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Leadership and Community
Happy and Inspiring Religious Communities
Consecrated Life and Affective Maturity
Biblical Foundation for Community Life
Pauline Agape and Religious Communities
A Call to an Inclusive Missional Community

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EDITORIAL

Religious Communities are a marvel in themselves! Most sociologists, who analysed different groups and organizations in the history of human society, have wondered at the survival of religious communities against all odds, unlike any other group that emerged in the past and vanished more or less in a few decades. Some religious communities have stayed for several centuries: structures may have changed, lifestyles and rules may have changed, but the spirit of the original community has often been maintained; in some cases they have been transplanted in a different continent, yet they have flourished. What is the secret behind this marvel?

This year on 2 February, the day dedicated to Consecrated Life, addressing consecrated men and women, the Pope said in his homily, “If it (consecrated life) did not exist, how much poorer the world would be! Quite apart from the superficial assessments of its usefulness, the consecrated life is important precisely because it is a sign of unbounded generosity and love, and this is all the more so in a world that risks being suffocated in the vortex of the ephemeral and the useful. Instead, the consecrated life witnesses to the superabundance of love that is an incentive to ‘lose’ one’s life in response to the superabundance of the love of the Lord who first ‘lost’ his life for us.” So, consecrated life is a special attempt to transform oneself into the image of Christ, who loved us by losing his life. We can then boldly say that the secret of this marvel lies in Christ’s love for us and our love for Christ, which is manifested in our love for others.

But why do we form these ‘unnatural’ communities, after all? Do we form community for the sake of the ministry we do? Today, in most cases, other people do the same ministries we do, and do them just as well as we do, without being members of religious communities. Are we brought together as religious, for the purpose of a particular task? Many groups do join together for a task: trade unions or sports clubs, for example. Or are we relational communities as opposed to task-oriented communities? Or is it for security that we gather together? The Quaker Parker Palmer was puzzled over the longevity of monastic community, especially given the difficulties of community life. He concluded that it is because the monks “created a form of community that brings them together not for the purpose of togetherness but to support each other in the rigors of the inward journey.”

Though the idea of making a transforming journey together towards the image of the compassionate Christ is very sweet-sounding, at times our experience in religious communities offers a different picture altogether: sometimes the community soothes us as in a gentle breeze, but at other times it becomes a foretaste of hellfire for some.

That is why Sr. Rose Hoover says, “In community, as we accompany each other along the way, as we support each other in the rigors of the spiritual journey, we are for each other burden-bearers, burdens, and blessings... as we ourselves are being transformed into the compassionate and merciful presence of Christ for each other and for the world.” We know this journey is tough, painstaking, slow, long and often without the desired transformation into a compassionate nature. Hence many questions about religious communities remain unanswered. In search of answers and practical tips, we have dedicated this issue of Sanyasa Journal to the discussion of matters related to this marvel of community life.

As in the previous years, Sanyasa Institute organized a seminar from 28 to 30 January this year in connection with the day of Consecrated Life (2 February) on the subject ‘Religious Community: Being for One Another’. Eminent religious men and women led the discussions on different aspects of Community Life in the present day circumstances. All the articles in this issue of the journal are either papers presented in that seminar or dealing with related subjects.

Gabriel Mathias OFM, in his article ‘Leadership and Community’, describes the role of the Superiors as ‘animators’ of the community, not really ‘superiors’. Leadership in religious communities needs to be understood as both responsibility and authority. The article also discusses the challenges to this exercise of authority. The author differentiates religious leadership from secular leadership, and leader from manager, because the authority of a religious leader is spiritual authority. Finally the article dwells upon practical tips and mechanisms to help the animators of communities, calling him/her as the guardian of unity in the community.

‘Happy and Inspiring Religious Communities: Essential Elements, Distinguishing Marks and Formation Issues’ by Joe Mannath SDB is an attempt to look at the reality of religious life and religious community in our context, with its plus and minus points. Religious community is not simply a voluntary gathering of persons, nor a tool for getting work done more efficiently; it is founded on each person’s genuine and properly discerned response to God’s call. A healthy community needs the free self-gift of each member to God and to the common goals. The author also discusses some distinguishing marks of a good religious community and the essentials that formators need to keep in mind for providing a realistic, inspiring and integral formation to the young recruits.

Marie Eugene D’Almeida AC begins her article ‘Consecrated Life and Affective Maturity’, presenting today’s scenario with its lights and shadows and analysing how far consecrated men and women are able to integrate sexuality and affectivity in their life and ministry. With the help of psychology, the author explains the process

of attaining affective maturity and proposes some effective tools for it. Next she deals with the issue of relational intimacy among consecrated people, drawing boundaries and cautioning us against boundary violations. The article is concluded with some helpful hints for healthy intimacy.

Arul Jesu Robin CMF discusses the 'Biblical Foundation for Community Life', starting with a narration of biblical inspiration in the foundation and life of early monastic communities of Pachomius and Basil. He then goes on to analyse the traits of community life in the Old and New Testaments: in the OT period, prophetic groups and the Qumran community led a community life with their own characteristics (which are discussed in the article); in the NT period, the first Apostolic community and the first Christian community may be taken as models for the modern religious communities - their guiding principles are relevant even today.

'Pauline *Agape* and Religious Communities' by Martin George CMF is an effort to draw inspiration from the Pauline concept of love in 1 Cor 13:1-3 and to apply the concept to our religious communities. With the help of some tools of modern biblical scholarship, the author explains the relevance of 1 Corinthians against the background of divisions in the Corinthian Church, especially of chapter 13, where Paul proposes *agape* as the solution to their problem. The NT concept of *agape*, reaching its summit in the Pauline hymn in 1 Cor 13, is explored thereafter, followed by a text study of vv. 1-3. Paul considered *agape* as indispensable for any disciple of Jesus; the author's contention is that it should be more so for consecrated men and women.

Antony Kalliath CMI, in his article 'Consecrated Life: A Call to an Inclusive Missional Community', invites us to a holiness, which is interpreted as holism and reconciliation, in which the whole of creation is redeemed and restored in a creative equity. Every religious is called to become a proactive participant in the fullness of life. Analysing the 'truth' of consecrated life, the author explores its Christological angle, the prophetic nuance, the Kingdom centric nature and its need to be inserted in the public space. He finally explains the ways of being missional: by being a cultural presence, being dialogical and embodying a multi-faith perspective; being a narrative and welcoming community.

We are also publishing in the last pages the homily of Pope Benedict XVI on the occasion of the 14th Day of Consecrated Life (2 February 2010) for easy reference by religious men and women, to whom this homily was addressed.

Martin George cmf

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY

Fr. Gabriel Mathias OFM

Leaderless Community

It is not rare these days, for a stranger who visits a small religious community and asks for the superior to be told, “We have no superior; we are all equals”. One may also find the officially appointed superior reluctant to exercise her/his role of leadership and there may prevail a *laissez-faire* kind of atmosphere where each one does what he/she wants and no one really is a leader. The Superior may be just an administrator who sees to many material aspects of the running of the house which for all practical purposes is a “hostel.”

This kind of situation in some religious communities is quite a contrast to the situation that prevailed in religious communities in general some years ago when minute details of a community member’s life was controlled by the superior. Thus, for example, in many communities of sisters letters received by them would first be scrutinized by the superior.

Not “Superior” but Animator

These days there is an aversion to the word “superior” when referring to the leader of the religious community. The more commonly used word is “animator” or “facilitator.”

Fr. Gabriel Mathias OFM, a Franciscan priest, holds a doctorate from the Institute of Psychology of the Gregorian University of Rome. Besides doing psychotherapy and testing, he has been involved in teaching for the last 25 years at various Seminaries and formation Institutes in India. He has also conducted workshops on Psycho-Spirituality in India and abroad. At present he teaches at St. Pius X Seminary, Mumbai, NVSC, Pune, Mater Dei Institute, Goa, Institute for Formators at AVP, Bangalore and St. Anthony's Friary, Bangalore. He has published many articles in journals of psychology and religious formation. He has been the resource person in various national and international workshops and seminars. He has held various leadership roles in the Franciscan Congregation such as Rector of the major Seminary, Dean of Studies, Provincial moderator for on-going formation and Councillor of the Province. At present he is the Superior of St. Anthony's Friary Bangalore and Vice Provincial of the Franciscans in India. He may be contacted at: gabrielofm@yahoo.com

What are some of the reasons for this change which has often left communities leaderless and many religious averse to accepting the role of the superior of the community? The shift from a rather authoritarian style of leadership to a *laissez-faire* style of leadership, the challenge, or at times, an aversion to official leadership in religious communities and in the Church has to be considered in the broad context of the social changes in the past few decades.

The Church is a divine, but also a human Institution which is subject to change. In terms of models or systems

Authority as standing within the community as service rather than as standing over it as a power to decide and command

of leadership we can say that before the Second Vatican Council the Church tended to copy the classical theory of organization in its structures while after the Council there is a tendency in religious circles, to take over the “industrial humanism” prevalent in the society.

Summarizing the stances of the Church on the system of leadership before the Second Vatican Council, Courtney Murray¹ stresses three aspects:

- 1) It was a leadership of authority as a reaction to reformation which attacked the authority of the Pope and, the French Revolution which attacked the authority of God himself.
- 2) The relationship between ruler and the ruled is conceived in terms of vertical relationship where the ruler is the tutor and guardian of virtues.
- 3) Those who hold office make decisions – doctrinal and pastoral. The faithful in the ranks submit to the decision and execute orders.

This theory didn’t consider important elements like the interplay of individual personality, group dynamics, etc. It did not consider the contribution of the behavioural sciences on behaviour and organization. Moreover, it gave less importance to the individuality of the person.

The second Vatican Council brought in new concepts in its ecclesiology:

- 1) the concept of the People of God with equality and dignity and freedom for its members;
- 2) the Church as an interpersonal community;
- 3) the Church with an apostolic mission to love all humanity;
- 4) authority as standing within the community as service rather than as standing over it as a power to decide and command.

The Church, therefore, has given a great impetus to the concept of community and the dignity of man. As the recent Instruction from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on *The Service of Authority and Obedience* states, “in recent years the way of listening to and living authority and obedience has changed both in the Church and the society. This is due to, among other things: the coming to awareness of the value of the individual person, with his or her vocation, and intellectual, affective and spiritual gifts, with his or her freedom and rational abilities, the centrality of the spirituality of communion...”² These above changes have tended to favour a kind of “industrial humanism” in ecclesiastical structures. In this type of system participative decision-making is emphasized. Man’s freedom, human dignity and individuality are respected, as against an authoritarian type of hierarchical structure which fosters infantilism in the subjects.

Leadership as Exercise of Responsibility and Authority

It is necessary to distinguish between two aspects of leadership in the church:

- 1) Leadership as exercise of responsibility toward and within the institution
- 2) Leadership as exercise of authority.

The latter is reserved for a few people – the superiors; the former is the duty of both the superior and the subjects.³

Challenges to Leadership as Authority

In the past, leadership which stressed authority often used the power of recompense and coercion to achieve its goals. The superior’s manner of dealing with “subjects” often impinged on their dignity as human persons. The Second Vatican Council has recognized the growing consciousness of man’s personal dignity and his right to make use of responsible freedom, not driven by coercion or motivated by a sense of duty. Accordingly, reward and coercion have less popularity since they touch the dignity of man.

The changes in the society at large have affected the authority of the leader in religious communities and have created a “crisis”...

Authority, today, has to be earned rather than accepted as given. The changes in the society at large have affected the authority of the leader in religious communities and have created a “crisis” for the traditional type of “superior” whose word was always respected. This has also led to the difficulty in finding people willing to

take on the service of leadership in religious communities and the situation of superiors who do not lead, but are mere administrators.

The traditional type of leadership style with stress on authority, power to punish or reward did not foster internalization of religious values. It only led to outer compliance⁴ without inner conviction.

Communities based on such leadership in the past produced perfect observance of religious practices but

The role of leadership of religious communities cannot be based on secular models of management alone.

often produced infantile, dependent human beings. Religious observance was often a kind of servile compliance with very little personal conviction or acceptance.

Neither did such leadership foster real community. Quite often communities were large anonymous groups who hardly had any interpersonal contact with each other. We could even say that they were not “communities” since there was hardly any communion between members. Since professed religious are grown up adults and leadership with stress on authority and power of reward and coercion are not really the most suitable

for internalization⁵ of religious values, what is the role of leadership in a religious community?

Secular versus Religious Leadership

While in some ways leadership of a religious community is like leadership of any human group, it is also in many ways different. The uniqueness of the religious group consists in that the spiritual or religious perspective is the very reason for its togetherness as a community of life; without this religious value, its cohesiveness and identity as a religious community is bound to be undermined. It may remain a communion of people with common interests such as work or personal likings but cease to be a religious community.

The role of leadership of religious communities cannot be based on secular models of management alone. In the secular world, managers do not concern themselves with moral values. Their goal is results and efficiency. There is no place in the secular model, for weak persons or for mercy and compassion. The ‘hire and fire’ policy of the secular world cannot be used in religious communities.

Jean Vanier⁶ says: “There are different ways of exercising authority and command: the military model, the industrial model and the community model. The general’s goal is victory; the

factory manager's goal is profit. The goal of the leader of a community is the growth of the individuals in love and truth."

Manager versus Leader

From a purely secular, sociological point of view, we could say that where a number of people are living together, it will be realized that several needs must be met: this is a matter of coordination regarding such concrete factors such as seeing about guests, meals, finances, physical care, etc. These needs, however, need not be met by one single person. These responsibilities can be shared among the different members of the community. The Superior need not be the administrator, bursar, guest master and jack of all trades. Most of these functions fall under the title of management or administration rather than leadership.

The manager, however, is not necessarily a leader. The manager is concerned with the smooth day-to-day running of the community. The leader, on the other hand, is one who brings about change, transformation in the community. He/she is the one who moulds and communicates a task-oriented vision for the community growth, providing transforming focus to the actions of others so that they are able to foster within themselves their own potential for change (G.A.

Arbuckle). "Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things. Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall." (Stephen Covey).

Religious Leader as Legitimate Authority

As mentioned earlier, the different leadership tasks for running a community can be shared by the members of a community. This refers

"Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things."

to leadership as responsibility. One of the aspects of leadership of a religious community that cannot be shared by community members is leadership as authority which is related to legitimate power. This is connected with faith, objective values, obedience, and accountability. Does the role of an administrator, coordinator or manager satisfy what is envisaged by the vow of obedience which is ultimately based on faith?

The religious community is "a communion of consecrated persons who profess to seek together and carry out God's will: a community of sisters or brothers with a variety of roles but with the same goal and the same

passion. For this reason, while *all* in the community are called to seek what is pleasing to the Lord and obey Him, *some* are called, usually temporarily, to exercise the particular task of being the sign of unity and the guide in the common search both personal and communitarian, of carrying out the will of God. This is the service of authority”⁷

The Code of Canon Law⁸ states that in the strength of the assumed office the superior owes obedience to the Law of God, from whom his or her authority

All authority in the Church must be characterized by the spirit of service, in imitation of Christ who “came not to be served but to serve.”

comes and to whom he or she must render an account of conscience, to the Law of the Church, to the Roman Pontiff, and to the proper law of the Institute. It also reaffirms that all authority in the Church must be characterized by the spirit of service, in imitation of Christ who “came not to be served but to serve” (Mt. 10:45).

This role of leadership connected with legitimate power and authority is directed to:

- 1) helping individual community members live their own consecration,

- 2) constructing fraternal communities, and
- 3) participating in the common vision of the Congregation and the Church.⁹

Leader as Animator of the Community

The role of the leader of a religious community today is usually referred to as animation. By animation is meant an “inspiring” or “life-imparting” experience. This refers to leadership where persons with special gifts for interpersonal relationships “inspire” others. In social animation the animator is the person who, after taking the pulse of the group, acts as “pace-setter”, facilitator and catalyst for individuals in the group. He is the pace-setter in that he proclaims the Lord’s message by his life. He takes the pulse of the group and of the individuals to discern where the Spirit is leading them. He is the catalyst who facilitates the Lord’s activity in and through the members.¹⁰

The recent Vatican Instruction on “The Sacred Service of Authority and Obedience” enumerates some priorities in the service of authority which concretely spells out the means for constructing community.¹¹

- a) **In consecrated life authority is first of all a spiritual authority.** Persons in authority are “spiritual” when they place themselves at the

service of what the Spirit wants to realize through the gifts which He distributes to every member of the community.

The phrase “spiritual animation” is often used in this context.

b) Persons in authority are called to guarantee to the community the time for and the quality of prayer, looking after the community’s daily faithfulness to prayer, in the awareness that the community approaches God with small but constant steps.

Personal example is of utmost importance in this. Physical presence of the Superior is indispensable to guarantee that community prayer happens.

Community sessions of weekly Bible sharing can be a means to enhance the prayer-life of the community.

c) Persons in authority are called to promote the dignity of the person, paying attention to each member of the community and to his or her growth, giving to each one the appropriate appreciation and positive consideration, nurturing sincere affection towards all and keeping reserved all that is said in confidence.

Persons in authority are to challenge the community members in order to bring out the best in each person and to enable the community to fulfil its mission.

d) Persons in authority are called to inspire courage and hope in the midst of difficulties. Leaders of the community are like the Good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep, because even in the critical moment they do not retreat, but are present, participating in the concerns and difficulties of the people confided to their care, involving themselves personally. Leaders are to show genuine love and concern for all.

Physical presence of the Superior is indispensable to guarantee that community prayer happens.

It is normal that there will be some abnormal people in the communities: people with psychological problems and people who are difficult to live with. The Superior has to take extra care that these members of the community feel accepted and loved.

e) Persons in authority are called to keep the charism of their own religious family alive. In order to do this the leader will have to be in touch with the history and traditions of his/her Institute, the Constitutions and documents of the Institute, as well as be alive to the signs of the times.

f) Persons in authority are called to keep alive the “sentire cum Ecclesia”. This implies an authentic spirituality of communion that is an

effective and affective relationship with the Bishops, primarily with the Pope, the centre of the unity of the Church.

Concretely, this implies not only respect for ecclesiastical authorities but also keeping abreast with the developments in the local church, participation in and respecting the pastoral plan of the diocese, and ensuring attendance at important functions and meetings of the local church.

Human beings grow best in a relaxed environment built on mutual confidence.

Persons in authority are called upon to accompany the journey of ongoing formation. This they do, not only by offering help in resolving problems or in managing possible crises but also in paying attention to the normal growth of each person in every phase and season of life.

