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**Re-visioning Consecrated Life Moved by the Spirit:
50 years after Vatican II**

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EDITORIAL

Like every other historical reality, consecrated life is also an evolving one. There are, however, significant stages in its historical evolution. Being essentially an ecclesial reality, changes in the collective theological consciousness of the Church will bring about necessary changes in the understanding and living of consecrated life also. One such significant stage that unleashed changes in the evolution of consecrated life has been the convocation of Vatican Council II. One who takes a close look at the history of consecrated life which is interwoven with the history of the Church, will soon discover that there has not been a serious theological reflection on consecrated life till Vatican Council II. Among the ecumenical councils, it is only Vatican Council II that dealt with religious life at length. Drawing on the orientations given by the Council documents, especially *Lumen Gentium*, *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, there began a process of theological re-visioning and the consequent renewal, initiated by the Council.

Almost 50 years after the Council, we have come a long way with ups and downs. “During these years of renewal,” writes Pope John Paul II, “the consecrated life, like other ways of life in the Church, has gone through a difficult and trying period. It has been a period full of hopes, new experiments and proposals aimed at giving fresh vigour to the profession of the evangelical counsels. But it has also been a time of tension and struggle, in which well-meaning endeavours have not brought out positive results” (*Vita Consecrata*, 13). With the Council, we have come to recognize that historical forms of consecrated life will change, but there will be “no change in the substance of a choice which finds its expression in the radical gift of self for the love the Lord Jesus” (VC, 3). Perhaps to alert us in this process of re-visioning, the Document of the Sacred Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, namely, *Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious life* (1983) states: “Historical and cultural changes bring about evolution in the lived reality, but the forms and direction that the evolution takes are determined by the essential elements without which religious life loses its identity” (EE. 4). Keeping the essentials and, at the same time, recasting our identity, re-articulating our charism and expressing ourselves in new forms is part of this re-visioning process. This is the gift that Vatican Council rendered to consecrated life.

In October 2012, the Church celebrated 50th anniversary of the convocation of Vatican Council II, conjoined with the celebration of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that called for *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*. Because of the importance of the theme, the Consecrated Life Week Seminar 2013 (CLW) at Sanyasa: Institute of Consecrated Life (SICL) had taken up the theme of “new evangelization.”

As the only Institute in the Indian Church, that focuses on study and research in Theology and Formation of Consecrated Life, and taking stock of the 50 years of the growth and development of consecrated life since Vatican II, SICL took up the theme, **Re-visioning Consecrated Life Moved by the Spirit: 50 Years after Vatican II**, for its Annual Consecrated Life Week Seminar, conducted from February 07-09, 2014. As usual, the current issue carries the papers presented at this seminar.

Characterizing Vatican II as a momentous event in the history of the Church, *L. Legrand*, brings out the underlying concerns that set the context of the Council and goes on to show the immense research that went into the documents of the Council and the tensions that prevailed in the drafting and the final conclusions. Showing the Council as a work of the Spirit who brings out newness in the ways of being Church and fulfilling her mission, he explains the “hermeneutic of continuity” of the Christian tradition, which in being faithful to the message received from the Lord, remains also open to meeting and responding to the ever renewed challenges of today. He shows that the newness of the Council is not something to be admired as a monument of the past, but should alert us to keep the Word of God alive in the midst of the words of the world.

Placing consecrated life within the context of the Council, *Vimala, CMC*, makes an assessment of the impact of the Council on consecrated life. She begins with a narration of the evolution in the understanding of religious life that marked the context of the Council, and then goes on to describe the theological foundations of religious life, its adaptation and renewal and its relationship with other members of the people of God, as explicated in the documents of the Council. Drawing on the clear and abundant guidelines for reform offered by the Council, the author moves on to evaluate their implementation after the Council. She analyses varied conciliar consequences that positively effected renewal, reform and changes in the varied aspects of consecrated life and also the controversial consequences that led more to rupture, discontinuity

in the essentials and confusion. She also gives a brief reflection on the post conciliar documents, especially on *Vita Consecrata*, the second *Magna Carta* on consecrated life.

In helping us to revision “vows,” 50 years after Vatican Council, *Xavier Manavath*, points to the shift that has taken place—the shift from the theology of the vows to that of the evangelical counsels. He takes us through an understanding of the vows prevalent up to Vatican II, which was mostly on juridical, moralistic and disciplinary terms, regulating one’s attitude, actions, behaviour and relationships and brings out the pressing concerns that clearly called for a theological revisioning that began with the Council. The new horizons opened up by the Council and the critical and creative dialogue with the wisdom of the human and psychological sciences paved for new avenues in understanding and living of the counsels. Re-discovering the profound anthropological ground of the counsels, they are seen as values emerging from an evangelical vision of life, capable of addressing aspirations and concerns vital to humanity, its survival and transformation.

Moving on in the same line, *Venceslaus Lawrence*, helps us to re-discover the identity of consecrated life in the changing world. He begins his reflection on the nature of the crisis that religious life faces today and traces out some signs of this crisis. Inviting us to see the hidden opportunities for creative response and growth within this crisis, Lawrence goes on to show that consecrated life embodies values that are very fundamental and vital to humanity, and therefore, the need of the hour is to recast them in new forms. The guiding light in this process would be to recapture the original spirit and motivation present in the Syrian and Egyptian models of eremitic-cenobitic living. The author, aided by scholarly research, shows, that the goal of these monks was to attain a three-fold communion (God, Human and Earth and Creation) through a process of ego-transcendence. He explicates further the three evangelical counsels as a path of transformation of the three basic drives for sex, wealth and power.

Highlighting the ever-living vitality of the Gospel that has evoked prophetic responses from believers for the last 20 centuries, *Joe Tauro*, brings to us the emerging trends in consecrated life. Making us aware of the epoch-making changes in the religious domain of today, he calls religious congregation for a re-articulation of their charism, a re-casting of their identity so as to respond

effectively to the spiritual, moral and socio-cultural needs which the present day world cannot adequately address. He then goes on to alert us to the new signs on the horizon, the letting go that is involved, and the immense resources available, especially with the Indian religious. He, finally lists out a number of new forms of radical discipleship that are emerging, the positive signals that are detected, and traits of a new thinking that are required of the religious of today, if they are to remain relevant and meaningful.

Drawing on the reforms initiated by the Council and on the emerging ecclesiology of communion, *Mani Karrot*, details the context and the evolution of new forms of consecration, expressed in the birth of new evangelical families and ecclesial movements. He speaks about the paradigm shift in the understanding of the mission of consecrated life in these new evangelical families as they move away from the institutional models to an insertional thrust into the midst of the secular world and into a sharing of life with the masses. The originality of these forms is seen in the composition of these communities which consists of clerics and lay people, married or celibates pursuing a common style of life, characterised by deep aspiration for community living, poverty and prayer. They also manifest a new form of government where laity and clerics share responsibilities in a common commitment to new evangelisation. Bringing a few narratives on these evolving ecclesial families, he envisions an opening for dialogue between the older Institutes of consecrated life and these new forms of consecration.

Inviting us to make a paradigm shift from Vatican II to Synod 2012, *Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes*, speaks about the new scenarios and language of a “new evangelization. According to him, consecrated life is called in this time to participate in the ‘New Evangelization,’ which requires of the Church a “pastoral conversion,” calling for new methods, new structures, new attitudes or a new paradigm of mission. For such a conversion to happen, the religious needs to be open to a new awareness that the Spirit of God is the main actor of the “new evangelization.” We, the religious, are collaborators of the Spirit and are launched towards new frontiers of geographical, social and cultural settings. The main contribution of consecrated life is “to announce God” in new scenarios and with a new language so as to become evangelical witnesses of God in the midst of the post-modern and global societies. Offering us guidance in this field, he also proposes certain traits of this new evangelizing spirituality.

I hope that the present issue of the Journal stimulate our own thinking and reflection, lead to better appreciation of the gift of consecrated life in its evolving dynamism and help commit ourselves with fresh enthusiasm as the Church needs the spiritual and apostolic contribution of a renewed and re-vitalized consecrated life.

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF
(Chief Editor)

VATICAN II: A MOMENTOUS EVENT IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Lucien Legrand, MEP

Spiritual realities cannot be quantified. However, numbers can be significant and the presence of 2400 Bishops at Vatican II is impressive. Still more significant is their representativeness. On the opening day of the Council, Oct 11, 1962, 1041 Bishops were Europeans, 956 came from North and South America; 379 from Africa and 300 from Asia.¹ Never had Church history seen such a convergence of pastoral, theological and spiritual horizons. By way of comparison, the Council of Trent opened on Dec 13, 1545 with 4 Cardinals, 4 Archbishops, 21 Bishops and 5 Generals of Orders. By the time it ended on Dec 4, 1563, the total had increased to rather meagre a figure of 250 members. As for Vatican I, it started on Dec 8, 1869 with 754 participants but ended a year afterwards with only 532 members.² The sheer number of mitres gathered in Rome for Vatican II made it a unique event in Church history.

1. UNDERLYING CONCERNS

Evidently much more is expected from a Council than an impressive display of mitres. Coming from such a diverse background, the bishops and the theologians, who accompanied them, carried along with them a vast experience, a multitude of problems and a rich background of pastoral and theological thinking.

Any newness stems from a history and so it was for the new élan which Vatican II brought to the Church. Vatican II came at a momentous time of human history. The period between Vatican I and II covered a crucial and tumultuous period of almost a century (1869-1962). It had seen the development of industrialisation which had made consumer goods more easily available but had led also to urbanisation, proletarianization and class struggle. This had led to

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the two Great Russian and Chinese revolutions. It had been a century of technical development, especially as regards communication: it could be seen as a “sign of the times” that most of the Council Fathers would have come to Rome by plane and presumably all of them and still more the media made a large use of the phone. But this technical progress had been instrumentalized by two atrocious World Wars and turned into producing more lethal tools of destruction. The horrendous and ominous climax had been the atomic explosions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The following period saw the so-called “cold war” that kept a precarious nuclear balance between the two superpowers who, on their part, were trying to involve the newly decolonized nations in their respective camp and to use them as tools in their strategy of world domination.

The generation of bishops and theologians who took part in the Council had been deeply involved in this world turmoil. Young Josef Ratzinger for instance had been enlisted in the Nazi Hitler Youth and later on in the anti-Aircraft forces of the German army. On the other side of the fence, Fr. Congar had spent five years in the War prisoners’ camps while Fr. de Lubac had joined the Resistance movement. Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York and General Chaplain of the US Forces blessed the US Airforce which dropped the atomic bomb but Bishop Yamaguchi of Nagasaki found himself under the deadly blast blessed by his confrere. And both of them sat together at the Council, both of them coming from the opposite direction joined in the same concern to make a revived Church an instrument of peace.

Such were the “signs of the times” which carried the concerns shared by the members of the Assembly. These concerns found expression in *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the last document to have been sanctioned by the Fathers, as a grand finale to the Council which was solemnly concluded on the following day, Dec 8, 1965. It is not the place here to attempt a summary of the rich contents of this document. Let it suffice to quote the prologue stressing “the solidarity of the Church with the whole human family”:

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well... For theirs is a community of men who, united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onwards towards the kingdom of the Father and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all men. That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history (GS 1).³

It was the first time that a Council dealt not only with Church matters but with such worldly issues as social justice, value of human labour, family life, culture, economics, labour disputes, investment and money, war and arms race, international cooperation for world peace, etc. The Church had come out its ghetto. It assumed “the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (GS 4). This was a new language expressing a new relationship with the world.

2. UNDERLYING RESEARCH

However, it was not as though this enlightenment had fallen on the Vatican gathering on the eve of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception 1965. Vatican II did not suddenly emerge out of nothingness. The Holy Spirit did not fall on the Assembly like a bolt from the blue. The footnotes to *Gaudium et Spes* refer to previous papal declarations expressing the on-going endeavour to read the Gospels in the context of the days’ problems. The references were not only to the recent *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris* of John XXIII (1961, 1963) and *Ecclesiam Suam* of Paul VI (1965). They went back to *Libertas Praestantissimum* and *Rerum Novarum* and of Leo XIII (1883, 1890) and of course to the Fathers of the Church and to the Scriptures. This well articulated and systematic exposure of evangelical faith to the world represented a daring newness of Vatican II. But this newness was rooted in the incarnational solidarity of the Christian folk with humanity at large, created at the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26; GS 12).

This newness, rooted in a history of solidarity with the world, was not restricted only to the final document of the Council. It represents a spirit that pervaded all the deliberations of the Assembly and can be perceived in all the major documents of the Council.

For *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on Liturgy, for instance, the newness and boldness of its proposals are clearly evident. It is not only a matter of external practices like the use of vernacular languages, concelebration, cultural adaptations. It was basically a matter of restituting to the liturgy its prophetic character by reviving the narrow connection between the two altars of the Word and of the Eucharist, or rather the one altar of the Word proclaimed and celebrated.⁴ But this newness was the outcome of a long endeavour to make the liturgy more relevant to human existence. A recent article on “The Theological and Historical Roots of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*”⁵ for instance traces the liturgical movement back to the 17th century scholarly work of Mabillon (1632-1707), Muratori (1672-1750) and even the Anglican reconstitution of the liturgy of St James by

T. Rattray (1744). This movement was intensified particularly under the leadership of the great Benedictine Abbeys of Solesme in France, Mont César in Belgium, Maria Lach in Germany. It was given official encouragement in the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (1943) and *Mediator Dei* (1947) of Pius XII. Great names well known to theology students like those of Battifol, Duchesne, Baumstark, Gregory Dix, OdoCasel, De Lubac, Congar, Daniélou, Jungmann, and many others are associated with this intense liturgical revival. They show “that the Constitution (on Liturgy) is the fruit of an immense and patient labour of faithful and talented theologians and historians for well over a century.”⁶ This theological and historical interest in Liturgy meant more than mere academic scholarship. It was prompted by a need to free the Christian cult from the shackles of routine ritualism so as to recover its inner prophetic dynamism.

The same could be said of all the other major Council documents. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* makes reference to the Encyclical *Divinum Illud* of Leo XIII (1887), *Mystici Corporis* (1943) and *Mediator Dei* (1947) of Pius XII and other papal documents and declarations. These Roman pronouncements themselves echoed the works of theologians like Mersch, Scheeben, Congar, De Lubac, Von Balthazar, Schillebeeckx, Rahner, and of Biblicists like Lyonnet, Cerfaux, Benoit, Schnackenburg, etc. It is to them that we owe the new perspective on the Church, viewed primarily not as an establishment but as a people gathered by the Gospel and responding to it under the power of the Spirit.

The Bible scholars just mentioned above and many others, following on the footsteps of Fr. M.J. Lagrange, the pioneer of modern Catholic Biblical scholarship (1855-1938) had succeeded in avoiding the pitfalls of Modernism while addressing scientifically the questions put by modern science, archaeology and history. Their insights, already endorsed in the Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), provided the substance of the Constitution *Dei Verbum* on Divine Revelation, but not without meeting with stubborn opposition, as will be seen shortly.

Unitatis Redintegratio on Ecumenism gave ecumenism a new élan. But it was also the fruit of a movement long started. It had been already particularly intense in the Malines Conversations between Catholics and Anglicans run from 1921 to 1926 under the aegis of Cardinal Mercier of Belgium which proposed “an Anglican Church united but not absorbed” according to the formula proposed by Dom Lambert Baudouin.⁷

The Decree *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, on the Church Missionary Activity made a major shift in the Church outlook on her mission. In line with the Theology of the Church, it situated the Mission in the heart of the Church identity and made it the responsibility of the local Church in sisterly solidarity with the churches of the entire *oikoumene*. Evangelization was no longer the reserved domain of some missionary congregations working on the margins of the Church. It became the charge of every bishop, every priest and every member of the People of God. The Mission had so to say been delocalized. Anyway this new perspective had already been anticipated in the praxis of the Church who, after the Encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* of Pius XI in 1922, had started a vigorous indigenisation of the Hierarchy with the consecration of 6 Chinese and one Japanese Bishops in 1927. The Church was well ahead of world political powers in the process of decolonisation.⁸ As for “inculturation,” the word had already entered theological vocabulary in 1953.⁹

A similar analysis could be extended to all the documents of Vatican II. On the one hand, these texts were not meteors appearing in the sky out of nowhere: they were the fruit of a long experience and mature theological research. On the other hand they embodied a Spirit inspired dynamism, a new readiness to listen to the Good News and announce them in the context of “the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the present times.”

3. TENSIONS IN THE COUNCIL

Coming from above but also from below, it was the Spirit of the One who says “Behold I make everything new” (Rev 21:5) who blew on the Council and brought about “the newness of the Spirit” (Rom 7:6). But this newness did not come without meeting stiff opposition. In the final vote on the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* was still disapproved by 75 votes against and 7 abstentions. It may not be much versus the 2309 votes of approval. Still it is much more than the 4 and 5 votes of dissent which were expressed respectively for the Decree on *Ministry and life of the Priests*, and on the *Missionary Activity of the Church*. It can be compared with the 70 votes against and 6 abstentions for the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*. The convergence of a lasting opposition to the two documents dealing with attitudes towards the world shows the subsistence of a certain state of mind which found also expression all through the debates of the four sessions of the Council. The case of the debate concerning *Dei Verbum* on Divine Revelation is enlightening.

The draft was one of the first to be presented to the Assembly, in the First Session on November 14, 1962. After long debates and many modifications, the

final text got approval only towards the end of the last Session on Nov 18, 1965. So, in its own way and through the laborious argument which went on throughout the duration of the Council, it gives a good image of how the Council came to a final agreement of 2344 votes in favour and 6 against it, in other words, of how the “newness of the Spirit” found its way amidst the resistance that came from attachment to old setattitudes.

At the preparatory stage of the Council, before its opening, a theological Commission was constituted to prepare a text on Revelation. It consisted mostly of representatives of the Roman school. The text they proposed was entitled *Constitutio de Fontibus Revelationis* and the first chapter treated *De Duplici Fonte Revelationis*. In other words, it resumed the agenda of the Council of Trent and hardened its position. The observations proposed by the Secretariate for Christian Unity and by the Biblical Pontifical Institute were not taken into account. This draft had been prepared by a certain type of theological academics which seemed never to have left their scholastic cocoon. Facing the world, they took a defensive stand as watchmen of the truth. Most of them were in Rome and were quite influential in Roman Congregations.¹⁰ They had managed to have Congar, Rahner, De Lubac, Lyonnet, Zerwick temporarily suspended from their teaching positions. The writings of Teilhard de Chardin were the object of a *Monitum* (reprimand) of the Holy Office.

At the outset of the Council, Pope John XXIII had expressed the wish that the Assembly should exercise “a teaching activity that is predominantly pastoral in character.”¹¹ This opened a horizon embracing the world and history. Its inspiration had a deep missionary thrust. But the horizon of the Roman academics remained that of the Council of Trent and the anti-modernistic oath. Their schema entered head on in the dispute on the sources of Revelation: it wanted to tighten the straight jacket of orthodoxy.

After a tumultuous debate,¹² the text was rejected. The discussion went on, connected with a controversy that raged in the Roman circles during the first days of the Council. It concerned mostly the application of the method of Literary Forms to the Gospels. An anonymous pamphlet distributed to the Council Fathers in November 1962 asked the Council to condemn the extension of Literary Forms to the Gospels and suggested “*solemniter proponere et imponere limites*” to the use of scientific exegetical methods. This pamphlet echoed a campaign coming mostly from Roman universities and targeting the Pontifical Biblical Institute. Launched by an article of Mgr Romeo, a professor of the Lateran University, in the review *Divinitas*, it had attacked the Pontifical Biblical Institute in general

and Prof. Lyonnet and Zerwick in particular. It had even met with the support of Cardinals Ruffini, Pizzardo, Ottaviani. Pope Paul VI had to intervene personally and, in a talk at the Lateran University, asked to put an end to acrimonious and sterile controversies.¹³ In April 1964, the Pontifical Biblical Commission issued an Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospels that justified the prudent application of Literary Forms to the Gospels.

In course of time, a new text was submitted which approached divine Revelation from the pastoral and missionary viewpoint of the dynamics of God's Word. This is not the place to analyse it in detail and to go into the many amendments and much recasting. The key note is given by the Prologue which opens large perspectives by presenting Revelation as God's great gift to humanity. This outlook finds a majestic expression in the beautiful first lines of the Constitution:

Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith, the sacred synod takes its direction from these words of St. John: "We announce to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our common fellowship be with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:2-3). Therefore, following in the footsteps of the Council of Trent and of the First Vatican Council, this present council wishes to set forth authentic doctrine on divine revelation and how it is handed on, so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe, by believing it may hope, and by hoping it may love.

The pastoral and missionary viewpoint is striking. As Benedict XVI said, "it is one of the pillars on which the entire Council is built."¹⁴ It "points out to the Church as a community that listens to and proclaims the Word of God... From this has derived a renewal of the Church's life, especially in her preaching, catechesis, theology and spirituality and even in the ecumenical process."¹⁵ The entire orientation of Vatican II derived from this return to the power and enlightenment of God's Word, as it was symbolized by the daily function of the Enthronement of the Gospel

4. NEWNESS OF THE COUNCIL

This kind of confrontation between an open worldwide vision and a narrow Tridentine horizon ran through the debate on the nature of the Church, its relation with other world, ecumenism, relation with other religions, etc. It was

not exactly a battle between two camps, progressive and conservative, in which the former won the victory. It was rather a Spirit inspired process in which the Assembly came to voice the Gospel message for today's world while remaining faithful to the Tradition.

As regards the newness of the Council, an elaborate survey has been done by late Fr. Puthanangady in a concise article of *Word and Worship*.¹⁶ As mentioned above, the article points out to “a new way of being a Church,” a new outlook on Revelation, and on Liturgy. As regards religious Life, three points are singled out: religious life as an integral part of the Church, religious life to be inserted into the mission of the Church and a new perspective on the vows and community life.¹⁷ In conclusion, Puthanangady records and invites to take note of a “paradigm shift in the Ministry of the Church”

- From religion to Gospel
- From institution to community
- From instruction to communication
- From ecclesiastical community to ecclesial community
- From faith to hope.¹⁸

In short, Vatican II proposes a “new way of being Church and a new way of fulfilling our ministry.”¹⁹ The newness of Vatican II could be summarized in the prophetic words of Pope John XXIII in his inaugural address *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* at the opening ceremony of the Council on October 11 1962: The Pope had expressed the wish that the Assembly should exercise “a teaching activity that is predominantly pastoral in character.”²⁰ So it was. Vatican II gave theological thinking a pastoral dimension, not in the sense that it would have supplied small practical tips but in the sense that it exposed the message of the Gospel to the realities of a fast changing world. Vice versa Vatican II submitted its pastoral concerns to an intense theological scrutiny on the nature of the Church of its Mission and of its dependence on the Word of God. In short Vatican II was the work of the Spirit guiding the Church in her prophetic mission of making God's Word heard to the world in a spirit, not of dominating triumphancy, but of humble service at the image of the Servant.

5. AND NOW?

One could go on exploring the treasures opened by the sharing of experience and of concerns, Spirit inspired quest for answers in the light of the Gospel,

cooperation between Bishops and theologians of various background and tendencies that took place during the four sessions of the Council from 1962 to 1965. They resulted in the profound collection of texts that will remain as “a momentous event in the history of the church.”

One could also point out to some shortcomings of the Council. Such important issues as feminism and ecology do not figure on its agenda. Only two paragraphs refer to the youth. But it would be anachronistic squabbling to look back at the past to pick up its flaws. The point is rather to turn to the future and to keep alive the spirit of Vatican II, the dynamism of the Word in the world. As put by Puthanangady in the title of his survey: Vatican II is “A Council for the Third Millenium,” and he concludes: “Standing at the dawn of a new millennium, animated by the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and looking towards the horizon with a vision for the future, we need to take up courageously the challenges which the Spirit and the world offer us.”²¹

Benedict XVI liked to speak of a “hermeneutic of continuity.”²² Both terms of the phrase are meaningful. “Continuity” is needed in fidelity to the message received. As St Paul puts it, “we are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Now what is required of servants is that they should be trustworthy” (1 Cor 4:1-2). “Hermeneutic” expresses the other aspect of openness to the need of on-going updating, of *aggiornamento*, of meeting the ever renewed challenges of the day. In that way, we could as well speak of “dynamics of continuity” in the sense that the *depositum fidei* is not a static block, an immovable quantity, but a Spirit driven force to make the Word alive for each generation.

This is what genuine Tradition means.

The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit... And the Holy Spirit through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church, and though her in the world, leads believers to the full truth and makes the Word of Christ dwell in them in all its richness (cf Col 3:16)” (DV 8).

This is what happened in the history of the Councils. The formulas which they left to us may seem to be desiccated abstractions. Actually they were lively responses to the challenges of their times. Tradition means that the concern for the Good News had always been active in the Church. The councils of Nicaea, Chalcedon and Constantinople had to formulate the Good News in the language of the Greek world: they are lively experiments in inculturation. The two councils of Lateran (1123 and 1139) had to deal with the developing socio-

political system of feudalism which had crept into a Church threatened with simony, usurious practice, and clerical positions feudally inherited. The question of *Scriptura Sola*, raised by Protestantism and treated at length by the council of Trent, was in a way the outcome of the great socio-cultural revolution brought about by the discovery of printing by Guttenberg in 1455 and the subsequent diffusion of the books and of the Book. Viewed in that way, Tradition is not an additional Letter but the readiness to keep the Word of God alive in the words of the world. This is the Tradition that Vatican II embraced, a Tradition which, far from clinging to the past, invites to do what Jesus had done, to put new wine in fresh wineskins.

This is the legacy that we have now received: the dynamic of continuity has to be kept alive. History never remains static. It has indeed moved a lot in the fifty years that elapsed since Vatican II came to an end in 1965. Science and techniques have made gigantic progress both at the macro and micro level, progress which raises tremendous questions. Humanity has landed on the moon, placed its robots in what has now become the “neighbouring” planets and is exploring the interstellar space. At the micro level, the identification of genetic DNA has opened the way to awesome possibilities of nanotechnology and genetic engineering. The facility of communication has made the world smaller and we are moving towards a new cultural revolution that may make the book obsolete. The global world landscape has also undergone profound changes. At the time of the Council, humanity was divided between capitalist West and the communist bloc of the East. Another political factor has now appeared on the world scene with the emergence of religious fanaticism and terrorism not only in the conquering Islamism of Al Qaeda but also in its mirror images of Hindutva in India, of Buddhist aggressiveness in Sri Lanka and Myanmar. New branches of theology have now appeared responding to new questions like ecological theology, feminist theology, Liberation theology. Moral theology has now to take into account the complexities of globalisation “the invisible hand of the market,”²³ of ethic investment, of an economy turned towards the good of humanity and especially of the poor. Sexual ethics have now more to do than grading the sins against the 6th commandment; it has now to deal with a genetic knowledge and expertise that could turn science into a monstrous Frankenstein.

At the same time, within the Church, new challenges and new forms of Christian life have appeared. Feminist claims oppose the patriarchal ecclesial structures. The development of communication media has led the Church to more transparency, as the case appeared in the question of clerical paedophilia.

Vocation crisis in many countries has resulted in practical clericalisation and creation of lay ministries. In the context of growing and aggressive fundamentalism, both within and without the Catholic Church, ecumenism is no longer the gentle and slow moving process supposed by the decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* on Ecumenism. New forces also have appeared: prayer movement, *Lectio Divina* and other forms of return to the Bible, charismatic groups, basic Christian communities, youth movements, new forms of religious life, better awareness of the “social dimension of evangelization,”²⁴ emergence of a better instructed and more involved laity,²⁵ etc.

Mostly the economic and political fulcrum of history has now moved from West to East, from Europe to Asia, North to South, to Africa and South America. So also has moved the fulcrum of Church life. In spite of a substantial number of bishops coming from Asia and Africa, Vatican II Agenda was mostly Western oriented. This remains true in general of Church documents presently. At least, we had the Synods which produced the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations *Ecclesia in Africa* (Sept 14 1995), *Ecclesia in America* (Jan 22, 1999) and *Ecclesia in Asia* (Nov 6 1999).²⁶ And now the election of a Pope coming from South America has come as a sign of the times.

Should a Third Vatican – or Buenos Ayres – Council be convoked to address the new challenges presented to the world and to the Church by these new horizons? Or, with the facilities given by modern means of communication, should the Church Magisterium open itself to a better exercise of intercontinental collegiality?²⁷ At any rate, the newness of Vatican II should not be left to be admired as an old monument of the past. It should not remain as “a momentous event in the history of the Church.” It has released a dynamism that should be kept alive. In the words of Benedict XVI, “in the Church there is also a Pentecost today.”²⁸ It is our task to keep to the dynamism of the Spirit by sharing in the life, expectations, joys and anguishes of today’s world in general and of the Asian world in particular, while listening and responding responsibly and creatively to the Word of God, light and source of life to the world.

Endnotes

¹G. Alberigo, *A brief history of Vatican II*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 21. This makes a total of 2676. But due to deaths and sickness, when it came to the final votes, the tally came down to some 2400 (exact figures in Alberigo, 109).

²Other elements of comparison: the Councils of Constantinople and of Ephesus gathered respectively 150 and 250 participants. Due to imperial pressure, the Council of Chalcedon fared better with 450 to 600 members according to various estimates.

