

S A N Y A S A
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January – June 2016

**Being Consecrated:
Called to Care for Our Common Home**

SANYASA
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SANYASA Journal of Consecrated Life

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S A N Y A S A

Institute of Consecrated Life

Carmelaram, Bengaluru

CELEBRATES

**the Feast of the Presentation,
the Day of Consecrated Life and
the Conclusion of the Year of the Consecrated Life
With a Three-day Seminar on the theme**

BEING CONSECRATED: CALLED TO CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

Date: February 04-06, 2016 (Thursday to Saturday)

Time: 09.00 am to 04.30 pm

Venue: Sanyasa Auditorium, Carmelaram, Bengaluru - 560 035

Seminar is open to all Consecrated Persons
and those interested in Consecrated Life

Let us Respond to the Exhortation of Pope Francis to Care for Our Home!

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EDITORIAL

The Year of Consecrated Life is coming to an end. I presume that many of us, consecrated men and women, have participated at least in one of the workshops, seminars or renewal programs that have been conducted. During the course of this year, we have also been gifted with *Laudato Si*, a call to care for the earth, our common home, the Encyclical from the Holy Father Pope Francis. As we conclude the Year, it is to good examine what has happened to us internally, especially in the renewal of our commitment to our vocation. Has it ignited our passion for God and humanity? In the midst of the increasing polarization and violent reactions that follow, are we truly gearing up to live the vocation and mission proper to us? Are we poised to reclaim and live our liminal and prophetic witnessing to the Lord and to the joy of the Gospel that he came to reveal? I still come across groups of religious who still think: “What is so special about this year? After all, it is an year for all the baptized as we are all consecrated.” Hence, even for many religious, the vocation to consecrated life is a common vocation, lived by all, priests, religious and laity. I was told that even some Bishops promote such a view. To live forgetfulness or in ignorance of one’s own identity and mission is indeed a tragedy.

All are called to holiness. At the same time, if equal dignity of all the members of the Church is the work of the Spirit, the same is also true about their diversity. It is the Spirit who establishes the Church as an organic communion in the diversity of vocations, charisms and ministries. Discovering and living our own mission, we, the consecrated men and women, are called to true synergy with all other vocations in the Church, beginning with priests and the lay faithful, in order that we may, in the words of Pope John Paul II, “spread the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries” (*Vita Consecrata*, 51). We live what we are called to do and we also collaborate. There can be real renewal only if we reclaim our identity and mission.

After the *Evangelii Gaudium*, comes also *Laudato Si*, with its special message to consecrated men and women. We need to read *Laudato Si* from this perspective of our identity and mission and especially its implications for the way we live our evangelical poverty. It is in view of this that Sanyasa: Institute of Consecrated Life celebrates the conclusion of this Year of Consecrated Life with a three days Seminar

on the theme, *Being Consecrated: Called to Care for our Common Home* (February 04-06, 2016) in its campus. All are welcome.

The present issue of the Journal carries six articles that are meant to open up our horizons with regard to different aspects of consecrated life. In the first article, *Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes*, takes us to a launching pad towards a paradigm's shift in our understanding of mission, whose reach we can hardly imagine. The purpose of this article is to present *Evangelii Gaudium* and the letter *Scrutate* from the CIVSVA for the year of Consecrated Life, as the invitation to make an "exodus" guided by the signals that God gives. He sees these signals in the seven steps towards the great objective of a pastoral and missionary conversion. As a wise guide, he alerts us of the formation and the expertise needed to make this journey, overcoming turbulences and working through fears, so that we can reach the goal.

Next is the article by *Diarmuid O'Murchu* who helps us in re-visioning and re-interpreting consecrated life, by placing it in a new historical paradigm. His intention is to uncover what may have been kept hidden in the "underside" of history. He asserts that the true meaning of a historical narrative cannot be deciphered merely through cold fact and dominant trends; it requires another mode of discernment, more akin to a *parable story*, full of surprise, breakthrough and creative elaboration. When applied to the historical narrative of religious life, we discover that the virgins, the village ascetics, and the ancient monks, when re-visioned within the communal and ecclesial endeavors of their day, were agents for the flourishing of the new companionship and serve as enduring sources of inspiration. Their flight from the world, pursued through penance and asceticism, was in view of making God's world a better place, which in fact, singles them out as enduring and inspiring sources for women and men religious across the ages.

Living the vow evangelical obedience has increasingly become a challenge in modern times. Developing a psycho-spiritual lens, *Babu Sebastian*, makes a laudable effort to present the meaning, the various interpersonal dynamics, intricacies, challenges, factors of immaturity and the personality styles involved in the practice of religious obedience. He shows that genuine obedience is a distinctively human act originating in the will of the person and involves the exercise of freedom and judgement, which distinguishes it from mere compliance or passive submission to authority. He takes us through what is involved in obedience at various levels, shows its relationship to trust and listening and brings out various forms of immaturities that could be seen in the practice of religious obedience. The author argues that these

immaturities are due to the weaknesses in the foundation of natural obedience, laid in childhood and adolescence of a person's life.

Constitution of an institute of consecrated life is, in fact, "the book of identity," and therefore "the book of life" for the consecrated people. The purpose of *Jacob Arakkal John*, in his article, is to present us with the fundamental principles that underlie the constitutions of religious institutes. Explaining to us the meaning of laws in the Church and the notion of consecration, the author leads us to an understanding of what constitutions are, their purpose, authority, life cycle, the fundamental forms, basic contents, process of approval and their binding force as stipulated by the Church. In order to balance the charismatic and the institutional, it becomes imperative that the religious institutes sacrifice some freedom of initiatives in order to conform to the canonical categories and the framework of the ecclesiastical laws, which, according to the author, is made in return for the greater good of being able to live and work publicly in the Church and for the Church.

Living in the heart of the Church, it is essential consecrated men and women understand clearly the purpose of ecclesiastical offices, so that these offices may be rightly used for the common good and their abuses can be avoided. Coming to help us in this regard is *Joseph Ammaikunnel*, who tries to highlight the notion of ecclesiastical office according to Second Vatican Council. Though the style and content is hard for a lay reader, the author strives to show that all ecclesiastical offices are established mainly for the pastoral ministry in its manifold ways and that they represent a cluster of ethical, religious, social and juridical significances. Though there is a need for a legislation that clarifies the matter about the services and ministries entrusted to the persons who are not in the sacrament of Holy Order, the ministries of the laity, he argues, should not be confused with those of ordained ministries; they must find their place in doctrine and canonical discipline, in complementarity.

The last article by *Joseph Rovira* is a continuation of the one published in one of the earlier issues of this Journal, dealing with the theme of the moderator's role in community. Having explained the primary function in the role of Moderator in a religious community (facilitating the common search for God's will), Rovira now takes up the second major function, namely, governing community life. He begins exploring at length what it means to govern a religious community, substantiating every conclusion with the wisdom drawn from the documents of the Church. The role of the Moderator, according to him, is precisely that of presiding and coordinating,

of moderating this living and searching in common, with the help of the individual efforts of each member; it is to make community, to create community, to animate community, and to keep it faithful to whatever things constitute its reason to exist. He states that the moments of dialogue, of comparison, of discussion must be as democratic as possible, though the final decision does not necessarily have to be according to the majority vote. He concludes by offering the readers a “decalogue” for the moderator’s relationship with the community.

What follows are two book reviews made respectively by two post graduate students of the Institute, namely Lify Paul, SJB and Sabu George Palackathadathil, CMF.

We are already into the Jubilee Year of Mercy and we conclude the Year of Consecrated Life with the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple on February 02, 2016. These two great moments converge in the Birth of that Babe of Bethlehem, the merciful and compassionate face of God ever manifested to us. Let us celebrate it! Happy Christmas to all and a Blessed New year 2016!

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF
(Chief Editor)

EXODUS AND SIGNALS OF GOD: THE JOURNEY OF CONSECRATED LIFE TODAY

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

The purpose of this article is to present “*Evangelii Gaudium*” and the letter “*Scrutate*” from the CIVCSVA for the year of Consecrated Life, as the invitation to perform a flight’s plan from the airport of our communities, our Congregations or Orders, towards new destinations. To carry out this flight, we need formation and expertise. We must overcome turbulences, our own fears, and be able to arrive to the new destinations. In this symbolic flight towards the “new evangelisation” we are launched towards a paradigm’s shift in our understanding of mission, whose reach we can hardly imagine.

1. INVITED TO A NEW EXODUS: WITHIN A CHURCH GOING FORTH

The CIVCSVA or Congregation of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life wrote a letter entitled *Scrutate* (“Scrutinize”), addressed to all the consecrated men and women, journeying under the signals of God. The title is explained in the opening of the Letter: “Scrutinize the horizons of our lives and our time in watchful vigil. Peer into the night to recognize the fire that illuminates and guides, scan the sky to recognize the harbingers of blessings for our aridity. Vigilant watch over and intercede, firm in the faith.

Scrutinize therefore constitutes an invitation to discern: “The Lord is living and active in our history, and calls us to the collaboration and discernment choral, for new seasons of prophecy in the service of the Church, in view of the coming Kingdom.”

The point of departure of that letter is the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) in which we are reminded that we are sent “to go

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forth” (EG, 20), to take part in a new missionary “going forth,” from our comfort zones. Our mission as *Mebasser* is a visitation that communicates the messianic joy (EG, 21), with the power of the word of God (EG, 22). We are sent to evangelize all: “No one can be excluded: to every nation and tongue and tribe and people, to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, without reluctance or fear (EG, 23), “rejoicing always and celebrating in a beautiful Liturgy (EG, 24).

In this going forth, in this pilgrimage, we are guided by the Spirit in *limine historiae*, towards the peripheries of the history: “Stand at the crossroads and look... which was the good way? Take it and you will find rest for yourselves” (Jer 6:16).

We are invited to drill down through the horizons of our life and of our time in watchful vigil. The horizon is open and we are invited to watch with prayerful intercession for the world. We continue to see little signs heralding abundant, life-giving rain on our dryness, light whispers of a faithful presence.

The way to follow the cloud is not always easy; discernment requires sometimes long and tiring waits; the sweet and easy yoke (cf. Mt 11:30) can become heavy. The desert is a place of solitude and emptiness; a place missing what is essential for life: water, vegetation, the company of others, the warmth of a friend, even life itself. Everyone in the desert touches in silence and solitude its truest image: measuring itself against the infinite, its fragility as a grain of sand, and the strength of the rock, the mystery of God.

The Israelites remained encamped until the cloud came upon the tabernacle; then they resumed the journey, when the cloud was taken up from the house. Stopping and starting, a life guided, controlled, marked by the cloud of the Spirit; one life to live in watchful vigil.

Elijah, curled up on himself, crushed by grief and the infidelity of the people, carries on his back and in his heart the suffering. He himself becomes a prayer, supplicating prayer, an interceding womb. Next to him, and for him the companion scans the sky to see if the sea is the sign of a response to God’s promise.

It is the paradigm of the spiritual journey for each one of us, by which man converts himself to be really a friend of God, the instrument of his divine plan of salvation. He becomes aware of his vocation and mission for the benefit of all the weak of the earth.

Consecrated life in the present time is called to live with particular intensity, this intercession. We are aware of our limitations, and our spirit, through the desert and consolation, is to search for God and the signs of his grace, darkness and light. This

stand of praying gives a voice to the passion for humanity. Fullness and emptiness – in a deep perception of the mystery of God, the world and the human – are experiences we go through along the way with the same intensity.

Pope Francis challenges us: “Do you fight with the Lord for the people, like Abraham struggled (cf. Gen 18:22-33) That is courageous prayer of intercession. We speak with frankness, apostolic courage, pastoral plans and we think this is fine, but the same frankness is also needed in prayer.” Intercession becomes the voice of human poverty; preparation for the response of grace, the fecundity of the dry land, the mystical encounter in the sign of the little things.

The ability to sit in the choir of men and women religious is not to be as lonely prophets, but men and women of communion, listening together to the word, able to work together on new meanings and signs, designed, constructed also in a time of persecution and martyrdom. It is a journey towards the communion of differences: a sign of the Spirit blowing in our hearts a passion that they all may be one (Jn 17: 21). This highlights a Church which, sitting at the table after a journey of doubt, sadness and hopelessness, recognizes their Lord in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:13-35), expressed by the essentialness of the Gospel.

2. THE SEVEN STEPS TOWARDS “MISSIONARY CONVERSION”

The long apostolic exhortation can be summarized into five words: transformation, crisis, proclamation, dream of a new society and docility with the Spirit: (a) Transformation through missionary conversion; (b) Crisis of missionary commitment and personal growth; (c) Proclamation as novelty for our contemporaries; (d) Dream the possibility of a new city-society; (e) Complicity with the Spirit in this post-modern era. The five chapters of the Exhortation sketches out a kind of itinerary or flight map that will help consecrated life to journey from the present situation towards the great objective of ‘pastoral and missionary conversion’. This itinerary can be condensed into seven moments or steps: (a) ‘On track’: style and method; (b) ‘Departures’: places for take-off; (c) Brakes and ‘Stops’: comfort, acedia and worldliness; (d) ‘Destinations’: peripheries, new scenarios or areopagai; (e) ‘Turbulences’: the idolatry of money; (f) ‘Transformation’: pastoral conversion; (g) ‘From the heart of the Gospel’: message and witness.

2.1. “On Track:” Style and Method

First of all, we need to discover and to learn a new method in order to accomplish our mission. The Holy Spirit –the main actor in mission- inspires us the method of the Good News (and not of the bad news), the method of appreciation and not that

of contempt¹, the method of trust in the wheat more than the darnel², the method of faith that water can be changed into good wine.³ We are too accustomed to using a negative ‘critical eye’ and this happens both to the progressives and the more conservatives in the Church: ‘they that give too much importance to evil!’ (1 Cor 13). The method of the ‘new evangelization’ is not naïve – as it recognises evil – but it does justice to the good: dialoguing with all its expressions, dignifying it, humbly welcoming it wherever it may be found. It starts from the conviction that where evil abounds, grace will be even more abundant (cf. Rm 5:20). This is the method of appreciative inquiry with these four moments: appreciate, dream, imagine and performance.

“The Joy of the Gospel” tells us that seeing the context that we are living and acting in does not need a ‘complete diagnosis’, a ‘purely sociological analysis’: “What I would like to propose is something much more in the line of an evangelical discernment. It is the approach of a missionary disciple, an approach nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit”. . . with the gaze of the Good Shepherd, who seeks not to judge but to love’ (EG, 50, 125).⁴ We can enjoy the flight very much with this appreciative method.

2.2. “Departures”: Places of take off

If anything has characterized the consecrated life, needed for our times, it is ‘the going forth’, because it feels sent. The peripheries and the geographical limits where it has been present are innumerable! The consecrated life, in general, speaks many languages; it is dressed in many cultures; it has placed its tents in the most hidden, isolated and even inaccessible places.

In some places, this impulse ‘to go forth’ is being halted for different reasons: in place of expansion, concentration is being sought; in place of missionaries’ dreams, the realism of security and in situations of aging, the lessening of possibilities is being imposed.

For some years now, instead of going forth ‘we are returning’. We are fearful, in consecrated life, of ‘new departures.’ A preference is imposed to stay in what is safe, what is known, and in what we have always done. The worst is that such approaches are also found in some of the younger generations, those who come from poorer countries, dreaming not of the peripheries but rather of the centres of power and money; those belonging to countries with a great Christian tradition seek security in what has always been and don’t dare to confront the new necessities. In any case, some of us look for the most sophisticated reasons ‘not to go forth’, to maintain our ‘centres’ and place ourselves in those centres that give us security and allow us

to realize our own desires and not so much the dreams of our God. Pope Francis invites us ‘to go forth’: “The word of God constantly shows us how God challenges those who believe in him “to go forth” (EG 20). “All of us are called to take part in this new missionary “going forth”. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call” (EG 20); “To make all the structures more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth” (EG 27).

The Exhortation invites us to ‘go forth’ but to go with an attitude of ‘closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey; “communion and mission are profoundly interconnected” (EG, 23). Closeness to our Lord is not achieved just in the peace of a chapel or in the seclusion of a cell or within the walls of a monastery, convent or religious house. The ‘going forth’ has to be accompanied by Jesus. “It is not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly. A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him. He senses Jesus alive with him in the midst of the missionary Enterprise”(EG 266). How beautiful and meaningful is this expression of ‘closeness on the journey’! Jesus is our co-pilot.

Our communities must be like airport-communities: points of take-off for the most diverse destinations and the most dangerous missions. It is not good to have an airport with more than enough land crew, with parked planes that never take off, passengers packed into spaces, or merchandise staked up in the shops and containers but never take flight. Consecrated life is in need of ‘flight plans’, ‘air controllers’ that make us take-off without delays, without fear. How sad to see our large or small airports converted into hangars for unrepaired aircraft that little by little are converted into useless junk!

The invitation to ‘go forth’ implies a *starting point* and an *arrival point*. Unfortunately the starting point is, at times, like a trap, a prison that makes the take-off very difficult: Pope Francis speaks of the two forces that hold us back: comfort and acedia. They block us in the way of going forth “from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel” (EG 20).

2.3. Stops: Excessive Care of Ourselves, Acedia and Worldliness

That which stops our willingness to ‘go forth’ is the comfort that lets us ‘enclose ourselves,’ to escape from others, to hide ourselves, and to deny to ourselves the willingness to share and to give: “Such a life is nothing less than slow suicide” (EG

272). Some say: ‘Why should I deny myself my comforts and pleasures if I won’t see any significant result?’ This attitude makes it impossible to be a missionary. It is only a malicious excuse for remaining caught up in comfort, laziness, vague dissatisfaction and empty selfishness. It is a self-destructive attitude (EG, 275).

Excessive care of ourselves is giving rise to a type of apathetic community, insensitive to the new evangelizing projects of the Spirit. In not just a few places, consecrated life – including the young and middle aged – is being converted into a residential block where each one lives their life, occupies their time in their work and in their particular diversions, where creativity and boldness, the creation of bold and creative teams is rejected; where the only interest is survival.

Besides comfort, Pope Francis detects a paralyzing vice that attacks evangelizers: acedia, one of the old capital sins – to which the ancient monks gave a lot of attention. Acedia is described as a “chronic discontent and by a listlessness that parches the soul” (EG 277); it is classified as “egotist” (EG 81), “paralyzing” (EG 81), “tense, burdensome, dissatisfying, unbearable fatigue” (EG 82); acedia is a desire for immediate results that doesn’t tolerate contradiction, failure, criticism, and the cross (EG 82).

Acedia is a virus that is injected into our soul. It produces in us, consecrated women and men, apathy, loss of tension, sensation of emptiness, boredom, lack of interest, inability to concentrate, anxiousness, and lack of hope. It comes preceded by sadness and aggressiveness. Afterwards comes a frustrated desire and after being ignited, it is changed into anger. The acedia of evangelizers blocks every process of mission. Acedia is very toxic.

Another of the evils that stop and hold back the missionary going forth among us is worldliness. This “consists in seeking not the Lord’s glory but human glory and personal well-being” (EG 93). Worldliness is expressed in different ways (EG 95-96); in an extreme case, it is a “tremendous corruption disguised as a good” (EG 97). A terrible expression of this worldliness is the internal wars within the Church. The Pope makes here one of the few explicit references to consecrated life and it is worth reproducing it here: “It always pains me greatly to discover how even consecrated persons, can tolerate different forms of enmity, division, calumny, defamation, vendetta, jealousy and the desire to impose certain ideas at all costs, even to persecutions which appear as veritable witch hunts” (EG 100).

2.4. Destinations: “Peripheries,” New Scenarios or Areopagus

The Lord sends us to “every nation and tongue and tribe and people” without

excluding any one (EG 23). The Church 'going forth' is a mother that wants to reach everyone, but "the poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel" (EG 48); "not so much our friends and wealthy neighbours, but above all, the poor and the sick, those who are usually despised and overlooked, those who cannot repay you" (EG 48). While at our door, people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (EG 49).

Because of this, the privileged destinations of going forth are all the human and urban peripheries of our world that need the light of the Gospel, "wherever the need for the light and the life of the Risen Christ is greatest" (EG 30, 46, 191); also the peripheries of the particular churches and the new socio-cultural areas, the impoverished zones that survive amid great human suffering and look for immediate solutions for their needs (EG 63).⁵ Our communities are like runways to take-off to the peripheries of our planet. This is the criteria that give validity; that justify and that give meaning.

We can, then, ask ourselves: How many destinations do we exclude from our mission? For what reasons? What peripheries do we exclude from our trajectory? What are our fears and what causes our upsets? Why are we so attached to certain places; why do we prioritise them despite their evangelizing sterility? Can we not also speak here, although in a different sense, of the 'rejected places' of congregations and religious institutes?

Today the church feels called to new scenarios: (a) To where there is no presence of Church, where the faith is not proclaimed nor demonstrated through the mysticism and loving service of a community; (b) To where compassion, consolation and opening the heart to hope must be exercised: prisons, extermination camps, areas of violence and where one lives to survive; (c) To where language about God is progressively disappearing and at times at an alarming rate: the atheist, indifferent or agnostic culture; (d) To where it is necessary to have sensitive and respected voices that give witness to our God just as it has been manifested in Jesus Christ; (e) To where the Church is found with other believers, of other religions, of other Christian confessions or with those who deny God; (f) To where there are liminal spaces for artistic creation, frontiers of thought and for searching for truth or where the great ethical questions that challenge humanity are investigated and dealt with; (g) To where human beings are creating and utilizing networks of communication, information and interaction; (h) To where we confront the frontier of sickness or death, the last frontier to which we are all destined; (i) To where the great political and economic decisions are handled and which later affect human groupings (j) To where the emerging humanity of children and youth, lacking economic, educational,

religious possibilities and in a special way to where women still need to be liberated and to be treated with equality and dignity.⁶

These new scenarios challenge us as a Church. Pope Francis does not invite us to respond to these challenges through work, programming and being involved in all these scenarios. He tells us: “Yet I realize that no words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts. A spirit-filled evangelization is one guided by the Holy Spirit, for he is the soul of the Church called to proclaim the Gospel. I implore him to come and renew the Church, to stir and impel her to go forth boldly to evangelize all peoples” (EG 261).

We must be attentive to the profile of the community that evangelizes in this manner. Such a community does not present the characteristics of crazy activism, of frantic doing and doing more. It knows to slow down, be eager to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way. At times we have to be like the father of the prodigal son, who always keeps his door open so that when the son returns, he can readily pass through it. The profile of an evangelizing community also requires that she always has her doors open to welcome without conditions (EG 47).⁷

2.5. “Turbulences”: Idolatry of Money

The evangelizing mission of consecrated life, if it wants to be clever and wise, must be aware of the present planetary context, noted for its idolatry of money. From this, the profession of the evangelical counsel of poverty acquires a strong anti-idolatrous connotation. Our profession of voluntary poverty puts us into confrontation with that god of money that everyone today wants to worship.⁸

The apostolic exhortation detects, with a special intensity, the idolatry of money as a characteristic of our time. Today the economy is made into the new religion, with its liturgy, its figures and oracles, its language of initiation and even its message of redemption. The idol of the new economy is a god of exclusion. The excluded are not only the “exploited” but also the outcast and the “leftovers” (EG 53). “Masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape” (EG 53).

We must be very attentive so that the idol does not seep into us religious and begin to rule us, to control and determine everything, to govern even our mission and to put thousands of obstacles to a frontline evangelization, to missionary creativity and boldness. The economy in our communities has not to govern, but only to serve.

2.6. “Transformation”: Pastoral Conversion

In such a context we feel called to a serious evangelical discernment about ourselves. We have to discern what kind of spirit is moving us: the good Spirit or the spirits of evil (cf. EG 51). We must not allow the evil spirits to stop or weaken this urgent missionary and pastoral transformation which we need (EG 52). Pope Francis calls: “I hope that all communities . . . will devote necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. “Mere administration” can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of misión’” (EG 25).

How is this pastoral conversion to be understood? This responds to the dream of a missionary option capable of changing everything: customs, styles, timetables, language, all ecclesial structures. And for what? So that it can be suitably “channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (EG 27). Pastoral conversion “can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with him” (EG 27).

Pastoral conversion does not exclude, rather it implies personal and also community conversion. But at this time, it has become necessary a pastoral ‘conversion’ of structures, methods and message. This requires that the particular Church enters into a decided process of discernment, purification and reform.⁹

We ourselves are also asked to enter into a particular process of discernment, purification and reform to make our life, activity and structures more evangelizing and missionary. If it is calling us to pastoral conversion, it is because we need an authentic missionary ‘meta-noia’: a change of mind, of vision.¹⁰ Pastoral conversion is not possible by our ascetical efforts or our pastoral programmes. Pastoral conversion has a lot to do with a seduction, with letting oneself be penetrated by the wind of the Spirit that lets the world breath and will let us also breath in a different way. It is the Spirit of God, the Father, the Spirit of Jesus, the Lord, who is the principle protagonist of mission and of conversion at this time. If the call exists, is it not because the Spirit is already moving the Church, its communities and people in this direction? We are dealing with one of the signs of the Spirit in our day?

In any case, where the Spirit of God is acting, there will be present the forces that put the break on, that generate unease, that try to kill the initiative of the Spirit. The evil spirits produce the crisis of missionary commitment as we have seen previously.

Each community or organism is asked, from the lowest to the highest levels, that we put ourselves on the runway for take-off: “in constantly going forth to the outskirts of its own territory or towards new sociocultural settings” (EG 30).

We expect much from our leaders in this respect. They, in the whole network of the leadership of our institutes, have the task of seconding the movement of the Spirit and favouring the Wind that takes us to our place: they will do so, sometimes ‘from the front’, others ‘in the midst,’ and others again ‘from behind’, aware that ‘allowing the flock to strike out on new paths’ (EG 30).

2.7. Arrival: Message and Witness “from the Heart of the Gospel”

The message, both doctrinal and moral or ethical, that we transmit with our words or with our works and life often runs the risk of being distorted or reduced by ourselves or by the recipients to some secondary aspects. The missionary has to facilitate the access to faith. For that, the apostolic exhortation reminds us that there exists a hierarchy of truths and a hierarchy of virtues (EG 34-37). Our contemporaries are not able to accept all the Christian truths from the very beginning and to carry on all the proposals of Christian morals.