Ongoing formation is often understood as “updating” for which one attends courses. While this may be needed now and then, ongoing formation basically takes place everyday in the life of the person in the community because basically it is a process of daily conversion.

Everyday life, and the ambience and historical context in which it is lived, is the precise and original space of

Ongoing Formation for living the vocation and mission, by favouring the process of transformation of the person. The local superior is, therefore, the main ongoing formator for the members of the community.

Other means that the Superior needs to employ in fostering growth of the community are:¹²

a) The service of listening. The exercise of authority implies that persons in authority should gladly listen to those who have been entrusted to them. They must have the ability to listen to everyone and not just their friends and admirers. This is important in making decisions but above all in attending to those who feel isolated, and in need of attention.

Some training in acquiring listening skills and counselling skills can be a great asset to the community leader.

b) Creation of an atmosphere favourable to dialogue, sharing and co-responsibility. “The leader’s mission is also to create an atmosphere of mutual love, confidence, sharing, peace and joy among community members. Through his relationship with individuals, through trust shown in them, he will lead each member to trust the others. Human beings grow best in a relaxed environment built on mutual confidence. Where there is rivalry, jealousy, and suspicion, and where people are blocked against each other,

there can be no community, no growth and no life witness”¹³

It is very important to create an atmosphere of trust where everyone feels at ease to make known to the others one’s opinion and needs.

This implies that the Superior discourages any gossip or talking behind the back and allows each one to express his opinion openly without judgment. It also means that community members feel at home in the community and are happy to return to it after they are away.

c) Soliciting the contribution of all for the concerns of all. The community is what its members make it. Therefore, stimulating and motivating a contribution from every person so that each one feels the duty to contribute his or her own charity, competence and creativity is fundamental. “The role of the authority can only be understood if it is seen as one of the many gifts or ministries which we need to build to community. The leaders do not have monopoly of insights and gifts; their role on the contrary, is to help all the community members to exercise their own gifts for the good of the whole.”¹⁴ The wealth of a community lies in the fact that all its members can share the qualities and gifts of others.

The superior must always share his work, even if others do it less well than he, or in a different way. He needs to

pay special attention to involve the weaker and less talented persons in the community in contributing to building up the community, according to their capacity.

The wealth of a community lies in the fact that all its members can share the qualities and gifts of others.

d) At the service of the individual and of the community. The Superior needs to find the right balance between:

- 1) respecting the individuality, needs, aspirations of the individual,
- 2) the common good of the community and
- 3) the demands of the work entrusted to the community.

This is a delicate task in the present cultural context: the desire for *self-realization* can at times conflict with *community project*; the search for *personal well-being*, be it spiritual or material, can render total dedication to the service of the common mission difficult. Visions of the Charism and of apostolic service which are too subjective can weaken fraternal sharing and collaboration.¹⁵

e) Community discernment. While persons in authority should not shy away from making decisions, as far as

possible, the spirit of discernment ought to characterize every decision-making process that involves community. While the decisions may not please everyone, if a discernment process has been followed, the decisions will be seen as community decisions rather than impositions by authority.

When there are conflicts in communities it is important that these are not allowed to simmer and come to a boil.

When major decisions are taken, it might be wise to employ the service of a neutral facilitator who is experienced in the Christian discernment process.

Superior as the Guardian of Unity

One of the central roles of the leader of a religious community is to symbolize and foster communion and unity. One and the same call from God has gathered the members of an Institute together (cf. Col. 3:15). According to *Vita Consacrata*: “Life in community is the particular sign, before the Church and society, of the bond which comes from the same call and the common desire – not withstanding differences of race and origin, language and culture – to be obedient to that call. Contrary to the spirit of discord and division, authority and obedience shine like a sign of that unique Fatherhood which

comes from God, of the brotherhood born of the Spirit...”¹⁶

It is possible that there are subgroups in the community based on age, culture, ethnicity, language, etc. The Superior should be especially careful that he/she does not favour or join any subgroup in the community but works for the welfare of the whole community.

Some Concrete Mechanisms for Animating the Community

1. Community meetings/house Chapter

Regular Community meetings or house Chapters are an indispensable means to foster community life. These should not be left to chance but programmed preferably on a monthly basis. The agenda for these meetings should not be merely “business matters” of running the house but should involve sharing on topics relevant to religious life. The latest documents by the church or the Congregation could form the basis for some of these sharing sessions. The presider for these sessions need not always be the superior.

2. Conflict management:

When there are conflicts in communities it is important that these are not allowed to simmer and come to a boil. Conflicts need not be signs of a bad community. Conflicts well handled can lead to a deeper community life. At times it is necessary to employ

the services of an outside facilitator for this.

Reconciliation liturgies could be a part of the conflict management process.

3. Community Life Project:

At the beginning of the year it is good to make a community life project which deals with schedule of activities on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly basis in the areas such as prayer life, community meetings, recreation, work, ongoing formation etc. Priorities could be worked out for a year with clear objectives and means to achieve them. This life project should be the result of the reflection and decision of the whole community.

Conclusion

Religious life has seen radical changes in the recent years in the way leadership is exercised. The shift in our culture from a hierarchical to an egalitarian and democratic outlook has meant that even in religious circles there is an aversion to authority and “superiors” and an unwillingness of people to take on the responsibility of leadership of communities. Some question the necessity of an official superior since the different responsibilities for the community can be shared among its adult members. But as the priest sociologist Andrew Greeley writes: “To speak of a structure-less

(leaderless) community is similar to speaking of a mountain range without mountains, of an ocean without water, or a building without walls or roof. The institution-less community is a sociological impossibility, a nonsense phrase, a slogan without meaning, without content, and without sense. Institutions are not optional in a community; they are essential for its survival.”¹⁷

Endnotes:

- ¹ J.C. Murray, *Freedom, authority, community*, In America, 1966, p. 115.
- ² Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Instruction on: The Sacred Service of Authority and Obedience*, *Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram*, Vatican, 2008, no. 3.
- ³ Rulla, L. M., *Depth Psychology and Vocation*, Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1971, p. 293.
- ⁴ H.C. Kelman, “Compliance, Identification and Internalization: Three Processes of Attitude Change”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1958, 2, pp.51-60. Kelman says: “Compliance can be said to occur when an individual adopts influence from another person or from a group because he hopes to achieve a favorable reaction from the other.”

- ⁵ “Internalization can be said to occur when an individual accepts influence because the induced behavior is congruent with his value system.”(Kelman, Op.Cit.,)
- ⁶ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1996, p. 208.
- ⁷ Instruction on “*The Sacred Service of Authority and obedience*”, no. 1.
- ⁸ Cf. Code of Canon Law, can. 617-619.
- ⁹ Instruction, Op. Cit., no. 3.
- ¹⁰ Canadian Religious Conference, *Community Spiritual Leadership*, Bangalore: ATC Publications, 1975, p.105.
- ¹¹ Instruction. Op. Cit., no.13.
- ¹² Instruction, Op. Cit., no. 20.
- ¹³ Jean Vanier, Op. Cit. p. 208.
- ¹⁴ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1996, p. 201.
- ¹⁵ Instruction, Op. Cit., no. 3.
- ¹⁶ *Vita Consacrata*, 92.
- ¹⁷ A.M. Greely, *The Hesitant Pilgrim*, New York: Sheed & Ward, 1966.

HAPPY AND INSPIRING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS, DISTINGUISHING MARKS AND FORMATION ISSUES

Joe Mannath SDB

In this article, I want to look at religious community life today, with particular reference to our situation in India. I mention our context right away, for it matters. Just as India and, say, Germany or Canada differ in how people get married, how husbands and wives relate, how parents bring up children, how younger and older people relate, religious communities differ, too, from one culture to another. The person who joins a religious community (or seminary) comes from a particular culture. Studies show that the average candidate has the strengths and weaknesses of the average male or female of the culture she/he comes from. That is the “raw material” or the starting point for formation work. Culture influences and even defines us in more ways than we usually think, or

even more than we are consciously aware of. Hence the context of these reflections and conclusions will be Catholic religious communities in India today. Direct experience of religious communities in several other countries convinces me that the differences are evident and remarkable, especially between women’s communities in India and in the West.

So, too, the setting I am familiar with is that of “active” or ministerial religious orders. I have not been part of a monastic or contemplative religious order, and I cannot speak from direct experience about the issues contemplative religious face today. Most of the examples I will quote will be from the community experiences of ministerial orders.

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One of the findings I was surprised to read while preparing this article was this: Among the many types of human organizations, Catholic religious orders have been the most lasting. Groups, movements and organizations rise, grow, weaken and disappear. Most of them do not last long. What has made religious communities last for centuries, when most other human groups have disbanded or disappeared much sooner than the initial group expected?

“History testifies that, paradoxically and amazingly, Catholic Religious community is one of most stable and

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long-lasting forms of voluntary community in the history of the Western world, even though it lacks a sexual, blood, economic, or political base and is not created with community itself as its objective.”¹

What explains this type of stability? What has helped hundreds of religious orders not just to survive, but to thrive, in such disparate conditions and cultures across the world, in spite of the evident blunders and negative traits of a number of the members and even of the leaders?

A purely human group coming together for a favourite activity, such as, sports or self-improvement or social service, would have disbanded very soon. What has given stability to religious congregations and communities is something else.

I. The Basis of Religious Community

It is good to remind ourselves right at the start—to prevent a very harmful misunderstanding—that men and women join religious communities, not to find community or friends, but to find God. I am not talking about the actual motivation of everyone, but of what religious life offers and stands for. The purpose of religious life is not to meet my emotional needs, or find friends, or a nice, enjoyable type of company where I feel at ease. No, the valid reason for joining religious life is to follow God’s call—to be in that state of life where God wants me to be, and where, deep down, I know I am responding to God’s call. Loving and genuine relationships do form an important part of religious life, but that is not the grounding reason for joining this way of life. We can find friends among our neighbours or college mates or colleagues at work. We need not join a religious congregation for this purpose.

The experience of community affects the way I see and understand religious life, of course, but my main

search, if I am to find happiness and fulfilment in this way of life, must be to do what God wants me to do. Since God does not (normally) reveal this to a candidate through a blinding vision or miracle, she/he needs help with the process of finding out what God wants. This is why discernment is important in religious life. No one has the authority or right to tell someone else to join a religious order, or to take decisions for that person, or to claim that this person has a religious vocation. Such a decision needs a reasonably long and careful process of discernment. Even at the end of such a process, the decision must be of the candidate, made in freedom and with a reasonable degree of knowledge, self-awareness and human maturity.

As a key Vatican document explains, “Religious consecration establishes communion between religious and God and, in him, between members of the same institute. This is the basic element in the unity of an institute.”² The same document adds, “The foundation of unity is the communion in Christ... This communion is rooted in religious consecration itself.”³

An important part of this process is to sort out whether one feels one is called to a life of celibacy, which, after all, is not needed for living well, or for following Christ or finding personal holiness. All of us know married persons—often our own parents or

others we know well—who lead exemplary and God-centred lives as spouses and parents. We have no right to coax, or much less pressurize a young person to give up marriage and parenthood and live in community with other unmarried persons of the same gender. This, by itself, will not help anyone to become holier or more loving or more committed to service.

This whole path makes sense only when, after a sincere and serious process of discernment with the help of competent persons interested in the candidate’s inner journey—not persons

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mostly interested in increasing the number of members in their order, or in getting “hands for work” to maintain existing institutions, or, worse still, in recruiting pliant though unsuitable candidates rather than sharing responsibilities with qualified lay people—the young person is happy to commit oneself to God in this way of life, which includes also a particular way of relating to God which is celibacy. Without this faith-centred and happy choice, celibacy would be an unhappy burden and a block to one’s development. If “put up with” rather than freely chosen, it will degenerate

into unhealthy compensations—the search for comfort or power, or addictions, or unloving, even cruel treatment of people, as well as sexual acting out.

The whole discussion of religious community must be clear about this premise. Religious life is rooted in a personal relationship with God; without a meaningful inner journey, it does not make sense; the community is made up of celibate women or men, that is, adults who have made a willing and considered choice, as a response to God's call, to belong to God in a

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particular way that responds to the deeper desires of their heart. If this core is missing, I will have unrealistic expectations from community, and I will not give to my community and to the mission what I would be able and happy to give if my heart is in the right place.

Some cynics may reply that they know religious who have lived this life for years, and do not seem to be God-centred or marked by faith, or who seem to be more concerned about power or money or comforts than about service.

I agree that such persons are apparently found in religious life. (In fact, the well-known and unedifying divisions and rivalries based on language or caste or tribe are usually about power and money, not about service or about God's will.) Just to survive in religious life or the priesthood, one does not need faith or prayer or spiritual convictions and practice. For this, it is enough to have common sense, pass the assigned exams and tests, and avoid committing big, publicly known mistakes.

But blundering infidelity is not what I am talking about. What I am trying to see is what this life is meant to be, and how and when it makes sense.

II. Essential Elements of Community Life

Human beings cannot survive in isolation. We need mutual support. Historically, the human race has constructed many types of support systems. The commonest and most evident is the family—a close-knit unit into which we are born, where we become adults, and where we experience our most intense positive emotions such as tenderness, closeness, intimacy, the security of being loved and cared for and also, alas, some of our most painful emotions.

Other support systems are: the local parish, associations, clubs, and the nation. We depend on each other in

myriad ways everyday. To be able to write this article, I depend on a reliable electrical supply that powers my computer and more importantly, though more remotely, on those who taught me to read and write, trained me in different skills, looked after me when I was sick, etc. Human interdependence is too evident to need proof. Let us move on.

When people come together “in community,” that is, for a reasonably long amount of time, for a definite purpose and life-style that has conditions for admission and, with mutual obligations—unlike, say, spectators at a sports stadium or in a movie theatre or passengers in a bus—there are certain elements which are essential for community-building. A community is not the automatic result of just any human gathering. Fifty thousand people watching a World Cup match are not a community; they will disband as soon as the game is over. The admission requirements are minimal, e.g., the possession of a valid ticket and abstention from dangerous or offensive behaviour.

This is not the case when I am recruited for a job, or join a college, or enter a religious order, or marry and start a new family. Each of these new settings has clear and demanding requirements, without which they will fail.

What are the elements of religious

community-building? These three: the individual’s self-gift to the community, the community’s effective concern for the individual and meaningful common activities that promote unity.

1. The Member’s Self-Gift

When I join a religious community, I do it as a response to God’s loving call. Only within a faith-inspired life-orientation would this decision make sense, as we have already said. Everything I call my own—my body, my intelligence, my other gifts—all this is, more truly, God’s gifts to me,

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entrusted to me for a time to do God’s work on this earth. I am not my own. I belong to God. Everyone does. Religious profession is one way of taking cognizance of this truth, and choosing to live by it. This is why we say that it is a living out of one’s baptismal commitment, not a higher or holier step. There are many settings in which I can live out my response to God’s love. Celibate community is one such setting. If, after prayer and discernment, I find this to be the best path for me, then I publicly “own” this

path, and make it my own, and join a group of persons, each of whom has also made the same choice. It is to God that each of us is committed, not to each other, or to the superior.

Life-commitments, whether marriage or religious life, if they are to be happy and life-giving, cannot be half-hearted. I can watch a football game for ninety minutes even if I am not a football fan. It is a way of passing some time; it is not a commitment. So, too, with a number of other things we do. But life-commitments are something else. To make them succeed, we have to give ourselves, and do it willingly, generously and cheerfully. Half-hearted commitments will always feel heavy, and leave our hearts empty

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and unfulfilled.

So too, life-commitments are full-time. I cannot be married on a part-time basis. I cannot be a spouse or parent part-time. Similarly, I cannot be a part-time priest or religious. This choice defines me as a person, not in the sense that it cuts me off from others, or puts me above the crowd, but in this sense that it affects all my other choices.

Hence, to succeed in this type of

commitment, I give to it all I have: my time, my talents, my ideas, my qualifications, my future. I withhold nothing. In fact, I choose not to raise a family of my own, or to own a home or bank account.

The real wealth of a religious community is its members, each of them living one's life as a whole-hearted response to God's love and call.

At a day-to-day level, this means that I spend time with my community—prayer, work, meals, recreation; that I contribute ideas to the common discussions; that I work hard; that I give to the community and our common mission things or money I may receive; that I share my inner journey with someone in trust; that I do not claim privileges of space and things and special treatment. The more I give myself to this new family I have chosen in faith, the happier my life is likely to be. A religious—like a husband or wife—really tries one's best to make the religious community one's new and first family, the primary setting of one's belonging and affective investment. We do not just live side-by-side without loving, nor limit our conversation to comments about the weather—or, worse, to gossip—but we really build this family together through our sincere daily commitment spelt out in many sacrifices and shared responsibilities and shared pains and joys, just as our

married brothers and sisters do to construct a home together. In fact, we have much to learn from them—and they from us.

The happiest religious are those who give of themselves the most, just as the happiest married persons are those who put their spouse and children before their own comforts and conveniences. All spiritual paths—whether celibate or married—are ultimately about moving from self-centredness to love. Those who achieve this core transformation best are the happiest and most fulfilled human beings—and the holiest—whether one does it in a marriage partnership or in a celibate community.

That reminds me of Brother John Kespret SDB, a radiantly happy religious brother who inspired so many of us. One day, in his old age, he was preparing songs to teach to the parish choir for the next Sunday Mass. I told him, “Brother John, you have been busy in the press the whole week. You must be tired. Why don’t you take a bit of rest on Sunday?” Brother John’s reply, “Joe, if we want to be happy, we must help others as long as we can.” That is the simple truth he lived, right up to his last sickness. He died a happy man.

Without a willing self-gift, one finds neither meaning, nor happiness.

2. The Community’s Care for Each Member:

The community accepts each

member with his or her gifts and limitations. The community—whether the local or provincial community or the whole order—has the obligation to provide opportunities for the member to grow up to be a mature and happy human being, to be qualified for the forms of ministry the congregation is engaged in, and above all, to cultivate one’s relationship with God. The young members are not there to be “used” for work, or to get things done; they are there mainly to grow to the human and spiritual stature that God wants for them. For this, we provide the member

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with helps of various types: encouragement, fraternal correction, inspiring example, support in difficult moments, guidance at crucial moments of decision making, help with discernment. As a very experienced and much-esteemed Salesian formator and superior, Father Peter Brocardo used to say, “The young have the right to make mistakes; it is we older people who should be exemplary.”