³Translation of A. Flannery, *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, (Bombay: St Paul's Publications, 1975), 811. It may be noted that avoiding sexist language was not yet on the agenda at that time.

⁴The traditional image of the Two Tables of Christ's Word and Body is corrected as "The one table of the Word of God and Body of Christ" in DV 21; cf Post-Synodal Pastoral Exhortation *Domini Verbum* of Benedict XVI, 54-55 especially n 191.

⁵J.F. Baldovin, "The Development of the Liturgy: Theological and historical Roots of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*," *Worship* 87, 2013, 517-532.

⁶J.F. Baldovin, "The Development of the Liturgy," 531.

⁷In Lord Halifax, *The Conversations at Malines* (1921-1925), London, 1930, 251-261

⁸It could even be traced back to the Institution of the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* established by Rome to recover Mission initiative from the Padroado powers of Spain and Portugal. It was followed by the appointment of Apostolic Vicars. Cf. J. Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol II, (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1982), 6 and 414-420.

⁹In an article of P. Charles, "Missiologie et Acculturation," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 75 (1953), 555-570. Cf. L. E. Espinosa, "Los primeros pasos de la Inculturación: De Lovaina a Roma," *Voces* 10 (1997), 133-151.

¹⁰G. Ruggieri summarizes the position in drastic terms. On the one hand stood "the Church of Pius XII, which was essentially hostile to modernity and in this respect the heir to the nineteenth century restoration," It was opposed "to a Church that is a friend to all beings, even children of modern society, its culture, its history." Please see "The first Doctrinal Clash," in G. Alberigo, ed., *History of Vatican II*, vol 2, (New York-Leuven: Orbis-Peeters, 1997), 233. Ruggieri's statement needs being qualified: it was Pius XII who issued the liberating encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943.

¹¹Allocution *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* of John XXIII at the opening session of the Council. Text in W.M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 223-283.

¹²See the report of G. Ruggieri, 233-266. Ruggieri rightly concludes that, in the debate, "the Council had perhaps made one of the most important changes in the doctrinal development of the Catholic Church: the choice of a teaching that was 'pastoral' (p. 266).

¹³See report on this background in G. Alberigo, *History of Vatican II*, vol 1, 1995, 277-285; R. Latourelle, *Vatican II. Assessment and Perspectives (1962-1987)*, vol 1 (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 299-320.

¹⁴Angelus Message on the Anniversary of Dei Verbum, Nov 6, 2005, text in D.J. Murphy, *The Church and the Bible, Official Documents of the Catholic Church*, (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2007), 999.

¹⁵Address to the International Congress of the World Biblical Federation, Sept 16, 2005, text in Murphy, *The Church and the Bible*, 997-998.

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¹⁶“Vatican II. A Council for the Third Millennium,” *Word and Worship*, 45(2013), 80-84.

¹⁷“Vatican II. A Council for the Third Millennium,” 82

¹⁸Vatican II. A Council for the Third Millennium,” 83-84

¹⁹Vatican II. A Council for the Third Millennium,” 84.

²⁰Allocution *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* in Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, 223-283.

²¹“Vatican II. A Council for the Third Millennium,” 84.

²²Cf. Address of Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia offering them his Christmas greetings, December 22, 2005.

²³Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 204.

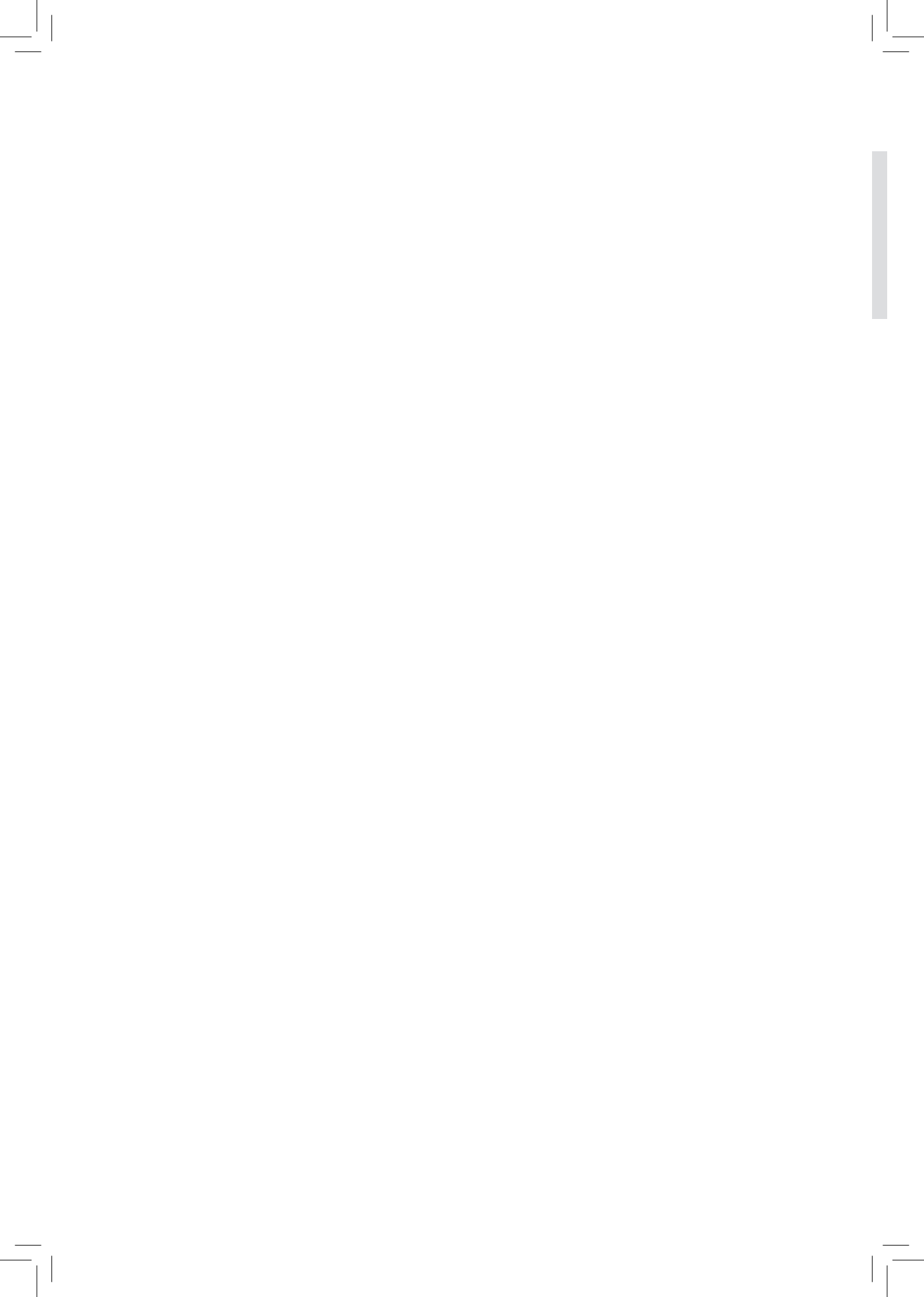
²⁴It is the title of a long section of *Evangelii Gaudium* (176-258) with an emphasis on the poor.

²⁵For instance, in a number of Theology Faculties in the West, the number of lay students exceeds by far that of clerical candidates, at both the graduate and post-graduate level. So also it tends to be in the teaching staff.

²⁶Apart from those specialized documents, the official documents of the Church in general, remain somewhat confined in the Western horizons. For instance the Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, in its vast coverage of the different Methods and Approaches to Biblical Interpretation makes no mention of non-Western interpretations. By contrast the forthcoming meeting of the Society of Biblical Studies to be held in San Diego in November 2014 offers units on African Biblical Hermeneutics, African-American Biblical Hermeneutics, Asian and American Asian Biblical Hermeneutics, and Post-colonial Biblical studies. The Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* of Benedict XVI has a substantial section on Dialogue with Islam (118) but a rapid mention in which Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism are dumped together in three vague lines.

²⁷It is noticeable that the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the new Pope makes 9 references to the Conference of Latin American and Carribean Bishops, in addition to one reference each to the Conferences of the United States, France, and European Assembly. When will the FABC find its due place in this emerging worldwide collegiality?

²⁸Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 4.



IMPACT OF VATICAN II ON RELIGIOUS LIFE

Vimala Chenginimattam, CMC

“Open the windows of the Church to let in some fresh air” was the great vision of Pope John XXIII, who dared to respond to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, by convoking the Second Vatican Council (*hereafter referred to as VC II*). All the expectations of the Pope and of the council fathers are expressed in the ‘watch word’ of the Council, ‘*aggiornamento*’ (updating). The spirit of the Council can be summarized in this word because *Ecclesia semper reformanda* (the Church constantly reforms herself). Today, 50 years after the VC II, it is quite fitting to reassess where we presently stand. How much *Aggiornamento* have we achieved? The Church, time and again, invites the faithful to have renewal, revitalization, transformation, conversion, change and growth.

Among the ecumenical councils, it is the VC II that dealt with religious life at a good length. St. John Paul II, once rightly pointed at the VC II, as “a compass with which to orient ourselves in the vast ocean of the third millennium.” Many profound changes have occurred in the Catholic Church as a result of this Council and its teachings. Though some would say that it has lived long, actually the impact of the teachings of the VC II are still in its infancy. We must continue to grow in acquaintance, appreciation and admiration of the VC II and its teachings in order to fully embrace its vision for our Church.

Now, 50 long years have elapsed after this great historic event. It is the right time to look back and evaluate the present position and disposition. The year of faith (2012-13) was proclaimed for this purpose. At this juncture, I would like to present in this paper three aspects of this Post-Vatican evaluation, using the same three terms of historian John O’ Malley, aligning with three moments

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of the history of VC II: conciliar context, conciliar experience and conciliar consequences.

1. CONCILIAR CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Let us first briefly discuss what conciliar context of religious life inspired Pope John XXIII to convoke the Council. Generally speaking, the importance of consecrated life for the good of the Church and of humanity at large cannot be underestimated. From the very beginning of Christianity, some men and women were moved by the Spirit to devote their entire lives in imitating Christ more closely. Their consecration gradually took on the multiple forms of rules and ways of life that express and give continuity to the charisms, given by the Spirit.¹

After the French revolution, the Bishops and Popes had to acknowledge the facts and admit the usefulness and necessity of the un-cloistered communities, which dedicated themselves with genuine fervour to the works of charity and education. These communities, moreover, were multiplied by the strings of religious renewal, which followed the revolution.

Historian Gustave Martelet observed that between the 16th century and Vatican II, theologians did not discuss the place of religious in the Church. The evangelical counsels were considered almost exclusively as a means of personal asceticism, as a privileged way to perfection.² In the early centuries, the state of religious were more restricted because the power of the local ordinary and other ecclesial authorities was absolute. Again, they were bound strictly by the constitution of each Congregation. But Leo XIII's apostolic constitution, *Conditae a Christo*, which is called the *Magna Carta* for religious, made some differences in religious institutes.

In 1947, Pius XII, recognised and granted approval to secular institutes which are marked by a distinct secularity and seek a state of perfection in the world.³ In the early 1950's, Pope Pius XII had instructed Religious to adjust their way of life and the structures that sustained it to current requirements of healthy, human living. This instruction coincided with the requirement for Religious in Australia to update their educational qualifications in order to deal with the educational and social developments taking place in the country. New methods in catechetical instruction were also being promulgated, requiring theological studies. So by the time of the proclamation of Vatican II, Religious had already been in a process of change and renewal in response to the needs of the time.

Evangelical counsels were viewed in a new light. The lives committed to evangelical counsels were considered as effective means of attaining holiness.

This life and adherence to evangelical counsels liberates the human heart from inordinate attachment to created things. Therefore, they constitute a particularly effective means of attaining the Christian perfection of love. So the commitment to the life of the counsels is both a declaration of the will to seek perfection and a means of achieving it. Janusz A. Ihnatowicz writes about the relevance of evangelical counsels as follows:

The evangelical counsels were considered almost exclusively as a means of personal asceticism, as a privileged way to perfection. There was a certain feeling of obviousness about such a way of seeing them. An ascetic motive, a desire to attain sanctity, does play an important role in a person's decision to embrace the life of the evangelical counsels. Constitutions of religious orders give sanctification of members as their primary purpose. The monastic tradition presents the life of a monk as the expression of a desire to seek God, to live the Gospel literally, to obey the Lord's invitation to the young man: "If you would be perfect, go sell what you possess and give to the poor... and come, follow me" (Mt 19:5).⁴

Thus the life of evangelical counsels itself promotes a life of asceticism and a greater desire for perfection. Hence, the personal perfection of each individual through the life of evangelical counsels was asserted.

2. CONCILIAR EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

The council sees consecrated life as the life of professional lovers of God. In *Lumen Gentium*, the Constitution on Church, the Council contributes to the theological foundations of religious life. The decree, *Perfectae Caritatis*, speaks about the adaptation and renewal of religious life. And a few paragraphs of *Christus Dominus*, the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, explain the relationship between bishops and religious.

2.1. The Council's Call for Reform

Pope John XXII, while convoking the Council, used the Italian word *aggiornamento*, to call for a profound renewal of the Church. Father O'Malley, the great Jesuit historian, explains that Vatican II was the first council to address the issue of change in the church. He said that one of the major components of this change was the reconciliation with modernity (Ruiz 2013). It means a "reconciliation with religious diversity and the freedom to choose one's religion as a right, as a human right." According to the famous German moral theologian

Bernard Häring, through the VC II, the Church desires to divest herself of all legal harshness and of all dead formalism to enter into the most intimate union with revealed truth and with the great commandment of love.⁵

Aggiornamento and *Ressourcement* (return to the sources) are two foundational pillars that guided all the four sessions of the VC II.⁶ The Council's call for renewal, *Aggiornamento*, was not focused primarily on the change of external structures, but a profound inner transformation. This is captured in the council's affirmation of *the universal call to holiness* (LG). Rev. James Alberione rightly pointed out that there are three dangers connected with *aggiornamento* like: to want to reform everyone except ourselves; to want to reform what must not be reformed; to refuse to reform what must be reformed. In substance, *aggiornamento* should consist in this - in living the life of Jesus Christ more perfectly: "Christ lives in me" (Gal 2: 20).

Another important matter the Council Fathers exhorted was a returning fully to the sources (ressourcement) of the Catholic Faith, especially the Scripture and the Church Fathers. Hence, a renewed commitment to God's Word was high on the agenda of the Council.

The VC II is undoubtedly, a historical turning point in theological reflection on the consecrated life. No Ecumenical Council had ever spoken at such a length, and with such a depth of this important charism in the Church. According to Alberione, the Council fathers proposed *aggiornamento* in four areas of religious life: the spirit of faith, the spirit of poverty, conscientiousness in charity, and finally, more supernatural obedience of the judgment and will.⁷

2.2. Council's View on Religious Life

The Council acknowledges that religious are a gift to the Church and that the Church should always foster vocations to religious life. The seventh document issued by the VC II was the Decree on Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life- *Perefectae Caritatis* (Oct 28, 1965). PC roots all religious life in "the pursuit of perfect charity through the evangelical counsels." The document highlighted "the great value of a life, consecrated by the profession of the counsels," and hoped that "it may yield greater good to the Church." For this, the document insisted that "the manner of living, praying and working should be suitably adapted everywhere, especially in mission territories, to the modern physical and psychological circumstances of the members and also, as required by the nature of each institute, to the necessities of the apostolate, the demands of culture, and social and economic circumstances."⁸

However, PC is one of the shorter documents, chiefly because it deals only with the broadest guidelines. This has led many to consider the document too vague. It did not develop as a doctrinal treatise on consecration through the evangelical counsels. Its doctrinal basis is found instead in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, especially chapter VI on “Religious”. Therefore, let us have a look at LG first before studying PC.

2.2.1. Lumen Gentium 43-47

Among the council decrees, Chapter VI of *Lumen Gentium* is most important for our consideration. Its origin can be traced to the discussions on the states of perfection in the Church. The Council Fathers found the existing categories of states of perfection unacceptable and the doctrine of holiness in the Church was rewritten in terms of the universal call to Christian perfection. Chapter V of LG speaks about Christian holiness as the vocation of every member in the Church; and then Chapter VI deals with religious life. Chapter V enumerates the basic elements of Christian holiness and Chapter VI shows how the vows deepen this baptismal commitment. Religious life is thus presented in the Council dogmatically rather than canonically. The categories of “state of perfection” are by-passed and the emphasis shifted from the juridical to the vital reality of grace and charity.

In LG, the Council defines religious life as a service, a witness and an apostolate. It sees this form of life as total consecration to God, from the perspective of the salvific mission of the Church rather than from exclusively personal sanctification. The council thus gets away from the concept of individualistic striving after perfection. Thus religious life is to be lived for the whole Mystical Body of Christ. It is a charism, a spiritual gift, arising in the Church from below but regulated from above.

Religious life thus pertains to the order of holiness received and lived; however active and apostolic it appears to be, it is not part of the hierarchical function of teaching, ruling and sanctifying. The council returned to the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, who held that each of the three states of life - the laity, ordained priesthood and religious life - are essential for the perfection of the Church.

The *Code of Canon Law* has a triple division of the members of the Church into clergy, religious and laity; LG rejects this division and makes the religious vocation a personal and social expression of sanctification in the Mystical Body. Here, we touch on something new: religious are no longer a special class in

the Church, because there are only two classes, clergy and laity. The vocation of religious is to be holy, to mirror the life of Christ. Each order represents different aspects, some active and some contemplative. So in the words of the Council the orders represent “Christ contemplating on the mountain, announcing the kingdom of God to the crowds, healing the sick and the maimed, converting sinners to the better life, blessing children, helping all” (LG 46).

LG 44 says that religious life has an undeniable bond with the life and holiness of the Church. Through the action of the hierarchy, it is God who consecrates the religious for a higher service to the people of God. There is a change of emphasis in the council’s attitude. The *Constitution*, is positive in its praise of religious life and uses adverbs like *pressius* (precious – no. 42 & 44) and *singulariter* (special – nos. 42 & 43) to characterize the imitation of Christ and the way of perfection in religious life.

a) *Ecclesial Nature of Consecrated Life*

By adding the theme of religious life in the decree on the Church, the council fathers upheld the ecclesial nature of religious life. In the teachings of the council the ecclesial spirit stands out. While religious life does not pertain to the hierarchical structure of the Church, it is essential to the Church because it is the expression of the pure faith and charity of the Church in their transcendent reality. Moreover, religious life involves a gift given for the Church and in the Church.

It attains meaning in the Church and has the same qualities of the Church - Trinitarian, Christ-centred and eschatological. We see that Vatican II has opened a new perspective of religious life by calling it “life consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels”. The Council did this, not by rejecting the earlier doctrine, but by giving it a new context: making it an essential part of its ecclesiology.⁹ Being a religious is not some middle way between priests and people, but a life in its own right. Their consecrated life must not be dedicated to their own personal good alone, but to the good of the whole Church. Let us see how this point is highlighted in the paragraphs of LG that deal with the religious.

LG 43: Certainly, it is the life, model and counsels of Christ Himself that serve as the foundation and source for a life according to evangelical counsels. Ecclesial authority has the responsibility to nourish and encourage this gift of religious life in the Church (Rose 1998, 191). “From the point of view of the divine and hierarchical structure of the Church, the religious state of life is not an intermediate state between the clerical and lay states. But, rather, the faithful

of Christ are called by God from both these states of life so that they might enjoy this particular gift in the life of the Church, thus to contribute to the salvific mission of the Church.”

LG 44: speaks about the nature and importance of religious life. Through evangelical counsels “a person is totally dedicated to God, (who is) loved beyond all things. In this way, that person is ordained to the honor and service of God under a new and special title.” The second paragraph explains the ecclesial aspect of the religious life. The aim of life according to evangelical counsels is charity. Through this life a person “joins to the Church and its mystery in a special way. Since this is so, the spiritual life of these people should then be devoted to the welfare of the whole Church.” Therefore, it is the duty of religious “to implant and strengthen the Kingdom of Christ in souls and to extend that Kingdom to every clime... This can be realized through prayer or active works of the apostolate. It is for this reason that the Church preserves and fosters the special character of her various religious institutes.” Thus religious life, even though not part of the hierarchical structure of the Church, unquestionably belongs to Church’s life and holiness.

LG 45: As religious are under the jurisdiction of local ordinaries or subjected to the supreme Pontiff, the nature of religious life remains as a consecration to God and the Church. Again it is dependent on Church authority and the Church itself, by the authority given to it by God, because it is the Church that accepts the vows of the newly professed. Differing from the old theological understanding of religious life, Vatican II gives the vocation of the life of the counsels an ecclesial context and function. To strengthen the ecclesial awareness of consecrated religious, the council elaborately explained its theological vision on ecclesial nature of the spousal mission or religious life. This was for the first time that an ecclesial document definitively recognized religious life as integral to the holiness of the Church and not as a way of personal asceticism.

b) Universal Vocation to Holiness and the Religious

All are called to holiness; all have specific roles, rights and responsibilities. (LG 8) Thus, “all faithful of Christ are invited to strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state” (LG 42). Universal vocation to holiness is one of the fundamental notions of the Scripture and Christian tradition. It is also a key concept of the Council’s ecclesiology, or more generally, of its anthropology.

In the documents of Vatican II, “vocation” retains all its biblical richness. Creating us, God calls each of us to a “most high vocation” (GS 3b); this vocation is the source of our human dignity (GS 12b). The dignity of a human being, says the Council, “rests above all on the fact that he (or she) is called to communion with God” (GS 19a). It is in the context of this common vocation of humanity that Vatican II sees the role of the Church. In manifesting Christ, the Church reveals to all human beings their true situation and calling (AG 8). The Church serves this universal vocation; in this sense the Church is “for the world”: her role is to lead humanity to that communion with God which is their vocation. This is the vocation of the Church as a whole and of every Christian. One is called to the Church to participate in her mission.

Those whom God calls, he also consecrates. Baptism is the consecration of those called to the Church (LG 10a, 44a). This “common vocation” to personal holiness does not negate differences in vocations in the Church. “All are called to sanctity and have obtained an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God,” but “not everyone marches along the same path” (LG 32c). There is “a wonderful diversity” in the Church (LG 32a) of natural and supernatural gifts, of graces and charisms (LG 41, GS 29). This variety of gifts corresponds to a variety of vocations. Among them three are special: to the priesthood, to the consecrated life, to lay life or marriage. Because they are constitutive, they are also mutually irreducible; each has its own purpose and its own *modus operandi* (LG 13c).

Though all are called to holiness, the Religious “have set about following Christ with greater freedom and imitating Him more closely through the practice of the evangelical counsels, each in his own way leading a life dedicated to God” (PC 1). It is the not only a personal way of living, but a call to witness and mission.

2.2.2. Perfectae Caritatis (PC)

Perfectae Caritatis is the decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life. The Council fathers prompted all religious institutes to authentic renewal which “includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time” (PC 2). The council also affirmed that religious life is a special charism in the Church. The religious, through the ‘manner of living, praying and working’ (PC 3), try to better serve humanity today-with greater apostolic zeal and in imitation of Christ’s self-emptying love (James H. Kroeger 2012, 70). According to Council fathers the ideal of religious life is to be found in perfect

charity. This charity is sought and attained through the practice of evangelical counsels and imitation of Christ.

The draft met with many criticisms including the following: 1) the title *Of Religious* did not apply to secular institutes; 2) the term “state of perfection” could be misunderstood; 3) there was a lack of theological and biblical explanations; 4) there were not sufficient guidelines for renewal; 5) provision was not made for a more appropriate involvement of religious in the world.¹⁰ In addition, Rev. Anastasio of the Holy Rosary OCD, wrote that the words, ‘renewal’ and ‘adaptation’ can generate a confusion of ideas. To prevent this it is necessary to stress that these words signify a return of individual members and communities to their primitive fervour and an adaptation to the needs of our day.¹¹ Keeping these criticisms aside, we can locate three important points in PC.

a) *Consecrated Life as a Charism*

Religious are an important group of the people of the Church. However, they are called to place themselves on the line of the common Christian ideal, not out if it, neither above it. The common vocation of all Christians to holiness can’t be an obstacle but an incentive to the original and specific contribution of the religious – men and women – to the splendour of holiness in the whole church.¹² Hence, it is necessary that the members of every community seek God solely and before everything else (PC 5).

The practice of the counsels is undertaken in response to a divine call (PC 1c, 5a), under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is a personal gift, but one that is ecclesial in scope and character. The evangelical counsels are a ‘divine gift’ for the Church (LG 43a), granted so that the Church might be adorned by the gifts of her children (PC 1b). They are a charism in the strict biblical sense of the word: a gift bestowed on some of the faithful “making them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church”. The decree defines religious life as follows: “it constitutes a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in that of baptism and expresses it more fully”. So this consecration in religious life completes the baptismal consecration.

b) *How Is Religious life Different from Common Christian Life?*

PC enumerates the following aspects, whereby the religious differ from the other Christians, who are also called to holiness:

- It entails a different consecration. With the life of evangelical counsels they live Christian life more perfectly.

- Religious life is triple gift: a gift of God, a gift of the one consecrating himself/herself and a gift to the church and from the church.
- Just as Baptism presupposes the gift of faith, likewise the religious profession presupposes the gift of special call on God’s part.
- A religious receives the vocation at the origin of life. That is religious life draws from the doctrine and example of the divine master.
- Religious life is valuable from both an earthly and a heavenly viewpoint, from the human and the divine perspective.
- The dimensions of religious life are boundless. They are all-embracing and goal of religious life is the perfection of Christian life, i.e. sanctity.

c) *What is Renewal?*

As Cardinal Avery Dulles wrote in an insightful essay five years ago, “to reform is to give new and better form to a pre-existent reality, while preserving the essentials . . . The goal is to make persons or institutions more faithful to an ideal already accepted.”¹³ The Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life writes that reform entails three essential elements: 1) something essential to preserve; 2) some way of dealing with what is essential that has gone wrong and needs to be corrected, 3) a new way of dealing with what is essential that has to be implemented. From the beginning, bishops recognized that their task was not just updating church practices but also a process of ‘ressourcement’ or going back to the sources of the faith.

The Council repeatedly insisted that every religious family should strive to be what God willed it to be and to renew itself in an unbroken rhythm of absolute fidelity to the task assigned to it by the Lord. The guidelines for renewal, suggested by the council fathers, are as follows: first, follow the council constitutions; second, undertake revision work in a spirit of “feeling with the Church” (*sentire cum ecclesiae*), by sharing in the mystery of the church; third, the renewal of a Congregation’s rules should recall and apply its own special charism, i.e. continually returning to the inspiration, spirit, mind and directives of the founder, for these treasures are a heritage valid for all time.

Thus, renewal of the consecrated life, as the Council described it, should be lived through a return to the sources. These sources are represented primarily by Sacred Scripture, hence, by the very person of Christ, and subsequently by the authentic charism of the founders. The renewal of the Religious life, as we read in PC 2, “comprises both a constant return to the sources of the whole

of the Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of the Institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time”.

2.2.3. Ecclesiae Sanctae

Ecclesiae Sanctae is an apostolic letter issued *motu proprio* (6 Aug, 1966) by Pope Paul VI, giving the norms by which four decrees of the VC II are to be implemented, namely: *Christus Dominus* (Pastoral Office of Bishops), *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (Ministry and Life of Priests), *Perfectae Caritatis* (Renewal and Adaptation of Religious Life), and *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (Missionary Activity of the Church). This document is the single most important post-conciliar declaration of the Holy See to understand the Church’s mind on the episcopacy, priesthood, religious life, and the missions.

Through this letter, the Pope invited Religious institutes to promote a renewal of spirit, and to carry out this renewal, adapted to their life and discipline, prudently and yet skilfully by applying themselves diligently to the study especially of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (chapters 5 and 6) and the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, and by putting into practice the norms and teachings of the Council.

The Pope called for renewal of the Religious life through general chapters or synaxes (among the Orientals). The task of the chapters is not completed by merely making laws, but especially by promoting spiritual and apostolic vitality. Official authority was given to the major superiors to make decisions and norms to make changes as an experiment, according to the need of the congregation, in reading the signs of the time. (ES 3-8) They were also asked to renew the Constitutions of the Congregation within the given criteria. The norms and spirit to which adaptation and renewal must correspond should be gathered not only from the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* but also from other documents of the VC II, especially from chapters 5 and 6 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (ES 15).

3. CONCILIAR CONSEQUENCES ON RELIGIOUS LIFE

The ‘Spirit of the Council’ was represented by the words renewal, reform and change. The Council, in fact, offered clear and abundant guidelines for the needed reform of Consecrated Life. Let us see how those guidelines were interpreted and applied? Generally, the Council was interpreted and applied in two very different ways: one of *aggiornamento* - renewal in continuity and the other of rupture and discontinuity. The call to change would be the true ‘spirit

of the Council', in as much as we hold on to what is true and belonging to the original sources. We cannot completely negate the hermeneutic of discontinuity and continuity in consideration with the wholeness of the Council. Renewal can be attained only with what we already have; however, for occurrences to constitute an 'event' changes must take place. The Catholic Church is also a historical event, and its journey through the history is one of continuous progress toward deeper understanding of the faith; it is not marked by fractures or breaks.