The doctrine we propose has to connect with the nucleus, with the heart of the Gospel, to give it meaning, beauty and attractiveness (EG 34). It must concentrate on what is essential, on the most beautiful, grand and necessary (EG 35). There should exist an adequate proportion in the proclamation of the Gospel. This is noted in the frequency in which certain themes are mentioned and the emphasis placed on them. “The same thing happens when we speak more about law than about grace, more about the Church than about Christ, more about the Pope than about God’s Word” (EG 38). The same can be said about preaching about ethics and morals. There also exists a hierarchy of virtues: the supreme virtue is the saving love of God, the mercy that is the manifestation of the grace of the Spirit (EG 37). For this, there is also needed a correct proportion in preaching about morals.

Consecrated life, which has so much responsibility in the evangelizing mission and in so many different positions, needs the mental reformatting of a theology and an ethical or moral teaching with the ‘fragrance of the Gospel.’ It is not easy at a time when an old fashioned theology and moral teaching is being established in some seminaries which tries to impose a Catholic dogmatism, clericalism, fundamentalism that is not able to recover the ‘healthy traditions. “A missionary heart never closes itself off, never retreats into its own security, never opts for rigidity and defensiveness. It realizes that it has to grow in its own understanding of

the Gospel and in discerning the paths of the Spirit, and so it always does what good it can, even if in the process, its shoes get soiled by the mud of the street” (EG, 45).

Consecrated life must not abandon its permanent formation in theology and morals, given its serious evangelizing responsibility. Brothers as well as sisters, laypeople as well as priests should not leave their diverse ministries to improvisation. Docility to the Spirit asks us to live in a permanent state of listening, of prayer, of attention to what the Spirit inspires in us. It is not easy today ‘to express unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness’ (EG 41), but it is necessary.

CONCLUSION

An attempt is made in this article, to re-read the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* as a road map to navigate towards a very concrete objective: to enable a serious ‘pastoral conversion’ in consecrated life. It means a conversion that is within our reach. However, we do not achieve it through volunteering, neither individually nor as a group. Pastoral conversion is offered to us by the Holy Spirit in a mysterious, unforeseen manner, when the opportune moment arrives, the *kairós*. For this, it is necessary to be on the runway and waiting for what Leon Felipe says: “Now a strong Wind will come, that will take me to my place.” For this I have proposed seven steps: (a) to be ‘on track’: deals with losing fear, to use the appreciative model or that of looking anew with boldness and discovering a whole world of possibilities; (b) ‘Departure’: from airport-communities always set for take-off: it can be a ‘contemplative’ take-off or and ‘active’ take-off. How beautiful it is to discover the sisters and brothers collaborating with the Spirit in the mission with a great variety of charisms!; (c) ‘Stops’ and breaks: there are problems on the track caused by three evils: individualist comfort, the dark evil of acedia and spiritual worldliness. They are demons that block the dynamisms of conversion and see that life develops on a path full of obstacles and new problems; (d) ‘Destinations’: when the flight plans are adhered to, it takes-off and thousands of destinations are discovered. The consecrated life is especially prepared, by its charism, to be present in the diverse peripheries of society and the world but also in the new scenarios in which a new civilization is born; (e) ‘Turbulences’: threats to the mission come from the idolatry of money, through sacralizing the economy. The anti-idolatrous witness of some forms of life that profess the evangelical counsel of voluntary poverty and the message they transmit, resist the idol and, little by little, they deactivate it; (f) ‘Transformation’: the pastoral conversion is the motor and the result of the whole journey. Its principle actor is the Holy Spirit and acts in those who voluntarily

become his partners. The Church does not have a mission. It is the mission of the Spirit that has a Church; (g) 'From the heart of the Gospel': what the consecrated life in pastoral conversion exhales is the fragrance of the Gospel, not dogmatism and moral rigidity. The message and witness transmit the eternal Gospel through the reinterpretation of what the Spirit does in each era and place, by means of the creative beauty which makes our world jump for joy.

The seven exhortations of the Exhortation re-echo in us like a mantra¹¹: Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary enthusiasm! (EG 80); let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization! (EG 83); let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope! (EG 86); let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of community! (EG 92); let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the Gospel! (EG 97); let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love! (EG 101); and let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour! (EG 109).

Endnotes

¹ Tcf. José Cristo Rey García Paredes. "¿Problemas que resolver o milagros que abrazar? Ante el pesimismo espiritual, comunitario e institucional". *Vida Religiosa* 117 (2014) 111-115; David Cooperrider, *Positive Image, Positive Action: the Affirmative Basis of Organizing*, in "Appreciative Management and Leadership: the Power of Positive Thought and Action in Organizations", Jossey-Bass 1990; Sue Annis Hammond, *The thin book of Appreciative Inquiry* (Bend: Thin Book Publishing, 1996); Jane Magruder Watkins, Bernard Mohr, Ralph Kelly, *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination* (San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2011).

² The evil spirit of defeatism is brother to the temptation to separate, before its time, the wheat from the weeds; it is the fruit of an anxious and self-centred lack of trust (EG 85). The parable of the weeds among the wheat (cf. Mt 13:24-30) graphically illustrates an important aspect of evangelization: the enemy can intrude upon the kingdom and sow harm, but ultimately he is defeated by the goodness of the wheat (EG 225). An evangelizing community cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds. The sower, when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or overreact. He or she finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear (EG 24).

³ 'Our faith is challenged to discern how wine can come from water (EG 84). When certain categories of reason and the sciences are taken up into the proclamation of the message, these categories then become tools of evangelization; water is changed into wine (EG 132).

⁴ Seeing reality with the eyes of faith, we cannot fail to acknowledge what the Holy Spirit is sowing (EG 68), which he always radiates in the midst of darkness, never forgetting that "where sin

increased, grace has abounded all the more” (EG 84), ‘a contemplative gaze, a gaze of faith’ (EG 71). The ‘new evangelization’ asks us to have another ‘gaze’ at the reality. Not the gaze ‘shamelessly given over to morbid curiosity’ but rather to ‘look more closely and sympathetically at others whenever necessary’ (EG 169), reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth (EG 169). Far from being suspicious, negative and despairing, it is a spiritual gaze born of deep faith which acknowledges what God is doing (EG 282). We need to broaden our perspective -see the greater good which will benefit us all - and to hear the plea of other peoples and other regions than those of our own country (EG 190, 235), to see the world with ‘Jesus’ gaze, burning with love, expanding to embrace all his people’ (EG 268).

⁵ Cf. Philip L. Wickens. “Mission from the margins: the *Missio Dei* in the crisis of the world Christianity”. *International Review of Missio* 93 (2004) 182-198.

⁶ Cf. Pedro Belderrain, “Los destinatarios actuales del Evangelio”, in. B. Fernández-F. Prado (eds.). *Vida evangelizadora y evangélica* (Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 2012); also, “¿A qué situaciones sociales y espirituales ha prestado el Sínodo más atención?”. in: IV Simposio ITVR. *Una evangelización nueva para la transmisión de la fe. Desafíos, respuestas y propuestas* (Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 2013), 39-64.

⁷ Cf. Francisco J. Caballero Ávila, “Algo se mueve”, in “Vida Religiosa” 116 (2014), 83-110.

⁸ Cf. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, *La idolatría de las riquezas. Redescubrir la pobreza evangélica en tiempos de crisis* (Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 2010).

⁹ The pastoral conversion also asks for ‘thinking about conversion of the papacy’: ‘the papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion’ (EG 32).

¹⁰ Cf. IV Simposio ITVR. *Una evangelización nueva para la transmisión de la fe. Desafíos, respuestas, propuestas* (Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 2013) (con artículos de J. Abella, P. Belderrain, J. C. R. García Paredes, Card. Sistach, Álvaro R. Echeverría, L. A. Gonzalo Díez, A. Pelayo y Mons. Ricardo Blázquez).

¹¹ Cf. The commentary of these sentences of *Evangelii Gaudium* by Luis A. Gonzalo Díez, *La vida religiosa en “operación salida”*: “no nos dejemos robar la esperanza”, in *Vida Religiosa* 116 (2014), 17-48.



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RELIGIOUS LIFE: TOWARDS A NEW HISTORICAL PARADIGM

Diarmuid O'Murchu, MSC

Several times in Catholicism's history, waves of religious communities have burst upon the scene and flourished, only to institutionalize, rigidify, and ultimately decline, as a result of a repeated pattern of internal and external causes (Patricia Wittberg).

Thus the old theory that traced the monastic impulse in all corners of the Empire back to an original Egyptian inspiration has proven to be a literary fiction (James E. Goehring).

We now move into the story of Religious Life as we have known it for almost 2,000 years. This is our historical narrative, the true meaning of which cannot be deciphered merely through cold fact and dominant trends. There is a subtlety to this narrative requiring another mode of discernment. We are dealing with something more akin to *a parable story*, full of surprise, breakthrough and creative elaboration.

The historical story of Religious Orders and Congregations tends to be ensconced in books describing the history of the Church. In the past many such books were written by male scholars, often priests, with a strong interest in the triumph and success of the faith, as mediated by the institutional Church. Allusions to Religious Life tended to be minimized, recording contributions that enhanced the Church's progress as a powerfully influential institution, often resulting in a slanted perspective and an interpretation with many disturbing features.

Most history books highlight the achievements of the great founders, notably, Anthony of Egypt, Pachomius, Benedict, Francis, Dominic, Ignatius, Vincent de Paul. These texts tend to prioritize those who advanced the Church's progress and defended it against heresy and attack, namely outstanding patriarchal males.

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Women in general, and vowed women specifically, were not meant to be visible in the Church's agenda of power and control, and therefore for most of Christian history (down to the 19th century) women were officially hidebound by monastic enclosure. Rarely, therefore, do we hear of the outstanding witness of foundresses, such as Angela Merici, Mary Ward, Nano Nagle, Elizabeth Seton, Mary McKillop, Margaret Ann Cusack, and several others. In most Church history books, these names are not even cited, never mind acknowledged.

The historical texts rarely, if ever, acknowledge that throughout Christendom, female Religious made significant, and even major, contributions. And if records had been responsibly maintained, we would see that females frequently outnumbered male Religious. The religious and pastoral impact of vowed women has been outstanding, enhancing the growth and development of the Church, frequently in a manner far more profound and effective than the witness borne by male clerics. Yet, the female members are noticeable by their invisibility, not to mention their historical oppression. This grave injustice needs to be addressed and rectified.

1. THE UNDERSIDE OF HISTORY

Church history, along with other forms of historical documentation follows a well established strategy to communicate its wisdom and truth. Most of ancient history was written by and for the ruling classes or the winners of military campaigns, from the Gilgamesh epic of ancient Babylon, to the musings of Confucius and Plato, to the histories and heroic achievements documented by Herodotus and Thucydides. A careful analysis of most textbooks used in history lessons for schools around the world today clearly shows a bias for triumphalism and victors. Thus chapter three of a particular history textbook will describe a battle or confederation out of which emerges a winner and a loser. The discerning eye will clearly see that the subsequent three chapters (four-six) are largely if not totally about the winner. By the end of chapter six, the loser has been virtually obliterated, condemned to utter invisibility. This is what is meant by *the underside of history*.

The concept was first popularized by the Quaker sociologist, Elise Boulding (1920-2010) in her famed text, *The Underside of History: A View of Women Through Time* (Boulding 1976).¹ Here we have a panoramic view, going deep into ancient time, of how women have been consistently marginalized and undermined by the dominant patriarchal culture. In many ways their unique giftedness has been suppressed, even to the point of invisibility. The Peruvian liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez (1983), expanded the historical suppression to include all those condemned to poverty (in this case, material poverty), deprived of voice and agency

to outwit colonial and patriarchal domination. In their tribute to another liberation theorist (philosopher), Enrique Dussel, Linda Alcoff & Eduardo Mendieta (2000) unmask the complex and sinister political dynamics that generate and sustain the underside of history. In a word, it ensures that power is maintained for those addicted to it, to a point where the maintenance of such power becomes an end in itself, to the detriment of the common good which politics – and religion - is meant to serve.

The history of Religious Life also has its underside, with the undesirable outcomes noted above. Most historians don't even allude to the rich Eastern traditions of Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism, with the several enriching parallels with Western forms (more in de Dreuille 1999). And within Christianity itself, a patriarchal approach to history takes clear precedence, with a tendency to highlight the advancement of ecclesiastical domination in a linear historical outline that leaves us with a seriously distorted view. An alternative cyclic approach has received scant attention, and despite limited research and paucity of evidence, I wish to highlight its potential value for a more empowering and inclusive view of the vowed life.

Despite the fact that the cyclic approach to history seems to be a phenomenon of great age, and adopted in several ancient civilizations, it has been largely overshadowed by the rational, linear approach that came to the fore after the Enlightenment, usually dated from 1650-1780, also known as the Age of Reason. History prioritized rational analysis, factual statement, linear progress, male achievement, and the exaltation of the winner, irrespective of the plight of the loser.

Many ancient cultures held a mythical conception of history and time, evidenced in the Indian Vedas (leading to the concept of the wheel of life in both Hinduism and Buddhism), Chinese dynastic cycles, Egyptian mythology, ancient Greek philosophy, also discernible in the writings of the Islamic scholar, Ibn Khaldun. Cyclical conceptions were maintained in the 19th and 20th centuries by authors such as Arnold Toynbee Oswald Spengler, Pitrim Sorokim and Nikolay Danilevsky. However, it was those favouring linear/evolutionary models - Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, and August Comte – who exerted greater influence, exhibiting strong faith in secular science and in the inevitability of human progress. Interest in the cyclic approach continues to our own time exhibited in works such as Peter Turchin's mathematical modelling outlined in his book *Historical Dynamics* (2003), and G. J. Whitrow's cultural overview of cyclic patterns across several millennia (Whitrow 2004).

2. TOWARDS A NEW HISTORICAL PARADIGM

The first attempt to outline a cyclic version of the history of Religious Life was undertaken by a French Jesuit, Raymond Hostie (1972), and further refined by the Marianist Brothers, Raymond Fitz and Lawrence Cada (1979). It proposes a cycle pattern of recurring time-spans, approximately 300 years each, during which a dominant model evolves, expands, stabilizes, and declines. In all, six cycles have been identified, beginning with the Egyptian model around 300 CE and culminating in the current cycle which commenced around 1800 CE. The following is a summary outline:

- 300-600: *The Egyptian Monastic model*, consisting of communal foundations in Syria and Egypt, and a more popularized diverse set of eremitical expressions, extensively documented in the writings of John Cassian (360-435).
- 600-900: *The First Benedictine Era*, marking the launch of the Benedictines and their spread across mainland Europe of the time.
- 900-1200: *The Second Benedictine Era*, documenting the Cluny-led renewal and restructuring of the Benedictine movement, the rise of the Cistercians as a further attempt to salvage the Benedictine ideal, up to the emergence of Religious Life into the wider culture of commerce and learning.
- 1200-1500, *The Mendicant Era*, describing the rise of the Franciscans, Dominicans and Carmelites, with a range of attempts to bring the wisdom of the vowed life into the wider ecclesial and human realms.
- 1500-1800: *The Apostolic Era*: Beginning with the Jesuits, and followed closely by Orders of Brothers and the first groups of apostolic women (e.g., the Ursulines), Religious sought to engage afresh with the spiritual and cultural challenges – initially of Europe and later of China and the Americas.
- 1800- ????: *The Missionary Era*: In a spirit of solidarity with the missionary thrust of the Church, a range of new groups came into being, many initially serving local apostolic needs, but quickly embracing the international missionary outreach of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

According to the above schema, the present missionary cycle is likely to complete its course towards the end of the present (21st) century, thus yielding pride of place to a new thrust for women and men Religious, sometime in the final decades of the present century. The veracity of this prediction is borne out in the numerical decline of Religious in the Catholic Church from 1,300,000 members in 1960 to 1,232,516 in 1970 to an approximate 895,600 in 2014 (data obtained from Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), Washington, DC., USA). This results in a decline of 27.3% between 1970 and 2014. Even if the decline remains stable, which is unlikely, Religious in the Catholic world will number less than 200,000 by 2100 CE

To the best of my knowledge, historians of Religious Life have given scant attention to the cyclic approach. Some point to the superficial nature of the original research by the Jesuit scholar, Raymond Hostie, based exclusively on male groups and largely from a European perspective. Since Religious Life is now a global movement, and not merely a European phenomenon, Hostie's research is of limited value, but nonetheless worthy of serious consideration. The strongest criticism however comes from those who believe the model lacks rigorous research, ensuing in an outline that is too neat and simplistic, almost to the point of being deterministic, bypassing or ignoring the more haphazard nature of history generally and the consequent inability to discern any kind of enduring or broad set of patterns.

Although I cannot offer a logical or rational response to these critical concerns, I want to support the wisdom embedded in Hostie's cyclic thesis, adopting a more interdisciplinary set of insights: (1) As indicated above the cyclic approach to history carries an enduring credibility over several thousands of years and across a range of cultural and religious contexts. (2) A valuable endorsement of Hostie's approach is provided by Sr. Patricia Wittberg (1994), incorporating additional wisdom and insight from extensive sociological research. (3) My experience of renewal work among Religious – women particularly – over a span of thirty years, suggests that rank-and-file Religious discern within the cyclic approach an intuitive wisdom, a compelling sense of truth that rational analysis fails to deliver. (4) There is a consistency within the paradigm that defies rational analysis. The first one-hundred years of each cycle is characterised by numerical growth and cultural impact, despite internal strain or conflict, as in the case of the early Franciscan movement in the 13th century, torn and divided over the ideal way to live the call to poverty. And the last one hundred years begets a sense of stalemate leading to eventual disintegration – or in the case of a minority of Religious families, a revitalization (further explored throughout this book). (5) In face of the impending decline, individual groups, or the movement at

large, can do little (it seems) to halt the ultimate disintegration. In the 11th century, the Cistercians set out to capture afresh the pure Benedictine charism, in the hope of prolonging the Benedictine influence. As we know the revival was short-lived, despite the fact the both the Benedictines and Cistercians survived the demise of the late 11th century. Most intriguing of all, is the emergence in the late 18th century: according to a census taken in Europe around 1750, there were 400,000 Religious inhabiting the continent, and on the surface the members seemed to be living holy and dedicated lives. Yet when another census was taken in 1805 in the aftermath of the French Revolution, it numbered only 40,000 Religious throughout the entire continent; a decline of 90% coinciding accurately with the end of a 300 year cycle. (6) Critics are quick to point out that this latter example was triggered by an external event, namely the French Revolution. I suspect the decline would have happened anyhow, since most Religious in Europe were influenced by the remnants of a Jansenistic spirituality, taking their attention away from God's world – and the building up of God's Kingdom on earth – and preoccupied with their own internal religious comfort (see Rapley 2011, 213ff). Here we detect a work of divine providence difficult to explain as it comes dangerously close to determinism. (7) My suggestion of providence rather than determinism arises from my conviction that the Holy Spirit is the catalytic agent within this cyclic unfolding of the vowed life. Not that the Spirit can be boxed into a 300 year configuration, but rather that the Spirit who forever draws order from chaos is the one who befriends Religious Life through both its growth and decline, forever recreating new possibilities for renewal and refounding – for those ready to embrace this dangerously promising adventure. (8) What is under review is similar to the organic trajectory that characterizes all life-forms, a dynamic movement flowing through a pattern of growth, stabilization (maturity), decline, and death. The viability of life at every level depends on this process. Why should Religious Life be an exception? Might it not be our addiction to immortality (a feature of patriarchal domination) that prevents us from seeing the deeper truth and engaging more wisely with it!

The cyclic approach offers courageous hope in the sense that it indicates that Religious Life will prevail, come what may. It seems to be a divine gift to humanity (Raimundo Panikkar's *monastic archetype*, described above), that has always flourished (in one way or another), and apparently always will. *It will never die out!* Its survival, however, is based on a readiness to die to those behaviours and institutions which render us indispensable (mainly to ourselves), and to be open to radical new ways of responding to the needs of the times and the urgent call to serve God's world particularly through the struggles of the poor and marginalized.

The Religious Life *charism*, therefore, has a double meaning. Firstly, it is the divine gift (charism) to humanity at large, a cultural charism, transcending formal religion, given for the benefit of all humanity. Secondly, the appropriation of that gift happens through a range of specific Orders and Congregations, many of whom have sequestered the notion of charism to themselves in a dangerously exclusive and idolatrous fashion. It seems to me that all individual charisms need to reflect, and be accountable to, the general charism. In terms of the various Orders and Congregations, what we share in common (our commonalities) is, culturally and theologically, more significant than what sets us apart (our differences).²

The cyclic approach helps us to understand the crisis and decline of contemporary Religious Life over the past fifty years. Our diminution is not merely the result of the reforms of Vatican Two (voiced by restorationists), or the corrosive influences of the secular world. It belongs to a historical theological process, with the Holy Spirit animating and supporting its unfolding, including the decline experienced today, particularly in the West. We don't have any choice other than to learn to flow with it. And as I shall indicate in later, it is that sense of divine abandonment that provides the greatest hope and impetus for a possible future refounding of each of our Orders or Congregations.

All of which seems to suggest that we are victims of historical determinism, and that we can do nothing much about it. To the contrary, my argument is that we are the beneficiaries of a historical/parabolic narrative, imbued with the wisdom of providence, interlaced with the paradoxical dynamic of birth-death-new life, and capable of empowering and guiding us on a more hope-filled journey into the future. The success of that enterprise, however, is heavily dependent on how we read and discern our historical past, and particularly the bedrock inspiration to which I now turn attention.

3. REVISITING THE BEDROCK INSPIRATION

When and why did Christian Religious Life come into being? And what can we glean from the foundational wisdom that might inform our discernment as we wrestle with the refounding challenges of the 21st century? Here parable and paradigm coalesce with a quality of shock and surprise that require a great deal of discernment.

Most historians trace the origins to the middle of the third century (c.250CE) when Anthony of Egypt fled to the Judean desert and apparently attracted a large number of co-hermits, who exhibited varying degrees of heroic austerity. Legend has it that Anthony one day visited a Church seeking God in his life and experienced

a distinctive call to the words: “If you would be perfect, go sell all you have, give to the poor and come follow me.” (Matt.19:21). Taking these words quite literally, Anthony left all to follow Christ – as a desert anchorite - quickly accompanied by many others inspired by his example. Anthony’s option has been interpreted broadly along four lines:

1. Alongside the mainline Christian faith is a more noble ideal requiring the Christian devotee to abandon all earthly cares to dedicate oneself exclusively to a spiritual alliance with Christ. This tends to be interpreted as abandoning all earthly cares and eliminating from one’s life all attachments to earthly and bodily welfare. One easily detects the then popular split between sacred and secular, resolved by fleeing the latter in order to obtain for oneself reassurance of salvation in a life hereafter. Not surprisingly, in every Christian generation, questions have been raised on how this extreme asceticism can be reconciled with the earth-centred vision of bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth, a clash of paradigms requiring a more nuanced discernment, and a more responsible understanding of ancient history (as suggested by Goehring 1995; 1999; Rubenson 1998).

2. In times of persecution, the readiness to shed one’s blood as a martyr was viewed as another ideal of Christian witness. Since this was not everybody’s calling, religious scholars of the time developed the notion of a second baptism, often identified with martyrdom, and applied to the early Christian ascetics in a form known as *white martyrdom*, which became another rationale for the Religious Life option. How prevalent the practice of martyrdom was, and the complexities of the practice, ecclesiastically and politically, are reviewed by Candida Moss (2013), requiring in our time a more nuanced interpretation of a phenomenon that merits a more in-depth evaluation and a more cautious admiration.

3. When the Roman Emperor, Constantine (272-337) began the process of adopting Christianity as the official religion of the Empire, many Gospel ideals were reframed as imperial values (power, domination, structure, control, etc.). For some Christians this was a compromise too far, from which they fled, initially to the desert areas, and later to the monasteries established by Pachomius and others. This notion of the vowed life as a counter-cultural protest movement against the growing institutionalization of Christianity (a new paradigm) has never been given the discerning attention it deserves. It may well be one of the more authentic reasons why Religious Life arose in the Christian tradition, despite a contrary view held by Christof Joest (2010, 159).

4. Nor have we done responsible historical discernment around the lay foundations of the vowed life. The late Benedictine monk, R. Kevin Seasoltz (1997,

28-34) claims that Christian monastic life began as a pre-canonical experience. The first monks did not seek orders. (In fact, Pachomius seems to have avoided meeting a Bishop, in case he might be coerced into priesthood). Rather the early monks saw themselves outside the hierarchical structure of the Church. They understood themselves to be lay people, based on one's baptismal call. In the ancient Rule of the Master (chap. 83), the abbot is identified as a layman.

As indicated above, Christian historians have long favoured the heroic patriarchal paradigm, thus ignoring or bypassing other historical developments which should inform both our research and discernment. Some researchers suggest pre-Christian precedents such as the Therapeutae, and Qumran community. Within the Gospels themselves, both Eusebius and John Cassian regarded the twelve apostles as the first monks. Among the other models of discipleship, we note that of the Beloved disciple, documented at length by the late Johannine scholar, Raymond Brown (1979), suggesting another form of discipleship, with a focus on contemplative, non-imperial values. According to Christof Joest (2010, 178), community asceticism characterises Christian faith from the beginning, “. . . providing early Christians with the possibility to follow Christ in different stages of radicalism.”

4. THE APOTACTIC MOVEMENT

Under the impetus of the American monastic scholar, James E. Goehring (1995; 1999), our understanding of early Christian monasticism has changed dramatically: “Thus the old theory that traced the monastic impulse in all corners of the empire back to an original Egyptian inspiration has proven to be a literary fiction.” (Goehring, 1999, 32). The Life of St. Antony, written by St. Athanasius, depicts an ideal ascetic hero, now understood to be of little historical worth. The movement to the desert, popularly acclaimed as the *fuga mundi*, is a complex social and historical phenomenon, embraced by a minority rather than by a majority of ascetics at the time.

The developments of St. Pachomius, along the Nile, should not be portrayed as a simple shift from the eremitical to the coenobitic. Pachomius' unique contribution is that of a monastic organizer (rather than an originator), and his most reputable foundation was a deserted village called Pbow rather than Tabennisi. (More in Rousseau 1985). Increasingly, evidence from archaeology and ancient literary sources suggest that there may have been no direct link between the Pachomian monasteries and the desert hermits. The link belongs to a third group known as the *apotactic movement* (Goehring 1999, 26, 31, 45, 54ff., 212), often referred to as the village ascetics, and the first group to which the term *monachos* (monk) was applied (Goehring op cit., 21, 45).