The community, particularly the superiors and senior members, helps the younger members by creating a healthy atmosphere for their growth. As we said

earlier, we cannot really “form” anyone. Human beings are free agents. People grow up best when they are loved and trusted, not when they are suspected or shouted at; hence the importance of providing a happy and loving atmosphere for young members to grow up in. Only in such a setting will a person feel free to be himself/herself,

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to express oneself, ask questions, take initiative, make mistakes, and grow up. In a fear-filled setting, a person may do the expected external act, but one’s heart will not be in it, and, as soon as the threatening external presence is removed, the same person will tend to do the opposite.

3. Sharing Life at All Levels:

Families and religious communities become so by being together and doing things together. Shared memories unite—or infuriate—siblings in a family or members of a religious order.

One thing that always helps, and hence is indispensable to community-building, are meaningful celebrations. A well-conducted common prayer builds community. A happy, loving birthday celebration can bring people

together. The spontaneous celebration when a member has achieved something—“Mary has just got her results; she got a first class. Let us have ice cream at lunch!” is a heart-warming gesture, both for Mary and for the rest of the community.

Life itself can be a celebration when we live it with love. When a couple are in love, for instance, they enjoy the simple pleasures of life more intensely, e.g., going for a walk, having a simple meal together, enjoying nature together, chatting, watching a movie together. The same is true of religious communities. There are communities that have wonderful memories of living together in great poverty, with simple meals, poor accommodation, plenty of hardships and deep and heart-felt joy. It is not buildings, meals, costly gadgets and positions that fill the heart, but the warmth and support of genuine, caring relationships.

Cooking a meal together, cleaning the house together, preparing a parish programme together with the people, working late into the night, with no proper sleep or food—all these can be wonderfully happy experiences and material for years of happy memories, if done in the company of loving people.

It would be a great mistake to try to make people happy by providing luxurious housing or expensive meals or comfortable living. This will attract

the wrong type of candidates to religious life, cause non-stop rivalry and bickering, and empty religious ideals of their inner strength and attraction.

Sheela, a bright young woman who had completed her post-graduate degree with good marks and also done further training in software, was interested in religious life. Her family was hoping she would marry and stay at home, since they had no sons. Sheela's stand: "You have brought me up with so much love. I want to share that love with those who have no one." She looked at several religious congregations, and decided on one. One of her main reasons for choosing that community was this experience: "I spent three months with them. I saw that there is no discrimination among the sisters. All of them share in all the work. There are no big shots and less important sisters. That is the kind of community I want to be in."

A happier religious community will be built more surely any day on, "we have very little, but we are rich, because we have one another, and God's loving protection," than on "We have money, we want more, we do not need each other, and we do not feel the need of God."

In other words, a happy community is built:

- on *individuals* who have given

their heart to God, and hence hold nothing back in humble, cheerful service to each other and to the people they serve;

- on a *community atmosphere and network of relationships* where one feels supported and appreciated, where the community really shares my joys and sorrows, and has time for me when I am down, and will correct me to my face without spoiling my name behind my back;
- and on *shared celebrations, shared work, shared fun, shared space and time.*

III. Marks of a Good Religious Community

What are the marks of a good

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religious community? Are these marks visible, noticeable? Let us have a look.

As we walk into the home of one of our relatives, we can "sense" a lot of things. The way the children approach you or avoid you is itself a strong message. How they behave with their parents tells us much about the family. There are many verbal and non-verbal

cues about the actual situation of the family.

The same is true of religious communities. The following traits will mark a good religious community:

1. Joy: Do people look happy? This is easy to notice. As Father Teilhard de Chardin would say, “Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God.” Joy is one of the clearest signs that our heart has found what it was looking for. Both individually and as groups, one of the clearest signs of a good, healthy community (or family) is that the members look happy. Happiness is not

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a sense of personal satisfaction when things are easy or going well. It is both the effect and the cause of a life lived well. How? In the Bible, the secret of happiness is to live according to God’s laws. If our relationship with God is well-cared-for and in order, and our relationships in community are sincere and loving, the result will be happiness. As for our mission, happy people will work more, be more available, can handle stress much better, and have more energy and dynamism than

unhappy people.

2. Unity: Unity does not mean uniformity or sameness of ideas or tastes. Nor is it based on sameness of ethnic origin or political views. Unity refers to the readiness to stand by each other, without pulling each other down, whether it be by open fights or gossip or slander. The unity in a religious community comes from a double fidelity—to God and to the mission. Fulton Sheen used to use the drawing of a cycle wheel to illustrate our relationship with God and with people. The spokes of a wheel are closer to each other when they are closer to the centre; as they move away from the centre, there will also be greater distance between them. This is true of people as well. When each of us is seeking God’s will rather than our private preferences, we will be united with the others in the community, seeing each one as a brother or sister sent there by God, meant to bring me something unique, to whose life I am also called to contribute. Our sense of mission, too, fosters unity. When all of us are aware that we are here together for a worthwhile goal, e.g., the integral education of poor youth (as in the Salesian mission), that gives the whole group much energy and great unity of purpose and action. We are ready to let go of petty differences and accept sacrifices, because the mission is something all of us believe in.

Unity is not the same as uniformity. In fact, religious communities should guard against what Pope John Paul II spoke of as an “inauthentic attitude of servile conformism.” Conformism, he says, brings uniformity rather than unity.⁴

3. God-centred atmosphere, where holiness or Gospel-based living is palpable. I know boys and young men who, without any great interest in prayer or religion, nor in religious life or the priesthood, were won over by the joyful and deeply religious atmosphere of a school or formation house, and picked up a taste for prayer and for following Christ. Don Bosco, for instance, was a genius in creating a taste for holiness in ordinary street boys, who, before meeting him, were merely interested in food, fights and fun. I recall the words the father of a seminarian uttered on spending some time in the seminary, “this place feels like heaven.” In another religious community that ran a college, the superior was a woman of such evident goodness and prayerfulness that the lecturers—belonging to different religions—would go to her when they faced personal or family problems, and tell her, “All I want is that you pray for me and with me. I am sure that God answers your prayers.” They experienced miracles after she prayed with them. One expression of this God-imbued atmosphere is vibrant and joyful community prayer, which is not

sleepy or dull, but devout, heart-felt and simple. This is accompanied by the simple but edifying sight of community members dropping in for a moment of prayer in the chapel at various moments of the day. Such simple, spontaneous acts, done very naturally and without a show, create an atmosphere of prayer and recollection even in the midst of noise, activity, sports and music. This is no idle theory; I have seen it happen.

4. Inspiring and humble leadership marked by simplicity, availability and readiness to serve. Superiors are the ones with the greatest responsibility for the atmosphere of a community. In pursuing a faith-vision of religious life and living its mission with enthusiasm, the superior sets the tone for the community. When superiors behave

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like loving brothers/sisters to the rest, rather than as authoritarian bosses or privileged “big shots,” they teach the rest valuable lessons about Jesus’ lifestyle and values. I recall a meeting of the final year seminarians with their superiors and the way they thanked the staff at the end of seven or eight years of formation. One deacon said, “I am

grateful to the seminary, because when I came here eight years ago, Father Rector carried my suitcase to the dormitory.” Unexpected acts of kindness and humble witness have far more impact than hundreds of conferences and exhortations. As Francis de Sales used to say, referring to the gentleness and warmth that should characterize those who do ministry, “More flies are caught with a spoonful of honey than with a barrel of vinegar.” Part of this Christian leadership is also the openness to suggestions and to constructive criticism from the rest of the community.

5. Hospitality, including openness to the poor and the needy: Hospitality has, of course, many levels. It is, in the first and most obvious place, the

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openness to members of the same religious order. This is one of the things I like best about being a Salesian. I have so many heart-warming memories of experiencing the hospitality of Salesians around the world. Just to quote one case, when I was doing my post-doctoral studies in Boston, I used to stay in a parish, and go to the Salesian school in the city now and then. Once,

during Holy Week, when I went there to spend a couple of days, I noticed that they had many guests. Wondering whether they were short of rooms, I asked the Rector, “Ken, I notice you have many guests this week. Is my coming causing you any inconvenience?” His reply—which I recall clearly after so many years with much gratitude—was: “Joe, you are not a guest; you are a Salesian.”

Heartfelt and cheerful hospitality comes from the conviction that the religious house is no one’s private property; it is the Lord’s house, and everything we have is meant to be shared. In general, we see that the poorer the house, the more hospitable it tends to be, just as, in society, poorer people are, by and large, more hospitable and generous than the wealthy. In the Bible, hospitality and poverty of spirit are linked; a simple, uncluttered house is open to welcome others, while a “full” house is so packed with things that it has no space for people.

I often tell religious and priests that poor Indian villagers are better models of hospitality than many religious houses in the West or in India. You probably know the Sanskrit expression, *adhiti devo bhava* (“the guest is like God”). There is much we can learn from the warm and self-sacrificing hospitality of our people, who spend even more than they can afford to make

a guest feel welcome, offering them the best in the house. It would be sad and selfish if we religious make a fuss about offering a meal or a room to someone who needs it, especially if they are other religious and priests. This simple and warm attitude of welcome to guests and visitors seems to be stronger in some parts of India than in others, and much more evident in certain religious congregations than in others. Once the member of a large religious order told a friend from another congregation, “If I were to visit your city, I would prefer to stay in one of your houses than in one of our own; your communities are much more hospitable than ours.”

Christian hospitality includes, too, kindness and respect towards the poor. How do we treat the poor person who comes to the door for help, or the poor village woman who comes to sell us a handful of vegetables or fruits? Jesus’ teaching is about treating everyone with kindness, especially the poor, not just those we consider “our own” or those who can invite us back. Wouldn’t it be a terrible counter-witness if we are all sweetness and courtesy towards the wealthy contractor or the rich parent, and indifferent or harsh towards the poor and the unemployed?

Jean Vanier, who left a life of privilege and comfort to serve the mentally and physically handicapped, saw the crucial role that community plays in the healing of people. One of

his core convictions is about our concern for the poor. “Communities, if they close themselves off from the poor, close themselves off from God... Every community must be concerned about the poor and broken of the world. Everyone must be close to the poor who are close by and who are calling us to love... It is not possible to eat the broken Body of Christ in the Eucharist and to drink his blood shed for us through torture, and not open our hearts to the broken and the crucified people in our world today.”⁵ It would be ridiculous and a scandal if, in the name of community life, we were to live lives of comfort in a swanky building, cut

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off—even physically, by high walls—from the poor of the neighbourhood. A religious trained or living in such a setting is more likely to develop love of luxuries and indifference to the poor than love of Christ and commitment to the needy.

6. Enthusiasm and initiative in the mission: Religious communities are not exclusive clubs where members enjoy privileges and outsiders are kept out. We are meant to build loving families, after the example of the community

described in the Acts of the Apostles, united in Jesus' name and having everything in common. One result of this sense of belonging to the Lord and being about his work is obvious enthusiasm for ministry. Religious congregations are alive to the degree that members are keen on opting for the more difficult missions, for the poorer settings, ready to go where the need is greatest. When we start looking for comfort and power and positions, the congregation is sick or dying. As one inspiring religious priest used to say, to describe the meaning of religious obedience, "any job, any time, anywhere, but not anyhow."

Involvement in the mission can make religious aware of the complex realities of the world, of the tremendous

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goodness and tremendous cruelty that are a part of human life, the biased reports in the media, and the power games going on in society, and to understand how small and manageable our problems are when compared to the sufferings and challenges lay people face everyday.

IV. Formation Issues:

How do we teach young people to

build happy, loving communities?

Formation is a large and complex issue. There are common principles and guidelines valid all over the church, but the settings are very different from one country to another or even from one part of a large nation like India to another; and these differences matter. The strengths and weaknesses of the formation scene are very different in India from what they are in the "First World." So, too, the types of candidates who join religious life today are very different from candidates some forty years ago. The formation settings and practices are very different, too. In many Western countries, for instance, religious orders, particularly of women, hardly have any candidates, or have two or three novices in the place of the forty or eighty they used to get before 1960. Here in India, we have the world's largest number of young religious and seminarians in training. The crucial issues here are right selection, motivation, quality and follow-up. This requires wise and inspiring formators. A short article like this cannot look at all the issues of formation in religious life. In an earlier article in *Sanyasa*, I have written about some of the nice-sounding rhetoric we hear in religious circles and the more problematic reality.⁶ Here, instead, I will limit myself to making some suggestions on formation, particularly about helping people to become constructive

community members.

In line with what we saw at the start of this article, we need to remember that the purpose of religious life is not pleasant human relations, nor finding friends to overcome my loneliness. Religious life can be lived enthusiastically and with inner serenity and strength only if it is based on a faith-vision—Jesus’ life and teachings, as seen more concretely in the life of the founder/foundress and in the tradition of the order—and a sincere attempt to conform my life to Jesus’ way of life. Without this base and shared understanding, we would only be groping in the dark. While we can use *helps* from common sense, psychology and management practices, these cannot be our guiding principles, nor the *norm* on which to base our decisions.

Here is a concrete illustration of what faith does for community life.

In a large community which I know well, the superior made some decisions which a few of the younger members did not like. In their anger, they calumniated him, saying hard things about him which were not true. Then, to humiliate him further, they smeared ink on his photo which was in a public place. In the midst of all this, I found him serene. I never heard him seek revenge or say things like, “We must find out who did this, and punish them.” When I told him that I admired him for

the way he faced this unfair criticism and humiliation, his calm reply to me was, “When someone speaks ill of me, I pray extra for that person.” Unjust

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criticism did not make him lose his serenity. No wonder he could say on his golden jubilee, “I have never been unhappy.”

The question of forming young people “for community life,” therefore, is not merely a question of teaching people to adjust and fit in, or play it safe and survive, or keep quiet to avoid trouble. It is about teaching people a way of life based on Jesus’ life and teachings, whereby we build communities of love, forgiveness, simplicity and service, where Christ is evidently the centre, and not human manipulation or power-games.

How do we do it?

There are no short-cuts, just as there are no short-cuts in raising children or building a happy family. Our parents were parents twenty-four hours of the day, and trained us, not mainly through conferences, rules and time-tables, but through years of loving sacrifice,

constant presence, repeated helps and corrections, daily prayers for each of us, and often through quiet suffering and facing much ingratitude.

The paradigm that comes closest to formation work is parenting. Formators are not mere lecturers or occasional counsellors. We share the life of the formees, loving them as our younger brothers and sisters, keeping their welfare at the heart of our concern, open to their suggestions and criticism, eager to build them up, and convinced that

Only in loving and happy settings will people grow into loving and compassionate adults.

the real work of formation is between each of them and God, not between them and us. They are here to find out what God wants them to do, to open their hearts to the action of the Holy Spirit, and do with a cheerful heart and free spirit the mission God has in store for them. They are not here to do what we want, nor are they hands for work (“cheap labour,” to quote a disparaging expression some people use to describe us religious) to be kept busy, doing whatever work we assign them, and doing it preferably without questioning or initiative.

As we said earlier, no one can “form”

another human being. People are not clay, lying passively to be moulded into some pattern, another person has in mind. Nor does any human being have the right to try it, even if we could. Young people are not playthings in our hands. Each of them is a human being with a God-given mission, with the gifts and talents needed for that mission, and with much to contribute. Each candidate is an adult, who has to make his/her own decisions, with help, of course, but without undue pressure or any coercion. How do we help them on this journey? Here are some suggestions; they are given in brief, to avoid making this article too long.

1. Provide a happy and loving atmosphere. Formators, as we have said, cannot “form” a human being. I can, for instance, write this article. I cannot make you read it. If you choose to read it, I have no power to make you agree with me, nor the power to make you do any of the things I am suggesting here. But, if I am a happy and loving person, and treat you with genuine love and respect, I provide a safe setting where you have a better chance of growing up. You are more likely to open up to me and get the help you need, if you find me loving, sincere and approachable, and if you are sure that I will not betray your secrets, nor put you down. Only in loving and happy settings will people grow into loving and compassionate adults. Fear-filled

settings may appear to give results, but they do more harm in the long run. People will do what is asked, out of fear, but they will resent doing it, and will tend to do the opposite once they are out of this oppressive setting.

2. Choose suitable persons to be formators: Formation work is not like teaching mathematics or computer science. (Even in such subjects, the teacher's attitude and way of relating matters, especially in the case of younger students; don't we all know children who love a subject because they love the teacher, or hate a subject for the opposite reason?). It is about daily interactions with a younger person, whose ideas and goals are seldom crystal clear, who has unresolved personal problems, who is often afraid of authority figures, who will take time to believe the nice theories we teach them, who has seen good and bad examples, and whose silence may not mean understanding or conviction, but fear or loneliness or confusion. More important than the content of the formation programme is the person of the formator. He/she needs to be a good human being a younger person can look up to (sincere, loving, convinced, with deeply held religious values), who can work well in a team (since jealousy or divisions will destroy formation work very quickly), with some training (e.g., in spiritual direction

and counselling), adequate knowledge of Catholic doctrine, religious life and the charism of the order, sound judgement (since she/he has to make judgements on the candidate's suitability) and happy to lead a simple life (since formees study the formators more than formators study the formees, and only those who lead a simple life are taken seriously by the formees).

3. Promote heterogeneous formation groups: Young people develop an open mind by mixing with others from different cultures. If their formation experience includes living with people who differ in language, culture, caste, tribe or race, they learn to see persons as persons rather than as simply as "Tamils" or "Dalits" or "Nagas" or

More important than the content of the formation programme is the person of the formator. He/she needs to be a good human being a younger person can look up to...

"Italians" or whatever. One of the problems facing religious in India—not only in India—is multiculturalism. In a thoroughly researched doctoral dissertation completed at Madras University, Brother Pavul Raj, presently Provincial of the Montfort Brothers, mentioned three crucial findings: (1)

that a significant number of religious mention multiculturalism or living in community with “others” as a problem; (2) they also say they have had happy experiences of living in multicultural communities; (3) the majority are convinced that religious should not yield to divisive tendencies, which are clearly contrary to the Gospel.⁷ Growing up in multicultural communities is one of the ways of promoting an open mind, and fighting divisive tendencies, bigotry or dislike for “others.”

4. Help the candidate to strengthen his/her good side and weaken the negative: The average candidate, as we said at the beginning, has the strengths and weaknesses of the average male or female of the culture he/she comes

If the formator, instead, is a bigot, his/her influence on the younger person will be detrimental...

from. The family is our main formation house, and its impact is greater, in most cases, than the long years of seminary or religious formation. We can provide a healthy setting that strengthens the good points of a candidate’s earlier upbringing—prayerfulness, spontaneity, spirit of sacrifice, simplicity of life—and remedies its weaknesses, e.g., intellectual mediocrity, inferiority complex, cultural narrowness, racial or caste

bias, etc. Or we may have a setting that sharpens the negative traits, and damages the good side. If, for instance, a young religious lives with senior religious or superiors who love all impartially, without any discrimination, she/he develops an open heart and mind, will cultivate friendships with people from different backgrounds, and learn to look at one’s own culture more realistically and more honestly. If the formator, instead, is a bigot, his/her influence on the younger person will be detrimental; under such influence, a seminarian or young religious may become a worse caste-fanatic or language chauvinist or tribal fighter, and, later, as a priest or religious, cause divisions among the laity.

