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EDITORIAL

The Year of Faith is intended to “contribute to a renewed conversion to the Lord Jesus and to the rediscovery of faith, so that the members of the Church will be credible and joy-filled witnesses to the Risen Lord in the world of today—capable of leading those many people who are seeking it to the door of faith.” Thus we read in “The Door of Faith,” the Apostolic Letter of Pope Benedict XVI that declared the year of faith. This call to conversion and to the rediscovery of our faith carries a special significance for us, as consecrated men and women. Rediscovering faith involves rediscovering our commitment to the Lord and living it credibly and joyously in the changing situations of our life and world. The credibility with which we live and witness goes a long way in our role as evangelizers. Our presence, as the working document of XIII Ordinary General Assembly reads, “even if hidden from sight, is seen as a source of many spiritual blessings in the missionary mandate which the Church is presently called to fulfill, [and our] prophetic witness to the Gospel as a dynamic source of energy in the life of faith” (*The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, 114).

How do we live our consecrated life as a source of spiritual blessings and as a dynamic source of energy in the life of the Church as she is eager to lead everyone to the door of faith? This issue of the journal is an effort to help us in this regard as it brings together a series of articles to help us rejuvenate our faith and commitment. We need to respond to the call for renewal as these authors presents us with reflections from biblical, spiritual, formational, communitarian and missiological horizons.

Through a deep exegetical look at the Psalm 88, considered as an embarrassment to conventional faith, **George Panthalanickal**, explores the dark night experience of the Psalmist who descends into its abyss as he/she encounters the total unresponsiveness of Yahweh. By analyzing the experience of the supplicant in the psalm, who cries out to God even as he/she slips into total darkness, the author shows the way for the readers to incorporate the harsh reality of doubts, unanswered questions and unresolved conflicts in one’s journey of faith. The failure of God to respond, in the case of the Psalmist, does not lead to atheism or rejection of God, rather to a more intense address. Such dark moments manifest not only the faith of the believer but also his or her faithfulness to God as these moments reveal that not every crisis in human life is susceptible to immediate resolution and logistic conclusion. The author points out that there are times we are called to be partners of God in His own inexplicable absence and to believe, sometimes, involves addressing God even in His apparently unresponsive absence, just as Jesus believed and addressed the Father with that cry of God-forsakenness. A good lesson for this Year of Faith!

Jonathan K. Morse, in his article, presents Mary, the Mother of God as a prototype of religious life. In delving into the faith and devotion of Mary as revealed in the scriptures, he elucidates qualities that should characterize the vocation of a religious. He, then, proceeds to reflect on religious life in the present day context and invites religious to imbibe those qualities of Mary so that they can face up to the challenges of our times with the heart of Mary who, as the Mother in faith of all humanity, can teach us how to follow her son and grow in conformity with him.

By bringing us in touch with the Christological and biblical dimensions of spirituality, **Noble Mannarath**, wants to show that they form the two core characteristics of the spirituality of consecrated life. To help us delve into these two fundamental dimensions of this spirituality along with all their practical implications in the life and the mission of consecrated life, he presents us with a striking and stimulating model in Saint Antony Mary Claret, considered as a modern, great, apostolic missionary. By letting us go through his life and mission, the author demonstrates that the central thread that bound together the spirituality of Claret with all its dimensions was his passionate desire and persistent efforts to live a life in Christ and his constant encounter with him in the Holy Bible. One could only marvel at the prodigious creativity manifested by Claret in his efforts to evangelize and re-evangelize all sections of the Church in one of the most turbulent periods of her history. He is certainly a model to be emulated as we are in this era of new evangelization.

Becoming aware of the fragmentation and disintegration that are the hallmarks of modern human existence, **Tresa Purayidom**, speaks about the hunger for a holistic spirituality manifesting itself in different ways among all sections of people. Such a hunger, as she points out, can only be satisfied by a holistic vision of life that takes into account the interwovenness of all aspects of life-- body and soul, head and heart, and interior life and exterior concerns. She envisions spiritual growth as a journey towards wholeness of life where Christ becomes the model, and attunement to him becomes the goal of integration and thereby religious community becomes the best place for growing in wholeness. The author also speaks about religious formation as a process that must begin from an integral view of the human person and manifest the character of wholeness. To accompany such a process, she argues, we need formators who are authors of an experiential, integrated and holistic life. Only those who enjoy inner wholeness can breathe an air of harmony into their own community and to the world around.

Sharing his insights with the Major Superiors of India at the recently held General Assembly on the theme “Innovation in Consecrated Life,” at Hyderabad, **Xavier Manavath**, in his article, deals with the topic of innovation in the way consecrated men and women live their community life and organize themselves for their mission. The author shows that innovation has always been part of the heritage of consecrated life and affirms that authentic innovations are to be undertaken as expressions of

creative fidelity. This process, in turn, calls for a re-thinking of religious values and re-grounding them in new forms and styles that are more responsive to the needs of the Church and the world around them. He, then, proceeds to re-vision religious community and shows that the essence and thrust of such a community is to fuel the charism of the founder, not only by translating but also by inculturating it in continuous dialogue with the times and situations so as to make it more responsive to the calls of the Spirit. The author finally brings out a series of implications and reflective questions that are meant to open our horizons in the way we organize and live our communion in communities.

Speaking from a missiological perspective, *Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes*, presents us with the *Missio-Spiritus* as the emerging paradigm for mission in this period of epochal change. Calling us to shift from a “religious life-shaped” mission to a “mission-shaped” religious life, he shows that mission is, first of all, not an activity of the Church, but an attribute of God as mission flows from the heart of God. On the completion of the mission of the Son, God the Father and the Risen Lord sent us the Holy Spirit, marking a new stage in the *missio Dei*, namely, the “mission of the Spirit.” His main contention is that the mission of the Church and of religious life needs to be re-thought from the perspective of the *missio-spiritus* and of the current socio-political context of global change. The author wants us to move from ecclesiocentric and narrow interpretation of mission-Dei to a broader framework, capable of encountering the mega project of global transformation where Spirit is the prime mover and evangelizer. Tremendous are the implications that he outlines for religious life and mission.

Assisting the readers to reflect on their faith from a more global perspective, the present issue of the Journal introduce to them two good resource books on spirituality, titled, *Reclaiming Spirituality* and *Ages of Spiritual Life*, reviewed by Valsamma George, MSI and Deepa John, SJC, two of the graduate students of Sanyasa: Institute of Consecrated Life.

By the time, this issue of the Journal reaches you, we would be already into the New Year 2013. May that Babe of Bethlehem who would be born for us stir up our hearts and help us “devise new tools and new expressions so that the word of faith be heard more and be better understood even in the new deserts of this world,” so that we can live our “faith in the spirit of it being a divine proclamation” (*The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, 8-9). Grace-filled Christmas and Happy New Year to all our readers!

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF
(Chief Editor)

‘THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL’: FAITH AND FAITHFULNESS IN PSALM 88

George Panthalanickal, CMF

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 88 is a lament, an account of a troubled yet unbroken faith. It deals with the paradoxical dark nights in one’s spiritual experience, through which one manifests the ultimate form of faith and faithfulness to God. Sometimes one may be embarrassed to see the crisis of faith even in the lives of saints, exposing how low the spirits of good and brave men and women can at times sink. Psalm 88 is an expression of such a crisis; at the same time, it is also an instructive code, which reminds that the sorrows of one saint can be lessons to others, and that experiential teaching is exceedingly valuable.¹ The heart breaking cries of pain and agony of the saints could become a huge shade-bearing tree, under which men and women who pass through similar moments will have a soothing experience to let go of their shadows of life and live in faith and remain faithful to God. The apparent ‘desperate cry’ of Jesus on the cross in the gospel of Mark (15:34) has become a similar shade and encouragement to the believers who pass through similar dark nights in their life of faith.

In Psalm 88, one encounters the supplicant in deep spiritual tension, which remains unresolved and, probably in the psalmist’s mind, irresolvable. It portrays someone who prays and keeps on praying (v. 2; cf. 86:1),² while everything in his life seems to scream out against his belief that there is a God who delivers. His prayers (e.g. vv. 9b & 13) provide no answers but only lead to deeper questions and doubts. It reminds the reader that faith also has to incorporate the reality of doubts and its repression is not the right option. Such acceptance leads one to pour out all pain and hurt, one’s bitterness and unanswered questions to God. In this sense, Psalm 88 mirrors the experience of countless saintly men and women of faith (e.g. St. John of the Cross) across the centuries and highlights the spiritual tension with which many people have to grapple.³

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Psalm 88 is frequently described as a gloomy psalm with expressions such as: “the saddest Psalm in the whole Psalter” (Kirkpatrick); “unrelieved by a single ray of comfort or hope” (Weiser); “stark and lonely and pain-riddled” (Durham);⁴ and “the black sheep of the Psalter” (Mandolfo).⁵ Psalm 88 alone, among the 150 psalms, contains not the least glimmer of hope so as to be nicknamed as the “black sheep of the Psalter.” The opening verse describes God as “the God who saves me”, but from that point on, it seems to be down-hill all the way. The final words of the Psalm are unbearably desolate: “the darkness is my closest friend (v.18b).”⁶ Psalms of laments typically contain both statements of complaint and statements of confidence in God’s positive response. Or typically like Psalm 7, they have the supplicant’s voice and the didactic responsive voice (Ps 7:9, 12), which interrupts the laments, making sense to the suffering and adding encouragement to the supplicant and the reader. But psalm 88 begins, proceeds and ends in darkness and despair. There is no shift to praise, no explicit and visible attempt to render the supplicant’s suffering meaningful. Two notable features of this psalm are the number of terms used for the abode of the ‘dead’ and the absence of the characteristic change of tone from lament to praise and thanks giving.⁷ This Psalm is noted for the extent and severity of the complaint, which occupies virtually the whole psalm.⁸ The entire psalm could be termed as ‘a loud cry’. According to Davidson, the reader of Psalm 88 journeys with the psalmist into the “dark night of his soul,” and the darkness is deep.⁹

What makes this psalm remarkable is the unrelenting concentration on the victim driven to the brink of the realm of death by the fearful onslaught of the anger of Yahweh. The Psalm dramatizes only the cry of a believer, neither giving any clue of its reason nor pointing towards an explicit response from the part of Yahweh. This psalm professes a singular disappointment with God, but the psalmist has not foreclosed the relationship. In fact, the reader might assume that the psalmist indeed is expressing his ‘stubborn love’.¹⁰ There are no conventional theological answers or solutions in the Psalm. Normally in theology God is the answer but here, for the supplicant, God is the question. The Psalm seems to reflect a suffering person’s expectation of an answer to the unresolved question regarding innocent suffering. It requires an entirely new answer and so there is no sense in looking for it in the contemporary theology of Israel. Until an answer arises, Israel has to wait along with the supplicant of Psalm 88 as the silence around the supplicant explains.¹¹ But some note that this particular silence is pregnant with voices – those voices Israel has not heard explicitly yet at the time of the Psalm.¹² Probably an explicit answer is provided to the silent wait of Israel with the resurrection of Jesus, who remains a model for all those saintly men and women, who suffer like Jesus without being visibly vindicated.

1. THE STRUCTURE OF PSALM 88

The structure of Psalm 88 is governed primarily by the three instances of the psalmist’s crying out or calling out to God (vv. 1, 9b, 13). Three different Hebrew terms for ‘cry’ or ‘call’ are used in these three occasions (1, 9b, 13), as if to indicate symbolically that the psalmist has exhausted every approach. To be noted too, is the fact that each of the psalmist’s cries is accompanied by a chronological reference (night, everyday, in the morning). In other words, every possible approach, at every possible moment, has been tried, and the result is ‘darkness’, which is literally the final word of the psalm. Each section of the psalm contains a form of the Hebrew root for ‘darkness’ (6, 12, 18). Darkness thus pervades both the text of the Psalm and the psalmist’s experience.¹³

2. THE UNANSWERED CRY OF A BELIEVER (VV. 1-2)

The Psalm opens with an urgent appeal to Yahweh (vv. 1-2). Among the many unanswered questions regarding the subject of the Psalm, one thing is certain that it is the cry of a believer whose life has gone awry, who desperately seeks contact with Yahweh, but who is unable to evoke a response from God. Perhaps terminally ill¹⁴ but certainly, either literally or figuratively on the brink of death, the psalmist complains of being treated like one who is already dead (vv. 4-5). Even worse than the physical pain is the mental anguish that the speaker suffers because he or she feels abandoned or shunned by friends and acquaintances, and by God (vv. 8, 13-14, 18). The psalmist assumes that both sickness and the pain of abandonment by friends are caused by God (v. 6-8, 15-18), yet this person of faith and faithfulness still addresses the Lord as the “God of my salvation” (v. 1a).¹⁵

This initial address of Yahweh in verse 1a as “God of my salvation” is one of intimacy; it is suggesting what is urgently needed and expected. This is followed by an appeal in verse 1b-2 that the prayer be heard: “I cry... my prayer... my cry.” The same appeal is reiterated in verse 9b (“I call on you... I spread out my hands”) and again in verse 13 (“I cry out to you ... my prayer comes before you”). We have already noted that this threefold cry (vv. 1-2, 9b, 13) of the Psalmist forms the structure of the psalm. After the two opening lines affirming continual prayer and appealing that it be heard, the rest of the psalm is essentially a description of the grim situation which has called forth the prayer.¹⁶ Characteristically when Israel cries, Yahweh hears and answers (cf. Ex. 2:23-35; Ps 107:6, 13, 19, 28). In Isaiah, in fact, the answer of Yahweh is anticipated; a time is expected when the answer will precede the cry. “Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear (Is 65:24).” But Psalm 88 follows

a different divine or theological strategy of response and the supplicant here is left to desperately wait for an answer. The supplicant in Psalm 88 is adamant in his insistence, and it is harsh on Yahweh's unresponsiveness.

In Psalm 88, it is noted that the psalmist always addresses God in second person with 'You' and never address God in third person. In the descriptive and narrative language, in which the psalmist narrates his own situation, the tone is of a personal supplication, desperately seeking a response. But it does not become a dialogue, because God does not respond. It remains a monologue all through. Normally in Psalms of laments there is a distinct shift in tone within the laments, and not rarely do they account for this shift by the presence of another voice. Normally in a Psalm of lament, the supplicant's cry of desperation is interrupted by an objective, third-person voice that implies that Yahweh is indeed on the job. An assurance that God is indeed at work behind the screen is expected of the supplicant of the Psalm. But here, the psalmist is in a desperate search of a dialogue: the 'I' of the psalmist desperately searches for the 'You' of God, but the search does not produce any result because God has 'hidden his face from him' (v.14b). The psalmist is tragically alone. This terrible loneliness is the key and decisive aspect of the experience of the dying, from where originates this cry of the psalmist.¹⁷ Mandolfo has noted that it is against the characteristic nature of most psalms of laments, which are double-voiced. From this, we will be in a position to appreciate just how uniquely single-voiced Psalm 88 is.¹⁸ In short, Psalm 88 is 'monologic' in the extreme. It is pure complaint, and a complaint very clearly directed towards God.

3. THE EXPRESSIONS OF DISTRESS AND DEATH IN THE PSALM (VV. 3-18)

A reader of this psalm is struck by the extended preoccupation with death accompanied by a deep sense of the anger of God and isolation of friends, and all these with little or no mention of rescue from the bleak situation. In this respect it stands out from the other psalms of complaint.¹⁹

Together with Ps 22, we have in Ps 88 the broadest description of the psalmist's experience of total abandonment, with ever new expressions for illness, chaos and death. Illman, along with many other scholars, has pointed out that unlike in the myths and legends of ancient cultures, "death in this psalm is no numinous power, like the Canaanite Mot, but just a grave, a dark and desolate place. This means that there is no opponent, nor any life-giving deity, which could raise the dead to new life. Death is here the place or sphere where God is not. This is a place from which there is no return."²⁰

3.1. God's Place in Distress and Death (vv. 3-8)

These verses (3-8) form the essence of the 'dark night' of the supplicant because here God is the question whereas in faith and theology God is the answer. Scholars note that the psalmist's complaint in this Psalm is bitterly and brutally honest. The bitterness is evident in verse 3a, where a Hebrew idiom is employed which literally means: "My soul is satisfied with..." The speaker's 'soul' is 'sated' or 'full' not with the good things of God's house (Ps 65:5), but with troubles and with a life that is lived on the brink of disaster and death (cf. Ps 123:3, 4; Lam 3:30). The description of the grim picture begins (v. 3) with the general claim that the speaker is 'sated' or 'filled' with misfortunes. This is explicated by a portrayal of the fearful proximity to the sphere of death (4b - 6): the speaker is "near to *Sheol*" and "is counted with those who go down to the pit." Verses 3-4 are complaints with reference to the 'pit' and to '*Sheol*', which symbolizes the extent of the distress of the supplicant. This is the voice of a literally or figuratively dying one, crying out to the only source of life. The different expressions in the psalm hint at a loss of communion with God or his total absence, finally identifying God as the source of all his distress.

3.1.1. Death as Loss of Communion

In this Psalm, the psalmist speaks as if he is already experiencing death and descending to the pit. This is possible because in the Old Testament concept, death is understood as a sphere, which can invade the sphere of life in a situation where the relationship or communion with God and others are degraded. Relationships make the true content of life itself. Biblically the tragedy of death consists of experiencing the breach of these relationships. The 'pit' is not the final judgment or a fiery place of punishment. It is the reality beyond the range of communion. For this speaker, the communion with God and communion with others (friends and acquaintances) are clearly everything. The notion of "cutting off" from communion is expressed in verse 5 with three metaphors and a fourth climatic line: "dead... grave... remember no more... cut off from your hand."

So death is not restricted to physical or biological death. Wherever one experiences a degradation of life in the form of weaknesses, diseases, imprisoning, inimical threat, privation of rights or anxiety, the sphere of death invades the camp of the living. The reason for this agonising terror is the fact that the relationship between God and the person is interrupted, destroyed or non-traceable. In the contemporary theology of the psalmist, death is the state of man beyond the possibility of experience of communion with God and His life giving activities; hence figurative death is the experience of abandonment from God. This is what exactly the psalmist experiences here.

3.1.2. *Absence of God in Death*

As the Psalmist is going deep into the experience of his own death, what exactly is the state of his faith and God experience? To arrive at an answer to this question, one needs to search in the relevant expressions of the psalmist. His expressions of death-experience and God-experience are mutually evoking. Look at the following:

- “For my soul is full of troubles” (v. 3a)
- “my life draws near to Sheol” (v. 3b)
- “I am counted among those who go down to the Pit” (v. 4a)
- **“I am like those who have no help” (v. 4b)**
- “like those forsaken among the dead” (v. 5)
- “I am shut in so that I cannot escape” (v. 8)

These expressions effectively explain the situation of the Psalmist and his faith and God experience. The rich symbolism present in the psalm also helps us to understand the experience of the psalmist. The *spatial and postural symbolisms* present in the psalm are centred on the expressions “go down” (v. 4a) and “lie down” (v. 5b). Just as the dead body of a man “goes down” to the pit, the psalmist is experiencing his “going down” to the sphere of depth. According to the psalmist’s contemporary theology and understanding of the reality of life, ‘grave’, ‘pit’, ‘Abaddon’, ‘sheol’ etc. are names and situations, from where one can no more come out.²¹ In the psalm, this ‘going down to the pit’ culminates in the ‘lying down’ (the horizontal position) in the tomb (v. 5b). The psalmist feels himself in the grave (v. 5b), losing his state of ‘verticality,’ a state in which man can relate with others and God. So in this state, he cannot ‘walk’ towards some goal and there is no future for him: “*homo viator spe erectus*.”²² Such a man lying down in the pit has no more hope and his journey is ended (v. 3b).

In the OT understanding, the dead do not enter into relationship with God; in addition, she or he is separated from the world. The psalmist has an even more radical view: he describes that the dead are “like those whom you remember no more for they are cut off from your hands” (v. 5cd). In the Bible, the remembrance of God always precedes his historical interventions (Ex 6:5-7; Lk 1: 54, 72). But according to the psalmist the dead are already out of the sphere of interest of God. When communion with God and others is understood as the essence of life, being forgotten by God as well as dear and near ones corresponds to experiencing relative or figurative death. If there is no remembrance there is no history, no relationships and no life. If God forgets, man finds himself separated from His hands - the same divine hands which guided and supported

him earlier. In verse 5, the verb used in parallel and opposite to ‘remember’ is ‘to be separated’ or ‘cut off’. This expresses what death is in the contemporary understanding of the psalmist: being forgotten by God and becoming a stranger to God, after which God does nothing for him. God does not do any miracle for those, who are reduced to the existence of Sheol, and who do not arise any more, nor praise God any more.²³

The choicest expression ‘darkness’ explains the situation of the psalmist well. If ‘light’ is the reality or sphere to relate with others, ‘darkness’ on the contrary is the reign of indifference and lack of distinction. In darkness we do not recognize others and we ourselves are not recognized by others. Thus darkness is a symbol of non-recognition and non-relation. The symbols of ‘depths’ and ‘waves’ in verse 7, by allusion, underscore the aspect of hostile forces of the underworld, symbolized by the sea. This aspect is often found in the passages like Gen 1:2, explaining the primordial chaos associated with ‘darkness’ and ‘water’ (cf. also Ex 15:5; Neh 9:11; Ps 69:3,16).