St. Jerome effectively denounced the village ascetics as heretics (the *remnouth*), because they did not measure up to his ascetical ideals as did the postulated desert hermits. The apotactic movement (village ascetics) adopted a life of simplicity and celibacy and lived in small clusters in towns and cities, not merely in Egypt but also in Syria and Palestine. Some lived in family homes or rented houses, meeting frequently for prayer and the study of scripture. They also seem to have been involved in local church communities. Most importantly, however, is their immersion *in every aspect of secular life*, experiencing, it seems, no conflict between the sacred and the secular. And this involvement in the lives of ordinary people became an integrated aspect of the communal movement associated with Pachomius.³

When, where, and how did the apotactics come into being? Thus far we don't have the scholarly evidence to answer that question. Meanwhile the Australian scholar of ancient history, Edwin A. Judge (2010, 162f.) and Goehring (1999, 213) suggest that the Virgins were the *first* apotactics. Later, the men adopted the structures that the females had evolved and developed. The *Virgins*, known to have existed throughout the second and third centuries (c.200-400 CE), have been popularly hailed as ascetical, asexual heroines, fleeing the world and the temptations of the flesh, a depiction elaborated at length by Church fathers such as Tertullian, Jerome, Origin, and Augustine. But as Elizabeth Castelli (1986) demonstrates at length, this is a dangerously misleading description, reflecting male misogyny and the irrational patriarchal fear of women's embodiment, rather than the intuitive prophetic counter-culture of the Virginité movement itself, infused with much parabolic wisdom and a paradigmatic significance that merits more responsible and discerning attention.

In the dominant patriarchal culture women were viewed essentially as biological organisms designed by God for the primary purpose of biological reproduction. A woman obtained status and dignity by being somebody's wife or somebody's mother. The Virgins saw right through the oppressive misogyny and decided to change things for themselves. By opting for the virginal state they sought to transcend – and ultimately transform - the cultural oppression. Most lived singly and in their homes, meeting frequently for dialogue and prayer. Some dressed unconventionally, probably as a mark of protest, and they excelled in devoted care to the poor and suffering. McNamara (1996, 38) captivates the mood when she writes:

The free movement of women who simply desired not to marry, to live alone or together with other women and pursue a vocation of charity and religious devotion in the midst of normal urban life, may have scandalized pagans and provoked persecution. It definitely scandalized male clerics and provoked their resentment.

The political and sociological implications of this movement are cryptically stated by Sandra Schneiders (2013, 8) when she writes:

The consecrated virgins made a radical choice against not only reproduction for the empire but also reproduction for the family. In the virgin the family died out historically, something the virgin considered not a tragedy (like barrenness in the Jewish community) or a curse (like being born or made a eunuch), but a triumphal espousal of the Resurrection as a present, intrahistorical but history-transcending reality.

And inviting all historical researchers into this more discerning mode that can sense the parabolic shift and the paradigmatic breakthrough which we detect in this foundational strand of the vowed life, the Irish scholar, Bernadette Flanagan (2014, 49) writes:

I do not intend to get involved in the sociocultural meaning of the ascetic behaviour of women in the ancient Greco-Roman world. Instead, I accept the work of a wide community of scholars that has argued that the solitary, celibate choice of women in this era was not a private religious choice but an embodied protest against the social roles to which women were assigned. Lastly, I will read the available fragmentary material in the awareness that while the textual sources are limited, the overall conclusion of contemporary scholarship is that in this era, “women’s asceticism had sizeable numbers, varied lifestyles, and considerable vigour.” [William Harmless SJ]. At all times the originality of the imagery in the text witnesses to a vivid personal voice behind the author’s inscriptions.

While Church history generally gives prior attention to the male developments of early monasticism, I devote considerable attention to the more loosely federated female story. This is the alternative paradigm with a distinctive parabolic flavour. And it is not merely a case of trying to balance the gender emphasis. To engage responsibly with the several challenges of refounding, and above all to be receptive to the guiding wisdom of the Spirit, we need to reclaim and reconnect with historical developments that are likely to be more authentic in terms of the Spirit’s creative freedom and bold originality. It strikes me that the early female strand briefly reviewed above is a long neglected example of the Spirit who blows where she wills, forever surprising us with parabolic breakthrough. For me at least, the story of the early Virgins illustrates this in a vividly inspiring way, providing an invaluable resource for the discerning task of refounding the vowed life in our time. The historical and theological significance for the work of refounding can scarcely be exaggerated.

5. THE MALE TRADITION

As already indicated, the *apotactic movement* was not merely an Egyptian development; in fact, it seems to have arisen simultaneously in various geographical locations, Syria possibly being the place of origin. What some scholars claim to be an earlier communal strand in Syria, is popularly known as the *Qeiama/Covenanters* (cf. Voobos 1958, 1961; Gribomont 1965; Nedungatt 1973), deserving a more discerning attention than it has thus far received. These groups may have prevailed in more peaceful times before being forced to scatter as persecution became widespread. The Basilian communities (cf. Gribomont 1965; Fedwick 1979), are often considered to be a direct offspring of the Covenanters, with a more moderate quality of asceticism and a lack of the Hellenistic split between sacred and secular. As already indicated, the Pachomian developments in the Upper Nile probably drew much of their inspiration from this same ancient source.

This earlier strand is known as the *Benyai Qeiama* and the *Benat Qwiama*: the Sons and Daughters of the Covenant (hence, the Covenanters). Initially the group consisted of baptized members of the Christian Church, at a stage when, apparently, Baptism involved commitment to an ascetical life, including celibacy and a degree of communal living (cf. Leclercq 1968, 63-70). With the expansion of Christianity however, Baptism became synonymous with membership of the Christian Church and those formerly committed to a 'special' lifestyle now became a group apart. In this new capacity their commitment came to be known as the Second Baptism, a term frequently used in Christian literature to describe Religious profession.

The following are some of the outstanding features of the Covenanters:

1. Nedungatt (1973, 444) claims that they did not leave their towns or cities in search of seclusion. Veilleux (1971) and Gribomont (1965) are of the opinion that the anchorites and hermits were unknown at this early stage. The available evidence seems to suggest that the communal ascetical movement predates the eremitical one popularly associated with the traditional Egyptian model.

2. Celibacy and singleness of heart are the unique features of these groups. Although commitment to the Qeiama was considered to be life-long, it seems that vows did not exist at this early stage.

3. It was a *lay organization* and seems to have been well integrated with the local Church, co-existing with ordinary Christians, and like the latter, subject to the local Bishop. Superiors and internal governance do not seem to have existed among the Covenanters. There is some evidence to suggest that a leading charismatic figure, the Spiritual Father, held an honoured place within the group, providing spiritual

guidance rather than juridical leadership. And both women and men constituted the membership of this early group.

4. In terms of service to the local Church, the Covenanters seem to have functioned mainly in the preparation of liturgical celebrations and in the service and care of the sick and needy. Burkitt (1904, 130, 150) describes them as the backbone of the Syrian Church which probably tells us little of their functional role and, instead, may be indicative of the high respect in which they were held among the people.

5. In contrast to the conventional emphasis on extreme asceticism, excessive mortification, long fasting, and social isolation seem to be largely unknown among the Covenanters. "The rule of life which he (Aphrahat) sketches out is quite dignified and temperate, with no special features of observance of asceticism." (Nedungatt 1973, 428).

6. Worthy of note too is their attitude towards celibacy, which, while regarded as superior to marriage, does not as in the conventional understanding of Egyptian monasticism, consider marriage as an attachment to a passing sinful world. The Syrian attitude to celibacy (and to virginity) is beautifully portrayed in these words of Aphrahat:

For those who obtain this portion there waits a great reward, because it is in our freedom that we bring it to fulfilment and not in slavery or under the compulsion of any commandment; for we are not forced thereto under law. Its model and type we find in Scripture. And we see in the triumphant the likeness of angels; on earth it is acquired as a gift. This is a possession, which if lost cannot be recovered, nor can one obtain it for money. The one who has it loses it and does not find it again. The one who does not have it can never race to pick it. Love, my beloved, this charism (machabta: gift) which is unique in the whole world. (quoted in Nedungatt 1973, 431-432).

The Covenant groups with a distinctively communal lifestyle, and the other features outlined above, flourished during the third century of the Christian era, and seem to be another variation of the apotactic movement noted earlier. A long phase of persecution under three successive emperors, Shaphur (309-379), Vahram IV (388-399) and Jazgard (399-421), impacted negatively on the Covenanters. Because of their benevolent attitude to slaves and other oppressed groups, they became the focus of violent attack. Many of their foundations were destroyed, their lifestyle was disrupted, and many fled to the mountains for shelter and safety. Thus began a new strand of Syrian monasticism which in due course seems to have

accommodated the Egyptian desert influence; it became much more individualistic and ascetical in its orientation.

Fortunately, this was not the end of the Covenanters. In time they morphed into the Basilian monastic upsurge, with a little known Christian ascetic, Eusthatus of Sebaste, as the crucial link. Basil's monasteries exhibit many of the key features of the Covenant groups: brotherly love, simplicity, moderation, and compassionate care for the sick and underprivileged (for more, see Gribomont 1965; Fedwick 1979).

According to popular history, it was the ascetical Egyptian model that entered the West mainly through the initiative of John Cassian (360-435). When Cassian came to Europe early in the fifth century, he encountered a rather chaotic scene populated by wandering monks for whom he sought to establish a uniform and universal structure. He modelled this structure on the Christian church in Egypt, especially as evidenced in Alexandria, and not on the Pachomian communities as is often presumed. In fact, Cassian never seems to have visited the Pachomian monasteries. Having devised a structure, he sought to spiritually enliven it with the principles and lifestyle of Egyptian eremiticism which he undoubtedly admired, although it is quite unclear how much he knew from first-hand experience.

As a monastic organizer, Cassian cannot be faulted. However, he can no longer be regarded as an authentic representative of Pachomian monasticism. It is now more widely accepted that the Pachomian developments in Egypt were, in many ways, similar to Basilian monasteries in both spirit and lifestyle. The long-assumed progression from eremiticism to cenobitism in Egypt is no longer tenable. Instead it seems that Religious Life initially flourished through a variety of forms, with a strong communal ethos, an egalitarian involvement with local peoples (politically and commercially), and a quality of acetical living far less extreme than formerly understood and much more integrated with adult Christian faith.

6. RETURNING TO THE ARCHETYPE

For the purposes of refounding, this original strand embodies a set of values that constitute the creativity and empowering vision for every new breakthrough that happens across the centuries. Throughout this book, we will encounter, time and again, something of that original communal and prophetic inspiration; obviously it will be expressed differently in each new historical epoch. At its source is what Sandra Schneiders aptly describes as *the God-quest*, a mystical-type fascination with, and allegiance to, the divine mystery at the heart of all existence; in Christian spirituality it came to be known as the *Sequela Christi* (the following of Christ).

As already indicated, the *Sequela Christi* in the 21st century needs to be re-interpreted and realigned with the monastic archetype. Popularly understood throughout much of Christian history as a heroic patriarchal endeavour to emulate an ascetical heroic Christ, to procure individual salvation, we must now wrestle with the cultural contingency of that view, its defective historical appropriation, and its distorted biblical application.

Firstly, the historical context: the solitary eremitical ideal was in many ways a patriarchal projection of excessive individualized heroism. In reality the evidence points to something much less dramatic, and more integrated with the cultural norms of the times. As noted earlier, archaeological research is posing the greatest challenges for a review of what we have for long taken to be the norm. Thus Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom (2013, 300) provides an up-to-date evaluation:

The accounts of the monastic residences at the Cells (Kellia) suggest monks resided in one room structures that served as the place for prayer, daily work and sleeping. The accounts suggested that the monks lived in relative isolation from one another and had need of few possessions. But when archaeologists began uncovering massive settlements that looked more like densely settled villages and towns, with multi-room residences, at Saqqara, Bawit, and Kellia, it was difficult to maintain the long-held notion of ascetic simplicity. The archetype of monastic habitations as isolated, solitary, and wholly non-material, is no longer a tenable interpretation of Egyptian monastic history.⁶

Brooks Hedstrom (2013, 300, n.3) goes on to claim that the archaeological research also indicates that “monks owned property, involved themselves in legal disputes, and were, in large part, very much engaged in the world around them.” (More in Goehring 1999, 46-47, 95, 106). To which, Christof Joest (2010, 162ff) adds the observation that while the monks renounced marriage, and were more committed to spiritual practice, they were nonetheless very much integrated into the daily life of town and village, engaging in commercial business and social engagement.

Secondly, to recapture briefly the material outlined in Chapter Three above: We need to reappropriate the *Sequela Christi* within the context of how we understand the Christ event today, biblically and theologically. Christian discipleship is not about following a divine patriarchal hero over against the world, but rather about being co-disciples with Jesus in serving the new Companionship, in the midst of God’s creation. Religious Life exists not as a special mode of consecration to engender more salvific holiness, but to expedite the wholesomeness of all God’s creation through serving the empowering companionship of the Gospel, God’s

New Reign on earth. Religious Life involves consecration for mission – beyond the dualistic split of the sacred v. the secular - and not merely a more selective route for anthropocentric salvation.

The history of the vowed life involves a great deal more than a nostalgic admiration for ascetical heroes whose understanding of incarnational growth arose from cultural, religious, and anthropological influences which have long outgrown their usefulness, and even in their own historical context we now deem to have been one-sided and, at times, exaggerated. The following of Christ today is not focussed on a patriarch-like ascetical hero, but rather on the human and earthly transformation required by our appropriation of the Companionship of Empowerment, inspired by Jesus as the first disciple of the new dispensation.

Yet, there is continuity with the past, but at a subtle rather than overt level. The virgins, the village ascetics, and the ancient monks, when revisioned within the communal and ecclesial endeavours of their day, were agents for the flourishing of the new Companionship and serve as an enduring source of inspiration. Their flight from the world for the exclusive salvation of their souls, pursued through penance and asceticism, is merely one aspect, and certainly not a major one, of their exemplary witness. It was their courageous witness to making God's world a better place for all that singles them out as an enduring and inspiring source for women and men Religious across the ages.

Endnotes

¹ This particular article is the fourth chapter of O'Murch's book, titled, *Religious Life in the 21st Century: The Prospect of Refounding*, yet to be published by Orbis books in June-July 2016. The style of reference throughout this article is different from the style usually followed in this journal. The Editorial team allowed an exception to this article, because of the difficulties involved in converting this style into the style, usually followed in this Journal.

² In a previous work (O'Murchu 1991) I seek to extend this embrace of commonalities to include the Religious Life traditions of the other great religions as well. Despite cultural differences many of the underlying aspirations show a remarkable similarity.

³ Goehring (1995 26, n.56, 58) notes the oldest version of the *Life of Pachomius* was published in Bohairic, an Arabic dialect, largely devoid of any of the dualistic splitting between the holy and profane which inundates the later Greek version, and more specifically, the Latin text used and promoted by St. Jerome. "In the aftermath of Chalcedon," writes Goehring (op.cit.92, n.12) "and the eventual Arabic domination, knowledge of Coptic developments mostly vanished outside of Egypt. Egyptian monasticism was defined through the monastic texts that had appeared in Greek and Latin."

⁴ Bernadette Flanagan goes on to describe a parallel countercultural movement among early Irish monastic women, which was also consigned to historical distortion and misrepresentation. Thus she writes: “What we read then in the lives of early Irish women innovators is a socially androcentric perspective on women’s new spiritual engagements. Within this perspective two approaches characterise the biographies: minimalist reporting of women religious innovators; robust reporting of the negative reception of the new spiritual autonomy claimed by women through frequent accounts of the abduction, rape, and murder of the virgins; and positive reporting of women who displayed “manly” virtues in their new lives.” (Flanagan 2014, 61). Throughout much of Christendom, outstanding holiness in women, and the internal genius of its aetiology, was attributed to a psychic and spiritual make-up that belonged primarily to men, but somehow became possessed by some women. Consistently, when it comes to the spiritual realm women are viewed as frail, fickle and unreliable, incapable of reaching the spiritual maturity of the male. Thus emerged the concept of *the virile woman*, who features strongly in medieval spirituality (cf. Newman 1995). For a comprehensive overview of this historical and cultural distortion, see Gillian Cloke (1995).

⁵As with other revisions of ancient history highlighted in this book, it is also quite difficult to distinguish fact from fiction in our knowledge of Cassian. Steven Driver (2002) provides a critical overview while prioritizing the value of Cassian’s overall inspiration. More problematic is the recent debate on whether Cassian was actually the fifth century monk, later resident in Gaul, or the sixth century figurehead, Cassian the Sabaite, linked with the Mar Saba Monastery in Palestine (cf. Columba Stewart, “Another Cassian?” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 66 [2015], 372-376).

⁶ Other researchers documented by Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom (2013, 313ff) highlight that contrary to the traditional emphasis on fasting for ascetical purposes, the monks seem to have enjoyed a mixed diet of vegetables, fish, and meat. All of which requires us to adopt a more critically discerning approach to ancient literary sources as suggested by the monastic scholar, Malcolm Choat (2013).



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LIVING THE VOW OF RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE SEEN THROUGH A PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL LENS

Babu Sebastian, CMF

Perhaps the biggest sacrifice a person can make is to surrender his will before someone else and in that sense, obedience may be the most personal and most painful sacrifice of one's ego. In the case of a consecrated, the question of obeying the legitimate authority of the superior can present a vast array of possible reactions to his superior's directives. There are moments when he feels sure that what has been asked by the superior is the right thing to do, there are also moments when he feels certain that the directive of the superior is clearly wrong, unwise and imprudent. However, apart from these situations of certitude regarding right or wrong, there are also situations when the person is in doubt regarding the right or wrong in the obedience requested by the legitimate authority and moments when personal considerations make obedience difficult or impossible. On the psychological front, the exercise of obedience becomes quite challenging if one makes the error of perceiving obedience exclusively as the privation of a good. Obedience to authority becomes even more difficult when there is abuse, error, misunderstandings, highhandedness, even favouritism on the part of the authority in demanding obedience. Regrettably, such defects in the exercise of authority are not rare, thus making the already bad situation even worse!

1. INTELLECTUAL OBEDIENCE TO THE WILL OF THE SUPERIOR

Religious superiors, like everyone else, have no means of directly accessing the content of God's will. When a provincial superior asks a religious to go to a certain mission, he cannot be absolutely certain that such is the divine will for that particular religious. The only certainty which the superior can claim about a decision, made after sufficient discernment, is that his action and intentions are free from malice and therefore aimed at the greater good of the congregation, of the mission and of

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the person concerned. Although one may know that the choice made is good, there still is no direct way to affirm with certitude that it be how God judges the matter. Does the superior's inability to access directly the will of God render obedience to his directive meaningless?

In fact, intellectual obedience implies the attempt of the person to see the wisdom of his superior's decision. This act of obedience is not mere conformity to the superior or to his thought but rather, adhering to the principle that God wills obedience to legitimately constituted authority. When the decision of the superior is against the desire and will of the religious member, the latter should make effort to agree with the thought of the superior in so far as honesty permits and a devout will can make it possible.¹

While material conformity to the divine will (direct knowledge obtained through a private revelation) is unlikely as far as human beings are concerned, what is possible is formal conformity, that is, the conformity of motive or intention (for the greater glory of God and the good of the individual) of which one has knowledge. One may consider some principles to apply in situations where the subject is not sure of the relationship of God's will to the superior's decision regarding him. First of all, everyone is bound by mere natural honesty to conform his mind to the truth as far as is possible, as no one has the right to remain in and cling to error because there can be no right to what is unreal. In addition, when there exists a genuine difference of opinion between two persons regarding something of which the difference of truth is not clear, honesty calls for sincere efforts to see it also from the other's point of view, in order to avoid possible prejudice. The demand of intellectual obedience that the subject try to see the wisdom of the superior's order is no challenge to his intellectual integrity. It rather protects the intellectual integrity and humility as it helps him distance himself from the tendency to cling tenaciously to his own view. Although the religious superior remains fallible as any other human person, yet his dispositions and orders enjoy an ontological rank as representative of divine authority.

When the intellectual obedience is present, the degree of perfection present in carrying out the work is higher as the person obeys in behaviour, in will and also in the intellect. The religious does not have to extend the value of his intellectual assent to the directive of the superior beyond available evidence. In order to facilitate the intellectual assent in the religious, the superior should, within the permitted limits, spontaneously offer reasons for his directive when his decisions are extraordinary or liable to possible misunderstanding².

2. VOW OF OBEDIENCE: AN ACT OF THE MIND, HEART AND WILL

With the vow of religious obedience we offer God the homage of our will, which is the principal faculty. Obedience is an act of faith in God and overturns human pride in its very roots. In order to be complete, obedience must necessarily involve the *mind*, *heart* and the *will* of the consecrated person. Obedience of the mind involves understanding the meaning, the purpose and the limits of what one has been asked to obey. Obedience of the heart involves bringing *love* to the task one has been asked to do by legitimate authorities. It is to be loved because it is the will of God. Obedience of the will involves accepting one's duty with full consent and full docility, applying all of one's physical and spiritual talents to each assigned task and praying for a successful result. When obedience is not genuine in nature, at the level of the *mind*, it is marked by judgement, criticism, anger and contempt towards the authority and towards the obedience required. One may passively comply with the assigned duty while resenting it in his mind. At the level of the *heart*, such obedience is marked by the absence of love. One may obey to please the superior or to gain some personal advantage. The mechanism of compliance to authority enters in action here, when one obeys either only to please or to avoid possible punitive action. At the level of the *will*, such obedience is characterized by a spirit of rebellion, laziness, carelessness and lack of willingness³.

3. OBEDIENCE: AN ACT OF CONFORMITY WITH CHRIST THE OBEDIENT SON

In the life of a Christian, a vow is not simply a moral virtue. Rather, it leads us to look on God as our Father and Creator; it helps us in our efforts to imitate and configure ourselves with Christ the Son. We love Jesus when we constantly make efforts to be like Him, to think and feel like Him, to act and suffer like Him, to pray and submit our wills like Him to the Father. In exercising the vow of obedience, we imitate Christ who was obedient to the will of the Father. In an act of obedience inspired by faith and trust, one obeys the superior's order because faith tells him that God speaks through his superior. Without the elements of faith and trust, it is difficult to see the will of God in what is ordered by the superior. Most of the difficulties experienced in the act of obedience reveal that the elements of faith and trust were either missing or were insufficiently present in the individual. The elements of faith and trust can be found only in persons who consciously cultivate a deep life of prayer.

4. VOW OF OBEDIENCE: A WAY OF BECOMING A FREE PERSON

When we speak of obedience in a fully human sense, it does not mean having to undergo a limitation on our freedom or a humiliation, either in the sense of achieving a reward or avoiding a threat. If that alone were the motivation for obedience, it would be an infantile obedience based on compliance, either to receive a favour or to avoid a punishment from the superiors. Obedience in the truly human sense is an act originating from a rational and free disposition, an act revealing one's personal autonomy. It might seem an apparent contradiction to equate obedience with freedom of the person. Obedience is an act that consists in saying 'yes' to an order or directive which often comes from outside oneself, but which the person recognizes, at least under certain aspects, as reasonable, valid and acceptable and in virtue of it accepts to obey.

Obedience can be a wonderfully freeing thing when it is understood as a sensitive listening to the heartbeat of the religious community. It is also a responsive and responsible listening, which implies that those in positions of power and those under them have a need to listen to one another, to listen together to those they are committed to serve. It is responsive, and this implies a kind of generous spontaneity which is far removed from docile acceptance and passive compliance to an order from the superior. And it is a responsible obedience, implying in itself, the recognition of an obligation that originates from a commitment of love. Obedience is a listening to the call of God in the dynamism of daily events. It is a commitment under the authority and tradition of a religious congregation and in dialogue with others to listen to God's invitation and to answer it wisely with courage⁴. In doing so with love, trust and humility, one becomes internally free. Some people think that to be under obedience is to be always under pressure like a slave. This is not true. The obedient religious enjoys great liberty. He does what God wants because God wants it and the superior for him is none other than God's representative. What could be nobler and greater than to carry out the will of the Father?

5. TRUST AND OBEDIENCE

Many people tend to think of obedience in terms of fantasies of control, force by an external authority and restrictions on personal freedom and on autonomy. What actually makes obedience a truly freeing force from the psychological point of view is the element of trust that exists between the one who obeys and the one who demands obedience. Various research findings by social scientists point to the fact that when there is an atmosphere of reciprocal trust among the members in the group, those in authority feel less need for exercising tight control over the

members. They are more inclined to dialogue and more open to suggestions for improvement and change. The same atmosphere of trust make the members in the group more inclined to sacrifice personal interest and work for the common good of the group. When the atmosphere of trust is missing in a group, those in positions of authority tend to operate from two basic assumptions regarding the members in the group under them: that they are *less trustworthy* and that they are *irresponsible*. This can lead to a vicious cycle in which there is greater exercise of tight control and absolute authority, in turn making the members experience less trust in the abusive authority, and perhaps even make them rebellious or disobedient. Perceptions of disobedience can make the authorities even more paranoid, further aggravating the already vicious atmosphere in a religious community. The element of reciprocal trust is thus very essential to the benevolent exercise of authority and for the genuine act of obedience.

6. OBEDIENCE AND RESPECTFUL LISTENING

Respectful listening and dialogue becomes impossible if I do not give up my self-preoccupation and self-centredness. The more I am self-centred, the more likely it is that I hear only my own voice and not the voice of the Spirit who speaks through my community or superiors. The vow of obedience is also a promise to develop a sensitivity to listen to the voice of the community as potentially the voice of the Spirit of the Lord. A truly obedient religious community will foster the atmosphere of respectful listening and dialogue among its members regarding those matters that form the radical and fundamental essence of religious life lived in the day to day life situations. A religious does not automatically become obedient just by wishing to be so. It is something that needs to be learned through constant practice. He needs to learn to see God acting through the will of the superiors and the decisions of the community.

7. OBEDIENCE AND IMMATURITIES

Often enough in childhood and early adolescence, the motivating forces behind an act of obedience could be traced to fear, shame, guilt and idealization. The child or adolescent obeys for fear of punishment, to please, to obtain favours, to avoid feelings of guilt or shame or even because he idealizes or admires the one who commands obedience. As the person progresses into late adolescence, he realizes that the ideals and values he holds on to are not his, but of parents or of significant others. He also realizes the need to develop his own ideals, opinions and values. One natural corollary to this process is the adolescent rebellion against all that is imposed from outside including values and ideals which the person feels are not his.

The person needs to go beyond the childish compliance and adolescent rebellion to move into the mature practice of obedience involving the exercise of freewill and reasoned judgement. The vow of obedience practiced in religious life is built on the foundation of a natural obedience that was laid in childhood and adolescence when the person was still with the family.