5. Provide graded initiation into ministry, according to the mission of the congregation. The mission provides focus, enthusiasm and unity. It cannot be learnt through conferences and books. It needs to be experienced. Thus, when we came to the Salesian house, even before our novitiate, we were involved in ministry among poor boys. This continued all along our formation years. It is not enough that the formees be sent to the field of mission (e.g., to be among street children), while the formators are sleeping or sitting in their rooms. No, the formators must be with them in the ministry. It is by seeing how the seniors do the ministry that those in formation learn. Thus, for instance, by

seeing how my provincial and rector and novice master deal with poor boys and with youth in general, I learn, “Oh, this is how Salesians deal with boys.” That is how a young religious understands the mission of his/her congregation. It is by experiencing the congregation’s mission in realistic settings that the young religious picks up zeal and ardour. Without the commitment and sacrifice and the joy experienced in mission, religious community can easily degrade into a comfortable club of mediocre, easy-going men or women, or a group of bachelors/spinsters out of touch with reality. Communities are rooted in one’s commitment to Christ; they exist, and are organized around a mission. Both these truths need to be lived out and learnt—by experience and inspiring example—during the years of formation.

6. Do not promote those who are a problem in communities: If a young man or woman of, say, twenty-two, is found to be a problem in practically every group she/he has been in, such a person is likely to be a bigger problem at thirty-five or forty or fifty. To think that people will become easier to live with as they grow older is generally not true. This is especially true if they will not mix with “others” (those of a different language or tribe or caste, etc). Such bigotry will tend to be stronger as people age; bigoted people will do

much harm as older religious or as superiors, spreading the venom of division among younger members. In one word, don’t keep “dividers,” “avoiders,” or perennial fighters, the tale-bearers, and the insincere.

V. Conclusion

The initial outline, with which I started working on this article, had many more points. But I see that to elaborate on all of them would turn this into a bloated, unwieldy piece. Let me end by summing up the main issues we have tried to look at.

We need to look at the reality of religious life and religious community in our context, with its plus and minus

Without the commitment and sacrifice and the joy experienced in mission, religious community can easily degrade into a comfortable club...

points.

The non-negotiable foundation on which religious community rests is each person’s genuine and properly discerned response to God’s call. Religious community is not simply a voluntary gathering of persons, nor mainly a tool for getting work done more efficiently.

A community requires, for its

functioning and health, the free self-gift of each member to God and to the common goals, the community's support of each member, and a life shared at all levels.

A good religious community - like a well-functioning family - has certain distinguishing marks. We looked at a few of them.

To prepare religious to be constructive members of happy, God-centred, service-oriented communities, we need to make sure that recruits and younger members receive a realistic, inspiring and integral religious and human formation. I have indicated some of the essentials that formators

Our real job is to promote communion - between human beings and God, and among human beings as God's children.

need to keep in mind.

Any analysis, diagnosis or prescription dealing with complex human and religious issues is, of course, partial, one-sided and incomplete. May the reader, as well as other writers and activists, challenge the author, complete the picture presented here, and help to create purposeful and life-giving religious communities.

Today, in many fields, people trust experts, and tend to look for an expert. In medicine, for instance, patients want to meet specialists. What is supposed to be our expertise as religious? Neither teaching nor medical work, neither management of institutions nor even preaching, but this: "Consecrated persons are asked to be true experts of communion and to practise the spirituality of communion as 'witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design.'...Communion leads to mission, and itself becomes mission."⁸

As religious, our best contribution to the world is not the external work we do, however useful it may be; just to do the work, there is no need of religious life or a personal commitment to Christ. Our real job is to promote communion - between human beings and God, and among human beings as God's children. This we need to live first of all in our own communities; when we do that, we have something valuable to contribute to the world.

In a world of division, bigotry and exclusion, where there is much more violence and manipulation than the media tell us, good religious communities can be beacons of light showing people of good will that it is possible and worthwhile to live together in love, work together in unity, and

grow together into the kind of humanness that Jesus came to show us.

Endnotes:

¹ Sandra Schneiders IHM, *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy and Community in Catholic Religious Life (Religious Life in a New Millennium, Volume Two)*, Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2001, p. 228. Schneiders, a well-known US woman religious and New Testament scholar, quotes two other authors who made much quoted studies on women's religious congregations: Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, *Women in the Vanishing Cloister: Organizational Decline in Catholic Religious Orders in the United States*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993, and Patricia Wittberg, *The Rise and Fall of Catholic Religious Orders*, Albany, NY: State University of New York

Press, 1994.

- ² Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teachings on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, Rome, 1983, no. 18.
- ³ Ibid., no. 18.
- ⁴ Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, *The Foundations of Religious Life: Revisiting the Vision*, Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2009, p. 143.
- ⁵ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, Mumbai: St. Paul Publications, 1991, p. 188.
- ⁶ Joe Mannath, "Priestly and Religious Formation in India Today: The Rhetoric, the Reality and Some Proposals," *Sanyasa*, vol. IV, no. 2 (July-December 2009), pp. 193-218.
- ⁷ Pavul Arul Raj A., *A Socio-Religious Study of the Members of the Catholic Religious Orders of Tamilnadu, with Special Reference to Multiculturalism* (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation), Chennai: University of Madras, 2007.
- ⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, n. 46.

CONSECRATED LIFE AND AFFECTIVE MATURITY

Sr. Marie Eugene D’Almeida, AC

1. The Present Scenario

One of the biggest and most realistic challenges that Consecrated men and women face today is to lead a committed life with an adult affective maturity. When we reflect objectively on the causes or precipitating factors that entail in acquiring affective maturity, we acknowledge that the above statement points to an obvious reality and that “affective maturity” can be acquired only through a long and patient process of self-awareness and self-transcendence, which extends through the different stages of one’s life.

Gleaning through a recent brief survey (of 42 Congregations) done in our own country on the existential

reality of the challenges of Consecrated Life and Affective Maturity, especially in the area of Celibacy and Sexuality, and its related lights and shadows elicited by Priests, Religious Brothers and Women Religious, it was brought to our awareness that the human struggle to live a chaste and celibate life is a problem faced by every consecrated person.

Some of the feedbacks, received at a professional and confidential level, show the immaturity in the way consecrated persons deal with sexuality and affectivity. Sexual acting out with persons of the complementary sex and unhealthy relationships were quite common phenomena in some.

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Homosexual relationship was also one of the issues that needed our attention. Feeding of images into the psyche through internet, media, movies and literature was another common feature, which needed help and follow-up in communities as well as in pastoral environments. Inability to cope with loneliness and frequent tendencies to look for compensations was a further lack in living one's affectivity maturely. Failure to come to terms with the pain of renunciation of what is human and legitimate, specially the conjugal love and partnership, was one of the most sensitive problems that was sighted in the survey input. Many noted that there was lack of availability of professional help, adequate mentors and guides to listen to. This was considered as a great dearth in our country. Some women religious spoke of the lack of emotional balance in their dealings and in expressions of love with men. Some complained of not having proper preparation at the early formation period, for the integration of sexuality and affectivity.

In the light of these and scores of the other problems (despite the efforts made in counteracting them) that surfaced in this vital survey, it was affirmed that these are only symptoms of deep emptiness, emotional and psychological insecurity, lack of spiritual depth and personal encounter with God.

2. The Process of Attaining Affective Maturity

There was an earnest cry and a dire need was felt to help at all cost the vocationers and consecrated individuals at the stages of both initial and ongoing formation, to deal with their background, and their brokenness in some cases, and gain effective remedies to face the challenges in their affective life and ministries. Giving inputs on psycho-sexual integration, along with personal accompaniment and follow-up counselling, could be one means to offer this help.

One of the effective ways of acquiring help in dealing with such problems is through obtaining "self-consciousness" and "control of our

Inability to cope with loneliness and frequent tendencies to look for compensations was a further lack in living one's affectivity maturely.

emotions" on a regular basis. This will respond to our need to acquire a mature ability to love intensely and be loved by others. It means growing through a process towards personal maturity and reaching a healthy sense of personal identity (Who am I really?), which will enable one to acquiring a sense of balance between intimacy and self-

transcendence. Hence, we as individuals can handle our affective maturity by going through a vital process, which calls us to grow in such maturity at each stage of our life, by means of an Identity Sense, Intimacy Sense and Transcendence Sense.

What do we mean by these three elements of **a) *identity sense*, b) *intimacy sense* and c) *transcendence sense*?**

a) Personal Identity Sense simply means, answering the question: “Who am I?” This gives the self, adequate self-worth, which provides self-awareness/consciousness of positive and negative aspects of personality, as well as self-confidence and self-affirmation in our ministry.

In the recent years, material and natural values have become more important and people look for immediate fulfilment and satisfaction.

b) Personal Intimacy Sense consists in the ability to relate with others in an intimate way, to give and receive affection, as well as to experience healthy friendship with different degrees of depth.

c) Personal Transcendence Sense is achieved by answering the question: “What do I exist for?” It directly points to our finding meaning to our own

existence. And if he/she does not find meaning to his/her existence, he/she finds existential emptiness, which leads him/her to experience a feeling of despair and frustration in one’s personal life.

Therefore, an affectively mature person is characterized by:

- A true knowledge of oneself.
- Self-acceptance and acceptance of others.
- Recognition of others’ qualities and skills
- Recognition of his/her own limitations.
- Recognition of one’s emotions and feelings
- An Ability to love.
- Free and independent relationships.
- An Ability to create.
- Friendly and deep relations.
- Self-control/self-discipline.

3. The Relation between Consecrated Life and Affective Maturity

In the recent years, material and natural values have become more important and people look for immediate fulfilment and satisfaction. So struggles in living the consecrated life directly touches upon challenges faced in growth towards affective

maturity and sexual maturity. The ideal for consecrated men and women is that they do not have earthly attachments, do not pay much attention to material goods and don't need constantly to feel loved by others; they are rather filled with God's love so as to love others through Gospel values/evangelical life. We instinctively know that the absolutely free love of God is the reason why all human beings have this deep need to be loved and to love. Everybody needs to love because we are made by and for love. However, it would be naive to think that love is the great solution to solve all our human affective needs. Consecrated persons really ought to know and internalize all through their lives, the "why" and "what for" of "renunciation of conjugal love" and of the consecration of oneself to God to live the apostolic celibacy and virginal chastity. This entails understanding the meaning of "renunciation" not as a negative burden, but rather as giving up something "less" for "more". This does not mean that married people are less saintly than celibates. Personal sanctity is the relationship with the grace that God has given us, so we are not more or less holy due to the state or the calling that God has given us, but because of our relationship with the "call". Hence, consecration means **going beyond our natural disposition** towards an honest love between man and woman. Celibacy demands a move

to a supernatural dimension because it goes beyond purely human strength and disposition. That is why celibacy is a gift of God, a gift that God adds up to our nature so that we can lovingly sustain the renunciation.

People who accept this gift of God certainly have the same desires and need to love and be loved, just like those who get married. The only difference is that the person who has been called by God expands one's capacity to love and be loved and will devote one's body, spirit and energy to show Christ's love to every person, as his/her top priority. This means consecrated persons affirm the corporeity of one's body without reducing the body to mere sexuality. We understand that a person does not have "a sex", but he/she is "a

This means consecrated persons affirm the corporeity of one's body without reducing the body to mere sexuality.

sexed person", which means that we are men and women in all our integral being and not just in some parts of our body. Therefore our service to others shows Christ's love and it is done with all our masculinity and femininity. Hence, our love towards God and our neighbour is not a love that represses us, or that fills us with prohibitions. Rather, God makes us full and "fertile" without nullifying love, but it extends to

everybody so that we can receive Christ's love and the "renuncia-tion" allows us to "give more". We embrace the entire humanity and extend this love to everybody, especially to those children whose parents could not or did

"I know that this head ache/ shoulder pain... is due to my pressing down my anger towards my colleague/ superior/boss today"!

not want to love.

4. Effective Tools to Attain Affective Maturity

The following tools have been found to be effective means to attain affective maturity:

- **Make daily efforts to grow in "positive self-esteem"** remembering and affirming your strengths and putting them to use by looking for opportunities in community and in your work.
- **Begin to identify and own your emotions**, saying for example, "I am longing for love and attention; I feel sad and lonely; I too would like to be patient and not irritable...; I am getting angry and feel like exploding right now!"
- **Gradually learn to accept them without denying or repressing them** by being consciously aware

that you never like to own your mistakes. Say to yourself each time you tend to deny or repress your feelings, "I know that this head ache/shoulder pain... is due to my pressing down my anger towards my colleague/ superior/boss today"!

- **Make concerted efforts to channel them in the right direction.** When you are anxious or overcome by certain inner urges, put in your best efforts to do your vocational ministry well, by giving some extra time for the poor, the weaker students, or those struggling to handle their work or by taking on projects like literacy programmes and by using all your resources.
- **Express your emotions in a constructive and healthy way** by doing *yoga*, *vipasana* exercises, aerobics, playing music or doing art work, taking part in games, gardening, long walks, working out crossword puzzles etc.
- **Develop and use a sense of good humour** leading you to flexibility and cheerful attitude.
- **Encourage in your daily life positive emotions** and put them to use in your relationships – such as being cheerful, giving joy to others, extending forgiveness and

gentleness, compassion and selfless love.

- **Strike a balance between your work and rest.** Do not become a workaholic, take regular breaks. Have relaxed recreation and time for healthy leisure.
- **Discipline and control your imagination** by not giving into daydreaming or becoming addicted to TV serials, surfing internet cyber-sex sites, or being obese. Learn to regulate your compensatory habits – masturbation, over-dependent friendships, drinking and smoking.
- **Do some practical and worthwhile service for others.**
- **Reconcile with yourself and with the others** especially in your community, family and among colleagues.
- **Live in peace with God.** Take time out for silent meditation and contemplation.

5. Relational Intimacy: Psycho-Sexual Affective Maturity

Joan Timmerman, a theologian defines intimacy as, “the experience of being wholly and deeply touched by others” and describes it as a “mark of sexual maturity and a fruit of the Spirit” (J. Timmerman – Sexuality and the Sacred, 1994, p.100). As consecrated

and committed persons what are the relational dimensions we explicitly or implicitly propose?

The Counselling relationship is a beautiful helping relationship between two persons. It needs a certain depth and permanence to be effective and to yield lasting results. In seeking growth in such a healthy intimacy it becomes valuable to ask yourself some of the following questions: What or who are your models of perfection? Are they persons who encourage you to integrate, to grow and to grapple with what causes you to struggle? Or are they the ones that cause you to push into shadow, ignore or hide the difficulty? All these issues are related to sexuality and intimacy and they are intertwined with **boundaries** which are the parameters for understanding our intimacy and

Learn to regulate your compensatory habits - masturbation, over-dependent friendships, drinking and smoking.

relational lives. Boundaries are limits marking the distinction between two persons or realities (of space, time, roles, and culture).

In maintaining healthy and mature sexual boundaries of consecrated persons, especially those working in

Spiritual Direction, Counselling and Therapeutic contexts are to be mindful in maintaining a control on transferences and counter-transferences that transpire during the dynamic process of guiding and accompanying others in their respective counselling and vocational growth sessions. These transferences and counter-transferences involve intense emotions, which often translate into sexual feelings. Feelings of loneliness, vulnerability, tenderness are stirring sexual longings (cf. Jane J. Becker & David Donovan, "Sexual Dynamics in Ministry Relationships." Human development, 1995). Hence, Priests, Religious, Formators and guides alike should expect to encounter sexual reactions in themselves and in others in the course of their work. We are to be cognizant that in such a ministry we are dealing with "nature and grace" which promote human growth. The effect of such ministry in the church, theologically supported "is a good sown in the minds and hearts of men or in rites and customs of peoples,

Hence, Priests, Religious, Formators and guides alike should expect to encounter sexual reactions in themselves and in others in the course of their work.

these not only are preserved from destruction, but are purified, raised up, and perfected for the glory of God and

the happiness of human beings" (cf. Lumen Gentium, n. 17).

Boundary violations happen when individuals act on their emotions and feelings (often sexual ones) occasioned by transferences and counter-transferences. When boundary violations occur, individuals get hurt and experience betrayal and significant damage is often done to the vocational and pastoral objective or message. Some clear guidelines such as the following can help avoid boundary violations:

- The authority figure is *always the responsible person* in the relationship, the one who must draw the lines and set clear guidelines as to what is acceptable, regardless of pressure, requests or seductions from the other person.
- Sexual activity between a minister/authority figure and a person being served/formed is always abusive to *the latter*, regardless of the circumstances in which it occurred. At a transference level, such relationship parallels the relationship between a parent and a child.
- Relationship with a person, with whom there is potential for a romantic attraction, in the celibate context, needs to be challenged by asking oneself: 1. How appropriate is the relationship? 2. Where am I? 3. Who is the other person? 4.

How does the relationship affect the other person? 5. How does the relationship affect the community?

All of us have sexual feelings, reactions and attractions, including to people who are in some way in authority over us or subordinate to us. The challenge is not to ignore this reality but to accept it and remain alert to one's own dynamics. When there is a lack of awareness of one's sexual dynamics, needs and unresolved sexual or relational issues or one's emotional behaviour, we become vulnerable to perpetrating or being the victim of boundary violations.

It would do much good to our individual selves if I am aware of "how comfortable and confident I am about my sexuality, my sexual orientation and sexual attractions when I am lonely, tired, afraid, stressed, angry, hurt or intoxicated". *With such awareness I can work through appropriate behaviour and grow in my affective maturity as a sexual celibate.* It is always good to ask, "Where do I find the emotional support and appropriate intimacy to keep myself healthy and mature"?

6. Helpful Hints for Healthy Intimacy

How can we grow and help others grow in Healthy Intimacy, especially in Consecrated Life? To grow in our capacity for healthy intimacy and help others to develop mature affective

intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships in celibate life, we can be open to the following strategies:

- Cultivating a mature willingness to be influenced by God, others and situations. This can only happen when we start opening to the

Developing greater ability to transcend favourite privacies, personal comfortable zones and the tendency to be shy and weak...

possibility of change, of letting-go and transcending the defensive armour (of repression, denial, rationalization and regression, and projection) with which we surround ourselves.