Actually we had a kind of 'pseudo-aggiornamento' that followed, which is centred on humankind rather than on God, a turn toward 'naturalism' and away from the 'supernatural'. Pope Benedict in one of his speeches said that "in vast areas of the Church the reception of the Council has been somewhat difficult."¹⁴ "The difficulties in the implementation of the Council," he says, "derive from the fact that VC II was rejected or at least debated by a huge part of the subjects of the Church." Pope Benedict XVI also reminded that the true spirit of the Council consisted in a hermeneutic of reform, rather than a hermeneutic of revolution.

Hence we can assume that the period of the Church history that followed the VC II can be aptly characterized as one of lights and shadows. The council was received, on the whole, with tremendous zeal, and the fruits of the *aggiornamento* were cherished. At the same time, however, there was a "partial and selective reading of the council, as well as a superficial interpretation of its doctrine... a lack of discernment of spirits"¹⁵ in some cases. Let us see some of the helpful effects of the Council and a few controversial ones.

3.1. Positive Consequences

The period that followed the promulgation of *Perfectae Caritatis* was marked by a huge amount of experimentation in religious life. One of the most encouraging contributions of the Council to the renewal of religious life was its evocation of the theological category of 'Charism' in relation to that life (PC 1). A charism is a grace given not merely for the good of the recipient itself but primarily for the development of the Church.

Through the Council, the Church affirmed religious life as her gift to God. PC also defined the true nature of religious life – a special consecration rooted in baptism. The *aggiornamento* announced by the Council was a sincere and loving pursuit of anything that will be of help to extend Christ's presence in the world. Through the evangelical counsels, the religious are called to yield greater good to the Church.

A sincere effort was made by all religious Congregations to renew and update themselves. Many Congregations convoked special Chapters/Synaxes under the

leadership of their major superiors and entered laborious discussions to grasp and apply the councillor documents in their particular charisms. They specially re-considered and changed their prayer life, governance, mission, formation etc.; they updated their mission with freedom, in response to the needs the time.

The Council teachings upheld the ‘sign value’ of religious life to the world. The profession of the evangelical counsels stands at the high point of the practice of Christian life; this charism is planted in germ form in baptism and is developed through the sacramental organism and through the fidelity to the grace of God. Secular institutes, although not religious institutes, which involve a true and full profession of evangelical counsels, were also considered by the council in the category of religious life. Responding to Vatican II’s universal call to holiness, many new religious movements for lay people also emerged in the Church and the already existing movements, such as the Focolare, began spreading worldwide.

In the area of spirituality, many institutes experimented different forms of prayer; many rules of community life underwent change and many replaced their traditional ‘habits’ with more modern attire; most adapted ‘obedience to a superior’ to a form of consultation and discussion, than blind obedience. That meant each individual became a participant in the decision making of oneself and of the community. Numerous seminars and classes were conducted in an attempt to understand the Council teachings, which showed a new openness to the Spirit.

As a result, religious life changed dramatically: religious orders adopted Vatican norms and re-wrote their own constitutions, taking a new look at issues of authority, community and identity. Inculturation affected not only the dress, but also theology, spirituality, ways of praying and living. Many started going to overseas mission stations and many religious women were sent for higher learning in theology.

3.2. Controversial Consequences

At the same time, the after-effects of the Council were controversial and confusing for many in the Church. Michael Buckley wrote that Vatican gave us an idealistic concept of the Church in which we all were seen as mature Christians.¹⁶ According to people like Buckley, that is not a realistic way of dealing with the people of God. He says, “Vatican II was written for men and women of faith and vision but its message has gone out to the various parts of the world, where we find people clinging to those things which they regard as

precious, but are in fact in open contradiction to the teaching of the Council.” Hence confusion and controversy necessarily followed.

Soon after the Council, some religious in the Catholic Church initiated harmful movements in the name of renewal. They were critical of traditional doctrines, venerable customs and fundamental and dignified structures of the ecclesiastical body and wanted to avoid the return to the sources.¹⁸ Some problems arose because many religious were selective about Council teachings and they used the ‘pick and choose’ method to practice it, without much reflection.

As a consequence of the misinterpretation of renewal, some individuals and Congregations became lax in the observance of precepts, which the Church has proposed for the sanctification and the moral dignity of her children. A spirit of criticism and even of indocility and rebellion is calling into question sacrosanct norms for religious perfection. Buckley is of opinion that through Vatican II many priests and religious were given a vision of the Church, but the common people as a whole failed to respond to its challenge (Buckley 1975, 753). They misinterpreted the teachings of the Council on universal holiness. A great number of religious left religious life entirely, and in subsequent decades there was a large drop in the number of religious vocations in the Western World. Actually it is not clear how much of this change was due to the documents of the VC II. Some were too impatient with the slowness of the reform in the Church.

Another negative aftermath was that religious life was distanced from God. There was a remarkable increase in the number of articles on religious life, but with hardly one word in reference to God. Some of them had lost the original vision of their founders, as they took on ministries such as schools and hospitals. Communities were encouraged to return to their roots and discern what their founders’ visions meant today, and to engage in a period of experimentation. At the same time, the church experienced some worrisome developments, including a dramatic drop in vocations and an increase in the number of priests and religious seeking laicization. Mass attendance fell in many places; many Catholics abandoned the sacrament of penance; and dissent on certain teachings, such as birth control, was widespread.

During the Council, the status of Secular Institutes was unclear. Chapter 6 of LG was titled ‘Religious,’ addressing those who bind themselves by vow or other sacred bonds similar to a vow. But according to the code of Canon law (1983), it refers only to those who profess vows and the reflective revision of PC 11 clarified that members of Secular Institutes are not religious.

Lumen Gentium, the greatest achievement of the Council, puts the order in the church this way: first the episcopacy, then the laity, then the call of the whole Church to holiness, and only then the call of religious. Some religious protested to this order, for they felt “banished to a sort of appendix.”¹⁹ They feared that consecrated life would lose its value in the eyes of the Catholics. In *Lumen Gentium*, the council fathers reiterated the ecclesial dimension of the Church, and stated that evangelical counsels unite those who practice them to the Church and her mystery in a special way, with a special title. So they do not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church, but inseparably belong to Church’s life and holiness.²⁰ Confusion about the nature and role of the consecrated life in the Church affects not just the religious themselves. It influences the laity’s attitude to religious life, and thus often adds to the contemporary crisis of vocations: parents will not encourage their children to embrace religious life; instead, they will even make every attempt to dissuade them from such a decision.²¹

Some surveys show that the dominant imperative in the reformation and disintegration of so many Congregations was not one of authentic renewal within the heart of the Church, but rather of secular ideology. For example, radical feminism and women’s liberation spoke a language that was at odds with a Catholic Christian understanding of the individual and of society. Its agenda was in no way Christian, but essentially secular, employing a variation of the Marxist class-warfare to gender conflict.

Vatican II was a tidal wave which swamped us and caught us unprepared: many recipients of the council were not yet ready for the Spirit. If rupture and confusion are what characterize the recent difficulties in religious life, then the way forward has to be a greater seeking of continuity and clarity.

3.3. Post Conciliar Documents

Through the post-Conciliar documents, the Holy See intended to make possible the right interpretations and practice of conciliar teachings. There are some 9 post-conciliar documents that deal with the religious. They explain the rite of initiation to religious life, nature and value of consecration to virginity, act of special general chapters, the clear definition of vows, government of the congregation by authority figures, common life, mutual relations between Bishops and religious, the contemplative dimension of religious life and the relation between religious and human advancement.

Following *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, many changes were carried out in each congregation during its period of experimentations. Then the sacred congregation

gave some instructions named, 'Essential Elements in Church's Teaching on Religious Life' (1983). These instructions clearly identified the elements that form a religious institute; if any congregation fails in these aspects they lose the identity as religious congregation. The reception of this 'Essential Elements' also underwent some crisis, because some strongly reacted to it, considering it as Vatican's unilateral and discriminatory intervention without prior consultation. The Synod on Consecrated Life would later try to heal some of the wounds thus inflicted. In any case, 'Essential Elements' offered a "comprehensive synthesis of the Church's provisions," and so doing, it addressed two of the pressing issues regarding religious institutes: the origin and ecclesial nature of religious life and the transmission of power to the superior.²²

3.4. The Synod on Consecrated Life and Vita Consecrata

The synod on Consecrated Life was one of the propitious moments in history for the integration of the conciliar texts. The main question discussed in the Synod was about the precise role of consecrated life within the Church. This 'ecclesial identity issue' was debated from its *Lineamenta* to *Instrumentum Laboris* and the Synodal discussions. Various questions were raised especially by women religious like "How can we justify this continued commitment to public identification with the Church?"

What emerged in the debates were two different paradigms: a consecration paradigm, reflecting the concern of the magisterium to defend consecrated life within the structure of the Church; and a charism paradigm, reflecting the lived experience of religious and their place in the Church. The truth prevails that a part from the Church, there is no religious life. In substance, we have to underline the fact that religious do not choose to participate in the Church; they are part of the Church.

Vita Consecrata (VC)

Vita Consecrata is the Post-synodal apostolic exhortation, promulgated by Pope John Paul II; it has been called the second *Magna Carta* on consecrated life. It speaks of all sorts of religious life, consecrated through vows - monastics, hermits, contemplatives, apostolic religious, secular institutes, and all new forms of consecrated life.

The Synod fathers refer to consecrated life as having an objective superiority over other forms of Christian life. (VC 32); this notion is at variance with Vatican II's dogmatic Constitution on the Church (LG) and was the basis of the main

controversy that arose within the Synod around the precise role of religious life in the Church.

It also offers profound interpretation of LG 44 (*Sentire cum Ecclesia*), and states: “The consecrated life, present in the Church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of her essential and characteristic elements, for it expresses her very nature. This is clearly seen from the fact that the profession of the evangelical counsels is intimately connected with the mystery of Christ, and has the duty of making somehow present the way of life which Jesus himself chose and indicated as an absolute eschatological value” (VC 29).

Along with asserting the ecclesial dimension of religious life, VC clearly affirmed the role of consecrated life as an eschatological sign, thus pointing at the eschatological dimension of consecrated life. Added to that, VC 46-49 urges that “Consecrated persons are asked to be true experts of communion...the life of communion, in fact, becomes a sign for all the world and a compelling force that leads people to faith in Christ ... *sentire cum Ecclesia* of St. Ignatius Loyola, and the joyful profession of faith made by St. Teresa of Avila: “I am a daughter of the Church”. One can certainly note a continuity in this exhortation, with the Church’s teaching in VC II about the ecclesial nature of consecrated life.

CONCLUSION

Second Vatican Council recommended an *aggiornamento* or reform by a return to the original charism or inspiration of the founder/foundress of each Congregation and adaptation of this charism to contemporary conditions in the world. However, there was some dichotomy between what the Council intended and what the people understood. The emphasis on renewal was misunderstood by some groups. Then, instead of reconciliation with modernity, some pursued complete conformity with it or expected a radical change from the present.

Re-vitalizing religious life was the clear motive of the Council fathers; but the religious failed to receive its challenges adequately. Pope John XXIII, thus summarised why he convened Vatican II: “To make the human sojourn on earth less sad.” In this statement, I feel the whole teaching of Vatican II about religious life is summarised. It is a charism received as a gift to walk in front, in holiness in the Church and for the Church.

Pope Francis, being a Vatican II bishop, reveals to Catholics that the evangelical missionary nature of the Church consists in the compassion for sinners and its commitment to the poor. The real spirit of the Council is reflected in the life

of our present Pope Francis, creating a wave of awakening in the minds of religious. When asked by a young girl why he has chosen to live in Santa Marta, his humorous answer was that, to be healthy, he needs close contact with people. In fact, we religious are called to live a life for the people of God, who expect our prayers and sacrifices and a radical living. Therefore, Vatican II invites all the religious to live in communion with the world, the larger community.

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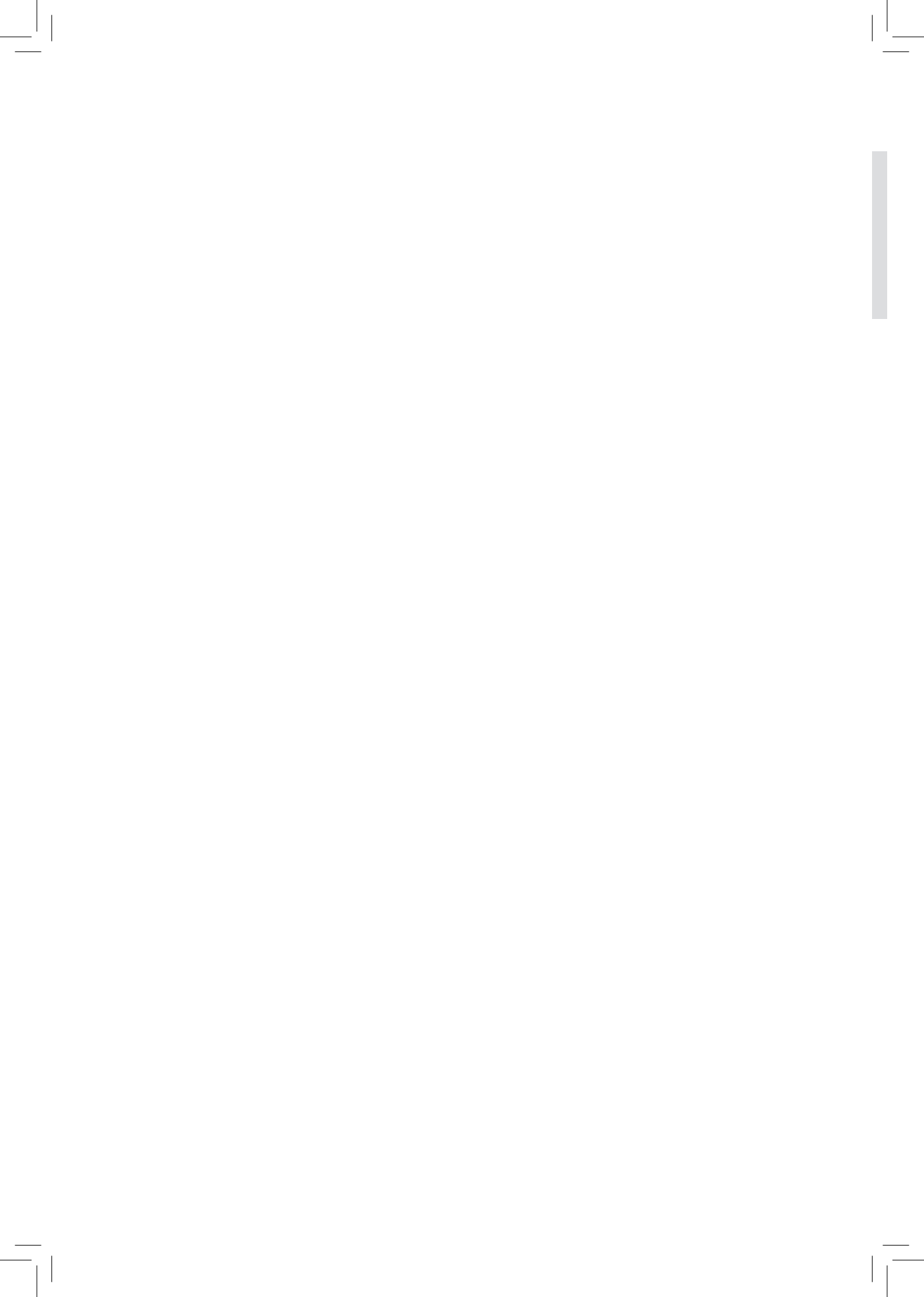
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RE-VISIONING EVANGELICAL COUNSELS: 50 YEARS AFTER VATICAN II

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF

With the epoch-making reform movements introduced by Vatican Council, many things in religious life began to change. A major area of this change was in the understanding of the “vows” of religious life.

1. UNDERSTANDING OF THE VOWS UNTIL THE COUNCIL

Upto the time of the Council, there has not been any serious theological reflection on religious life and, therefore, also of the vows. The three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience were seen as the essential elements of religious life. They were understood and explained mostly on juridical, moralistic and disciplinary terms, regulating one’s attitude, actions, behaviour and relationships. Through the vows, a religious made a total giving of self to God as an oblation, where the person reserved nothing for herself or himself.

Theologically, it was St. Thomas Aquinas who, in his *Summa Theologica*, developed the understanding of religious vows. He explicated the distinction between the evangelical counsels, which were the objects of the vows and the commandments by which all Christians were obliged. Thus, the taking on of added obligations became the specificity of the religious state and the touchstone of its superiority to the other forms of life in the Church. This theology completed the development toward the equation of religious profession with the making of specific vows by which one took upon oneself obligations beyond those incumbent for ordinary Christians, thereby establishing oneself in a superior state of life.

Later in the 16th century, with the emergence of the regular clerics, such as the Jesuits, there was an unqualified priority to mission, which in turn, suppressed

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all aspects of monasticism such as the cloister and office in common. The obligations and practices of this apostolic form of religious life were no longer integral elements of a common experience but an individual program for which each religious accepted individual responsibility on the day of profession. Thus, the rule had to be detailed, obligations of each vow were clear and the formation of the individual religious became intensive. Obedience came to be seen as the central vow of religious life, the one, which governed every act of every day and whose practice became the touchstone of religious perfection. It assumed a quasi-military character and was strictly hierarchical, even a monarchical form that already characterized the organization of the Counter-Reformation Church itself. During the reformation period, there was a virtual equation not only of profession with the making of the vows but also of the keeping of the individual vows with religious life itself.¹

Generally speaking, until the Council, in the living of the vows, the practice was always for a strict adherence to the “Rule of Life.” *Servo ordinem, et ordo servabit te* was the maxim. The emphasis was more on removing the obstacles and so the focus was more on detachment, denial or renunciation. There was the loss of a christological and pneumatological focus. Besides, the understanding and living of the vows were subjected to the interpretations of certain cultural moulds, periods or filtered through the mindset of those in authority. They were often treated as three independent aspects of a commitment to God; there was a loss of complementarity and inter-relationality.

2. PRESSING CONCERNS REGARDING VOWS

With regard to the understanding and living of the vows counsels, there were many pressing concerns which the Fathers of the Council sensed and they wanted to address them.

2.1. With regard to Obedience

There was this purely pyramidal or vertical line of authority-obedience, which was devoid of participation from the members and which emphasized the exalted role of the superior as the sole decision-maker and discerner of God’s will. Leadership and authority then came to be seen as power and largely in juridical terms. The Superior was looked upon as someone, who had the authority to decide, to command, to interpret the will of God and channel it to the members.

Consequently, there was a confusion of obedience with submissiveness, with passivity, with conformity and with identification. There were religious who found it easy to be submissive and passive, and authority found it easy to deal

with submissive and passive people. This contributed to the interior paralysis of many religious, as well as the devaluation of true talents along with a feeling of insecurity and infantilism. Such a situation, often led to an “inferiority complex of people, who lost confidence in themselves or who went on living domesticated and alienating servility.”² It also stifled and neutralized personal initiative and creativity in those who were not in authority and kept them passive. There was also an underestimation of the need for consultation and sharing and elimination of the meaning of participation and the practice of co-responsibility, stressing the dependence of everyone on a single source of decision. Besides authority was understood without a perception of and sensitivity to the organic and subsidiary body, a perception that was crucial in the living out of mission.

2.2. With regard to Poverty

The counsel of poverty had been at the origin of most foundations, reforms, and collapse of religious congregations. The various interpretations / understanding of poverty become the very source of conflict and disunity among the religious. First of all, there was the influence of a Manichean perception that material goods are evil and so poverty was understood mostly on negative, ascetic and disciplinary terms. Total dependence upon superiors for one’s material well-being was experienced by many religious as trivial in itself, unrelated to evangelical poverty and conducive to immaturity and irresponsibility.

There was also a disturbing question in the hearts of many religious. Are we, the religious, really poor? What is the meaning of evangelical poverty for us, who seemingly are not poor? There was an increasing awareness on the part of many religious and severity of real destitution around them and in the world at large and a consequent sense of unauthenticity in claiming to practice poverty while enjoying a disproportionate share of this world’s goods and virtual freedom from material insecurity.³ Confronted by the reality of injustice, indiscriminate, exploitation and oppression, many felt called to participate in the struggle and establishment of a just economic order in which there would be an equitable sharing of limited resources among all that will hasten the end of the oppression of the poor by the rich. Many were sensing this call as inherent in their call to live evangelical poverty.

Many were also faced with global issues that challenge their vow of poverty. Some of these are consumerism, materialism, capitalism, unemployment / underemployment, ecological degradation, poverty caused by deprivation and injustice, unjust structures and policies, pollution, limited planetary resources, ozone layer and many others. Many felt called to respond to these concerns

within their commitment to evangelical poverty. There was also a positive appeal that came from communism providing alternatives.

2.3. *With regard to Celibate Chastity*

There is a propensity in Catholicism to give answers to questions before they are asked, to ask for commitments before these are developmentally possible. It tends to turn the normal maturation process upside down, and at times, may cause more harm, especially in the area of guilt. There was this disturbing question: how something as intrinsic a part of our being as human genital expression can be renounced responsibly if it has not been honestly addressed and truly understood? Thus, avoidance rather than openness, has been the approach.

Also, in the air was the awareness of the past dualisms, especially of the spirit and the flesh in mutual opposition. This situation has been compounded by the prudishness and obsessive negativity toward sexuality in general from the part of the Christian-Catholic world; there was so much suffering and oppression associated with its history. There were also the controversies attached to the “law” of celibacy and the process of speaking about the coercion of celibacy, a vow that was identified largely by “don’ts.” Thus, the option for celibate chastity seemed to remain almost totally “un-reflected.” Many were the consequences:

First of all, growth into celibate chastity and the sexual awareness of the person who chose it prematurely has been prevented; the dimension of depth in relationship has been neglected. It created an environment of secrecy and suspicion in convents and monasteries; honest questions were silenced; healthy affection stifled; and an atmosphere of otherworldliness of abstract spirituality that was dissociated from the body, life, earth and social relationship” prevailed. This, in turn, fostered a type of disembodiment and a certain love-lessness, insecurity, coldness and weariness that were connected with a kind of abstraction. Many religious communities displayed a dehydrated communal lifestyle where love had been reduced to decency and where those who dared to be friends were more often criticized than empowered. Many were busy about many things but were seemingly incapable of touching each other in meaningful and healing ways. Negatively, such a situation often led to compulsive and unhealthy as well as damaging behavioral patterns, paving the way for shallow emotional involvements such as, collecting friendships to fill one’s own emptiness or embracing a honeymoon mentality that protects us from the pain of loving the other in our sinfulness and from facing the dysfunctionality that appears only in the struggles of daily interactions. Finally, people move to complete withdrawal

of affect in order to avoid the suffering that sustained encounter invariably brings with it. Escape is neither the answer nor is dispassion.

Often, “violations” against celibacy, were seen as clear and precise, always serious – mortally sinful, whereas those against other vows, were rarely enforced punitively. They were often dealt with severely and with no seeming knowledge of or respect for the growth process, necessary for a mature appropriation of celibacy, without which any meaningful commitment is impossible

There was and continues to be so much rejection of celibacy, even in contemporary society and media, that its power to call us into depth loving is completely obfuscated and its presence in our lives appears more like a cross than a grace. Strangely, there were also those, including some religious, who pointed to their commitment to celibacy rather than to the lack of depth *per se* in their lives, as the primary reason for their emotional impoverishment. Many were often left wondering whether their choice was, in fact, viable, healthy and wholesome. Confusion, avoidance, endurance, a sense of feeling “trapped,” feeling “saddled with it and not particularly called to it,” being apologetic or even embarrassed, were often the answers rather than consciously and creatively living the vow.

Just around the time of Vatican Council II, there was a much felt need to re-vision celibate chastity. With the emerging human and psychological sciences, there came a realization of the importance of sexuality in human life and of its irreplaceable role in the affective growth of friendship with members of one’s own, the other sex and with the whole of creation. This led many religious to a serious revision of both the theology and the practice of religious celibacy. The focus of attention, both theologically and in practice, of celibate chastity shifted largely on to personal development, the improvement of the affective quality of community life, and the consequent growth of religious in interpersonal effectiveness. Many began to see their chosen lifestyle less as a renunciation of marriage, but more as a witness complementary to that of Christian marriage and also as a commitment to growth in love dedicated to the development of a world characterized by unselfish service and mutual care.

3. THE EMERGING VISION AFTER THE COUNCIL

It is from the Vatican Council that the Church initiated a systematic theological reflection on religious life in all its aspects. There came out a series of documents.⁴

3.1. Theological Shift: Vows to Evangelical Counsels

One of the significant developments was the shift of focus from making of the vows to living the evangelical counsels. Though these terms were interchangeably used, today we know that there is a difference. Vow simply means making of a promise. Vow can be made by anyone for any purpose. It is not necessarily linked to religious life as such. Evangelical counsels are intrinsic to the very life and mission of Jesus in the Gospels. They emerge from the vision of life symbolized, mediated and proclaimed by Jesus. As religious, called to radical discipleship to Jesus, we make the vows to live the evangelical counsels. The point of reference and identification here is Jesus Christ, who is chaste, poor and obedient. Though the counsels contain the human values of chastity, poverty and obedience, which are universally found, they now become “evangelical” in the sense that they now become Christian values or virtues as these are understood and lived by following Jesus Christ who imbibed these virtues in His very life and teaching.

Another biblical figure, who is outstanding in living out these Christian virtues and who is taken as the model and prototype disciple of Christ is the Blessed Virgin Mary. From her, we also learn the meaning of chastity, poverty and obedience. Counsels, therefore, form the content or object of the vows of the religious. This is also the reason for the shift from a “theology of the vows” to a “theology of the evangelical counsels.” Though we may use the terms (vows and counsels) interchangeably, this distinction must always be kept in mind. The religious, through their public profession to follow Christ, poor, chaste and obedient, turn the counsels into religious vows and live them with the necessary implications. Religious vows cannot be understood without reference to Christ of the Gospel and, therefore, cannot simply be subjected to the interpretations of one cultural mould, period or a human authority.

3.2. From Closed to an Open Understanding

We need to move from a closed to an open understanding of the vows. This calls for a shift from “vows of” to “vows for.” Vows are understood primarily as values, liminally focused on behalf of the people and governed by the key values of the New reign of God. Relational wholeness is the goal. The focus becomes world rather than church, people rather than structures, something to be worked out rather than clearly given once and forever. In this model, the witness of Religious Life is about value-radiation.

Poverty is seen as a profound recognition of the giftedness of life and world. Everything in the world is a gift from God, given to be used creatively,

responsibly and generously for the good of all. We, as religious, are challenged to model and facilitate this creative use of life's resources for God's Kingdom. Celibate chastity points to our ability for respectful love in the manner and style of the love of Jesus. Responsible relational intimacy is a central feature of every vocation. How to negotiate this growth in a creative and loving way is the luminal and pastoral challenge to which Religious are called. Obedience is a call to attentive, vigilant and dialogical listening to exercise our God-given creativity, in conjunction with people, systems and creation at large so as to nurture life in all its forms in mutual sustainability and collaboration.

3.3. Re-discovering the Original Meaning

Obedience

- Transcendent
- Attentive Listening
- (Jana Marga)

Poverty

- Functional
- Simplicity
- (Karma)

Chastity

- Vital
- Respectful Love
- (Bhakti)

The three counsels taken together correspond to the three dimensions of the human personality (transcendent-functional and vital) and as such are meant to dispose ourselves to interact with the world in a certain way. Obedience comes from the Latin word, *ob-audire*, which means a disposition of attentive, vigilant and discerned listening. Poverty is to be seen as simplicity which calls for a disposition of celebration of things and resources in their simple givenness or giftedness. Chastity is all about a disposition of respectful and responsible love. The three counsels are meant to reform and transform the three levels of human presence and interactions, namely, freedom, possession and affectivity-sexuality; they are indeed three ways of pledging oneself to live different areas which cover the whole of life: autonomy, possessions and affections.

In other words, evangelical counsels deal with the attitude and behavior of the religious in the three major dimensions of human life (power, possession and affectivity) and bring them in interaction with the three areas which structure the world: politics (obedience), economics (poverty) and social life (chastity).

It is not just a question of directing one's personal energies towards God. Evangelical counsels have the potential for enabling the religious to play a significant role in the transformation of the structures of the world through an evangelical contribution to the major areas of human interaction. Seen in this way, there are not in themselves Christian elements, but possible human

structures existing even beyond the context of consecrated life and the Church as seen in the three fold path of God-realization (*jana, karma and bhakti margas*) in Hinduism.

3. 4. As Liminal Values

Involved in the profession of evangelical counsels, therefore, is a commitment to live liminal values. A liminal state is a sacred, social state in which a person or group of persons is separated for a time from the normal structures of society. The liminal group embodies in a profound way the deepest values, which the culture and society cherish most deeply, but struggles to live. In fact, the function of the liminal group is to mirror for the wider community the deepest hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the people. Animated by a new vision of the future, it seeks to respond to the pressing needs of the contemporary world.