In a further darkening of the picture, in verse 8 the psalmist explains his tragic situation by using the symbols of ‘distancing’ and ‘separation’. Already separated from the world of the living, his ‘house’ is no more the place for the living relations of intimacy and communication but a closed place - infernal and dead - a house of the dead! It is separated from family and friends (v. 8).

The psalmist bites dust in his experience when he feels the rejection of God too (v. 14a); he is like one who is ‘cast out’ from His hands, no more protected but abandoned. His life, which depends solely on his relationship with God, is in crisis: God does not give his ears to the invocation of the psalmist and withdraws his hands (v. 5b) and hides his face (v. 14b). This tragic situation of the psalmist continues ‘the whole day’ (v. 17a) a period of time, extended and unending.²⁴

3.1.3. *God as the Source of these Misfortunes*

Verses 7 & 8 continue to describe this unfortunate plight but add an important and most horrifying feature. The Psalmist is clear about who the source of all his distress is. Thus for the supplicant not only does death come, but shockingly it is Yahweh who causes it:

- You have put me in the depths of the Pit, (v. 6)
- Your wrath lies heavy upon me, (v. 7a)
- You overwhelm me with all your waves (v. 7b)
- You have caused my companions to shun me; (v. 8a)
- You have made me a thing of horror to them. (v. 8b)

The psalmist certainly assumes that his agony is caused by God (vv. 6-8, 15-18) but he does not provide any information about the cause of God's anger against him. No reason is provided for the silence of Yahweh and His unresponsiveness. One may speculate that God may be silent because the guilt of the supplicant has driven Yahweh away, but we are not given any explicit hint to that possibility. Or one might take it to be a statement of God's transcendent freedom, so that God is not always on call (cf. Jer. 23:23). But more than what the speculative freedom of the reader is left to imagine, the text does not give any visible hint to this effect. The Psalm is not interested in any such theological reasons Yahweh may have.

It definitely appears to the psalmist that it is Yahweh who in His anger is overwhelming him and it is He who has isolated him by distancing his friends.²⁵ The experience of death and dread of the psalmist reaches its dramatic climax here. Biblically, Yahweh is the origin and source of life and he is the 'light' of the faithful. But the Psalmist experiences the cause of his death and darkness in him.²⁶ The speaker is utterly helpless. The fault is firmly fixed. In Job-like fashion and with child-like innocence, the speaker may hope that such an assault on God by squarely placing the blame on him will evoke a response. But it does not; what follows is only more silence. From vv. 4-7, the terms used are associated with the underworld: *sheol*, the pit, the dead, the slain, the grave, darkness and depths. In verse 5, the expression "they are cut off" is an idiom for the dying (cf. Is 53:8; Ez 37.11; Lam 3:54-55).²⁷ By allusion the word 'deep' (6b) designates the place where God put the Egyptians (Ex 15:5). Whereas God caused the Israelites to escape from Egypt (see "brought ... out" in Ex 18:1; 20:2), the psalmist feels here that, like the Egyptians, he cannot escape (v.8). Thus he remains in affliction (v. 9a), the same state out of which the enslaved Israelites also cried to God (see 'suffering' in Ex 3:7, 'misery' in Ex 4:31 and 'affliction' in Dt 26:7). Apparently abandoned by God, the psalmist is also deserted by friends (v. 18; see also Ps 31:11; 38:11; Job 19:13; 30:10; Jer 11.18-19; 12:6).²⁸ Verse 7 says, "you overwhelm me with all your *waves*"; The 'deep' in v.6 and the 'waves' in v.7 are related to the sea, a common symbol for chaos and death (Ps 18:5-6; 40:3).²⁹

3.2. Rhetorical Questions from the Jewish Spirituality of Existence (vv. 10-12)

After the second cry in verse 9b, verses 10-12 offer a series of four rhetorical questions, two of which have two parts. The four questions have a dramatic rhetorical effect. They serve in one sense to reinforce the description of the pitiable plight of the one praying. In those questions we encounter further description of the sphere of the dead. All of them ask about Yahweh's capacity to

work his sovereign way in the sphere of death. We have the expressions such as 'dead', 'shades', 'grave', '*Abaddon*', 'darkness', and 'the land of forgetfulness'. That is the situation into which the speaker has fallen. In another sense this makes them instruments of persuasion: what benefit is there when a worshipper is in the realm of the dead? The Psalmist is more active in the art of persuasion. Eslinger argues that darkening the picture here can be a form of persuasion.³⁰

The speaker will surely fall further if Yahweh does not act soon. Here the psalm gives six corresponding words or expressions that characterize Yahweh's usual action: 'wonders', 'praise', 'steadfast love', 'faithfulness', 'wonders' and 'saving help' (vv. 10-12). These verses intensify the complaint by stressing the praise-less quality of death (cf. Ps 6:6; 30:10; 115:107; Isa 38:18-19; Sir 17:27-28). The netherworld is a land of forgetfulness where the great saving deeds of God are not recalled or praised. In the Old Testament, it is primarily the living who praise God: "The living, the living, he thanks you" (Isa 38:19). Praise and life go together: "There cannot be such a thing as true life without praise. 'Praising' and 'no longer praising' are related to each other as the realities of 'living' and 'no longer living'."³¹ Praise of God is a 'mode of existence' which is an indispensable component of life. Biblically, when the living cease to praise God, they are as equal as dead.

The above mentioned two contrasting sets of words in verses 10-12 show the incongruity between where the speaker is and what Yahweh characteristically does in the normal expected pattern. The obvious response to the four rhetorical questions (vv. 10-12) is 'no'. Yahweh does not do his typical actions in death, so, if it is to make any difference, what Yahweh does will have to be done prior to death (which according to psalmist is very near). The urgency of the speech is that at this moment Yahweh can still do his life-giving work, but not for long. If Yahweh does not act soon, the chance will be lost, pre-empted by the power of death. The speaker will be utterly lost, because the power of Yahweh has failed. If the devotee of Yahweh fails it is the failure of Yahweh too. This is once again an art of persuasion of Yahweh to act urgently to protect his honour. But there is still no answer – only waiting. An imaginative reader may imagine a long dramatic and impatient pause after verse 12. But there is no answer, and so the cry is resumed in verse 13.

3.3. The Final Appeal and the Uncharacteristic End of the Psalm (vv. 13-18)

The final accusations against God in verses 14-18, which some scholars term as part of the psalmist's 'holy anger', come after the third appeal or cry in verse 13. Now the Psalmist moves to direct and unambiguous accusation. In verse 14, two questions place the blame frontally: "Why do you reject me?" and "Why

do you hide your face?" Questions of this type occur elsewhere in complaints (Ps 10:1; 22:2; 42:10; 74:1) but what is striking here is that nothing is coming after these questions, which could hint that these questions might be answered. The four questions in vv.10-12 are framed in general terms, but verse 13 begins with the emphatic Hebrew pronoun 'I', thus once again focusing attention on the psalmist's own plight and cry (see Ex 2:23; Pss 18:6; 22:24). The questions in v. 14 are also framed very personally. The verbs in both questions are characteristic of previous prayers for help (on v. 14a, 'cast off', 'reject' and 'spurn'). In short, they sum up the psalmist's situation; she or he has cried out in affliction, but God has not responded. In a last attempt to persuade, verse 15 describes the situation one more time in this psalm, as if in case Yahweh did not hear it in verses 3-8 and 10-12. And then the poem culminates in its harshest statement: "Your wrath has swept ... your dread assaults... You have caused... (vv. 16-18)."

Finally, the speaker is shunned in darkness. The last word in the psalm is 'darkness', also the last symbolic and theological word. Nothing is changed after the prayer. Nothing is resolved after the prayer. All things continue to deny life. And worst of all is the 'shunning' which means Yahweh is deliberately avoiding the supplicant. It is twice articulated in the psalm (vv. 8 & 18), so that the blame is fixed on Yahweh. In verse 19 the psalm unceremoniously ends with the word 'darkness', a motif that occurs in verses 7 and 13. Regarding the conclusion of this psalm, Dahood makes an astute statement that "in a lament thick with terms designating the realm of the dead, 'darkness' forms a fitting close to a lament unredeemed by any note of hope."³² Thus, the Psalm deals with the 'dark night' of the psalmist and ends with that.

4. THE SENSE OF THIS PSALM OF 'CRY WITHOUT A RESPONSE'

Psalm 88 is very often termed as an embarrassment to conventional faith. As noted earlier this Psalm is adamant in its insistence, and it is harsh on Yahweh's unresponsiveness. If the supplicant is understood as representing Israel, perhaps the truth underscored in this Psalm could be that Israel is passing through the 'dark night' in its faith experience and it lives in a period where there is no answer. Another way of looking at the message of this psalm is to think that, along with similar poems, this psalm intends to speak of the whole of life, not just the good aspects of life. Here, more than anywhere else, faith faces life as it is. The Psalm is not providing any hint to take the reader to any reasonable speculation about the cause of the misery and Yahweh's unresponsiveness. The Psalm is also not providing any traditional theological perspective from which to read the experience and make it sensible. The Psalm simply reports how it is to be a partner of Yahweh in Yahweh's inexplicable absence. According to

Brueggemann, the presence of this psalm in the canon reminds us that not every crisis in human life is susceptible to an immediate solution. Even the faithful can be bogged down in the depths of despair or caught up in what the mystics called the 'dark night of the soul.'³³

In the bottom of the pit, Israel still knows it has to do with Yahweh. It cannot be otherwise. Israel or believer has no option but to deal with Yahweh. That belongs to Israel's identity and character in the world. Israel or believer must deal with Yahweh in the silence, in God's blank absence as in the saving presence. Israel has no choice but to speak to this One, or she will cease to be Israel. In this painful, unresolved speech, Israel is simply engaged in being Israel. To be Israel means to address God, even in God's apparently unresponsive absence.

While all other psalms of laments are prompt in speaking about the faithfulness of Yahweh to Israel, this psalm brings out Israel's version of the reality. This psalm purely exposes Israel's viewpoint in the sense that it speaks about the ultimate faith and faithfulness of Israel or the believer to Yahweh. It not only speaks about the faith of the believer or Israel in Yahweh but also his or her faithfulness to Yahweh. The unanswered plea does not silence the supplicant. Perhaps the speaker may be feeling that he is speaking to the empty sky, but that does not deter the speaker from his steadfastness and faithfulness to Yahweh. In this sense the supplicant becomes a prefigure of Jesus in his firm faith and ultimate faithfulness to Yahweh, even in the midst of his experience of agony and God's apparent unresponsiveness and abandonment. Ideally the faith of Israel and its saints are expected to be like that. The failure of God to respond does not lead to atheism or doubt in God or rejection of God. It leads to more intense address. This psalm, like the faith of Israel, is utterly relying on the notion that Yahweh is there and must be addressed. Yahweh must be addressed, even if Yahweh answers not. The greatness and the strength of this psalm is that the psalmist is bringing to God himself the contradictory and anomalous experiences of his own relation with God.³⁴

Perhaps the 'dark night' of the supplicant and his questions look forward to a time when these questions will be transcended, rather than requiring an answer. The psalmist questions the ability of Yahweh in the world of the 'dead', 'shades', 'grave', 'Abaddon', 'darkness' and 'forgetfulness' to perform 'wonders', 'steadfast love' and 'faithfulness', to receive 'praise' and offer 'saving help'. But God by raising Jesus from these places proves he can still perform 'wonders', 'steadfast love' and 'faithfulness', receive 'praise' and offer 'saving help' even in these places. This is the new sphere where a Christian reader reaches when he waits along with the supplicant of psalm 88 for a new level of answer, whereas

the traditional Israelite theology is clueless about a possible answer or thinks the situation as 'irreversible'.³⁵ The grounds for the questions of the supplicant are transcended in the new element in the faith of Israel, namely, the resurrection from death.

CONCLUSION

According to Brueggemann, in spite of the depth of distress that characterizes the psalm 88, it is "not a Psalm of mute depression".³⁶ The prayer is addressed to God and the speaker assumes that God hears his complaints. The very fact that the psalmist prays, shows that he has not given up all his hope but clings to God (vv. 1-2, 13).³⁷ The speaker has no option but to deal with Yahweh, which is basic for the life of Israel. The speaker must deal with Yahweh even in the experience of silence or divine absence. "The Psalm is a scandal to anyone who isolates it from the biblical canon, a pain to anyone who hears it apart from its more lively words. Whoever devises from the Scriptures a philosophy in which everything turns out right has to tear out this page of the volume."³⁸ Psalm 88 may be "an embarrassment to conventional faith", but it is an embarrassment which we should keep. According to Tate, whenever one passes through the "valley of the shadow of death" one can find that this psalm prepares the way for divine comfort.³⁹ It also reminds the readers that God can always bring surprises that are able to transcend even the very basis or logic of our questions.

Psalm 88 is an example of a human experience which a believer often encounters: the mysterious experience of a God who hides his face behind the forces of evil and of death, and covers his own words in silence. Devoid of a possibility to dialogue, the believer has nothing else to do but cry. Deprived of a response and not seeing a change in his own tragic situation, the believer has no other way but to knock and ask God "why?" Asking to God, the psalmist or the believer once again finds himself/herself still in relation with God. It looks like a paradox but the Psalm presents the ultimate form of faith and faithfulness to God: cry to God in one's own state of desperation. Finally the apparently defeated believer would victoriously bounce back, evoking the words of Paul: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? (1 Cor 15: 54d-55)."

Endnotes

- 1 M. Lockyer, *Psalms: A devotional Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1993), 294
- 2 Unless otherwise mentioned, the biblical verses used in this article are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

- 3 R. Davidson, *The vitality of worship: A commentary on the book of Psalms*, (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 289.
- 4 M.E. Tate, "Psalm 88", *Review and Expositor* 87 (1990), 91.
- 5 C. Mandolfom, "Psalm 88 and the Holocaust: Lament in Search of a Divine Response", *Biblical Interpretation*, 15 (2007), 165.
- 6 C. J. Sedgwick, "Darkness amid the Light: Ps 88", *Expository Times* 101 (1989), 273. The verses quoted by Sedgwick are from the New International Version. Other acclaimed translations also do not agree with the NRSV rendering of verse 18b as "my companions are in darkness"
- 7 J. S. Kselmon & M. L. Barre "Psalms" in *NJBC*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 541. Also cf. M. Dahood, *Psalms II 51-100*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1968), 302.
- 8 J. C. McCann, "The Book of Psalms" in *NIB* Vol. IV, (Nashville: Abington Press, 1996), 1027.
- 9 Davidson, 289
- 10 Mandolfom, 165.
- 11 Ibid, 169
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 McCann, 1027.
- 14 Scholars have often insisted that the origin of the complaint in Psalm 88 can be traced to the psalmist's apparently terminal illness (Psalm 6; 38; 41). The psalm is certainly pervaded by vocabulary associated with death, but it is not necessary to conclude that sickness definitely accounts for the origin of the psalm, nor is it necessary to limit the psalm's relevance to situations of illness. It is noted that the language is metaphorical and stereotypical enough to express other life-threatening situations. For instance, the history of interpretation of Psalm 88 reflects the opinion of both Jewish and Christian interpreters that this psalm was used as an exilic or post-exilic prayer to articulate the plight of the whole people Cf. J.C. McCann (Jr.), "The Book of Psalms" in *The New Interpreters Bible*, Vol IV, (Nashville: Abington Press, 1996), 1027. Also cf. Tate, M.E., *Psalms 51-100*, 399. Tate notes that there appears to be no language in Ps 88 which necessitates a direct reference to illness. The language of lamentation similar to this has been found in contexts with no direct reference to sickness: e.g., Ps 18:5-5; 28:1; Lam 3:54; Jonah 2:4, 6, 7; Zech 9:11, though some of these contexts could involve illness. Cf. Tate, 400.
- 15 K. Farner, "Psalms 4-89" in *The International Bible Commentary*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 839.
- 16 McCann, 1027.

- 17 L. Manicardi, ““Perchè Signore, Mi respingi?” Sal 88”, *Parola, Spirito e Vita*, 30 (1994), 64.
- 18 Mandolfom, 169.
- 19 L. M. Eslinger & J. G. Taylor, (ed.), *Ascribe to the Lord. Biblical and other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie*, (Sheffield: JSOTSS 67, 1988), 289.
- 20 K. J. Illman, “Psalm 88 – A Lamentation without Answer” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 1 (1991), 119.
- 21 Manicardi, 72
- 22 Ibid, 72-73
- 23 Ibid, 76
- 24 Ibid, 74
- 25 Eslinger & Taylor, 290.
- 26 Manicardi, 74
- 27 Kselmon & Barre, 541
- 28 McCann, 1028.
- 29 Kselmon & Barre, 541
- 30 Eslinger & Taylor, 290.
- 31 Tate, “Psalm 88”, 92.
- 32 M. Dahood, *Psalms II, 51-100*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1968), 307.
- 33 W. Bruegemann, *The Message of Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, (Minneapolis: AOTS, 1984), 78. Also cf. Farner, 839.
- 34 Manicardi, 78.
- 35 Mandolfom, 169
- 36 Bruegemann, 80.
- 37 Illman, 119. Also cf. A.A. Anderson, *Psalms*, Vol. 2, (Oliphants: Morgan Schott, 1972), 623.
- 38 M. Marty, *A Cry of Absence: Reflections for the Winter of the Heart*, quoted in M.E. Tate, “Psalms 51-100” in *WBC*, (Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1990), 404.
- 39 Tate, “Psalms 51-100”, 404-405.

MARY: THE PROTOTYPE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Rev. Jonathan K. Morse, PhD

1. INTRODUCTION

“More honorable than the cherubim and far more glorious than the Seraphim” is a liturgical description of the Mother of God.¹ Our Lord never commanded such love and devotion to His mother. Rather, the Christian witness that Mary gave, has inspired this poetic religious fervor and devotion throughout the centuries. The Mother of God has been seen by the faithful as the Christian *par excellence*. Imitation of her example can lead to an eternal life with her son. In her being taken up to heaven, we see the possibility for ourselves, not so much as a Dormition but an ascension.²

2. MARIAN PROTOTYPE

Religious, in particular, can discover in the faith and devotion of Mary, a prototype of the suitable qualities of their vocation.

2.1. Partakers of the Divine Nature

We choose the “how” of the way we live to attain the promised everlasting life with God. In all of our thoughts and actions, we reach out to touch God. Mary, the woman, touched the divine.

In iconography the Mother of God is seen clothed in blue with a red mantle. Her son is with a red inner garment and a blue mantle. The red symbolizes divinity and the blue humanity. Christ is the God who took upon himself humanity. Mary is the human, who became clothed in divinity.

The reason for this lies in the creation of humanity. Humanity was created in the “image and likeness of God.” This was the beginning of the process of the divinization of all humanity. This way of being one with God was the divine

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intention in creation. This process was interrupted not by divine design but by human sin. God's intention for humanity is not thwarted but postponed. In the fullness of time God continued the process.³ "God became man so that man might become God."⁴ The Son was sent so that we may become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4).

Mary because of the incarnation is most like God in that she partook of divinity. She is ascribed a glory and an honor higher than any angel or man because she is most in the image and likeness of God. Mary is most like God. Religious are by calling meant to be more like God. These last words express the ideal that can be actualized in the here and now.

The likeness in Mary's case is not just due to her moral righteousness but more so to her ontological state of being all-holy and most pure. One is holy and one is pure not because of the absence of evil but because of the indwelling of the Spirit. Only one is holy and that is God. Holiness exists in the participation in the divine nature. In Mary's divine maternity we see holiness. The Virgin's life and will were in synergy with God. It was not her will, but rather His will be done. "I am the handmaid of the Lord be it done to me as you say" (Lk 1:38). Her nature lived in and partook of the divine nature.

2.2. The Womb of God and Contemplation

This synergy is not because of what the Mother of God did. Her external charity of rushing off to see Elizabeth is not what made her holy, but rather her openness to the divine will. Her openness is only possible if Mary was truly a contemplative. Many of the Fathers of the Church call Mary the "womb of God."⁵ The "womb," in this sense, is not just her reception of the divine life that dwelt within her, but her receptivity of the word of God. It was in hearing the word that led to salvation. St John of Damascus writes: "But she, the truly blessed above all, inclined her ear to the Word of God and was filled by the workings of the Holy Spirit and through the Father's good pleasure, announced by the archangel, became pregnant."⁶

The womb of God's contemplative nature is also revealed in the celebration of the presentation in the Temple of the Mother of God. This event is not found in Scripture but in the apocryphal writings. There is probably no basis in fact for such a feast, but its popularity and staying power on the liturgical calendar is more than likely due to its expression of Mary freely choosing to be open to the activity of God.

When one is open to the activity of God, one is open to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is referred to as "life-giving." In the overshadowing of Mary we have a

life giving activity of the Spirit, but since Mary is in the image of God, she too becomes life-giving. One does not keep God to oneself but rather God's life within us bursts forth from us. Mary in her maternity and as the Mother of the Church is still life giving. Iconography of the Mother of God shows her holding her divine son in her arm with her other hand pointing gently to him. She knows that her son is the word of life and is desirous that all will have life through her son. Her divine maternity grew at the cross to being the Mother of the Church. She shows the world that the way to the Father is through her son and in the life-giving Spirit.

As Religious there is a search for holiness. This holiness is not found in external acts of charity but in contemplation of the One. Mary's contemplation did not find her withdrawn from the world but at the center of it. Religious life becomes life giving when it is spirit-filled. Each and every day the Religious chooses to be a hearer of the word. So in being a receptacle of divine life, one has divine life to partake and to share.