- Learning to accept and love the person you are now. Being comfortable and truthful in sharing your psycho-sexual strengths and conflicts without fear of rejection or shame.
- Accepting the realities of our own bodies and *working at the obstacles* to healthy intimacy, such as fear of abandonment, rejection and losing our dependency needs, being excessively self-centred, or being dishonest in relationship with God, self and others.
- Developing greater ability to

transcend favourite privacies, personal comfortable zones and the tendency to be shy and weak, and opening ourselves up to meeting God in a deeper way through silence, prayer and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

- Nurturing and fostering healthy self-discipline at the spiritual, psychological, social, intellectual and moral levels. Practice appropriate asceticism (not masochism) which is rationally motivated and Christ-centred, which will resist self-indulgence, regressive compensations and

Celibate love calls for mature loving which has an outward thrust and not merely a seeking for inward gratification through one's ministry.

those which will replace a spirit of loving devotion and self-discipline. Psychiatrist Gerald May speaks of asceticism as an act of love, a willing venture into the desert of our nature, loving the emptiness of that desert, knowing that God's rain will fall.

- Dealing with the models of perfection you carry. The Gospel invites us to be perfect: "therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48); the passage

describes a God that makes the sun rise on the good and the bad (5:45). So, it does not mean that we are to strive for the unattainable perfection of never making a mistake but rather, "being perfect" probably means being compassionate in a way that treats others and oneself fairly equally and with respect and specially those affective parts with which we struggle most.

- Dealing with what *causes* you to struggle with your relational and sexual celibate life.
- Forgiving and dealing with the past and forging ahead with greater inner freedom.
- Seeking adequate help from skilled and mature guides and following up the inputs you get.
- Seeking help from a professional counsellor who will accept you and who you can trust.

Sexuality is a gift given by God and as a gift it is rooted in our call to love. It is only when we experience a sense of belonging and genuine care, while living up to our consecration, we will be better equipped to deal with the challenges in authentic celibate and affective loving. Celibate love calls for mature loving which has an outward thrust and not merely a seeking for inward gratification through one's ministry. Working with quite a few

celibates (men and women) and helping those who failed to see the critical importance of self-esteem or those with immature perceptions of understanding sexuality in consecrated life, it was

Many middle aged celibates displayed very often a lack of adequate/mature capacity for loving.

rather difficult to bring them to believe that they needed to drop seeking human sources and people outside of themselves to fill the empty void. Many middle aged celibates displayed very often a lack of adequate/mature capacity for loving, the way in which St. Paul describes love in 1 Cor 13: 1- 8.

Maintaining a balance in affective maturity becomes a vulnerable limitation especially for those who have experienced past sexual abuse (sad to state that many a contemporary vocationers are observed to be sex-abuse cases). For some it may take years to face the challenges and be healed. These sexual wounds are more severe and take longer to heal, because of the impact these wounds have on the healing process. It has been our observation that such individuals should be given sufficient help and continued accompaniment during the Initial

formation period to deal with these wounds, accept the hurts and learn to integrate this reality in their lives. Such healing, when coupled with faith and trust in God who touches and heals them and an ability to forgive those who have caused the pain, will go a long way in maintaining affective balance in their ministry.

Considering the broad spectrum that Affective Maturity entails, it has been our endeavour to deal only partially with this vast topic. There are many important questions our readers would like to raise and yet it must be concluded that Consecrated Life and Affective maturity needs to be explored further by delving into the daily struggles and yearnings of human affectivity.

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BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY LIFE

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Consecrated life as we see today is a post biblical development. Hence it is futile to look for concrete biblical foundation for the community life that the consecrated persons live today. At the same time, it is also true that Consecrated life itself was inspired by the Bible and right from the beginning, persons chose to lead a consecrated life simply because they wanted to live the radicality of the Gospel. Thus, it is in no way odd to look for inspiration from the Bible for the community life that we see today in Consecrated Life. Some features of consecrated community life are present in First Testament as well as in the Second Testament. In this article, I am attempting to point out some of these biblical features and models that would serve as biblical foundation for community life and

inspire the consecrated persons of today to appreciate the beauty of living together for the common mission of establishing God's kingdom here on earth.

1. Biblical Inspiration in the Origins of Community Life

Ancient monasticism was born under the sign of solitude. But within a few decades, it underwent a Copernican revolution. Little by little, the solitary monks rediscovered the value of encounter in community. As years went on, complete solitude was mitigated and it gave way to various forms of more-or-less institutionalized relationships, and community life became the most common form of religious life. Interestingly, the code of 1917, by defining the religious state as a stable

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form of living in common (c. 487) excluded the possibility of a purely eremitical form of life. The new Code (c. 603) once again acknowledges this form of religious life.¹

a) Pachomian *Koinonia*

Pachomius and Basil are credited with the discovery of community life. Pachomius can be rightly called as the father of religious community life. Pachomius as well as Basil considered that the goal of monastic life was charity and it should be lived in a community.² At the root of Pachomius' vocation was a concrete act of charity. While he was chained and taken by force to be enrolled in the Roman army, he was fed with bread and victuals in the prison by some citizens of that city. He wondered, "Why are these people so good to us when they do not know us?" There came the reply, "They are Christians and they treat us with love for the sake of Jesus." Pachomius was so much taken up by this experience that he spent the whole night praying before God saying "My Lord Jesus the Christ, God of all the saints, may your goodness quickly come upon me, deliver me from this affliction and I will serve humankind all the days of my life." Thus Pachomius encountered the Word of God made flesh in some Christians who came to visit him in prison.³

Pachomius, while accounting his vocation, narrates a beautiful experience.

An angel appeared to a worried young Pachomius. When the angel wanted to know the reason for his preoccupation, he replied that he was searching for the will of God. The angel answered him that the will of God was to be found in serving his brothers and sisters. Pachomius was still confused and the angel had to repeat the invitation three times. Finally, obeying the command of the angel, Pachomius built a house to receive brethren. It was the beginning of the cenobitic life, the birth of religious communities.⁴

Thus Pachomius encountered the Word of God made flesh in some Christians who came to visit him in prison.

At the root of Antony's vocation was the biblical text of Mt 19:21 where he felt being invited to abandon everything and follow Jesus and his words radically. Pachomius, while instituting religious community, did not explicitly quote any biblical text as its foundation. But his disciple Horsiesios reinterpreted the experience of community life and justified it by recourse to the model of the primitive church. He explicitly quoted the famous passage from Acts. He said, "Carry out everything in conformity with the law of the holy *koinonia* ... as one man, as it is written: 'Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul'"

(cf. Acts 4:32).⁵ He writes in his Testament:

“The apostle taught us that our community, the communion by which we are joined to one another, springs from God ... We read the same thing in the Acts of the Apostles: *For the multitude of believers had one heart and soul and no one called anything his own. They held everything in common ...* The psalmist is in agreement with these words when he says, *Behold, how good and how delightful it is for brothers to live together.* And let us who live together in the Koinonia, and who are united to one another in mutual charity, so apply ourselves that, just as we deserved fellowship with the holy fathers in this life, we may also be their companions in the life to come.”⁶

Instead, horizontal relationships predominated among its members, based on love, edification and correction.

He further enriched the concept of community by seeing the community as a place where the Lord himself is present, quoting another biblical text: *where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them* (cf. Mt 18:20). He says, “Let us fear mightily lest we be in any way a scandal in the place” (where the Lord is present).⁷ Horsiesios was also fond of using

Pauline texts to reprove those in community who had lost the attitude of practical and attentive love for their brethren. A Pauline text often used by him was, “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2).

From Theodore, another disciple of Pachomius, onwards, we find the use of the Johannine texts to strengthen community life: e.g. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (Jn 13:34) and “that they may all be one” (cf. Jn 17:21).

b) Basilian Brotherhood

The most significant religious community after the Pachomian *koinonia* was the Basilian brotherhood. This new community was governed by a system of fraternal interpersonal relationships than a complex Pachomian system of rules. Basil did not insist on common submission to a rule or a charismatic father. Instead, horizontal relationships predominated among its members, based on love, edification and correction.⁸

Basil’s views on religious community life were greatly influenced by his conversion to the Gospel. He writes:

“I wasted much time in the service of vanity and spent all my youth in useless labours, since I consecrated it to the acquisition of the doctrines of a

wisdom which God had condemned as folly (cf. 1 Cor 1:20). Suddenly, one day, as if coming out of a deep sleep, I raised my eyes to the wonderful light of the Gospel truth; I realized the futility of the wisdom of the princes of this world who are engrossed in futility (cf. 1 Cor 2:6). I mourned bitterly over my wretched life and I prayed that a guide might be granted me who would direct me to the principles of sound religion.”⁹

His monastic life in the beginning focused on asceticism and solitude. But later, he realized that life in community is superior to life in solitude. For his community, he gave just one rule called the *Moralia*. It is the collection of 1500 verses from the New Testament, arranged according to themes. These verses mainly speak about detachment from secular tasks and from the family. Then, he places rules on the two commandments of love of God and neighbour. In his rules for community life, two features stand out: the centrality of evangelical inspiration and renunciation as the basis of life according to the Gospel.

Basil’s next work was *Asceticon*. Here, we find a shift in the understanding of Basil from *Moralia*. Basil reads the Scripture afresh and he begins no longer with penitence and detachment but with the two greatest commandments. The starting point of *Moralia* was the invitation to repentance but in *Asceticon*, this theme was reduced to the corollary

of the love of God.¹⁰ His continuous return to the Gospel led him to understand that the heart of the evangelical life does not lie in renunciation, but in the two-fold commandment of charity. And according to him, this must be the foundation of community life.

The heart of the evangelical life does not lie in renunciation, but in the two-fold commandment of charity.

Basil too was greatly influenced and touched by the example of the first Jerusalem community. This is a theme so dear to him. He writes, “Let us take the example of the three thousand” (cf. Acts 2:41). He adds again, “Let us imitate the first Christian community! They held everything in common: life, soul, concord, table, indivisible brotherhood, the unfeigned love which makes one body out of many bodies, harmonizing different souls in a single thought.”¹¹

While speaking about the importance of community life, Basil was very much moved by the Pauline concept of communion of the body of Christ (Eph 4:4; 1 Cor 12:12). He was inspired by the Psalmist, “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” (Ps 133:1). In fact, Basil wanted to achieve the most perfect

Christian brotherhood possible, according to the Gospel models.

Thus, we can summarize that the main models and scriptural passages which illumined the monastic and religious community right from the beginning were:

1. Psalm 133
2. The Johannine texts on mutual love and the unity of the believers
3. The summaries in Acts and
4. The Pauline passages on charity.

Yet, there is in the heart of humankind a search of intimacy and friendship with God.

2. Community Life in the First Testament

The term “community” or “communion” does not appear in the Bible at all, though there are many terms for assembly, convocation, association, meeting, people of God, household of God and the like. The Second Testament names the disciples of Jesus as Church and synagogue.¹² Yet, there is in the heart of humankind a search of intimacy and friendship with God. We find the same in the history of Israel too. But Israel’s history is not that of an individual hero trying to find a god but a history of God searching out and choosing individuals as well as the

people of Israel for a special intimacy and communion.¹³

a) Yahweh’s Covenantal Relationship

Yahweh entering into a covenant with Israel is a clear sign that God wants to establish a deep relationship with the people of Israel (Ex 19:20; 24:12-18). Yahweh provides the Law as a guide for the daily life (Dt 24:18; Lev 19:2). Observing the law would ensure deeper communion with Yahweh (Ps 119). Various prayers are given to Israel to recall the purpose of the covenant and to foster intimacy and communion with God (Ps 42:2-5; 63:2-6). Because of the covenant, the Israelites must develop a common bond with one another, a sense of solidarity and belonging as the chosen people of God. Loving Yahweh is helping a fellow Israelite in need (Dt 22:1-4; 23:20).¹⁴

Though the First Testament does not have the word “communion”, it does speak about spiritual bond of solidarity, called fraternity. Fraternity is based on faith (Gn 13:8), sympathy (2 Sam 1:26) and the covenant (Amos 1:9). Abraham and Lot avoiding clash over property (Gn 13:8), Esau forgiving Jacob (33:4) and the touching gesture of Joseph, pardoning all his wicked brothers (45:1-8) are great examples of fraternity in the First Testament. Whenever there was injustice, the prophets cried out and called upon the Israelites to live as brothers and sisters (Hos 4:2; Is 9:18ff;

Mic 7:2-6). They powerfully proclaimed that Yahweh was against all forms of divisions and discriminations. He wanted unity and he would bring reconciliation of all peoples.¹⁵ Thus, we can say that the Jewish fraternity is a foreshadowing of the Christian communion and religious community life to come.

Let us present just two groups that were present during the time of First Testament which could inspire the community life of today's consecrated persons.

b) Prophetic Groups

There are many references to groups of prophets in the Bible (1 Sam 10:5-13; 19:19-20). They are also known as the company of prophets. They are generally called "sons of the prophets". Samuel seems to be the father of this prophetic group (1 Sam 19:20; 10:12). The main centre of the prophetic group under Elisha seems to have been at Gilgal, near Jericho (2 Kg 4:38). Possibly, there they had a common assembly place. 2 Kg 6:1-9 tells how their building had become too small for the needs of the group, which then moved nearer to the Jordan where wood for building a larger hut was available. Meals in common are also attested in 2 Kg 4:38-41 ('the poisoned soup' episode). There were also other groups at Bethel (2 Kg 2:3) and at Jericho (2 Kg 2:5).¹⁶

Elisha was like a 'superior' of the group. The members of the group looked at Elisha for even material welfare (2 Kg 4:1-7, 38-44; 6:1-7). But he was also called "My Father" (2 Kg 6:21; 13:14) and this referred to his function as "Spiritual Father" of the

The prophetic group of Elisha presents certain characteristics of an organized monastic life.

prophetic communities. So, his leadership role went beyond the material concerns of the group. 2 Kg 4:38 bears witness to this: the prophetic group is shown "sitting before" Elisha. Thus, he was presented as teacher of the group. Ordinary Israelites visited the "man of God" on Sabbaths and feast-days, to receive religious instruction (2 Kg 4:22-23).¹⁷

The prophetic group of Elisha presents certain characteristics of an organized monastic life. Most probably, they lived in community. But there were also married members among them (2 Kg 4:1). We do not know how exactly they were related to the community. Again, Elisha, the superior, did not live permanently with the group but had a house in Samaria (2 Kg 5:9; 6:32). Possibly, the prophetic group gathered only periodically for their religious exercises. A *nucleus* of the group might have lived in community in a stable way

and other members came to the general assemblies from time to time. The prophetic group continued to maintain its relationship with the outside society. The prophetic groups of Elisha's time provide what is probably the closest approach to a paramonastic community in ancient Israel before the emergence of the Qumran community.¹⁸

c) Qumran Community

We are well informed about the Qumran Covenanters, thanks to the archaeological discoveries at *Qumran* from 1947 on. It was a very strongly organized religious movement. Majority of them were priests though some of them were lay members, who lived outside of the community. They established their community at *Kirbet Qumran*, near the Dead Sea in 135 B.C. But their life was miserable from 68 A.D. onwards due to the Jewish war against the Romans, and by 70 A.D., all of them disappeared or were killed.¹⁹

Their ideal community living consists in seeking the Lord with undivided heart and soul and practising all that is good.

We do not know who founded the Qumran community but one "Teacher of Righteousness" *moreh sedeq* is mentioned in many of the community writings. He led the community out into the desert and understood that this way

had been foreshadowed in the challenge of the prophet in Is 40:3: "Prepare the way of the Lord in the desert, make smooth in the wilderness a way for our God". "The way" is interpreted as 'study of the Law'. The Sinai covenant tradition was the basic law of Qumran.²⁰

They gave much importance to the covenant spirituality. Every year on the Pentecost day, they celebrated the annual renewal of the covenant. It was on that day that they enrolled new applicants and initiated the candidates into community life at the end of their two-year training. They had well organized community life.

Their ideal community living consists in seeking the Lord with undivided heart and soul and practising all that is good. The members should love what God loves and hate what he hates. They should love the members of the community (sons of light) and hate the sons of darkness (outsiders). They were to practise truth and justice, observing faithfully the terms of the covenant fully in their common living.²¹

The community life was hierarchically composed of Priests, Levites and Lay people. The community was considered "a fortified city" which set the climate to practise justice, love and the law of the Lord. Even the most vacillating ones were supported in truth by the community. Communion of fidelity, benevolent humility and pure

love were much stressed. Brotherly correction in humility and love was given importance and no one was supposed to get angry with one another. If this was transgressed, forgiveness should be sought and given on the same day. Very complicated cases were solved in the assembly.²²

The community itself was considered the real Temple and the members, the true priests. Study of Torah and the works of the law were the right sacrifice of the Qumran community. They gave much importance to community banquets and they had a cultic character, since they substituted the sacred cultic meals of the Temple. The liturgical worship of the community was modeled on the liturgy of the angels. Worship and meals were in minimum units of ten, each quorum of ten presided over by a priest. The units of ten operated in relays. While some slept, others prayed and others studied.²³

In the community, they felt intensely the living presence of God. The community was considered as entrance into heaven. Entering into the community is called “being united to God’s council” and “involves walking before him”.

Even minor offences against the order of the community invited harsh punishment, even expulsion: “anyone who utters a foolish word with his mouth, three months. And anyone who

interrupts while another is speaking, ten days. Anyone who lies down and sleeps during the session of the many (assembly of the permanent members), thirty days. Anyone who laughs foolishly with a loud voice shall be punished with thirty days” (1Qs 7:9-15). For graver offences one year of expulsion was foreseen in the rule (1Qs 6:24-25).

Plenary assembly was the forum to discuss common matters, but the council of the community had the authority to make decisions. It consisted of twelve lay men, one for each tribe of Israel and three priests among whom one was “the president” the other “inspector” and the third “the wise” *maskil*.²⁴

Brotherly correction in humility and love was given importance and no one was supposed to get angry with one another.

When a person applied for admittance into the community, he informed the council of his wish to “enter the covenant of God”. He underwent two years of probation during which time he was not permitted to participate in the common meals. When the two years elapsed, “then he is to be tested at the behest of the many (the assembly). And when the vote is cast for him to bring him into the

fellowship, then he is to be inscribed among his brethren. Then he must “oblige himself with a binding oath to turn to the law of Moses in accordance with all that God has commanded, with the whole heart and soul, and all that is revealed by him to the sons of Zadok, the priests, who keep the covenant and search out his will, and to the host of the men of the covenant, who in the fellowship have proven submissive to his truth and to walking in his will” (1Qs 5:8-10). At this time the new member had to transfer ownership of his personal property to the entire community, an activity administered by an overseer. Then he was permitted to participate in the ablutions and meals of the community.²⁵

Obedience was very specially required in spending money and community work. Slight murmuring was also punished.