If there are weaknesses in the foundation of natural obedience, the person may develop difficulties with the practice of religious obedience. The person who has not progressed beyond the level of compliance out of fear or guilt or shame will often find that this is the motivating force behind his obedience in his religious living. The religious who has not overcome his stage of adolescent rebellion may also find his rebelliousness poking its head each time he is asked to obey something which goes against his will and desires. The immaturities work at an unconscious level and the person, without help from competent persons, will not be able to understand why he feels such resistance to obey the superior. Each of us still carries within unevangelized traces of compliance and rebellion in different degrees. Candidates to religious life need to be accompanied with the help of competent persons to identify traces of immaturity present in their obedience in the form of passive compliance, inner rebellion and negative transference reactions against persons in authority in the community so that they can arrive at mature forms of living the vow of obedience. Our ability to negotiate with such negative influences successfully depends on the depth of internalization of religious values and on the extent of our identification with the person and values of the Son of God.

All of us have obeyed someone in the process of growing up. As infants we obeyed our parents, as children we obeyed the rules at school, and as adults we are obliged to respect important norms in the civil society although at times we may not like to. While for some persons the willingness to obey comes rather easy, some others find obeying an authority figure a painful and difficult exercise. Psychologists point out that if a person has had a very difficult relationship with a highly punitive and dominating parental figure, he or she may develop difficulties later with persons in authority in the form of negative transference reactions. This could be true also in the case of the religious who finds difficulty in obeying a religious superior who reminds him or her of the punitive parental figures from the past. The very fact of living together in a community favours the emergence of regressive dynamics and of emotionally charged reactions where the person may tend to regress to a lower level of maturity. Several such immature forms of obedience can be identified:

7.1. Obedience as a Passive Submission to a Discipline

A religious community is not like a hostel or a military camp, nor is it like a factory or company. In all these institutions, obedience is a rule and a must. A soldier or a worker cannot decide for himself the timetable according to his liking but rather, he must follow what has been already stipulated. A religious who obeys the rules in the form of a passive submission to a discipline is not following the radical and redemptive obedience of Christ to the Father.

7.2. Obedience out of Admiration

Even the most disobedient person finds someone to obey when he admires or likes him. There arises a natural tendency to please such persons and one becomes willing to obey such persons in order to please them. In a religious its negative effect is noted when the superior whom he admired tried to please is transferred, he finds difficulty in obeying the new superior whom he does not like.

7.3. Utilitarian Obedience

In such form of obedience, I obey only that which appeals as useful and advantageous to me at a personal level. I then become open only to one aspect of life and of my life situation: that of usefulness. Such a stance towards life and life situations prevents me from the basic listening to the deepest possibilities of human and spiritual unfolding. Understood in this sense, disobedience would be the person's lack of willingness to listen to life unless it favours his own egoistic plans and projects. It makes the person close in on oneself and eventually experience the isolation from the rest of those who one lives with. When the dynamic of conformity is present one also may be obedient to legitimate authority for the actualization of the personal objectives which have motivated him to be part of the religious order. The greater the possibility of reaching such goals, the greater will be the willingness to obey the expectations of the authority.

7.4. Obedience out of Repression of Legitimate Feelings

Complying with the discerned will of the superiors does not mean that one needs to deny to oneself the fact that he or she sees and feels things differently. Such denial would result in unhealthy repression which then constitutes a barrier to healthy and wholesome obedience. The repressed feelings and thoughts against the will of the superiors, if they do not find legitimate expression, would tend to influence one's behaviour at a subconscious level. When one's obedience is based on repression of genuine feelings, it is an incomplete form of obedience and may result in difficult

relationships lived with the superiors and other members in the community. At times, in some formation houses, under the guise of offering training in obedience, candidates are required to show a type of submission that simulates obedience that is expected of a small child. It needs no elaboration to suggest that such practices promote the permanence of regressive behaviour in the candidates. Houses of formation need to present the candidates with opportunities to make important decisions for themselves. If the superior micromanages even the small details of the life of the candidate, leaving him no room for autonomous decision making, the regressive, compliant behaviour of childhood will continue in that person making his obedience an act of immaturity.

7.5. Obedience out of Scrupulosity

At the level of motivation, it may be possible that one observes the vow of obedience out of a sense of moral obligation. In such case, one remains faithful to the vow in order not to sin. What is important for such a person is to obey meticulously all the prescriptions entailed in the religious commitment. Observing the rule of obedience because its transgression is a sin which would create feelings of guilt is not a sufficient motive for a genuine observation of the vow. This however, does not mean eliminating the moral dimension of the vow, but that it does not constitute a sufficient motive for a valid religious obedience.

7.6. Psychological Insecurities and Need for a Structure

At times, the need for psychological and spiritual security can be a motivating factor behind the obedience. One is willing to obey what the congregational authority says because it offers the security of belonging in a structure. One feels at ease in a community in which he or she has very little to decide on one's own and where life is structured with determined rules and regulations which one only needs to obey. For persons who are psychologically insecure, this offers the best possible solution to their problem of emotional insecurity as the institution offers the required psychological and spiritual security and the sense of belonging to a structure. They may even end up idealizing the authority figure, his role, his decisions to the extent of retaining them unchallengeable. Even if the structure and authority at times may get suffocating and oppressive, such persons endure it for the sake of psychological security it brings them in belonging to the institutional structure. However, the search for such security is not a valid motivating factor for genuine religious obedience.

In persons who are yet psychologically immature, the practice of obedience becomes a space where they feel relieved of personal responsibilities, which they

would have been forced to assume had they remained outside religious life. Such persons think that obedience means blindly following the will and decision of the superior without dialoguing or discerning. This can avoid every need for making important decisions or assuming responsibility for the acts. The religious order takes care of all the needs of the religious and all he or she needs to do is to follow the orders without questioning. If the person has dependent personality traits he or she would enjoy such a condition in which one is treated like a child whose needs are taken care of and in turn only needs to obey willingly. The person subconsciously begins to view the religious community as a safe haven where Christian love, peace and love abound. Religious authorities then become god and goddesses to be cared for and respected at all costs. Such persons can easily become the right hands of authority figures who tell the authority what it wants to hear, silencing thereby their genuine opinions or feelings. They become 'yes' persons for the authority. Obviously, such practice of obedience does not favour growth to maturity in the person.

7.7. Taking Liberties with Freedom

One of the simplest forms of obedience which is enacted on a daily basis relates to the question of having to inform or ask permissions from one's legitimate superior. Some persons find it humiliating and even absurd to have to inform or get permission from the superior to do things, to go places etc. As a result, little by little, they begin to neglect the aspect of informing the superior or getting permissions, with the excuse that one is a grown up adult and therefore knows what is right from wrong and as such does not need the superior as an intermediary between one's decision to do something and carrying it out. This happens in spite of the fact that many religious constitutions and directives explicitly mention the need for informing and getting permission from the legitimate authority. One may begin to be absent from prayers or other community activities, may go out or come in to the community according to one's convenience, and may spend or accumulate money in inappropriate manner. Such little acts of infidelity in the minimal things slowly take their toll on the quality of religious obedience. The little liberties one may enjoy on the sly begin to expand in number and strength and it may take the form of uninformed absences from community, spending time and resources of the community with friends, adapting to a secular form of life in all senses etc. It is like saying: "one who trains himself in swallowing little flies will not experience any trouble in swallowing even camels later on. The speed and the extent of the stealthy growth of vices within one's character are astonishing.

8. RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE AND PERSONALITY STYLES

The style of personality of each individual can have an influence on the quality of his inner disposition to obey the superiors and on his attitude towards religious obedience. It may make religious obedience easy for some persons, while for others it becomes a matter of a difficult personal struggle. Let us look at some of the personality styles and how they may dispose a person to religious obedience.

Those having a *narcissistic personality style* consider themselves very special and important and may treat others as an extension of themselves. They have least regard for the feelings of others and their sense of entitlement makes taking orders from someone else a difficult and humiliating experience. Obedience for them is a difficult experience, for in having to obey something which they may not like, they have to undergo the feeling of powerlessness and unimportance. Being very manipulative, they may as well try to influence authority figures in order to ensure that their personal interests remain protected. They may also demand favours and special treatment from the authorities. Unless their narcissistic self-absorption is transformed into mature and stable self-esteem, such individuals may find the act of obeying the will of a superior an extremely agonizing experience.

The scenario is very different in the case of a person with a *dependent personality style*. Persons with a dependent style have a pervasive need to cling to others who they perceive as stronger and may want such persons to take care of them or make decisions for them. Fearing isolation and abandonment, they go to any extent to make sacrifices in order to please the people they consider important so that they retain their love and esteem. As they play the inferior and dependent role well, authorities may not have much difficulty in getting them to obey the orders. Because of their core belief that they are inadequate and inept as persons, the dependent personalities rarely develop assertiveness and other interpersonal skills in order to express their personal stance on any issue. If the dependent traits are significantly present, their acts of obedience could be motivated by the need to please the authority figure. Often they end up with too many responsibilities as they are unable to say no to those who make requests to them or to defend their legitimate rights assertively.

Those with an *obsessive compulsive personality style* are often worried about rules and obligations. Being highly oriented towards efficiency and productivity, such persons can have a tendency towards perfectionism and worry a lot about possible mistakes they can commit. They often are very obedient loving, respectful and subservient before authority figures as they unconsciously believe that they must be perfect

before authorities in order to obtain their love and appreciation. Obedience at times is taken to the extreme of literal obedience without caring for the consequences for oneself or others. Their attention to the minute details in following orders deprives them of peace of mind and as a result they remain constantly tense individuals. What often drives them to obsession regarding observance of rules is their constant feeling of inner emptiness, sense of imperfection and unworthiness. They try to make up for their inadequacies by meticulous observance of rules and regulations. In their efforts to please those in authority, they often resort to compliant behaviour and by being silent about their preferences. The love, respect and concern they show to those senior to them may not be shown to those they regard as inferior to them. This may become a serious issue when someone several years younger to them in age and experience becomes their religious superior. They may experience difficulty in taking orders from such an authority.

Those with a *histrionic personality style* are characterized by excessively emotionality and search for attention. Their emotional states are constantly subject to change. They can easily attract persons by their dramatic behaviour and emotional involvement. Being extremely manipulative, such persons attempt to influence authority figures by their praise, theatrical skills, excessive emotionality and ability to attract. They make living of obedience easier by emotional manipulation of authorities. In their efforts to protect their vested interests, they do not care about other people's feelings and may even hurt them in an insensitive manner. Obedience out of inner freedom and love in religious life may remain a distant dream for such persons if they do not achieve sufficient levels of self-awareness and self-acceptance regarding their style of functioning.

Those having a *passive-aggressive personality style* adopt a strategy of provocation, resistance, non-collaboration, negativism, and indirect defiance of authority. Often resentful and angry as they are, they are unable to make up their minds whether to obey or not and they assume a non-collaborative stance. They are characterized by their ambivalence regarding every issue and constantly fight the dilemma of whether to aggressively assert themselves or passively submit. They resolve this inner conflict by assuming an attitude of non-collaboration, resistance, backbiting, gossiping, postponing, rumour mongering, stubbornness, inefficiency and selective forgetfulness. They may accept obedience with a smile but with no intention of carrying it out. Being ambivalent and unsure about their commitments, they sabotage programmes by engaging in negative cooperation and mindless resistance. Due to their inherent mistrust and resentment against authority figures, religious obedience becomes an issue of potential conflict for such persons.

9. RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE: AN EXPRESSION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY

A genuine obedience is a human act originating in the will of the person and involving the exercise of freedom and judgement. This distinguishes it from a mere compliance and passive submission to authority. The act of obedience exercised by a religious therefore is very different from the passive submission by a child to parental authority. The act of obedience of a religious is an active choice and involves the exercise of free will, charity and faith⁵. Religious obedience finds its primary inspiration and its ultimate finality in the participation in the mystery of the filial obedience of Jesus to his Father. This way the religious assumes the same sentiments of the Christ who is the *innocent Lamb, the obedient Son and the suffering Servant*. Obedience thus would mean committing oneself to an attentive and profound listening which implies welcoming or receiving of the plan of God for one's life and converting oneself so that the plan of God concretizes in one's life. The self-emptying of Jesus involved a conscious surrender to the will of the Father. It was an offer of his own will, the interior reality of the person. Phil 2:8 reads: "And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross". Jesus did not let his desire for power, autonomy and freedom dictate his choices and therefore, following the will of the Father was possible for him. Applying the filial obedience of Christ to the Father's will to the context of religious life involves raising one's capacity for total listening and alertness to the voice of the Spirit coming from the events, decisions, community discernment and from one's own inner voice.

Obedience includes the totality of the project of life. In religious life, everything (such as celibacy, poverty, community life, mission) is fundamentally an expression of obedience because everything is the result of a free, loving and *obedient* response to the call and will of God. The apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, when speaking of consecration, puts obedience in the first place followed by celibacy and poverty⁶. Submission to the authority of a superior is thus only one of the aspects of obedience of the religious. In religious life no one is lord over anyone else, but everyone is fundamentally equal, because everyone is brother and servant of one another and of God as is evident in the gospels.⁷

The second Vatican Council and the documents that followed it have reiterated that the obedience of the consecrated, who is human like any other person, does not diminish his dignity⁸, and that the obedience should be *voluntary, active and responsible*⁹. The complete renunciation of one's own will is offered only to God, and to the superiors one offers humble obedience¹⁰. The community and the superior

are not to be confused with God. They are rather mediations of God's authority. The obedience of the consecrated is the fruit of a free choice because he continues to be free to be obedient. If he were not to feel free to obey, life would be unacceptable and less human. Obedience in consecrated life does not consist in not willing any more or in renouncing to will anything, but in willing in a certain manner, for a specific reason, within a determined context. Obedience of the consecrated is a way of exercising own freedom and autonomy and at the same time presupposes a certain sacrifice, in order to dispose oneself according to the regulations of the vocational choice. Obedience thus, is not suffering the loss of one's will but rather is a *receiving*.

It is easy for us to obey when what has been asked by the authority corresponds to our way of seeing things and to what we prefer to do. Has it ever happened to us that we had resisted the authority's demand to the point of making him force us to obey under obedience? When this happens it is an indication that one has not yet transcended the attachment to one's own will and to one's personal interests over the common good of the community or the congregation. If obedience is important, the way in which one chooses to obey it is equally important. Do we live our obedience as adult persons who know to assume responsibility for their actions or like those who are incapable of assuming responsibility for their actions? Do we seek to submit our wills consciously to the authority representing God in faith and trust or do we content ourselves with an obedience that is not illuminated by faith and trust? Are we active, dynamic and full of initiative in our obedience or are we resentful, passive, and cynical in carrying out what has been asked of us? Is our obedience an expression of our faith and trust in God's will or is it a sign of our insecurities or dependent mentality? Do we live our obedience on the dimension of faith or on a very natural, human plain? Do we experience inner freedom to seek clarification and even challenge fraternally and gently certain decisions of superiors or do we prefer to accept everything, even those decisions whose motivations are suspect? Do we feel free to protest when we feel used or exploited or do we choose a passive mutism?

What poses a major threat to the virtue of obedience is the tendency to close oneself in individualism. In fact, a person actualizes himself all the more in the measure he discovers himself to exist in a community of relationships. Obeying is a battle against one's will when it manifests itself as egoistic and closed in on itself. Obedience does not eliminate one's freedom; rather, it removes all that makes the person less human: his ego, arrogance, pride and tendency to close in on oneself. Genuine obedience introduces him to a multiplicity of rapports, of community, to

a fulfilling relationship with Christ who emptied Himself to fulfil the will of the Father. Certainly, any effort to free self from such tendencies which makes one less human comes at a cost to the ego which has to die a slow death for the emergence of the true self of the person.

Endnotes

¹ Cf. T. Dubay, “Personal Integrity and Intellectual Obedience,” in *Review for Religious*, 22 (1963), 493-501.

² Cf. T. Dubay, “Personal Integrity and Intellectual Obedience,” 497.

³ Cf. J. Alberione, “Obedience. The Easiest Way to Holiness”, in *Daughters of St. Paul, Obedience the Greatest Freedom* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1966), 103-104.

⁴ Cf. Adrian Van Kaam, *The Vowed Life* (New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1968).

⁵ Cf. R.P. Vaughan, “Obedience and Psychological Maturity,” in *Review for Religious*, 21(1962), 420-427.

⁶ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, n. 22b. On the other hand, when it speaks of the Trinitarian love, the document discusses virginity in the first place, followed by poverty and obedience.

⁷ Cf. Mt 23:8-12; 20:24-28; John 13:12-17. It is not surprising to note that the title of the pope, who is the supreme authority in the Church, is *servus servorum Dei* (servant of the servants of God).

⁸ Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis* 14b, *Evangelica Testificatio* 27, *Potissimum Institutioni* 15a, *Vita Consecrata* 16a, 21d, 46, 84-85, 91-92

⁹ Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 14c, *Vita Consecrata*, 91b.

¹⁰ Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 14a, *Evangelica Testificatio*, 23.

CONSTITUTIONS: THE WAY OF LIFE FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Jacob Arakkal John, CMF

It is a common notion that the best society is the one, which has the least number of Laws. But in our actual living situations we cannot imagine of a society without laws. The impact of laws in our daily life is so strong that even the terms like “law-less society” or “law-less people” though in themselves are neutral terms, evoke a very negative feeling in our usual way of thinking.

Every system needs to have laws and legal principles, which give a proper shape and orientation to that system. Laws are those that give a proper and definitive shape to any system whether political, social, cultural or religious. Every nation, every people and every culture is governed by a set of laws and regulations, which allow its members to live on par with its aims and goals, and thus achieve the fuller meaning in life.

1. LAW IN THE CHURCH

In a religious system it is the *divine law* or the *law of the spirit* that actually works as the guiding and motivating principle. But along with the divine principles there are quite a number of human laws that are in operation in any religious system as, such a system is constituted of human beings and it is constituted for human beings.

The Catholic Church, considered as a religious system or group has its own governing laws and principles. The Church acknowledges and accepts the “rule of the spirit” in her formation and in her continued existence. But, at the same time, the Church has a full-fledged legal system to govern its members. Thus Pope John Paul II while promulgating the oriental Canon law in 1990 has rightly said that the Church has her constitutions in the *Holy Bible*, *The Document of the Vatican II* and in *both the Latin and the oriental Code of Canon Law*.

If the Holy Bible gives the faithful soul-nourishing divine commands and inspirations, the documents of II Vatican Council give the much-needed theological

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roots for one's faith. The Code of Canon Law, both Latin and Oriental, gives the essential legal sanctions along with the rights and duties to the faithful in their life as members of the Church.

Along with these universal laws, the church allows the faithful to be governed by the particular laws of the diocese: Church *sui Iuris*, institutes of consecrated life, societies of Apostolic life, and of the various associations of the faithful. Thus the life of the faithful in the Church achieves the fullness of life not by observing the Word of God alone but by abiding to the Ecclesiastical Laws and these particular laws, along with the Word of God.

In the above sense we could say that the institutes of consecrated life are “a splendid sign in the Church” (c.573 §1) and are governed by four types of normative sources. The first being the norms of the universal law issued by the Holy See i.e. the Code of Canon Law. The second is the norms of the particular law issued by the particular Church where the respective institutes have their seat. The third is the fundamental code or the constitutions of the institutes and finally, the other norms or proper law drawn by the competent authority of each institute.¹ In this article we are trying to see mainly the importance of the fundamental code or the constitutions of the institutes of consecrated life.

2. CONSECRATED LIFE: SOME BASIC CONCEPTS

Consecrated² Life is a stable form of life in the Church through the evangelical counsels. Through the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person follows God more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit.³ A person through the consecration dedicates himself or herself totally to God as the One who is most loved.⁴ The building up of the Church⁵, the salvation of the world⁶, and the perfection of charity⁷, are the reasons, which prompt a person for this dedication.

This form of life is assumed by the faithful canonically when they profess freely by means of vows and other sacred bonds, otherwise called the evangelical counsels⁸. Constitutions are one of the basic characteristics of Institutes of Consecrated Life in the Church. It is by the approval of the constitutions by the competent authority that an institute of consecrated life gets the full sanction in the church.

2.1. The Notion of Consecration

Consecrated life is a free choice made by the person called. This free choice made by a person is fundamental and binds him/her to live according to the gospels in a radical way in his/her relations with God and his fellow-beings. This radicalism of the life chosen is expressed through the free profession of the three evangelical

counsels. Though the profession of evangelical counsels produces a real new and special consecration, it is deeply rooted in the baptismal consecration, and is a fuller expression of it. Thus the consecrated person belongs no more to the world but to God alone.

We find various expressions to signify the life “consecrated to God” in *Perfectae Caritatis*. It speaks of “vita Deo dicata” (n-1), “Domino se devovere” (n-1) “Deo uniri per professionem consiliorum evangelicorum” (n. 2), totam vitam suam Eius famulatu mancipare” (n. 5), sui ipsius donoatio” and “totalem suiipsius Deo dedicationem”(n.11). Canon 573 addresses this form of life as “Life consecrated through the profession of evangelical counsels.” Hence it is the profession of evangelical counsels that makes one consecrated.

2.2. The Elements of Consecration

In the consecration through profession of evangelical counsels, the object that is being consecrated is the persons. This consecration can be considered as an ‘alliance’ or ‘pact’ one makes personally with Christ to conform one’s life with the life of Christ, chaste, poor and obedient. The sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and holy orders confer a special consecration as a result of their sacramental characters. Consecrated life, on the contrary is not based on any particular sacrament; all the same it produces a real consecration. We can notice three elements here:

2.2.1. The Divine Action

Through the divine action God grants a person special grace and unites him to Himself and thus separates him from the rest (c. 573 §1). In other words, the first movement in the ‘evangelical’ consecration comes from God Himself. God calls some faithful, clerics and lay persons, and gives them the grace to embrace consecrated life so that they can dedicate themselves fully to the love of God and for the service of humankind. Without this divine call and intervention, there cannot be any real ‘evangelical’ consecration (c. 574 §1).

2.2.2. The Human Action

By human action, we mean the readiness from the part of the persons called to offer themselves totally to the love of God and keep themselves aloof from the things that may hinder this love. This readiness comprises the whole life of the persons, without any reserve, and as a result, such a self-dedication constitutes a special consecration, which is rooted in the baptismal consecration. This complete dedication from the part of the persons is expressed through the profession of the three evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience (c. 573 §2). The

constitutions are essential at this level to accommodate, contain and deliberate the human actions.

2.2.3. The Ecclesial Action

The ecclesial action is the intervention of the ecclesiastical authority in the religious consecration. This external aspect is very important. Evangelical counsels and consecrated life do pertain to the life and sanctity of the Church (cc. 574 §1, 575). Therefore it is up to the Church, namely to the competent ecclesiastical authority, to discern the divine call to consecrated life in a person and to accept in the name of the Church, the self-offering of the persons divinely called (c.576). Without this ecclesial intervention, the consecration of a person would remain only in the interior level and does not produce any juridical effect; and the obligation that comes out of such a consecration pertains purely to the virtue of religion. The constitutions assume significance at this level too that the acceptance of it by the ecclesiastical authority gives authenticity, specific identity and an accreditation to a particular institute as it is within the church.

3. CONSTITUTIONS: SOME BASIC NOTIONS

Now what is Constitutions? Constitutions in its secular meaning are, “the system of fundamental principles according to which a nation, state, corporation, or the like is governed.”⁹ The word Constitutions is commonly used in two different senses. It is used to describe the whole system of government of a nation, state, corporation or the like, the collection of the rules, which establish and regulate and govern the government. It is in this sense that writing on constitutions Cooley a British legal expert has defined Constitutions ‘as a body of rules and maxims in accordance with which the powers of sovereignty are habitually exercised’¹⁰.

In a narrow sense, constitutions could be a selection of rules and not the whole collection of rules, which has usually been embodied in a document. It is thus a “selection of legal rules which govern the government of the country and which have been embodied in a document”¹¹. To be successful, every Constitution has two great objectives to achieve: every Constitution must first gain authority and then use authority. This is achieved in the civil society by winning the loyalty and confidence of the people and then employing that in the work of the government.

3.1. The Purpose of the Constitutions

Constitutions in the religious sense are, “a body of laws drawn up and approved by competent authority for a particular religious institute.”¹² Law in the Church has

a place and purpose, which is unique because of the nature of the society which it serves, the ecclesial communion, and the congregation of believers in Jesus Christ. The basic purpose of the constitutions therefore is the same as the basic purpose or role of law in the Church, which is, “*salus animarum*” (c. 1752).

While speaking on the role of law in the Church, Pope Paul VI said, “The purpose of the entire array of laws is to help the faithful iron their spiritual life, which must be inspired by personal conscience and a sense of responsibility rather than precepts.”¹³ It is by keeping this ultimate purpose of law in the Church that the constitutions maintain the proper subordination to the universal law in the Church.¹⁴

Constitutions comprise code laws of frequent applications in the life of the institute and its members. In the strict sense constitutions are a rereading of the Gospels, made initially by a founder or a foundress and afterwards by the members of the particular Institute who over the years have embraced the way of life and the mission of their founder or foundress.¹⁵ Constitutions contain provisions concerning the nature and purpose of the Institutes, the vows to be taken, members and the manner of life, and norms for government and administration.

As Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, an eminent theologian on religious life, rightly says, ‘the constitutions of every order or congregation are an answer to the question of their charismatic identity ‘who they are?’ ‘Who should they be?’¹⁶ Constitutions as written norms are nothing more than an externalized expression of the law engraved in each founder’s heart. They are born out of the spiritual and apostolic experience of the founder and by their very nature offer an inducement and an invitation to the members to share in the spiritual and apostolic experience of the founder.¹⁷

3.2. The Authority of the Constitutions

On God’s part the spiritual and evangelical experience that gave rise to constitutions is the first stage in a process of divine election. In this process through the labour of search and discernment the constitutions crystallize a point of convergence or encounter between God’s action and collaboration first of with the founder and later of with all the members of the institute. In this sense the constitutions could be called as an expression of God’s salvific covenant with the religious institute.

The ultimate source for religious law therefore is God Himself who confers effectiveness on it so that we may enter in communion with his saving love (*PC* 14). All of the authority that the constitutions have is due to their conformity with the

Gospel as discerned and authenticated by the Church. God has given full authority and power both in heaven and on earth to Jesus Christ¹⁸ and the same power he has communicated to the Church and in the Church to the Apostles. In virtue of this power, the competent authority in the Church erects and guides the Institutes of Consecrated Life with the profession of the evangelical counsels.