The Church is our treasure, but it is also something that we plant in the world through our ministries. The word of God was something that Mary too treasured and shared. We are told in scripture that she treasured all of these things and reflected upon them in her heart (Lk 2: 19). Mary saw the wonder of the angels heralding the birth of her son, and also her son baffle and bewilder the teachers in the temple. She did not put them away like we put away pictures of faded memories but rather reflected upon them. As she saw her son travel to teach, she reflected upon his words in light of the wonderment of his birth and the announcement of the angel.

Mary was not removed from the center of the Church because of her experiences, but rather her treasures placed her at the center of the early community. She was present at the foot of the cross and when the apostles received the Spirit on Pentecost. She did not remove herself to cling to the glory of her son's birth but knowing what she did she was called to leave the security of home and follow. She had to watch the activity of the word of God grow in the world. Mary was not contemplative in her withdrawal from the world but she was contemplative in her hearing of the word in the world. Contemplation of divine realities and constant union with God are qualities of Mary that are exemplary to all Religious.

2.3. Faith

These qualities demand faith, which is a gift with which Mary was truly blessed. The virgin's faith was apparent at the Annunciation. She did not question the reality that she would have a child. If God said it was going to happen, it was

going to happen. Her question comes from her human experience. "How can this be since I do not know a man?" (Lk 1:34). Her question also comes from her faith, for she was a consecrated virgin and her faith told her that she was going to remain a virgin. Faith is bold even in the face of an angel. Mary knew that her vocation was to be a virgin and an angel told her that she was going to be a mother and yet she still knew that she was going to remain a virgin. Virginal maternity was unheard of and there was no basis for it in Jewish tradition. The prophecy of Isaiah that a virgin shall give birth was understood in the sense of a young woman having a child. It is only in the Marian experience that we come to the true knowledge of Isaiah's word. It is only in the virginal maternity of Mary that we can see the completion of all forms of creation. Normally creation involves a man and a woman. Adam was created from neither a man or a woman. Eve was created from man alone. The only form of creation left for the Word made flesh was from woman alone and that woman was the Virgin of Nazareth.

Faith is also always prepared to accept the unexpected. Mary thought her consecrated virginity meant that she was not going to have a child. Then the unexpected visit from the archangel Gabriel. It is imaginable that when our Lord as a youth at the temple expounded upon Scripture Mary that night probably said to Joseph, "Jesus is going to be a great teacher." Yet Jesus then worked in Joseph's carpentry shop through his adult life. Age thirty was "old" age at the time of Christ. But Mary accepted the unexpected. Then when Jesus should have been enjoying the rewards of his labors in the shop, he begins a ministry. Mary probably did not expect the rejection of her son in this new role by the people in the town in which they lived. She probably thought even if they disagreed they would be polite. When Jesus went into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday, she must have said to herself: "My son is going to be a great earthly ruler." She probably did not expect the crucifixion, but she was there for her son. She may have hoped in the resurrection but probably did not expect it.

Mary knew that certain realities in faith are absolute but most are unexpected. If a Religious firmly believes that they have a vocation it is here that the faith is bold. The living out of that vocation involves more of the unexpected than the expected. A vocation in terms of a calling is a beginning. Like Mary, we should respond, "be it done to me as you say" (Lk 1:38). Once you have accepted the call of the Lord, where you are going is a mystery.

2.4. The Divine Plan

There is a divine plan for the salvation of the world. The virgin was willing to cooperate with the plan. Religious too must accept that it is God's plan rather than their own and be willing to cooperate with it. Mary's vocation and that

of a Religious are both in acceptance of a role in the fulfillment of the divine plan and the willingness to collaborate in divine activities that are related to the plan. Mary then had accepted a role in the messianic activity of her son. All religious by virtue of being called accept a role in the activity of Mary's Son. All of Mary's energies were devoted to the ministry of divine maternity to which she was called. All of a Religious' energies are to be devoted to the service of the Lord.

But then again at the heart of this is that all are called by the gift of faith to serve God. Every Christian in whatever part they play in the plan of God must devote all their energies to carrying out that to which they have been called. The difference for the religious is their public witness to the reality of faith and its call to serve.

3. THE PRESENT SITUATION

Is it possible that the shortage of vocations is due to a lack of faith? Rather, there is no shortage of vocations because God is still extending the call. The call is not being responded to by those who are called. God is still calling. God still gives the faith necessary for any calling. We cannot say that God's plan today involves giving less faith to people, but rather like the seed in Scripture, it has withered. Faith needs to be nourished. It is the ministry of Religious to nurture the faith of those who have been entrusted by God to their care in ministry.

A young person today may receive a call, but their question is "How can this be, since I do not know what you are talking about?" Religious are called to witness to their particular way of life while carrying out their Christian witness and ministry. How a member of one Religious community ministers must be different than the ministry given by a member of another. They are still carrying out the same ministry of Christ but in a different manner because of the charisms of their Religious community.

The whole Church is called to minister to the seed of the faith planted in each and every person. We do not know what that seed will grow into until it is grown, but we have to treat it as if it is going to be a great oak. What does this mean? It means that we have to water it with the waters of Baptism and an ongoing sacramental life especially involving regular reception of the Eucharist. It means that we have to feed it with good teaching, sound theological readings, enlightening sermons, heart moving videos, etc. We have to weed around the growing faith. We must remove temptation rather than plant more weeds. The religious are called to be the sowers in the field for the harvest is done by the angels at the end.

There is a legend that at the judgment seat of Christ, a person is asked only one or two questions. The first question is “Did you come alone?” Mary could point to her children in faith, Religious point to their children in faith as well. If the answer is “Yes,” the second question is: “How could you?”

3.1. Daring Initiative

Members of the church seem to be embarrassed to evangelize and catechize. We are the only ones embarrassed. Robert Woodruff after World War I was the President of Coca Cola. His goal was that everyone in the world should have a taste of Coke.⁷ Today, you can buy coke in the deserts of Africa or outside the Kremlin gate. Religious need the same commitment and dedication. Everyone should have a taste of the charism of their community. It takes daring to be a Religious.

Daring initiative is also seen in the life of the Mother of God at the wedding feast in Cana. When they ran out of wine, she could have gone neighbor to neighbor asking for contributions to the feast, but this would have embarrassed the young couple and their families. Rather she went to her son. There was nothing in their family life up to that point which could have suggested that Jesus was capable of such a miracle. Despite the medieval legends, Jesus as a child did not turn stones into birds or a playmate into a statue. We know from the reaction of his towns’ people that they did not think of him as a miracle worker, when they threw him out of their synagogue.

To ask for a miracle where a miracle has never been seen requires a great deal of daring faith. In Mary at Cana we get a foretaste of the faith her son would speak of, “How blest are they who have not seen, yet believed” (Jn 21:29). The disciples believed after the miracle, but Mary believed before the miracle.

Our Lord in response said, “Woman, how is this concern of yours involve me?” In calling her woman, she is reminded that as a woman and even as His mother, her status was not sufficient to overcome the fact that it was not his time. Mary’s faith then dared again. She told the servants to do what he tells them to do. Her faith told her that her son could change the hour. The request was granted because of Mary’s perseverance in faith.

God like a Father at times waits to be asked. In the divine scheme of things, yes it was the honor but Mary’s faithful collaboration was required by God. Just as Mary’s faithful collaboration was needed at the Annunciation to bring about the Incarnation, her collaboration by way of her intercession at Cana was needed to bring about Jesus’ messianic ministry.⁸

Religious too need daring faith. Great saints have gone and done things that everyone said was impossible. But, they in turn responded in faith by acknowledging this was the divine will. As at Cana there was more and better wine than what would be expected. When faith releases divine activity, it comes in abundance. God says to the Religious: “I have given you the faith sufficient to move mountains; believe and dare that you can and the mountains will be moved.”

3.2. Barriers to Ministry

Sometimes we place artificial barriers in our ministries because we don’t want to intrude. We do not want to interrupt a person’s grief or we do not want to “force” our faith on anyone else because they are free to believe whatever they want. Daring faith is intrusive. We can see that our Lord himself intruded. The widow of Naim was grieving. Jesus stopped the funeral procession. Yes, the woman appreciated greatly the miracle, but she probably was not expecting a miracle when Jesus interrupted the trip to the cemetery. She may have been upset at this intrusion, but she needed the miracle. Zacchaeus was watching to see the Messiah and Jesus invited himself to his home. Zacchaeus didn’t start the conversation, Jesus did by stating that he was going to eat at Zacchaeus’ house. Zacchaeus too was probably upset because it meant that he had to defend himself against his neighbors’ accusations. In both cases Jesus intruded. The Religious too must intrude where salvation is the issue. To fail to intrude when there is the danger of the loss of eternal life is unconscionable. It is better to err on the side of salvation than to let a sheep be lost out of courtesy.

Mary’s faith was always based in her willingness to collaborate with the plan of God. She desired that her messianic son be revealed and it was getting late. As consecrated persons, Religious are called to collaborate with the plan of God and all of their energies must be used in carrying out that plan because the time is late. Consecrated persons must seize every opportunity no matter how unrelated it may appear.

The Virgin of Cana reminds us that even when God says, “No,” one does not stop having daring faith. Her Son had told her it was not the time, yet she still told the steward to do whatever Jesus instructs. In this she was a faithful daughter of Abraham, who “negotiated” with God to save Sodom, and secured the safety of Lot and his family.

Too often Religious are prone to cease activity because they feel it is God’s will. If God does not send us vocations, so be it. It must be God’s plan, they say. Mary would continue on as if vocations were still plentiful knowing that

somehow her son would provide. The crucifixion must have shaken the faith of the Virgin of Cana, but she was there at the foot of the cross, as she also there at Pentecost.

3.3. Pain of Ministry

The young girl of faith at the Annunciation was not promised an easy life. She heard the prophecy that her gently loving heart would feel the pain of the sword. She felt that pain when her town's people rejected her son. She felt that pain when the religious leaders arose against their messiah. She felt that pain as her only son was sentenced to death by the Roman authorities. Her heart was surrounded with pain as her son had a crown of thorns placed upon his head. No mother ever wants to experience the death of her child. This pain was multiplied a thousandfold by the manner of the crucifixion.

Nowhere does Scripture tell us that Mary was surprised by any of these happenings. She had listened to the Good News that her son preached. She probably understood that the messiah was to suffer as expressed by the prophet Isaiah (Is 53). Even though she knew what was to come, it did not lessen the pain that she felt.

Religious too know that the message to which they witness is not one that society and the world welcome. The message of sin and repentance, of crucifixion and resurrection, of darkness and light and of death and life is one that is in direct opposition to the teachings of the world. The world says the winner is the person who dies with the most possessions. The Religious stands out in poverty. Religious life is and has always been counter-cultural. Followers of the Master can expect no less opposition than the master himself received. Religious then should not be surprised when civil authorities oppose their acts of charity and social justice. Religious should expect looks of disgust given to them because of their witness of Christian values. If Christ himself did not give his own Mother a pleasant and peaceful life, should any Religious expect one.

CONCLUSION

Mary held in her heart the treasure of a messianic faith. This treasure was her pearl of great price. Religious too, if they are going to meet a hostile world must hold onto the same messianic faith. It is a faith in a God who loves his creation and has promised to send a redeemer and kept His promise.

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Endnotes

- 1 As found in both the Divine Liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great"
- 2 Falling Asleep
- 3 Paul Blowers, "Divinization," *The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, edited by Robert Benedetto, James O. Duke. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 201-202.
- 4 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*. 93 (8.54).
- 5 George A. Maloney, *Mary: The Womb of God*. (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1976.)
- 6 John of Damascus, *Sermon II On the Assumption*. 171.
- 7 Mark Pendergrast. *For God, Country and Coca-Cola*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), 169.
- 8 *Orthodox Study Bible*. (Thomas Nelson, 1982), 1424.

CORE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF CONSECRATED LIFE: A CASE STUDY OF ST. ANTHONY MARY CLARET

Noble Mannarath, CMF

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church teaches that the consecrated life is one that is “deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord and is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit.”¹ The essence or the fundamental norm of consecrated life is the radical following of Christ as proposed by the Gospel.² It is a radical form of living of the *sequela Christi* by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, “the purpose of the religious life is to help the members follow Christ and be united to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels.”³ These aforesaid Church teachings make it vividly obvious that among all the diverse spiritual dimensions of consecrated life, the Christological and the Biblical may well be considered the core characteristics of this Christian form of life.

To delve further into these two core dimensions of consecrated spirituality, we have a striking and stimulating model before us: St Anthony Mary Claret. He is a great modern apostolic saint, who was born and lived in Spain (1807 - 1970) in one of the most turmoiled epochs in the whole of Spanish history. He has remarkably excelled as a very popular itinerant apostolic missionary, an organizer of the lay apostolate, an archbishop, the founder of a religious congregation (*Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary* commonly known as, *Claretian Missionaries*), confessor to the Queen of Spain, father of the first Vatican Council, a prolific writer and publisher, an enthusiastic social reformer, a great lover of the Church and, above all, as the pioneer of so many modern apostolate. Remarkably manifold are the dimensions of Anthony Claret’s spirituality: Christological, biblical, apostolic, eucharistic, evangelical, cordi-marian, ecclesial, pneumatological, soteriological and missionary.

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However, the central thread of his entire apostolic spirituality was, the idea of living a life in Christ, in the style of the apostles--the Christocentric dimension--and the constant encounter of Jesus Christ in the Holy Bible. He formulated and patterned his evangelical dimensions of his consecrated living, after Jesus Christ, the Missionary of the Father, whom he personally encountered from the reading and meditation of the Holy Bible. This article is an attempt to investigate into the Christological and Biblical dimensions of the apostolic spirituality of Anthony Mary Claret as the two core characteristics of the consecrated life, which probably may well provide a valid significance for the consecrated living of today.

1. CHRISTOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY

Among the diverse dimensions of Anthony Claret's apostolic spirituality, it was the 'Christocentrism' that remained as the very epicentre and the characteristic trait of his life. The person and the presence of Christ always dominated his life;⁴ and, from the childhood till his death, it was the person of Jesus Christ who was the very nucleus of all his apostolic activities and preaching. This attitude of Claret was clearly seen when he offered himself fully to Jesus Christ and for his service, even at an early age. He writes in his *Autobiography*: "A thousand times over I would offer myself to His service. I wanted to become a priest so that I could dedicate myself to His service day and night."⁵ Gradually, this consecration ever matured and helped him to assimilate the very spirit of Jesus Christ and his zeal for the Father's glory. Claret so fervently felt that he was anointed by the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the Gospel to all and thus to bring salvation to all. Like the oriental theologians, Claret seemed convinced that, in the economy of salvation, the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit were inseparable.⁶

1.1. A Fervent and Personal Imitation of Jesus Christ

The fervent obsession of Anthony Claret in imitating Jesus Christ certainly was something he crafted from the life and readings of St. Paul: "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (I Cor 11.1). When Claret was referring to Jesus Christ, he was not an impersonal and a far-away person; it was the figure of Jesus preaching throughout the villages and synagogues of Palestine and Judea, born of the Virgin Mary and living as a human person. It was the historical and human Jesus, whom he contemplated and became a model for him, the master who taught by words and deeds.⁷ Jesus, his model, "began to do and to teach" and thus Claret laid stress on practising what he preached. Claret relentlessly contemplated the Jesus of the Gospel and strove to imitate the same Jesus, in the crib, in the carpenter's shop, and in Calvary. He meditated on his words, his sermons, and his actions. And he would ask himself, "How would Jesus act in this case?" Striving to imitate Him filled Claret with great contentment and joy.⁸

The influence of the traditional spiritual milieu of Claret's time, along with the direction of Fr. Bach, the spiritual director of Anthony Claret in the Seminary, and the short Jesuit formation in Rome influenced in shaping Claret in the external imitation of Jesus Christ. The ascetical writers of Europe of his time, like Rodriguez, Thomas of Jesus and Monsieur Olier, together with apostle Paul and his writings had great impact in the life of Claret in forming his Christological doctrines in spirituality. For Paul and Claret, it was the very love and life of Jesus Christ that propelled them in their apostolic and spiritual life. Besides, the examples of all the great saints in the history of the Church, in particular, Francis of Assisi, Bernard, Catherine of Sienna, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, etc., also influenced him significantly. There was a strong and visible, but harmonious blend of asceticism and mysticism in Claret. 'Praying to God and rowing to shore' was the life-attitude Claret pursued all through his life.

1.2. The Evolution of the Imitation of Christ

In Claret's life, there was an evolution in the imitation of Christ as well as in the experience of Christ. We can see a progressive transition, as regards the contemplation of the life of Jesus Christ, from the external imitation to the internal dimensions of Christ, such as, His virtues and inner attitudes. It was through a process of internalization that he became more fully conformed to Jesus Christ in prophetic unction, in apostolic sending, in the grace of sonship, in tireless preaching, and in redemptive sacrifice. This imitation of Jesus, keeps progressively shifting into a deep conformity with Jesus Christ⁹ along with a strong drive toward martyrdom, which took on the characteristics of amalgamation with the Paschal Christ and of offering himself as a victim of love.¹⁰

During his early life--the Catalan phase of Claret--it was mostly an external imitation of Jesus Christ: the Christ of the Nativity, the Christ of the unknown life in Nazareth, the Christ of the public life and the Christ crucified. Claret continued to ask and search for the answer as to, how would Jesus have acted: "I used to ask myself in every situation, and still do, how Jesus would have acted."¹¹ Besides, he meditated constantly on the teachings of Christ, with a view to imitating Him intimately and completely. Claret constantly desired to be an itinerant missionary, following stringent poverty, practising the evangelical virtues and preaching in the style of Jesus who was an itinerant preacher, living in poverty and always on foot. It was not a blind imitation of Jesus Christ, but an unconditional and passionate imitation of Jesus Christ, in full knowledge and conviction.

In his later life--the Madrid stage of his life--Claret grew up more in the mystical experiences as well as in greater conformity with Jesus Christ. The

resolutions he made from 1843 onwards until 1870, evidently exhibit his unremitting conciseness about the need for the unflinching battle he had to fight against the 'old man' in himself. Claret followed the rigorousness of the apostolic asceticism in the style of an 'oriental ascetic', without taking meat or wine, ever conscious about his human fragility and the possibility of falling back, even though the Lord was guiding him to the heights of the mystical graces in the later years of the Madrid period.

1.3. *Caritas Christi*: the Epicentre of the Christological Dimension

The Episcopal motto that Anthony Mary Claret had chosen in his life was *caritas christi urget nos*, meaning, "the love of Christ impels us." This motto explains well the inner force that moved and spurred Claret all through his life.¹² It was 'the love of Christ' that impelled Claret to reach out to every human being without distinction and even beyond the borders of the visible Church. For him, this love was revealed in Jesus Christ and was made present through the action of the Holy Spirit, and it impelled him to restore the beauty of the Church, the Spouse and Body of Jesus Christ. The great impact of Paul in the vocational experience and in the apostolic orientation of Anthony Claret is clearly seen here. In the apostolic life of Claret, the *Caritas Christi* became the very nature of his life and the key expression of his very being. It was this love of Christ that enabled him to work, pray, and suffer heroically for the expansion of His Kingdom.

Although the religious experience of Claret was essentially centred on the person of Jesus Christ, it did not merely terminate in Christ; it went beyond, through Christ, in the Spirit, to the Father. Claret encountered Christ as the most efficacious 'way' and mediator' to reach to the Father and hence to experience His Love. That is why we see him in the Madrid period ablaze with a yearning to love God as Jesus did and to love as the Son loves; also, to love Him as much as Blessed Mary did.¹³ Probably, it was the grace of the conservation of Eucharistic Species within him that led Claret to live the life of Christ, who lived His earthly life constantly in deep communion with the Father. From a dogmatic perception, the Christ of Anthony Claret was the Son sent by the Father, the Saviour and Redeemer who delivers us from sin, intercedes for us with the Father and becomes the spouse of souls. For Claret, it was in the person of Jesus Christ, the salvific and personal love of God had been made visible in an unsurpassable way.

2. BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY

In the life of Anthony Claret the Word of God had the dominant influence, which gave the fundamental impetus for creating a vibrant apostolic spirituality. It was through the reading of the Bible that Claret was awakened to his apostolic vocation and mission, while he was doing his philosophical studies in Vic. It

is quite noteworthy that during the years 1830-1831, two decisive events took place in the life the seminarian Anthony, which indeed became 'the turning point' in his apostolic life. The first was the temptation and the apparition of the Virgin Mary,¹⁴ and the second was the discovery of his apostolic vocation as a result of his charismatic reading of the Bible.¹⁵ Being a passionate reader of the Holy Bible, Claret encountered the Christ of the Holy Scriptures, as the authentic model of his life. Jesus, the Word Incarnate, whom he encountered in his relentless readings of the Bible, fostered in him a profound Biblical spirituality that lasted till his last breath.