Strict obedience to God was obligatory. Since they voluntarily took up this life they generously obeyed. Every year the promotion of the candidates depended largely on the practice of obedience. Obedience was very specially required in spending money and community work. Slight murmuring was also punished. Expulsion from the community for disobedience was foreseen in the law.²⁶

Renunciation of their properties and earnings in favor of the community was stressed for the ideal of unity (*yahad*), to enable a common search to achieve perfection. They believed that only to the community the secret of administration of goods was revealed and therefore they surrendered everything to it. They were forbidden to share anything with the outsiders. Josephus describes their communion of goods in the following way: “In an admirable way, they were practising the community of goods. Nobody sought riches, nobody possessed much or less, no affluence of riches. Lived in the same house, had one patrimony...” (Ant. xiv.16).

It is not clear from the scrolls whether the sect of Qumran practised celibacy. The community rule is silent on this topic. However, the war rule explicitly envisages the total separation of men and women during the last thirty-three years of the eschatological war. Philo testified that they abandoned marriage and decided to practise perfect continence for the sake of a strict community life (Apol. 14-17). Josephus, the historian says, “They did not take wife, renounced everything for the love of God” (Ant. xviii. 21). Homosexuality was strictly forbidden and law demanded strict punishment in case of failure (1 Qs 7:12-14).

It was possible that it prohibited marriage in order to prevent possible

contact with impurity. As their forefathers in the desert prepared themselves to receive the covenant, practising perfect continence (Ex 19:15), the community also practised the same, in order to receive eschatological revelation. It was considered the angelic form of life (1 Qsa 2:8). Since they were preparing themselves to wage war against *Belial* and *kittim* (Rome), which could be expected at anytime, the military code demanded them to be ready practising perfect continence (1 Qm 7:6-7; Dt 23: 9-10).²⁷

But certain texts suppose that there were married people in the community. 1 Qsa 1:4 speak of ladies and children and 1 Qs 4:7 fixes the age for marriage at 20. All these texts could be best taken to apply to the members who did not strictly belong to the community.

3. Community Life in the Second Testament

With Jesus, Yahweh perfected the First Testament covenant and began to offer a share in the Trinitarian life to anyone who accepted the Messiah (2 Pet 1:4). This perfected covenant is manifested in the union of universal love between Christians realized by breaking of bread (Act 2:42) and sharing one's abundance with the needy (Rom 12:13; Gal 6:6). This unity of Christian with another Christian is characterized by metaphors like branches on a vine (Jn 15:1-11),

members of a body (1 Cor 12:12) and living stones of a temple (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). Jesus came to restore the unity broken by sins of generation after generation on multiple levels. He called for reconciliation and communion from individuals pulled apart by ignorance, weakness and powerful emotions from within (Rom 7:14ff) and by family and social problems (Eph 5:25-32). Christ invites everyone to reclaim individual and social unity.²⁸

But it is a seeing that penetrated the innermost being of a person. It is looking at a person who is known, loved and chosen intently.

a) The Birth of the First Apostolic Community

Mark's Gospel like other Synoptics sees the beginning of the apostolic community in the calling of the first four disciples (cf. Mk 1:16-20). Jesus was walking by *the Sea of Galilee*. He did not expect people to go to him rather he goes and meets people in the setting of their daily lives. Their calling takes place within the story of each person. Jesus saw persons and he knew their names: Simon and Andrew, Simon's brother; James, son of Zebedee and John his brother. It is said that Jesus saw them. This seeing is not merely seeing a person or a casual onlooker's action. But it is a seeing that penetrated the innermost being of a person. It is

looking at a person who is known, loved and chosen intently with sentimental attachment. In that look, Jesus radiates the eternal love of the Father that can regenerate human beings to the point of radically transforming their very existence.

“Like ‘knowing’, so ‘seeing’ produces a current of vital participation between the divine subject and the reality that falls within the range of his vision. Afterwards, things do not remain as they were before, and the person is destined to become different. Jesus radiates a look which in anticipation creates something, even before man is aware if it.”²⁹

This radical invitation presupposes radical acceptance from the part of the disciples.

Any vocation is a gratuitous gift from God willed from eternity. But it comes at a particular time and place for human beings in a historical here and now as the result of Jesus’ intent look. It is this looking at one another that establishes the first interpersonal relationship between Jesus and his first disciples. This same experience will be later repeatedly reinforced, purified and renewed by further intent looks which recall the first unforgettable indelible meeting of the eyes (cf. Mk 8:33; 10:27; Lk 22:4).

When *Jesus said to them*, the intent look became a word. The creative word recreates human beings from catchers of fish to catchers of human beings. The creative word transforms the first disciples. They have become new beings. The creative word creates the first apostolic community which would form the base for future religious communities.

Jesus invited the first disciples to form the first apostolic community with the exhortation *Follow me*. The love that chose the individuals and the word that created the community are now translated into a radical invitation to follow Jesus, giving up everything and possessing Jesus alone. This radical invitation presupposes radical acceptance from the part of the disciples. The unconditional invitation also requires an act of faith in the person of Jesus Christ. The words of Jesus “I will make you fishers of men” created the discipleship and the community of people who followed together.

At once emphasizes the immediacy of the response. One cannot respond slowly to the invitation of Jesus to follow him and to form a community for mission. Immediately, Simon and Andrew left their nets. James and John left their father in order to follow Jesus who called them. Leaving the nets, boat and father signify giving up all material and emotional security and the protection of the family.³⁰

“With the abandoning of their nets and their father, which expresses, so to speak, the personal, socio-cultural and spiritual co-ordinates of the human condition, a point of ‘no return’ is fixed. Henceforward they are without roots, in past, present or future... Men who appear as if they had never been born, set free in a giddy void.”³¹

Luke, in his vocational narratives, makes the radical demand to give up everything. The disciples at the lake ‘left everything’ (Lk 5:11) and Levi, leaving everything, rose up and followed him (5:28). Peter summarizes the experience of every disciple: “We left all we had to follow you” (18:28). Jesus’ invitation and the demand for radical following made all other realities merely relative. The kingdom of God broke in and everything changed. Following Jesus is a lifelong, absolute, unreserved and radical commitment. Jesus should occupy a place in the life of his disciples above other people and things and all affection for parents, brothers, sisters, sons and wife. Jesus chose the apostles to lead an unlimited sharing and community of life and destiny with their master and Lord.³²

The apostolic community was born from the word of Jesus, who called each one of his disciples by name, and the response of the apostles to the invitation of Jesus to follow him. Jesus’ powerful word “follow me” called forth a response and a commitment and esta-

lished a relationship of dialogue. As the disciples left everything and unconditionally followed Jesus, a progressive communion began between the master and his disciples and among the disciples themselves, who, though born in different families and villages, came together simply because Jesus called them to follow him and his way.

The apostolic community emerged simply because of Jesus. There would have been no apostolic community if Jesus were not there. It was Jesus’ presence that gave stability to the apostolic community. The disciples were formed into a community by the relationship of each one of them with Jesus and this relationship then became the bond among the disciples.

Following Jesus is a lifelong, absolute, unreserved and radical commitment.

Interestingly, when Jesus was taken away from them for a short period, the apostolic community disintegrated. This is what exactly happened in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:51) as Jesus himself foretold, “I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered” (Mk 14:27). They failed to follow Jesus at that moment of crisis; consequently the common bond with him was broken and the ties, binding them to each other, were also dissolved. This is simply because the community

of the apostles existed for Jesus. They left everything, followed Jesus and formed a community because of the concentric movement of following Jesus. When Jesus is away from the apostles, the movement takes place in the opposite direction: forsaking Jesus, all the disciples took to flight and as a result, the community disintegrated.

The importance of Jesus in the formation of the apostolic community is even more obvious in the narration of the appointment of the Twelve (Mk 3:13-15). He called those whom he loved, to be with him, to be sent out to preach the Gospel and to cast out the

Now they have a new identity: an identity that is derived from 'being with Jesus.'

demons. The twelve responded positively as they did by the lake. Then, it is indicated that "they came to him." The acceptance changes their condition; just as they had moved away from their nets and their father, now they are no longer part of the crowd. But they are around Jesus. This physical movement away from the crowd and towards Jesus is a clear sign of a radical transformation of their relation with their master. Now they have a new identity: an identity that is derived from 'being with Jesus.' Jesus wanted them to be with him in a stable, permanent

and exclusive relationship. By the lake, Jesus promised "I will be with you". Now Jesus does this by making the Twelve "to be" with him. It is to be noted that it is Jesus who by his word forms them into a particular entity, a community. The apostolic community is formed precisely by the act of being with Jesus. The very first task of the Twelve is just to enter into communion with Jesus.³³ The community of the disciples has its centre of gravity in Jesus and this relationship in turn forms the centre for the relationships among the Twelve. Thus, we can notice here three interlaced types of intimate relationship: the relationship of each individual with Jesus; the relationship between the group as a whole and Jesus; and the relationship of the called among themselves.

Another element that we notice in the Markan pericope is that the community is for mission, "communion for mission." Once community is formed, it does not live for itself. The Twelve are with Jesus in order to become his envoys and witnesses. They were called by the lake so that they could follow him and Jesus could make them fishers of men. Now, Jesus calls them to be with him in a fellowship to enable them to acquire his own power to preach and drive out demons.

At the end of his life, Jesus prayed to his Father for this diverse group of men: "May they be perfectly one" (Jn

17:23). He asked them, “As I have loved you, you are to love one another” (Jn 13:34). Having made them one community, by the mystery of his death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he would send them to the world to continue the work which the Father had entrusted to him.

The twelve did not form one community that easily. Jesus had to teach them and form them very gradually in spite of doubts, jealousy, misunderstanding, strife, and power struggle, present among them. Even their relationship with Jesus was not that strong in the beginning. But as their relationship with Jesus gradually intensified, so did the relationship among the disciples themselves. Communion with Jesus becomes communion among themselves.³⁴

Hence we can summarize the essential aspects found in the apostolic community as follows:

- The apostolic community is a community of those who have been called. The community does not come into being through the autonomous initiative of its members.
- The apostolic community is the community of those who welcome and live the Word. It shares radically and totally Jesus’ way of life: his poverty, renunciation and

journeying.

- The apostolic community is the true family of God gathered around Jesus and united in their relationship with the Father. Therefore, it is a community of people who pray.
- In the apostolic community, every one is equal because they are all brothers. The greater the variety and diversity of people called to belong to the community, the more outstanding the fraternity and equality become.
- The apostolic community is a

It shares radically and totally Jesus’ way of life: his poverty, renunciation and journeying.

community of service.

- It is a community of the reconciled and as such, called to mutual forgiveness and brotherly correction (Mt 18:15-17).
- It is a community with only one rule: mutual love, the love with which Jesus loved and which lived out even to the giving of life itself.
- After the ascension, it became a Eucharistic community, experiencing Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist and united by sharing the one bread and the one cup. Thus

the Eucharist ensured the communion with God and with one another.

- It is a community of those who are sent, wholly dedicated to the kingdom of God. An important characteristic of Jesus' community is its missionary openness. He formed the twelve in order to send them out to preach. A few were formed so that they could go and teach many. Mission is the final act in the formative process which Jesus imparted to his disciples.

b) The First Christian Community

Like the apostolic community, the existence of the community after Easter is the result of a call and a decision to follow. But Jesus is no longer visibly present among them since his ascension into heaven. So, it is not possible to follow him, to continue to be his disciples or followers. Yet the risen Lord is still present in some mysterious way through his Spirit. Imitation becomes the post Easter reinterpretation

The first fruit of Christ's work after resurrection is the creation of the Jerusalem community that lives its unity in mutual love.

of following Jesus, since Jesus is no longer physically present. The risen Christ and the Spirit sent by Jesus

himself brought the community to life again, reassembled the scattered flock and enabled it to resume the following. The earthly community with Jesus is a re-enactment of the primitive paschal community. There was an authentic community in the newness of the Spirit. The Lord was present spiritually. There was after all only one community of Jesus, the community that begun by the lake of Galilee and continued in the Jerusalem Church.

The presence of the risen Lord gave fresh cohesion to the apostles who were now reformed in all its integrity (Acts 1:15-26). The disciples showed new determination and attitude. They began to experience again unity among themselves and with the Lord. The Jerusalem community resulted from the outpouring of the Spirit. The first great summary of Luke that stresses on living together, with everything in common, is preceded by Pentecost. The second summary (Acts 4:32-35) that focuses on the community as being of one heart and soul, is preceded and caused by a further descent of the Spirit, known as the 'little Pentecost' (4:31). This makes us to believe that communion is the gift of the Spirit. The first fruit of Christ's work after resurrection is the creation of the Jerusalem community that lives its unity in mutual love.

As unity around the Master was the characteristic of the disciples before Easter, the Jerusalem community is

characterized by the communion, which makes one heart and one soul out of thousands of people. The Lord continues to be present among the disciples, but in a new way and new form. It is actually this presence of the Lord Jesus which makes it possible for the intense communion among the Christians.

The Features of the New Community

The summaries in Acts show the fruit of Christ's redemptive work which reached its fulfilment at Jerusalem in the outpouring of the Spirit. The first summary is found in Acts 2:42-47. The first summary stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in the origin and development of the Christian community. The first feature of the new community is that the members 'were together'. Here 'being together' has the Semitic meaning of interior union rather than a unity in place and time. Unity here was not simply a question of the physical coming together of several people. It was the inner disposition. There were also four other features that the first believers pursued: the teaching of the apostles, *koinonia*, the breaking of the bread and prayer. *Koinonia* mentioned here not only means sharing of possessions but it also expresses a deeper reality of life: the sharing of hearts and souls.

The second summary is found in Acts 4:32-35. The second summary too, like the first one, is preceded by a

descent of the Spirit. This passage too makes it clear that the primitive Jerusalem community possessed 'one heart and one soul'. The second feature that emerges from this summary is that 'they had everything in common'.

"They share their possessions not because they find themselves together, but because they know they are united in a single reality, a single body. Thus the expression seems to translate the believer's sense of community: they have become aware of their unity. Sharing their possessions is only a consequence of their awareness of forming a community together, a community in which everyone knows themselves to be in agreement with

Here 'being together' has the Semitic meaning of interior union rather than a unity in place and time.

all."³⁵

The communion that inspired the first Christians at Jerusalem had three dimensions:

- 1) Their unity was founded on their common faith (Acts 2:44; 4:32; 5:14).
- 2) This unity had to be really lived out.
- 3) *Koinonia* needed to be incarnated and transposed on to the tangible

level of this world's goods.

It would not be authentic if it had not become in some way, a sharing of possessions. It is not a community if some of its members live in abundance while others are left without the necessities of life.

Thus the summaries in Acts present Christians as closely united among themselves in a rich and coherent fraternal sharing. This unity was effected and nourished by the Word of God. The Christians were so united that they formed one heart and soul and could express this unity in the most concrete sharing of possessions. The Jerusalem Church lived in a profound sharing which eliminated divisions of race, nationality and social class. It was the historical fulfilment of Jesus' prayer

The Christians were so united that they formed one heart and soul and could express this unity in the most concrete sharing of possessions.

to the Father, already granted: "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).

For the religious of today, this image of Jerusalem community is the ideal to be aimed at. *Koinonia* and Jerusalem should be synonymous. As Origen writes, "When the heart and soul of the faithful are one and the members have

the same care for each other, then they are Jerusalem."³⁶

4. Problems in Community Life

Let me conclude this paper with a mention to the difficulties that Pachomius, the father of cenobitic life faced and the valuable lesson that he learned from the problems. His first attempt at community life was a failure. He had the first group of disciples who gathered around him. There arose grave dissensions in this first group. Pachomius was so upset that he sent all of them out. This experience made him realize the need for a certain communal order. So he had to give clear and demanding rules. And he discovered that obedience is a decisive element in community life.³⁷ This is also the experience that we see in the Bible with regard to the first Christian community. The Jerusalem community was in one mind and one heart, but it also had many problems of relationship.

Pachomius, the father of cenobitic life, even after seven years of community life, found it very difficult to live. For example, he had a severe quarrel with Brother John, with whom he had begun the work of enlarging his own dwelling, over a trifle. Then he realized how far he still was from a perfect life and that God and his neighbour were inseparable realities on the spiritual journey. Then he wrote, "He who is at enmity with his brother

is an enemy of God; and he who is at peace with his brother is at peace with God.”³⁸ This experience also taught him another valuable lesson. He learnt with all his humility that relationships with others are often the occasion of purification and growth in virtue. Pachomius’ lesson is still valid for the consecrated persons of today.