The three counsels together provide the liminal space to express and articulate humanity's deepest aspirations. Its initial aspiration tends to be embodied in one person (founder / foundress) and comes to fruition in the group which the initial founder/foundress gathers around himself/herself.

When these religious congregations/orders no longer serve their liminal purpose of living out the values of the Gospel in a prophetic manner, they will lose their appeal or impact. This liminal purpose may reappear in various forms such as new forms of consecrated life, BCC, feminist and ecological movement, lay missionary groups and spiritual sects. The challenge is upon us on how will we be able to retrieve and make our liminality more appealing and significant in our contemporary society? Religious communities are to be the holding places of liminal values, essential to humanity.

3.5. Significance of the Triad

It is important to remember that there are many counsels.⁵ Gospel is a religion of counsels. In the beginning, the Fathers and the theologians of the early centuries, seeking to define monasticism, were presenting rather a description of the various elements which were its characteristics: leaving one's homeland, penitence, constant prayer, poverty, fasting, meekness, continence and prayer; every word of the Lord was important. It was impossible to limit oneself to any single element. What is involved is a life of total consecration to the Lord.

Gradually, they become concentrated on the triad. From a human perspective, counsels are three as each corresponds to each of the three dimensions of the human personality. Besides, the Fathers of the Church had a preference for

number three, even though the counsels listed by them are different. For Andrea, a desert monk: leaving one's home land, poverty and silence; for Elia, another monk: poverty, meekness and continence; St. Augustine: Virginity, poverty and fasting, also virginity, poverty and community life; Cassian: renouncing riches, family and visible (material) things; and for St. Benedict: stability, conversion and obedience.

Historically, the triad is commonly accepted only from the 12th century with St. Thomas Aquinas, although there are exceptions.⁶ Benedictines remain faithful to their own triad; the Dominicans limit themselves to a profession of obedience; the Orthodox Orientals ignore it even if they live the reality of the three counsels. Ignatius of Loyola, in his first draft of the constitutions of the Company of Jesus, insisted on a sincere commitment to a life of the apostolic community, rather than the three vows.⁷

Even as we affirm the triad, they are to be seen as a "triple expression of single vow: our total 'yes' to the gift of God."⁸

3.6. Relationship of Profession and the Vows

The relationship between profession of the counsels and making of the vows has been controversial. What is implied in profession is total consecration. This has been the essential thing in consecration and not making of the vows. The equation of religious profession with the making of the three traditional vows is more a later phenomenon even though it is become virtually universal now.⁹

Nevertheless, the experience of religious in our times has raised questions about this equation of religious profession with the three vows. Reasons are as follows: a) Religious profession is not strictly synonymous with the making of vows; b) The three vows have not always been the content of religious profession; c) They have not always had basically the same meaning as they have today.

In fact, religious profession is a constant element of religious life but it has not always been expressed by the making of vows.¹⁰ Not all religious families imposed the vows. Even after the vows became the normal form of religious profession, the same vows were not made by all religious. And even when most religious made the same vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the meaning of the vows was not always the same. Furthermore, the three vows themselves are not on equal footing. They are not equally ancient; they do not have equal bases in the New Testament; and they are not equal in theological significance as constituents of religious life.¹¹

3.7. Purpose of the Counsels

Evangelical counsels share in the ultimate purpose common to all great religions of the world. As religious, we belong to a movement that exists with remarkable similarities in the diverse religious and cultural traditions. Present to all religious traditions is the singular quest to seek the fullest, the most perfect way of living one's faith, to seek God alone, to attain the infinite, to be simple and single and to see and relate to the world from the perspective of that divine horizon. Through the profession of the counsels, we share a common vision and the same unifying archetypal aspirations. This means that we share in the deepest values, hopes, and dreams of all peoples because we share in the universal consciousness. In our universal search for meaning, our universal consciousness (collective unconscious) creates liminal groups who are living out these liminal values in a prophetic manner.¹²

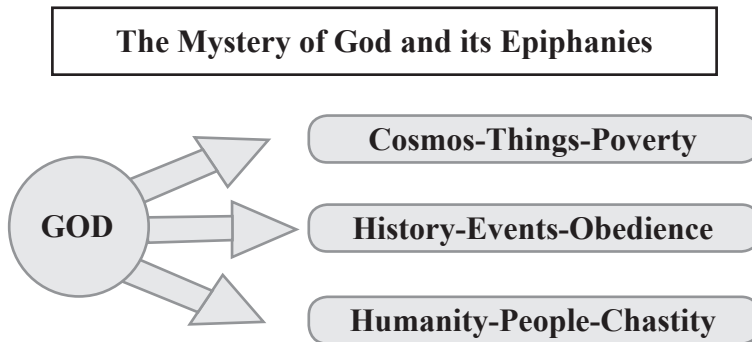
However, in the concrete way of living the counsels, there is the primacy of love. As Christ has given us only one commandment, love of God and others, the deepest value that we want to express through the counsels must be respectful love. There has to be the primacy of love over everything else in spiritual life. Hence, the purpose of all counsels is perfect charity.¹³ The three counsels are the means to this goal which every Christian has to aim at irrespective of clerics, religious or lay. Hence, every aspect of religious life must be subservient to living in perfect charity. For the same reason, the counsels are not to be understood negatively but positively and creatively in ways that build up and nurture life and world. The counsels are in "no way obstacle to personal human development, but of its very nature fosters it in the highest possible way."¹⁴ Though the living of the counsels involves renunciation, it is not renunciation for its own sake; it comes as a consequence of our fascination with Christ and from a desire to place ourselves at the service of his Kingdom. The aim is to attain the freedom to be for the Lord and for everything he stood for. Negative ways of understanding the counsels can lead to many distortions and un-evangelical pursuits. Such understandings are incompatible with the authentic foundations of human life.

Counsels taken together form an ocean into which we need to jump and explore; there are new dimensions to discover, new challenges to negotiate and deeper implications to be implemented as we journey through life. Though the values lived out through the counsels are not exclusively Christian, what makes them Christian is the motive with which we embrace and live them. They are undertaken out of love for Christ in a sincere effort to follow him. Even if religious life claims a "superiority," it is to be found not in being celibate, poor,

or obedient or in having made the profession of special consecration, but in attaining a greater and effective closeness to the goal of Christian charity.

3.8. Nature: Inter-relationality

Counsels are to be understood as three mutually complementary dispositions that enable us to be present to the Mystery of God in three different and necessary ways.¹⁵ While God calls us to holiness, He is not simply calling us and leaving us alone. He reveals himself to us and does so in principally three ways—cosmic, historic and human Epiphanies. The cosmic epiphany of God is concretely manifested in the things and resources; the historic, in the events and experiences and the human, in the significant people of our life. Hence, the three counsels of poverty, obedience, and chastity, together form a three-fold attunement to God, who chooses to reveal Himself to us in its three-fold epiphanies.¹⁶ Through poverty, we attune ourselves to God’s word, mediated to us through the things and resources; through obedience, we attune ourselves to God’s word coming through significant personal events and through chastity, to God’s word, radiated through the significant people of our life.



This could be the foundational understanding of the vows as per the Old Testament. No wonder, we read in the letter to the Hebrews: “Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways” (Heb 1:1). God had been speaking to us in many ways, through his cosmic, historic and human epiphanies, hoping that we would heed and respond to him. But we failed to heed him. And so, “in these last days, he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed as heir of all things, through whom He also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:2-3).

So God sent His own Son, the Eternal Word of the Father, who “became flesh and lived among us” (Jn 1:14) and revealed through his own life how to do this

threefold form of attunement to his Father through his own poverty, obedience and chastity, namely, through the ways he related to the things, events and people of his life. Thus, the poverty, obedience and chastity as embodied, lived and expressed by Jesus Christ, become the evangelical counsels. Through profession, we seek to conform ourselves to Christ, poor, chaste and obedient.

Scriptures, being the recorded expressions of this Christ-event, provide us with the criteria needed to do this attunement. So we attune ourselves to God's word through, people events and things, applying the criteria of the reign of God, provided in the scriptures.

Holiness consists in the Christ-like quality of our responsiveness to things, events and people. Hence, to enhance the easy flow of our sounding together with God, we must develop right dispositions in regard to things, events and people. We must be open to each of them in positive appraisal and appreciation. We develop disposition of simplicity in regard to the things we possess or use in our formation field, of obedience to the events that happen in our lives and of respectful love in regard to the people with whom we interact inter-formatively.

Such a three-fold commitment to God in the context of faith becomes a detailed expression of a single "vow of religion," a total self-giving to God or a "triple expression of a single "yes" to the one relationship of total consecration. Counsels are the act by which the religious "makes himself or herself over to God in a new and special way."¹⁷ By them, the religious gladly dedicates the whole of life to God's service, regarding the following of Christ "as the one thing that is necessary, and seeking God before all else and only him."¹⁸

The living of the counsels, therefore, becomes a continuous apostolate, a prophecy in action and a state of proclaiming Christ wherever they are. With the public profession of the counsels, they become professionals of God and a people of the absolute.

Each of the counsels emphasizes a relation to Jesus, consecrated and sent. He was rich but became poor for our sakes, emptying himself, and having nowhere to lay his head. He came to do the will of the Father who sent him, and he did it steadily, learning obedience through suffering, and becoming a cause of salvation for all who obey. He loved with an undivided heart, generously, universally and unconditionally and did so to the very end of his life. Since the commitment to the counsels takes place in the context of faith, it becomes a particularly intense sign and convincing witness of faith of the Christian community.

The counsels are very rich and inexhaustible realities, whose truths and meaning cannot be fully and profoundly explained, expanded and grasped by just taking a single dimension or perspective. Consecrated people, therefore, do not seek celibacy, poverty and obedience as if they were ends in themselves but as suitable ways of living their baptismal consecration, the mystery of Christ according to their charism and mission. This would mean, among others, a sharing in the charism and mission of the religious group that they belong to.

Endnotes

¹This position has become controversial in the contemporary theological thinking as we shall see later in this article.

²Marcello Azevedo, *Vocation for Mission: The Challenge of Religious Life Today* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 82.

³Diarmuid O' Murchu, *Religious Life A Prophetic Vision* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1991), 166.

⁴*Lumen Gentium* (43-47), 1965; *Perfectae Caritatis*: (1965); *Evangelica Testificatio*, 1971; *Mutuae Relationes*, 1978; *Redemptionis Donum*, 1981; *Vita consecrata*, 1996; *Starting Afresh from Christ, 2002*; *Passion for Christ and Passion for Humanity* (Document from the First International Congress organized by the UISG and the USG), 2004.

⁵*Lumen Gentium*.42c.

⁶It was in the context of the Canon Regular that the triad was established for the first time. In a formula of profession made at Paris in 1148, we find in fact: chastity, community of goods and obedience. However, it seems that the formula received its definitive character only in 1405 under Innocent VII. From that time onwards it spreads rapidly although not always.

⁷Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Theology of Religious Life: The Evangelical Counsels, Vol.5.*, (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2006), 6.

⁸LG. 44. Also see Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life* (1983), 4.

⁹Since the development of monastic life in the 5th century, total consecration is what is stressed upon and not individual vows. The equation of consecration with profession of the three vows (along with other vows in some cases) has been considered theologically essential at least since the middle ages when this proposition was explicated by Thomas Aquinas in his treatment of religious life in the *Summa Theologica*.

¹⁰LG. 44.

¹¹Sandra M. Schneiders, *New Wineskins: Re-imagining Religious Life Today*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986), 47-65.

¹²Kathleen Coyle, *Hand-outs on Vowed Life: Living our Prophetic Call in the Third Millennium* (Manila: ICLA Library).4.

¹³ *LG*, 45.

¹⁴ *LG*, 19, 46.

¹⁵ To read more about the complementarity and mutual relationality of the three counsels, please read Adrian van Kaam, *Formation of the Human Heart: Formative Spirituality*, Vol III (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 31-51.

¹⁶ *Vita Consecrata*. 88-92.

¹⁷ *LG*, 44.

¹⁸ *PC* 5.

REDISCOVERING THE IDENTITY OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE CHANGING WORLD

Venceslaus Lawrence, CMF

“Rediscovering the identity of Consecrated Life in the Changing World” presupposes that we have either forgotten or lost the very identity of consecrated life today. I feel we all must reflect together on the theme carefully and find out ways and means to retrace the roots of consecrated life in order to revive its relevance and meaning in this post-modern age. In this article, first I reflect on the nature of the crisis that the religious face today and identify some of its signs. Secondly, I proceed to show that the values that the consecrated life enshrines are deep human aspirations and therefore they are going to stay; hence the present crisis I aver is only a cry for evolution and growth. Thirdly, I delve into the original motivation for consecrated life in the Syrian and Egyptian model and show how the life of Jesus and his teaching caught their imagination. This is the central part of this article, and here I convey my conviction that we need to return to these original ideals by all means if we want to revive vitality, discover joy and stimulate growth of numbers in our congregations. Finally, I conclude by showing the way forward for renewal and transformation.

1. CONSECRATED LIFE GOES THROUGH A CRISIS:

The religious life passes through a crisis today. It is a crisis of identity and commitment.¹ But it should be placed within the context of the global and universal crisis humanity is facing at its social, economic, political, cultural, religious and ecological levels. In short, it is an anthropological crisis, a crisis of meaning and purpose.² The age-old orthodox and authoritarian structures of control are collapsing or falling away namely religion, family, caste, traditional and cultural mooring, etc., and new modes of viewing the self, family, society, politics, religion and international relations are emerging. Now, people do not

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want to be told what to believe and what to do. They want to find meaning in their lives by themselves. It is something indeed positive! The humanity has come of age! Let us celebrate it! When a boy grows into adulthood, he has to see the old patterns of meaning crumbling down on the new experiments he performs standing on his own feet. He is coming to terms with his original identity. It is indeed a time of crisis, but not of gloom but of growth! A similar thing is happening to us today. The values that are enshrined in the consecrated life cry for a new depth, new look, a new interpretation, and a return to the origin.

It is often claimed by certain Post-modern beliefs, such as ‘Nobody or no institution can claim absolute truth and so the teachings of the Church and values espoused by religious life are considered by many as relative or half truths, and one’s own opinion based on rationalization is preferred over doctrines and dogmas.’ So, the caveat is that the post modern world is moving from fixed reference points to uncertainty, doubt and insecurity.³ It is aggravated by a market-oriented world where everything is measured and evaluated according to the utility and profitability, even people. This utilitarian outlook of today stands in direct conflict with the universal values taught by the Church and the Church controlled institutions. It is a software world, in which everybody expects everything to be soft, where there is no place for sacrifice or for renunciation. It is again a culture of individualism and subjectivism, in which the individual is the measure of everything. All these create quite a lot of turbulence in the society which cause tremors in religious life too. The post-modern generation abhors authorities, patriarchy, petrified and stereotyped dogmas, because they have failed to shed light to them, but they have not totally rejected guidance. On the contrary, they seriously seek for it from those who have depth experiences of life, who can speak about the transcendent from personal experience. This is really the silver lining in the cloud. Therefore, genuine wise men/women and sages are in demand. The same situation is applicable also to religious life today.

2. SIGNS OF CRISIS IN RELIGIOUS LIFE:

- In general, there is a sharp decline of vocations to religious life in India, and in the European context rarely people choose it. This has caused pessimism, gloom and great discouragement to us. Many of us are worried about the future of our congregations, and wonder whether our Charisms would soon face a natural death.⁴
- Another hard reality is that of the frequent leaving of our brothers and sisters of the religious life in all our congregations. This reality creates

in us a further feeling of insecurity and anxiety. It is said over 3,000 men and women religious leave the consecrated life each year worldwide.

- There is an evident atmosphere of lack of joy and of vibrant life in our communities. When we ask the Religious, “Will you become a religious again if you were given another birth,” many hesitate to answer in the affirmative, and some say a firm “no.” Many try to prolong a life of boredom and dissatisfaction than live it with a joyful and cheerful commitment to their consecration.
- Perhaps the worst indication of this crisis is the growing religious formalism that makes life dry and routine. Prayers, community exercises, even our apostolate become formalities. We exercise external acts but without the spirit that should animate them.⁵ We can notice these tendencies in the way we pray and celebrate our liturgy, without any contemplation and mysticism; the way we participate in the daily meals without deep communion; the way we do our ministries without much passion for the people.
- The growing trend of individualism and subjectivism is another sign of this crisis. The formees in their initial stages of formation itself plan and project for themselves a particular ministry of stability which would give them security, recognition, a degree, and influence. Many today seek appointments in educational or institutions of influence or try to create their own ministries which give them independence, authority and money.
- The financial and sexual scandals which are often kept under cover in some of our Institutes even among the contemplatives are disturbing signs; again, caste or region consciousness, and polarization on that basis in our Institutes are other symptoms of crisis.
- Lack of creativity and vision in our ministries do not give our members ministerial satisfaction; very often the people complain about their ministers of laziness, lack of commitment and of authoritarianism. Due to lack of simplicity and approachability, they fail to mingle with the people. And our traditional public institutions which were best once upon a time are taken over by others in spite of the fact that big talents occupy the governing seats.

3. CRISIS, A CRY FOR CREATIVITY

As I have already said, any crisis is a moment of decision and creativity and that is the meaning of the original word in Greek, “*krisis*.” Religious life was formally started in the 4th century A.D. in a moment of crisis, when the martyred Church, all of a sudden, became a royal kingdom under Emperor Constantine, slowly moving away from the teachings and values of Jesus; it was when the Church was beginning to lose its charismatic characteristics and was putting on the political structures of the Roman Empire. The monks served as the conscience of the Church, calling her back to the gospel values of love, sacrifice, simplicity and communion.⁶

Similarly, Western monasticism was also born in a moment of crisis. In the 12th century A.D., the mighty Roman Empire was slowly dying due to the assaults of the Barbarians and God raised up St. Benedict to guide it through the turbulence. He went to Subiaco and founded a community of monks. This was the time when the Church was most deeply bound up with the structures of the feudal Empire. Pope Gregory was courageous and wise enough to break the Church away from the feudal system and ensured its freedom. This was the point of departure for an extraordinary period that witnessed, among other phenomena, the birth of many new religious communities: the Orders of Canons and of Mendicants, as well as the great monastic reforms by the Cistercians (Citeaux, the Chartreuse) and Benedictines (Camaldoli, Grandmont, Valumbrosa etc.). When the story of humanity seemed to be going nowhere, the religious showed them the way.⁷ Similarly, we are hopeful that at this time of crisis, God would continue to raise up visionaries and men and women of holiness to bring about renewal, growth and transformation in religious life to be able to guide the Church and humanity.

4. THE VALUES OF RELIGIOUS LIFE ARE TO STAY! A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The values that are enshrined in our religious life, in fact, embody humanity’s higher longing and aspiration for greater freedom and transcendence. They are common to all peoples and cultures. Therefore, these values will endure for ever, even though the form or structure in which these are accommodated may change. Christianity is a late comer in this field. Historically, before formal religions ever came to the scene (ca. 2,500 B.C), there were sages and holy people who guided the people in the smooth functioning of the society. Among these, the outstanding figure is the “Shaman,” a saintly person, whose lifestyle and value system, resembles closely vowed life of consecration in all the religious

traditions. Shamans are known to have existed as early as 10,000 B.C. Hinduism is the oldest world religion, the seedbed of formal religious life, dating from about 2,500 B.C.⁸

And from the 6th century B.C. on, we hear of the monastic movements of Buddhism and Jainism. In the 1st century A.D., in Palestine, there was a well developed monastic system by the Qumran Monks and the Therapeutae, who were celibates. Sikhism, which originated in the 6th century A.D., has developed a mystical and broad monastic system, even though they reject celibacy. The Muslim Tariqahs (Sufi) of 9th century A.D., are intended to serve as a monastic model within the Muslim faith. The contemporary Jewish Kabbalah theosophical movement, which originated in the 12th century A.D., and the religious Kibbutz movement from the second part of the 20th century, do manifest some type of mystical orientation in their approach.⁹

One must also mention here the upsurge of numerous cults and sects and the so called “New Religions” which exist normally on the fringes of a wider religion, which are often syncretic like ISKON (Krishna consciousness), Scientology, T.M. Movement, the Moonies or Unification Church, the Pentecostal Movement, etc. Most of these new religious movements are Church related, united in a common aspiration of transformation of the world, which they perceive to be the task of the Church in which it miserably has failed. They should be seen as alternative routes of passage to God experience, fullness of life, transcendence, inner peace or integral wellbeing – different terms for humanity’s longing for freedom and transcendence – when the main road of established religions face some kind of blockage. Many of these groups assume a monastic orientation.¹⁰ This is the same orientation, which gave birth to Christian monasticism in the 4th Century A.D.

Here, we must know that even though the religious/monastic life is a global phenomenon, it is not essentially the same in all religions and cultures. There are certainly common elements but at the same time we must recognize the differences in their spiritual experience and cultural expression, which are unique to every religion. Behind these different expressions, there seems to be a basic set of aspirations shared by all humans in every age and in all cultures. Only this can explain the historical evolution of religious/monastic life as I have outlined above, quite independently at various times and in different historical contexts. I am sure that these aspirations will never die; the longing of the spirit for higher reaches will never be quenched, as long as the human species exist.

If a particular pattern or structure of religious life becomes petrified in mere authoritarian orthodoxy or introverted survival mechanism, the spirit will find its own way out through other alternative ways. So we need not be gloomy over the stagnancy in which we find ourselves to be, which could well be an indication of a new era of conversion and change, of new way of living our consecration towards which the Spirit is leading us.

Some of the basic values of religious life, such as simplicity, austerity, prayerfulness, God-experience, compassion to all beings and service to the poor and marginalized are common to all religions which should be practiced by the religious in a radical way. In the history of religions when such basic values are forgotten by the majority, fringe groups try to live them out with heroic radicalism which is often acknowledged and revered by the majority. Today authors call them “liminal groups”,¹¹ who try to practice those cherished values which the majority find it difficult to live up to. Most of the monastic movements in all major religions have such strong liminal tendencies and as such they are essential for the ongoing life of any society, leading the people in hope of realizing greater freedom and transcendence by themselves.

5. REDISCOVERING THE IDENTITY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Today respect and reverence given to the religious by lay people is very much on the wane. People don't come to us as it used to be to receive guidance into God experience, interior wellbeing, freedom or transcendence. They see our consecration as half-hearted and our commitment as cold and lacklustre. In general, we don't energize and stimulate their aspirations and longing any longer. On the contrary, often we show bad example and our life is scandalous in many ways. Religious life has lost much of its liminal appeal and cultural relevance. It has lost its counter-cultural instinct. Far from being mystics and prophets, we have become excessively institutionalized. We have been more inward looking rather than out-going and life-giving to the people. With a stagnant spirituality practised as a routine, we take refuge in excessive activism and professionalism. Only when the religious embody in our lives the common religious values of people in a radical way, we will be of some relevance to the society at large. We need to address the world being sensitive to its needs and evolution, always ready to respond pastorally to lead it in the right path.¹² For that we must first go through a process of renewal and transformation. And now is the “*kairos*” of conversion, of change in our vision and commitment.

5.1. A Return to the Origin

In order to experience a deeper conversion, we need to return to the origin. The Christians of early fourth century faced a severe political and cultural upheaval; the Roman Empire was beginning to disintegrate. And there was a sense of disillusionment with the Church which, in its efforts to establish itself, had accommodated secular models and standards. From 313 A.D on, there was a complete halt of martyrdom in the Church, and those who aspired to be martyrs, following Jesus' death on the cross, were disillusioned with the turn of events. In those circumstances those disciples, who wanted to follow Jesus radically as it is stipulated in the gospels, found it difficult to pursue their Christian ideals in their towns and villages, and, therefore, were led into seclusion by the Spirit in the deserts and mountains of Syria and Egypt. There they started eremitical life characterised by certain fundamental aspirations or impulses which are valid even for our own time.

5.2. Communion with God

The first among them is a quest or thirst for deeper God experience. In the silence of the desert or mountain they experienced inner silence and were able to focus on God and experience him in and around them. Their goal was to fix their gaze on him 24 hours. Fleeing from the world was a means of realizing total communion with God. They were aware of the fact that as disciples of Christ, they were in the world but not of the world (cf. Jn 17:14). Even though reciting the Psalms and other prayers were common among them, the most cherished form of prayer was called "Jesus Prayer" or *Hesychasm*, which consisted in reciting the formula, "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" over hundreds of times with much attention on the words and with the aid of a garland of beads. With this prayer, the mind was trained to be fully engaged with Jesus, and his presence slowly became alive to them, as there were no other mental preoccupations.

Referring to this experience a monk called Mor Aphrem († 373) says, "I have built a church in my soul, and I have offered up to the Lord the travails of my body as incense and fragrance. My spirit became the altar, my will the priest, and like a lamb without blemish I sacrificed myself."¹² Here, he clearly articulates that God is experienced in the body and it is from this background that we must understand the severity with which they treated the body. Jesus himself experienced the Father in his own body (Jn 2:19). It is clear that they understood the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16). The mystical phenomenon of *stigmata* can be perfectly understood from this perspective.

The word *hesychasm* derives from the Greek word *hesukia*, which means rest, peace or quietness, which was provided by the desert environment. The foundation for this spirituality can be seen in the Rule of Basil the Great, who lived in the fourth century A.D. There was a monastery by the name of Mar Saba in Jerusalem, which was known for this spirituality. One of the monks, St. John the Hesychast, was its noted propagandist. The fourth century monastery of St. Catherine at the foot of Mount Sinai eventually became the centre of *Hesychasm*.¹⁴

One old man asked Abba Lucius, “What is your manual labour?” He said, I do not touch manual labour; but as the Apostle says, I pray without ceasing (1The 5:17). While doing manual work I pray without interruption. I sit down with God, soaking my reeds and plaiting my ropes and I say, God have mercy on me, a sinner. The man again asked, “When you are sleeping who prays for you then?” He replied, “So when I have spent the whole day working and praying, making thirteen pieces of money more or less, I put two pieces of money outside the door and I pay for my food with the rest of the money. The one who takes the two pieces of money prays for me when I am sleeping. Thus by the grace of God, I fulfil the precept to pray without ceasing”. So, according to this tradition “Prayer is the living human being in the act of praying”.¹⁵ This is what is called “prayerfulness”. This is the foremost goal of eremitical life. Today we need to reclaim this approach of contemplation in action which is the most effective means of revitalising consecrated life.

5.3. *Communion with Humans*

As they began to experience inner peace and quiet and the divine presence in and around them through prayerfulness, the next step of mystical development is seeking communion with other humans. The hermits who began their life in the desert as anchorites living individually in their own cells started coming together once a week for common prayers, fellowship and meals which slowly grew as semi-anchoritism and later on into full-fledged cenobitism with St. Pachomius. They began to realize that Christians are the body of Christ and therefore they have to live together as one community; a member in the cell is only one limb of the body. The monks realized that loving God goes hand in hand with the love of brothers and sisters. They found great opportunity in the community to serve one another with simplicity, humility and to do great sacrifices for others.¹⁶ This communion was extended to the outsiders also very specially to the poor, sick, refugees and travellers etc. Studies show that even the anchorites were in communion with people because many came to meet them regularly

for guidance; the poor and needy came to get help. Abba Anthony said, “Our life and our death are with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, then we have gained God; but if we have scandalized our brother, then we have sinned against Christ”. Abba Apollo said, “When you see your brother, you have seen the Lord your God”.¹⁷ These sayings are proofs of their communion with one another.

Scholars say that the Syrian monasticism was communal from the very beginning. As against the case of Egyptian hermits, they did not think it necessary to leave their towns or cities in search of seclusion; they were lay people living as communities side by side with the ordinary Christians under the bishop; they did not have superiors or administrative structures except a spiritual father who guided them. They were serving the poor and needy and taking special care of the sick, besides preparing for the liturgical celebrations in the local churches. They were highly held in esteem by the people for their love of neighbours in charitable service.¹⁸ It is their inner silence and God experience that led them to reach out to others in a spirit of love and service. This important aspect of living with others in communities in genuine love for one another is another area we need to recover.

5.4. Communion with the Earth

The third important aspiration is communion with the earth and creation. In their contemplation the desert Abbas and Ammas did not overlook the world. In fact, they enjoyed a new awareness of everything in this world – human – animal – and natural. It is basically “Earth Awareness”. With this awareness Abba Anthony seems to have said when he saw the desert for the first time “I love it”. It was the hermits’ home and there they experienced a sense of communion with the earth and with God. In the nature they were able to see God, hear God and live with God. Therefore, God experience and earth experience went hand in hand. They considered themselves as the sand of the desert that surrounded them, a sense of becoming one with the environment. Their holiness was part and parcel of a sense of wholeness. At-one-ment with God and their neighbor was essence of desert spirituality, at the same time, at-tune-ment to their environment, to the earth was essential part of it.¹⁹

When it comes to relating to the animals, there is an abundance of information about the connection that the desert fathers and mothers enjoyed with their co-inhabitants of the desert. Abba Paul used to take venomous kinds of snakes in his hands. When asked by another monk, “Tell me what you have done to receive this grace”, he said it seems “If someone acquires purity, then everything is in submission to that person, just as it was for Adam when he was in paradise

before the transgression of the commandment”.²⁰ Abba Anthony had persuaded the animals around him to live at peace with him and no longer to disturb him. In fact the notion of being like Adam before the fall from the graceful condition he enjoyed in paradise is the ideal to which the desert Abbas and Ammas aspired.