2.1. A Passionate Lover of the Bible

At a time when 'Bible reading' was quite uncommon in the Spanish Church and in society, Claret had been an avid reader of the Bible since his younger age. In this habit of reading Scripture he was influenced by Jose Pinton's *Compendium of Sacred History*, which was a regular textbook for primary education in the Spanish schools and the Sunday catechism class. The *coup de grace* that uprooted Claret from the world of textiles to seminary life was the powerful verse of Jesus: "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and suffers the loss of his soul?" that he had read from childhood.¹⁶ As a priest, Claret mostly followed a fixed time for reading the Sacred Scripture.¹⁷

Even without having any special Biblical studies, he mastered and assimilated profound Biblical knowledge in a highly efficient and intense manner.¹⁸ He was able to memorize fluently a number of passages even with their context and was proficient in applying them at will. His many writings show the abundance and ease with which he cited not only Scriptures, but also various commentaries. Claret himself acknowledged that it was through the reading of the Sacred Bible that he was awakened, shaped and nourished in his apostolic vocation.¹⁹ The spiritual, moral or topological reading of the Bible has been the decisive factor in promoting the imitation of Jesus Christ and the inner inspiration for conforming one's life in closer communion to Christ.

Applying the Biblical Word to his own personal situation, Claret reinterpreted it in terms of the apostolic vocation and mission the Lord was giving him. Claret was profusely using the living traditions of the Fathers of the Church and the Christological, ecclesiological and apostolic interpretations of Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom, Augustine and Gregory the Great.²⁰ In giving interpretations of the Biblical texts, he was more concerned to give a spiritual synchronism as well as an apostolic interpretation, pertinent to his time. Although his reading of the Bible was a reading 'in letter and in spirit', Claret was incredibly insightful to interpret sensibly and astutely the signs of the times. It was the Bible that formed Claret, converting him body and soul into an apostle of the Bible.

In giving various interpretations of the Biblical text, the good of the Church and the welfare of human society always came in the vanguard for Claret. With regard to Jesus Christ and the texts which speak directly of Him and His Word, Claret's spiritual and topological reading was in fact characterized by 'evangelical literalism' fixed on the image of Christ, the Missionary. Claret's attitude, as an intense reader of the Bible and as one deeply enamoured of Christ, is well depicted in his book *El Colegial o Seminarista Instruido* ("The Well Instructed Seminarian"). In the section "On the Virtues of Jesus that a Priest should study and practise," he proposes the virtues of Jesus in order to become a prolific apostolic missionary.²¹ Nevertheless, his eagerness to reproduce in himself the image of Christ the evangelizer led him to visualize details that were not found in the Gospel text itself, yet were in consonance with it.

2.2. The Apostle of Bible Reading

The Biblical spirituality which Claret drew from the rich fountain of the Holy Bible was always geared for evangelization. He devoted all his time and energy to the missionary proclamation of the Word that is stimulated by the love of Christ. He was well aware of the quasi-sacramental importance of the Word and of the people's need to be evangelized. Claret considered himself as the minister of the Word and for him the ministry of the Word was the most exalted and overwhelming of all apostolic ministries. All other apostolate and social works that he undertook in Spain and Cuba were only supplementary works or actions of the essential ministry of the Word of God. The epicentre of Claret's Biblical spirituality is the unconditional imitation of Jesus the evangelizer and the proclamation of the Word of God to all creatures.

Claret not only read the Bible for his own spiritual and apostolic benefit, but also proposed and preached to others of the immense worth and great usefulness of it to all sections of people. He was relentlessly exhorting all the consecrated people--bishops, priests, religious, missionaries--through his writings and preaching, of the great need to exercise it for their apostolic works and, very particularly, in their evangelizing mission. Claret was trying his best in re-christianizing and re-evangelizing the Church of his time, in a most proficient and systematic manner, at a time when the Church was severely shaken up by the menaces of communism, socialism, secularism, atheism, modernism, etc. All his evangelizing endeavours in propagating the Bible reading effected a great spiritual revitalization in the people as well as genuine love for the Holy Bible.

2.3. An Apostolic Missionary of Evangelization

Claret was not merely an apostle, who was formed by the Word of God, but was a great evangelizer in the modern world, who successfully employed the modern media, above all, the press and publication for evangelization works and

for the spread of the Bible. He started a *Religious Library* towards this purpose with great investment of latest technologies and expertise. He published and distributed books, booklets and leaflets by the heap, in order to counter evil with good, especially the great evils of his time, such as, socialism, communism, secularism, atheism, pantheism and Protestantism. Claret understood that the people had become weak and were starving because they had ceased to receive the daily bread of God's Word. Therefore, he envisioned a systematic plan of evangelization, involving priests, lay people, and consecrated persons, which gave rise to various movements, associations and institutes, categorically oriented towards the evangelizing apostolate.²² Claret was at the same time an innovative founder of the means of evangelization and the promoter of the agents of evangelization.

Not only did he promote the shared apostolate, but he also helped numerous religious institutes to collaborate actively in the work of re-christianizing society through a diverse and profound evangelizing activity. Since Claret was fully convinced that the impact of evangelization depends on the quality of the evangelizers, he also paid great importance on the formation of qualified evangelizers and well trained priests. Forming a sound and committed clergy for evangelization was one of Claret's principal objectives both in Cuba²³ as the Archbishop and in Madrid as the President of the Seminary of Escorial.²⁴ The biblical inspirations in the life of Anthony Claret were so vital that he transmitted them to his *Missionaries* through the constitutions of his congregation, which were abundant with scriptural quotations and they were substantially cited.

2.4. Apostolate towards Re-Evangelization of the People

With the compliance and direction of the local diocesan Prelate, Claret went around preaching the word of God, igniting a pentecostal experience for the people of God, who had been so long deprived of the flame of the divine Word. It was towards the end of his Cuban period and during his years in Madrid that Claret acquired a new experience of Christ and of the Church, where he experienced Christ not only as the evangelizer but also the redeemer, who creates and saves his Church through his own sacrifice. He then began to fully grasp the mystery of the Church as the communion of salvation and the body of Christ.²⁵

An in-depth investigation into the life and apostolic campaign of the Saint reveals to us that, from the very beginning of his apostolic life, he was preoccupied with the evils and problems that were affecting the Church.²⁶ And Claret, in fact, initiated systematic actions for restoring the beauty of the Church from the early years of his Catalan period in diverse manners and methods. It was from the privileged post as the Royal Confessor that Claret directed a vigorous and comprehensive reform, commencing with the election of bishops and the

renewal of social structures by means of the *Academy of St. Michael* and the *Popular Parish Lending Libraries*, and continuing with the formation of youth and of priests.

For Anthony Claret, at a time when society was being swiftly de-christianized by the disruptive factors of socialism, liberalism, pantheism, rationalism and protestantism, along with the appearance of two antagonistic systems, capitalism vs. marxism, which has come to be called the “apostasy of the Masses”, his preoccupation was how to re-evangelize and thus to re-Christianize the people. The prophetic and apostolic mind of Claret was greatly preoccupied on how to conserve, as well as promote, the faith of the people. Towards this he adopted various means and methods, which he discerned as most profitable.

2.4.1. Catechism

The first means he employed towards the re-evangelization of the people was the catechism and here he specially focussed on the catechism for the children.²⁷ He understood that an adequate and effective religious instruction was lacking in the Spanish Church of his time. Furthermore, a systematic de-christianizing was taking place in society by the enemies of the Church and the faith. To remedy that shortage, he himself came forward, writing and publishing four basic catechism works.²⁸ Perceiving atheism as an important threat for society from his Cuban period, Claret focussed greater attention on the catechism for the Christian education of different groups. These works on catechisms were of such great importance that most of the people of his era came across the basic Christian doctrines through these texts and many even memorized its prayers.

2.4.2. Preaching

Knowing well that preaching was a vital form of evangelization, Claret began his apostolic life focussing mainly on popular missions. The sermons were preached as vital parts of mission preaching. Though the popular mission and the mission preaching were rather common in his age, Claret developed them further, not only for the conversion of the people but also for imparting Christian doctrine to people and to spur them on to a better life. It has to be said that, even though Claret was influenced by Baroque piety, he indeed elevated the elements of piety and devotion to a level of faith instruction and education in Christian doctrine. Following a style of preaching that was more simple and clear, more biblical and doctrinal, Claret was giving a new orientation to evangelization of the people and thereby aiming for a more enduring and stable renewal of the Church.²⁹ Here we should recall that he edited overall 23 volumes of “Mission Sermons” with many biblical references, mainly to help the priests in their preaching, which were considered complementary for mission preaching.

2.4.3. Books and Publications

Experience had taught Anthony Claret the great influence that books, pamphlets and leaflets could produce on the life of the people. According to him, they were some of the most powerful forces for good and he launched this powerful apostolate of pen for evangelization and re-evangelization. His motivation was so simple and clear: “The preacher cannot always be preaching, but a book is always delivering the same message tirelessly and is always willing to repeat what it says.”³⁰ Seeing them as an effective evangelization means that could bring forth copious fruit, Claret used all his God-given talent and capability, acquired through his textile training, towards this apostolate.

The beginning of the *Religious Library*, along with a few like-minded priests and lay people, was a great evangelizing enterprise and a far-sighted initiative of Anthony Claret in the whole of Spain. The innumerable titles, volumes, and editions of books and pamphlets that the *Religious Library* published, even during his lifetime, was telling testimony to the immense contribution it made in Christian society.³¹ Claret wrote books on Bible, Catechism, Christian Doctrines, Religious Life, Spirituality, Family Life, Social Themes, Music, Agriculture, Education, etc. Practically there was no area left out without being touched by this illustrated author. The wider distribution and publication of Christian, moral and religious books initiated by Claret, prevented to a great extent, the spread of anti-christian, atheistic and secular literature in the society of his age.

2.4.4. Associations and Institutes

From the very beginning of his apostolic missionary campaign, he recognized the role of the laity in the apostolate and therefore he initiated different projects and confraternities to involve them.³² If the high point of all of those initiatives in the Church was *The Congregation of the Missionaries*, another momentous effort was the enterprise involving the lay people in the Catholic apostolate, that is, the foundation of the *Academy of St. Michael*. The “triple army” of Claret towards the evangelizing ministry were: the missionaries, the secular priests in community and the archconfraternity of the lay people.

Claret contemplated the agents of evangelization in a unified vision as a union between priests, religious and laity, united in the same cause, but each one fulfilling their respective duties according to their Christian vocation. Dependent on one another, but committed to an evangelizing mission with complementary charisms and functions, was his vision. Here, both priests and religious fulfil their roles in the world with their prophetic priesthood and religious consecration, whereas the laity fulfils their secular apostolate in the world, with or without consecration. Certainly, the Saint kept opening up new apostolic channels for priests, religious, and laity for the evangelizing mission of the Church in the

world. His prophetic vision kept leading him to a greater balance in each concrete circumstance of time and place.

CONCLUSION

We have been critically analysing the two dominant spiritual dimensions of the Christ experience of Anthony Mary Claret and identifying the features that are overriding in his apostolic spirituality, which in fact are the core Christological dimensions of consecrated life too. His whole life and apostolate were developed around the very person of Jesus Christ, the *Caritas Christi* and the Holy Bible; and it is equally same for every consecrated person. Among the various doctrinal and theological features that are dominant in his apostolic spirituality, the central thread is the Christocentric dimension. But the Christological spirituality of Anthony Claret is also interwoven with the Biblical and apostolic spiritualities. In the doctrine and practise of his Christological and Biblical spiritualities, Claret was equally supplemented by the other fundamental elements of the Catholic faith and doctrines: the Church, the Holy Eucharist, the Blessed Virgin Mary, priestly and consecrated life, laity and apostolic mission. Moreover, Claret was an imaginative and dynamic apostolic missionary, who lived an evangelical life most fruitful and beneficial to the world and the Church in a very turbulent period, by generously responding to the promptings of the Spirit. He was very judicious in reading the signs of his time and to interpret them in a very charismatic and prolific manner.

It is true that the Church in his time and of the succeeding years have greatly benefited from his doctrinal and theological teachings on the Christian life, centred on Jesus Christ and the imitation of Christ as exposed from the pages of the Bible. Even today, they remain as the core characteristics of consecrated life and dimensions essential for the meaningful evangelical living. These elements of the apostolic spirituality shall be seen not as the exclusive patrimony of the Claretian missionaries or of the Spanish Church, but dimensions common to the whole Church and to the entire People of God, in particular, to every consecrated person. The heritage of the Christological spirituality and the apostolic Christ-experience of this great missionary son of the nineteenth century is the patrimony of everyone, who genuinely aspires to imitate Jesus Christ and to grow in the Christological and Biblical dimensions of spiritual life. It is so, very specially, for those who have chosen to live a radical life of following Jesus Christ through the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Above all, in this 'Year of Faith' those who aspires to discern new avenues and methods for the new evangelization towards the transmission of Christian faith in a more meaningful, effective and opportune way, Anthony Mary Claret and his evangelizing methods can possibly give a visible direction and a positive paradigm.

Endnotes

- 1 *Vita Consecrata*. 1
- 2 *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2a.
- 3 *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2b.
- 4 The whole of *Autobiography of St. Antony Mary Claret* (Chicago: Claretian Publications, 1976) especially the no. 356), demonstrates well Claret's constant obsession with and meditation on the person of Jesus Christ.
- 5 *Autobiography* of Saint Anthony Mary Claret. 40.
- 6 John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (3rd Edition, New York, Fordham University Press, 1987), 170.
- 7 Auto. 340, 642, 782; RR (Retreat Resolutions of Saint Anthony Mary Claret), 1863, no. 7 in AW (*Autobiographical Writings*), 207.
- 8 Auto. 356.
- 9 RR, 1864, no. 8 in AW, 210; RR, 1865, no. 8 in AW, 214; RR, 1866, no. 11 in AW, 218.
- 10 RR, 1870 ("Homage") no. 3-4 in AW, 235.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 387.
- 12 Letter to Sor Dolores Sánchez, July 25, 1850, EC (*Epistolario de San Antonio Maria Claret*), I, 414. In this letter Claret explains the Episcopal motto and gives the description about the various elements in the Episcopal seal.
- 13 LG (Lights and Graces of Saint Anthony Mary Claret), 1863 in AW, 327.
- 14 Auto. 95-98.
- 15 Auto., 113-120.
- 16 Auto. 68.
- 17 RR, 1851 in AW, 166; Auto. 637.
- 18 Manuel Orge, "Biblical Inspiration and Basis of the Claretian Charism" in *Our Project of Missionary Life: Commentary on the Constitutions*, Vol. I (Edited by Aquilino Bocos Merino, Quezon City, Claretian Publications, 1992), 189-190.
- 19 A few examples for the great influence of the Bible were: "This phrase impressed me deeply and went like an arrow..." (Auto. 68); "What moved and stimulated me most..." (Auto. 113); "The passages that impressed me so deeply..." (Auto. 114); "In many passages of the Bible I felt the voice of God calling me..." (Auto. 120); "The Lord made me understand..." (Auto. 118).

- 20 Manuel Orge, "Biblical Inspiration and Basis of the Claretian Charism" 195-196.
- 21 *El Colegial Instruido* (sec. V, ch. I, Barcelona, LR., 1860), 709-734. (The same is also presented in "The Priestly Spirit" in SSW (*Selected Spiritual Writings of Saint Anthony Mary Claret*), 357-378). In the *Autobiography* Claret reproduces the same, but in a brief manner with the title "Virtues of Jesus Christ I resolve to Imitate." Cf. Auto. 428-437.
- 22 The Institute of "The Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Blessed Virgin Mary" (1849), "The Pious and Apostolic Union of prayers and other good works under the special protection of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary, Queen of the Apostles" (1845), "The Spiritual Society of Mary Most Holy Against Blasphemy" (1845), "The Confraternity of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary for the conversion of sinners" (1847), "The Congregation of Catholic Mothers" (1863), "The Fraternity of Christian Doctrine" (1849), "Spiritual Brotherhood of Good Books" (1846), "The Academy of St. Michael" (1858), "Popular Parish Lending Libraries" (1864), "The Brotherhood of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary, Lovers of Humanity" (1847) and "The Enlarged Confraternity of the Heart of Mary" and 'The Army of the Heart of Mary' (1864) were some of the main associations and movements Claret organized for apostolic and evangelization works.
- 23 Reynerio Lebroc Martínez in his book *San Antonio Maria Claret, Arzobispo Misionero de Cuba* (Madrid, Misioneros Claretianos, 1992) elaborately deals the various effort of Claret in the renovation of the seminary and life of the clergy. Cf. 393-522.
- 24 José Miguel Espinosa Sarmiento in *El Seminario de El Escorial en Tiempos de San Antonio Maria Claret* (Pamplona, EUNSA, 1995) illustrates the various endeavours Claret has taken in giving a new direction to seminary formation. Cf. 66-82, 133-191.
- 25 It was at the time in Madrid that he discovered the deep meaning of the vision in Vic with the appearance of Mary and of the words he listened to during his ordination to the Diaconate. He saw that the principalities and powers of darkness had become incarnate in modern ideologies: German idealism, leading to Hegelian Pantheism, the Rationalism of Renan, the Positivism of Comte, the Scientism and Historical Materialism of Marx. These were the "powers of darkness" against which the Church must doggedly fight. Cf. J. Bermejo, "Charismatic Foundation of the Claretian Mission," I (Booklets on Claretian Formation 10, Rome, 1991), 19.
- 26 It is specially to be remembered that from very early childhood Anthony Claret was unhappy when others were suffering and were in difficulties, whether it be worldly suffering or eternal damnation, for he was very soft-hearted and compassionate. Cf. Auto. 8-10, 19-20.

- 27 Auto. 275.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 285. The four catechisms he refers to here probably were: *Catecismo de la doctrina cristiana explicado* ('Catechism of the Christian Doctrines explained,' Barcelona, 1848); *Maná del cristiano* ('Manna for Christians, an elementary summary of the catechism,' Vich, 1850); *Compendio o breve explicación de la doctrina cristiana* ('Compendium or brief explanation of Christian Doctrine,' Barcelona, 1848) and *Devocionario de los párvulos* ('Devotions for Little People,' Barcelona, 1859). Claret actually composed 12 catechisms, with few modifications and edited various others. In his later years he brought out even a complete catechism, the *Catecismo unico*.
- 29 J.M. Viñas, "Ministerio Profético de Claret en la edificación de la Iglesia" in *Studia Claretiana* (Vol. XVIII, Roma, 2000), 14-15.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 310.
- 31 All together Claret has written and edited more than 120 books, both small and big ones, worth of a total of 21,000 pages, and innumerable booklets and leaflets. Until the end of the last century, the total amount of copies published surpasses the enormous quantity of 12 million (12,000,000) volumes with a total of 550 million (550,000,000) pages. *An incredible and astonishing figure indeed...!* One of his book *The Straight Path* that explained so beautifully the ways to reach Heaven, became the 'best-seller' in his time that it was re-printed up to again and again, from different places and in different languages, in Spain, Portugal, Cuba and in most of the Latin American countries, reaching about 300 editions till the middle of the 20th century; probably creating an all time record among all the Catholic books ever published.
- 32 Important among them were, *The Fraternity of the Heart of Mary* (for lay apostolate: 1847), *The Religious Library* (for publishing apostolate, 1848), *The Congregation of the Missionaries* (for the ministry of the Word, 1849), *the Secular Institute of Cordimarian Filiation* (1850), *The Licensed Credit Unions* (in Cuba, 1852), *The Claretian Missionary Sisters* (for teaching apostolate, 1855), *The Academy of St. Michael* (for intellectuals, 1859), *The Parish Lending Libraries* (1864), *The Conference of the Sacred Family* (founded in Paris in 1868 or 1869), and so on.

FROM FRAGMENTATION TO WHOLENESS: JOURNEY TOWARDS A JOYFUL CONSECRATED LIFE

Sr. Tresa Purayidom, EF

It is said that the primitive people experienced reality in its totality. Their intuitive vision of the reality as an integrated whole made them live in harmony with God, with nature, with others, and with their own innermost self. There was unity and harmony everywhere and everything was seen as interwoven in a cosmic whole. They viewed everything in the universe as a manifestation of the One Reality,¹ and as such sacred, charged with divine energy. They nurtured a sense of the sacred and sacramentality of everything. This sense of our interwovenness with the Divine, with others, with nature, and the cosmos is lost in the course of time. Fragmentation and disintegration are the hallmarks of modern human existence. Hence there is a much felt need to develop and promote an integrated life in relation to God, humanity, and the whole universe.

We speak of freedom when we experience the absence or limitations of freedom. We speak of justice and righteousness when we see unjust deeds are taking place in the midst of human beings. In a similar way we speak of integration and wholeness when we experience the negative effects of a fragmented and scattered existence.

1. PRESENT CULTURAL CONTEXT

Our postmodern society, with its propagation of a culture of appearance and scientific positivism shaped by mass media and market forces, has turned all traditional values upside down. We do witness tremendous growth and discoveries in scientific and technological fields. Information, communication, and digital technologies are moving in an unprecedented pace towards convergence. Power of the internet is indescribable. With all these facilities, the present-day world

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should have become a better place for all human beings to live. But the result we see is quite the contrary. Disparities are becoming more and more acute; violence is on the increase; there is much restlessness among human beings living on this planet, disintegration and disharmony everywhere. People today live on the basis of comparisons, measuring out their relationships according to status, creed and so on.

Doesn't the root cause of all these unpleasant and unhealthy experiences lie on a loss of the sense of the Sacred, a total absence of awareness of the all-pervading presence of the Holy?

The Western world with its highly sophisticated technologies and lifestyle has influenced the Eastern minds too and, as a result, there is a quasi-total disinclination among the modern generation to be present to the Sacred or the Great Truth that matters. Even those who profess to be religious men and women, seem to be spiritually dismembered, fragmented, dissected, and torn into numerous directions, no longer whole and centred. The adherence to the modern philosophies of materialism and existentialism has blinded many a man and woman from seeking an organic and holistic view of life and reality. This is why today at least some people are experiencing the need to retrieve from our spiritual and cultural heritage, the vision, insights, teachings, and practices of an integrated life in relation to God, to oneself, and to the rest of humanity and the whole universe.