Endnotes:

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- ² Lawrence Venceslaus, *On Earth as in Heaven: Biblical Spirituality for Consecrated Life*, Chennai: Claretian Communications, 2007, p. 87.
- ³ *Bohairic Life*, vol.1, p. 27.
- ⁴ Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia. Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Community*, London: New City, 2001, p. 77.
- ⁵ Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia*. p. 77.
- ⁶ Horsiesios, *Testament 50*, vol. 3, pp. 208ff.
- ⁷ *Regulations 2*, vol. 2, p. 197.
- ⁸ Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia*, p. 91.
- ⁹ Letter 223, 2 in Roy J. Deferrari, *Saint Basil. The letters with an English Translation*, 4 volumes, London: Loeb Classical Library, 1926, p. 291.
- ¹⁰ M. Augé, “La fraternità evangelica di Basilio”, in *Storia della vita religiosa*, Brescia, 1988, p. 67.
- ¹¹ *Hom. dicta tempore famis*, 8 (PG 31, 325A-B).
- ¹² John J. O’Brien, “Community”, *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Bangalore: TPI, p. 150.
- ¹³ Basil Cole and Paul Conner, *Christian Totality: Theology of the Consecrated Life*, Bombay: St. Paul Publication, 1992, p. 201.
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- ¹⁶ M. Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, New York, 1952, pp. 90-117.
- ¹⁷ Lawrence Venceslaus, *On Earth as in Heaven*, p. 19.
- ¹⁸ C. Conroy, “Old Testament and Monasticism”, *SM 28* (1979), p. 2.
- ¹⁹ Lawrence Venceslaus, *On Earth as in Heaven*, p. 22.
- ²⁰ E. Lohse, *The New Testament Environment*, London 1986, pp. 100-101.
- ²¹ Lawrence Venceslaus, *On Earth as in Heaven*, p. 24.
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- ²³ P. Sigal, *Judaism: The Evolution of a Faith*, Michigan, 1988, p. 61.
- ²⁴ W.A. Meeks, *The Moral World of*

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- ²⁵ E. Lohse, *The New Testament Environment*, pp. 101-102.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- ²⁷ Cf. Lawrence Venceslaus, *On Earth as in Heaven*, p. 27-28.
- ²⁸ Basil Cole and Paul Conner, *Christian Totality*, pp. 202-203.
- ²⁹ L. Di Pinto, “Seguitemi, vi farò pescatori di uomini”, in *Parola Spirito e Vita*, 2, July-December 1980, p. 86.
- ³⁰ Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia*, p. 25.
- ³¹ L. Di Pinto, “Seguitemi, vi farò pescatori di uomini”, p. 101.
- ³² Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia*, p. 25.
- ³³ G. Fattorini, “Gesù capo della comunità nel vangelo do Marcò”, *Inter Fratres* 32, 1982, p. 106.
- ³⁴ Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia*, p. 31.
- ³⁵ Dupont, “L’unione tra i primi cristiani”, in *Nuovi studi sugli Atti degli Apostoli*, Cinisello Balsamo: Paoline, 1985, p. 289.
- ³⁶ Origen, *Selecta in Psalmos* 121, 3 (PG 12, 1633).
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PAULINE AGAPE AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Martin George CMF

Jesus summarized the law and the prophets into one word, 'Love' - love of God and love of fellow human beings. 1 Jn 4:8 says, "God is Love." There is no other word, with which God is equated, both by the New Testament authors and by the Church Fathers and modern theologians alike. St. Paul has gifted us in 1 Cor 13 with the most beautiful hymn in the NT, attributed to love. In this article, we shall briefly examine a small part (1 Cor 13:1-3) of that hymn, and relate it to communities of consecrated men and women of today because many founders and foundresses of religious Congregations found love as the only binding force that can hold together a religious community. In the absence of natural bonds in the Corinthian Church, Paul tried to establish that love has the power to keep them united. In the same way,

can modern religious communities draw inspiration from this Pauline lesson and form communities of love?

In the modern times, innumerable volumes have been written on this theme of love and poets all over the world have sung at length about it. Pope Benedict XVI titled his first encyclical with the expression, '*Deus Caritas Est*'. If we are asked to explain Christian faith in the briefest way possible, we have no other option but to use the word 'love', because it was the characteristic feature of the early Christian community and it is still the ideal for the Church: a community based on love. The Church has had numerous living witnesses of love among her faithful, who practised love in manifold ways. If love is the identifying mark for any Christian, religious communities have

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more reasons to be identified by the same mark. However, as is the case with any other unit in the society, religious communities are also finding it more and more difficult to be united by *agape*, though Paul had envisioned *agape* as the unifying force. Hence a deeper understanding of *agape* and, more importantly, a more dedicated practice of *agape* is necessary for the survival of today's religious communities.

Why Agape?

Agape is specially necessitated in the context of the absence of natural bonds in religious communities. As is evident,

**Religious communities
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by *agape*.**

communities of religious men and women are not formed basing on natural bonds. For example, they lack the strength of a family, where the wife, husband and their children are united by a natural bond. Members of a religious community are not usually relatives; their mother tongues may not be the same; they may not belong to the same caste, tribe or ethnic group; and they may have cultural differences. In short, modern religious communities do not carry almost any natural bond or potentially unifying factor like language, culture, ethnicity, caste or

tribe or even nationality because many of them are either multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic or even multi-national in nature. Probably the only commonality is that they all belong to the same Congregation and share the same charism. It is there we get connected to the Pauline *agape* because Paul speaks of *agape* while dealing with different charisms. For the Corinthian Church that was troubled by divisions, including those ironically based on charisms, the gifts of the Spirit, Paul proposed *agape* as the solution. Can we draw some parallels between the Corinthian Church of the first century and the religious communities of today? I think, yes. Don't our communities face problems similar to those of the Corinthian Church? If problems are similar, the solution might work as well, regardless of the differences in time and space. This is what we are trying to explore by the study of a small portion of the Pauline treatise on *agape*.

1. The Pauline Hymn of Agape (1 Corinthians 13)

Scholars agree that Pauline letters are composed for an occasion, often produced in haste and mostly handling concrete issues in the Churches addressed. If so, why did Paul include this hymn of love in his first letter to the Corinthians? Which were the issues related to common life in the Corinthian Church that Paul intended to address through this hymn of love? Why is this

hymn of love inserted into the section dealing with different charisms in the Church? What is its relevance for the Church today? Let us try to find answers to such questions in the following paragraphs, before going into the study of the text itself.

a) **The Background and Importance of 1 Corinthians**

1 Corinthians is of particular interest to the student of New Testament, because in it we begin to see how Christianity began to establish itself and what it meant to be Christian, to be the Church in a Mediterranean city in the middle of the first century. It is a fascinating picture, one very far removed from the ideal of the New Testament Christianity (narrated in the Acts).

“Even a casual reading of the letter makes it clear that the Church in Corinth was a very mixed group, with several differing views and practices which put considerable strain on their common life. So much so that one soon begins to wonder how it was that they held together at all as a church. Also fascinating is the way Paul dealt with these tensions. The fact that the letter was preserved and later acknowledged as canonical, we may assume that its handling of these tensions was recognized to be of lasting value. The potential benefit of a close study of the letter is therefore considerable.”¹

The other interesting aspect of 1 Corinthians is that it has attracted an amazing amount of attention over the past few years. Precisely because it deals with so many practical issues of mutual relations within the church and between its members and their neighbours in a first century city, over the last century, the letter has been in effect, a testing ground for different hermeneutical techniques and theories. So many contemporary Christian movements have based themselves on the interpretation of the letter: Christian Feminism, Charismatic renewal, the rise of Pentecostal Churches etc, to name a few. Hence the letter as a whole,

The letter deals with many practical issues of mutual relations within the church and between its members and their neighbours.

and the 13th chapter in particular, is of special interest and inspiration to the Church even today. Needless to say, religious communities have several lessons to learn from it.

b) **The Place and Nature of Ch. 13**

Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians holds a special place as the highest tribute paid to love (*agape*) in any Christian literature. “The closing sentence of chapter 12 (v. 31b) and the beginning of chapter 14 (v.1 a) frame the contents

of chapter 13, which is the core not only of the subject on charisms but also of the entire letter.”² However, the fact that 12:31a can easily and coherently continue with 14:1b, leaving out the entire section (12:31b-14:1a) has made many scholars raise questions about chapter 13. Let us try to understand the chapter, by looking into some characteristic features of this famous chapter.

i. The Questions about Chapter 13

The quality of its literary style and the problems in relating it to its context, but above all its lack of theology or Christology, have led some interpreters

Increasingly, interest is shown in seeing this treatment of love as part of the ongoing debate between Paul and the Corinthians.

to question whether it derives from Paul. The question of its relationship to the preceding and following portions of the letter is also vexing. Many scholars like B. Standaert, C. K. Barrett, H. Conzelmann, J. Weiss and W. Schmithals maintain that the chapter is a sort of digression. Klassen says,

“Some have considered it an interpolation which seeks to bring Stoic values into Christianity; if written by Paul, it must have been written at a time when he was deeply influenced by

Stoicism (Lehmann and Fridrichsen 1922: 56, 67). Others have pursued the Jewish background, either specifically in rabbinic thought (Gerhardsson 1978) or in the wider Jewish wisdom literature (von Rad 1953). Increasingly, interest is shown in seeing this treatment of love as part of the ongoing debate between Paul and the Corinthians, and above all in taking seriously the theological connections between 1 Corinthians 13 [where neither the word “God” nor “Christ” appears] and the rest of Pauline theology (Wischmeyer 1981; Pedersen 1980).”³

But despite the opinion of many scholars in favour of moving it to another part of the letter (after ch.8 - J. Weiss; after ch.14 - W. Schmithals), many others see it being inserted in the right place, for practical and pastoral reasons for which 1 Corinthians was written. Prof. Viejo would say,

“There are many attempts to move or eliminate the text in question, or to consider it an extraneous body in the structure of the letter. ... We can keep the text in place where it is now found and we can try to explain the content in the context of ‘*the gifts of the spirit*’ (1 Cor 12:1). I share the opinion of those who maintain that the text is in its rightful place...”⁴

When Paul promises to show a “better way” in 12:31b, he is availing himself of a term much used in Judaism,

but also commonly used by Epictetus (Weiss 1910). His better way is to reject the passion for charismatic gifts and concentrate instead on *agape* which he does not see as a charismatic gift. As we have seen above, though the subject matter indicates that this unit could be a digression, yet this ‘excursus’ functions within the flow of thought of the whole section.⁵ The connection with ch.12 is manifest. ‘Tongues’ of v. 1 is taken from 12:28, 30 and ‘prophetic powers’ of v. 2 from 12:28, 29.

ii. The Relation with Chapters 12 and 14 (‘Charisms’ and ‘Love’)

In 1 Corinthians, the section on charisms stretches from chapters 12 to 14. Different charisms are dealt with in the first section, 12:1-12:31a. The rest of the discussion on charisms, comparing the two charisms most valued by the Corinthians, namely, ‘gift of tongues’ and ‘prophesy’, occurs in chapter 14 (v.1b -40). The Hymn of Love is inserted in the middle. It should be noted that Paul often associates charisms with *agape* (Rom 12:3-16; Eph 4:11-16). *Agape* is considered essential for the construction of the Church, the body of Christ, and for its growth in harmony.

“We can say, from the way they are structured, that chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians correspond to the usual way Paul treats the subject of charisms. It is impossible to speak of charisms without

speaking of charity, which must express the underlying meaning: exactly because they are an expression of powerful vitality in the body of the Church, charisms must be manifested as a sign of love, of mutual respect and of the harmony of the whole body. Otherwise they would be more of an instrument of discord than of edification. A charism should not become an instrument of power, nor an affirmation of superiority. Charisms and charity are therefore intimately connected as we find them in chapters 12-14.”⁶

His better way is to reject the passion for charismatic gifts and concentrate instead on *agape*.

In ch. 13, there is an internal comparison between the charisms and *agape* because the Corinthians had probably begun considering charisms as identifying marks for a Christian. Paul wanted to prove that not charisms, but *agape* is the identifying characteristic to be Christian. That is why he introduces the theme of love, calling it a ‘still more excellent way’.

iii. The Structure of Chapter 13

The chapter divides into three clearly distinguishable parts. Verses 1-3 emphasize that love is the condition without which no gift is of any value to us; love is indispensable. Verses 4-7

depict the qualities of love positively and negatively. Verses 8-13 explain how love, unlike the gifts, never ends; love is permanent. One easily detects the concentric character of ch.13. The second subdivision (B) forms the centre and is completely devoted to love; the first (A) and third (A¹) subdivisions contrast the spiritual gifts with love. As stated above, in this paper, we are restricting ourselves to the study of the first part (v. 1-3); it is there that the indispensable nature of love is categorically stated - without love all other religious exercises become worthless gimmicks.

**Love has the primacy,
and the measure of love is
applied to all else.**

iv. The Relevance of the Theme of Chapter 13

Some Corinthians were exalting the 'gifts' as eschatological realities par excellence, but Paul insisted that, to a degree that distinguished it from other gifts and virtues (even faith and hope), love was to be considered the eschatological reality. That is why it has the primacy, and the measure of love is applied to all else. Barton says,

"Here in ch.13, it has to do with ... the priority of love for sustaining the common good. What Paul says here about love is concrete instruction for a

specific situation. It is not a 'merely rhetorical' or 'sentimental' or 'idealized' hymn, but rather a *social praxis*, performance of which will serve as an antidote to the attitudes and behaviours in the Church which are in danger of tearing apart."⁷

So the theme of *agape* was prescribed by Paul to the Corinthian as a life saving drug. In the words of O'Connor, "despite its generalizing character and the fact that it can be lifted out of its context as a complete whole, this chapter has a precise relevance to the situation at Corinth."⁸ Modern Churches (including religious communities) are not very different from the Corinthian Church, at least with regard to the presence of divisive forces and ideologies; hence projecting love as the unifying force is a theme ever relevant.

c) The Meaning and Significance of *Agape*

In Greek, at least three different verbs are used to mean 'love'. The verb *erao* (noun *eros*) expresses passionate love that desires the other for oneself. It can also refer to a state of intoxication with love or ecstatic frenzy, leading to a religious experience of supreme bliss. *Phileo* (noun *philia*) would signify solicitous love, e.g. of the gods or of friends. It embraces all humanity and entails obligation. The verb *agapao* (noun *agape*) has neither the magic of *erao*, nor the warmth of *phileo*. Among

the Greek writers, the word is colourless. It is a love that makes distinctions, choosing its objects freely. Hence it is especially the love of a higher for the lower. It is active, not self-seeking love.⁹ It is in the NT, the word *agape* attains great significance.

With the Pope initiating a detailed discussion on different forms of love in his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, the debate on the theme gained importance once again among scholars and theologians. The comprehensive term 'love' in English saves us from the confusion created by different equivalent Greek terms, though the term 'love' can mean a whole lot of things, both good and bad. It is also to be noted that every NT author may not have the same understanding of the term *agape*. However, speaking of Christian love, it is worth noting that most scholars today reject a strict compartmentalisation of the different forms of love (like Nygren's extreme position on *eros*) and agree that *agape* and *eros* must in fact co-exist in Christian love.¹⁰

i. The Concept of Agape in the Non-Pauline NT Books

The verb *agapao* and its noun and adjective forms are most favoured by the authors of the NT.

"The *agapao* family is critical to our perception of the nature and self-understanding of the early Christian communities. Words from the *agapao*

family occur 341 times in the NT and are found in every book of the NT. Acts has only one occurrence of the adjective, but in Luke, both noun and verb appear. The *agapao* family is most frequent in some of the shortest books, e.g., 1 John (52 times) and Ephesians (22 times). It appears in the Pauline writings 96 times."¹¹

The commandment to love regulates human conduct within the church: "love one another."

Love is a very extensive theme in the NT. But as it is not the focus of this paper, we shall refer to only a few selected passages, to present a general picture. Among the synoptics, the double commandment to love the Lord God with one's whole being and the neighbour as oneself appears in all the three (Mt 22:37-40; Mk 12:29-31; Lk 10:26-28). There is, moreover, the commandment to "love your enemies" found both in Lk 6:27, 35 and Mt 5:44. Finally, there is the parable of the Good Samaritan in Lk 10:29-37, describing what love for the neighbour means. The commandment to love regulates human conduct within the church: "love one another" (Jn 13:34; 15:12, 17; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 Jn 3:11; 2 Jn 5). In particular love is directed towards fellow Christians (1 Jn 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20, 21) and within the family (1 Pet 3). It includes theology, for God is defined

as love (1 Jn 4:9, 16), and ethics, for all of the Christian commands can be summed up in the command to love.

ii. The Use of *Agape* in Pauline Letters

When Paul speaks about love, his starting point is the love of God (Rom 5:8; 8:37; 9:13; 2 Cor 9:7; 13:11,13; 1 Thess 1:4), which he has shown in Christ. God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5) "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ

Love is the force which holds a Christian community together and builds it up. Without love, no fellowship or shared life is possible.

died for us" (v.8). The hymnic passage in Rom 8:31-39, which begins with the question "If God is for us, who is against us?" concludes with the assurance that nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The *agapes* (v.37) is Christ who has shown his love (v.35) on the cross (2 Cor. 5:14ff) and reigns as the Exalted One. "He loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Paul frequently speaks of the love of the Christians without qualification. Thus *agape* (Rom 12:9; 14:15; 1 Cor. 8:1; 14:1; 16:14) could easily be understood as one form of moral conduct among others. Husbands are

commanded to love their wives (Eph 5:25, 28; Col 3:19). The neighbour is to be loved (Rom 13:9). Yet, he emphasizes decisively the priority of *agape* over other virtues (Gal 5:6; Phil 1:9; 1 Cor 13:13). Love is not *ergon* (work, deed, act), but 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal 5:13-22)¹². Here, Paul readily puts *pneuma* (Spirit) and *agape* side by side (also 1 Cor. 14:1). 1 Cor makes it clear that love is the force which holds a Christian community together and builds it up. Without love, no fellowship or shared life is possible (14:1; 16:14; also in Eph. 1:15; 3:17 ff). The Church, the body of Christ, is built up by love (1 Cor. 8:1; 2 Thes. 1:3; Phil. 2:1 ff; Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:2). When Paul offers the Church the example of his own love, he is calling them back again to their fellowship in the love of God (2 Cor. 2:4; 8:7).

"Paul also takes up command of the OT and of Jesus 'to love' (Rom. 13:8ff; Gal. 5:14), thus setting *agape* alongside faith (*pistis*), and over against the law (*nomos*). The law has been fulfilled because Jesus is love, and has died for sinners. Therefore, in so far as Christians love one another, they too fulfil the law, not in the sense that they attain any perfection, but that they are now living in God's new reality through the strengthening power of forgiveness."¹³

iii.1 Cor 13 as the Summit of the Pauline Concept of *Agape*

1 Cor 13 summarizes Paul's concept

of *agape*. Here, *agape* is always both God's love and man's love. Love stands over every power and authority introducing and encircling the whole. Prophecy (*profeteia*), faith (*pistis*), hope (*elpis*) and knowledge (*gnosis*) are subordinate to it, not however, as gradations of lessening importance but as component parts of that one powerful force which permeates and animates everything. And love is stated to be the greatest of the gifts of the spirit. Paul says that of the three things that last for ever, faith, hope and love, "the greatest of them all is love" (v.13). Throughout the chapter, it is brotherly love that gives value and content to all other action or gifts.