By the ecclesiastical approval, the constitutions are fully guaranteed to be an expression of the Gospel and an authentic way of life in the Church.¹⁹ In this sense the constitutions are the institutionalization of the founding charism of every founder. The constitutions can only be properly understood and accepted in a context of faith. The efficacy of the constitutions which derives its force from the authority is tied up with a free choice empowering a person to go beyond what is commanded to reach perfect charity. The demands of the interior law of charity blend with the exterior juridical law.

With the profession one submits himself or herself to the law as it is presented, pledging himself or herself to observe the constitutions and other norms of the Institute obeying them as a code of life. C. 598 §2 imposes upon the members the duty of conforming their lives to their proper law i.e. constitutions and norms tending this way to the perfection of their state.

3.3. The ‘Life Cycle’ of the Constitutions

Like any other Law, constitutions too have a ‘life cycle’: “at one point it is conceived, at another point it is born, then it lives, until it dies or fades away.”²⁰ There are two major periods in the life of a Law: the period of acquiring legal validity and the period of acquiring existential validity. The first period is that of the conception, consultation, drafting, promulgation, the time of *vacatio* during which the community becomes familiar with the new law before it becomes binding, to the point at which a law becomes official and valid. At this point in the life cycle of the law it acquires ‘legal validity’.

The second period in the life of a law is the time during which the law is actually received and internalized by the community as its own. At this point a law gets its existential validity as the community now recognizes the value of the new law and begins to act on it.

The final phase of a law’s life circle is its death. When a law has served its purpose, it is superseded by a new legislation and the old one is no longer observed and that particular law ceases to exist.²¹

Constitutions being code laws have to undergo all these processes. It is *conceived* in the human mind of the founder or foundress. Then it undergoes the process of consultation, drafting and promulgation. When it is officially accepted by the Church as the law for the particular Institute, it attains legal validity and when it is observed by the members of the Institute, the constitutions attains existential validity. If an institute ceases to exist, the constitutions too cease to exist.

Any rule that is to become meaningful to a group of people must move beyond the phase of legal validity. There is no meaning in announcing to a group that a rule is now part of an official document like the constitutions and that is to be obeyed as part of a set of rules. Such an approach would rarely produce a full-hearted response that allows a community of persons to internalize and live from the values underlying the document. This is true with a community of persons living the consecrated life too. While formulating the constitutions it has to be then remembered that the process of reception is crucial to the success of the whole endeavour.²²

Constitutions therefore cannot be just a rule book of prescription but should show the constituent elements of the patrimony of the institute, the inspiration of the founder, his thoughts, and his intentions concerning the nature, purpose, spirit, character and outward features of his foundation as well as the institute's wholesome tradition.²³ These features work as a catalyst among the members to receive the law in the right sense.

4. THE FUNDAMENTAL FORMS OF CONSTITUTIONS

Constitutions of the institutes of consecrated life are statements of convictions from which flow a sense of identity for a community of people who share a common vision of what they wish to be and a common hope of the realization of that vision. Juridical norms define the social boundaries of membership, norms of behaviour, organization and so on. In that sense inspiration and definitions stand side by side in the constitutions. Inspiration and definitions go back to the times of the founder.

Perfectae Caritatis and *Ecclesiae Sanctae* stipulate that the codes should have as their constituent element the wholesome traditions of the institute.²⁴ The wholesome traditions denote the characterizing elements introduced after the foundation and which are part of the essential patrimony such as the very character of an institute like clerical or non-clerical.

The literary form of the constitutions itself make it possible to categorize and place their contents in the right place and view them in the right perspective. We can thus identify three fundamental forms of literature in the constitutions of the

institutes of consecrated life: the proclamation of doctrine, legislative statements or the norms of action and the exhortations. Let us examine these fundamental forms to have a clear understanding of the constitutions.²⁵

4.1. Proclamation of Doctrine

Proclamation of Doctrine includes statements which express belief and perspectives of the institute held in common with the universal Church or with other vowed religious or expressed as particular convictions of the Institute. These statements help to constitute the special charism of the institute. An example might be, “we, the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, have also received a calling like that of the Apostles and have been granted the gift to follow Christ in a communion of life and go out into the whole world *to proclaim the good news to every creature.*”²⁶

Religious constitutions contain various other different subtypes of belief statements like, “theological statements, biblical quotes and allusions, historical statements, quotations from a founder or important person, and interpretative statements of spirituality”²⁷. Theological statements serve the function of contextualizing the life of the institute within the life of the whole Church. For example, statement about the end and mission of the institute might be situated within the larger discussion of the Incarnation or of the Paschal Mystery.²⁸

Biblical quotes and allusions serve to enhance the integral relationship of the religious congregation to the process of revelation and to the entire Christian tradition. Statements about the historical origins or development of the institute express beliefs about the institute, its destiny, and its divine predilection. These historical statements serve to join the contemporary articulation of the vision of an institute with its heritage.

Quotations from founders, foundresses, and other key founding figures serve to authenticate the existence of the institute and give it its unique character. Interpretative statements of spirituality apply general theological principles to the particular circumstances in which the institute exists. These statements concretize universal beliefs into the living spirituality of the members in the background of the Institute’s particular perspective and apostolic focus. Quotations from key figures ground and validate the spirit of the congregation in a way analogous to the founding of the Church in history through theological statements and biblical references.

4.2. Exhortations

Constitutions not only state beliefs, but also propose a way of life to the members. “They are like the family portrait or family tradition that seeks to depict the finest and the best of the members and how they make meaning of their life.”²⁹ An exhortatory text may appear in the indicative case as “we are” or “we do.” It may appear as well in the imperative case as “let us be” or “let us do.”

Exhortatory statements portray the ideals of religious life. They depict the ideal of what a member of an institute could become and of what he or she aspires to be.³⁰ Ideals are proposed not to discourage, nor to compel in an ‘unfree’ way, but to invite and challenge. The individual religious and the community as a whole are invited to consider the image proposed and to realize that no one is expected to match it, only to keep it on the view of one’s eyes as the ultimate goal of one’s strivings. Exhortatory statements are finally a measure of the successful reception of constitutions that such exhortations actually ground the institute’s continual conversion.

4.3. Legislative Statements

Legislative statements contain norms for action. These are canonical statements and they define conditions for membership, rights and duties of members, responsibilities and powers of those in authority and rules regarding material assets of the Institute. It is here that the constitutions could strictly be called a law.

The legislative statements in the constitutions bring about the ordering that is necessary in an Institute.³¹ They specify procedures, grant favours, impose penalties, and state restrictions and exceptions to the general norms. They are meant to delineate the *minimum* essentials of a member’s obligation and rights with precision, excluding from the constitutions proper, all elements which are subject to change or which are dependent on local usage.³²

Legislation must be understood as one of the functions among the many functions of constitutional documents. Its authority must be weighed according to a hierarchy of values. Those laws which support higher values have greater authority. In case of conflicts those rules which uphold more fundamental values prevail.

Thus for every member of an institute, there are day-to-day decisions to make in dialogue with competent authority, in the name of genuine fidelity to the constitutions and the spirit of the institute. In such instances an ordering and vitalization of priorities is necessary and constitutions appropriately include passages which guide how that ordering and vitalizations are to be done³³. Thus constitutions

have the potential to foster the growth of the members and to further the mission of the institute.

5. BASIC CONTENTS OF THE CONSTITUTIONS

The new Code of Canon Law of 1983 especially Canons 578, 587 and 662 establish the contents that must be included in the constitutional texts of the institutes of consecrated life.³⁴ According to these canonical norms, the Constitutions should be consisted of the following elements:

- 5.1. The intentions of the Founders regarding the nature, aims, spirit and character of each institute as well as its sound traditions (Can 578).
- 5.2. Fundamental norms regarding governance, discipline, incorporation and formation of members, as well as the specific object of the sacred bonds, that binds the members (Can 587§1).
- 5.3. The spiritual and juridical elements required for the normal development of the institute, though without needless multiplication of norms (Can 587§3).
- 5.4. The constitutions are not entirely within the complete control of the institute. They are to be approved by the competent ecclesiastical authority and the consent of that approving authority is required to change any of these constitutions (Can 587§2).
- 5.5. All of these are to be done with a view to fostering and facilitating the supreme norm of the religious which is the following of Christ as set forth in the gospel and as expressed in the constitutions of the institute (Can 662).

In short the Constitutions of the institutes of consecrated life are an expression of the founding charism granted by the Spirit of the Church through their founders and make them a permanent design of their life in the Church.

6. THE APPROVAL BY THE COMPETENT AUTHORITY

The fundamental code or the constitutions describe the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church and contain the essential elements through which it is preserved and developed. Therefore its approval and any changes in it are reserved to the competent ecclesiastical authority.³⁵ Strictly speaking only the book of the constitutions needs the ecclesiastical approval (c. 587 §2). The secondary codes require the approval of

the supreme moderator of the institute with the consent of his or her council. But all the necessary books are usually submitted along with the fundamental code, for the first time for ecclesiastical examination.

It is through the approval of the constitutions that an institute's existence and role in the Church are given formal approbation. The approbation reveals to the members of the institute and prospective members that the spirituality described in the constitutions is according to the Church teaching, that the authority of the constitutions is recognized by the Church. It also reveals that the apostolic works outlined in them are mandated by the Church.³⁶

For the diocesan congregation, the bishop of the diocese who is the principal authority of the institute, is the competent authority to approve the Constitutions. For Pontifical Institutes, it is the Apostolic See that is the competent authority (cc. 589, 590, 593, 595). It is that competent authority of the Church in turn discerns under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the viability and authenticity of those rules which have been proposed. Same authority's approval is required for any changes in the constitutions.

Keeping up the spirit of II Vatican Council the Canon Law has recognized the inspirations of the Holy Spirit in the foundation of religious institutes. By following the new Code every institute of consecrated life can now make their constitutional texts an expression of the founding charism granted by the Spirit of the Church through their founders and make them a permanent design of their life in the Church.

7. THE BINDING FORCE OF CONSTITUTIONS

The obligation of the members of the Institutes Consecrated Life to observe the Constitutions was mentioned in general terms by CIC 1917 and *Postquam Apostolicis* of 1952. "Each and every religious, superiors as well as subjects, is bound not only to observe faithfully and integrally all the vows of which he has made profession but also to order his life according to the rules and constitutions of his institute and thus to tend to the perfection of his state."³⁷ Inspired by this Canon of the 1917 Code, the new Code of 1983 says: "All members must not only observe the evangelical counsels faithfully and fully, but also direct their lives according to the institute's own law, and so strive for the perfection of their state"(c 598 § 2).

The CCEO further states that "each and every religious, whether superior or subject, is obliged not only to observe faithfully and integrally the vows which they have professed, but also to arrange his or her life according to the typicon or statutes,

thus having faithfully observed the intention and determinations of the founder, and so tend to the perfection of his or her state” (CCEO, c 426).

The constitutions of the institutes generally contain specifications for the obligation of the members to follow the Constitutions.³⁸ But this obligation does not of itself bind any member under pain of sin.³⁹ However, the religious are not excused from fault to the disobedience to the constitutions out of contempt or in committing matters that are contrary either to the religious vows or to the natural law or of the laws of the Church.⁴⁰ “The strongest motivation for observance is the pledge of fidelity to the state embraced in answer to the love of God; a pledge which could also be strengthened by a moral obligation when dispositions are clear and precise.”⁴¹

CONCLUSION

The founding of a religious institute is a relevant moment in the history of the Church. Every founder or foundress is the providential mediator through whom the Spirit introduced the particular institute and its charism into the history of the Church. The ultimate aim and the charism of every religious institute is the glory of God through personal sanctification and the salvation of all people.

Personal sanctification is the best way of glorifying God, and saving humankind is saving God’s image. The best available way for a consecrated person to glorify God is to put himself unconditionally at the service of God’s people. The charismatic movement the Spirit begins at the foundation of every institute is, therefore, a historic movement where human hearts are moved by the Spirit to give the supreme worship to God by a supreme self-sacrifice for the sake of the Kingdom. The Church gives her ascent to this historical and charismatic movement of the Spirit by recognizing and accepting the consecrated life into her folds. It becomes then a need that, while getting approved in the Church, the religious institutes sacrifice some freedom of initiatives in order to fit into the canonical categories and the framework of the ecclesiastical laws. This sacrifice is made in return for the greater good of being able to live and work publicly in the Church and for the Church.

A new institute is accepted in the Church only when the Church is convinced of its authenticity and only when she is sure that its founder has an authentic spirituality to offer to its members in following Christ. Although, being a founder means being a pioneer with his own situational constraints, we will always be able to find certain common situations in those foundational charisms, which constitute the charism of the institute. In order to orient the overall life journey of a religious as an individual as well as the member of the institute, the founder shows the

way through the constitutions. The constitutions, as we have briefly seen, contain the whole patrimony of the founder which in fact differentiates the member of a particular institute from all other religious institutes. The constitutions thus could be called, “the book of identity”. It is not just a book of laws but it is “the book of life” for the consecrated people.

At the same time it has to be remembered that laws do not create forms of life but recognize and regulate them. It is the Spirit who creates. The laws are formulated later on, on the basis of lived experiences, for a smooth functioning of the institute. Hence it is understandable that law and, for that matter, even theology always tend to be much behind the action of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is important that while formulating laws, the inspiring action of the Holy Spirit has to be kept up alive to keep the historical need for which every institute has been established in the Church.

Endnotes

¹ E. Caparros et al, (eds.), *Code of Canon Law Annotated* (Montréal: Wilson and Lafluer Limited, 1993), 415.

² The word *consecration* is identified with “setting apart for sacred use”. Consecration emphasises the action of God, and removes the temptation to view consecrated life as the creation and accomplishment of human beings. Strictly speaking, only God consecrates because God the Holy One alone makes holy. Cf. D. L. Fleming, “Understanding a Theology of Religious Life” in G.A. Arbuckle and D.L. Fleming, eds., *Religious Life, Rebirth Through Conversion* (Middlegreen: St. Paul Publications, 1990), 21-25.

³ See LG 43; PC 1.

⁴ See LG 44; PC 5.

⁵ See LG 44; PC 1.

⁶ See LG 45.

⁷ See LG 46.

⁸ See Can 573 §2; LG 44.

⁹ *Webster’s College Dictionary* (New York: Random House Inc, 1990), .292.

¹⁰ V.D. Mahajan, *Constitutional Law of India* (Lucknow: Eastern Book Company , 1991), 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² J.L. O’Connor, “Religious Life,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 276

¹³ Paul VI, *Address*, February 19, 1977, *The Pope Speaks* 22 (1977), p.178

¹⁴ James A. Coriden, "Rules for Interpreters", *The Art of Interpretation: Selected Studies on the Interpretation of Canon Law* (Washington D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1988), 15.

¹⁵ J.C. Daries, trans., *Our Project of Missionary Life, Commentary on the Constitutions*, Vol. I (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992), 9.

¹⁶ J. Cristo Rey, Foundation, *Charismatic Roots and Identity*, 1.

¹⁷ J. Cristo Rey, tr., *Our Project of Missionary Life, Commentary on the Constitutions*, vol. I, 10.

¹⁸ *LG*. 43; cc. 330-331; 576.

¹⁹ John P. Beal, et el, (eds.), *The New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 754.

²⁰ Ladislav Orsy, "The Interpretation of Laws: New Variations on an Old Theme," *The Art of Interpretation: Selected Studies on the Interpretation of Canon Law* (Washington: Canon Law Society of America, 1982), 48.

²¹ For a detailed study of this see L.Orsy, "The Interpreter and His Art," In *The Jurist*, Vol.40 (1980), 27-56.

²² *Ibid.*, p.58.

²³ *ES*, II, 12-14; c. 578.

²⁴ *PC*, 2b; *ES*, II, 12a.

²⁵ Carolyn Osiek and Kathleen Hughes, "Constitutional Hermeneutics: On the Interpretation of Constitutions." *Review for Religious*, Vol. 45, No.1 (1986), 60-64.

²⁶ *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Missionaries who are called Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary Claretian Missionaries*, Rome (2000) No.4, 20-21.

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ For a detailed study on this see L. Orsy, "The Interpreter and His Art," in *The Jurist*, Vol. 40 (1980), 27-56.

²⁸ For a detailed study see, Carolyn Osiek and Kathleen Hughes, "Constitutional Hermeneutics: On the Interpretation of Constitutions" 60-64.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p.62

³⁰ For example "Our Missionaries should aim at being truly poor both in reality and in spirit. ... All of us should feel bound by the common law of work. ... We should rejoice when some of the effects of poverty never doubting the providence of the One who said: "set your hearts on his Kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well." CC.26.

³¹ “The community should establish its own inner order, setting up a timetable for community prayer and regulating the other aspects of its life, so that community exercises are distributed according to the needs of the apostolate.” CC. 57

³² John Lozano, “Revision of the Constitutions: Meaning, Criteria and Problem,” *Review of Religious*, Vol. 34, (1975), 525-534.

³³ Carolyn Osiek and Kathleen Hughes, “Constitutional Hermeneutics: On the Interpretation of Constitutions,” 63-64.

³⁴ Canons that refers to constitutions are 581, 587, 595, 670, 648, 596, 598, 601, 609, 613, 662, 614-616, 627, 667, 668, 631 and 634.

³⁵ Beal et. al, (eds.), *The New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, 754.

³⁶ Coriden, *The Code of Canon Law, A Text Book and Commentary*, 460.

³⁷ CIC, 1917, c.593, PA, 136

³⁸ E.g. *The Constitutions of the Claretian Missionaries* read thus, “We, the members of the Congregation, are obliged by the prescriptions of these Constitutions so that we may grow in the way of the Lord and in the service of the Kingdom of God. However, the force of this obligation should derive from the very nature of each prescription. The Church most highly exhorts all of us to base our earnest search for the vigour of our missionary life on the Constitutions.” No.158, 113.

³⁹ “Exprimatur in Constitutionibus, eas per se non obligare sub reatu culpae; ...” Normæ, Sacred Congregation of Religious, 1901, 320.

⁴⁰ See J. I. O’Connor, “Constitutions of Religious”, *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 277.

⁴¹ Elio Gambari, *Religious Life according to Vatican II and the New Code of Canon Law*, 74.



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PURPOSE OF ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE ACCORDING TO VATICAN COUNCIL II

Joseph Ammaikunnel, CMF

In conformity with traditional practice and doctrinal progress, the Church has also created, adapted and developed her own legal system, so that her pastoral mission may be carried out effectively and in an organized manner. This legal system is meant for the pastoral order, which is so essential for the functioning and completion of the Church's mission. Therefore, all ecclesiastical offices are established mainly for the 'pastoral ministry', though not in the strict sense of the term. Moreover, it is from the pastoral image of the Church that her juridical order draws significance; it is the manifestation of the pastoral order in the manifold ways that the juridical order is established. The Church uses various means for attaining the supreme objective of *salus animarum* (salvation of souls). The system of 'office' is one of the prominent means among them. In this article I try to highlight the notion of ecclesiastical office according to Second Vatican Council. It is essential to clearly understand the purpose of ecclesiastical offices, so that these offices may be rightly used for the common good and their abuses may be avoided.

1. GENERAL NOTION OF ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE

Some scholars have analysed the use of office (*officium*) in the documents of Second Vatican Council¹ and brought to light at least three principal and distinguishable senses in which the term *officium* is employed in the Council documents.² The first sense is that of obligation, *duty*, or a *prescribed competence*.³ It is in the general sense that the designation, divine office (*divinum officium*),⁴ or at times merely *officium*,⁵ is used to express the functions prescribed of divine cult.⁶ However, this sense is not equally applicable to all the acts of public cult involving the exercise of the power of Order, but signifies only the Liturgy of Hours,⁷ or the Divine Office.⁸ The second sense of *officium* is noted as a grade of dignity or the totality of rights

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and obligations, especially of administrative nature, entrusted to a person who is competent according to law.⁹ The third sense of *officium* in the Council terminology indicates all the institutions or organs of public administrations, or the group of persons assigned to such structures.¹⁰

The Council Fathers used the term office (*officium*) in the decree *Presbyterorum ordinis* (PO) no. 20, in the second sense noted above.¹¹ PO 20 is principally a text on the just remuneration of clergy, who dedicate their life for various ministries in the Church. It is in the final paragraph of this number that the descriptive statement on the office is situated. For a better understanding, it would be relevant to cite the entire paragraph with the background in which the notion of office is inserted:

It is, however, to the office that sacred ministers fulfill that the greatest importance must be attached. For this reason the so-called system of benefices is to be abandoned or else reformed in such a way that the part that has to do with the benefices - that is, the right to the revenues attached to the endowment of the office - shall be regarded as secondary and the principal emphasis in law given to the ecclesiastical office itself. This should in future be understood as any office conferred in a permanent fashion and to be exercised for a spiritual purpose.¹²

Thus, an ecclesiastical office is precisely defined as ‘any function conferred in a permanent fashion to be exercised for a spiritual purpose’. This is not a random statement of the Council Fathers. It is true that this is seemingly a very brief and a general description of such an important institution with wide scope of applications as an office in the Church. This description has the vigour of a legal statement especially for its expression, *in iure* (in law). It comes to be affirmed that it is under this legal imperative that an office is to be understood. The term *deinceps* (in future) is expressive of a break with the anterior definitions.¹³ As has been previously said, its extensive nature and implications can be well understood in the pastoral context of its evolution. With this formulation, the Council sought to rectify a general principle, which had already been established by the previous canon law in which an ecclesiastical office, as regards juridical concerns, was understood in the strict sense. The Council seemed to have established the fact that those functions, which are not of Order or of jurisdiction, that is to say, office understood not in the strict sense, could be considered in the law as offices, when the holder of such functions enjoys stability in the office.¹⁴ According to J.A. Souto this definition is defective in its formulation, for it established a requisite for an office that did not exist in the strict

sense of the legal notion of office. In fact, the legal definition required that office be constituted in a stable manner (objective stability), but did not demand, in turn, that which was conferred with a stable character on a physical person (subjective stability).¹⁵

In almost all the drafts and schemas of the final text of *PO*, it was found that the notion of ecclesiastical office was correspondingly restated or modified at least in the terminological compositions, though the key terms were kept intact. In general, the following points were clearly evident in the elaborative process of the text describing an ecclesiastical office in *PO* 20: a) there could not be but one notion and single sense of an office in the Church, with a specific nature and purpose; b) consideration of the notion of office, as based on the already existing canon law and its partial adoption; c) the future possibility of a canonical reformation of the notion of office in the doctrinal text. Therefore, let us briefly compare the Conciliar notion of ecclesiastical office with the previous canonical notion.

2. COMPARISON BETWEEN CONCILIAR AND PREVIOUS CANONICAL NOTION OF OFFICE

According to many authors, even though there are similarities between the previous canonical notion and the conciliar notion of ecclesiastical office, the latter is noted for the modifications and innovations.¹⁶ It is argued that the Council Fathers wished to adopt the broad sense of ecclesiastical office in the previous canon law, and to exclude the strict sense existing so far as a technical term.¹⁷ A close examination of the background of *PO* would reveal that by offering a specific notion of ecclesiastical office, the Council Fathers, rather than showing leniency towards any particular aspect of its configuration in the previous canonical legislative texts, combined and affirmed the fundamental constituents of an office in the Church. Thus, the conciliar notion of ecclesiastical office reformed certain traditional elements,¹⁸ suppressed certain irrelevant elements,¹⁹ and conserved certain common elements.²⁰ J. I. Arrieta summarises the comparison into three points:

- Technical configuration of ecclesiastical office in the margin of the benefice system;
- The reconstruction of the notion of office from a unitary meaning of ecclesiastical administration and
- The delineation of the notion of office independently from the participation in the power of order or of jurisdiction in the Church.²¹

3. DOCTRINAL CONSIDERATION OF ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE

Second Vatican Council highlights the nature of ecclesiastical office, that it has some special ecclesiastical functions with a purpose proper to the Church, that is, both spiritual and social. The spiritual functions are sacramental²² and pastoral. Such functions are understood as social because, in one way or other, they are related to the social and public nature of the Church, and in that sense they have some juridical elements. In this perspective, offices are closely associated with the functioning of the ecclesiastical community. Therefore, the Church determines the office bearers, and provides wider means for greater participation in the ecclesiastical functions. It is also pointed out that, since any function that is conferred with the character of stability and with a view to the spiritual well-being of the ecclesial community could be called an office, the Conciliar definition supposes a more flexible and agile pastoral activity.²³

Some of the Conciliar expressions seem to offer a juridically imperfect notion of ecclesiastical office: for example, the expression in *PO 20, stabiliter collatum* and the generalization of *finem spiritualem*. While the former expression permits inclusion in the category of ecclesiastical office 'any function' conferred even occasionally at the will of a superior for private matters, the latter leads to designating any function in the Church as office.²⁴ This notion, therefore, is pointed out as one that lacks a terminological precision and, hence, it expresses juridico-technical rigour. But a response to this line of thought may be given in such a way that only when the terminologies that are used in the notion of office are taken together, they constitute the meaningful notion of office, facilitating the grasping of its significance both in theory and reality.

As A. Longhitano has rightly remarked, the theological principles or the juridical institutes cannot be considered in an abstract way, disregarding the circumstances in which they were formulated; since they find their origin in the Church and the Church is a reality living in history, they are conditioned by human vicissitudes.²⁵ It is also verifiable in the fact that the notion of ecclesiastical office evolved in Second Vatican Council in the context of the felt need for emphasising the priority of ministry in the Church on account of various pastoral reasons,²⁶ the need for suppressing or at least modifying the so-called system of benefice as it has become obsolete,²⁷ and for a clear idea on the just remuneration of the clergy.²⁸ Having observed the daily complexity of pastoral life and a situation in which the ecclesiastical functions were numerically and qualitatively multiplying, the Council intended to separate the office from the system of benefice.

The renewed understanding of the nature of ecclesiastical power and of the position and role of lay persons in the Church contributed, at least indirectly, to the formulation of a clear notion of an office in the Church. These last mentioned factors, which are implied in the conciliar notion of ecclesiastical office with the consequence of its general applicability to any Christian Faithful,²⁹ are obviously verifiable in a phase of the elaboration of *PO 20*. This is openly revealed that by conserving the new definition of ecclesiastical office in the Decree, the Council's principles would have to be inserted in the legislative texts, more particularly, the wider sense of an office in the Church instead of its strict sense, as it was in the definition itself.³⁰

On the other hand, the Fathers of the Council were not content to see only the spiritual life and the theology of the presbyterate, but they were also justly preoccupied with establishing necessary means for resolving the material, social and family problems of presbyters.³¹ In this context, such means were suggested, a reformation of the system of benefice was insisted and the ministry which the priests carried out came to be particularly emphasized.³² The ministry can be understood in its varied form of service. Thus, the pastoral ministerial context of the emergence of the notion of office is clear in the Second Vatican Council.