2. HUNGER FOR A HOLISTIC SPIRITUALITY

In spite of the materialism, consumerism, and individualism that is all pervasive, we can identify a hunger for spirituality present in the people both in developed and developing world--in Asia, Africa, and South America as well as in the West. It is as if people are instinctively struggling to be freed from the fetters of a dualistic and mechanistic world view that controlled our life and reality. Albert Nolan says: "It seems to me that by and large the new search for spirituality, the deep hunger for spirituality, is genuine and sincere. It is one of the signs of our times."²

The many books written, the many centres of spirituality mushrooming all over the world, the many gurus and spiritual masters to whom large numbers of seekers flock are all signs of this hunger. Is it a passing phenomenon? It does not look like. It seems to be linked to the very dynamics of human becoming. We are a 'whole' and the search for holistic life will be a perennial quest of our life, especially when it seems to be threatened by forces and currents of the times, as it is today.

Again as Nolan puts it, "the signs of our times are ambiguous. Things seem to be moving in several directions at the same time. Some trends seem to be reactions to the direction others are taking. The different signs become like strands of wool that are woven together into a complex pattern The signs of the times are pointers to the future. It is not that they show us clearly and definitively where we are going. Rather, the value of these pointers is that they challenge us. And what matters here is that we allow them to challenge us. Or, to put it in terms of faith, what matters is that we allow God to challenge us through our reading of the signs."³

What is particularly striking about this hunger is that people are also looking for a holistic life, where the body, soul, matter, earth, the ecosystem, the web of human relationships are all seen in their interconnectedness among themselves. This hunger is nothing but the gift of the Holy One who draws the human being to himself. We presume that those who embrace the consecrated life are somehow or other influenced by the same hunger. Rather, it is this hunger that stands as the motivation of such a choice as priestly or religious life.

3. NEED FOR A HOLISTIC VISION OF LIFE

The loss of a holistic vision of life and world during and after the age of Enlightenment⁴ had its repercussions on the character and personality formation of individuals. The approach to life became one-sided, not holistic.⁵ The tendency is to give emphasis on one aspect. For example, efforts are concentrated on professional efficiency and higher productivity. Often, care is not given to other aspects such as physical, spiritual, social, and cultural well-being and development of the person.

Restoration of a holistic vision is very important to advance to the adulthood of human, Christian, and religious living and personality formation. Without an integrated view of body-soul, spirit-matter, mind-heart, it is impossible to develop a life that is centred and whole.

A truly holistic theory of personality, grounded in the mystery at the centre of all that is, proposes to avoid any type of subtle or overt dualism, such as that between soul and body, spirit and matter, supernatural and natural, mind and heart, vital and functional, social and individual, historical and personal, free and structured, transcendent and immanent, secular and sacred, and active and contemplative.⁶

Only by revitalizing the awareness of our interwovenness with what is beyond the visible and tangible, the measurable and statistically verifiable we can hope for the return of a vision that is holistic. Awed attention to the Beyond

in the midst of our everyday life heightens our understanding of the human and spiritual meaning of our existence.⁷

3.1. Integrated View of Body-Soul

A wholesome life necessarily takes into account the body-soul unity. There is no holistic well-being at the exclusion of body. “Ours is an intertwining unity of body, mind, and spirit, of head and heart, wholly embraced by the mystery at the centre of our life and world.”⁸ Body and soul are intimately interwoven in a unity of matter and form.

All our bodily, aesthetic, cultural, educational, and spiritual needs are to be cared for in order to experience wholeness and well-being. The more the awareness of this integration grows, the more we become solicitous of ourselves as temples of the Holy Spirit in need of proper upkeep! We watch our health. We eat wisely. We do the exercise needed for our physical and mental wellbeing. We sense the gentle breeze of the Spirit cooling our overheated hearts. We feel less aloof from the ordinary and more inclined to listen in humility to all that is. We become more realistic, straightforward, and down to earth in all we do. Instead of focusing on our own accomplishments, we rely on God.⁹

Our life in God is thus an all-embracing reality. It does not exclude what is human; rather, it complements and elevates the natural gifts of goodness preformed within us by the Triune God.

3.2. Harmonizing Head and Heart

The split between head and heart is a common phenomenon we observe in our life today. While the mind seeks the reason for everything, the heart prefers to rest in the mystery. To the extent this split widens, disintegration increases, diminishing our spiritual energy for effective ministry. As Adrian van Kaam says, “we behave like instruments out of tune with the symphony of our Spirit-orchestrated existence.”¹⁰

We need to understand the positive effects of a head and heart integrated existence: First of all, we are enabled to see all problems as challenges. Secondly, we become sensitive to the mystery’s whispered invitations and willingly pause long enough to listen to the wisdom of our heart. Instead of concentrating on our tiredness and irritation, we silently wait in order to be invigorated and filled with gratitude for God’s many gifts. Thirdly, we avoid the constant overloading of our psyche by proud attempts to put the messiness of life in perfect order by our own ingenious techniques. Harmonizing our head and heart shields us from unnecessary tensions and concerns that make us sick at heart.

Synchronization of mind and heart is an important factor in Christian and religious character building. It helps us to be attuned to the gentle beat of Christ’s heart than to try to keep up with a world mad with worry. When our finite heart is enfolded into the infinite heart of our Lord and Saviour, we begin to think in a less foggy manner. We formulate more prudent plans and execute them with gentle but firm precision. We have more energy at hand since none of it is expended on projects of our own making. Unmoved by useless disturbances and undistracted by aggravating detours, we begin to behold the face of our Beloved Lord in every facet of creation. We celebrate the Father’s first revelation in blades of grass, tiny buds, and blooming trees. Our heart begins to expand by a newly found love for such spiritual disciplines as formative reading, listening, meditation, prayer, and contemplation.¹¹

We recognize that God does not want us to lose our equanimity in spastic actions but to do what we can in the calmer climate of contemplative existence. When head-knowledge is complemented with heart-knowledge, it leads to true wisdom. The mind comprehends the meaning of commitment but it is in the heart or centre of our inner life that we find the courage to commit ourselves to the mission that the Father has entrusted to us.

3.3. Synchronization of Interior Life and External Concerns

In the course of history some religious currents placed a lopsided emphasis on the interior dimension of human growth while others stressed the external manifestation of God’s love and care through humanitarian services. Without a serious attention to interior life all our external ministries may merely become routine actions devoid of heartfelt joy and kindness. Our professional excellence may remain arid. Today, however we notice a welcome reconnection between work and worship, commitment and compassion, personal sanctity and social service.

Christian tradition uses different expressions like *contemplation and action, love and care, prayer and work* to affirm the togetherness of our being and doing. We read in the document *Fraternal Life in Community*: “Sometimes men and women religious ‘don’t have time’ and their day runs the risk of being too busy and anxious, and the religious can end up being tired and exhausted.”¹² An activity-oriented life will soon empty us of all interior substance and gradually make us feel miserable.

We will really lose our balance unless we break away from the ‘too much’ and ‘too busy’ moments of life. Even noble pursuits can drain us if we dissipate our energy in too many directions at once. Break from continuous and strenuous activity is not a luxury but a necessity.

Our organism needs inner calm if we want to assist others. The Mary in us has to rest at the feet of Jesus if the Martha in us is to do his work (Luke 10:40-42). A rested body, a peaceful soul, lessen our susceptibility to illness and apathy, threatening our availability to ministry and apostolic care. The more attentive we are to the work of grace in our soul, the more we find it easier to be present to others with generous hearts and open minds. In other words, contemplative prayer along with love-deeds can take us to spiritual heights.

3.4. Heart: The Integrating Centre of Our Divine-Human Experiences

The heart is the centre of our decisions and actions. It is the motivating force behind our commitments to live in Christ's name and to be instruments of his peace, love, and mercy in the world. It is the core form of our experiential life, the hidden, affective-cognitive centre of all our divinely articulated experiences. It is the sacred space wherein we integrate the various dimensions of our everyday life, their dynamics, expressions, and phasic maturations. Its enduring dispositions influence every aspect of our life and make it blossom. Integration implies building a living synthesis of values and experiences of everyday life with a view to achieving unity and harmony within oneself, with God, with other human beings, and with the whole reality around.

4. TOWARDS WHOLENESS OF LIFE

Consecrated life is not a scattered existence. It is a call to wholeness of life. There is a divine centre around which all that one is, does, and experiences is gathered. This integrating core is Christ himself, the Incarnate Word of the Father. Wholeness of life is in fact the fruit of a long term journey of integration of one's life experiences of the past and present with a positive outlook towards future. It is not an isolated individual effort but a journey that one undertakes together with others in the 'here and now' of the created world, in response to the call of God. It helps the person to develop a fundamentally positive attitude towards reality; of reconciliation and gratitude toward one's own history and trust towards others. Our strengths and our weaknesses are to be integrated and made part of the dynamic force in our striving towards a life that is whole and centred. As St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Ephesians "we are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it" (Eph 2:10). This good life is nothing but the fullness of life which Christ has brought for us.

4.1. Christ: the Model of Integrated Life

Christ, fullness of humanity and divinity, becomes our model of an integrated life. In Christ we see the harmonious blend of the human-divine qualities, a

perfect flow of contemplation and commitment. He was totally oriented towards the Father's will in his concern for spiritual and social acts of justice, peace, and harmony.¹³ He chose to adapt himself to the people to whom he was sent. He was at home with the poor, the sinners, the tax-collectors, women, and children. He shows us that to be a Christian, to be a Religious means to live in praise of the Father and in obedience to his will.

The mystery of Christ's being fully human and fully divine guides our journey towards wholeness, experience of fullness of life in him. His wholly divine, wholly human identity was progressively disclosed to him. He constantly sought and lived in perfect attunement to the Father's will. His entire life was an uninterrupted chain of appreciative abandonment options. He remained frank and fearless as he deciphered intimations emanating from his founding call and leading him to the passion he was destined to endure for our sake.¹⁴ It is his unconditional fidelity to his fully human, fully divine destiny that led him to the full transformation of his humanity in the glorious form of his resurrected life.

4.2. Attunement to Christ: The Goal of Integration

For Christ, the fidelity to his call implied supreme attunement to the will of the Father. Like him consecrated persons seek to tune themselves to the divine directives they receive in and through the Holy Spirit. They allow the Spirit to guide their lives towards the wholeness and holiness that the Father wills for us in his Son. Like a good gardener, the Spirit nurtures the seeds of our vocation and brings them to maturation. It is Christ's Spirit in us who loves the Father and tunes our mind and heart to the Father's love-will, making us bypass anything that diminishes our whole-hearted response to live in accordance with his call.

By following the footsteps of Christ in our day to day life, we grow to the stature destined for us by the Father. Living in intimate communion with him we become capable of announcing the kingdom and bearing witness to God's infinite love for human kind. All this presupposes the transformation of our heart into a Christ-like heart, constantly abiding in the Father while being attentive to the needs of humankind. It is Christ whom we follow as disciples and whose life we want to emulate.

Our consecrated life in Christ is not about documenting our occasional gestures of charity but about becoming joyful givers of love and care, in the unnoticed arena of everydayness.¹⁵ Christ's life inspires us to be faithful to our calling, to face the challenges of life, and to complete our mission relying on the grace which uninterruptedly flows into us.

Living a life of wholeness with Christ means conforming our hearts with his own. It means to be like him at the core of our character and personality. Christ is not only the Master and Lord but an intimate companion and true friend for all; he wants us to experience him as such. He requests his followers to be friends and partners in his mission: "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father" (Jn 15:14-15). Our likeness to Christ cannot flow from external motivations but from his love within our heart for the Father.¹⁶

4.3. Joyful Messengers of Christ

Every baptized person is called to be a messenger of Christ; for priests and religious this mandate is all the more true and radical. The world of ours needs joyful witnesses and daring prophets of the beneficent power of God's love. To be a Christian and to be a religious means to be running the race with our mind and heart fixed on Christ, to practise the values that he taught us, and to be messengers of the new heaven and new earth which he promised.

A new model of religious/consecrated life has been inaugurated during the YRC – 2012 in Delhi. This new model is named as 'Messengers.' The consecrated persons are called to be at the service of the mystery "that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints" (Col 1:26). Energized by the Spirit we become the joyful and courageous messengers of Christ going to the furthest ends of the earth to proclaim the good news of salvation. Salvation means to make whole. This is the mission before us to restore the wholeness within ourselves and all around us.

It is Christ himself who enters our heart and readies us through the power of his Spirit to fulfill the great commission to "go and bear fruit" (Jn 15:16). His grace lifts us up and makes us gracious servants and messengers of the mystery. Rather than withdrawing to our own closed selves or putting our gifts and talents under wraps we become Christ's instruments for the betterment of our world.

5. RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY: THE BEST PLACE FOR GROWING IN WHOLENESS

Religious community made up of individuals coming from diverse (national, cultural, educational) backgrounds form a "surprising uniqueness of personalities, interests and capacities through which the infinite richness of the presence of Christ may increasingly reveal itself in the culture."¹⁷

The document, *Fraternal life in Community* described religious community as a place for becoming brothers and sisters. It is the communal character of religious community, the fraternal relationship, and the growing in freedom and responsibility that help religious to become full-fledged brothers and sisters.

For religious men and women, fulfilment comes through their communities. One who tries to live an independent life, detached from community, has surely not taken the secure path to the perfection of his or her own state. The community not only strengthens the individuals' capacity for self-gift but constantly offers them opportunities to cultivate those qualities which are required in all human relationships: respect, kindness, sincerity, self-control, tactfulness, a sense of humour, and a spirit of sharing.¹⁸ In this way, the community becomes the locus of unfolding for its members.

The religious community in fact becomes the place where we learn daily to take on that new mind which allows us to live in joyful fraternal communion through the richness of diverse gifts and which, at the same time, fosters a convergence of these gifts for greater fecundity in the Church and the world.

The document reminds us that "peace and pleasure in being together are among the signs of the Kingdom of God. The joy of living even in the midst of difficulties along the human and spiritual path and in the midst of daily annoyances is already part of the Kingdom. This joy is a fruit of the Spirit and embraces the simplicity of existence and the monotonous texture of daily life. . . A fraternity rich in joy is a genuine gift from above to brothers and sisters who know how to ask for it and to accept one another, committing themselves to fraternal life, trusting in the action of the Spirit. Thus the words of the Psalm are made true: "Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity.... For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life for evermore" (Ps. 133:1-3), because when they live together as brothers, they are united in the assembly of the Church; they are of one heart in charity and of one will."¹⁹

Let us become witnesses of such true and authentic joy in our community living. As the document invites us let us cultivate such joy within our religious community; let us initiate gradually and patiently that passage from 'me' to 'us', from 'my commitment' to a 'commitment entrusted to the community', from seeking 'my things' to seeking the 'things of Christ'.²⁰ Thus let us celebrate our consecrated life in its abundance and diversity with our hearts full of loving concern for the integral welfare of all beings. Let us invoke the intercession of our Mother Mary, the woman of fullness, the fullness of grace, who wholeheartedly cooperated with God's plan of salvation for the entire human family.

6. FORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS

A joyful consecrated life requires a formation that takes care of the entire person. Formation is, in fact, a process that starts off from an integral view of the human person, in her cultural and vocational originality, as member of the Church and citizen of the world. A theory of human formation should never lose contact with life as a whole. It should not isolate one part as ultimate, but try to focus on the interwovenness of all aspects. Formation “should include and express *the character of wholeness*. Formation should involve the whole person, in every aspect of the personality, in behaviour and intentions. It must therefore provide a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation which pays special attention to the harmonious integration of all its various aspects.”²¹ These different dimensions interact harmoniously to contribute towards holistic human growth. Certainly the focal point of such an organic formation is the spiritual, the thirst from within for the Holy.

In formation, we need to be concerned about a process of interiorization of the information and insights that the candidates receive. Often, it happens that whether in the seminary or in any other religious Institution, during formation or any other programme, most of the components or items or elements or data can be just accumulated, or juxtaposed without being personalised and integrated into a single comprehensive whole. The theoretical and practical inputs one receives must lead her to an inward movement toward the core of one’s being, and an internal integration done from the depth of the heart. To the extent this integration takes place in the person, her attitude towards life will become positive and his relationship with God, with others, and with nature harmonious. This should result in a life-style which is holistic. Such a life style will lead the person to have a holistic approach to mission.

An integral formation aims at helping individuals to: (a) connect and unify the various aspects of their lives in a responsible and coherent manner; (b) embody in a lifestyle the values that they profess verbally; (c) give them a sense of increasing wholeness and guide them in fashioning a concrete way of living out their spirituality; and (d) heal the dichotomy between body and soul, brain and heart and thus make them whole.

Most of the Institutes today speak of a formation that is gradual, systematic, progressive, complete, and stable in order to form the entire person who is a complex reality of the human and spiritual. It insists on a solid and integral formation that enables the candidates to seek God above all things, love him with their whole heart and to love everyone in him and make a total gift of themselves in freedom and joy for building up the Body of Christ, the Church.

It also reminds the need to be respectful of the ethnic and cultural characteristics of the countries in which the religious family is present. The goal of formation being the transformation of the whole person, it is necessary to have a holistic approach that enables the person to be integrated in all the aspects of her life and become one with God, with others, and with nature, in order to offer her life in praise and glory of the Triune God.

Initial period of formation is the time to facilitate the process of developing the positive potentialities of the candidates. Even in very healthy human beings, there are at least some disruptive tendencies that hinder the possibility of self-discovery and self-integration. From childhood candidates may have developed ways of denying, escaping, resisting, and evading their true calling. They are often not aware of such repressed tendencies to rage, hostility, religious frigidity, envy, and jealousy. These tendencies make difficult one’s openness to God, to oneself, and to others. These attitudes are to be brought to light and positively integrated into one’s personality.

Formation is basically a spiritual journey into which the candidate needs to be initiated, the journey that ultimately leads to a fulfilment of oneself in God, through a harmonious network of interaction with self, Other (God), others, and the whole universe (cosmos). It presupposes and leads to one’s physical (physical health or stamina), mental (equanimity, mental serenity, emotional maturity), and spiritual well-being. This is the type of formation we need to impart to our young people in order to help them to make their consecrated religious life an inward journey of peace, in constant encounter with the Lord, witnessing him with joy in the world of today.

Candidates coming from different social, cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds need to be introduced into a process of harmonious living in spite of the differences they experience within and around them. Let the differences be considered richness, and not threat. The religious community into which they are welcomed and especially the formators who accompany them may express and promote union of hearts and minds that transcends social, cultural and other differences.

For any formation, the witness of an experiential, integrated, and holistic life is needed. This is to be realized first and foremost in those elder brothers and sisters who are placed in charge of those who join the convents and seminaries. Then such a life will be more easily reflected in the life of those whom they take care to form. To talk about holistic life meaningfully, one must first of all follow this path honestly.

CONCLUSION

Human being, though made in perfect shape and harmony by the Creator God, experiences weakness and disintegration and yearns to regain her true identity. No science is as efficient as the spiritual formation that can facilitate the growth process of integration and harmony which one needs to experience within, with other human beings, and with the nature.

Ronald Rolheiser speaks of a fire inside of us, a restless longing that energizes each of us. According to him, how we channel this longing, the disciplines and habits we choose to live by, will either lead us to a greater integration or disintegration within our bodies, minds, and souls, and to a greater integration or disintegration in the way we relate to God, others, and the cosmic world.²²

It is not sufficient to be integrated within oneself, but integration should include a harmonious relationship with others. For this an integral vision is needed. Such a vision is to see others as part of one's self. Thomas Merton, a catholic contemplative monk expresses it as follows in an experience he had one day, while standing in the centre of a shopping complex of Louisville crowded with people. An insight happened to him which he shares in his book "Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander": "I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I love all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we would not be alien to one another, even though we were total strangers. It was like walking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream."²³

In today's challenging world, every single religious is challenged to develop a well-integrated, harmonious interiority. Those who accept this challenge will definitely contribute to the healing of our segregated society and fragmented planet through the wholeness operating from within. A religious who enjoys inner wholeness breathes an air of harmony into her own community and to the world around. Such a person is indeed a blessing for the human life especially in these difficult times. Her life becomes an inspiration to all those who are engaged in building a community/society spiritually grounded, socially just and ecologically wise.

When one is integrated and whole, one is not affected unnecessarily by flattery, nor put down by criticism, nor by self-pity but becomes an authentic self-critique or soul-searcher in order to find uprightness before one's God. This, in turn, gives serenity, peace, and enlightenment to the people around.

To be whole and creative one needs to be in a relationship of harmony and communion not only with God and other human beings but also with nature and

the whole cosmos. When we lose the immediate contact with the whole web of relationships with nature, then it affects even our prayer life, for we miss the invitations of nature to contemplate the mystery.

When one is integrated at the deeper self, one is drawn to contribute for the welfare of all. To work for cosmic and environmental harmony is to be the outcome of an experience of harmony within and with others. It is not because a job is assigned to us, but because there is an inner call to share and establish wider harmony and wholeness in the creation. The harmony in nature is a sign of the divine harmony.