They were considered as the guardians and protectors of nature. They had to depend upon the trees and plants for their food and medicine (for most of them were vegetarians) and to make handicrafts like baskets, mats, dresses etc. Therefore, they were careful to nurture and guard them. They were protecting the animals from the poachers, and there are stories of many monks, who were killed by them in frustration. All these indicate their deep communion with the nature.

Later on, St. Benedict adopted in his rule this creation spirituality. For him choral prayer is praising the Creator God in union with the entire creation. The Greek word *poesis* which was applied to the psalms and hymns (poems) chanted, also means creation. For Benedict, we meet the Creator in the things of every day. He abolishes the distinction between sacred and profane. For him we meet God even in the kitchen utensils, for he seems to have said “all things are full of God’s Spirit”. He instructs the cellarer, “Let him look on all the utensils and goods of the monastery as on the sacred vessels of the altar” (RB 31:10). The cellarer or the one in charge of community goods is called “custodian” which derives from the Latin word “*custodire*” which means to pay attention, a contemplation of God in material things. Also, the seven hours of community prayers were designed to be in harmony with the passage of time. In the prayer of the hours, the monks yield to the rhythm of the day and give to each hour a particular accent. *Horaios*, which means hour, also means for the Greeks “beautiful”, which is something in order, harmonious and rhythmic, like the nature.²¹ All these are proofs of how our religious life is a life in union with the creation. This is another important dimension we need to incorporate today in our life.

6. TRANSFORMATION BY EGO-TRANSCENDENCE

This threefold communion is attained through a process of ego-transcendence. The hermits and monks found it very difficult to free themselves from the encumbrance of egotistic tendencies deeply imbedded in their subconscious, very much connected to concupiscence a term they often used to mean the sensuous leaning of the human mind. They talk about two kinds of consciousness or awareness: ego-centered and ego-transcendent. The former is a state dominated by attachments to the senses, emotions, intellect, and imagination. The latter

involves detachment from those faculties. They understood conversion or transformation as a shift from ego-centered to ego-transcendent consciousness which is called *metanoia* in Greek. It is transformation of the *nous*, but the English language contains no exact synonym for the word *nous*. The usual rendering such as “mind” or “intellect” are misleading. The *nous* bears no resemblance to the rational intellect, which is *dianoia* in Greek. *Nous* should be best translated as “consciousness” or “awareness”. *Metanoia* is then altered or changed awareness, and in the understanding of the desert fathers and mothers it is “ego-transcendent awareness”, in other words “God-centered consciousness”. It is the goal of their life, which they called *theosis*.²² Later on, in the western Christian mysticism, especially in John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, we encounter a similar process of transformation.

Today, this important aspect of personal transformation in our formation is not much stressed. We give our formees skills and degrees and when they perform well in their studies we promote them to the higher stages. The goal of our formation should be transformation of our formees into the image of Christ, through a process of “ego-transcendence” (cf. Mk 8:34; Gal 2:19-20).

7. THE MEANING OF THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS

7.1. The Three Basic Human Drives

In fact, the vows should be viewed as connected to the three basic human drives, namely, to have sex, gather wealth and enjoy power or authority. Many are in bondage to these three drives and they long for self-transcendence and freedom from them. In general these drives are insatiable and that is why they are bondage. Many of the problems that humanity faces today are connected to this. These three are, in fact, gift of the Creator to us for self-transcendence. He implanted in us the sexual desires so that a man or woman would not live alone. Sex is a means of transcending the ego to be in communion with another in order to create a community, but often it is used as a tool for mere *self-gratification*. Similarly, the interest to establish one economically sound is natural in all of us so that all would work hard for the welfare of the society, but this urge is also used solely to amass wealth for oneself, which leads to *self-aggrandisement*. Again, the taste for power is put inside us in order that we might readily take up leadership roles to serve others, but unfortunately this is also used for one’s own *self-glorification*. Therefore, these three drives which are meant to lead us into self-transcendence and communion, in most cases, end up in an inhibiting bondage.

7.2. *The Magi's Story in Mt 2:1-12 and the Release from the Bondage*

The Magi's story in the beginning of Matthew's gospel can be interpreted as a crucial stage of humanity's release from this triple bondage. The Magi *magoi* means wise men and they are from the East probably from Persia.²³ They can be regarded as representatives of wise and transcendent sections of humanity. They seem to have recognized in Jesus the Messiah, humanity's redeemer from all bondages, in particular the triple bondages in question. That is why, they are offering him three things, namely, Gold which stands for "wealth" (Mt 10:9), frankincense for "authority" since it was used as part of incense in the holy of holies for the most authoritative God Yahweh (Ex 30:34ff), and myrrh for "sex" as it is connected to human body for embalming (Jn 19:39). Through these symbolic offering they surrender these three basic drives in human beings that they may not enslave them anymore but in his presence may lead them to the original intention of the creator God, namely to communion and self transcendence. For religious, the so called eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God, they represent the three vows of poverty, obedience and chastity. One must notice that it is not a mere coincidence that only in the gospel of Matthew these three evangelical counsels are more pronounced among the synoptic gospels.

7.3. *The Relevance of the Evangelical Counsels today*

So, according to the story of the Magi, Jesus has taken the form of human flesh, in order to help humans to channelize these drives to their original end. That is how he is the head of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 1:22). Even though in the early Christian monasticism the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience were not clearly pronounced, the hermits and monks lived them with utmost care and sincerity. They lived these counsels as practiced by Jesus himself. They understood that through their committed practice they were in touch with the experience of Jesus himself. In other words, they thought that they practiced chastity, poverty and obedience of Christ. Each one can not have his own understanding and application of these vows. So, practicing evangelical counsels was itself a deep Christ experience for them. All the above mentioned goals of religious life are experientially lived through the practice of these counsels.

The meaning of evangelical counsels needs to be redefined today in the wake of certain confusion and lack of clarity prevailing in this area, mainly due to influence of media and crossing of boundaries in an attempt to accommodate the lifestyle of the world around. We need to sharpen our focus on this vital component of religious life, in order to be in touch with the original gospel inspiration.²⁴ My

impression is that they have been given too much of explanations from the side of human sciences and theological jargons that their simple gospel meaning is much blurred. We need to stress today once again that these counsels are Christ-centred, in the sense that they should be seen as Jesus saw them and should be lived as he lived them, so that the end result is “Christ experience”. Everybody can not have his or her own interpretation of these counsels in which case we are sure to lose their meaning.

7.3.1. Chastity

Chastity for Jesus was a symbol of intimacy, an intimacy which embraced God, human beings and the entire creation together in an act of continuous self-offering. It was a total affirmation of all the physical that he was; there was no negation of anything physical in him. He was very warm, intimate, affectionate, affirmative and deeply loving – all physical acts – which is very clear in the gospel accounts. His sexuality was central to this experience, as Jesus of Nazareth, male. He showed us that our need to give and receive love, part of our affectivity, is much deeper than our genital relationships. Even in the married state there is a deeper union of love and self-giving beyond physical union, the aspect of self-transcendence I mentioned above. That is why the context of Mt 19:12 where he talks about “the eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God”, he also talks about the indissolubility of Marriage (vv. 4-6). Both the charisms of celibacy and marriage have the same goal of going beyond oneself in an intimacy of a deeper communion.²⁵ That is why he underlines here the fact that the marriage union is the work of God, and so its ultimate goal is God experience, and not mere genital exercise.

As human beings any intimacy is experienced in the body. Jesus also experienced these triple intimacies in his own body, not as self-gratification but as self-offering.²⁶ We all know that giving is more gratifying than receiving. Jesus experienced God, the Father in his chaste body, for he says, “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up again” (Jn 2:19), referring to his own body. He must have applied the term “eunuch” of Mt 19:12 first to himself, because he was in fact incapable of a small intimacy with one particular person in marriage because of the overwhelming presence of God the Father (the kingdom of God), in his body 24 hours. Finally he gave up his chaste body as a beautiful gift to the Father on the cross. The same thing is applicable to us today also, if the real presence of God in our interior being does not become overwhelming, we can not call us eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Secondly, Jesus experienced celibate intimacy with the entire humanity and he gave it a bodily expression especially on the cross. When he died he incorporated all human beings into his chaste body and regenerated them as children of God, washing them in his blood (Col 1:20) for he said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (Jn 12:32; cf. 2 Cor 5:14, 19).

Thirdly, he also established a similar type of communion with the creation. We know his parables are replete with created objects. His love for mountain tops and deserts is no secret. It is very gratifying to see that creation was in union with him while he died on the cross, when his disciples abandoned him. The Sun did not give light, the earth shook, and the rocks were split (cf. Mt. 27:51; Lk 23:45). That is a clear indication of his intimacy with the cosmos, an ecological experience of the paschal mystery. Do we see chastity today as a means of this triple communion? Once this is taken as the goal of chastity, it will really attract many.

7.3.2. Poverty

For Jesus poverty is part of his kenosis, his self-emptying. St. Paul says, “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). The Christological hymn in Phil 2:5-11 portrays his self emptying, taking the form of a slave. Here his self-emptying is presented as voluntary act of “non-attachment” to his status as God (v. 6). I think this is the radical meaning of poverty. When Jesus says, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but son of man has nowhere to lay his head” (Lk 9:58), he does not complain here of deprivation but speaks of “detachment”. It is the experience of sages and wise men that the more one is detached from persons and things, the more he/she is in perfect union with them. Any greedy attachment leads one to loss of freedom, freedom to be in perfect communion. Therefore, we can say that Jesus’ poverty is a means of his above mentioned threefold communion, through which he has made all of us rich. This can be seen in the call of the rich man to whom he says, “...go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor...then come, follow me” (Mt 19:21). Normally in the call narratives Jesus’ command is a direct “come and follow me”; but in the case of the rich man the process is “go and then come”. He has to go in order to forgo his attachments to wealth and to be in communion with the poor, before he begins following Jesus. Here the rich man’s renunciation is the poor’s enrichment just as the poverty of Jesus is the cause of our enrichment (cf. 2 Cor 8:9).

It is because of this connection that we speak of “an option for the poor” in the context of the vow of poverty. When Jesus executed his *kenosis* in his incarnation, he clearly opted for the poor by being born in a manger, in communion with the shepherds, out in the open field on the cold night. He highlighted his communion with them by giving his own glory to them, for it is said, “..the glory of the Lord was shown around them” (Lk 2:9). Nowhere else in the Bible we see the glory of the Lord standing around people, except these representatives of the world poor. It is his first Christmas gift to them. That is how they became rich in his incarnation, and his proxy (Mt 25:40).²⁷ In the gospel of Luke the poor are blessed not because of their poverty, but because God is with them and the kingdom of God is for them (Lk 6:20).

Our detachment from our monies, time, talents and other resources are not a sign of hatred for the world but a sign of our love for the world of the poor that with commitment we work for their glory and dignity, sacrificing our life in imitation of Christ. That is how we practice his *kenosis*. The poor includes all those who feel deprived of meaning, dignity, and purpose in their lives. These are largely the materially poor, victims of injustice, the marginalized, the rejected old people, the unemployed, refugees, the sick, the disoriented youth, abandoned children, the migrants etc.

One more important aspect of the vow of poverty is our relatedness to the created order, in the sense that we are entrusted with the stewardship to take care of the universe with responsibility and sense of justice. A steward is not the owner (Lk 12:42). It articulates a deep, human aspiration that all people live in harmony and justice, sharing equally the goods of creation, that we treat the earth with gentleness and respect from which we receive life and sustenance. Vow of poverty is a reminder that we should resist the forces at work today damaging the creation and exploiting people in a highly competitive and consumerist market.²⁸ It is similar to Jesus’ fight against the demonic forces during his public ministry.

The vow of poverty is lived daily in a virtuous life of simplicity, humility and meekness. It is the outcome of recognition that God abides in oneself, that one is the temple of the Holy Spirit. In the presence of the Lord one can not but be simple and humble, recognizing the same presence in others. This was the case with Jesus (cf. Mt 11:29). As St. Paul says, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Phil 2:4), this vow should lead us to a lifestyle of always reaching out to others in reverence and respect, renouncing all types of egocentric attitudes.

7.3.3. Obedience

Jesus' *kenosis* and communion with all is directly connected to the will of the Father. Everything originates from his one universal and salvific will; and Jesus was always in communion with it. That is why the Christological hymn in Phil 2:5-11, while stating his *kenosis*, does not forget to underline Christ's obedience (v. 8). God's universal salvific will moves all human beings and the entire creation to the *pleroma* point, of fullness of life. God as the supreme ruler is in control and his plan and purpose will be realized on earth. All human beings are called upon to be in communion with this will of God, to enjoy peace and happiness. Jesus was perfectly in communion with this will and that was his daily nourishment (Jn 4:34). But it was always not an easy task. He had to seek it and formulate it. He had to discern it in long hours of prayer (Mk 1:35; 6:46), fight against the egotistic tendencies (tempter, Mt 4:1-11), which often lead to choose one's own wishes; he had to struggle against fear and weakness in times of trial even to the point of sweating his blood (Lk 22:44).

Since Jesus never allowed his ego to dictate his choices, he could always do the Father's will. This is the model that one imitates in religious obedience. Learning to join our individual will with the will of the Father, in union with the Holy Spirit will give us a mystical experience of joy and fulfilment. This is the basic meaning of obedience.

This entails a full use of our listening capacity, for that is the meaning of the Latin term *ob audire* which means to listen attentively; that we remain always in the mode of attentive listening to the nature, events and circumstances, persons and community members and most importantly to one's own inner voice, that ego propelled self-talk is replaced by active listening.²⁹ It is a life lived with alertness or watchfulness to the Spirit (Mt 26:41). Hence, it is an openness of cosmic proportion. It is pointed out that this basic openness is the mantra of the success of evolution of species. It is said that a necessary condition for survival and development of an animal species is their capacity to listen and adapt. Accordingly, those species which fail to adapt to the emerging circumstances face extinction, as in the case of dinosaurs. Even in the biblical understanding, order (obedience) is inbuilt in the fabric of creation (Pro 10:1; Ps 104:10-13). That is why disobedience causes the destruction of nature (Is 24:5; Hos 4:1-3). Those who listen and obey the will of God then will experience a type of cosmic communion. It is in essence a contemplative searching and seeking in a collaborative and communal interaction. Therefore, it is said that obedience in the case of a solitary monk is also communal in nature.³⁰

Today's vast network of communication and interactions should be seen as a sudden eruption of humanity's longing to be global and cosmic, which is the evolutionary urge in all of us, to be more full and complete.³¹ Religious who are specialists in deeper listening and seeking are the right persons to lead such human longing to its fullness in Jesus.

Thus, in a world avid for self-gratification, sexual fulfilment, for greed and consumerist tendencies, for gross individualism and domination, the values of chastity, poverty and obedience lived by the religious are prophetic signs of freedom and communion today.

Endnotes

¹Identity in the sense of individual understanding about the very nature of vocation to consecrated life and commitment in terms of total dedication to its objectives.

²A. Veilleux, "Religious in Today's World," www.scourmont.be/Armand/writings/religious_today.htm

³"Defining Postmodernism" www2.iath.virginia.edu/elab/hfl0242.html

⁴Report of Vatican Curial Official, www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=19526

⁵L. Kearns, "The Essence of Religious Life", www.redemptoristspirituality.net/.../index.php?...the-essence...religious-life

⁶Cf. F. J. Moloney, *Disciples and Prophets: A Biblical Model for the Religious Life* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1994), 156.

⁷M. B. Pennington, *The Cistercians: An Introductory History*, www.osb.org/cist/intro.html

⁸Cf. D. O' Murchu, *Religious Life: A Prophetic Vision, Hope and Promise for Tomorrow* (Indiana 1991) 33-41.

⁹Cf. O' Murchu, 14-26.

¹⁰Cf. O' Murchu, 27-29.

¹¹Cf. O' Murchu, 33-41.

¹²Cf. O' Murchu, 40.

¹³Mor I. Zakka, *Monastic Life in the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch* wwwuser.gwdg.de/~grabo/library/monastic.htm

¹⁴M. Korkoniyas, "Yesu Nama Japam, The Practice of Jesus Prayer." (CD Edition)

¹⁵Mor I. Zakka; Cf. M. B. Liester, "Hesychasm: A Christian Path of Transcendence." *Quest* 89.2 (March-April 2000) 54-59, 65.

¹⁶V. Lawrence, *On Earth as in Heaven, Biblical Spirituality for Consecrated Life* (Chennai: Claretian Communications, 2007), 87.

¹⁷Mor I. Zakka, *Monastic Life*, wwwuser.gwdg.de/~grabo/library/monastic.htm

¹⁸Cf. O' Murchu, 81-84.

¹⁹Cf. L. Brésard, “A History of Monastic Spirituality,” <http://www.scourmont.be/studium/bresard/>

²⁰Cf. J. Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (Indianna 2008), 85-89.

²¹A. Grün, St. Benedict and Creation, www.aimintl.org/index.php?option=com_content...id...

²²M. B. Liester, “Hesychasm: A Christian Path of Transcendence.” *Quest* 89.2 (March-April, 2000) 59.

²³N. Smart, *The World's Religions* (Cambridge 1989), 217.

²⁴J.A. Harden, Analysis of the Problems in Religious Life Today and Some Proposed Solutions, www.therealpresence.org › Archives Index › Religious Life Index

²⁵Cf. O' Murchu, 128-132.

²⁶Cf. R. Paredes, *Celibacy, Virginitiy for the Kingdom of God* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1995), 2.

²⁷Cf. V. Lawrence, 69-70.

²⁸Cf. O' Murchu, 160.

²⁹Cf. O' Murchu, 144-145.

³⁰Cf. Adrian van Kaam, *The Vowed Life* (Denville: Dimension Books, 1968) 17 as quoted by O' Murchu, 144-145.

³¹Cf. A. Cohen, *Evolutionary Enlightenment: A New Path to Spiritual Awakening* (Mumbai: St. Paul Publications, 2012), 42-43.

THE GOSPEL VITALITY AND THE EMERGING TRENDS OF COVENANT- DISCIPLESHIP

Joe Tauro, OCD

The platform for our discussion today, I believe, is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has still the resilience and caliber to evoke radical response today and tomorrow, as it has evoked prophetic response from the believers down the last 20 centuries. The point of research, however, is to identify the signals emanating from the social currents inside the believing community that will somehow give us a peep into the future of the radical or covenanted discipleship, understood as the religious or consecrated life. We will have also to take into account collateral world currents that will necessarily influence in the shaping of the message and language of the covenanted discipleship tomorrow. For, our tomorrow is already happening somewhere today. That is where we can detect what the Spirit tells the church today.¹ No doubt, it indeed is a million dollar question to know clearly what form or forms that prophetic response might be taking in times ahead. We know we are indeed walking here on slippery paths bordering almost on soothsaying.

1. THE SHOCKING CHANGES IN THE RELIGIOUS DOMAIN

Alvin Toffler in his path breaking book, *The Future Shock*, in 1970 envisaged the immediate possibility of ‘the disease of Change’ that will overtake a lot of world population.² It is the mental illness, he said, caused by just the awareness of the arrival a future that is going to be surprisingly so different from what we are familiar with and accustomed to and so fast, rendering one helplessly paralyzed not knowing how to make sense of that shocking future. He envisaged upheavals in all sectors of life. Nothing is permanent and stable and we see those things happening: Ever increasing displacement of peoples, right and freedom for any opinion, short lived relationships, loss of sense of community, hierarchy

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and authority; equalizing work and entertainment; adventure for leaving a mark, even to the point of death; making the human being just a small part of the world picture and not its central piece.

We are hearing the similar voices today as well. Albert Einstein, a sworn believer in the God of the Bible as a convinced Jew that he was, towards the end of his life, however, affirmed in one of his letters to his friend that all the religions are meant for the illiterate and the insecure people to have a frame work of mind, and that we have to outgrow gradually from our dependency on them. Stephan Hawking, once a 'devout Catholic,' again having proposed the end of theoretical physics, is of the opinion that we can explain the intricacies of creation and evolution of the universe and its singularity without requiring a god at the other end. These luminaries of our times almost apologetically shied away from the religious explanations given by the Church for questions posed by physics, higher medical sciences, bio-chemistry and history of the evolution of human organism.

Other recent discoveries like Higgs Boson particle that gives mass to the subatomic particles of energy has again necessitated a review of the way the church has to accomplish its mission of bringing the salvific good news to the world. It has to find new categories of thought, invent a new mindset to penetrate the thought pattern of the modern critic, and accept the shift of the paradigms that we were all familiar, sure and accustomed to till now, and in turn allow the unfamiliar to emerge on the scene.³

The effects are very much there to be seen. Diffusion of knowledge and availability of every possible opinion in the market place of internet denies any institution, even the Catholic Church the capacity to filter the information and protect their faithful in a safe world of select holy ideas. It is only a matter of time that this information will throw up all forms of questions, confusing the simple people, especially the younger population. But there is no other way.

There is lot of God talk everywhere, despite the agnosticism of the intellectuals. On the other hand there is an attrition of many from monolithic institutions and ideologies and formation of so many marginal and often fanatic religious groups world over.⁴ The ordinary man out there strangely is no more worried of the authenticity of the narrative, purity of doctrine or its historicity. As long as these movements offer a certain mental framework and give some emotional and religious satisfaction they are good enough to be followed, or to be discarded to pick up something else without any lifelong commitment.

This phenomenon is unprecedented. It is estimated that in USA alone by 1985 there were some 600 NRMs (new Religious Movements) with great majority of them being focused on young adherents. That would necessarily put heavy pressure on the Catholic Church as the most numerous and lead religious institution of the world to play its role and to offer vital and deeply satisfying spiritual and moral nourishment for the people. There is a revival and awakening of the spiritual all around. Signs are very much there and the people look for this nourishment in music, dance and fine arts, spirituality, meditations, sects, yoga, and stress reducing skills etc. or they also deteriorate into substance abuse, drugs, sex, pornography, pleasures, and all that offer easy and cheap paradise.⁵

We too are shocked today at the empty pews in our churches; we are saddened that the youth disappear from the church mainstream; we are embarrassed that the church leaders like priests and nuns, who enjoy respect and trust of the people, who were supposed to be showcasing the spiritual strength to rise higher in life are exposed as fragile and after all human and not angelic, time and again by the sexual adventures; we are distressed to find huge convents almost empty or with just a few aging nuns; we are deeply disturbed by the sporadic news of the suicides among the nuns and priests. It simply means our religious language is not understood by wider public.

Our huge educational and medical institutions, once the pride of Christian charity and virtues of kindness, are now with a few veiled sisters and many lay teachers and nurses instead, and do not any more represent or speak for the Christian culture. We are very much disturbed and left wondering why our bishops and priests have very little to say about corruption, exploitation, unjust social structures, abortion etc. when the whole world around us is asking for honesty and dignity in public life. Perhaps we are out of touch with the reality.

The falling numbers in consecrated life has sent shock waves and even panic.⁶ Sr. Patricia Wittberg, a qualified sociologist says: “Whether or not its members acknowledge it or are even aware of it, the single most vital issue that any group faces is the retention of its current membership and the recruitment of the new membership.”⁷ We are made to peep into the void of extinction as an institution and that naturally brings tears and sadness.

Theoretically numbers are not important; the idealist will tell us that what finally matters is the spirit and quality. But there is always the historical side to every idea. Though what is said as a sociologist with respect for the survival of a group need not be the real sign of vitality of the Church yet that fact is that so

many religious forms have sprung in the church in the past and have disappeared in the history and we do not need to shed tears about them. And it is happening also very vividly before our own eyes. What is irrelevant has to die and what is dead is to be reverentially buried; lest it stinks.

But what Patricia Wittberg affirms has relevance about the vitality of the church as a whole. The question is: the appeal to consecrated life on the decline world over? How shall we interpret the decimation of huge congregations? It is a fact that Jesuits, Salesians among men and FMM and Canossians, who were ranked as the most numerous among women show signs of aging and serious reduction of new entrants and also of total numbers world over. If that is true of these most numerous groups that must be true proportionately in all other smaller and older congregations. Does that show that the consecrated life is really dying out or is it just in a phase of temporary metamorphosis? Does it require an action from us? or should we allow things to take their own course with the hope of striking a balance automatically someday in the near future?

The socio cultural and religious spectrum we live in today demands a new form of consecrated life that responds to the exigencies of our times. That seems to be the message of what is showing up and we have to be bracing ourselves to such an eventuality. The forms of religious life that have survived and once again are vibrant and even luxuriant have very probably reset their identity or they have found their right time. They make their presence vital once again taking the parameters of the society and its requirements today. They are not simply the same as of yesterday. It is not a cosmetic change or some image make up. Dynamism is the key. If the young seems to be able to identify their own aspirations with the core elements of the congregation, it will survive and be reborn and revitalized with the new blood and new thinking. It is simply a question of relevance and the people out there should recognize that they are required to supply spiritual, moral or socio-cultural needs which the society does not adequately address. It is a call for a 're-foundation' of the charism already loudly announced in the halls of the synod 20 years ago. No one seems to be listening or simply not in a position to know where to turn to for help and often resign oneself to the inevitable doom that is invading, by selling off the assets and confining themselves to the old age homes.

Or simply the question is: does the world require so numerous religious when the future requirements of the world are not so much for the socio developmental work but more as inspiration for spiritual life and moral life? Has not the laity come of age, given the worldwide rise in education levels and in the same token

of being literate and also more exposed to faith formation based on wide literacy content? Do we need women in veils and men in toga to go round today walking as if out of the old text books of history? Was not the Bl. Pope John Paul right when he had said that the first millennium was of Martyrs, second of monks and missionaries and the third of laity?

So surely there will be many congregations that will not be in a position to make all the readjustment of their identity and their appeal to recreate and take a totally new form. What will be the dimension of that form? When and how the new Gospel initiatives will become organized societies that will have visibility and witness value? Will that be possible?

2. THE SIGNS OF NEW AGE ON THE HORIZON

2.1 The Church Detects What Spirit Whispers

The present Pope Francis expressed his profound recognition of the rich contribution of the consecrated life for the vitality of the church saying, “We cannot think of the life and vitality of the Catholic church without the consecrated life.”⁸

Pope Pius XII soon after World War II in 1947, in his Apostolic letter ‘*Provida Mater*,’ recognized for the first time the appearance and existence of new forms of religious life in what we later called as the ‘secular institutes.’ He saw it as the new outpouring of the Holy Spirit and welcomed them giving a first official stamp for new forms of consecrated living beyond those we were accustomed to. In doing so, the Church which was identifying the consecrated life exclusively with the narrow concept of the spiritual dimension and prayer was now taking into account the secularity also as a realm of God’s salvific action. The distance between the sacrality and secularity was thus bridged.

Pope Paul VI, on December 8, 1965 concluding the Vatican Council II, was envisaging already the need for the church to reach out to the world in a way the world could understand.⁹ However, when the Vatican Council in the 6th chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, Apostolic constitution on the life and activity of the church in its no. 43, brought in the religious as very much part and parcel of the laity (Chapter 4), many eye brows were raised and the false separations and lofty pedestals created for the consecrated life as a sector between the hierarchy and the laity crumbled, and many congregation saw the attrition of the members in huge numbers.

2.2 Resistance to Being among the Laity

This shattering blow had its natural repercussion in the monolithic religious societies. While they refused to readdress themselves and decide their own end, the concept of religious life shifted itself closer to the Gospel and there was an exodus of well-intentioned persons who just felt they could not reconcile with being just a group in the midst of the vast majority of the people of God. Losing the high social status was too much. The systematization of formation of religious as a mega institution like an army had its day. It had produced no doubt very disciplined men and women who like loyal soldiers courageously went to the mission field and added new churches to the catholic fold. But the emphasis on, doing than being, finally took its toll. The bubble blown beyond proportion has finally burst. Mere numerical affiliation to the Catholic registry does not exhaust the missionary charism of a congregation. Evangelization or the foundational role of every religious community to be the prophetic voice of the gospel to its time couldn't be reduced to the narrow dimension of affiliation. It has wider and loftier strides to make. This enriched the post-Vatican church even though numerical exodus from the ranks of well established congregations was painful. It was a clear sign of a paradigm shift.

The older form of the religious life as a *state of perfection* has given way to a more realistic, person centric, dynamic and existential understanding of it. This understanding is more close to the Gospel times. No doubt the older understanding had its day. If it attracted persons of high caliber and conviction to live the ideals of religious life and complying with the strict demands more in letter even by tremendous sacrifice, rigour and violence to oneself, it also attracted facile people, who did not fit anywhere else to get into the garb and refuge of 'a perfect society' to ensure themselves of a higher status of life that commands social respect. A false superiority of religious life over the laical state accumulated from the past four centuries simply could not take the load of today's realism where the religious life precisely finds its place in the heart of the Church, amidst the ordinary faithful.¹⁰

Others, especially the new charisms struggled and managed to arrive at a working self definition while retaining the shell of the structured religious life. They simplified their way of life and brought themselves to closer to the people they served.