4. STABILITY OF ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE

In the light of the conciliar notion of ecclesiastical office, any function that is *stably conferred* with some other qualifications can be considered as office in the Church. This expression, differing from previous canonical texts, indicates the sense of *subjective stability* of the office holder. In this sense it is normally interpreted that only the act of conferral of office has the character of stability. Therefore, once the office is conferred on a physical person, that person enjoys subjectively the stability of that office as long as nothing contrary happens to the person so as to alter the stability of the conferred office.³³ The key expressions, conferral (*collatum*) and appointment (*constitutum*), though they are not interchangeable, are not mutually exclusive, but complimentary to one another, because the former expresses a subjective sense, and the latter an objective sense.

5. POWER IN THE ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE

The Conciliar delineation of the notion of ecclesiastical office, 'detached' from participation in the ecclesiastical power, is of remarkable doctrinal concern. First of all, it has to be said that the absence of the power categories in the notion of office in no way implies a 'taken for granted' idea of power as a constituent of office. As it has been maintained, ecclesiastical office, considered in itself, cannot presume

some participation in the power of Order, due to the fact that the unique mode of attributing this power is the imposition of hands.³⁴ It was also noted that while ecclesiastical office could be and can be the object of resignation or privation,³⁵ the power of Order is not so. Such irrevocability of Orders is to be seen as a consequence of the dogmatic elaboration of the indelible and permanent character of the sacrament of sacred Ordination, impeding its cancellation. The absence of the element of power in the Conciliar notion of office is also explained in such a way that the power of Order is not an effect of the investiture of an office, but a presupposition for the conferral of the same; in other words, the power of Order is none other than a condition for the mission.³⁶

With regard to not mentioning the power of jurisdiction, or that of any other public ecclesiastic power, in the notion of ecclesiastical office, the following can be observed: first of all, it seems to be a clear indication of a careful avoidance of an interpretative theory of office centred on 'jurisdiction alone'. Moreover, it can be viewed in a wider ecclesiological and pastoral context. Thus, from the Conciliar notion of office, which is devoid of power as its constituent part, the mind of the Council Fathers could be inferred as unfavourable to reducing conceptually the vast sphere of ecclesiastical functions only to certain limited members of the ecclesial community and to certain limited areas of activity. However, this is not to limit the ecclesiastical activities.

6. ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE: A PASTORAL OUTLOOK OF SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The decree *PO* reflects the general pastoral outlook of the Council regarding ecclesiastical office. In this decree, the pastoral nature and meaning of ecclesiastical office in general is brought to light. It has already been noted that the context in which the notion of an ecclesiastical office emerged in *PO* 20 was exclusively a pastoral setting. Everything, material or immaterial, that was related to the presbyters was affirmed as oriented to the effective fulfilment of their ministry. "It is to the office that sacred ministers fulfil that the greatest importance must be attached...the principal emphasis in law given to the office itself".³⁷ In this context it is relevant to seek the pastoral identity of presbyters and the content of presbyteral ministry in the context of which the general notion of an office emerged and to which a priority is given.

The identity of priests, without distinction of the diocesan or religious, chiefly consists in his ministry in such a way that his ministry is his life. During the elaboration of *PO* the reason for the changing of title from *De vita et ministerio*

sacerdotali to the final formula *De presbyterorum ministerio et vita*³⁸ and the negative response of the Commission to 139 Fathers who requested to change the title into *De ministerio et vita presbyterorum speciatim dioecesanorum*³⁹ underline this statement.

Having made a doctrinal synthesis of *PO*, M. Caprioli has pointed out four dimensions of the ministry and life of presbyters: sacred, apostolic, ascetic-mystical and ecclesial.⁴⁰ The priestly identity, characterized by these dimensions, consists in their ministry as participants in the pastoral solicitude of the Church, which is principally shared by the bishops. However, this ministry has an ontological root in the sacred ordination. Therefore, in all its three Christological and ecclesiological dimensions, namely, prophetic, priestly, and kingly, this ministry is divinely willed. Consequently, whatever ministry the priests render has a pastoral link to the salvific plan of God. Accordingly, the priests are ministers of the word of God in preaching (*PO* 4); ministers of the Eucharist and of the other sacraments in the liturgy (*PO* 5) and 'educators of the Christian people',⁴¹ both individuals and community, by pastoral action and by leading them in various ways to the full maturity in the life of faith; they should act towards people not according to what may please men, but according to the demands of Christian doctrine of life (*PO* 6). Hence priests who are associates and collaborators in the teaching, sanctification and guidance of God's people in the Church, are living instruments of Christ.

No priest is sufficiently equipped to carry out his own mission alone and as it were single handed; he can only do so by joining under the leadership of those who are rulers of the Church (*PO* 7). Therefore, the nature of their ministry is essentially related to the bishop, his brother priests and lay people: to the bishop as his brothers and friends and as his necessary collaborators and counsellors in his pastoral care on the theological basis of the common participation in the same and unique priesthood of Christ (*PO* 7); to the brother priests in the fraternal unity and cooperation (*PO* 8) and to all the laypersons in the community (*PO* 9). Thus, it is through a network of essential relationships that the priests accomplish their ministry. A closer examination of *PO* 7, in relation to the diocesan curial offices, which are held by priests, would reveal that it is on the essential Episcopal-presbyteral relationship⁴² that these offices exist and operate.

This nature of the ministry of priests is further clarified by the Synodal document of 1967, *Ultimis temporibus*, on 'the ministerial priesthood': Under the title 'priests in the communion of the Church' it deals with the above mentioned categories of relationships. Speaking about 'principles of doctrine', it underlines the fact that the priestly ministry is essentially communitarian within the *Presbyterium* and in

relation with the bishop who is in communion with the Roman Pontiff and with the body of the bishops; this holds good also for the priests who are not in immediate service of any community.⁴³

Thus, the nature and exercise of the presbyteral ministry has a pastoral nature, whether rendered in immediate relation with any community or not, as for example the diocesan curial services. By offering a general definition of an office in *PO* 20, Second Vatican Council wanted to prioritise the manifold ministries of the priests with this pastoral motive. This also underlines the fact that the general notion of an office in Second Vatican Council is characterized by its essentially pastoral content; hence, the exercise of offices has a pastoral link.

7. ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE AND THE NON-ORDAINED

In the broad sense of ecclesiastical office, it simply added ‘stable conferral’, as if it would suffice to qualify office in the Church. At the first sight of these facts themselves, it is clear that office in the technical sense is not restricted to clerics alone, but extended to the non-ordained persons. Regarding non-ordained persons, that is, the lay persons (lay or consecrated), it could be said in the light of *LG* 33 that they collaborate with ecclesiastical power by assuming in some ecclesiastical offices with a view to a spiritual end (*quaedam munera ecclesiastica, ad in finem spiritualem exercenda*). It was interpreted that the significance of the word “some offices” (*quaedam munera*) was not to be considered as equal to any office (*quodlibet munus*) as in the notion of office. However, such an understanding seems to be contradictory when lay persons assume those functions conferred on them in a stable manner, as established by *LG* 37⁴⁴ and *CD* 27.⁴⁵ In both of these texts the expressions, namely, at the service of the Church and spiritual finality have mutually complimentary significances.

CD 27 gives the idea that the lay persons hold some offices, though the manner is different from those offices occupied by the priests as intended in the decree.⁴⁶ It indicates that *officium* was understood not only as ministerial offices which are exercised by sacred ministers, or office in the strict sense of the Code, conditioned by participation in ecclesiastical power and thus restricted only to clerics, but also as non-ministerial or better non-hierarchical, as established by law with the broad sense of office. It means that an ecclesiastical office in its technical and proper sense, though different in kind, could be entrusted to and exercised by laypersons.⁴⁷ According to the opinion of O. Robleda, there is possibility of *special office* that has no participation of power of order or of jurisdiction. The laypersons accomplish such offices in various apostolates, participating in the power of baptism

and confirmation, and on the basis of divine deputation as taught by *LG* 33.⁴⁸ But, according to P. Erdő, the Conciliar notion of office in itself did not permit that ecclesiastical office in the strict sense could be conferred to laypersons, but it established that the functions accessible to them could be named as offices.⁴⁹ The mandate to office certainly involves some exercise of power. According to *CIC* c. 129 §1, those who are in the sacred ordination have the capability of power of governance, which belongs to the Church by divine institution. And the lay members of Christ's faithful can cooperate in the exercise of this same power in accordance with the law (*CIC* c. 129 §2).⁵⁰

The *motu proprio Ministeria Quaedam*⁵¹ had clarified that the ministry entrusted to the laity is no longer to be considered as reserved to candidates for the sacrament of Holy Orders.⁵² Ministries should always stand out as stated in the *motu proprio*: "the distinction between clergy and the laity, and that which are proper and reserved for clerics and what can be entrusted to the laity". This was intended also to understand their "mutual relationship" in communion (*Ministeria Quaedam incipit*).⁵³

CIC c. 204 §1 states: "Christ's faithful are those who, since they are incorporated into Christ through baptism, are constituted as the people of God. For this reason they participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They are called, each according to his or her particular condition, to exercise the mission which God entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world". Since the power of governance belongs to the Church and of its divine origin, all the faithful, not only the clergy, by virtue of the reception of the sacrament of Baptism, are enabled to hold some ecclesiastical offices with competences binding on the other, as long as they have the required skills.⁵⁴ The *tria munera* is radically entrusted equally to all the baptized, based on the ecclesial communion and co-responsibility, but the *munera* are carried out with different legal status, dependent on their status. The ontological differences between the baptized and the ordained are on the basis of the ministerial structure of the Church for the welfare of the community.⁵⁵ In the final analysis, it can be said that the offices that laypersons exercise are related to power of governance, on a collaborative basis, but are not exercised independently.⁵⁶ In the opinion of A. Montan, there is need for a legislation that completely reorders the entire matter about the services and ministries entrusted to the persons who are not in the sacrament of Holy Order. The ministries of the laity should not be confused with those of ordained ministries; it must find their place in doctrine and canonical discipline, in complementarity with ordained ministry.⁵⁷

8. JURIDICAL NOTION OF ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE IN THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

We see in *PO* some juridical vigour. This is also evident at least in three instances, namely; 1) the notion of office conveyed by *PO* 20 is practically a reformulation and a revision of what had been already established by previous canon law; 2) the Council Fathers discussed and deliberated on and defined an ecclesiastical institution of a juridical nature;⁵⁸ and 3) by formulating the phrase ‘in law’, the ecclesiastical legislator was obliged to base any modification of the notion of office on the Conciliar determination. It may lead one to think that certain dogmatic terminologies can be of a juridical nature and in such instances, the legislator can laterally incorporate them into juridical norms;⁵⁹ at the same time, the legislator can opportunely utilize or substitute terminologies of more extensive juridical weight than that which is implied in the dogmatic terms. All these suppositions are found equally verified in the notion of ecclesiastical office in the canons of the post-Conciliar Codes, for example *CIC* c. 145 §1 and *CCEO* c. 936 §1, “An ecclesiastical office is any function constituted in a stable manner by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance to be exercised for a spiritual purpose”.

CONCLUSION

To summarise what has been said, the term office in the Church may be understood in a broad sense or a strict sense. In the broad sense, ecclesiastical office could be any function in the Church, legitimately exercised for a spiritual purpose. But we need to pay attention to the strict sense, because it was only in this sense that canon law considered a function as office in the Church. The ecclesiastical developments were undoubtedly influenced by a secular culture imbued with the rich legacy of Roman law. The present concept of office (*officium*) represents a cluster of ethical, religious, social and juridical significances. Moreover, the legislative texts developed it in a permanent subjective and objective functional perspective, specifically attaching some rights and duties to the person to whom the incumbency is conferred. In the legal sphere, *officium* came to be regarded under various disciplinary and institutional measures.

Second Vatican Council highlights the purpose of ecclesiastical office as both spiritual and social. The Vatican decree *PO* clearly brings out the pastoral nature and meaning of ecclesiastical office and the context in which the notion of an ecclesiastical office emerged in *PO* 20 which was exclusively a pastoral setting. When common people think about the ecclesiastical office, they think that it is something highly official and it is only meant for the clerics. Second Vatican Council II makes

it clear that lay people have a greater role to play in the ecclesiastical office. The purpose of the ecclesiastical office is purely of pastoral, and its main aim is to attain the supreme objective that is *salus animarum* (salvation of souls). In this context the laity has a greater role to play. Therefore, the ecclesiastical office is not only of clerics but also of lay faithful.

Endnotes

¹X. Ochoa, *Index Verborum cum documentis Concilii Vaticani Secundi* (Roma, Ediurcla, 1967), 339-341; P. ERDŐ, “Ministerium, munus et officium in Codice iuris canonici”, in *Periodica* 78(1989), 422-425; A. Montan, “Ministeria, munera, officia. I laici titolari di uffici e di ministeri (cann. 228, 230, 274): Precisazioni terminologiche”, in AA. Vv, *I laici nella ministerialità della Chiesa* (Milano, Ancora, 2000), 111-112.

²P. Erdő, “Ministerium, munus et officium in Codice iuris canonici”, in *Periodica* 78 (1989), 422-425; A. Montan, “Ministeria, munera, officia. I laici titolari di uffici e di ministeri (cann. 228, 230, 274): Precisazioni terminologiche”, in AA. Vv, *I laici nella ministerialità della Chiesa* (Milano, Ancora, 2000), 111-112.

³In this sense *officium* signifies a general obligation conveyed by the expressions, “*officia et iura*” cf. Vatican Council II, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum educationis* 28 October 1965, no. 3, AAS 58 (1966), 731-732; English translation in A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (St. Paul Publications, Bombay 1991), 658-659, (Hereafter it will be cited as *GE*); Vatican Council II, Declaration on Religious Liberty *Dignitatis humanae* 7 December 1965, no. 6, AAS 58 (1966), 933-934; English translation in A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Bombay, 1991), 723 (Hereafter it will be cited as *DH*); Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965), no. 87, AAS 58 (1966), 1110; English translation in A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Bombay, 1991), 892-893 (Hereafter it will be cited as *GS*), “*officium et ius*”, cf. Vatican Council II, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam actuositatem* 18 November 1965, no. 8, AAS 58 (1966), pp. 844-845; English translation in A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Bombay, 1991), 698-699 (Hereafter it will be cited as *AA*), also cf. *GE* 6; *DH* 3; *GS* 65 “*officium incumbit*”, cf. Vatican Council II, Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity *Ad gentes divinitus* 7 December 1965, no. 5, AAS 58 (1966), p. 951; English translation in A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Bombay, 1991), 734-735 (Hereafter it will be cited as *AG*); also cf. *GS* 76.

⁴Vatican Council II, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium* 4 December 1963, no. 83, 90, 98, 99, 100, 101, AAS 56 (1964), pp. 121, 122, 124, 124, 124, 124-125; English translation in A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Bombay, 1991), 41-42, 43, 44, 44-45, 45, 45 (Hereafter it will be cited as *SC*).

⁵ SC 88, 89.

⁶ P. Erdő, “Uffici e Funzioni Pubbliche nella Chiesa”, in *Anuario Argentino de Derecho Canónico* 3 (1996), 55.

⁷ Vatican Council II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum ordinis* 7 December 1965, no. 13, *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 1011; English translation in A. FLANNERY (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Bombay, 1991), 796-798 (Hereafter it will be cited as *PO*); also cf. Vatican Council II, Decree on the Training of Priests *Optatam Totius* 28 October 1965, no. 8, *AAS* 58 (1966), 713; English translation in A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Bombay, 1991), 644-645 (Hereafter it will be cited as *OT*); SC 88, 89.

⁸ *PO* 13; *OT* 8.

⁹ For example cf. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* 21 November 1964, no. 24, *AAS* 57 (1965), p. 29; English translation in A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Bombay, 1991), 347-348 (Hereafter it will be cited as *LG*); Vatican Council II, Decree on the Pastoral Office of the Bishops in the Church *Christus dominus* 28 October 1965, nos. 27, 28, 31, *AAS* 58 (1966), pp. 686-687, 687, 689-690; English translation in A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Bombay, 1991), 523, 524, 526 (Hereafter it will be cited as *CD*), etc; see also, P. Erdő, “Uffici e Funzioni Pubbliche nella Chiesa”, in *Anuario Argentino de Derecho Canónico* 3 (1996), 56.

¹⁰ Vatican Council II, Decree on the Means of Social Communication *Inter mirifica* 4 December 1963, nos. 19, 21, 22, *AAS* 56 (1964), p. 152; English translation in A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar* (Bombay, 1991), 271 (Hereafter it will be cited as *IM*); see also, P. Erdő, “Uffici e Funzioni Pubbliche nella Chiesa”, in *Anuario Argentino de Derecho Canónico* 3 (1996), 57.

¹¹ *PO* 20.

¹² The Latin text of *PO* 20 reads thus: *Officio vero, quod sacri ministry adimplent, praecipuum momentum tribuere oportet. Quare systema sic dictum beneficiale relinquatur aut saltem ita reformetur ut pars beneficalis, seu ius ad reditus ex dote officio adnexos, habeatur tamquam secundaria, et princeps in iure tribuatur locus ipsi officio ecclesiastico, quod quidem deinceps intelligi debet quodlibet munus stabiliter collatum in finem spiritualem exercendum.*

¹³ J.A. Souto, *La noción canonica de officio*, (Pamplona, Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1971), 88.

¹⁴ J.A. Souto, *La noción canonica de officio*, 81.

¹⁵ J.A. Souto, *La noción canonica de officio*, 81.

¹⁶ F. Daneels, “De subiecto Officii Ecclesiastici attenda doctrina Concilii Vaticani II. Suntne laici officii ecclesiastici capaces?”, in *Analecta gregoriana* 192 (Roma, 1973), 77-82; See also O. Robleda, “Innovationes Concilii Vaticani II in theoria et disciplina de officiis et beneficiis ecclesiasticis”, in

Periodica 58 (1969), 155-156; Ibid., “Notio officii ecclesiastici in Concilio Vaticano II”, p. 138; F. Coccopalmerio, “La riforma del concetto di ufficio ecclesiale nel Vaticano II”, in *La Scuola Cattolica* 104 (1976), 542-543; P.G. Marcuzzi, “Gli uffici ecclesiastici nel nuovo Codice di Diritto Canonico”, in *Apollinaris* 56(1983), 425; S.A. Menendez, “Quidnam conciliari hac aetate officium ecclesiasticum”, in *Angelicum* 54 (1977), 93-94.

¹⁷ F. Coccopalmerio, “La riforma del concetto di ufficio ecclesiale nel Vaticano II”, in *La Scuola Cattolica* 104 (1976), 542.

¹⁸ F. Coccopalmerio, “La riforma del concetto di ufficio ecclesiale nel Vaticano II”, in *La Scuola Cattolica* 104 (1976), 542-543.

¹⁹ M. Miele, “Dal vecchio al nuovo canone 145”, in S. GHERRO, *Studi sul Primo Libro del Codex iuris Canonici* (Padova), 165-166; F. Coccopalmerio, “La riforma del concetto di ufficio ecclesiale nel Vaticano II”, in *La Scuola Cattolica* 104 (1976), 542.

²⁰ M. Miele, “Dal vecchio al nuovo canone 145”, in S. Gherro, *Studi sul Primo Libro del Codex iuris Canonici* (Padova, CEDAM), 165-166; and V. Fagiolo remarked: “*Per ora basti osservare che è stata la volontà esplicita del Concilio attribuire all’ufficio una marcata prevalenza, teorica e pratica, pastorale e giuridica, sul beneficio; considerare quello, in senso ampio, qualsiasi compito o incarico conferito stabilmente per un fine spirituale, purché abbia stabilita, venga conferito dal diritto o con un decreto del superiore legittimo, e, infine, che sia per un fine spirituale, perché si dica “ecclesiastica”*”. Cf. V. Fagiolo, “Ufficio ecclesiastico”, in T. Federici, ed., *Dizionario del Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II* (Roma, 1969), cols. 1939-1940.

²¹ J.I. ARRIETA, *Diritto dell’organizzazione ecclesiastica* (Milano, Ancora, 1997), 138.

²² G. BAUSENHART, *Das Amt in der Kirche. Eine not-wendened* (Neubestimmung, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1999), 237.

²³ J.A. SOUTO, *La nocòn canonica de officio*, 100.

²⁴ J.A. Souto argued: the expression “in finem spiritualem” in *PO* 20, cannot be considered as a quality and orientation restricted only to office-holder in the Church. Any Christian faithful is called to strive for the spiritual apostolate in the temporal order and in the spiritual order. Then in the light of the Conciliar definition, can it be said that all Christian faithful exercise office in the Church? Moreover, is there any activity in the Church that does not have a spiritual orientation? Thus it would seem to reduce office to any kind of activity of the Christian faithful. Cf. J.A. Souto, *La nocòn canonica de officio*, 100-101.

²⁵ A. Longhitano, “Uffici ecclesiastici e condizionamenti politico-culturali”, in *AA. VV., Ministeri e ruoli sociali*, (Torino 1978), 55.

²⁶ P.G. Marcuzzi, “Gli uffici ecclesiastici nel nuovo Codice di diritto canonico”, in *Apollinaris* 56 (1983), 426.

²⁷ See Schema *Decreti de Clericis*, in *ASSCOV (Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II)*, III/4, 1963, pp. 838-839. Benefice as an institution existed in the Latin Church and it was regulated by *CIC/1917* cc. 1409-1494. According to *CIC/1917* c. 1409; “an ecclesiastical benefice is a juridic entity constituted or erected in perpetuity by competent ecclesiastical authority consisting of sacred office and the right of receiving income from the assets attached to that office”. This is cited from E.N. Peters (curator), *The 1917 Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2001), 486.

²⁸ *PO 20*: in *AAS* 58(1966), 1021; *ASSCOV*, IV/VII, 704.

²⁹ P.G. Marcuzzi, “Gli uffici ecclesiastici nel nuovo Codice di diritto canonico”, in *Apollinaris* 56 (1983), 426; cf also P. Erdő, “Sacra ministeria e uffici ecclesiastici per eccellenza”, in *PCLTI, Ius in vita et in missione Ecclesiae* (Città Vaticano, 1994), 855.

³⁰ *ASSCOV*, IV/IV, p. 338.

³¹ M. Caprioli, *Il Decreto conciliare Presbyterorum Ordinis. Storia-analisi-dottrina*, vol. 2 (Roma, Edizioni Devonian, 199), 314.

³² *ASSCOV*, IV/IV, p. 338. For this citation, see M. Caprioli, *Il Decreto conciliare Presbyterorum Ordinis. Storia-analisi-dottrina*, vol. 2 (Roma, 199), 318. In a relation of *Textus recognitus* of the Schema *Decreti De ministerio et vita presbyterorum*, Msgr. J. Sauvage, bishop of Kontum (Vietnam), reminded that the priests would avoid their liturgical service as a payment, and that the grandeur of their ministry was directly linked with their sense of detachment. See *ASSCOV*, III/IV, 496-497.

³³ *CIC* c. 193 §1: No one may be removed from an office which is conferred on a person for an indeterminate time, except for a grave reasons and in accordance with the procedure defined by law; also cf. *CCEO* c. 975.

³⁴ *CIC* c. 1009 §2.

³⁵ *CIC* c. 184 §1; *CCEO* c. 965 §1.

³⁶ M. Miele, “Dal vecchio al nuovo canone 145”, in S. Gherro, *Studi sul Primo Libro del Codex iuris Canonici*, 168. Power of Order would not be part of office, but it constitutes only the quality inherent in a physical person, who has to be invested with it, in order to hold a sacred office. Cf. M. Petroncelli, “Polemiche sulla nozione di ufficio ecclesiastico e gli insegnamenti del Concilio Vaticano II”, in J. Lindemans – H. Demeester, *Liber Amicorum Monseigneur Onclin* (Gembloux 1992), 301.

³⁷ *PO 20*.

³⁸ M. Caprioli notes: «Non era più lo schema *De vita et ministerio sacerdotali*, ma più precisamente *De ministerio et vita presbyterorum*. Il titolo appariva così più conforme alla dottrina esposta nel nuovo testo che non parlava del sacerdozio in genere, ma di quella particolare forma di ministero e di vita sacerdotale che si incarnano nei presbiteri nel loro posto specifico nella Chiesa, in rapporto a Cristo, ai vescovi e a tutto il popolo di Dio». Cf. M. Caprioli, *Il Decreto conciliare Presbyterorum Ordinis. Storia-analisi-dottrina*, 31.

³⁹ In the *modus* on the final Schema, many Fathers observed that the Schema as such did not treat priests as such but only diocesan presbyters and only *analogice* of the others who cooperate with their ministry; moreover, according to them that which was said about the spirituality of presbyters regarded exclusively the diocesan presbyters, not the religious who, instead, have a proper spirituality of their own. The negative response noted was: «Quando, infatti, si parlava del ministero e della vita richiesta dal ministero stesso, le affermazioni del Concilio valevano per tutti i presbiteri che partecipano al ministero. Il presbiterato è per il ministero e perciò le sue affermazioni valgono per tutti i presbiteri che lo esercitano». Cf. M. Caprioli, *Il Decreto conciliare Presbyterorum Ordinis. Storia-analisi-dottrina*, 33.

⁴⁰ M. Caprioli, *Il Decreto conciliare Presbyterorum Ordinis. Storia-analisi-dottrina*, 386-397.

⁴¹ This expression is very technical and a translation of the Latin subtitle, *presbyteri populi Dei rectores*, of PO 6. The term rector is rich in significance. It can mean to rule, act, guide, govern, administer, establish etc. It also signifies, 'to educate'. Cf. M. Caprioli, *Il Decreto conciliare Presbyterorum Ordinis. Storia-analisi-dottrina*, 226.

⁴² M. Caprioli, *Il Decreto conciliare Presbyterorum Ordinis. Storia-analisi-dottrina*, 263.

⁴³ Synod Of Bishops, *De Sacerdotio, Ultimis temporibus*, 30 November 1967, in *AAS* 63 (1971), 898-942, Eng/tarn., A. Flannery, (ed.), *Vatican Council II, More Post Conciliar Documents* (Bangalore, 1990), 690-691.