Endnotes

- 1 Jesu Rajan, *Bede's Journey to the Beyond* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997), 53. This One Reality is expressed as Yahweh in Judaism, God in Christianity, Brahman in Hinduism, Tao in Taoism, Dharmakaya in Buddhism and Allah in Islam. These are just names for what cannot be expressed, symbols pointing to the Ultimate Reality which is beyond all articulation and categorization.
- 2 Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today, A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 7.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 4 It was a movement of thought and belief concerned with the interrelated concepts of God, reason, nature and man that claimed wide assent among the European intellectuals in 17th and 18th centuries. Its basic belief was the superiority of reason as a guide to all knowledge and human concern. It attacked the established ways of European life and reinforced a conviction that we could discover useful knowledge, directed to the conquest of man's happiness through freedom. The roots of the enlightenment reach back to the Greek philosophers, when they discovered regularity in nature and concluded that its governing principle was the reasoning mind. This period was characterised by various intellectual movement like scientific revolution, enlightened religion, rise of materialism humanitarianism etc.: cf. David HARRIS, "Enlightenment", in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. VI, (Chicago: William Benton, 1976), 88.
- 5 The term holistic is used here in the context of psycho-spiritual growth referring to the all-round development of the person. One may be intellectually developed but spiritually dwarf. The early life of St. Augustine of Hippo is presented as an example of this apparent wholeness: "Developed as he was intellectually, his spiritual life lacked any notable strength. On the pre-transcendent level he looked like a whole person – physically robust, mentally bright, emotionally energetic. On the transcendent level his life was utterly fragmented; [...] By worldly standards he was a whole person; by spiritual standards he was a broken man in need of healing": Adrian van Kaam & Susan Muto, *Christian Articulation of the Mystery*,

- Formation Theology*, Vol. II, (Pittsburgh: Epiphany Association, 2005), 111-112. In due time, the Spirit of God erupted into his life making him a whole person.
- 6 Adrian van Kaam & Susan Muto, *Formation of the Christian Heart*, *Formation Theology*, Vol. III (Pittsburgh: Epiphany Association, 2006), 227.
- 7 Adrian van Kaam & Susan Muto, *Foundations of Christian Formation*, *Formation Theology*, Vol. I, (Pittsburgh: Epiphany Association, 2004), 211-213.
- 8 Adrian van Kaam & Susan Muto, *Formation of the Christian Heart*, 38.
- 9 Adrian van Kaam & Susan Muto, *Foundations of Christian Formation*, *Formation Theology*, 238.
- 10 Adrian van Kaam & Susan Muto, *Formation of the Christian Heart*, *Formation Theology*, 128.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.
- 12 *Fraternal Life in Community*, 13.
- 13 Adrian van Kaam & Susan Muto, *Foundations of Christian Formation*, *Formation Theology*, 248.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 112. 172. 174. 176.
- 15 Adrian van Kaam & Susan Muto, *Christian Articulation of the Mystery*, *Formation Theology*, 117.
- 16 Adrian van Kaam & Susan Muto, *Foundations of Christian Formation*, *Formation Theology*, 112.
- 17 Adrian van Kaam, *Personality Fulfillment in Religious Life* (Wilkes-Barre, PA: Dimension Books, 1967), 108.
- 18 *Fraternal Life in Community*, 25, 27.
- 19 *Fraternal Life in Community*, 28.
- 20 *Fraternal Life in Community*, 39.
- 21 *Vita Consecrata*, 65.
- 22 Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 11. To confirm what he says, Ronald recalls how John of the Cross, the great Spanish mystic, begins his famous treatment of the soul's journey with the words: "One dark night, fired by love's urgent longings". For him, it is urgent longings, eros, that are the starting point of the spiritual life and, in his view, spirituality, essentially defined, is how we handle that eros. According to Rolheiser this is what took place in Mother Teresa too. Though frail and meek she looked, she was a bulldozer, a dynamo of energy, fully dedicated to God and the poor (pp. 7-8).
- 23 Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 140.

INNOVATIONS IN LIFE-STYLE: A PROCESS IN CREATIVE FIDELITY

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF

1. INTRODUCTION

The National CRI meets in General Assembly once in every three years.¹ The coming together of the Major Superiors of India is, indeed, a providential moment to revision things, a moment laden with new possibilities, new directions and new ways of looking at reality. As leaders, we need to be visionaries, born out of our commitment to live the Gospel in creative fidelity. As people consecrated to the Lord, we are called not only to grow in conformity with him, but also called and bound to re-incarnate his presence, vision and mission contextually, meaningfully and relevantly wherever we are. That calls for varieties of styles and forms in the way we are, live, act, form and organize ourselves. This is our burden and our privilege. All our discussion, therefore, about *innovations* must be seen in this context.

2. INNOVATION: NOT A NEW REALITY IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

I personally have reservations in the way we have titled the session: "Innovations in Life-Style." We are not fashion designers. But we all know that we are talking about innovations in the way we live our religious life and organize ourselves. But the question is: is innovation a new reality in religious life? As a movement initiated by the Spirit of God in the Church, historically, we have been in a process of continual innovation. Take a simple glance through the history of consecrated life. We have been present in every period of the history of the Church as a symbol of the *liminality* of the Gospel,² not only when she was flourishing but also when she was getting disoriented. We have expressed ourselves in various forms—hermits, monks, mendicants, apostolic orders, secular institutes, missionary congregations,

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been found in all different situations—deserts and forests, mountains and valleys, towns and villages, in the main stream and on the frontiers, have evangelized all segments of the people of God—catholics, non-catholics, non-christians, infidels, atheists and pagans, have engaged in diverse forms of ministries and have wrestled with all kinds of ideological systems, searching for the new wineskins to hand over the Gospel. What an amazing variety! This has been our heritage.

It is no wonder that Pope John Paul II compares consecrated life to a “plant with many branches which sinks its roots into the Gospel and brings forth abundant fruit in every season of the Church’s life. What an extraordinary richness!”³ We must also remember that the radicality expressed in a life of total consecration, cannot be limited to one vow or even to three vows. Neither can it be fully expressed through one form or one congregation. Involved in consecration is a striving to unite all the counsels scattered throughout the Gospels which involves, possibly, a “religion of the counsels.” Hence the need for innovations, creativity in variety of forms, along with the breakdown one form and the emergence of a new form in consecrated life must be understood in the context of the innovativeness spirit of God, bringing forth new demands from the totality of the demands of the Gospels. Inherent in our call is the responsibility to continuously remind the whole church of what discipleship of Jesus consists of in every period and in every situation. No matter how entrenched religious life becomes in any one historical, cultural or spiritual mould, the Spirit will call forth prophetic leadership to pioneer new possibilities in response to new needs.

3. INNOVATIONS: A PROCESS IN CREATIVE FIDELITY

All that I want to state here is that *innovations* have been part of our heritage and they are intrinsic to our call as Religious. For this same reason, they should not be resorted to as arbitrary exercises undertaken just for the sake of newness or to catch up with the latest trend. We do not innovate simply because something becomes fashionable or because it has the applause of the liberal progressives. Innovations are to be expressions of “creative fidelity” as called for in *Vita Consecrata*, the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II. We are called to engage ourselves courageously in creative fidelity “to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of our founders in response to the signs of the times emerging in today’s world.”⁴ Apart from the responsibility to persevere in the path of holiness, most importantly, it is also a call to “pursue competence in personal work and to develop a dynamic fidelity to (our) mission, adapting forms, if need to be, to new situations and different needs, in complete openness to God’s inspiration and to the Church’s discernment.” In this process of creative fidelity, Pope states that two things are indispensable: a “quest for

ever greater conformity to the Lord” (a guarantee of any renewal) and a need to “return to the Rule” which will offer a reliable criterion in the search for the appropriate forms of witness that are capable of responding to the present needs and at the same time, remain faithful to the founding intuition of the Institute.

Creative fidelity demands that we make innovations in order that we may exercise that critical, therapeutic and prophetic function proper to the essence of our religious vocation. The major problem to creative fidelity, however, is our current “entrenchment.”⁵ It can be described as a situation where we get so used to or conditioned by a particular, historical, regional, and socio-historical mould that restricts and blurs our vision. It is vision of life, though grounded in the present, stifles, blurs and suffocates our way of seeing things around, making it a “tunnel vision.” Growing in creative fidelity, therefore, would call for a re-visioning of things by opening up our horizons. Such an opening is closely associated with the reality of the Kingdom whose stewards we are. Jesus says to Nicodemus: “No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again from above” (Jn. 3: 3). We must be willing to be open to the Spirit of God who “hovers over the face of the earth,” leading us to an experience of being “born again from above. It is the Spirit who challenges us to go beyond our entrenched, fixated, rigidified and routinized living, our partial perceptions, decisions and actions. It is the Spirit who is the Great Founder of consecrated life, who inspires the founders and “sustains consecrated life into existence and gives it the varying shapes it has assumed throughout history.”⁶ The Spirit calls us to seek, search and incarnate ourselves in new, and creative ways so that we can further the growth of God’s Kingdom.

4. NEED FOR RETHINKING AND RE-GROUNDING RELIGIOUS VALUES

If innovations are to be done in creative fidelity, there is a real need to rethink and reground religious values in dialogue with the pluralistic world that we live in. There is the need for, as Barbara Fiand says, an “honest rethinking and re-grounding” of all that we profess and live.”⁷ Some of the religious values, in the way that we have understood and carried them over from the past may have been based on erroneous, out dated, worn-out or one-sided philosophical presuppositions. Let me quote from Fiand:

“Today we know that reality is not static, and is in fact much more correctly understood as organic, dialogical and inter-related; change, therefore, and with it growth, viability, and health are concepts as well as values applicable to the cosmos. Today we know that we are part of the cosmic organism, and as conscious

life, are responsible for it in an intimate love relation. We know therefore, that matter and spirit are no longer juxtaposed but deeply interconnected. We know from the discoveries in holography, that each part of reality actually contains the whole; that nothing is insignificant any longer, that the Vine is in the branches and the branches are in the Vine. We know that union with one another and work toward personal as well as collective healing has cosmic implications. We know that competition and power fixations, even for the holiest of motives, spring from illusions concerning the nature of reality and ignore the interconnectedness of things. And although the metaphysics of the past explains the reason for, and helps us to understand a fixed world order, today, its thought system, simply no longer has any credibility, and the static theology suited to antiquity and many unquestioned values it engendered is rapidly losing its meaning.”⁸

What it implies is that reverence for the past traditions alone may not be enough anymore. These traditions probably had their own interdisciplinary roots, and must be understood and criticized within their historical situation. Past behaviors and the ways we have understood the values attached to them may not be necessarily holy. They could be often based on erroneous assumptions derived from the philosophies and sciences of the time that are no longer applicable today. The “command-performance” cycle of religious obedience, the developmentally regressive regulations enforced upon communities in the name of holiness, the notion of chastity, rooted in stoic self-abnegation and rejection of affect, poverty as negation, denial or disinterested towards things and living of community as a leveling collectivity and crowd—all these call for an honest re-thinking and re-grounding based on contemporary scholarship.

Some of our structures and traditions may be too ill for meaningful and relevant existence today. We are unable to let them go because of fear, fidelity as blind conformity to certain familiar forms or due to ignorance of the other ways that we could be and act. This is the reason why many of our renewal attempts, in spite of all our sincerity, are like re-arranging the deck chairs on the sinking Titanic. We must know that a value cannot be identified with one particular form as it can be expressed in a variety of forms. We must know that authentic values can be lived in a variety of forms and styles more in tune with the needs of the Church and world around us. The process of creative fidelity, therefore, would call for a dying and rising; dying of the moulds, customs of ways of thinking, modes of behavior, of world views, systems and traditions, to be undertaken in genuine freedom.

For a re-visioning, what is most important is the willingness to question the “why” of things without fear of rejection or worry about giving scandal. Such a

questioning does not imply a negative attitude or the desire to do away with what has been valued so long. We all know that the reasons for the stoic celibacy that influenced the Early Fathers may no longer be satisfactory, nor hold motivational power for the religious of today. A critical enquiry like, “what does it really mean to live by the vow of celibacy” can reveal our dispositional status: confusion, avoidance, endurance, or a sense of feeling “trapped,” feeling “saddled with it and not particularly called to it,” being apologetic, or even embarrassed: Are these the answers?

Spirit-filled enquiry provides an opportunity for an honest self-examination of our motives in an attempt to arrive at a more authentic meaning and proclamation of what we have been called forth by the Spirit of God who will certainly assist us in this open search.

5. RE-VISIONING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

As we search for the innovations in life style, I felt called, together with you, to revision the one thing that we are all so used to, the one thing that is our very home, namely, our community. My concern, here, is to raise, rather, to help you raise, certain fundamental questions which we are often glossed over or even repressed in the busy-ness of our living as a community. Let us begin with a very fundamental question. What is, rather, what should be essence of a religious community” whether at the congregational or local level. This enquiry will have necessary implications in the way we live and organize ourselves at the local, provincial and congregational levels.

5.1. Founders’ Vision: The Essence of a Religious Community

William James speaks of what he calls, the *strenuous mood*, the foundational life energy, the *eros*, the *libido* or a fundamental desire that lies slumbering in every human being. To be awakened from its slumbering mode, the *eros* requires the wilder passions like, the big fears, loves, hates, indignations or the appeal of one of the higher fidelities like, justice, truth, or freedom.

For our founders,⁹ the *strenuous mood* in them was awakened with two factors: faithful contemplation of the gospel and sensitivity to their own social milieu. These men and women were fascinated by the person of Christ, felt drawn to him, intrigued and capsized by him, and felt deeply the ramifications of his life in their hearts. They felt the Christ-event, not just as a historical event in the world’s past, but as a dynamic reality penetrating, subsuming the present, and challenging them to both mysticism and social action. Their following of Christ, therefore, had also elements that are both, mystical—as it began in a contemplative vision, and political—as it overflowed into expression of love.

The Christ-story, with its enormous range and depth, were dealt with by focusing on particular aspects and got reflected in the social milieu in which the founders lived. They saw areas of human life, where there was a crying need for the Christ-story to be retold. They went into the dark places of human existence, into its broken-ness, poverty, illness, ignorance, degradation, misery, and retold the story in words of proclamation and deeds of compassion. They went in with the “mind of Christ” as described by St. Paul. “So if in Christ, there is anything that will move you, any incentive in love, any fellowship in the spirit, any warmth or sympathy, I appeal to you, make my joy complete, by being of a single mind, one in love, one in heart and one in mind. Nothing is to be done out of jealousy or vanity; instead, out of humility of mind, everyone should give preference to others, everyone pursuing not selfish interests, but those of others. Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus” (Phil 2: 1-5).

The heart of the story is the *mind of Christ*, recognized by the founder and still being communicated, discovered and created within the experience of the congregational community. The mind of Christ, then, is the enkindling experience. The heat thrown off from it will be felt in the unity of central convictions, the tenderness and in the community’s life together.

“Born not of the will of the flesh’ nor from personal attraction, nor from human motives, but from “God” (Jn. 1:13), from a divine vocation and a divine attraction, religious communities are a living sign of the primacy of the love of God who works wonders, and of the love for God and for one’s brothers and sisters as manifested and practiced by Jesus Christ.¹⁰

As we come under the spell of these men and women—our founders, our vocation, especially as the awareness of it deepens, is not to imitate but to join this journey and to become part of the story. We bring our inherited understanding and experience of the founder’s vision and the plurality of our own insights, talents, and social consciousness in dialogue with contemporary needs and invitations to ministry.

Religious community, in its very essence, is this process of becoming united through the common experience of a core vision. It means sharing the contagion, catching that strenuous mood, and burning with the same fire. It means standing within the same story and looking at life from there. Community is this *process*, not a thing. It means being caught up in a movement, organizing itself with the necessary structures to live the vision and flexibly changing them when need arises.

The aim of a religious community is to facilitate the process of life based on the original vision and on being moved outward by that vision. It is this fiery vision

that unites the members. The foundation of unity is the “communion in Christ established by the one founding gift.”¹¹ “Reference to the institute’s founder and to the charism lived by him or her and then communicated, kept and developed throughout the life of the institute, thus appears as an essential element for the unity of the community. To live in community is to live the will of God together, in accordance with the orientation of the charismatic gift received by the founder from God and transmitted to his or her disciples and followers.”¹²

The quality of their bonded-ness in sharing this vision and translating it timely, contextually and relevantly is the essence of the community. A deepened understanding of the charism leads to a clearer vision of one’s own identity, around which it is easier to build unity and communion. Clarity concerning one’s own charismatic identity allows creative adjustment to new situations and this leads to positive prospects for the future of the institute. In this process, life will come to meet new and original moments for which there are no ready-made answers or responses. A lack of clarity in this area can easily cause insecurity concerning goals and vulnerability with respect to conditions surrounding religious life, cultural currents and various apostolic needs, in addition to the obstacles it may raise regarding adaptation and renewal.

5.2. The Major Thrust of a Religious Community

As we reflect on innovations in the way we live and organize ourselves, it is good to ask: What are the criteria that should guide us? On what basis do we structure our life and its styles? In other words, what should be the major thrust of a religious community? Perhaps, it is better to begin by stating what it is not.

5.2.1. What it is not

The major thrust of a religious community cannot be creation of structures, rules and regulations or insistence on laws. Neither can it be simply a community-centeredness, nor a leveling collectivity without dynamism or inspiration” where the emphasis is on “being in community” and neglect evangelical responsiveness to the world around. Religious communities cannot also be “task-oriented companies” or action-oriented corporate presence, like multi-national corporations where work and efficiency in execution are the prime values. Wherever work is important, activism can dominate and individuals could be sacrificed to the fulfillment of the work. Members can slip into careerism and professionalism, driven by cravings for status, power, glory and reputation. It is possible that a religious community structures itself in ways that aim primarily at the assertion of its own status, power, and reputation and removes itself and its members from the self-forgetful service of God in the world.¹³

At the same time, religious community cannot also be just a “bread and breakfast place” where the emphasis is on personal ministries at the cost of the common living. Members legitimate it by stating reasons of space, location, travel convenience without addressing to the aspect of “being in community.” Is ministry all that counts? Are all our obligations outside? Is apostolate the only factor that counts? Have we no obligations to each other?¹⁴ Are we not called to live in community as others are called to live in marriage which entails not only obligations outside but also obligations to one another?

It could also be that a community can structure itself on gratification of members with too much of caring, sharing, need-satisfaction and, thus, can become a “sentimental crowd.” If we are always looking for our own equilibrium or for our own peace, we will never find it, because peace is the fruit of love and service to others. We should be concerned about the needs of the members and on the quality of the relationships that exist among members. But the fulfillment of these needs and the relationships exist not merely for our satisfaction. They must impel us forward to the fulfillment of our vision and mission. We can easily build a closely bonded group with very heavy emphasis on loving and mutually satisfying relationships, and at the same time fall into a corporate loneliness or a bourgeois clique that forces us huddle together in the dark for comfort. A community can also build itself on safety and security becoming a kind of enclave for the weak and needy with all fortification and protective measures.

5.2.2. *What it is*

The major thrust has to be on fueling the charism of the founders not only by translating it from the context where they were born but also through inculturating it in the social context of our own time and countries. We need to initiate a process of rediscovering and implementing the original vision in continuous dialogue with our times and situations so as to listen to the calls of the Spirit in them. It is the duty of the community to awaken in the members the same “strenuous mood” of the founder and encourage them to live it along with others who are similarly awakened; every member needs to burn with the same fire and be caught up in a movement of the Spirit. The concern has to be to formulate a shared vision, emerging from the original vision of the founder, which calls each member to worship and witness to the presence of God in the broken areas of human existence, according to each one’s personal talents and aspirations. A religious community must strive to become a “visible and concrete manifestation of the communion which is the foundation of the Church and at the same time, a prophecy of that unity towards which she tends as her final goal;”¹⁵ it is called to be a prophetic sign of the intimate union with God who is loved above all things and of fraternal fellowship through communion of life, prayer and apostolate.

As a religious community brings together people of diverse background, cultures, languages and temperaments, there dawns an opportunity for it to be a “sign of the possibility of living christian fraternity and of the price that must be paid to build any form of fraternal life.”¹⁶ Besides, in this globalized world and in the context of the diverse cultures and societies of our planet, wounded as they are, by divisive forces of passion and conflicting interests, there exists a yearning for unity, though unsure of what path to follow. In such a context, religious communities can show the way as it brings together people of different ages, languages and cultures who meet as brothers and sisters and remain united despite the inevitable conflicts and difficulties inherent in common life. Thus they become signs that bear “witness to a higher reality and points to higher aspirations.”¹⁷

5.3. *Implications*

1. What really forms the heart of a religious community is the mystical dimension that binds the religious community to Christ, a mystical vision that emerges from a faithful and diligent contemplation of the Gospel. Devoid of this we inevitably come to forget the profound reasons for making a community and for patiently building fraternal life. This life and can sometime appear beyond human strength and a useless waste of energy, especially to those intensely committed to action. Hence prayer, both personal and communitarian, has to be considered the foundation of community life as it starts from contemplation of God’s great and sublime mystery, from wonder for his presence in the most significant moments as well as the humble and ordinary realities of our communities.

How fascinating has been our contemplation of the Christ story in its enormous range and depth? How faithful have we been to prayer, both personal and communitarian as a source of nourishment of our community and mission? If it has not been so, what are the reasons?

2. As a community, we, though different, come together in unity--a unity of central convictions. There is a merging of individual stories, without losing them, into a larger story.

Are we prepared to merge without losing our individuality? Are we prepared to give and receive from one another as we are “differing gifts?” How do we feel about our abilities of listening to and acceptance of others? Are we ready to envision together?