2.3 The Indian Scenario

The hordes of religious women the church in India has, 125,000 of them at this

moment, are a formidable workforce of the universal church, especially in the missions. This is also true in some other Asian countries; all of them, of recent history of Christian faith. They are just transplanted in a Western model, more with the intention to furnish workforce for the dying religious communities in the West. The model of religious life in these countries is still basically Western in mentality and even in form, but more or less in better relationship with the laity. They will be meaningful for the future if they would succeed to carve out an identity of their own that is incarnational and relevant for our times.

2.4. No Church without Radical Discipleship

The church reaffirmed once again the role and need of the ferment of the radical discipleship in the church.¹¹ It will be as anachronistic, irrelevant and irreverent to ask the question of the biblical origin of religious consecration. It would be as strange as asking for the origin of the Church itself. Both the Religious life and the Church are coterminous with each other, as the former is intrinsic part of the latter. The religious life is the natural outcome of the inner life of the Church and as old as Church itself.

It is one thing to find the historical date of a particular form of religious life and quite another to identify with precision the seeds of Gospel values sown and the remote inspirations that lead eventually to a developed form and structure in time. What is invisible when sown is as valid as its eventual manifestation as a full-grown organism even if it cannot be located with precision on the calendar and atlas. Such a breaking in of the Spirit has been seen in the church down the ages especially at critical moments of the life of the Church. Such a radical response to the Gospel had made the Church carry forward the mission to be the salt and light of the world and ushers us into our times.

2.5. The New Pentecost

What is emerging today is the fact that the world is changing beneath our feet as if the sand is slipping away. The kind of religious life and church leadership we have been accustomed to, has been inside looking, ghettoed, just taking care of the institution. It needs an overhauling. It has over lived its purpose. The consecrated life always has passed through these stages of death and reemergence. Whatever is dead has to be buried lest it stinks. Or it has to die and a new one has to emerge. We are moving into a different world. The parameters and thinking patterns of the people are different. Is the church and especially the consecrated life, the cream of the church, the covenanted discipleship ready for the future? Does it offer anything worthwhile beyond dishing out some more institutions of

public services, which have outlived their times, especially with the advent of the multinationals and conglomerates on the stage and have over taken them and even offer much better services.

Reading and interpreting the intricacies of human currents is not easy especially when you are very much part of the whirlwind that is taking you in. One current may be strong today but may not dominate tomorrow. So what are the signals emanating from the recent past?

The two world wars catapulted the whole world to a new stage. The first reality is that the world is a village due to fast transport and faster communication. Knowledge is available for free in media and net. Peoples eating and dressing habits have been standardized. Today, people are less insecure for their livelihood. They are more autonomous in decision making. We are connected with lots more people than ever. We have our anonymous clubs on twitter, face book or other blogs. But Relations are only for a short time and even terribly pragmatic.

The result is: the family or village which was a fortress of ethos, bastion of traditions and morals so far in history, which one would seldom transgress with the fear of ostracism, is no more capable of offering the role even of being basic shock absorbing mechanism for persons with job distress or relational stress. Individual is suddenly naked and helpless and has to rely on his inner resources, stray friends, and anonymous persons to make sense or just fall out of the race culturally and morally.

2.6 Our Quest: The Future of Consecrated Life or Consecrated Life of The Future?

Are we feeling the loss, and searching for a familiar model in our laments for the death of religious life? Are we not looking into the future and finding the future of the religious life we are familiar with as bleak and irrelevant? Is it the end of religious life? Or is the question wrongly posed? Should the question be? What is the future of religious life as we see it? Or what will the religious life of the future will be? The former focuses on the phenomenon, the latter on the content of religious life. Perhaps the right attitude is to look for the rebirth of religious life taking into account the new paradigms of world currents that have changed the human values and mindset.

No doubt there are currents that are not always synchronic even in the reemergence of religious life. We should not look for a clear and pure idea of religious life. It is cluster of ideas with broad and wide spectrum spanning between rigid forms of renouncements and almost reactionary radicalism of

externals to deeply human response of Mother Teresa to the pathetic human situation. It can also be formless spirituality that lives in a dazed world of spirit and mysticism closer to the experience of drug addicts.

Church belongs to Jesus Christ. It was born of persons who responded to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. So like Jesus Christ too it dies time to time and rises once again phoenix like from its ashes to be once again the visibility and the message of Jesus Christ to our times. There is so much goodness everywhere today unlike in the past, even on the so called bad web. There is no room for pessimism, only a need to change our box thinking sitting inside the cave frightened like the apostles. It is a call to come out of the cave like Elijah on Mt. Sinai. To behold the new Pentecost – to witness the energy for the Gospel, leaving willingly behind the older paradigms of reflection and assessment of religious life as it has happened quite a few times for the last 2000 years.

The post-world war scenario of insecurity and poverty in the West, which changed into economic boom in mid-60s had its sociological impact for priesthood and religious life. There was steady growth. In the same way, the in the post-world war thrust for literacy in third world countries coupled with growing economies again boosted the numbers of those who opted for religious and priestly life. In these contexts more than half came from those who did not know what religious life was all about. This is what we were familiar with and suddenly that is shrinking. But is that the normal standard for judgment about the health of the religious life?

Is the increase of numbers, the only criterion to judge the vitality of a charism? Can the mere presence of numerous persons in our communities and institutions as workforce be safely interpreted as a sign of the vitality for the Gospel? So what exactly is religious life? Do we require religious to do the redundant works? Lots of services done effectively by religious are done as much better by lay persons or business corporate. Is it really a decline because that anonymous majority, who came in, not knowing what the religious life was, is no more coming in?

The world today is striking a balance and setting public domain standards in all spheres as the literacy is spread almost to all; information on consecrated life is easily available. Does the present canonical understanding of consecrated life, especially as regards the evangelical counsels should hinder the evolution of an off shoot of older forms of monastic and hermitical life that was not circumscribed by the triple-vow-format of consecration? Could it be more spoken synthetically as a total covenant than a consecration of some aspects of life or so called religious vows?¹²

3. THE SIGNS OF NEW TIMES

The signs are very much there and, here, we are only to make some efforts to look beyond the familiar and the conspicuous. Jesus and his Gospel have always provoked people down the times, to take sides for him or against him; and will continue to do so; but what way? That is a million dollar question. Any soothsayers can have their guess. Others have to sit calmly and be an impartial observer of the currents and threads of the action that unfolds in the whole world and see the signals of a new direction and perhaps, also a new form. It is a fearful adventure.

The new phenomenon showing a new definition of consecrated life is emerging. It began clearly around the synod on religious life in 1993. In the post-Synodal document known as *Vita Consecrata*, the Church for the first time finally recognized, albeit cautiously, the emergence and existence of the new expressions of consecrated life.¹³ These forms could be the offshoots of the older forms of religious life, be it in the spiritual or apostolic dimension. Others manifest a sharp originality and wait for recognition in the church. The elements identified are: witness of the perennial power of the gospel to provoke a response of total gift of self to the Lord; there is a resonance among them for the apostolic church of the acts of the apostles lived in all simplicity; have an appeal to the younger generation today. The pope does feel that these new forms can coexist with the older revitalized forms and need not necessarily to be seen as replacing the older and the traditional forms of religious life.

Jesus had a unique logic, a different perspective of life. He keeps doing it in our days again. Blessed are those who have eyes to see it unfolding amidst us precisely when many a well established and institutionalized religious families fail to attract, to welcome and to nurture genuine vocations.

On the other hand, there are very many examples today of new ways of living radically the evangelical option for Christ in the Churches both in the West and the East, North and the South. The Spirit of the Lord is still active and the Church of Jesus Christ is very much alive and blooming world over, in spite of the falling church attendance, or declining affiliations to the church associations and institutions.

We have to go back a step first and ask some questions which we usually take for granted: The call is to move away from an all familiar Christology and ecclesiology of the councils and move to that of the Gospels.

4. THE TWO FUNDAMENTALS: JESUS CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

4.1. Jesus Christ: A Non Dogmatic Perspective

The spirituality Jesus announced was far from the cultic, the sacralized and the patriarchal spirituality of Jerusalem. But he was not a revolutionary, who imagined that all is going to be well because someone pulls down the social structures. No doubt he complied with his religious obligations; he obliged others to fall in line with all that was said by Moses; but his vision was the personalization and interiorisation of the cult, away from the quantified sacrifices from incense and rituals etc into a journey of individual and collective faith and love. His focus was on the qualitative progress a human being makes and is capable to handle the exigencies of life in serenity and grace. He was not a pious man loitering around the temple of Jerusalem or some local sanctuary. His prayer was sometime vocal but much of the time personalized yet universal and inclusive, often away from the crowd, away in solitary places, mountains, gardens and in silence.

He said that he wanted people, the ordinary and the simple, to have life in abundance. At the same time, he found his fulfillment in giving it up for love and service. He denounced religious duplicity and every attempt of using religion for social or economical gain; but made friends even with the social and religious outcasts and offered them human dignity and divine forgiveness.

It is a unique way of living; so different from the categories of human well-being and convenience. He emphasized the sacrifice as emanating from within, not imposed from outside. He redefined love as service. He proposed a high quality of living and dying. He will always have admirers and fans. He will provoke the humanity throughout for a response. Precisely in responding to him, will the humanity find meaning and fullness.

4.2. The Church as a Faith Community

We are not easily able to rescind the image of the church from the usual paradigm of church as a big multinational organization ordering and managing huge institutions of social service and religious places of worship. Rather if we go back to the apostolic and post-apostolic church as a force that makes Jesus present in the world by sheer energy that emanates from the resurrection and pentecost experience of the early adherents. For that church, structures and institutions were a non-reality; only faith in Jesus Christ was primordial. There was very less space for self-centered piety and sanctimonial ways. It was a New Testament faith that looked beyond rewards and punishments, blessings and curses.

4.3 ‘Sequela Christi’: To Follow Jesus through the Gospel

“No one enters the consecrated life for something or some work, but because of the one who calls.”¹⁴ Consecrated life, hence, is a spontaneous natural manifestation of the beauty, efficacy and vitality of Gospel message in the Church and the world under the powerful guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the vibrant sign of the perennial presence of resurrected Lord in the Church, his body, continuing his mission in time and space. The institutional church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit recognizes this passing of the Lord and appropriates these forms of authentic Christian living individually or collectively, as charisms.

4.4 The Emerging Trends revealing the Inner Resilience and Energy of the Gospel Today

I start with the premise that institutional religious life world over is in crisis, in spite of tremendous; revival of religiosity among the laity world over. This is not a prophecy of doom but of hope; it is a sign of grace and love of the Lord for his Church. Being in crisis is a good thing; it is to be at the crossroads where you have to stop and reassess your position and direction. That is the best thing that could happen to the church and so also to the religious life. This sickness is not unto death and destruction but for manifesting the power of Christ challenging and defeating every other form of power and influence.

5. THE NEW FORMS OF RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP TODAY

5.1. Specific Instances

- a) We are seeing desertions, falling number of vocations to traditional forms of religious life in spite of using high tech marketing tactics for promoting vocations; those who join too are not very clear in their motivation and choice of the radical discipleship.
- b) Precisely these times we have also the wonderful phenomena once again of quite a few people drawn to radical commitment to the Gospel.
- c) The charismatic renewal, the ‘1’ arche of Jean Vanier, Comunione e liberazione, The Focolarini of Chiara Lubich, the Neo catechumens (Kiko Arguello), Notre dame de vie (Marie Eugene), Comunita san Egidio, Fraternalite S. Elie,(Remy Montbard), Gruppi di Orazione Teresiana, Foi et Lumiere (Daniele Ange) The Beatitudes, The community of Immanuel, foyer de la charite, (Marthe Robin), Little sisters of Jesus by Magdeliane of Jesus founded in North Africa inspired by the contemplative Frere Charles de Foucoud. L’Eau vive, Lumiere et Vie.,

the Lion of Juda communes, community of Bose' (Taize model drawing inspiration from Basil, Benedict and Francis) Community Redemptor Hominis of Fr. Domenico Grasso, who lived in slum barracks to help those in slums in the suburbs of Rome. They call themselves 'monks' instead and very much given to prayer—to live the mystery of love of the trinity.

- d) I know of a few hermit women living in the mountains of Maine and Utah in USA. A few new initiatives in Canada of women who just choose to live in renouncement of wealth and be friends of the lonely. Just close by in Bangalore in a gully of Tannery Road, there are two French women engineers living a radical option to the Gospel and reaching out to children.
- e) In Asia, South America and Africa, where people struggle against hunger, aids, over population and illiteracy, the new forms are more liberation oriented, especially taking care of AIDS sufferers and mentally challenged persons.
- f) In Europe, Legionaries of Christ, Redemptoris Mater, Opus Dei, Oblates of Bl. Virgin Mary, Mother Teresa's missionaries, the Daughters of St. Paul, the Sisters of Divine Master, Brothers of St John (Les petit Gris).¹⁵
- g) In India, we have some very good inspirations: Apart from western foundations in India we have totally Indian congregations and flourishing societies like CMI, CMC, CTC, CCR, CSSA, CSST, CSA, AMC, CSSA, AC, SAB, SABS, SMMI, SMI, MC, CST, SST, IMS and many more;
- h) We have recently, the Sisters of Sacred Sciences, Bangalore of Fr. Antony Kolenchery; Ex-Brothers of Mother Teresa etc Mysore; The DDS of Tamil Nadu, Heralds of Good News, Khammam, Andhra and Missionaries of compassion of Fr. Jose Kaimlet of Elur, Shepherd and Sheep movement in Mysore; Bede Griffith ashram Trichy, Fr. Amalorpavadas's Anjali ashram Mysore; Samiksha Ashram of Fr. Sabastian Painadath, Kaladi; Mekyad and Virajpet experiments of Cistercian women towards indigenization of the charism, some radical contemplative movements in Kerala and Kanyakumari district etc. Society of infant Jesus offers counseling for the depressed. The situation is still fluid. We need time to see which of these will respond adequately to the needs of the society and succeed in proclaiming the gospel today and tomorrow.

- i) There are lots of committed Christians joining together sometimes along with the consecrated persons, in lifelong commitment (frontier ministries, pioneer ministries) in service of the AIDS patients, for prisoners, for migrants, for the unemployed, for the depressed. There are also other social response groups like ‘Birds of the air,’ ‘White doves,’ responding to the mentally challenged and destitute. ‘Friends of the birds’ are favoring the rehabilitation of street children. A priest, editor of an international journal, just lives in the dirtiest slum of Nairobi. No big social work is done by him; his only effort is to offer them self-respect and dignity by offering them solidarity and organization skills and conscientization of their rights and duties.

5.2. *The Positive Signals Detected in the Western Churches*¹⁶

- a) Explicit religious goals: Most of them come after a certain experimenting with the world and come to religious life with a profound sense of vacuum and emptiness ready to be filled by the spiritual life even if it is very austere and demanding. They desire silence, prayer, and value transcendence.
- b) The ‘implicits’ and the ‘explicists’: Some easily accept the Christian doctrine of salvation by self surrender and others make it implicit and emphasize the personal experiential way to God. They want lots of broad field, freedom of thought and mostly do not want to be guided or formed.
- c) Intense community life and Community solidarity: This is a novelty for them as many of them come from small worlds or lonely contexts. They long to build relationships but find it hard to go along with deeper sharing. They look beyond the world of the obligations of vows to a cumulative perspective of committed discipleship of Jesus.
- d) Passion for worldwide evangelization: They want to share the new found joy and are ready to go anywhere. The world is a small place today and there is no anxiety and fear of the wide world as they are well informed on the net on the situations.
- e) Two clear points emerge: Namely there is a desire for religious life that offers serious spiritual outlook of life and that integrates mission within the consecration and not apart.¹⁷

5.3. Re-Foundation of Religious Life¹⁸

There is no stereotype or ready-made model. It can have apparently contrary thrusts. Some may push for interior life, others for service of the poor, some for simpler lifestyle, others for revamping of institutions. Nevertheless, it is a response to the Holy Spirit that brings back fundamental Gospel values to the Christian community and the world. It is all about restituting charisms and redesigning new presences. Re-foundation can happen in the following ways: (a). To break down the edifice to its primary parts, salvage only that which can be salvaged, discard the rest and use what is salvaged to build a new one. Many religious have done so by giving up accumulated weight and making the new form concise, precise, and more radical as it could have when it was founded. (b). To study the older building and its artistic value very well, and replace the old with the totally new one with the old style and traits of the architecture. This will maintain a continuity and creativity. (c). Just forget about the old and start new from the scratches, as Mother Teresa did with MC Sisters.

5.4. The Shift of Paradigm: The New Thought Pattern

- a) Newer ecclesial movements¹⁹ are the spring time of spirit for the church and are not meant to quench the Spirit (1 Thes. 5:19-21).
- b) The Pope invites the local bishop to incarnate the mystery of Christ by listening to the word and breaking of the bread. For it is in the actual situation of each local church that the mystery of one People of God takes the particular form that appeals to each individual context and culture.²⁰
- c) That watertight compartmentalization of pre-Vatican days between lay and religious is slowly falling away. The radical witness to the vertical and the horizontal aspects of Christianity, even if there is need to swim against the surrounding culture, has to be in the heart of the true church of all times, and it shows itself in such outpouring of the energy of the gospel.
- d) Today there is lot of voluntary aspect and lots of social service beyond the teaching and nursing professions. The traits of such new initiatives are: individual initiative, radical commitment, merging with the social customs, small presences, localized witness, simple life style, limited visibility, personalized and even non-verbal proclamation, more inclusive and universalistic in dialogue, less triumphal, kenotic and incarnational.

- e) The classical elements (a personal call/response, separation from the world, very strong safeguards for keeping chastity, insertion into a community/Charism and communitarian life, especially common celebration of Divine office etc.) have helped to safeguard the communitarian context of growth in Gospel values as well as a minimum of institutional witness of holiness. However, these are not high priorities to the youth today.
- f) We need to overcome the separation and the dichotomy between the holy and the unholy. The curtain of the temple has been torn; the holy has invaded the secular by incarnation and the paschal mystery.²¹
- g) Need of revival of spirituality in spite of surrounding secularism.²² Primacy and centrality of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, Trinity, and Eucharist have to be kept. Many manifest a very strong desire for experiential contemplative prayer and personal prayer than vocal prayer, bordering on mysticism in the market place.
- h) Less fixated with the observance of time tables and vows²³ in the traditional form on juridical side of vows and preference for a relational, covenantal, synthetic perspective of vows than analytic and sectarian. Fuga mundi concept that puts God and world on opposing camps is less obvious. Be in the world and not of the world is more appealing (Jn 17:11).²⁴
- i) In governance and management, avoid paternalism that leaves the people humanly immature and incapable of personal decision-making. Persons are the central focus and not some services or institutions. There is readiness to collaborate with other institutions and involve silently not worrying who owns it; promotion of small groups in contrast to huge monasteries and convents.
- j) Commitment yes, perhaps not permanent and binding for whole life. There is a sense of non-permanence or provisory in nature and sense of being in continuous, ongoing, dynamic process of discernment for solutions for the future.
- k) We are just seeing the first stirrings of the Holy Spirit. We need time and capacity to discernment. We need to break down in order to be built up again. If in the economically well-off western world, the need is the interiority and authenticity, there is the drive to contemplative, mystical life in the East.

Endnotes

¹Paul VI, ET. 11. “Charism is the gift of the Holy Spirit who is always present in the Church”

²Alwin Toffler, *The future Shock*, (New York: Bentham books, 1970), 2.

³Pope Paul VI on 8 Dec 1965 concluding the Vatican council II.

⁴Eileen Barker, “Changes in New Religious Movements”, in *Rethinking New Religious Movements*, Michael Amaladoss, (ed)., (Rome 1998), 3-8.

⁵Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in Fragmented Age*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) has elaborated in depth the situation of the church.

⁶The analysis of church statistics of recent years tells of serious decline of new entrants to consecrated life in the older churches.

⁷Patricia Wittberg, *Creating a Future for Religious life*, (1992), 82

⁸Pope Francis, Allocution to the Consecrated persons on 13 May 2013.

⁹In ET. 4 Pope Paul VI in 1971 highlights the contribution of the consecrated and their need for the church. This is reechoed by the Present Pope Francis on 13 May 2013 saying, “ We cannot think of the life and vitality of the Catholic church without the consecrated life.”

¹⁰Juan Jose Etxeberria, “The Consecrated life in Ecclesial Movements,” in *Consecrated Life*, (25, 1-2), 235.

¹¹*Sacrasactum Concilium*, 25. “ The Holy Synod holds in high esteem their way of life in chastity, poverty and obedience, a way of life of which Christ himself is exemplar. It places great hope in their work, which is so fruitful, whether it is hidden or public.”

¹²For more discussion on this topic, see Juan Jose Etxeberria, op.cit. 235-241

¹³*Vita Consecrata*, 12.

¹⁴Paul Dominic, “Charism, Charisms & Faddism” *Review for Religious*, (Jan- Feb 1994), .51.

¹⁵Albert Dilani SM, “Religious Vocations: New Signs of Times,” *Review for Religious* (Sept-Oct 1993), 746.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 739-740

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 755-56

¹⁸Document from the USG Encounter, *For a Creative Fidelity: Refounding*, (Rome: 1998), 5.

¹⁹*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 46.

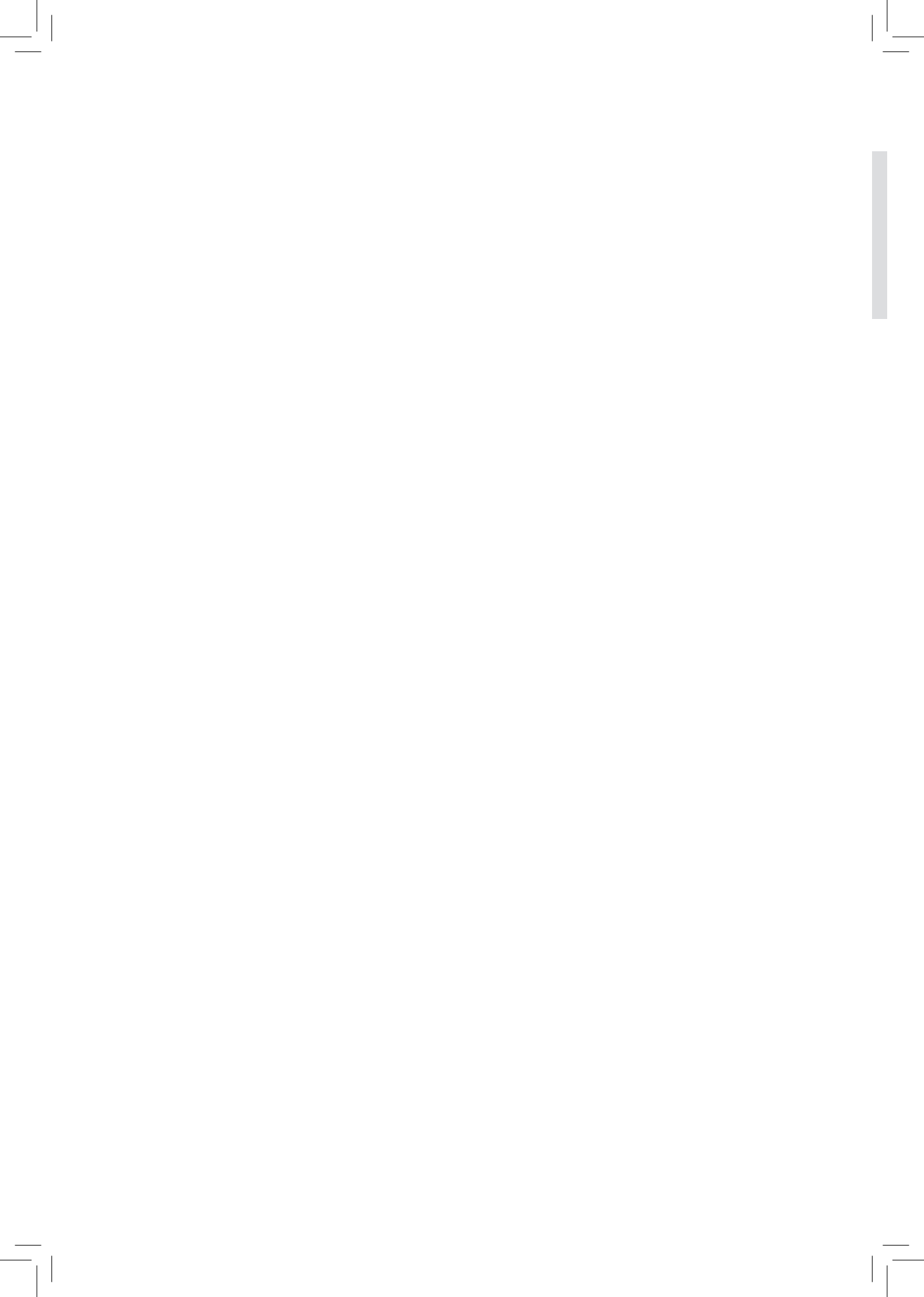
²⁰*Ibid.*, 3.

²¹Sandra M. Schneiders, “Religious Life in the Future,” in *Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity* (Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2005), 208.

²²John Paul II, *NMI*, 32-33

²³Schneiders, 211.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 210.



EVOLVING EVANGELICAL FAMILIES: NEW FORMS OF CONSECRATION

Mani Karott, LBJ

While reflecting on the theme of *Evolving Evangelical Families* in the universal Church, the image that comes to my mind is that of a mighty ancient tree, deeply rooted in the soil, with a solid trunk, with many hued birds building their nests among its branches, happily chirping away in polyphonic symphony! True, a tree buffeted by powerful scorching winds with many broken branches, but not uprooted. New branches with fresh sprouting leaves reach out again to embrace the world, inviting the passers-by to its maternal salvific shade.

Recently, Pope Francis invited the Religious to be conscious of their uniqueness: “A radical approach is required of all Christians,” the Pope stated at the end of the 82nd General Assembly of the Union of General Superiors, which took place in Rome on 29th November 2013, “but religious persons are called upon to follow the Lord in a special way. They are men and women who can awaken the world.”

This is the rationale of this paper as well on new forms of consecration in evolving evangelical families within the universal Church.

PART 1. MAGISTERIAL TEACHING ON NEW FORMS OF CONSECRATION

Without further digressions, let us plunge into the official teaching of the magisterium about these *new forms of consecration*, as presented in the seminal document, *Vita Consecrata*.

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1.1. New Ecclesial Families in the Church

This document presents the new forms of consecration in the Church as the work of the Spirit “either fostering in already existing Institutes a commitment to renewed faithfulness to the founding charism” or as “new charisms to men and women to start new institutions responding to the challenges of the times”¹ The originality of these forms is that of mixed communities of clerics and lay people, married or celibates pursuing a common style of life, characterised by “an intense aspiration to community living, poverty and prayer” and a new form of government where laity and clerics share responsibilities in a common commitment to new evangelisation.

The conclusion of the document is that these new forms of consecration are a gift to the Church by the Spirit and a sign of the times and that the older Religious Institutes “can be enriched through a dialogue with the new foundations appearing in our own day.”² This last remark legitimises the effort that we are making today in the context of this seminar to understand these new forms of consecration.

1.2. The Ecclesial Context: Vatican II

We all know that the one great event of modern times that changed the face of the universal Church has been the Second Council of Vatican (1962-1965). When asked for the reasons for calling the Council, Pope John XXIII replied by a symbolic gesture of opening one of the closed windows of the papal palace to let in some fresh air. The rest is history. We are still under its influence today.

Vatican II embodied the consciousness of the Church as “a sacrament of communion with God and of unity among human beings.”³ Reiterating the doctrine that the Church is the People of God “beginning with Abel the just to the last of the elect”⁴ the Council emphasized the common dignity of the baptised in a covenantal relationship of God with his people, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation”⁵ bound together by the bonds of sacramental life, prayer, thanks giving, a witness of holy life and active charity.

The doctrine of the Council was a radical departure from an earlier theological equation, which defined the Church as a sacred institution, the temporal realisation of the kingdom of God on the earth. Therefore, it was important as well to extend the territory of the Church on the earth. The colonial period of the 18th and 19th centuries saw a collaboration between the colonial powers of the West and the missionary efforts of the Church in the colonised lands. Missionaries went far and wide in a heroic endeavour of preaching Christianity and advocating

conversion as a means of salvation. But the missionaries also realised that entire populations resisted conversion to Christianity and that there existed a world out there beyond the reach of Christian affiliation.

At the same time, the tragedy of the Second World War opened the eyes of many prominent Christians to the fact that politically and sociologically, the influence of the Church was waning in the modern world. The temporal power of the Pope was reduced by the Treaty of Lateran in 1929 to a mere 160 acres of land called the Vatican City surrendering the large Pontifical Estates to the Italian Government.⁶

Meanwhile, new social movements like Marxism ignited the imagination of the working class the world over. With the success of the October revolution in Russia, vast populations lost faith in the Church deserting its ranks to join new materialistic movements and social utopias. This disconnect between the so called ‘sacred society of the saved’ and the secular society became too obvious to be ignored.

But the loss of temporal, political and sociological power over people had a salutary effect: the Church woke up to its true identity and mission instead of clinging to the pseudo-identity of a temporal power.