⁴⁴ As we read in *LG* 37: «Pastors, indeed, should recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church. They should willingly use their prudent advice and confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, leaving them freedom and scope for acting, indeed, they should give them the courage to undertake works on their own initiative». Cf. *LG* 37.

⁴⁵ «Priests and laymen who are attached to the diocesan curia should be mindful that they are collaborating in the pastoral work of the bishop». Cf. *CD* 27.

⁴⁶ O. Robleda, "Innovationes Concilii Vaticani II in theoria et disciplina de officiis et beneficiis ecclesiasticis", in *part 1, Periodica* 58 (1969), 167.

⁴⁷ O. ROBLEDA, "Innovationes Concilii Vaticani II in theoria et disciplina de officiis et beneficiis ecclesiasticis", in *part 1, Periodica* 58 (1969), 170-171.

⁴⁸ O. ROBLEDA, "Iurisdictio-Officium Ecclesiasticum", in *Periodica* 59 (1970), 684-689; cf. also F. Daneels, "De subiecto Officii Ecclesiastici attenda doctrina Concilii Vaticani II. Suntne laici officii ecclesiastici capaces?", in *Analecta Gregoriana* 192 (Roma 1973), 85.

⁴⁹ P. Erdő, "Il senso della capacità dei laici agli uffici nella Chiesa", in *Fidelium Iura* 2 (1992) 169, 180.

⁵⁰ A. Montan, "Responsabilità ecclesiale, corresponsabilità e rappresentanza" in Paolo Gherri (Ed.), *Responsabilità ecclesiale, corresponsabilità e rappresentanza* (Città del Vaticano 2010), 30.

⁵¹ Paul VI, *Motu proprio Ministeria Quaedam*, 15 August 1972, in *AAS* 64 (1972), 529-534.

⁵² Paul VI, Motu proprio *Ministeria Quaedam*, 15 August 1972, in *AAS* 64 (1972), 531: «Ministeria christifidelibus laicis committi possunt, ita ut candidatis ad sacramentum ordinis reservata non habeantur».

⁵³ A. Montan, “Responsabilità ecclesiale, corresponsabilità e rappresentanza” in Paolo Gherri (Ed.), *Responsabilità ecclesiale, corresponsabilità e rappresentanza*, 30-31.

⁵⁴ Paolo Gherri, *Introduzione al Diritto amministrativo canonico. Fondamenti, Teoria e Metodo* (Roma, 2004), 80.

⁵⁵ M.J. Arroba Conde, *Diritto processuale canonico* (5 Ed), Roma, Ediurcla, 2006), 87.

⁵⁶ P. Erdő, “Il senso della capacità dei laici agli uffici nella Chiesa”, *Fidelium Iura* 2 (1992) 169, 172.

⁵⁷ A. Asselin, “Vingt ans après la promulgation du Code de Droit canonique: qu’en est-il du service des laïcs dans l’Église?”, in *Studia canonica*, XXXVIII (2004), 85-109, in particolare 103-107. This is cited in A. Montan, “Responsabilità ecclesiale, corresponsabilità e rappresentanza” in Paolo Gherri (ed.), *Responsabilità ecclesiale, corresponsabilità e rappresentanza* (Città del Vaticano 2010), 31.

⁵⁸ L. Ortiz, “Valoraciones y decisiones jurídicas en el Concilio Ecuménico Vaticano II”, *Ius Caonicum* 6 (1966), 5-24; also cf. J.A. Souto, *La noción canónica de oficio*, 80.

⁵⁹ J.A. Souto, *La noción canónica de oficio*, 95.

THE MODERATOR'S ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY (PART II)

Josep Rovira, C.M.F

Having seen the primary function in the role of Moderator in a religious community, we shall now take up the second major function, namely, governing community life.¹

1. GOVERNING COMMUNITY LIFE

Coming shortly back, let us remember that, even as a human experience, obedience and leadership are necessarily at the base of social living. Even the most democratic of systems recognizes the need for an authority within the group to guarantee and coordinate the fulfillment of the group's decisions. In a society like ours, which is becoming constantly more structured, one might doubt at times whether the individual is actually free, but one thing is certain: He or she definitely does obey. Certain more-or-less fashionable theories which exalt the originality and freedom of the individual in our world are, to say the least, uncritical.

The religious live together with other religious, and in this group, as in all human groups seeking to pursue a common life or activity, there is the need for a point of reference and coordination of plans and activities. The role of the Moderator in the religious community is precisely that of presiding and coordinating, of moderating this living and searching in common, with the help of the individual efforts of each member. The Moderator is not alone in this work; everyone participates in it. He or she is only the point of confluence or, if one prefers, the tip of the iceberg; and there can be no point of confluence if there is no base. Everyone therefore participates in, and is co-responsible for, the state of the community. This is why true obedience, in the subject, is not of the sort that uses authority as a shield protecting one against the

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need to think and act in a personally responsible way; nor is the exercise of authority, in the Moderator, a usurpation of the liberty of the other religious. It can be nothing less than sinful to transfer one's own conscience and one's own responsibility to another person, because God has given to everyone their own talents for which they will have to render an account to the Lord. To have someone else think for me is not perfect obedience, but a way of impoverishing myself and the community. And if at times religious renounce what they believe would be better, because the community or the one presiding over it does not judge it to be advantageous or does not share their opinion, their attitude of renouncement will have human and Christian validity if it is motivated, not by feelings or coercion or convenience, but rather because they recognize in others and in the opinions of others a value which permits them to comply without minimizing their own personalities. They act according to the will of others because they accept the possibility that (even though it does not appear to be so at the moment) the others may see and evaluate some aspects which they themselves have failed to note and appreciate sufficiently at the time, and therefore they accept the possibility that the others may be correct. Above all they recognize that, since God called them to life in community, he may use the others to help them find his will (cf. FT 9, 10a). That does not mean that one renounces one's own personality or responsibility, but rather that one sets these in a larger framework which embraces the other members of the community also. It means, finally, that one recognizes realistically and humbly one's own limitations and the possibility of making mistakes. In this context the role of the Moderator, which at times will have to make itself felt, does not condemn subordinates to childishness or perpetual immaturity, but rather offers individual religious a greater enrichment of their personal development and of their search for God's will, as well as its eventual fulfillment. Obedience is not a mutilation or repression, but the availability, to the religious, of other possibilities (those of the other members, and especially of the Moderator) in favor of a life of conversion and total dedication to Christ and humanity.²

This is why authority is a form of service, and it would not be such if it suffocated or tyrannized other people's freedom. It is service for the furthering of a constantly greater human and religious responsibility and maturity within the community and in each of its components. Already the Council put it this way:

Superiors will have to render an account of the souls committed to their care (Heb. 13:17). They should be docile to God's will in performing the task laid upon them and should exercise authority in a spirit of service of the brethren, thus giving expression to God's love for them.

They should govern their subjects in the realization that they are sons of God and with respect for them as human persons, fostering in them a spirit of voluntary subjection. In particular, therefore, they should allow them due liberty with regard to the sacrament of penance, and the direction of conscience. They should train their subjects to cooperate with them by applying themselves to their ordinary duties and to new undertakings with an active and responsible obedience. Superiors, therefore, ought to listen to their subjects willingly and ought to promote cooperation between them for the good of the institute and of the Church, retaining however their own authority to decide and to prescribe what is to be done” (PC 14cd, cf. ET 23-29).

Our obedience will be a valid witness if it does not renounce that fundamental liberty and independence which insures our fulfillment as human persons. That is, obedience will have meaning if the individual continues to feel that he or she is truly free to obey; and accepts freely, in the light of faith, renunciation of personal independence without inner coercion or external threats. In fact Vatican II states that it is initially through faith that we religious submit our lives to obedience. This indicates, among other things, that anyone who, due to his or her temperament, willingly or unwillingly tends to coerce others must not be chosen as Moderator: Subjects must realize that they are obeying freely, for spiritual motives and values in which they believe, and not because they find themselves obstructed or threatened by someone's personality. It can be very convenient at times for the major superiors to hand over a troublesome community to a harsh person with a strong hand, so that he or she may put them all “through the wringer.” Such a policy may spare the major superiors some worry, but it also represents a failure, inasmuch as order was not brought into the community through those motives of faith which form the basis of community life. If individualism and anarchy are the hidden temptations of the subjects, those of the superiors are to dictate or inhibit.

We can see how human maturity and faith are two indispensable aspects in religious relationship of authority-obedience. In other words, religious obedience has to be always *reasonable*, but never merely *rational*. In the latter case it means that faith has disappeared from religious' discernment and behavior; in the first case, instead, it means that religious try humanly to discern and understand, for obedience cannot be something absurd, but the final decisive element of discernment and conduct has to be religious' faith.³

If, instead, faith is the initial and ultimate motivation for our life in common and for its corresponding obedience, then it follows that one will not always be able to explain the obedient attitude of the subject from a purely natural point of view. This means that, while the Moderator must keep in mind both the human and spiritual

elements of each situation in dealing with it, the subjects also, in judging the Moderator and the Moderator's decisions, must rise above a merely earthly opinion, and consider their obedience from a community and supernatural viewpoint. Only thus will it be possible to avoid two typical dangers—although not entirely—one among men and the other among women. Among men religious there is the danger that the emphasis placed on individual liberty and on organizing their own work may reach the point where each one has his own system of life and the Moderator does not know, in case of need, either what or whom to command. Among women religious instead—even though this happens less frequently today because of the advancement of women's emancipation—the danger lies in an unbalanced relationship between the almost complete passivity of the subjects, and the almost constant interference of the superiors, in both cases forgetting personhood, one's own and that of the others. There is neither true community life nor true religious obedience when a men's religious house resembles a hotel for more or less apostolic bachelors, where they usually sleep and also frequently eat, or when a convent of women is inhabited by persons who have remained immature, gathered around a ubiquitous "mother."⁴

A fundamental element of the Moderator-subject relationship is that of respect due to the person, whether it be not depriving subjects of responsibility and creativity or giving Moderators a vote of confidence and allowing them to exercise the responsibility for which they were chosen. This mutual respect will guarantee the human and Christian maturity of all. Unfortunately, today one sometimes has the impression that, when speaking of the respect due to the person, one refers only to that of subordinates. However, the Moderator not only deserves the respect and affection due to all the other religious, but also each subject has a double debt of gratitude and friendship toward him or her because it is a question of a fellow religious who is doubly at the service of the community: as a member first of all, and secondly as a member particularly involved on the community level because of the office.

Let us also concede to Moderators the possibility of not always discerning the will of God, of not always succeeding in seeing things clearly, of making mistakes. In spite of these things, let us continue to respect and esteem them. Moderators are not recipients of a special divine inspiration that would make them more or less infallible. They are individuals from our same community who have been credited with possessing a certain human and spiritual maturity and equilibrium, perhaps not to an extraordinary degree, but to a degree sufficient for making them acceptable coordinators and guides of community life. Let us concede that they

are human beings like us and therefore are fallible and imperfect. Let us not be less understanding and require more of them than of ourselves and others.

And Moderators should not be afraid to admit their limitations, or to change their course of action when prudence or the situation requires it; we would probably notice anyway that there had been a mistake. We know very well that they are also human, and subject to uncertainties and inconsistencies which are more evident in them than in us because their office makes them more visible, as the Magisterium recognizes they have (cf. VC 92, FT 13d, 18a, 21c, 25a, 28, 30a). Those who are able to admit their limitations with simplicity and honesty have at least one point in their favor among the mature people who should surround them. Those who instead believe that they always have clear and sure answers for everything are more apt to lose the confidence of their subjects, and run the risk of making more mistakes than any of the others. Let us, therefore, allow them to descend without embarrassment from the pedestal upon which a certain religious formation has placed them, and let us welcome them into our midst. Let us not forget that, after all, they all belong to us. Fr. Arrupe, at that time Superior General of the Jesuits said:

The fact of being considered as a brother “demythologizes” the office of the superior by placing him, on the one hand, in more direct contact with the community, but also bringing into much clearer view his virtues and his limitations. There is the danger of a lessening of esteem and respect, but this contributes to an objective and humble stance in the superior, and to a supernatural quality in obedience, which is accepted only because the superior has received authority from Christ.⁵

Every Moderator must be able to say, with even more reason than St. Paul: “Far from relying on any power of my own, I came among you in great fear and trembling.... so that your faith should not depend on human philosophy but on the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:3-5). However, for the relief of Moderators, it is also true, as one author states:

Religious expect much less from their superiors than in the past; in regard to decisions to be made, orientations, missions, they expect at least *fully as much* from the group and from the group's counsels, from the reading of events and of Scriptures, from the revision of life. The superior takes less the place of the Holy Spirit. But this does not mean that his task has become easier. His role may appear, at first, to be less important than in the past; in fact, he gives fewer orders, makes fewer decisions by himself, and has almost no permissions to give. And yet he is intensely present to each and everyone; he listens, joins in searching, stimulates initiatives, urges on, and after all have expressed their opinion, he knows how to make decisions if necessary. If he does not provide this type of presence, if he

withdraws from his role as animator and coordinator, his brothers will know very well how to inform him about it. Actually it seems to me that one of the surest signs that the superior is really filling his place is the fact that the group assumes, at times, an attitude of contestation in his regard. However he must accept these confrontations as signs of the group's trust in him. This means that he must live in real inner poverty.⁶

Let us say that the Moderator is the chief servant of the community, the one who forges human and spiritual union among its members, a visible reference point for unity of purpose and of fellowship, a catalyst in the common religious effort, but not necessarily an inexhaustible source of initiatives, nor a traffic policeman for the community. This is just as well, so that authority can send the subjects back to their own creative capabilities; the Council, in fact, spoke of "active and responsible obedience" (PC 14d). Authority is a call to personal responsibility because its purpose is to help subjects give a free, total, and mature response to their vocation. The Moderator's role is not one of forcing, but of stimulating, arousing, convincing, soliciting, and giving aid in the fulfillment of one's vocation. Since a common charism is the reason for a given number of individuals coming together to live in community, the Moderator's role is to help live that charism, to be a stimulus toward it, to cast light upon it, to be a "reminder" of it in actual life and interpersonal relationships; a reminder and a conscience also of whatever, of a practical and daily nature, has been decided together, in the context of dialogue, after all have been allowed to express themselves. He or she is the guide, the witness and fashioner of unity of life and action among fellow religious. Regarding this, it is fruitful at most to read once again the concrete and numerous advices given by FT 13, 20 and 25.⁷

This is why Moderators are not primarily juridical figures, preservers of order with the task of reporting everything to the superiors higher up, but rather what we might call at the same time human and "charismatic" figures: supporters of the human fulfillment of their fellow religious and of everyone's fidelity to the spiritual unity which originates from a common charism. In short, Moderators are not people who are faced with a system to be saved, or a schedule to be kept, but with a group of persons to whom personal and spiritual service is to be given. Thus, nothing in the community is more important than the persons: neither the schedule, nor the cleanliness of the house, nor the regulations. It is astounding to note how now and then we forget to apply to ourselves the words of the Gospel: "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath" (Mk. 2:27). Everything else (schedule, regulations, etc.) is in view of the community and its members, to help them and, by helping them, to bring their vocation to fulfillment.

All this supposes an active, not a passive role, in the Moderator, who may even be intransigent when the welfare and fidelity of individuals requires it, in spite of the fact that one speaks of respect for subordinates, of dialogue, etc. Today there is the danger of moving from the passivity of subjects, to that of Moderators. It would be too comfortable to evade one's responsibility on the pretext of allowing the community to decide everything, and then to say; "You wanted it"—to permit always and only what the majority of votes democratically decides should be done. To serve, to encourage, to coordinate, to be a sign are definitely not passive concepts.

This logically leads us to speak of one of the advances, and present problems, of community life: the question of "democracy". Are our communities democratic? Should they be? Can they be? And up to what point?⁸ I believe that in this area we have made some great leaps ahead, although we have not always avoided exaggerations. It has been somewhat the question of a typical reaction against the previous situation of exaggerated authoritarianism. The moments of dialogue, of comparison, of discussion must be as democratic as possible. All have the Spirit's gift of vocations; consequently all have the right to be heard, according to the Council (cf. PC 14d). This democracy, however, does not necessarily include the moment of decision making. The final decision does not necessarily have to be according to the majority vote, although it often will be. The reason for this is deeply human, Christian and modern: the respect due to the person of one's fellow religious. In this, perhaps more than ever before, precisely because of present democratic tendencies, the Moderator's role gains importance for two reasons: to save and protect the person of individuals in the minority and to avoid all types of intolerance. It can in fact happen that the healthy democracy which has entered our communities may at times turn into the oppression of minorities or of individuals who are always destined to lose when votes are taken and that these individuals may suffer unjustly for this. In such cases the Moderator will be the voice of those who have no voice, either because, having problems which the community does not know about (and does not necessarily have to know about) they favor acting in a different way; or because, being timid, their voice is stifled within them. The Moderator's duty is to keep balance of the community by avoiding decisions which, though democratically arrived at, become forms of oppression, injustice, or even worse, betrayals of its own charism. Finally one must not forget—above and beyond an excessive esteem for the majority vote, or the importance given to the "cultured" element—the human and spiritual wisdom of St. Benedict's Rule which says: "We have said that all should be called to the council, because the Lord often inspires one of the younger brothers with the best opinion."⁹

That is why the Council and the following Magisterium is wise when, after recommending that subjects be listened to, that dialogue be promoted and that personality be respected, it does not leave the question suspended, but states that Moderators should retain “their own authority to decide and to prescribe what is to be done” (PC14c; ET 25, CIC 618, EE II 49, PI 15, FLC 50c, VC 43, SAC 14b, FT 20ce).

Often the Moderator will be called upon to serve as a bridge, and one of his or her most important tasks will be to create, with calmness and tact (two fundamental virtues for those who govern), a climate of tolerance and fraternal trust so that, for instance, religious who are advanced in years will not think that the whole story ends with them, and young religious will admit that things actually did not begin with them.

In religious life, democracy means, first of all, internal unity, originating from the Holy Spirit who has bestowed the same calling on all. It means a fraternal spirit, mutual service motivated by an ever growing fidelity to the charism which has been received. In religious life democracy is a reality that is born from within, from communion in this charism and the effort to live faithfully together, and not from an external bond as in civil society.

The fact that the Moderator may make the final decision obviously implies a corresponding submission on the part of the subjects. However, in spite of this one must also admit the exceptional possibility of conscientious objection, that is, the case of someone who is convinced in conscience that he or she cannot obey in something which is not essential to religious life. (If it were a matter of something essential, the individual should be made to understand that honesty requires leaving religious life, or at least leaving that specific Institute). Let us consider for example the case of a religious who is convinced of not being able to accept a given task or office because it appears dangerous or gravely inappropriate to him or to her. It is true that at times “obedience can work miracles”, but it is also true that one may not “tempt God”. The superior can be mistaken—which is undoubtedly true also of the subject—and this fact might at times prove too convenient for a superior who does not know how to fill a vacancy and thus solve a problem. Miracles can certainly happen, but one must not require them. However, if the community is as it should be, the situation of conscientious objection will not be reached. The community will consider and understand the difficulties which one of its members has responsibly revealed to it and will help in overcoming these difficulties in one way or another (cf. ET 28-29, FT 26-27).

At this point, we may ask ourselves an important question. We agree that the Moderator's role can have meaning since it is useful for the community, but is it really always necessary? Is not a community without a Moderator possible, or one in which authority is shared, so that decisions are always made by everyone together? And if, perhaps, this is impossible in a large community, might it not be possible in a small one?

We have at least two answers from the Magisterium on this subject, aside from the fact that Vatican II, by ignoring this possibility, has also given an indirect answer. We find the first answer in the June 29, 1971 apostolic exhortation ET which states: "This labor of seeking together must end, when it is the moment, with the decision of the superiors *whose presence and acceptance are indispensable in every community*" (ET 25). The following year the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes issued the following declaration:

One asks whether it is permissible, contrary to canon 516, to allow an ordinary and exclusive regime, either for an entire religious Institute, or for a province, or for each of the houses, in which the superior, if there is one, is simply and administrator. According to the mind of Vatican II (PC 14) and according to the apostolic exhortation ET 25, aside from legitimate consultations and the limits imposed by common and particular law, superiors must exercise personal authority.¹⁰

To sum up, ET 25 demands the Moderator's presence in every community. PC 14 said nothing about this question, but indirectly supposes his/her presence. The same SAC 14a and FT 20ce. Also EE II 52 (cf. 19, 20) speaks of an effective and personal authority at all levels (General, Provincial, Local). EE III 43 repeats it. FLC 48 supposes again the same. CIC 629 reaffirms it, but accepts the possibility that it may be only one Moderator for more than one community, when they are small and close, and he/she lives in one of them. As a matter of fact, in these last decades the Holy See has approved Constitutions in which this possibility is clearly announced.¹¹

So, we can deduce that the possibility of a collective authority, or of a Moderator who is merely an administrator without authority, is therefore excluded. This exclusion, however, is not absolute. One should remember, in fact, that PC 14d affirms the necessity of an efficient use of chapters and councils, and that current common law foresees in several instances the existence of a collective government, as in the case of chapters, or also in the case of decisions made in the council through a deliberative vote, and other cases of collegial action.

Certainly the problem is different in a community formed by many people, and one where the number is very small. In the first case there is evident need for an

authority that can serve as a connection within the community and between the community and the outside world. For very practical reasons everyone, both inside and out, has to know to whom they should turn when it is a question of proposing something to the community. Also, a large community which is not provided with a sufficiently strong authority runs the risk of crumbling and dividing into individual cliques or factions, with an immediate loss of the most elementary dimension of a sense of community.

The matter may appear different if the community is very small. At any rate, if authority is exercised in the manner we have indicated so far, it does not become an obstacle and a frustration, but rather a real human and spiritual help. This is precisely because—as we have noted—the Moderator’s mission is exercised within the group, not on the group. As Goffi said years ago and still valid:

The more the superior awakens the cooperation of all members in the direction of religious life, the more authentic a superior he or she is. The person having responsibility, more than being an authoritarian officeholder, exercises the function of uniting, arousing, helping, supporting inside the community, in order to render it self-governing. Leadership is first of all an attribute of the group. The community itself is called upon to understand situations, to define goals to be attained, to seek practical coherence and unity. The spiritual activity of the members is all the more effectual for the group, as it is less oppressive and has been previously agreed upon through dialogue. The good which is realized by common agreement has been outlined through the responsible creative inventiveness of all.¹²

Already ET had recognized small communities: “Such small communities can... favor the development of closer relationships between the religious and a shared and more fraternal undertaking of responsibility” (ET 40).

If today there is a tendency to be against personal authority in this type of community, it is perhaps because one thinks that if there is personal authority it will undoubtedly be exercised more than is necessary. On the other hand, one does not consider the ease with which such a community can betray the reason for its existence. As a matter of fact, if a small community is composed of mature and earnest people, it has less need than others of a Moderator who is constantly active, whose voice is constantly heard so that everyone may be aware that “there is still someone who gives orders here.” There is need of the Moderator’s presence as a point of cohesion for all members within the community, and as a definite individual who may be contacted by people approaching the community from the outside. Now, it may happen that days, and even weeks, can pass in which the

Moderator's role is not exercised, simply because there has been no need for it. But the Moderator is present, with the responsibility of regulating and watching over the community's social and spiritual life whenever there is that need. On the other hand, communities in which everyone and no one gives orders, or where the Moderators do not have personal authority and are thus unable to impose themselves when necessary, run the risk—and this unfortunately has been proved by experience and not by theories—of lapsing into a situation in which, little by little, each individual becomes independent from the others. Moreover it is not uncommon for secularism to creep in because of the lack of spiritual stimulation in common, and the human and spiritual *koinonia* which gave life to the community disappears. Finally there is the risk of losing contact much more rapidly with the other communities of the Institute together with which—and this must not be forgotten—a complete community is to be formed.

Past experiments in this field have shown how easily communities that tend not to have superiors detach themselves spiritually, psychologically, and sometimes even juridically, from the rest of their religious Institute. Individual members often end by all leading their own lives, more closely bound with persons outside the community than those within, a tendency which we must describe as suicidal in a religious community. Moderators must intervene as seldom as possible, when it is appropriate, prudent, and necessary. There is nothing new in this; St. Augustine was saying it when he spoke of *cauta gubernatio*. Their action is one of service, and therefore must be felt, not as an imposition, but as something useful. And it is useful when the community as such needs to organize itself and make decisions, when its members begin to weaken in their life of human and spiritual union and of their common charism, when their bonds with fellow religious in the other communities are loosened, and when there is need for someone to represent the community before society, the rest of the Institute, the Church, etc.

This does not even mean that the Moderator must necessarily be a member of the mini-community. He or she may be a fellow religious who, though living in another building, takes charge, through regular contacts, of one or several so-called “satellites,” of communities which are actually extensions, for special apostolic reasons, of another more organized and complete community. These are experiments which do not originate from a desire to avoid obedience or community life; if that were the case they would be inadmissible from a religious point of view. But the reason for their existence is traceable to a definite apostolic need. One should remember, however, that precisely because they are communities whose internal and external circumstances are especially challenging, they must be made

up of individuals who are particularly mature, both from the human and the religious point of view. To place in such communities, instead, individuals who are more or less in a state of crisis so that they may clarify their situation would be to condemn them irretrievably to failure. As we have seen, ET states rightly that: “Small communities, instead of offering an easier form of life, prove on the contrary to make greater demands on their members” (ET 40). Similar comments, starting from ET 40, we find later on in IL 24, FLC 41, 64.

2. A “DECALOGUE” FOR THE MODERATOR’S RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNITY

To close these considerations let us propose a sort of “declogue” regarding the Moderator’s role in the community.¹³ Of course, to be complete we should speak about the corresponding attitude by the rest of the community to what to the Moderator is required; but here we are contemplating just the Moderator’s role in the community.

2.1. Attitude in front of the Community

Once the Moderator has been elected, he or she must become one, as far as possible, with the history and mission of the community. Only in this way will it be possible to feel with it and to be sincerely concerned and devoted to its members. Those, instead, who do not succeed in accepting the community entrusted to them, loving it with its virtues and its defects, will hardly be able to inspire their fellow religious with trust and impart encouragement as their office requires. Moreover, they must identify themselves with the entire community, not merely with part of it. They must therefore be careful (always, but especially in the beginning of their term of office) not to allow themselves to be “captured” by any faction. They are at the service of the community, of each and every member, and not only of a few, or of certain individuals. If it appears to be inevitable to have to approve one side while condemning the other, let them accept this as a cross, or as the result of a faulty method of governing which has divided the community and has not known how to re-establish communion.