3. The quality of community life is affected, positively or negatively, by two kinds of diversity in the institute: that of its members and that of its works. In

both, the diversity is a variety of gifts which is meant to enrich the one reality. The criterion for accepting both members and works in a religious institute, therefore, is the building of unity.¹⁸ “It is a mistake to try to make the founding gift of the institute to cover everything. At the same time, a gift which would virtually separate a member from the communion of the community cannot be rightly encouraged. Nor is it wise to tolerate widely divergent lines of development which do not have a strong foundation of unity in the institute itself. Diversity without division and unity without regimentation are a richness and a challenge that help the growth of communities. It is a particular responsibility of superiors and of those in charge of formation to ensure that the differences which make for disintegration are not mistaken for the genuine value of diversity”¹⁹

Do we experience a unity of the members and of the varied works undertaken by the members in our congregations? Do God’s gifts in this person or project or group make for unity and deepen communion? Is this a criterion that we apply in accepting new members and in the discernment of new apostolate that we take up?

4. If community is this process of increasing union in a common story, “all under the same roof” type of living (geographical or physical togetherness) is not a must. Important is communion and not community and there could be different forms of celebrating communion. Moreover every charism must lead us to sharing it with others and build communion.²⁰

Can we let go of the physical nearness and take the risk of loneliness and personal and individual responsibility for our lives as carriers of community? Can we create new ways of celebrating relatedness in community? How disposed are we to living in smaller, inter-congregational or inserted communities, forming more inclusive communion with those whom we serve?

5. We must constantly live the tension between fixity and mobility. The gospel view of discipleship frequently mentions a kind of nomadic detachment. The disciple is one who travels from one place to another, accepted in some, rejected in others, carrying neither purse, not scrip, not shoes, constantly in exodus, because the Word is to be taken to the ends of the earth.

How do we resonate with the above view of discipleship? What are its implications for our lives as the members of my community? How flexible have we been in relation to the members, works of apostolate and the places and cultures where the communities are situated?

6. To envision and travel together, we must be able to deal with pluralism within and without and refuse to accept a single way of looking at reality. Are we ready

to ask the question: How else might we be in our world so that we can be more effective in responding to the mission entrusted to us?

Do we have symptoms of a tunnel vision and what are they? Can we think new thoughts, take risks, and delight in our diversity? What prejudices have we, perhaps, institutionalized? What stubbornness cries out for conversion? In another 5 or 10 or 20 years, what will this group look like?

7. As we are in a process, we need to build structures that nurture our vision. We need to seek ways of protecting the values inherent in the vision, of keeping them alive and central. Structures, therefore, may change, adapt, develop, outgrow their usefulness and relevance, and can be, sometimes, need to be replaced. The vision will remain, finding new challenges to meet, more dark places to illumine, new stories in which to express itself.

Are we prepared for flexibility with regard to the structures of our community? Can we restructure our membership requirements so as to include those who are probably not ready for a long term commitment? Should perpetual profession be a necessary requirement for full membership? Are the structures of the communities (time schedule, rules and norms of community living, leadership models and styles of governance) life enhancing, dialogical and participative? What needs to be changed?

8. We do not have to over-sacralize the past. The present is holy too. Taking account of the tradition does not mean institutionally hamstrung or getting stuck, ignoring the influences that impinge on us now and which our founders never envisaged. Neither does the need to be a meaningful presence now necessarily mean ignoring our inheritance. Our evolution, personally and communally, must take into account of all that we hold dear and holy in our past, all those learning from the past that need to be surrendered now as non-essential, and the invitations to novelty that call us out of the “then” into the “now.”

Communally we are all lit from the same candle, and then on, every moment of our life derives light from that first spark. But the height, color, heat, and intensity of the flame depend on present conditions and our situatedness. Our fidelity to our common bond must take account of both.

What does this image evoke in us? How does the multi-religious-cultural context of India challenge us? Are we open to study and research on more incultured expressions of the charism of the founders who may have lived in a different historical period and cultural context? Can we not go beyond the *missio ad gentes* to *missio-inter gentes* model, looking for more incultured forms of

living like, ashrams that provide space for a more meaningful dialogue of faith and life?²¹

9. When we seek unity, we should not look for a monolithic unity, but a dynamic unity where, in spite of our differences on many things, we work constantly at the preservation of our central unity and the resolution of conflicts arising from our differences--personal, historical, social, psychological and intellectual. One of the most critical witnesses the world looks for from religious life today is evidence of people who do not hide in the enclaves of natural similarity, but who can find in our many differences a graced unity of love focused in a shared vision.

Can we disagree and still feel united? Can we be comfortable with differences? Do differences become an opportunity for us to receive and give? Even as we affirm our uniqueness and abilities, are we also ready to accept the uniqueness of the other and appreciate the other's abilities? Can we rise above our enclaves of natural similarities, based on region, caste and language and share the common vision?

10. In our journey forward, loyalty to the kingdom of God might perhaps be good substitute to loyalty to the Church. This is simply because, all institutions, including the institutional church, tend to assume unilateral power that can slow and even deaden responsiveness. Blind conformity disguised as loyalty to Church may, at times, shield us from being a continuous and living reminder to the institutional Church of its original purpose. This does not mean an angry criticism against the Church, but a sensitive thirst for gospel values that registers unworthy attitudes and refuses to adopt them.

Do I experience any conflict between loyalty to the Church and loyalty to the Kingdom? How do I resolve it? Are all our organizational structures, both internal and external more participatory, inclusive and gender sensitive?

11. We must seek new insights into the charism in order to discern new directions that are faithful to the deep story in which we are communally grounded. Returning to the roots must have a direct impetus for our present life together and its overflow in ministry. It calls for refined sensitivity to the times in which we live. This is especially so, because, in the words of J.B. Metz, religious life is meant to be a "kind of shock therapy instituted by the Holy Spirit for the Church as a whole" as it is called to offer prophetic criticism, avoid creeping passivity, bourgeois prosperity and dubious provincialism.²²

Are we prepared for these new directions, to enter into new dimensions of human existence where there is brokenness and pain? What about our "in-touchness" with the times we live? Do we know where the marginalized are whose plight demands

from our part hunger and thirst after justice? Are we brave enough today to take the raw and unpopular initiatives of our founders in new situations? Are we so comfortably settled within our own territory that we are so satisfied with what is instead of being constantly uneasy about what-is-not-yet-and-should-be?

Endnotes

- 1 This article is on the basis of a paper presented by the author at the National CRI General Assembly held in Hyderabad from October 28-30, 2012. The general theme of this Leadership Conference was "Innovations in Consecrated Life."
- 2 The word "liminality" is a concept coined by anthropologist, Arnold Van Gennep, to denote the periodic separation of a person from her family and is developed in recent times by Victor and Edith Turner (1969, 1974, 1978, 1985) and given a whole meaning to explain features of small groups and communities in their relationship to and interaction with, mainstream society. "Liminality" can be described as a "an ambiguous, sacred, social state in which a person or group of persons is separated for a time from the normal structures of society . . . Every society has a structure, and a liminal community both clarifies the structure of society and can be instrumental in changing it" (Richard Endress, "The monastery as a liminal Community" in *American Benedictine Review*, vol. 26, p.142-158). It is the ability to symbolize, mediate and proclaim certain values that are vital to humanity, which the wider society admires but often fails to live. See also Diarmuid O'Murchu, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life* (London: Excalibur Press, 1989) 33-41.
- 3 *Vita Consecrata*, Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, (Rome: 1996), 5
- 4 *Vita Consecrata*, 37
- 5 Please see Xavier E. Manavath, "Working through the Entrenchment in Religious Living," *Sanyasa: Journal of Consecrated Life*, Vol. VII, No.1 (January, 2012), 51-64.
- 6 Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Theology of Religious Life: Covenant and Mission*, (Claretian Publications, Manila: 2006), 209.
- 7 Barbara Fiand, *Wrestling with God: Religious Life in Search of its Soul*, (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 29.
- 8 Fiand, *Wrestling with God*, 30-31.
- 9 The term "founders" include also foundresses and this is done to avoid repetition.
- 10 *Fraternal Life in Community*, (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life: Rome, 1994), 1.
- 11 *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life*, (SCRIS: Rome, 1983), 18

- 12 *Fraternal Life in Community*, 45.
- 13 It is always important to see how a community structures itself: need for sharing and meaningful relationships, needs of everyone, and needs of the ministries undertaken, thus community becoming a base for doing personal ministries. Diversification of ministries may coincide with diversified forms of community living so much so that we lose a sense of unity in the midst of a plurality of work and life styles. Please refer Mary Jo Leddy, *Reweaving Religious Life: Beyond the Liberal Model* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990), 64-65.
- 14 Barbara Fiand, *Living the Vision*, 78.
- 15 *Fraternal Life in Community*, 10
- 16 *Fraternal Life in Community*, 56
- 17 *Fraternal Life in Community*, 56
- 18 Directives for the Mutual Relations Between Bishops and Religious in the Church (Sacred Congregation for Bishops and SCRIS: Rome, 1978), 12
- 19 *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life*, (SCRIS: Rome, 1983), 22.
- 20 One of the most striking phenomena in religious life of our time is the awareness of a "shared charism." We have become intensely aware how the gifts that give shapes to the various religious institutes are not only "charisms" for the religious life to be lived and explained within it but also charisms to be shared with other forms of christian and even non-christian life. Please see "Theological Reflection on Mission Today," a Paper presented by Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes at the Mission Congress organized at Colemanar, Madrid from September 02-07, 2012, pages 35-38.,
- 21 In contrast with the "mission ad" model, the Federation of the Conferences of Bishops from Asia aims to transcend the model of *mission ad gentes* and establish the model of *mission inter gentes* (mission among nations) in order to provide a more incarnate model which is less deductive and linear. It would encourage recognition of religious pluralism not as something that must be fought against and overcome but as something that defines the picture or landscape of Asia. This does not imply the renunciation of the proclamation of the Gospel. "The mission is not to be understood as confrontational but as a relationship and the building of relationships as dialogue and consensus, harmony and solidarity. The aim is for the Christian gospel and the Local churches to really immerse themselves in the realities of Asia and to commit themselves to a three –way dialogue concerning cultures, religions and the poor" (Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, "Theological Reflection on Mission Today," 34).
- 22 J.B. Metz. Followers of Christ, (London: Oats and Burns, 1978), p. 12-13. See also *Vita Consecrata*, 15, 87.

MISSION-SHAPED RELIGIOUS LIFE: NEW PARADIGM IN EPOCHAL CHANGE

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this article is to show how to move from a "religious life-shaped" mission to a "mission-shaped" religious life.¹

In her opening sermon at Eucharist of 76th General Convention of the Church of Episcopal Church (July 8 2009), the presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, said: "We are in cardiac crisis in the Church . . . The heart of this body is mission. Every time we gather, the Spirit offers a pacemaker jolt to pull the rhythm of this heart. The challenge is whether or not . . . the muscle will respond with a strengthened beat, sending more life out into the world. Can you hear the heartbeat? Mission, Mission, Mission?"²

These words raise the question whether, in reality, the "heartbeat" of "Mission, Mission, Mission" is heard among us, male and female Religious, among our communities and congregations, General and Provincial Chapters. The question is whether we allow the Spirit, at every level of our religious Institutes, to "offer a pacemaker jolt to pull the rhythm of our heart." It is as urgent as ever. I wonder whether mission is the heart of our religious institutes, of our communities and of ourselves.

We acknowledge the missional calling of Religious Life. Nevertheless, in many congregations, mission is understood primarily in "functional" terms: mission remains just a function among many other more pressing tasks or activities. Our religious institutes shape missions, but mission does not shape religious life; mission has little or no impact upon the being of the whole congregation or order. Very often we are good workers in different commitments. But we lack the mystic of a true missionary of God. Do we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to be integrated in his mission? Are our leaders in this issue?

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Almost the entire energy and time of our religious leaders are employed in the solution of our inner needs: they try to develop and maintain our inner and charismatic life. We are established in a culture of membership more than in a culture of missionary discipleship.³ We try to grow as institution: vocations, formation (initial and ongoing), economy, constitution of our communities, surveillance and control about the spiritual life of the members, a lot of energies in the exaltation and propaganda of our own charism. But, what is happening with our mission, precisely in this time of epochal change in human history?

I believe that we need another definition of religious life as “mission-shaped” religious life, whose very being is constituted in and for mission. For a fundamental reorientation of our religious Institutes, it is necessary to be a “religious life inside out.”⁴ In order to explain all this, I shall outline the article in three parts: *Missio Spiritus* as emerging paradigm; Mission-shaped religious life; and Leadership for such a mission-shaped religious life.

1. *MISSIO SPIRITUS* AS EMERGING PARADIGM

The mission of the Church and of the Religious Life within it today, needs to be rethought. There is a need for a re-conceptualization of the theology of mission from two angles: the *Missio Dei* and the current socio-political context of epochal change.

1.1. *Missio Dei*, the Core of the Church’s Mission

Until recent times the traditional systematic Theology has not included among its disciplines the treatise of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology). Simultaneously, the treatise of mission was not included in the ecclesiology, but relegated to a secondary discipline for missionaries (missiology). Can you imagine what kind of Theology is that in which the Holy Spirit is absent or totally subordinated to Jesus Christ?, or and what kind of Ecclesiology is that in which mission is absent? Without mission, the Church and her theology remain static and introverted and misses the great movements of the Spirit in post-paschal history. To neglect the Spirit in systematic Theology implies to neglect mission. Thanks be to God, a new paradigm of mission in the context of this epochal change is emerging with ecumenical contributions.

Mission is, first of all, not an activity of the Church, but an attribute of God.⁵ God has revealed himself to us as a “missionary” God, a missionary Tri-unity. The mission flows from the heart of God the Father who sent his Son into the world. The letter to the Hebrews explicitly called Jesus the *Apostolos* (Heb 3:1), i.e. the one who is sent. The fourth Gospel presents also Jesus as the One sent by the Father to the world to become way, truth and life of humanity. The whole

life of Jesus was the answer to this missionary vocation (Jn 4:34). Jesus’ mission came to an end the Good Friday, when he exclaimed: “It is finished” (Jn 19:30).

After death and resurrection, God the Father and the Risen Lord sent to us the Holy Spirit to stay with us forever (Jn 14:18.20-21). Thus began a new stage in the *missio Dei*: mission of the Spirit. This stage will last until the end of times. We are in the time of the *missio Spiritus*.

In Acts 1:8 the risen Jesus promises his disciples that they “will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come” upon them, so that they may be his witnesses” to the ends of the earth.” Here mission is primarily a fulfillment of a promise, a gift of grace, and a spontaneous outcome of receiving the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is “the active agent” or “real agent” of mission. According to Luke, the Spirit leads the way in mission. The Spirit rules, guides and goes before the Church in mission.⁶ The Church is merely an instrument of the living power of the Spirit: “Mission is not just something the Church does; it is something that is done by the Spirit, who is himself the witness, who changes both the world and the church.”⁷

1.2. Consequences of this Understanding of Mission

This understanding of mission means that God is the main player, the first mover. From this movement the Church is born. Mission is the mother of the Church.⁸ The Church is being given to the Spirit’s mission, not the Spirit’s mission to the Church.⁹ The Spirit and not the Church is the principal agent of Mission.¹⁰ Mission does not aim primarily at the propagation or transmission of intellectual convictions, doctrines, moral commands, etc., but at the witnessing of the presence and action of the Spirit.¹¹

The Church and religious life within it, are not an end in themselves and mission is not an optional extra to their being. The mission of the Spirit is their reason for existence. From this awareness of *Missio Dei*, the church changes from being the sender to being the one sent, and the same with religious life. We are not sent by our superiors, or our community: our superiors, communities and congregations are sent by the Spirit. The Spirit is the One calling us to collaborate with her mission.¹²

Through the church, as the body of Christ Jesus, the Spirit carries on the mission, entrusted by the Father and the risen Jesus. To do so, the Spirit gives each and every person, each and every community his charisms, as energies for collaboration with mission. Moreover, the Holy Spirit does not restrict the number of collaborators: he speaks through the prophets, both through Christian

prophecy as well as through prophetic people in other religions, and even through secular prophets. The Spirit is also the Spirit of matter-energy and of all kind of interconnectedness in a universe in expansion.¹³

The Holy Spirit displays his mission counting with all the human beings of good will and their charismatic creativity and activity. The Holy Spirit uses a huge range of charisms, and all the physical and cosmic processes to carry out his mission. The Spirit will never show his face, will never appear, but is in everything, being the main protagonist of the mission, the great facilitator, the great unifier. “The mission is one” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n.2), but, in the background, the Spirit acts through a great variety of ministries, services, charisms and dynamisms. All of them form the “fellowship of Spirit’s mission.”

In this epochal change we have to emphasize the need of a new vision, of discernment of the Spirit’s involvement in the *missio Spiritus* at its different levels:

- a. The need of a new vision, a new awareness of the new context. Without that, mission becomes blind, an activity outside of reality. For that purpose the Spirit arises visionaries, dreamers, people gifted for offering us new maps, new itineraries, new horizons. Jesus complained many times of the blindness of the leaders in Israel, totally close to the epochal change that his life brought about.
- b. The need of discernment between so many spirits, good and evil: unfortunately we are not living in a peaceful and innocent world. If we look at our history with apocalyptic eyes, immediately we will see opposite forces struggling among themselves. We do not collaborate with all sort of spirits, only with the Spirit of God and those collaborating with him. To learn the art of discernment and involvement in the mission of the Holy Spirit we need a strong spirituality, contextualized in our times, the mystic of the “open eyes.”
- c. The conviction that mission is always a shared mission, as collaborator of the *Missio Dei*. No group or person can monopolize mission. The mission of the Spirit happens at different levels: physical, anthropological, christian, charismatic. *Missio Dei* is a network mission, with interconnections even there where we do not imagine. In this mission of the Spirit, we, christians, offer that what is given to us: the christian faith, the Gospel of Jesus, the revelation through the books of the Bible, our apocalyptic vision of the Kingdom of God, the celebration of the everlasting covenant in the sacraments, a catholic community of sisters and brothers called, anointed and sent to the world.

But the Spirit never acts on behalf of those who collaborate with him in a violent way. “Where the Spirit is, so too is freedom.” Hence, he applies no pressure and so it is very easy to “sadden the Spirit” in this game of freedoms in which we reject compliance and try to impose our own will.

2. MISSION-SHAPED RELIGIOUS LIFE

2.1. The Mission of the Church and Religious Life: Visioning Beyond

For some this new thinking about mission as mission Dei, is like a Copernican revolution in mission reflection and practice: it shifts the agency in mission from the church to God, from the missionary projects of religious life to the surprising inspiration and action of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ In fact, one characteristic of many religious men and women is an acute sense of obligation to do something, somewhere, to someone, connected with “agenda-anxiety.” The statements of many General or Provincial Chapters are formulated as a list of “to-do” things.

We religious need to move away from an ecclesiocentric and narrow interpretation of the *missio Dei* to a broader framework:¹⁵ “Start with the church and the mission will probably be lost. Start with mission and it is likely that the church will be found.” We can add: “Start with the religious Life and the mission will probably be lost. Start with mission and it is likely that the religious life will be found.”

Mission of the Spirit in an epochal change will give a new shape to our congregations, if they are sensitive to the Spirit. When this happens, the Holy Spirit is welcome and recognized as the main leader, superior, formator, mover, and agent. Everything in the institute will be animated by the energies of the Spirit.

However, we should not forget that the Spirit is not only the Spirit of my congregation; that the Holy Spirit is not imprisoned in our charism. He is the Spirit of the Church and churches, the Spirit of humanity, the Spirit of nature and creation, the Spirit of the cosmos. Our congregations and their charisms are not the only concern of the *missio Spiritus*. The One who has the mission of leading us, is also leading the whole reality. If we share the vision of the Spirit we will contemplate the mega-project in which we are inserted. The book of Revelation talks about “the seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth” (Rev 5:6). The vision that sustains the Spirit’s mission goes beyond the very limited concerns of our congregations and beyond the same concerns of the Church.

Where the Holy Spirit is leading us? The answer will not be: “Take care of domestic questions and problems! Be your main concern the growth in numbers, in membership the growth of your institutions.” The Holy Spirit includes congregations, communities, the church, in a mega-project of global transformation, the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit is calling us to an amazingly shared mission, in which are included people of good will among all the peoples, races, cultures, young and old, women and men; but not only that: the processes of nature, of the earth, of the cosmos are also included!

Can you imagine the profile of a congregation shaped by this vision of mission? We recognize that we are very small and perhaps insignificant in this whole; we can exclaim with the Psalmist: “When I look up at the heavens, which your fingers made, and see the moon and the stars, which you set in place, of what importance is my congregation and myself, that you should notice them?” (Ps 8:3-4). The Spirit looks at our humble and limited condition. However, He calls us, as religious, to put our imprint in this collective performance of the Kingdom of God.

Besides, we should not forget that the Mission of the Spirit is intimately connected with the mission of Jesus. The Spirit, sent by the Father and by the Son, performs in another way and fulfils the mission of Jesus, the Son of God, until the end of times. The Holy Spirit does not eliminate the mission of Jesus, neither replaces it. In the mission of the Spirit Jesus is always remembered, made present. The Spirit of cosmos, nature, humanity is, above all, the Spirit of Jesus. By the Spirit, Jesus becomes the Lord of everything in heaven and earth.