Providentially, it was also this period that saw the birth of new initiatives in the ranks of the People of God. There rose up charismatic individuals challenged and inspired by the Gospel, who returned to a more radical evangelical ideal, free from the dead wood of institutionalism. Influenced by their prophetic vision, many others followed them, creating movements of renewal within the Church, prior to Vatican II. Through these new movements, the breath of the Spirit invaded the Church and sowed the seeds of new forms of consecration. The rallying call of these movements was articulated by Bl. Charles de Foucauld, a French hermit in the Sahara, in one of his meditations in 1910. “Let us return to the Gospel. If we are not living the Gospel, Jesus is not living in us. Let us return to poverty and Christian simplicity.”⁷

These new forms of consecration that we are witnessing in the Church today have their origin in the pre-Vatican period. This irresistible wind of the Spirit still continues to blow through the corridors of the Church today, urging the Church to a renewed fidelity to the Gospel.

Essentially, what is this new trend? It is the realisation that the Son of God, the Eternal Word of the Father, chose to be born into the heart of this world as a secular human being, as the son of Joseph and Mary. And, thereby, he

consecrated the world with its secularity into the dwelling place of God. He broke down the barriers which separate heaven and earth and created a New People by the proclamation of the Gospel, and he promised to be with his people until the end of time.

This is the silver thread that goes into the weaving of these new forms of consecration in the ecclesial families within the modern Church.

PART 2. NARRATIVES ON NEW FORMS OF CONSECRATION

In this second part, I would like to introduce some narratives about these new forms of consecration in the Church today. Some of them are of pre-Vatican origin, others post-Vatican, but they all represent the new evangelical spirit of the Council of Vatican II.

2.1. The Charles de Foucauld Spiritual Family

When we enter into this new stream of consciousness, the first figure that captures our imagination is that of Bl. Charles de Foucauld. He is the initiator of a new way of living the Gospel inspired by what can be called as '*the spirituality of Nazareth*'.

Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916) was a French aristocrat, who lost faith in Christian religion in early adolescence and lived a dissolute moral life to the point that he was dismissed from the French army. He made a dramatic U-turn in his life at the age of 24, when he was shaken in his disbelief, when he witnessed the faith of the Muslim populations of the Sahara during an exploratory journey in Morocco. It all ended in a confessional in Paris, when through the influence of a saintly priest, he returned to his childhood faith.

After his conversion, he entered the Trappist Order because he wanted to enter into the poverty of Jesus, his new Beloved Lord and Master. But seven years of monastic life made him understand that it was not his vocation to live in a monastery as a monk. He felt called to imitate what he called 'the life of Jesus, the Workman of Nazareth'. With the permission of his superiors, he went to live in Nazareth itself and found work as a gardener in a convent of the Poor Clares close to the shrine of the Holy Family. During the four years, he lived in a hut adjacent to the convent and spent long hours in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in his free time.

Encouraged by the Mother Superior of the convent, he returned to France where he was ordained priest. After his ordination, instead of going back to the Holy Land, he went to live in the Algerian Sahara in order to carry out 'the divine

feast of the Eucharist' of which he was now the minister to those who are far away in imitation of the Divine Shepherd looking for the 'lost sheep'. He lived the last 14 years of his life in great simplicity in the Sahara sharing the life of the nomadic tribes in the heart of the desert. He became their friend and brother, their *marabout* (man of God).” I want all those who live here, whether Christians, Muslims, Jews or pagans, to become accustomed to see me as their brother—the universal brother-....they begin to call the house ‘the fraternity’, (khaoua) ... I never stop meeting people and talking to them: slaves, poor people, soldiers, travellers, those who are ill or who come out of curiosity,” he wrote to his cousin in August 1902.⁸

He longed for companions, who would share his passion for the life of Nazareth among the remote populations of the Sahara men and women, both religious and lay. But it was not to be. He died alone in 1916 felled by a bullet shot at close range in Tamanrasset. It looked as though his dreams died with him.

But God’s ways are mysterious. Like *the grain of wheat that falls to the ground* (Jn12:24), his death produced a rich harvest. Several people, both men and women, inspired by his life and message took up the challenge of living the Gospel of Nazareth.

2.2. Association of the Spiritual Family of Charles de Foucauld

In 1933, led by a newly ordained French priest, Rene Voillaume, Little Brothers of Jesus started living by the rule of life that Br. Charles had written. Another French woman called Madeleine Hutin started the community of the Little Sisters of Jesus in 1939. Associations of all types, for priests and lay people, married or single, were founded by Fr. Voillaume to answer the needs of people who approached him for guidance. These groups took the ideal of Nazareth and adapted it to their needs. For example, Sr. Madeleine, foundress of the Little Sisters of Jesus, insisted that Bethlehem was an integral part of Nazarean spirituality: God taking on the fragility of a little child in order to inaugurate his saving presence in the world. She told her sisters:

Like Jesus, make yourself all things to all men—an Arab in the midst of Arabs, a nomad among nomads, a worker among working people, but above all, human among your fellowmen.... Do not set up barriers between the world and yourself: do not think that as a religious, you have a special dignity to safeguard.... Before being a religious, be human and Christian, in all the strength and beauty of these terms.... And if I am so sure of what I say, in spite of the fact that such a new

form of religious life may seem rather daring, it is only because this life is in conformity with the Gospel and the Tradition of the Church.⁹

This was bold language especially in 1939, when religious women were expected to live behind protected walls!

Thus, setting aside the traditional institutional systems of security deemed necessary for consecrated persons, especially for women, and going beyond boundaries of religion, nationality and race, the witness of life of these fraternities, (Gospel preached not by words by the way of life) influenced greatly the Church in the pre-Vatican days and contributed to a new form of consecration in the heart of the world. This way of life can be adapted to any status of life: religious, priests, laity, married or single as it does not depend on institutional structures.

The cluster of spiritual families that owe their origin to the witness of Br. Charles, some twenty one in number today, initially came together as an Association of the Spiritual Family of Charles de Foucauld in 1955. They are present in about 92 countries. In India we have some of these religious families like the Little Brothers and Little Sisters of Jesus.

2.3. Secular Institutes: A New Form of Consecration

Through an Apostolic Constitution titled, *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, promulgated in 1947, Pope Pius XII granted official approval to Secular Institutes as a new form of consecrated life in the Church. An year later, in a *Motu Proprio*, *Primo Feliciter*, the Pope stated “I have before my eyes a multitude of souls hidden with Christ in God and these while still living in the world generously and joyously consecrate their whole life to God.”¹⁰

The Vatican Council II ratified and reaffirmed this official teaching of the Church on Secular Institutes in the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*.

They involve a true and full profession of the evangelical counsels in the world, recognised by the Church. This profession confers a consecration on people living in the world, men and women, laymen and clerics... These institutes ought to preserve their own special character, their secular character—that they may be able to carry on effectively and everywhere, the apostolate in the world, and as it were from the world, for which they were founded.¹¹

In order to illustrate the newness of this form of consecration, I would like to present to you a narrative about a Pontifical Secular Institute called ‘Gleaners

of the Church', perhaps not well known to many of us, but they are active in the Indian Church.

2.4. The Secular Institute of the Gleaners of the Church

Pia Tavernelli (1906-2001), the foundress of the Secular Institute of the gleaners of the Church, was born into a fervent Catholic family in the region of Perugia in Northern Italy and became a primary school teacher at the young age of 16 in the village of Lippiano. When she was 23 years old, she embraced religious life in the Congregation of the Little Handmaids of Christ. After her novitiate and initial religious formation, she was sent back to the same village as teacher. One day, as she was cleaning the dilapidated village church in preparation for the feast of Archangel Michael, patron of the Church, she discovered to her horror that the tabernacle was broken and that in the pyx containing the sacred hosts, there were some little insects! Shaken by this experience, she arranged for a new tabernacle to replace the old in order to protect the sacramental presence of Jesus. This incident made her conscious of her deep attachment to the Eucharistic presence of the Lord. She did not stop there: she rebuilt the Church itself. It was a gigantic enterprise but she found within herself an inner energy to go up to the end mobilising the Christian community with the help of a few young women.

While going around visiting people for this purpose, she became aware also of the moral and material poverty of the people in the area. In her sensitive heart, building of the physical temple for God and uplifting the living temple of the poor in the community became a single project. Her devotion to the Eucharist was thereby directly linked to her passion for work among the poor.

These experiences opened her eyes to the need for a new form of apostolic presence in the community. She longed for,

an apostolate directed towards the individual, the ear of wheat buried in the earth, those who are poor in grace and love, who lack liberty and human dignity". (14) She saw clearly that she was being called "to a new form of consecration, a life based on the Gospel, in the following of Christ's footsteps and one spent in the middle of the world, in order to render a more efficacious apostolate in the Church and in the world.... like Christ who lived in a simple way, mixing with the common people, making himself one with them so that he could bear witness and announce the plan of the Father: the salvation of all men."¹²

These convictions resulted in her asking permission to leave the religious order and to propose the project of starting a new Secular Institute, which was officially accepted by her Bishop as a Pious Association in 1950.

She chose the name ‘Gleaners of the Church’ for the Institute, because “the figure of Ruth and the biblical episode brought it spontaneously to mind, the apostolate among the poorest and those who are most in need: the grain of corn buried in the earth.”¹³ The grain would be lost if the diligent eyes of the gleaner were not there to spot it, this hidden grain being the lowliest and the least in the society, forgotten by others, in the heart of the cities, on the streets and along the hedges. “The gleaner goes to them, does not wait for them to come to her, goes in search of those in misfortune, moral or material like the Divine Shepherd..... extremely sensitive to the feelings, sufferings, difficulties, temptations, hopes and joys of her brethren, and to them she yearns to bring the message of the Gospel.”¹⁴

Pia’s last word on this new venture is significant. She calls it, “a secular consecration based on the example set by Jesus during the time he lived in Nazareth among his fellowmen as one of them, as well as during the three years he spent preaching the Word of God.....a consecration marked by one thing only: an immeasurable love by which each member of the institute becomes for every person and in any situation a sign of God’s presence.”¹⁵

The group of gleaners is not a large group – about 120 in the world. But they are present in several countries as teachers, nurses and social workers, earning their living from work, supporting each other in solidarity and setting aside part of their earnings to help the poor around them. In 1972, they were recognised as a Secular Institute in the diocese of Prato in Italy. In 2007, they received the status of a Pontifical Secular Institute.

The Secular Institutes are vital signs of the love of Jesus Christ in the society like leaven in the dough, “to bring Christ to the world and to offer again the world to Christ.”¹⁶ In India alone, we have some 36 Secular Institutes.

2.5. *New Ecclesial Movements*

The post-Vatican Church has been marked by a renewed understanding of the common priesthood of the baptised: “All the baptised by regeneration and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood” (L.G. ch 2.10), called to live holy lives and to bear witness to Christ.

Pope Paul VI gave a new impetus to this Conciliar teaching in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by encouraging the emergence of new ecclesial communities “founded on the Word and sacraments, united in the struggle for justice, for human advancement, inserted in the local community with missionary zeal.”¹⁷

The post-Conciliar period saw the birth of several new ecclesial movements, where committed Christians started living together in communities without distinction, whether they were professed religious, ordained priests, laity, married and celibate, united by a common charism inspired by the Gospel. Many of them came into existence because of the initiative of charismatic lay persons, both men and women. I would like to illustrate this through a narrative about the Focolare Movement founded by Chiara Lubich, (1920-2008) an Italian lady from Trentin North Italy.

2.5.1. The Focolare Movement

Chiara Lubich was a school teacher in her native town of Trent, which saw immense destruction in the Second World War. Her house like that of many of her neighbours was destroyed. In fact, most young people were leaving Trent to go to safer places. Chiara stayed back by choice as she felt that she could not desert her family, friends and neighbours in this hour of need. They used to escape into the safety of the woods for the night when shelling was at its height. In one such night, she shed bitter tears in desperation, thinking of this man-made disaster and its consequences, when all of a sudden, she remembered a verse from a poem of Virgil, "Love conquers all". This was the beginning of a new hope in her life.

The confirmation that God was calling her to a new form of consecration came during another moment of prayer in the Nazareth House at Loretto in 1939. While meditating on the mystery of the Annunciation there, she found herself moved to the point of crying. It was a moment of deep contemplation and union with Jesus, Mary and Joseph. She experienced there a premonition that others like her would join her into a consecrated life: but not in the traditional form of religious life, but in what she called 'a fourth option' that would see "virgins and married persons living as a Holy Family, equally dedicated but differently committed,"¹⁸ a 'Focolare,' a hearth, a home like that of Nazareth. But this does not mean that they all live under the same roof; virgins live together in single sex communities while married persons live separately in families, close to a community. She spoke to her friends about this way of life and while sharing the night shelter with other young women during bombing, they started reading the Word of God. They fell upon the passage when Jesus prays for unity before his death. "May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, so also may they be one in us"(Jn 17.21). There it was, the mission of the Focolare movement: a passion for unity.

The Focolare movement started in 1943 with commitment to unity as its special mission. In 1948, an Italian parliamentarian, Igino Giordani, joined the movement as the first married person. This is what he writes about his first encounter with her, “What she said put holiness within reach of all; it tore away the fence separating the lay world from the mystical life, and opened to public view the treasures of a castle to which only a few were admitted. She brought God close; God as Father, brother, a friend available to all.”¹⁹

The movement grew. In 1949, the first priests joined the movement. In 1962, Pope John XXIII gave official recognition to Focolare as an ecclesial movement and its statutes were approved as a new form of consecration. Chiara’s dream of a fourth form of consecrated life became a reality.

What is this fourth option of consecrated life? In Chiara’s own words,

The key word for us is unity and our approach to our brothers and sisters is to make ourselves one with them and one with the places where we live and work....Our path is like that of the family of Nazareth which was known only for its industriousness and silence. Jesus himself spent 30 years in obscurity and only 3 years in preaching, scarcely 10 per cent of his earthly life..... When it comes to contacts with non-believers, “they will be Conscious of their specific aim, which brings them into contact with non-believers who are frequently opposed to the Church and they will try to witness not only to the truth and goodness of Christianity but also through their appearance, they will be an expression of harmony.”²⁰

Focolare movement found acceptance among various denominations of Christians, believers in other religions and also among non-believers due to this inclusive vision of unity and dialogue, which is the dream of all people of goodwill beyond boundaries of nationality, religion and belief systems. In 1988, Pope John Paul II addressed their international assembly in Rome: “The charism of your movement is Vatican II interpreted with your experience in today’s world, in the life of nations.... to bring radical, evangelical love to the lives of all people throughout the world and you give witness to God who is love.”²¹

The Focolare movement has many branches all over the world. They have communities in India as well. Wherever they are, they aim at living the Gospel, “not with words but by the witness of their daily life, because, the Gospel will be better received if it is witnessed in everyday life outside the churches in the secular world, on the streets, in the factories, in the offices, in scientific laboratories and in parliaments.”²²

There are many other ecclesial movements in the Church today living the Gospel in new forms of consecration adapted to the needs of the times.

2.5.2. *The Indian Christian Ashram Movement*

I would now like to come closer home to our own culture to pay homage to the form of consecration represented by the Christian Ashram Movement in the Indian Church. In the Post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Pope John Paul II, acknowledged that despite the fact Christianity was born in the Asian continent, still in many countries of Asia the Church was seen as foreign due to its association with the colonial powers.²³

In this context, the Pope encouraged inculturation and inter religious dialogue as means to bridge the split between culture and the Gospel. He particularly exhorted the religious to adapt their life style with sensitivity to the religion and cultural heritage of the people with whom they live and whom they serve, to cooperate with followers of other religions, paying special attention to the mystical richness of these religions in a dialogue of mutuality.

I cannot think of any other movement except that of the Christian Ashram tradition within the Indian Church that answers to this challenge of inculturation of the faith. It is a new form of consecration eminently adapted to the Indian culture.

Though today, the word *ashram* is used by most religious communities to name any religious institution, it is useful to recall that in our Indian culture the word denotes a particular tradition as presented in an article by Fr. Sebastian Painadath, the Acharya of *Sameeksha Ashram* in Kalady on the banks of the Periyar River in Kerala. “The characteristics of an ashram are the following: a contemplative atmosphere conducive to spiritual pursuits (*sadhana*), a relentless quest for the Divine, an all-embracing simplicity of life style, a compassionate attitude to people, leading to a genuine hospitality to all and a vibrant harmony with nature expressed in a culture of non-violence.”

I would like to illustrate this new challenging form of consecrated life by looking at the experience of *Dharmodaya Sevashrama* in Bellary, North Karnataka founded by Swami Dayanand, a Franciscan Friar.

2.5.3. *The Dharmodaya Seva Ashrama*

The story of this ashram starts with *Br. Jose Malekudiyil*, an OFM student friar who had a lot of questions about the relevance of a very traditional style of religious life during his studies of philosophy. He requested his superiors

to allow him to live the life of a labourer taking a break from his studies for a while. He went to Vazhathappu, Idukki in Kerala and worked as a coolie and lived with the workers. During this period, he frequented the Marxist activists in the area. He did not feel totally at home with the Marxian dialectical method of conflict as a permanent solution to the problems of the working class. He came back for theological studies to Bangalore, where he met Jean Vanier, founder of the l'Arche International communities for the mentally challenged during a retreat. After listening very quietly to the challenging questions put to him by the young friar, Jean Vanier took him to the chapel of the friary, sat down and told him "This is where I get my answers" and advised the friar to go deeper in his quest for truth. This listening attitude of Jean Vanier had a profound impact on this young seeker.

After his ordination in 1975, he was sent to Hospet in Bellary diocese where he worked as an assistant to a Jesuit, who was the parish priest of Tungabhadra Dam parish church. It is there that one day in 1976, this young priest, while praying at the foot of the cross in the chapel had a *darshan* of Jesus. He prayed, "Lord, I do not ask you to take away my suffering but make my suffering redemptive as yours." In 1997, he asked permission from his Provincial Superior to take the name of Dayanand. He received the *kavi* (saffron) habit during a prayer service. He then, took to the roads as a *sanyasi* wearing a *rudraksha mala*, going from village to village with a *bhikshapatra*, begging for his food. He became a people's *sanyasi*. He developed an intimate knowledge of the life of the people, their miseries, their spirituality and the locally alive mystical traditions of the Hindus, Muslims, and Budhists in the region. This experience also plunged him into the heart of the Franciscan vocation of the *Poverello* (Little Poor Man) of Assisi. He too became a man of the people.

Thus, he integrated within himself his discipleship to Jesus while reclaiming his Indian identity as a child of Hindu traditions. He loyally shared his faith in Jesus while respecting the faith of other religions, praying with the people that he met on his way. Many Hindus were attracted by his simple faith and took *snanadiksha* from him in the name of Jesus.

In 1993, the Plenary Council of the Franciscan order officially encouraged inserted communities as part of Justice and Peace ministry. Swami Dayanand and another friar, who followed the example of the swami, Fr. Scaria, volunteered for this new venture. This eventually led to the foundation of the ashram in Bellary. With the approval of the Late Bishop Joseph D'Silva of Bellary, the *Dharmodaya Seva Ashram* was started in 1995 on the corridors of Bethany, the

diocesan home for elderly priests. In 1997, a simple dwelling was built first with the donations of the local people, most of them, Hindus.

Fr. Bobby, who is now the head of the ashram, followed Swami Dayanand's mendicant life style as a student of theology. In 1991, after his studies, he opted not to get ordained. He received *sanyasadiksha* from Swami Dayanand in the following manner: Bobby along with Dayanand proceeded to the nearby forests by the side of Gudiyatham road along with two other friars. They entered the flowing waters of the river Kalyana Revu at Musal Madugu in Chittoor District. Upon a request from Bobby to make him a *sadhaka* in search of truth and prayer, Swami took his hand and dipped his head in the river with a prayer, offered him *kavi* clothes, the New Testament, *rudraksha* mala and a *bhikshapatra* for begging. Bobby removed his sandals, shirt and pants and wore *kavi*. Later, he went around as a mendicant alone as guided by Dayanand. He stayed with a Sufi Master Rasul Shah Qadri, and then went into the forests at the border of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and sat in *tapas*. Thus, he started his own journey as an Indian Christian *sanyasi*.

The life in the ashram is very simple. Morning and evening *arati*, chanting, time for silent meditation, reading of the Gospel and other sacred scriptures, Eucharist celebrated in a meaningful manner so that everyone can assist in it with genuine participation without anything shocking or offensive to the faith of other religions, simple vegetarian meals, manual labour, *satsang*, instructive sessions of yoga and meditation in nature, are part of the daily life of the ashram. People come to the ashram constantly: seekers of spiritual life, the sick and the poor to find shelter and renewal.

Today, we have at least 80 odd ashrams affiliated to the All India Ashram *Aikiya* movement. Entering into a respectful dialogue of life with people of various faiths in our land, Christian ashrams hold out to us the challenge of living as followers of Jesus in harmony with our own cultural roots.

PART 3. POINTERS TO THE FUTURE

It is time to bring together some learning from the above narratives so that we may engage in a dialogue between the older religious Institutes and these new evangelical families as recommended by *Vita Consecrata*. Though each of these new forms of consecration has their own distinctive particularities, we also notice some similarities when we look at them from a comparative perspective. I would like to mention some of them:

- 1) There is a paradigm shift in the understanding of the mission of consecrated life in these new evangelical families: moving away from the institutional models to an insertional thrust into the midst of the secular world, into a sharing of life with the masses. This is in connivance with the insistent message of Pope Francis to the religious: “Consecrated life is prophesy. God asks us to fly out from the nests to be sent to the frontiers of the world, avoiding the temptation to domesticate them. This is the most concrete way of imitating the Lord.”²⁵ What shall we do with this solicitation of the Pope in the context of religious life in India, which is mostly linked to providing social services in the society through institutions?
- 2) The second common feature that many of these new religious families share is that they have drawn their inspiration from the life of Jesus at Nazareth. It is none other than Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, who said in a meditation he wrote on his silver jubilee day in 1976: Nazareth has a permanent message for the Church. The New Testament does not begin in the Temple, nor on the Holy Mountain, but in the humble home of the Virgin, in the home of a worker, in one of the forgotten places of the Galilee of the pagans ‘from which no one expected anything good. It is only from that, that the Church will find a new beginning and healing. It will never be able to provide a true response to the revolt of our century against the power of wealth if in her own heart, Nazareth is not a lived reality.’²⁶ Is there something there for an integral spirituality that does not forget that the Carpenter of Nazareth, spent 30 years in a very simple way of living, apparently useless? What is its meaning for us today in the quest for a more authentic spirituality for religious life?
- 3) These new evangelical families insist on smaller familial communities that which favour a more intimate fraternal life founded on a new vision of the Eucharist; that attachment to the sacramental presence of the Eucharist is in direct continuity with the love for the sacrament of one’s brother and sister. Love of the poor and devotion to the Eucharist are perceived as being intimately interlinked. “These words, “This is my body, this is my blood” come from the same lips that also said: “whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, you do it to me,” Charles de Foucauld wrote to his friend Louis Massignon.²⁷
- 4) Another feature that marks these new forms of consecration is the attention to the signs of the times. Renewal in religious life cannot come from clinging on to historical traditions and practices that have proved their value in the

past but become obstacles in today's context. *Perfectae Caritatis* speaks in the same breath "of a return to the founding charism" while "listening to the signs of the times."

Are we not invited to face the challenge of continuity and change with creativity instead of clinging on to a globalised lifestyle as religious, largely dependent on western models of Christianity in dress, in liturgy, in spirituality and apostolate?

CONCLUSION

I have sketched some outlines of the new forms of consecration in the evolving evangelical families that are springing up in the Church today. Sketches have to wait for the completion of the final painting: many more new evangelical families may emerge in the Church from the hands of the Divine Artist, the Spirit of Christ animating the Church from within.

Endnotes

¹*Vita Consecrata*, 2.

²*Signum Fraternitatis*, 62.

³*Lumen Gentium* 1.1.

⁴*Ibid.*, 1.2.

⁵*Ibid.*, 2.9; 2.10.

⁶JesudasThangasamy, *History of the Church*, (Nagarcoil: Nanjil Publications, 1993), 440.

⁷Jean Francois Six, (ed). *The Spiritual Autobiography of Charles de Foucauld*, (New York: The Word Among us Press, 2003), 188.

⁸Annie of Jesus, *Charles de Foucauld* (London: New City, 2004), 74.

⁹Magdeleine, *Following Br. Charles of Jesus, The Universal Brother*, (Tre Fontane, Rome: n.p., 1946), 18. For private circulation only. It is also published as an article titled "Call of the Desert" in *La Vie Spirituelle* (269: 85 – 86), 1946.

¹⁰Gleaners of the Church, *She went and began to Glean* (Rome: 1980), 27-28. For private circulation only.

¹¹*PerfectaeCaritatis*, 11.

¹²Gleaners of the Church, 10-11.

¹³*Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁷*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 58.

¹⁸Chiara Lubich, *A Life for Unity*, (Mumbai: Mariapolis Trust, 1933), 42.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 56

²⁰*Ibid.*, 26-27

²¹*Observatore Romano* dated Aug 21, 5,1997.

²²Chiara, 6.

²³*Ecclesia in Asia*,9.

²⁴Article on Ashrams by Sebastian Painadath SJin website: [www. Ashram Aikiya.com](http://www.AshramAikiya.com))

²⁵*New leader*, Jan 2014, vol.127, 8.

²⁶Joseph Ratzinger, *God of Jesus Christ. Communio* (Fayard: Paris, 1976),

²⁷Annie of Jesis, *Charles de Foucauld*, 87.

SCENARIOS AND LANGUAGE OF A “NEW EVANGELIZATION”

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

In the Old Testament there are two types of prophets: the prophets of doom and the prophets of grace. The prophet of grace receives the name of ‘Mebasser’ (messenger of Good News). Chapters 40, 52 and 61 of Isaiah tell us about this prophet, who climbs a high mountain to console the people and whose feet are lovely on the mountain; he is also the one the Spirit has anointed to proclaim good news to the poor. Jesus identified himself with this prophetic model. He proclaimed on the mountain the Beatitudes of the Kingdom (Mt 5) and he presented himself in the synagogue of Nazareth as Mebasser of the poor. The Hebrew term “Mebasser” was translated into Greek with the word *Evangelion* (evangelize, evangelizer).

Consecrated life is called in this time to participate in the ‘New Evangelization’. Our main task is explained in this conference: “To announce our God”, to become evangelical witnesses of our God” in the midst of our post-modern and global societies.

We are called to perform a new evangelization, not to maintain the old one. A new paradigm has to be born. An old paradigm has to finish. We are launched towards new frontiers of geographical, social and cultural settings¹.

The icon of an old evangelization is Zacharias, the priest and father of John the Baptist. He was too traditional to welcome newness. The icons of a new evangelization are the two women who collaborated with the Spirit in the birth of a new presence of God in the midst of us: Elizabeth and Mary.

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The purpose of this paper is to invite you to enter into the new evangelization as witnesses of God in our times. My reflection will be divided into three parts: (a) Announcing God: The Spirit comes to our aid; (b) A God, who is good news to our people, our societies; (c) New evangelization-new spirituality; when the newness changes us.

1. ANNOUNCING GOD: “THE SPIRIT COMES TO OUR AID”

To enter into a new process of evangelization it is very difficult for us. Like de Mother of Jesus we can ask ourselves: And how will this be?

1.1. The Spirit as the Main Actor of the “New Evangelization”

The new evangelization requires of us, first of all, a “pastoral conversion.” That means: it is not enough in mere individual conversion or a communitarian conversion; the Church needs a conversion in the field of Pastoral Mission: new methods, new structures, new attitudes or a new paradigm of Mission. This is the content of the Proposal 22 of the Synod to the Pope: “Growth means change and change involves risk, stepping from the known to the unknown.”²

The new evangelization gives us a new awareness: we are not the main actors, but the Holy Spirit³:

Conversion in the Church, just like evangelization, does not come about primarily through us poor mortals, but rather through the Spirit of the Lord... It is not we who are to conduct the work of evangelization, but God: “The first word, the true initiative, the true activity comes from God and only by inserting ourselves in to the divine initiative, only by begging this divine initiative, will we too be able to become — with him and in him — evangelizers... We are confident in the inspiration and strength of the Spirit, who will teach us what we are to say and what we are to do even in the most difficult moments.”⁴

That the leading character in mission is the Holy Spirit has often been forgotten. Today it is also true that: ‘The spirit gives witness!’ (Rom 8: 14-16), the Spirit speaks through the prophets, the Spirit is the primary actor of mission. We are secondary or part actors.⁵

This great principal actor, which is the Spirit, does not enter the stage only at Pentecost. Jointly with the Logos, he was the protagonist at the initial Big Bang of creation, he has been protagonist in the whole evolutionary process; he will bring it to its culmination and making everything inter-connected, creating relationships in the universe.⁶ With reason we invoke him ‘Come Creator Spirit’

or Spirit of life." The Holy Spirit has revealed his or her definitive mission at the Pentecost over Mary in her virginal conception and over Jesus in his baptism at Jordan; and afterwards at Pentecost over the Church or the Assembly of the apostles and women disciples.

In his first paschal sermon, Peter spoke to the Jews and the inhabitants of Jerusalem in these terms:

But this is what was spoken about through the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days, it will be,' God says, 'that I will pour out my Spirit on all people, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy... So then, exalted to the right hand of God, and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, he has poured out what you both see and hear (Acts 2:16-18.33).