2.2. The First Encounter

On becoming part of the community, the Moderator should not appear as having already in hand a clear, definite, and infallible plan ready to be applied. The spontaneous reaction of many will surely be *a priori* rejection of an *a priori* plan. Each community is different, just as each individual is different. There are no such things as prefabricated plans that fit everywhere. If Moderators are to plan the

future together with the community, they must logically present themselves to the community unarmed, in addition to being well disposed towards everyone.

Therefore, don't promise or guarantee –like the politicians many times- what he/she cannot do: that his/her opinions are the best ones or his/her decisions will always be humanly the best ones; but he/she does promise that he/she will always have good intention looking at the best for the community, and that will be ready to admit and correct his/her possible mistakes, ready to learn from everybody and to improve in order to serve as best as possible to the group and each one of its members. He/she can guarantee his/her good will, but not perfection. That will be an always continuous source of peace even for him/her. And remember that normally it is not possible to please everybody.

At the same time, don't forget that all the community's members have to participate in the governance of the group; therefore, don't allow that only some members make decisions for the whole community. Everyone has the right to speak and to express his/her own point of view, with freedom and sincerity his/her mind; and to listen to the others with respect, openness and humility.

2.3. Being both Human and Spiritual

Those who don't know how to joke or cannot laugh at themselves; those who are unable to speak of this and that, for fear of jeopardizing their authority, or who cannot be disputed without losing their composure; those who can only speak of "serious" or spiritual things should not moderate a community. Human beings need contrasts, especially when they are young. Often a friendly joke is the best preparation for a moment of commitment and gravity. There is a season for everything, as Qoheleth would say (Qo 3: 1-8). Also incapable are those who do not know how to exhort their subjects spiritually or who refrain from doing so with the excuse that "by this time everyone knows what he or she should do". On the contrary, precisely because it is the question of a religious community, great care must be taken of its spiritual life and especially of its life of prayer in common. The community that does not pray together destroys its reason for existing, which is based on faith deepened and practiced together. In order to belong to a common-life Institute it is not enough to have some sort of a personal prayer life; it is necessary to pray together with one's fellow religious. The Spirit has called us to a visible communion, not to be hermits within the walls of the same building. Thus it would be better to disband the community that either does not know how, or cannot, pray normally together. And the individuals who habitually do not pray with the others must either change or leave because they are showing that they are not called to this

type of religious life.¹⁴

2.4. Character and Temperament

Moderators must beware of allowing their temperaments to burden the community. Choleric individuals think they can do everything by themselves and do not listen; or they put pressure on others in the belief that, by frightening them, they further their religious obedience. At best, they intimidate the weak characters, gain the others' mistrust, and the enmity of all. Melancholic individuals are inclined to listen more than necessary, because they can never make up their minds. Sanguine persons are easily swayed by any new suggestion, because they are changeable. Those who govern must instead be able to listen and to decide. Those who are aware of their qualities and defects who are open to criticism, create an atmosphere of freedom and co-responsibility.

2.5. Fostering an Ambience of Prudence, Serenity and Wisdom

The Moderator must be calm and tactful. There will be moments of tension and intolerance in the community, behavior that is humanly immature. He or she must know how to remain, as far as possible, above the factions; this calls for poise and serenity, openness and sincerity. Serenity is needed because, in a society like ours, where all are apt to be nervous, we particularly need people whose judgment is free from intellectual or emotional prejudices. Tact is necessary because there will be some individual problems which should not necessarily involve the others; individuals have a right to their privacy and reserve, to their good reputation. Trust and togetherness do not mean that one has to say everything to everyone. Moreover, trust cannot be exacted, it must be earned and unfortunately not everyone inspires or merits trust to the same degree, and the Moderator has to promote always the dignity of every person.

It will not be easy for the Moderator to maintain this poise and serenity. It may be that a religious has been elected precisely because of his or her equanimity is upset by the new situation. It may, in fact, be the question of individuals who have kept a healthy balance while in a subordinate position, but who are so affected by the new situation that their personality is endangered. The reason for this is to be found in the fact that Moderators are the meeting-point of forces that surely vary among themselves, and at times will even be opposed. Thus they have, in a certain sense, been placed between God and each religious, between the institution and its members, between the major superiors and the religious, between the common good and that of each individual, between the world outside and the community,

in the fraternal dialogue. Therefore a more or less well-balanced subject will not necessarily also be a serene and well-balanced Moderator later on. Only the person in question (who we hope has self-knowledge) and actual experience can tell this.¹⁵

Because of this, a good advice to those in authority is from time to time to have a space of rest, otherwise the questions could overcome them instead of overcoming them the questions. To relieve his/her anxieties by means of a sport, a walk, a hobby, calm prayer time... Often taking a cup of “good mood” in order not to dramatize. Keeping a humble and trusting prayer to God, so that He help him/her to understand that not necessarily His thoughts are his/her thoughts and His ways his/her ways (cf. Is 55: 8-11). Let God to be God, and the Moderator to be just a fellow-worker (cf. 1Cor 3: 4-9).

2.6. Authority not so much “over” but, “for or in favor of” the Community

Moderators should remember that they are religious among fellow religious, and consequently their authority is a service to their confreres/co-sisters. One does not so much have authority “over” one’s subjects, as “for” them. This means that one should make it felt only when—as we have said before—the right occasion, prudence, or necessity advise it, and not simply to remind people that there is someone giving the orders. It means that their authority is, first and foremost, at the service of persons, and not of rules, schedules, etc. They have not been chosen to enforce the law, but to help individuals to respond to God’s will for them. Never forget that: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mk 2: 27). And, if he/she is “representative of God” for his/her brothers/sisters, they are “sacrament” of Christ for him/her (cf. Mt 10: 40-42; 25: 40.45). This is the reason why St. Augustine spoke of the *cauta gubernatio* (a prudent leadership)¹⁶; and St. Benedict said that the abbot is Christ for the monks, but monks are Christ for him.¹⁷

2.7. One’s Mission as a Temporary Service

One should also remember that authority is a service, not an honor. One should avoid naming one a Moderator as a reward for past services, rather than in view of qualities that would be helpful in the new position. One must also avoid the tendency of making the office of superior a life career, so that leaving it would be a disgrace. Thus one should have the courage of putting an end to two situations which have been frequent in religious life: that of alternating people (always the same ones) who succeed each other year after year in the same offices (no one is immune to the wear and tear of time); and that unfortunate habit of promoting in order to

remove, which often means simply that individuals who have proved incompetent in their preceding position are transferred to another one which maybe even more demanding. It is a human and (even more) religious contradiction to sacrifice the community to one individual. It is not a disgrace to return to the status of an ordinary religious or to a less important office. It is simply to rejoin the regular ranks after rendering service in the spirit of the Gospel words: “When you have done all you have been told to do, say, ‘we are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty’” (Lk. 17:10).

Moderators must always be ready to retire, but not in order to transfer their problems to others or to enjoy a freer and more tranquil life, but for the good of the communities they were called to serve. In fact it happens, even now, that some do not want to accept appointments, not because of a presumed humility or an awareness of their incompetence, but through selfishness or personal calculations. Those who have no particular ambition to command are aware that, at present, it is much more comfortable to be a subject than to be a superior.

2.8. Having Time for and to Give Time to the Subjects

Moderators must have time for all of their subjects. Since their office is one of service, they must be available. Whoever is not available, either because of discriminating between individuals or on account of too many activities that hamper availability, must know how to alter the situation to do justice to the office. Certainly those Moderators are also to be censured who, in view of their position, do nothing and from their desk pretend to supervise everything, while actually they may be wasting a great deal of time leafing through newspapers and reviews, continuous chatting by Internet or cell-phone, zapping at tv programs, etc..., waiting for someone to require their attention. They should, therefore, constantly show respect, friendliness, kindness, and interest toward every member of the community, without fear of “wasting time” by listening to them. Being in a hurry is a too common temptation. If we may paraphrase the Gospel, the good shepherd “calls his sheep one by one...he knows his own, and his sheep know him” (Jn. 10: 3.14). For that, he/she must take interest in everyone, personally; each one has the right to experience that he/she has a space in the life and worries of the Moderator. Besides, Moderators should not give into the temptation of judging their subjects and their intentions easily. Let them rather adopt the wisdom of the Gospel:

Do not judge and you will not be judged, because the judgments you give are the judgments you will get, and the amount you measure out is the amount you will

be given. Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank in your own? How dare you say to your brother "Let me take the splinter out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own? Hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye (Mt. 7:1-5).

Don't confuse psychology with morals, the sick person with the sinner. If the Moderator must show preferences, let it be for those who are poor physically (the sick, the elderly...), culturally, and spiritually, and not for the one with the strongest character, or the greatest culture, or even worse, for the one who brings in more money. There is often the risk that the Moderator may be weak with the strong, and strong with the weak while it should be the contrary. Make his/hers the words of St. Paul (cf. Rom 12: 15; 1Cor 9: 19-23).

On the personal level, they should not grant themselves (unless the welfare of the community or his/her own health really requires it) anything which is not normally granted to the others; nor should they require of others what they do not require of themselves.

At the beginning of every community's meeting try to create an atmosphere favorable to confidence, dialogue, sharing and co-responsibility; soliciting the contribution of all for the concerns of all. By listening patiently and questioningly they should try to encourage the hesitant to open their hearts and the superficial to look within themselves. At the beginning of community dialogue they should act as converging points for suggestions and then try to unify opinions, serving as catalysts. They should not encourage unfounded optimism in order to avoid being naïve, nor should they accelerate the pace excessively, lest they lose some people on the way. Neither despair without way out, nor hope without foundation: there are discouraging enthusiasms! They should know how to always give hope and confidence. Their mission is to help the community and each individual to live their own identities and to serve the Lord better.

They should not give the impression that it is they who carry the burden of the community's organization and activity, but rather always insist on the group's responsibility for itself. They should know the capacities of all, and give responsibilities to each, according to his or her talents. No one should be left without responsibility, either because of his or her youth or old age, otherwise the individual may feel unappreciated by the others or be tempted to grow apart from the community and become self centered. The slogan of a big worker with many collaborators under him (card. A. M. Larraona, 1887-1973) was: do, make to do,

let to do. And a norm of government of St. John XXIII (1881-1963) was: notice everything, dissemble many things, correct some of them; in due time and due way. If, as a result of these policies, the moment arrives when the community seems, from various points of view, to be practically running itself, Moderators should not feel that they have failed or have not known how to exercise authority. This may instead indicate success in fulfilling the superior's mission, which is to serve and not to be served. Finally, let Moderators always remember that they have been subjects in the past and probably will be such again.

2.9. Attitude to his/her own Superiors

Moderators should always practice toward their own superiors the same spontaneous obedience they want to receive from their subjects. Moderators who criticize their superiors in the presence of their subjects are cutting the ground away from their own feet. In fact their fellow religious may unwittingly draw the conclusion that, if the Moderator does not respect his or her superiors, they are free to do the same with theirs and with him/her.

2.10. Being the “Face” of the Community

Although it is true that each member of the community represents it to the world outside, this is particularly true of the Moderator and the doorkeepers. They constitute, in fact, the community's face to the outside. It is up to the Moderator to establish good relations with the outside world, the people, the parish, the other religious communities, and present the occasion for mutual acquaintance agreement, collaboration, in keeping with the actual specific mission of his or her community.

The one who is responsible for the community should not forget to put into practice, both prudently and generously, Paul's exhortation to the Romans: “You should make hospitality your special care” (Rm. 12:13; cf. Heb 13: 2).

The community should not appear either as a cheap hotel for relatives or friends, or as an impregnable fortress. If it often needs to preserve its privacy, certain barriers make one wonder whether they are motivated more by personal or collective selfishness or by a lack of contact with surrounding reality, than by respect for the religious environment.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

In conclusion let us state that the Moderator's role is to make community, to create community, to animate community, to keep it faithful to whatever things constitute its reason to exist: as an "elder" of the community, he/she doesn't allow himself/herself to be overcome by his/her eventual limitations (cf. VC 92b, FT 28); but try to keep alive joy, love, gentleness, inspiring courage and hope in the midst of possible difficulties, witness, wisdom and prayer (cf. FLC 68c), and ask the confreres/co-sisters to pray for him/her (FT 30).

Once again, Moderators must not make the community to their own image and likeness, but rather must adapt themselves to it, even at the price of mortifying their own situation which requires, as Vatican II states in regard to educators: "Special qualities of mind and heart, most careful preparation, and a constant readiness to accept new ideas and to adapt the old" (GE 5b). Because of this, and summarizing what we have said before: "Far from being in opposition to each other, authority and individual liberty go together in the fulfillment of God's will, which is sought fraternally through a trustful dialogue between superior and his brothers in the case of a personal situation, or through a general agreement regarding what concerns the whole community" (ET 25).

Thus no opposition or rivalry exists between the Moderator and the community, between authority and obedience. It is rather the question of two converging obediences: that of the subjects who want to live their Evangelical life in fraternity and that of the Moderator who is at the service of the community (cf. FLC 44, FT 18d). Everyone is obeying because everyone is seeking to find and to do the will of the Father according to the special charism of their Order or Institute.

Let us finish calling in mind the words of St. Peter to the elders and young of Christian communities:

I now address myself to those elders among you; I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ, hoping to share the Glory which is to be revealed. Shepherd the flock which God has entrusted to you, guarding it not out of obligation but willingly for God's sake; not as one looking for a reward but with a generous heart; do not lord it over those in your care, rather be an example to your flock. Then, when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will be given a crown of unfading glory. In the same way, let the younger ones among you respect the authority of the elders. All of you, be humble in your dealings with each other, because 'God opposes the proud but gives his grace to the humble' Place all your worries on God since he takes care of you (1Pt 5: 1-6).

Endnotes

¹ Please keep in mind that this article is Part II of the one, written by the author. Part I has been published in Vol. X, No.1, January, 2015. For the list of abbreviations used in this issue, please refer to pages 77-78 of Vol X, No.1, 2015.

² Cf. A. Basso, *Obbedire da cristiani*, Testimoni 15 Dicembre 2003, 31-35; V. Marini, *Autorità e obbedienza. Gli sviluppi nel cammino postconciliare*, Testimoni 31 Maggio 2007, 23-29; P. Martinelli, *Tra autorità e obbedienza*, Testimoni 15 Giugno 2007, 18-20.

³ On this aspect, it can be useful to read: VV. AA., *Come credono I consecrati?*, Milano 2014; G. F. Poli, *Religiosi: chiamati ancora a generare la fede*, Claretianum-ITVC 5 (2014) 169-244; J. Rovira, *E se il religioso entra in crisi di fede, che si fa?*, ViCo 47 (2011) 16-28, 125-139, with abundant bibliography.

⁴ Therefore, to need to overcome, following the Magisterium, from one side, the attitude of dominion and any form of paternalism and maternalism (FT 14b), and, from the other side, any form of childishness (FT 20b), childish dependence or, on the contrary, self-sufficient independence (FT 25a).

⁵ P. Arrupe, *Discorso di Loyola*, May 7th 1970.

⁶ P. Dherbomez, *Ciò che i religiosi si aspettano dal Superiore*, in: VV. AA., “Superiori aggiornati per Comunità rinnovate”, Trento 1968, 82-83.

⁷ Although the topic is authority and obedience in Consecrated Life, FT actually speaks much more on the authority than on obedience.

⁸ At the Church’s level, cf., f. i., P. Valadier, *Quelle démocratie dans l’Église?*, Études 388 (1998) 219-229; J. LORÉ, *De la responsabilité des théologiens dans l’Église*, NRT 125 (2003) 3-20; and about obedience and dialog in the Church, cf. especially the recent EG 16, 32, 40, 41, 43, 47, 51, 184, 238-257.

⁹ RB 3.

¹⁰ Reply of February 2nd 1972, AAS 64 (1972) 393-394.

¹¹ Besides the response given by the CICLSAL in AAS 68 (1972) 393-394, cf. C. Dortel claudot, *Obéir aujourd’hui dans la vie religieuse: pourquoi? A qui? Comment?*, Paris 1984, 54-55; id., *Le strutture di governo e di partecipazione delle Congregazioni religiose*, Roma 2007, 138-170.

¹² T. Goffi, *Rinnovamento delle forme di obbedienza nella Vita Religiosa*, in: VV. AA., “Autorità e obbedienza nella Vita Religiosa”, Milano 1978, 285.

¹³ For an wider explanation, cf. The following selected bibliography. First of all, FLC 50, where the Magisterium explains some main aspects of authority: a) spiritual authority, b) authority conducive to unity, and c) authority capable of making final decisions and assuring their implementation. See, J. Rovira, *The Moderator’s Role*, o.c., 79-90; G. Mathias, *Leadership and Community*, Sanyasa 5 (2010) 109-120; S. H. Canilang, *The Religious Community*, Quezon City 2004, 120-122; J. C. R. Garcia paredes, *Religious Community as a Parable of God*, Quezon City 1995, 52-54; H. Gedemer, *Ansätze zu einem zeitgemässen Führungs- und Gehorsamsstihl*, in: VV. AA., “Geist und

Form religiösen Gehorsams heute”, Schönstatt 1975, 70-78; A. M. Ruiz, *Del papel de guardián al de animador de grupo. ¿Nueva ética del Superior religioso?*, Pentecostés 14 (1976) 158-162; J. Beyer, *I superiori locali e la loro missione*, Milano 1983; A. Bocos, *El Superior animador de su comunidad*, Confer 20 (1981) 533-602; A. Basso, *Le doti di un buon superiore*, Testimoni 15 Maggio 1984, 3; A. Pancrazl, *Creatività nell'esercizio dell'autorità*, ib., 17-27; interesting the “declogue” offered already by St. Albert the Great (1193-1280), 10. *Eigenschaften die ein Leiter einer Gemeinschaft haben muss*, Anzeiger für die Seelsorge 91 (1982) Heft 6; A. Manenti, *Vivere insieme. Aspetti psicologici*, Bologna 1994, 87-104; VV. AA., *Superiori aggiornati per comunità rinnovate*, Trento 1968; id., *La figura del superiore locale oggi*, Roma 1981; id., *La función animadora del superior local*, Confer 75 (1981) 423-639; id., *Animare la comunità*, Milano 2000; id., *Guidare la comunità religiosa. L'autorità in tempo di rifondazione*, Milano 2001, espec. J. M. Arnaiz, *Crisi di obbedienza o crisi di autorità? Problematiche e compiti attuali del governo religioso*, 9-50; C. Aniz, o. c.; P. G. Cabra, *Per una vita fraterna*, Brescia 1999, 3rd ed., espec. 139-140; A. Martini, *La Superiora nella comunità*, Testimoni 15 Giugno 2006, 23-29. Because of pedagogical and juridical consequences, cf. B. Giordani, *L'incontro personale come metodo di apostolato*, in: VV. AA., “L'azione apostolica dei religiosi”, Milano 1980, 205-229; B. Goya, *Aiuto fraterno*, Bologna 2006; VV. AA., *Corso di avvio all'accompagnamento spirituale*, Casale Monferrato (AL) 2007; G. Sovernigo, *Come accompagnare nel cammino spirituale*, Padova 2012; D. J. Andres, *Los Superiores religiosos según el Código*, Madrid 1985.

¹⁴ Cf. FLC 12d, 14, 19, 20, VC 51b, 95, CCC 2687, EG 281-283. Because in Consecrated Life authority is first of all a spiritual authority (the members are together in virtue of a charism, not of a human sympathy), the Moderator has to guarantee to the community time for and the quantity of prayer and fidelity to charism and mission.

¹⁵ To the famous Roman lawyer M. T. CICERO (106-43 bC) the following sentence has been attributed: The ruler needs a glass of science, a barrel of prudence and a sea of patience.

¹⁶ T. Augustine, *Enarr. In Ps.* 99, 10: PL 37, 1277.

¹⁷ St. Benedict, RB 2, 3, 5, 64; cf. A. Lopez Amat, o. c., 640-651.

¹⁸ Regarding to hospitality, cf. FC 74, IL 108; and in general about the openness fostered by FLC 70, VC 72-103, SAC 40-44, FT 25f.



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BOOK REVIEWS

Consecrated Life: Challenges and Opportunities,
by George Kaitholil, SSP (Mumbai: St. Paul's Publication)
2015, p. 196, ISBN 978-93-5015-238-6, Price - ₹160.

As we have spent this past one year reflecting on the role which consecrated life has played in the Church, it is worth reviewing a book written during this period which invites consecrated men and women to pause and analyze their own identity and mission. Throughout the ages, God calls men and women to pursue lives of perfect charity through the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. In this materialistic world, God still calls and leads human beings to holiness. But the interest in spiritual life has decreased a lot especially among the religious because of the excessive influence of the worldly things and comfort. Through this book, the author, George Kaitholil invites the religious to a transformed existence. According to him, this book is meant to be an eye opener to all of us especially the religious so that we may understand our mission in the current situation and respond to it meaningfully. The author deserves our applause as he has succeeded in bringing out his ideas and views in a clear and creative way. This book is written in a simple language with ample explanations substantiating the points with their theological and biblical background. I believe this book must become a necessary resource material for the religious communities, particularly the formation houses.

If consecrated life has to be lived genuinely, then it is necessary to understand the basic values of religious life anew. And so the author begins by introducing the reader to the basics of religious life. This book is divided into two parts with a total of eleven chapters. Each chapter lays down one or the other levels of the practical aspects of religious life. The first part gives a view of the three evangelical counsels as virtues of chastity, poverty and obedience in the light of spiritual and theological horizons. The author's focus here, is on the virtues rather than on the vows. He begins with the virtue of consecrated chastity and calls it "the distinctive mark of the religious," a sign of the Kingdom of heaven as well as the offering

of love that the celibate extends to the whole world, leading to communion. He also speaks of celibate friendship and shows how to be prudent, open and holy in such relationship as it has the power either to strengthen or destroy a person. The fruitfulness in consecrated celibacy through spiritual parenthood also can capture the mind of the readers as the author presents Mary and Joseph as models who can help us live a joyful celibate life.

The life of consecrated poverty, according to the author, helps us to bind ourselves with God, to love Him above all and to count Him as our immeasurable wealth and unending happiness. The spirit of poverty is in giving God the primacy He deserves and also in responding to the cry of the poor. With regard to obedience, its quality depends on how we live in love, are united with Christ, and on how loyal we are as citizens of the kingdom of the Father. In obedience we are truly led by the Holy Spirit, share the divine love with others and learn how to live in intimate friendship with God.

For the second part, as the author confesses, he has drawn inspiration from various speakers and writers, and presents the challenges and opportunities of consecrated life. He courageously speaks of the religious life today as devoid of deep God experience and, therefore, a failure in being the conscience of the rich and the voice of the poor. He invites the readers to rediscover the essence of religious life and its demands. He concludes the book by adding the sharing of Sr. Inigo where she speaks of a kind of tension to live the present religious life but offers an assurance that we can meet God in the poor as well as in our prayer. Prayer challenges us and moves us to mission and mission leads us back to God in silence and stillness and, therefore, to the Word of God. Religious life is beautiful and it is a call to live lovingly and joyfully for the sake of mission.

This book can be compared to a mother giving advice to her little one. The author speaks from much of his own personal experience. At the same time, we can find at some places certain oversimplification of the matter which may not be appreciated by everyone. The problem arising from the generation gap is also a struggle for the present day religious communities. I feel this aspect is barely considered here; it would have been more effective if the author had also addressed this aspect. The book, however, remains a real inspiration for today's religious to have a meaningful and fruitful renewal of life.

Lifey Paul, SJB

*A Confident Heart: How to Stop Doubting Yourself &
Live in the Security of God's Promises*

Renee Swope (Mumbai: Pauline Publications),
2015, p. 256 ISBN 978-81-7176-843-1, Price - ₹160.

The author, Renee Swope, currently serves as the executive director with Proverbs 31 Ministries in USA. He is a New York Times best-selling spiritual author and a women empowerment activist. Swope, in this newly released book, explains to women how to identify, overcome and even use doubt in order to live confidently in God's power, truth, and grace. *A Confident Heart* is an authentic, insight filled and encouraging work for all men and women to face the limitations and insecurities of life with biblical truth that will transform the ways they think, feel, and live. Very often the difficulty that we face in our life is in living out of our faith and our doubt about our own worthiness. Our communicative relationship with God, neighbor and situations in life often brings a lot of questions. This book gives voice to the questions, doubts, struggles and hopes so many of us may have in our day today life.

The book is divided into twelve chapters, with small spontaneous prayers, some reflections and questions for discussions. "Being honest about who we are and how we are doing is especially risky when it comes to our insecurities," says the author. Through the narration of her own painful life experience and thought provoking questions, the author makes the readers interested and enthusiastic. According to her, "Love" is something sacred and it must be given gracefully, by parents, teachers, husband, wife and Children. Denial of love makes every one less confident and unhealthy. The Physician who can heal this infirmity is our ever loving and merciful God through His faithful accompaniment. The book is full of truth about God, our loving Heavenly Father and shows how we doubt ourselves and God. The author charts a path for us to show how we can be confident to walk with God, and how we can heal the pain of our past and use it for His good. She repeatedly brings us back to what God has done for us and how He loves us.

The author presents Samaritan woman in the Bible as an example of a person who received God's unconditional love. Even though God knew all about her and her past, He yet loved her and spent time with her. In the first few chapters, the author has made an honest self-evaluation and found out that life was full of emptiness and limitations. Our human tendency is to fill this emptiness with the folly of this world or with human relations and this make us more desperate and desolate. Jesus is the only one who can meet our deepest needs to be accepted and he is delighted simply because of who we are. If we feel distance in our relationship with God, we can only see the shadow because we have turned away from light or we have believed in Him

for years, but haven't really believed Him completely. Author expresses the love of Jesus as a love letter nailed to the cross of Calvary, declaring the depth of His perfect love to every creature.

The author remains very honest about her life, her past and her current struggles. The book is well written, easy to read and enriched with Biblical quotes. Swope is open with her past and the things she battles with today. Our failures in life are graces to search and meet God closely and dearly. This book is excellent, encouraging, and filled with amazing truth about God, who we are in Him and how He can and will use us. No doubt this book will invite the readers to know God better in their lives and ask God to take away their insecurities and give them a more confident personality. However, the author has overlooked in her otherwise excellent work, the positive aspect of the human efforts to face this kind of insecurities in life because God has created them with all the capacities. If any part of ourselves is sick, especially the psychic structure, He also has deposited in us the possibilities so that we are free to find solutions for ourselves. Pauline Publications from Mumbai has come out with latest edition of this book in India.

Sabu George Palackathadathil, CMF

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