Those who do not know Jesus, do not know the whole mystery of the Spirit: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him, because he resides with you and will be in you” (Jn 14:16-17).

But we have not to be afraid of that. The Holy Spirit himself will provide: “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and will cause you to remember everything” (Jn 14:26). “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me, and you also will testify” (Jn 15:26-27). “And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (Jn 16: 8).

The wisdom of the Spirit knows the way of introducing in our societies the teachings and the deeds of Jesus, how to attract everybody to our crucified Lord.

The New Testament testifies how close Jesus and the Spirit are. Jesus said to his disciples in the last Supper: “But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I am going away. For if I do not go away, the advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you” (Jn 16:7).

At the end of the book of Revelation the Spirit and the Church long and claim for the coming of Jesus: “The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say: “Come!” (Rev 22:17).

A community shaped by the mission of the Spirit is inserted in the ecclesial body of Jesus, and brings about the mission of Jesus from a peculiar and charismatic perspective. It is a community blessed with the presence of the Spirit but also longing for the coming of the Lord. And because of this, that congregation, shaped by the Spirit, wants to fly and reach the ends of the earth, to make known to everybody this wonderful revelation.

In this way the Church which is the bride of Jesus, becomes by the power of the Spirit, the mother. The seed of the Gospel and of faith is planted and arise in new peoples with new faces, new possibilities. A mission-shaped religious life will be born from the fecundity of motherhood. Evangelization and sacramental celebrations have to be contemplated from the perspective of *missio Spiritus* and expressions of the maternity of the Church. In this sense, baptism is fundamentally a missional act, in which a believer in Jesus is assumed in the *missio Dei*, as a son or a daughter of God and steps out with Jesus for a life for others. Similarly, every celebration of the Eucharist is a missional act in which we share the self-pouring of the body and blood by Jesus on the cross; as the word “Mass” implies, the Eucharist is also an act of mission, a sending of the mission-shaped church so that it is broken for the life of the world in remembrance of Christ.

A mission-shaped religious life knows and is ready to sit at the margins of society. Therefore, it is not afraid of being a “minority” group; nor is it afraid that due to its prophetic witness it will be hated by others, both within and without the church. Triumphalism and head-counting has no place within a mission-shaped religious life.

When the Spirit comes upon us, we follow, stepping behind the Spirit who always goes ahead. Surely, the Spirit will move us afresh in changing contexts: there is always room for surprises and little room for fixed order and traditional strategies.¹⁶ A mission-shaped religious tries to be in a permanent openness to God and in God to the other, and to the world. An unmissionary religious life does not belong to the church. The body not broken for the life of the world is not the body of Christ.

2.2. Some Consequences of a Redefinition of Religious Life

It must become evident in our theological reflection that the identity of religious life is intrinsically “missional,” not only for active and apostolic religious life, but even for the monastic and contemplative religious life. If they are not missionary, they do not belong to the Christian Church. Our very nature is rooted in the identity of the triune God as the “sending God.”¹⁷ Mission does not come from religious life; it is from mission and in the light of mission that religious life has to be understood.¹⁸

Emil Brunner stated: “The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.” In the same way, we can also say: “Religious life exists by mission as fire exists by burning.” Mission is not a function of religious life, but rather, religious life is a function in the already up-and-running mission of God in the world. The challenge now is how our institutes, communities and persons may be transformed into missional congregations, communities and persons, or how to move from religious institutes shaping missions to being mission-shaped religious institutes.

Mission pulls religious life to overcome boundaries and to enter into the cross-cultural dialogue. This cross-cultural mission of Religious Life has been for many institutes their life-blood and well-being. In mission religious life breathes fresh cultural life; it is inspired by new thought-forms, and enriched by new practices.¹⁹ Mission is the keynote of the religious life existence, activity, and flourishing in the world. Community problems are not to be the main concerns: the common passion for mission is the occasion for the divided communities to enter into a shared reflection that may produce deeper unity: unity in mission through common goals, shared practices, new dreams.²⁰

3. FORMATION FOR A MISSION-SHAPED RELIGIOUS LIFE

3.1. The Hallmarks

What are the hallmarks of a mission-shaped religious? He or she must be: (a) a person with a profound sense of the *missio Dei*, in creation, in human history and in his or her one life; a liminal person able to see the glimpses of the Holy Spirit, the presence of the Divine, in the borderlands of human existence, like the prophets, and especially like Jesus; (b) a person who has learned how to collaborate in the mega-project of the Spirit obeying to his or her charism: a person who has learned to sit where people sit, just as the prophet Ezekiel sat where the exiles sat and wept with them for seven days and seven nights (Ezekiel 3:15); (c) a person constantly attuned to the Spirit who goes ahead of the church in mission. (d) a border-crossing person: across cultures, religions,

gender, race and sexual orientation. That demands skills across difference, skill for listening and to internalizing multiple stories, specially of those marginalized and silenced. Ability for inter-contextual conversation is critical in these days as our world is threatened by violence; also important is the ability to create spaces in himself in order to receive the other. A leader has to be “a catholic personality” (Miroslav Volf), that means, enriched by otherness.²¹

3.2. Theological Formation: A New Awareness

Our institutions and processes of formation must understand theological education not as an end in itself, but as serving the mission of God in the world. Mission has to become the overarching vision and the organizing principle of all formative processes in a mission-shaped religious life.

However, our most familiar major texts on Christian doctrines have very little to say about the mission of God or the responsive mission of the church. Classical theologians have relegated the topic of mission to the practical theology, either in the special field of missiology or in courses on the ministry of the church. Such an absence of any reflection on mission is due to a truncated understanding of the nature, notes, and functions of the church. What kind of discourse on God is that in which God appears divorced from the world that God so loves? George Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury said: “Ecclesiology is a subsection of the doctrine of mission.”²² David J. Bosch, says in his famous book *Transforming Mission*: “Just as the church ceases to be church if it is not missionary, theology ceases to be theology if it loses its missionary character. The crucial question, then, is . . . what theology is and is about. We are in need of a missiological agenda for theology rather than just a theological agenda for mission; for theology, rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than critically to accompany the *missio Dei*.”²³

When theologies and theological formative processes critically accompany the *missio Dei*, people will be transformed into mission-shaped co-workers with God, and the eschatological movement of God’s drawing all things into God’s embrace in a renewed creation and a reconciled new humanity will march on. The same we have to say regarding spirituality, as we said before.

CONCLUSION

We began this article with a reference to Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, of the Episcopal Church: “We are in cardiac crisis in the Church”. We also, in the Catholic Church, in religious life, are in cardiac crisis. The awareness and the experience of *mission Spiritus–missio Dei* offers as a pacemaker jolt to pull the rhythm of our heart.

Mission should not be confounded with work, things to do; we must not suffer the anxiety of agendas; the Holy Spirit is always active, even if we are sleeping, or distracted. The mega-project of the Kingdom of God is going on, despite our failures, and limitations. If we are confident in the Spirit, at the end our prayer will be: Glory be to the Spirit, than to Jesus and finally to the Father. During this time of epochal change, we are granted with a new vision: the seven eyes of the Spirit. We are graced with a new energy; the Spirit updates our charisms. The Spirit of the New Covenant replaces our hearts of stone with a new one of flesh. And surely, we hear our heartbeat: Mission, Mission, Mission!

Endnotes

- 1 I was inspired by some recent theological reflections on this issue: Duraisingh Christopher, "From Church-shaped Mission to Mission-shaped Church," in *Anglican Theological Review* 92 (2010), 7-28; ANDREW TAMBLEN LORD, *Spirit-Shaped Mission: A Holistic Charismatic Theology* (Waynesboro: Authentic Press, 2005); MISSION-SHAPED CHURCH WORKING GROUP, *Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).
- 2 Katharine Jefferts Schori, *The Heartbeat of God: Finding the Sacred in the Middle of Everything* (London: Sky Path Publishing, 2011); JAMES GRAMSEY, "Mission is the Heartbeat of the Body of Christ," in *Thinking Faith* (the Online Journal of the English Jesuits), (June 2010).
- 3 Fred Hiltz, "Go to the World! Go Struggle, Bless, and Pray: Bishops, Theological Schools, and Mission," in *Anglican Theological Review* 90 (2008), 307.
- 4 Title of a book by Johannes Hoekendijk (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1966).
- 5 Karl Barth stood alone in treating mission in his systematic Theology. In his book *Credo* (1935), the outline of his systematic Theology, he presented mission in this perspective.
- 6 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (1995: 56-61).
- 7 In the closing statement of the meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1952 in Willingen (Germany) appears this sentence: "There is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world" (Wilhelm Richebacher, "Missio Dei: The Basis of Mission Theology or a Wrong Path?," in *International Review of Mission* 92(October 2003), 589.
- 8 In Luke's Gospel, mission comes to the disciples as a promise: "You will be my witnesses," which is fulfilled in the experience of the Spirit (Lk 24:46-49; Act 1:8). The Holy Spirit is the motivator of christian mission. The Spirit initiates, guides and empowers the disciple's mission. The Spirit directs the disciples through prayer, visions and dreams.
- 9 Taylor, 1972: 83-84, 133.
- 10 *Redemptoris Missio* of Pope John Paul II (1990) included a relevant chapter which is titled as: "The Holy Spirit: the Principal Agent of Mission": He writes: "The mission of the Church is... the work of the Spirit... The coming of the Holy Spirit makes them witnesses and prophets... The Spirit gives them the ability to bear witness to Jesus with boldness... The working of the Spirit is manifested particularly in the impetus given to the mission which, in accordance with Christ's words, spreads out from Jerusalem to all of Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest ends of the earth" (RM: n. 24). "The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members"... Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel" (RM). In the Orthodox thought "the sending" of mission is essentially the sending of the Spirit (Jn 14:26), who manifests precisely the life of God as communion (2 Cor 13:13).
- 11 Orthodox theologians have preferred to use the concept of martyria, or witness, to describe this concept, rather than the word "mission" which may be associated in Orthodox minds with Western political programs of expansion, often at the expense of Orthodox lands.
- 12 The potential of the language of the Spirit and spirits for mission theology deserves further exploration for a number of reasons: Spirit language is shared between Christians of very different theological persuasions. It is a vehicle of ecumenical discussion. The language of the spirit-world is found in the Bible, and it is part of the biblical tradition; it has also the potential for a theology of pluralism. The language of spirits can be applied to social, economic and political movements and forces, both destructive and constructive. Spirits are connected with matters of the human heart, giftedness, morality and evangelism. The language of Spirit and spirits can be applied also to unity, dialogue and reconciliation.
- 13 David Toolan, *At home in the Cosmos* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 127-192.
- 14 However, the new emphasis on the "mission Dei" has to be attentive at some important issues: 1) not to emphasize upon the sending of the Son by the Father without an equal emphasis upon the role of the Spirit; 2) not to be centered exclusively in the work of Christ divorcing salvation from creation; mission is not to be reduced to the "conversion" of those who are outside the church. We should not forget the activity of God in creation of the *missio creationis*; 3) not to broaden the concept of mission because "if everything is mission, then nothing is mission."
- 15 A Dei-centric ecclesiology is very different from other ecclesiologies, such as the one shaped by the dominant theological axis, centered around the "creation-fall-redemption" matrix. In the latter, the emphasis is upon a christocentric exclusivism which envisages that the church is the only locus of salvation. The purpose of its mission, therefore, is the conversion of those who are outside it and to that end

- it plants churches everywhere so that the “benefits of Christ’s passion” may be dispensed. See Wati Longchar, Josef R Widyatmadja, and M. R Joseph, eds., *They Left by Another Road: Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in Asia* (Chiangmai, Thailand: Christian Conference of Asia, 2007); Ken Christoph Miyamoto, *God’s Mission in Asia* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2007); Lalsangkim Pachuau, ed., *Ecumenical Missiology: Contemporary Trends, Issues and Themes* (Bangalore: United Theological College, 2002); Choan Seng Song, *Christian Mission in Reconstruction: An Asian Analysis* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977); and M. M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization: Some Critical Issues in the Theology of Mission in Contemporary India* (Madras, India: Christian Literature Society, 1971). Another significant collection of provocative reflections is G. V Job, et al., *Rethinking Christianity in India* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1938).
- 16 Philip, the evangelist who was preaching successfully to a large crowd in the midst of a city, is suddenly led away along a desert road to meet a lonely individual (Acts 8). A reluctant Peter is sent to a God-fearing gentile. Peter learns, to his surprise, that the Spirit acts in totally unheard of ways for which Peter and the Jewish Christians were in no way prepared. Without a radical insistence upon the priority of attuned discerning of God’s already up-and-running presence and work in the world, there can be no transformation from a church-shaped mission to a mission-shaped church.
- 17 As a key example, see Darrell L Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America, The Gospel in Our Culture Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998).
- 18 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 10.
- 19 This theme runs throughout many of the essays included in Andrews F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 1-25. On the role of mission in the New Testament church, see NT Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 360-361
- 20 The last World Council of Churches’ Faith and Order study document, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, puts it as follows: “Mission thus belongs to the very being of the Church. This is a central implication of affirming the apostolicity of the Church, which is inseparable from the other three attributes of the Church—unity, holiness and catholicity. See “WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper 198 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 35. In addition to *Nature and Mission*, other significant initiatives that can be noted as examples of this trend are the 2010 world mission conference held at Edinburgh as the centennial of the ground-breaking 1910 Edinburgh conference.
- 21 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1996), 51.
- 22 Quoted in John Hull, *Mission Shaped Church: A Theological Response* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 1.
- 23 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 494.

BOOK REVIEW

Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Reclaiming Spirituality*. New York:
The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2012, Pages 197, \$19.95

Diarmuid O'Murchu's *Reclaiming Spirituality* is undoubtedly a leap into the realm of spirituality of human beings spread over a period of at least 70,000 years. Scanning through the pages of this book discloses the wide variety of the traditions of spirituality which articulates the human search for meaning and purpose in life. To explain these variety of spiritual traditions to the readers, O'Murchu has expounded different sources, such as conventional and modern, religious and numinous, psychological and philosophical in order to search what is authentic in spirituality. Consequently, this book is an appropriate resource for people of all cultures and races as it has both, depth in its resourcefulness and dynamism in its literary form.

O'Murchu presents the topic by distinguishing the difference between spirituality and religion. Spirituality is concerned about an ancient and primal search for meaning in life that is as old as humanity itself. Hence spirituality is, and always has been, more central to human experience than religion; as a result, he argues, spirituality can explode with a new vision with fresh possibilities for an integrated worldview. This is very pertinent as the modern humanity is imbued with a spiritual consciousness which expresses itself in the contemporary desire to create a one world-family, characterised by love, justice, peace, and liberation.

O'Murchu explains, in the first chapter, the spiritual hunger of our time. Many of the formal religions seem to be losing their dominant role and there appears to be a groaning in the fields that pertain to religion. Hence, there is a need to distinguish the supreme importance of the difference between religion and spirituality. The second chapter takes us to the narrow boundaries of spirituality where often the 'God' concept enumerated in a patriarchal terms has become an alien idea to the freedom of the children of God. This chapter also shows the readers an expanded horizon to explore the experience of many contemporary spiritual seekers who seek spirituality not religion; hence the retrieval of spirituality as the primary dynamic of human spiritual growth, according to the author, is a supreme challenge in the next millennium.

The third chapter reflects on the human need to recognise the creative God whose spirit blows wherever she/he wills, endowing creation with the divine flame, rather than the notion of spirit beginning from astrology, medium ship, witchcraft, to the invocation of the spirit guides etc.

In the fourth chapter O'Murchu tries to reconnect spirituality with the various dimensions of our existing spiritual traditions and goes on in the following chapter with a deep reflection on why we lost the connection with our ancient spiritual heritage and the gradual shift that took place from spirituality to religion. He develops it with historical examples beneath the rise of formal religions.

The sixth chapter on spirituality and creative universe, deals with new cosmologies thriving on relatedness and inter dependence and its expansion through the narrow horizons of both traditional science and orthodox religion. The seventh chapter is an empathic attempt in reclaiming the feminine heart, exploring its contribution to this new awakening. The eighth chapter stresses on sexuality as the erotic power of spirituality and shows that sexual power or energy must not be dissipated on illusory fantasies or desires that are abusive, rather as means to a blissful encounter with the Divine. Chapters nine and ten reflect on spirituality as the collective shadow of the kingdom of God. Here, the author explains collective shadow as a larger planetary and cosmic darkness where everything has its place and season and, where one learns to embrace the trans-patriarchal vision in a conscious and contemplative way. Thus the author shows that the spirituality of the kingdom at all times opens up the entire universe so that we can behold the glory and the grandeur of God. The eleventh chapter is the summit of all ten chapters, where one rediscovers a ritual space on grounding the new vision through new ways of befriending, supporting, and enlightening each other in the new spiritual revolution that is on the world stage.

This book helps us to appreciate human spirituality in a deeper and wider dimension. It also helps us to comprehend how indispensable spirituality is to human beings and shows also the distinction between spirituality and religion. It stimulates us to reclaim our own spirituality and live our spiritual life meaningfully and harmoniously in the present pluralistic, pragmatic, and chaotic society where people mistakenly indulge in religious fanaticism and consider it as authentic expression of their spirituality. The well-documented bibliography gives an asset of information on the complementary resources for those who are fascinated in further study and research on this topic. In short, this is a treasure for those who seek a solid spiritual journey in this pluralistic, global and confused modern world.

Sr. Valsamma George, MSI

BOOK REVIEW

Paul Evdokimov, *Ages of the Spiritual Life*, Revised Translation by Michael Plekon & Alexis Vinogradov, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002, Pages. 263, \$ 22.

Paul Evdokimov's book *Ages of the Spiritual Life* offers a profound, principled and innovative view of presenting life in the Spirit. In the midst of hundreds of books crammed at the racks of bookshelves all over the world on spiritualities, this work, in all probability, stands out as an incomparable insight and guiding light. He portrays the spirituality of the great tradition of the Church, drawing from the great riches of Christian spiritual life both in the Western and Eastern tradition particularly preserved in monastic ideals, drawn from Bible, liturgy and living tradition. The narration is beautifully entwined with his affluent and diverse spiritual experiences as an Orthodox Russian Christian, also considered as an endeared writer, theologian and pastor, among a wide spectrum of people, that include Roman Catholic monastics, Protestant clergy, ascetic specialists and laity.

The whole book is divided into three parts, namely: encounter, obstacles and struggles, and the charisms of the spiritual life and the mystical ascent. Evdokimov brings out the diverse aspects of spiritual life of different ages and expressions, elements and dimensions, and cognitively appraises the religion with its varying cultural nuances.

In the first chapter of the first part titled 'Encounter,' Evdokimov begins explaining atheism that prevails at all the levels of society and says that God does not impose himself on anyone and that his existence is not immediately evident to all. Marxist doctrines say that man is the only reality in history, but it claims the possession of all divine attributions. Chapter two deals with faith and shows that it is step beyond reason. God is not an object of faith but our faith is the measure by which he is revealed. The next five chapters deal with spiritual life in its two dimensions, religious and interior; the first entailing a relation of dependence on a transcendent and personal absolute, whereas the second as autonomous, penetrates its psychic richness. He then goes on to explain the three partners in the divine game, the spiritual elements that correspond to them and the process of transformation.

In the second part titled 'Obstacles and Struggles,' the first chapter tells about the negation of evil and affirmation of the good. The devil is a divider, one

who separates and cuts of all communion, while, on the other hand, God binds together, builds bridges, re-establishes communion. The second chapter deals with three aspects of evil that are parasitism, impotence and parody and shows the ways in which they afflict human living. The chapter that follows, deals with Jesus' confrontation of the cosmic elements that conceal the dark powers and explains the deeper meaning of the significant moments in the life of Jesus. Chapter four brings us the meaning of human suffering and shows how each one of us adds to the suffering of Christ.

In the next two chapters, the author speaks about the early consecrated life, the example of different desert fathers and mothers, as they lived a life of solitude. He states that the soul recognizes God in its avowal of its total powerlessness and monasticism evokes a certain receptivity to the universal priesthood of the laity. Through these presentations, the author argues that the testimony of the Christian life in the frame work of the modern world necessitates the universal vocation of interiorized monasticism. In the following chapters of the second part, he speaks about asceticism as an interior combat necessary for the spiritual person to acquire a mastery over the material world, while discussing also the need for divine grace and the signs of growth in spiritual life.

The first chapter of the third part, gives us an idea of the spiritual life of the East and the West and shows how these two spiritualities need to meet in order to establish a balanced spirituality. The second chapter distinguishes between the spiritualities of the Old and the New Testaments, while in the third, the author explains the charisms of spiritual life, such as: discernment, impassibility, silence, vigilance, repentance and humility. The next chapter shows how the universal priesthood of the faithful shares in the three powers such as government, teaching authority and sanctification. In the last and final chapter, the author speaks about the mystical ascent in its stages and the corresponding changes in prayer. The goal of this ascent is a face-to-face vision extended over eternity, when God comes into the soul and the soul goes forth to God

Paul Evdokimov offers, in this book, an authentic, meaningful and thought provoking spirituality for the whole humanity. While reading it, we learn about an all comprehensive spirituality of the Church which seeks a particular expression in the demands and the context of our modern time and our lives. The pages of this work are so engulfed with deep exposure and profound insights for everyone who has a quest for deep spiritual life. In the midst of the diverse streams of spirituality, this book can become a beacon of hope for those who genuinely aspires for meaningful spiritual life and God experience.

Sr. Deepa John, SJC

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