What is described here is a world too new for us (Jean-Luc Marion), so new and un-familiar that, penetrating into it, we have to learn everything from it. None of the previous categories fit. Referring to Easter, then in 1916, the poet W.B. Yeats wrote: "Everything has changed, totally changed, a terrible beauty has been born."

St. Peter, on that day of Pentecost, has experienced that the Spirit had descended not only on those in the Cenacle (Upper Room) but also on Israel ('your sons and daughters, your youth and old people, my servants); and also on those who at that time, coming from many places, were visiting Jerusalem: 'Partians, Medians, Elemites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Capadocia' (Acts 2: 5). 'They were filled with wonder because each one heard them speak and proclaim in their own language of the marvels of God' (Acts 2: 7, 11-12).⁷

More still the expression 'all flesh'; points to an outpouring of the Spirit on the life of the planet, as the great theologian Jürgen Moltmann points out. It makes real that which the Book of Wisdom (1:7) says: "The Spirit of the Lord fills the earth."⁸

Following this experience of Pentecost, the Church undergoes in herself the action of the Spirit of Jesus and of the Father ('the power that comes from on high' Lk 1: 35),⁹ when it proclaims and reveals the Mystery hidden in God¹⁰ with marvellous words and deeds, when one knows through him to be sent to new territories and peoples, when one feels empowered with the prophetic gift¹¹ and protected in persecution (Lk 12: 11).

The Church becomes today a living instrument of the Spirit in order to proclaim and reveal the Mystery of God.

1.2. Religious as Collaborators of the Spirit

If the Spirit of the Lord fills the earth, we must not think that we have a monopoly on it. It is important to discern and adore his presence in ‘the others’. Respect for the Spirit, present everywhere, converts our proclamation into dialogue.¹² In authentic dialogue everybody listens, everybody communicates and is listened to. Inter-religious dialogue takes seriously the beliefs and doctrines of the other. This way of performing mission is called *missio inter-gentes*, not only *ad gentes*.

Through its permanent mission the Spirit unifies and reconciles people, sums up everything in Christ, forms the Body of Christ which is the Church.

The protagonism of the Spirit never disqualifies us, neither us, the Church, nor humanity, nor the energy of the cosmos. The Spirit generously spreads his gifts, his charisms and counts on the most spectacular collaboration that we can imagine: both the explicit collaboration of the Church and the implicit one of humanity and of the cosmos. The mission of the Spirit makes us Church; it also makes us humanity; it makes us world and cosmos.¹³

Therefore, when we speak of announcing God, we are humble collaborators with the Spirit: “The Spirit unites himself to our spirit to give witness” (Rom 8, 15-16).

1.3. An Existential Synthesis: Thomas Merton and Kirsteen Kim

Thomas Merton in his book, *Seeds of Contemplation*, highlights that the main actor in our discovery of God is God himself:

The only One Who can teach me to find God is God, Himself, Alone . . . Our discovery of God is, in a way, God’s discovery of us. We cannot go to heaven to find Him because we have no way of knowing where heaven is or what it is. He comes down from heaven and finds us. He looks at us from the depths of His own infinite actuality, which is everywhere, and His seeing us gives us a new being and a new mind in which we also discover Him. We only know Him in so far as we are known by Him, and our contemplation of Him is a participation in His contemplation of Himself. We become contemplatives when God discovers Himself in us.¹⁴

Those who seek God discover in themselves a ‘harvest of miracles’ because in every event and every moment there have been planted in them the Life of God.

To those who seek God, it is proclaimed that God loves them through nature, the atmospheric phenomena.¹⁵ Those who love God possess and enjoy all things and find in each one of them, in what they see, in what they hear and touch, that nothing is unclean; everything becomes holy and is the seed of contemplation and heaven.¹⁶ How beautiful is the sentence of a sufi Muslim mystic, "If you take two steps towards God, God runs to you!"¹⁷

Merton also tells us that, *those who do not seek God*, neither love him, encounter a contradictory world, things that question them, and that keep them away from God. Although they reflect heaven, they produce the anguish of hell; those who do not seek God, instead of adoring him, adore themselves, which is 'to adore nothingness and the adoration of nothingness is hell.'¹⁸

In respect of the Holy Spirit, Thomas Merton says sublime things: It is he who teaches us who is Christ and who transforms us in Him,¹⁹ who transforms us into Church which is the total Christ, his body.²⁰ The Abba and Risen Christ are like the heart that pumps and spreads the blood of the Spirit to all parts and to members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church. But he adds: we also convert ourselves into new blood, pumped through the body of humanity 'to do the work of Christ and fulfil the will of the Father.'²¹ The blood of the Spirit is pumped to the whole body of humanity including the cosmic body.

Kirsteen Kim, Professor of Theology and World Christianity in Leeds Trinity University, invites us to become aware of how the mission of the Spirit overcomes the limits of the Church. "The *missio Dei* is spread everywhere, it crosses borders and is carried forward throughout the world by the wind of the Spirit."²²

This is the panorama of the evangelizing mission and proclamation, which is presented to us who form part of the consecrated life. Our charisms are voices and instruments of a grand orchestra. We are not the only ones who proclaim the presence and action of God. But yes it falls on us to interpret a beautiful score that says: 'The Spirit of God is upon me, it has anointed me and it has sent me to proclaim the good news to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, a year of grace in the Lord.' We want to be a consecrated life, directed by the Spirit and not by leaders who impose on us their own ideas and convert us into a sect. The Spirit makes us a 'Catholic' consecrated life, that is to say, holistic, with a passion for all and integrated into the Church and into humanity and into nature.

2. THE GOD WE ANNOUNCE: GOOD NEWS FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE XXI CENTURY

We will now take a second step in our reflection: How to announce God in our time? How is it to be done, what content, what language? Too optimistic is *Vita Consecrata*, when it tells us that our religious life should become “an eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world.”²³

2.1. How to Announce God in our Time?

Modern culture, highly intellectualized by reason and science, has constructed a powerful criticism of religion.²⁴ From this there has grown a culture of secularized masses at the margin of Christianity.²⁵ To announce God to our contemporaries, especially to the new generations, is a hard question. In his book, *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins has presented a battery of questions against the faith in God, formulated from the present culture and from science, to which it is not easy to answer: Why is there, almost certainly, no God?²⁶ If there is no God, why be good?²⁷ What’s wrong with religion? Why be so hostile?²⁸ Atheism is a much needed gap?²⁹

Many of us have already experienced it: how difficult it is to proclaim God to the students in our schools and colleges, to some of the sick in our hospitals, to the marginalized that come to our centres, or even people of our own families or circle of friends. Those who find God in everything do not help in this mission of announcing God in our time; their image of God is too flexible; it seems that for them God is a word that can be given the meaning we like: ‘If you want to say that ‘God is energy’, then you can find God in a lump of coal.’³⁰

To proclaim God today implies, above all, knowing what human beings think about him: what are their doubts, their difficulties at the moment of receiving the proclamation. If Jesus made himself Jewish with the Jews and Paul Greek with the Greeks, do we not have to make ourselves women and men of our time to be able to proclaim our message? Our proclamation of God becomes extremely weak when what we proclaim does not interest, does not stimulate, does not inspire, does not transform our contemporaries.

2.2. Paradigm for the Era of Science

Humanity today has a lot of knowledge about the origin of the universe, about what it is made of, of life, evolution, human beings... The scientific data are so complex, so numerous that today science is more hypothetical than ever. There exists the growing conviction that we are in an ‘open world’ (Karl Popper), in a

world of permanent creativity. The final enigma of the universe worries us and in the background we feel alone, disconsolate by the drama and enigma.

When reason asks about God, it cannot respond honestly of its openness but rather of its hiddenness. There are those who, from a fideistic and naive attitude, think that science 'stretches the mind' and that faith opens it. It is said with some frequency in the Gospels that Jesus 'opened the minds of the disciples that they would understand'. I dare to say that science also opens the mind through its investigation. And we should not avoid scientific knowledge with the excuse that faith is a superior understanding. We have to take risks to keep open and interested in the new understandings that are offered to us each day. Only from this enculturation can we re-interpret the experience of God and proclaim it.

We must be thankful to the many theologians, thinkers and artists for their attempts to tell us about God within this new cultural paradigm, this scientific Era. We must not discount their theories which are always provisional. They make God accessible in our time, more than we can imagine. We are convinced that the Book of Creation and the Book of Revelation have the same author. They both proclaim God to us.³¹

I want to thank Javier Montserrat, a Jesuit and professor at the University of Madrid for having condensed into a great volume of 750 pages everything in an attempt to reconcile reason and faith. This work is entitled, *Towards a New Council, the Paradigm of Modernity in the Era of Science*. In it, he concludes that 'the new Council, the great Council required for our time and one of the most important in history, must introduce to the Church in the modern age, its invitation, its plan and its content to respond to the logic of history after twenty centuries in the old paradigm.'³²

2.3. A Current Way to Speak of God and His Covenant

Some years ago, several authors proposed a new theological method what they called 'narrative theology'. Others spoke about theological "storytelling."³³ Storytelling is a language that everybody is able to understand and follow. It can be the language of proclamation. There are more and more theologians who are aware of the horizons that narrative theology opens up to evangelization in our time.

At a time dominated by images and by the preponderance of the mass media like television, the model of Christ continues to be significant and evocative. He points us towards the everyday experience in the parables: "He told them many things in parables He did not speak to them without a parable" (Mt 13: 3.34).

In his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, Jesus did not speak to the minds of the people with a vague, abstract or ethereal language. Rather he won over the people by starting from where they were standing, so as to lead them, through the daily events, to the revelation of the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, the scene recalled by John becomes enormously significant: “Some wanted to arrest him but nobody dared to lay their hands on him. The guards returned. The high priests and Pharisees asked them: Why have you not brought him? They replied, ‘Nobody has ever spoken like this man’ (Jn 7: 44-46).

What our serious theological works don’t achieve are sometimes achieved by other writers that make the mystery more accessible in their stories. A recent example: *The Life of Pi* by Yan Martel, a modern bestseller, begins with these words: “I have a story that will make you believe in God... I listened to that tape that I agreed with Mr. Adirubasamy that this was a story to make you believe in God.”³⁴

Another example is the bestseller of William Paul Young, *The Shack* which has the subtitle of “Where tragedy meets eternity.” In a world where religion appears to be ever more irrelevant, *The Shack* proposes the age old question: Where is God in a world full of suffering?³⁵ The answer is the story of a man broken by suffering who is allowed to spend a weekend in a shack in the depths of a forest. In it he encounters three mysterious persons who help him see ‘another dimension’ of reality: Papa, Jesus and Sarayu, that is to say the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Spirit, who in the novel is given the name Sarayu, present in a unique form the persons of the Holy Trinity:

I-she opened her hands to include Jesus and Papa, I am a verb. I am that I am. I will be who I will be. I am a verb. I am alive, dynamic, ever active, and moving. I am a being verb. And as my very essence is a verb, I am more attuned to verbs than nouns. Verb such as “confessing”, “repenting”, “living”, “loving”, “responding”, “growing”, “reaping”, “changing” “sowing”, “running”, “dancing”, “singing” and on and on. Humans, on the other hand, have a knack for taking a verb that is alive and full of grace and turning it into a dead noun or principle that reeks of rules: something growing and alive dies.... Verbs are what makes the universe alive.³⁶

The relationship between the persons of the Trinity (the famous ‘perichoresis’ of the theologians and mystics³⁷) are described in a sympathetic way by Mack, the hero of the novel: “He never had seen three people share with each other such

simplicity and beauty. Each seemed more aware of the others than of themselves... I love the way that you do it... It's certainly not how I expected God to be."³⁸

Finally, Jesus expresses a desire, very important for humans: so that they too can enter into the Covenant circle: "We want you to join us in our circle of relationship. I don't want slaves to my will; I want brothers and sisters who will share life with me."³⁹

Our service in announcing God is, above all, to transmit the Word of God with our own charismatic tonality; and always with conviction, credibility and passion. We want to offer the Word of God after so many experiences of the 'silence of God'.

We do not communicate the message of the Word as 'soloists' but as a 'symphonic choir,' in community with ourselves, in communion with the Church, in solidarity and friendship with all men and women of good will.

3. THE TRAITS OF THIS NEW EVANGELIZING SPIRITUALITY

3.1. Faith and the Charismatic Art of Dying

Consecrated life is having, above all in Europe, a progressive and growing experience of death. Everything is regrouping. Our health and educational institutions are now in other hands although we make a special effort that they do not lose their Christian and charismatic inspiration. Our life is finishing and few are following us. The final Provincial Chapters are being celebrated because our provinces are dying in the re-organization. We are seeing that many religious are retiring like Benedict XVI, because they have no strength left. Given this realistic panorama, we ask ourselves: can the present consecrated life, in Europe, involve itself in the new evangelization, announcing God to our contemporaries? Can it be done inculturating its proclamation in the new paradigm of the scientific era? Can we recover in the present consecrated life that dream of Pentecost 'your young men will have dreams, your old men and women will prophesise'?"

Death, where is your victory?, says St. Paul. When one dies in the Lord, in the faith, one is not defeated, but conquers death. Our institutes decrease on earth but increase in heaven. When we close a house, a school, a hospital, an apostolic position, we ought not feel ourselves defeated but rather live that reality with Jesus on the cross: *Consummatum est!* Abba, into your hands I commend my life.

And that is the ultimate proclamation. Here, above all, there is a God to proclaim and a God in whom to hope. Here is where we demonstrate the coherence between the faith that we proclaim and the faith we live. The time

is coming to return to God what he has given to us. That it be a sweet smelling offering and not a defeat through clenched teeth. “Faith never knows where it is being led. But it knows and loves the One who is leading” (Oswald Chambers).⁴⁰

The new generations of consecrated life ought not to forget either that systems have the autopoietic capacity to transform and reorganize themselves and be reborn. I have called it the ‘autopoietic capacity of the charism.’⁴¹

3.2. A New Humility

Past glories have no value for us, nor memories of better times. Everything has its moment. And ours is a time for humility, for smallness. When pride infiltrates into the heart of the consecrated life, the proclamation of the Gospel becomes hypocrisy and intolerance. We are turning from the language of ‘shared mission with the laity’ to the language of being volunteers in the projects that they lead. The consecrated life presents itself as a humble servant in someone else’s house, like Mary in the house of Zachariah and Elizabeth. It is there he proclaims, with the gesture of humble service to God.

3.3. Closeness to the Poor: ‘Mutual’ Proclamation of the Gospel

We should not forget that the Spirit sends us to evangelize the poor but to be evangelized by them as well. They are also our teachers, our masters, our evangelizers and as such have to occupy in our communities a privileged place, a position that excludes nobody. Their presence has the capacity to change people more than a talk, teach fidelity, help to understand the fragility of life, demand prayer, lead to Christ. The evangelization is authentic when it has the face of the poor⁷. Closeness to the poor is, before anything else, a spiritual act.

3.4. Charity that Proclaims the Living Presence of God in a World of Suffering and Sickness

When a human being suffers horribly, one asks: Where is God?⁴² The proclamation of God in the middle of suffering is done from silence, prayer of petition, sacramental contact, the chain of love, compassion: “Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal.”⁴³ Jesus cried on seeing the suffering of others. When there are no words, actions say it all: that is the diaconia of charity, that which makes us credible.

Jesus cried on seeing the suffering of others. Benedict XVI also cried when he met victims of paedophilia. “Faith acts in charity” (Gal 5:6). But we do not have to resign ourselves to suffering: we have to defeat it. In other times the Christian mission in relation to the sick had the great objective of teaching them

and accompanying them with the *arsmoriendi!*.⁴⁴ Today what challenges us is how to accompany them in the *arscurandi*. The charity of Jesus did not have borders, it was missionary, inclusive, open to dialogue.⁴⁵

3.5. From Solitude and Sharing

To proclaim God with credibility we need to visit solitude and avoid anxiety. We are not angel messengers of God when our lives are filled with activity and strangled by attachments, when we try to attract everyone to non-stop activity, filled like ours, when we are promoters of useless projects.⁴⁶

We discover solitude when we are hungry and thirsty, have regrets, poverty or desire, when we go beyond all the horizons, without direction on where to move, in a territory whose centre is everywhere. It is in such solitude where the deepest activities have their beginning.⁴⁷ The love of Christ and the Spirit is transmitted through each one of us to others. "Thus," says Thomas Merton, "all of us change ourselves into avenues and windows through which God shines his radiance to the interior of his own house."

CONCLUSION: "IF SOMETHING MATTERS, EVERYTHING MATTERS"

I have arrived at the end of my reflection how to become "new evangelizer" in new scenarios and with a new language and its implication for the consecrated life. At the beginning we made reference to the icon of Zacharias and the icon of the two women, Elizabeth and Mary: one, the icon of disbelief; the other, the icon of faith in the new.

In Mary and Elizabeth, we have a precious inter-generational dialogue. Both women proclaim the novelty of God, collaborate with the Spirit in a new Genesis. They believed and thus they spoke! The two were changed into 'mebasseret' prophets. The two are shown filled with happiness; they shared the beatitudes and transmitted their joy to the people. They also accompanied Zacharias in his crisis. Finally, Zacharias recovered his faith, his voice and with a magnificent song: the Benedictus.

The consecrated life wants to be a story inspired by these two icons. It wants to contribute to the presentation of God in a new period of the world. The Holy Spirit is the principal actor and among the secondary actors and actresses we are counted in the cast.

In *The Shack*, Mack asks the Holy Spirit: "Let me ask you something. Is what I do back home important? Does it matter? ... Sarayu interrupted him: "Mack, if

anything matters then everything matters. Because you are important everything you do is important. Every time you forgive, the universe changes; every time you reach out and touch a heart or a life, the world changes; with every kindness and service, seen or unseen, my purposes are accomplished and nothing will ever be the same again.”⁴⁸

Endnotes

¹The Synod asks Religious Orders and Congregations to be fully available to go to the geographical, social and cultural frontiers of evangelization. The Synod invites religious to move toward the new aeropaghi of mission”: XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *The new evangelisation for the transmission of the Christian Faith, Final List of Propositions*, n. 50.

²Wm. Paul Young, *The Shack: Chapter 8: A Breakfast of Champions*, Windblown Media, Newbury Park, 2007.

³“The principal agent of evangelization is the Holy Spirit, who opens hearts and converts them to God. The experience of encountering the Lord Jesus, made possible by the Spirit, which introduces one into the Trinitarian life” (*Proposition*, 36). “The sacrament of Confirmation in the New Evangelisation” states: “All the Christian faithful are entrusted with the mission to evangelize, due to the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Here the faithful are sealed by the anointing of the Holy Spirit and are called to participate in the mystery of Pentecost. Through Confirmation, all the baptized receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit, his charisms, and the power to give witness to the Gospel openly and with courage.” (*Proposition* 37). “The Trinity... then arouses through the grace of the Holy Spirit the power to evangelize and to give witness to the Word of God with enthusiasm and courage” (*Proposition*, 4).

⁴*Message of the XIII Synod*, nn. 5.6

⁵Cf. Amos Yong, *A P (new) matological Paradigm for Christian Mission in a Religiously Plural World*, en “Missiology: An Internation Review”, 33 (2005),175-191; Id., *Spirit bears witness: Pneumatology, Truth and the Religions*, en “Scottish Journal of Theology”, 57 (2004), 1-25; Jürgen Moltmann, *El Espíritu de la Vida: unapneumatología integral*, Sigueme, Salamanca 1998; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis, Maryknoll, 1991,10; Cf. CornelisBennema, *Spirit and Mission in the Bible: toward a dialogue between biblical studies and Missiology*, en “Trinity Journal” 32 (2011), 237-258; Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mision of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, Intervarsity, Downers Grove, 2006; Susan Smith, *The Holy Spirit and Mission in some contemporary Theologies of Mission*, en “Mission Studies” 18 (2001),87-114.

⁶Cf. Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A theology of the Creator Spirit*, Orbis Books, New York, 2004,8-15.

⁷Cf. Amos Yong, *The Spirit poured out on all Flesh: world Pentecostalism and the reconstruction of Christian Theology in the 21st Century*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2005, & 4,3.3.

⁸Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: a new theology of creation and the Spirit of God*, Fortress Pblications, Ausgburg, 1993.

⁹“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.” (Act 1:8).

¹⁰Cf. Act 2: 14-36; 4:8.31; 5:32; 6:5.10; 7:55; 13:9-12.

¹¹Cf. Hech 8,29; 39-40; 10, 19-20; 11,12: 13,2-4; 15,28; 16,6-7; 19,21; 20, 22-23.28; 21, 4.11.

¹²Cf. William R. Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1993.

¹³Cf. John Bolt – Richard A. Müller, *Does the Church today need a new “mission paradigm”?*, in “Calvin Theological Journal” 31 (1996),196-208; Myk Habets, *The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology*, Pickwick, Eugene, 2010.

¹⁴Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, New Directions Paperbook, New York 2007, 36. 41.

¹⁵“For it is God’s love that warms me in the sun and God’s love that sends the cold rain. It is God’s love that feeds me in the bread I eat and God that feeds me also by hunger and fasting. It is the love of God that sends the winter days when I am cold and sick, and the hot summer when I labor and my clothes are full of sweat: but it is God, who breathes on me with light winds off the river and in the breezes out of the wood. His love spreads the shade of the sycamore over my head and sends the water-boy along the edge of the wheat field with a bucket from the spring, while the laborers are resting and the mules stand under the tree. It is God’s love that speaks to me in the birds and streams; but also behind the clamor of the city God speaks to me in His judgments, and all these things are seeds sent to me from His will”: Thomas Merton, *o.c.*, 17.

¹⁶Thomas Merton, *o.c.*, 18.

¹⁷Yan Martel, *Life of Pi*, A Harvest Book/Harcourt In., New York 2001, 31

¹⁸“For until we love God perfectly His world is full of contradiction. The things He has created attract us to Him and yet keep us away from Him. They draw us on and they stop us dead. We find Him in them to some extent and then we don’t find Him in them at all. Just when we think we have discovered some joy in them, the joy turns into sorrow; and just when they are beginning to please us the pleasure turns into pain. In all created things we, who do not yet perfectly love God, can find somethings that reflects the fulfilment of heaven and something that reflects the anguish of hell... But to worship our false selves is to worship nothing. And the worship of nothing is hell”: Thomas Merton, *o.c.*, 25-26.

¹⁹Cf. Thomas Merton, *o.c.*, 157.

²⁰“The Holy Ghost, Who is the life of this One Body dwells in the whole Body and in every one of the members so that the whole Christ is Christ and each individual is Christ”: Thomas Merton, *o.c.*, 157.

²¹“It is the Spirit of God that must teach us Who Christ is and form Christ in us and transform us into other Christs. After all, transformation into Christ is not just an individual affair: there is only one Christ, not many. He is not divided. And for me to become Christ is to enter into the Life of the Whole Christ, the Mystical Body made up of the Head and the members, Christ and all who are incorporated in Him by His Spirit”. Thomas Merton, *o.c.*, 156-157; cf. also, 165-166.

²²K. KIM, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission*, Epworth Press, London, 2009, 284.

²³Too optimistic seems to me “Vita Consecrata”, when it states: “the first duty of the consecrated life is to make visible the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called. They bear witness to these marvels not so much in words as by the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world. To people’s astonishment they respond by proclaiming the wonders of grace accomplished by the Lord in those whom he loves... The consecrated life thus becomes one of the tangible seals which the Trinity impresses upon history, so that people can sense with longing the attraction of divine beauty.” (VC, 20).

²⁴Cf. Richard Dawkins, *The God delusion*, Bantan Press, London, 2006: «When a person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity, When many people suffer from a delusion it is called Religion”, 14.

²⁵“It was my first clue that atheists are my brothers and sisters of a different faith, and every word they speak speaks of faith, Like me, they go as far as the legs of reason will carry them – and they leap”: Yan Martel, *The Life of Pi*, 16.

²⁶Richard Dawkins, *The God delusion*, 111-160.

²⁷Richard Dawkins, *The God delusion*, 226-234.

²⁸Richard Dawkins, *The God delusion*, 279-307.

²⁹Richard Dawkins, *The God delusion*, 345-374.

³⁰Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a final theory: The Scientist’s Search for the Ultimate Laws of Nature*, Pantheon Books, 1992, 244.

³¹“When they allow themselves to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, consecrated persons can broaden the horizons of narrow human aspirations and at the same time understand more deeply people and their life stories, going beyond the most obvious but often superficial aspects. Countless challenges are today emerging in the world of ideas, in new areas as well as those in which the consecrated life has traditionally been present. There is an urgent need to maintain fruitful contacts with all cultural realities, with a watchful and critical attitude, but also with confident attention to those who face the particular difficulties of intellectual work, especially when, in response to the unprecedented problems of our times, new efforts of analysis and synthesis have to be attempted. A serious and effective evangelization of these new areas where culture is developed and transmitted cannot take place without active cooperation with the laity involved in them”. (VC, 98)”.

³²J. Montserrat, *Hacia el Nuevo Concilio: el paradigma de la modernidad en la Era de la Ciencia* (contraportada).

³³Cf. Christian Salmon, *Storytelling. Bewitching the modern mind*, 2010; Salmon unveils the workings of a “storytelling machine” more effective and insidious as a means of oppression than anything dreamed up by Orwell. The “reality-based community”—to use a phrase coined by an aide to George W. Bush—is now regularly outmanoeuvred by public relations gurus and political advisers, as they construct story arcs for a population that has come to expect them; cf. Boria, Sax, *Storytelling and the ‘Information Overload*, en “On the Horizon”, 14 (2006),165-170; Denning, Stephen, *Telling Tales*, en “Harvard Business Review”, 82 (2004),122-129; Forster, Nick, *The Role of Story-Telling in Organizational Leadership*, en “Leadership Organization Development Journal” 20 (1199).11-17; Gargiulo, Terrence L, *The Strategic use of Stories in Organizational Communication and Learning*, M.E. Sharpe, Nueva York, 2005; Guber, Peter, *The Four Truths of the Storyteller. (Cover Story)*, en “Harvard Business Review”, 85 (2007),

52-59; Silverman, Lori L., *There are Five Sides to Every Story*, en "Communication World" 24 (2007), 38-41.

³⁴Yann Martel, *The Life of Pi*, Harcourt, 2001, 9-10.

³⁵Wm. Paul Young, *The Shack*, Windblown Media, Newbury Park, 2007.

³⁶Wm. Paul Young, *o.c.*, 116.

³⁷Dios en su Trinidad de relaciones subsistentes distain finitamente de todasombra de egoísmo. Pues el Dios uno no subsisteaparte y solo en suunidad: subsistecomo Padre, como Hijo y como Espíritu Santo... Las personas no son independiente sniestánsolas. Son Uno y, sin embargo, cadauna existe-paralasostras... En el Padre el infinito Amor de Dios estásiempre empezando y en el Hijoessiemprepleno y en el Espíritu Santo es perfecto y nuncacesa de descansar en sueternafuente... No puedehaberegoísmo en Dios, porque los tresYoes de Dios son tresrelaciones subsistentes de generosidad, rebosantes y superabundantes en gozo en el don de su Vida": Thomas Merton, *o.c.*, 63-64.

³⁸Wm. Paul Young, *o.c.*, 68.

³⁹Wm. Paul Young, *o.c.*, 82.

⁴⁰Wm. Paul Young, *o.c.*, 135.

⁴¹Cf. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, *Arsmoriendicharismatica y la capacidadautopoiéticadel-carisma: un liderazgointeligentepara los desafiosactuales*, en Jesús María Alday (ed), *Un futuropara la vidaconsagrada*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid, 2012, 159-168.

⁴²"When I was your age, I lived in bed, racked with polio. I asked myself every day, 'Where is God? Where is God? Where is God? God never came. It wasn't God who saved me – it was medicine. Reason is my prophet and it tells me that as a watch stopo, so we die. It's the end. If the watch doesn't work properly, it must be fixed here and now by us. One day we will take hold of the means of production and there will be justice on earth" (Kumar)... This was all a bit much for me. I said nothing. I was more afraid that in a few words thrown out he might destroy something I loved. What if his words had the effect of polio on me? What a terrible disease that must be if it could kill God in a man": Yan Martel, *The life of Pi*, 16.

⁴³Wm. Paul Young, *o.c.*, 131.

⁴⁴Cf. Ivonne Maria Werner, *Arsmoriendi i kampenomdetgodasamhället*, Almqvistamd Wiksell, 2004.

⁴⁵Cf. Heinrich Pompey, *Die Diakonie des Glaubens, Hoffens und LiebensalsAusgangspunkt der Evangelisation*, en "Lebendige Zeugnis" 61 (2006), 185-200.

⁴⁶"They are great promoters of useless work. They love to organize meetings and banquets and conferences and lectures. They print circulars, write letters, talk for hours on the telephone in order that they may gather a hundred people together in a large room where they will all fill the air with smoke and make a great deal of noise and roar at one another and clap their hands and stagger home at las patting one another on the back with assurance that they have all done great things to spread the Kingdom of God""": Thomas Merton, *o.c.*, 83.

⁴⁷Thomas Merton, *o.c.*, 74.

⁴⁸Wm. Paul Young, *o.c.*, 133.



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