"(Having the clause 'Love never ends') in v.8, the train of thought fixes on the last time when all other gifts will be pointless. The transitory and the ultimately perishable nature of *gnosis* is brought out in similar expressions, as is also the temporary character of *pistis* and *elpis*. The conclusion begins with the typically eschatological concept of *menein*, which in 13:13 has the sense of outlasting. Though Paul's favourite triad comes in at the conclusion, a bit unexpectedly after all that has been said so far, the superiority of *agape* is safeguarded by the clause 'the greatest of these is *agape*', for love alone is seen to be no longer of this world, but to stretch into the future *aeon*.'" ¹⁴

Thus, *agape* is a reflection of what

is still to come (vv. 9,12,13). Anders Nygren described *agape* as the 'centre of Christianity, the Christian fundamental motif par excellence'. He argued that sharp distinctions could be drawn between *agape* and *eros* and that Paul had given the Christian idea of *agapao* its highest and final expression.¹⁵ A new humanity is the goal of God's loving action and he uses acts of human love to attain this end. Of course, God is the source of these acts, awakening the faith which comes into action in love and

**Throughout the chapter,
it is brotherly love that gives
value and content to all other
action or gifts.**

pouring forth His Spirit.

iv. *Agape* and the Common Meal

It is opportune here to mention that *agape* is also the word used for one of the early Christian ceremonies, a 'love feast'. 1 Cor 11 shows that the actual celebration of the Lord's Supper was linked with a normal meal. Later it became separated from the Lord's Supper itself and celebrated in its own right (cf. Jude 12; Ign., *Smy.* 8:2; Clem. Alex., *Paedagogus* 2:1). The difference between the two was this: the service of preaching and the Lord's Supper was the joyous celebration of the faith, whereas the common meal had its central significance in celebrating and

displaying the special fellowship which they shared in their *agape*. Thus this service provided the congregations an opportunity to give practical expression to their love in generous social action (Acts 6:1 ff).¹⁶

2. *Agape* is Indispensable (1 Cor 13:1-3)

The passage of our study, with which

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing (NRSV).

we are very familiar, reads thus:

As seen above, the three long sentences in the passage each consist of two conditional clauses and a conclusive clause:

- (1) “If I” + verbs (“speak in the tongues....”, “have prophetic powers.../faith...” etc.),
- (2) “but (if I) do not have love”,
- (3) A conclusive clause - “I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (or ‘I

am nothing’ or ‘I gain nothing’).

The threefold repetition is noteworthy. In this section, Paul uses the first person singular. It is usually taken in a general rather than a strictly autobiographical sense, though some interpreters prefer the latter. The five ‘charisms’ mentioned in this section are in the ascending order of importance. ‘Tongues’, the least important, comes first. The superior charisms of ‘prophesy’ and ‘faith’ and even greater charisms of ‘giving away of all possessions’ and the ‘handing over of one’s body’ follow suit.¹⁷ Paul is making use of a hyperbole, similar to those found in the wisdom literature (“Even if one were the most perfect among men, without wisdom, he is nothing”- Wis 9:2). With these general notes, now we shall briefly analyse each verse of the passage, starting with the introductory sentence in 12:31b.

a) Love as a ‘More Excellent Way’ (12:31b)

12:31b reads: “And I will show you a still more excellent way.” Love is presented as the ‘more excellent way’ (*hodos*). Of course, that does not mean that it is not also a gift from God, who is the source of all love (Rom 5:5,8; 8:39). But at least here Paul characterizes it differently, not as a *charisma*, but a *hodos*. The fact that he distinguishes *agape* from the charisms listed in the chapter, and calls it a more excellent

way, points to the special character of *agape*. The word *hodos* translates in Hebrew as *derek*, which means not only the way but also the act of walking, the march, with a profoundly dynamic dimension. This dynamism is true of *agape* as well, because Paul shows that *agape* is a practice, involving action (13:4-7). As such it is a way of life (cf. 4:17, Acts 24:14, 22) - of temperament, character, morality, belonging, ethos, habit and practice (individual and corporate) - which is to govern the exercise of 'the gifts' and which gives them their very *raison d'être*. For Paul, faith in Jesus is not a static doctrine, but a dynamic journey. One cannot attain it seated, but it is learnt by living it. It is a way of life, which will reflect in every aspect of one's life.

'The more excellent way' is not mentioned as a comparative form, as if *agape* is one of the ways, but a superlative form, making it the only way. To the Corinthians who were so enthusiastic about the charisms, Paul proposes *agape* as the only way to make the charisms useful for the edification of the community. In the words of Prof. Viejo,

"From here comes the fundamental difference between charity and charisms: charity alone is the way, because it introduces in the human being Christ's way of acting, indeed his own life through the Holy Spirit. *Agape* is not only a gift of the Holy Spirit;

agape is an activity of the Holy Spirit through the heart of the human being. *Agape* does not only lead to God. God is not at the end of the path, He is

As such it is a way of life - of temperament, character, morality, belonging, ethos, habit and practice (individual and corporate).

already there. He himself walks with the one who loves: He loves him."¹⁸

If so, when *agape* is missing in the lifestyle of a Christian, it is a clear sign that he/she has lost the way. Jesus' words corroborate this fact: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). This theory is more radically applicable to religious men and women. Hence from what we observe in our religious communities (many religious failing to be agents of Jesus' love, compassion, mercy and forgiveness), can we infer that many of us have lost the way, some even collectively? If we do not pretend to be blind, it is high time for introspection and remedial measures.

b) The Gift of Tongues versus Love (v. 1)

"Speaking in tongues of men or angels without love is a clashing cymbal or noisy brass, perhaps reminiscent of

the clashing cymbals of Cybele's procession conducted by priests who were, along with poets, dubbed 'drums and cymbals of self-advertisement'.¹⁹ In the list of spiritual gifts in chapter 12, the gift of 'tongues' is always close to the end (vv.10, 28, 30). This was probably intentional because one can

They cannot make man 'anything worth' without love, which qualitatively transcends these values. Love is the basic attribute, which alone confers worth.

easily infer from chapter 14 that the Corinthians exaggerated the importance of this gift. It was the most unusual and mysterious and so was greatly sought after because it brought its beneficiary into the limelight. Paul had a different hierarchy of values, and 'the tongues of men and even of angels' is mentioned first here because he begins with the gift that contributes least to the community (14:2, 9, 11, 28). Like a gong or cymbal, it has a place in an orchestra, but by itself it communicates little, and without love, nothing.²⁰ According to Hans Conzelmann,

"The conditional clause presupposes that there are universally recognized values. It is then a vitally important point, that Paul begins with values that are significant in the community in Corinth: speaking in tongues, prophesy

etc. This is a strong link with the context. These recognized values are then relativized: they cannot make man 'anything worth' without love, which ... qualitatively transcends these values. Love is the basic attribute which alone confers worth."²¹

For Paul, this wisdom teaching is Christian teaching, even if there is no explicit mention of Christology. For *agape* is for him a given Christian concept (Rom 5:3 ff; 8:35 ff), and indeed he links up emphatically with the values of the Christian Church. But at the same time he allows them to appear as universal values. The allusion to the language of men and angels presupposes the apocalyptic world picture and is understandable in its light.²² The instruments referred to (gong and cymbal) are used in ecstatic cults.²³ The comparison with the loud accompaniment in pagan worship, according to some, reveals Paul's rather derogatory attitude toward this charism. For what Paul means, we have to bear in mind the exposition in 14:7ff. There he speaks of inanimate instruments, incapable of doing anything by itself.

Do we not come across modern versions of the Corinthian error of exalting some gifts? Many of our so-called achievements are no achievements at all, if they don't contribute to the promotion of love in the society. In other words, the Principal, who takes pride in the outstanding result of his/

her school, is only a sounding cymbal if he/she has attained the ability to ignore the rag-picker boy wandering outside his/her school compound, who does not attend a school at all. Similarly, the administrator of a hospital, who has learnt the art of turning a deaf ear to the cries of a woman who has no money to treat her ailing child, is only betraying the *agape* principle. Such examples of consecrated religious (often practising faithful observance of the vows and a well structured prayer life), which are not rare in our society, are in fact re-creating the band of scribes and Pharisees, condemned by Jesus (Lk 11:42) for narrowing down their religiosity to elaborate rituals and strict adherence to the law. Do our religious communities restrict their spirituality to ceremonious liturgies and abundant pious practices or do we care to radiate love through our words, ministries and institutions? A religious, who at the end of an hour of adoration (which is a common practice in many communities) is able to frown at his/her community member and call him/her bad names, is him/herself a question mark. That kind of spirituality/religiosity is evidently not guided by *agape* and has missed Jesus' way.

c) Love is Greater than Prophecy, Knowledge and Faith (v. 2)

Even if one has in addition to the gift

of prophesy and knowledge, faith sufficient to move a mountain, without love, he is nothing. The gifts of prophesy (12:10), knowledge (12:8) and miracle working faith (12:9) make very real and very important contributions to the community, but without love, their beneficiary is nothing. This very strong term should not be banalized into a synonym for 'useless'. It means 'non-existent', and this is perfectly comprehensive in Paul's perspective where the new being of the believer is constituted by love. Those who do not

Do our religious communities restrict their spirituality to ceremonious liturgies and abundant pious practices or do we care to radiate love through our words, ministries and institutions?

love do not exist as God intended them to exist. Thus when viewed within the perspective of the divine intention for humanity, they were 'non-existent'.²⁴

Paul follows the Corinthian order of merit in the spiritual gifts, which he will reverse in chapter 14. In doing so, he emphasizes prophesy more strongly than 'speaking in tongues', because the arguments over prophesy are, by nature, more intellectually determined and consequently hotter, and the statements of the prophet, unlike those of the 'speaker in tongues', can be checked.

“Paul regards the knowledge of mysteries as parallel to wisdom. That is, he takes the Christian factor (Spirit-inspired utterance in the community) and transposes it into the universal style of Wisdom teaching.”²⁵ The parallel between *sofia* (wisdom) and *gnosis* (knowledge) can be easily understood and is already anticipated in 12:8 (also Col 2:3). *Pistis* (faith: cf. 12:9) is here explicitly characterized as a miraculous force, ‘the power to remove mountains’. It is a proverbial Jewish phrase, which means ‘to make possible what seems impossible (also cf. Mk 11:23).

When the gifts are used for self glory (individual and corporate) or for one’s own comfort and pleasure, evidently *agape* is out of the scene.

Compared with the overstrained conditional clause, the concluding clause comes with cutting brevity: “I am nothing.”

When individuals make use of their gifts - talents and abilities - for the promotion of love in the community and in the society at large, we may infer that they are done out of *agape*; on the other hand, when the gifts are used for self glory (individual and corporate), for the accumulation of money (Acts 8:20 - “May your silver perish with you”), for maintaining one’s position and

prestige, or for one’s own comfort and pleasure, evidently *agape* is out of the scene. That is why we have several efficient ‘managers’ and ‘administrators’ among religious, whose contribution is a ‘perennial headache’ in the communities. When the driving force is not *agape*, but other values take its place, the acts do not help community building; instead of uniting, they easily divide communities.

d) Works of Charity without Love (v. 3)

So far, the question was one of attributes (‘have’), now it is one of achievements. The style remains the same. The Greek verb translated as ‘give away’ means ‘give as food’ or ‘divide in pieces’²⁶ (split up). So the meaning in the context can be either asceticism or beneficence. ‘And if I hand over’ is explained by the ‘so that’ clause, which has two readings: ‘to be burned’ or ‘to boast’. If ‘to be burned’ is the correct reading²⁷, Paul can be thinking of martyrdom by fire or of burning oneself to death as an ascetic act. The heroic attitude in face of death by fire is a standard theme also in Greco-Roman philosophy. The voluntary burning of oneself is also recounted as an Indian custom, taken over by Greek philosophers. The brief verdict accords with the former one: “I gain nothing”

“The gift of helping (12:28) is

dramatized in two actions, rendering oneself destitute to help another, or the acceptance of a supremely painful death in a great cause. These come much closer to the type of behaviour that Paul expects of Christians. Nonetheless, they make no contribution to genuine growth if they are not inspired by love. The ideal of Christian charity is not to treat others *as if* they were one's best friends, but *to be* to them as life-giving as God is to us in Christ. That is why Paul defines love in terms of personal attitudes and not in terms of actions in the subsequent verses.”²⁸

If I give all I own, even deliver my body to be burned, without love, that profits nothing. This series moves from unusual speech to self-sacrifice. “It highlights what can be done with the mind and what can be done by faith. By putting them all together in this way he covers all that is generally seen as religion: liturgy, articulate prophecy, and acts of charity. The case of self-immolation had numerous antecedents and was a standard illustration of the time.”²⁹ Paul stresses that in the Christian community, just one thing is essential: love.

Sacrifice is a highly exalted virtue in the Christian circles, and especially so in religious life, which demands several sacrifices - family, marriage, possessions, freedom and many more. According to the Pauline principle, all

of them become worthless when not motivated by love. We don't appreciate the modern suicide bombers, for example, in spite of their big sacrifice, because we can't find any *agape* there. Therefore we need not look for other reasons why many religious find these sacrifices burdensome and turn to attempts at compensating the losses, ending up in gross lovelessness, playing games of power politics, back biting and what not. I have seen 'fervent' religious who fast the whole day and, at the end of it, are unable to smile at a brother or sister or forgive their small mistakes. There are both lethargic religious on the one side and workaholic

We don't appreciate the modern suicide bombers, for example, in spite of their big sacrifice, because we can't find any *agape* there.

(mostly for money-making) religious on the other side, who at the end of the day are filled with resentment and are reluctant even to talk to others in the community: they say, “Nobody sees my work; no one appreciates me; nobody helps; why don't they see that I am doing all this for them?” On the other hand, we can't ignore the many religious doing their ministry day and night assiduously without a complaint, but with a smile on their face; this group has certainly transcended the sacrifices

they made because they were only expressions of the love they have gathered in their heart. So, what is it that makes the difference? Whether we make our religious life a continuous mourning, with long faces and harsh words, or a celebration of joyful service to humanity will be determined by this magical gift, *agape*.

e) Summary Message of the Passage

By the comparison with the charisms, Paul means to say that they have value only if they are animated by *agape*. The comparison was not made to say that *agape* is the greatest, but to

Whether we make our religious life a continuous mourning, with long faces and harsh words, or a celebration of joyful service to humanity will be determined by this magical gift, *agape*.

say that *agape* is everything for the Christian. Without taking this road, one cannot reach God, not even with the powerful manifestations of the Spirit. The nuance should be taken seriously: it is not that the gifts are worthless, but that they are worth nothing if they are not sustained by *agape*. Paul had criticised the Corinthians (4:8-10), when they were so convinced of possessing religious perfection. Though Paul has high esteem for the

gifts of the Spirit, that is not the kind of perfection the community needs, because Paul knows that every gift will degenerate and undergo corruption, if love - which is God himself - is missing.

“Therefore, Paul places love above both prodigious forces of the Spirit and the highest moral behaviour, according to the mentality of men. All these must be filled with love. He has described to his readers every possible religious perfection; however, he totally rejected them because in these actions and in these gifts, man is only looking to himself, if he does not have love.”³⁰

In short, love is the only criterion to evaluate true religiosity. When other things like gifts are projected as sole signs of one's closeness to God (as some Pentecostals and Charismatic preachers do), the same Corinthian error is repeated and religion is misinterpreted. Rituals remain as mere rituals when they are not translated to real life through acts of love.

Does it mean that any act that is not motivated by love is worthless? Companies, for example, may not be driven by love, yet contribute to the welfare of the society. It is not right to judge secular values with religious standards and vice versa.³¹ One problem that religious face in this regard is the tendency to compare with the secular world. Especially in ministries like schools, colleges and

hospitals, which non-religious also undertake, this tendency to compare and compete is more visible. There, often the results are weighed (in comparison with their counterparts in the secular world) not the motives; when driven by a craze for better results, the whole course of action changes and we often end up in a state of affairs, far separated from *agape*. This is a real problem we religious face everyday.

3. Use of the Passage in Church Teachings

1 Cor 13 is a passage used extensively in the Church, because it deals with the core of Christian teaching - love. Considering the need for brevity in this paper, we shall look into only three such instances, two ancient and one modern:

a) John Chrysostom

He interprets the passage much the same way the modern scholars do. He corroborates the hymn of Paul with the teachings of Jesus. Though the theory is accepted by all, its practice has not reached the desired degree in the society. He assimilates not only the theme of the passage, but also its hymnic style (as seen at the end of the quotation below):

“First he denigrates everything that is not accompanied by love and then sketches out what love is like. Since he had decided to demonstrate his point by amplification, he begins with the lesser things and moves on to the greater. For the gift of tongues, which he

put last when he was ranking gifts (12:7-11), he now puts first, since he wants to advance by degrees from lesser to greater things. He then goes on to say that even the most exalted form of prophesy or great accomplishments of faith are of no good without love. Similarly, even with the highest form of self-sacrifice, I gain nothing, if I don't have love. Discussing love for one's neighbour, Jesus says, 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (Jn 15:13)...We get the full picture of the importance of love, when we keep in mind the teachings of Jesus on the subject. He said to the rich man, "Go, sell what you have, give it to the poor and then follow me" (Mt. 19:21). No form of following him is more characteristic of the Disciples of Christ than loving one another. "By this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). And speaking of the greatest commandment, he quotes Deut 6:5 & Lev 19:18 and says "you shall love your

**No form of following him
is more characteristic of the
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one another.**

neighbour as yourself". If this commandment had been kept perfectly, we would have known no slave or free, no rich or poor, no small or great, no devil. For hay withstands fire, better than the devil survives the flame of love. Love is stronger than a city wall; it is harder than steel."³²

b) Augustine

Augustine too offers a pastoral and practical interpretation of the passage. In his sermon on the passage, quoting the Scriptures, he proves the uselessness of faith and prophesy when love is

absent. He applies Paul's teaching to practical situations and past experiences. He says,

“According to the Apostle (Paul), it is in love that we find a still more excellent way (12:31). All these things (the gifts) are magnificent and from God, but only if they are set upon the foundation of love and rise from the root of love. One may not believe that we can possess these gifts without having love, unless we look at some of the examples from the Scriptures themselves. Can one prophesy without love? Saul sent his men to drag David to his presence to be punished. Three groups of men, upon reaching David who was in the group of prophets, began prophesying by the descent of the Spirit. Then Saul himself proceeds to accomplish the task, but he too began prophesying, upon reaching the place.

**Even the demons believe
all that we believe, but
without love.**

Did he have love, or was he burning with jealousy? Did the gift of prophesying help him or any other? No, because he lacked love. Another example of prophesy without love is that of Caiphas, when he prophesied about Jesus, ‘one man dying for all the people’. John says, “He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year, he prophesied” (Jn 11:51). It is no use, having great things with him, unless he knows how to use them. And the only way to use these great gifts is the path of love. And we don't lack examples of faith without love: there are too many before our own eyes. Even the demons believe all that we believe, but without love. Apostle James condemns those who believe that faith alone is enough. He compares them to demons, saying: ‘You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe - and shudder’

(Js 2:19).”³³

c) The Encyclical, ‘*Deus Caritas Est*’

As the title itself suggests, Pope Benedict XVI dedicated his first encyclical to the theme of love, basing himself on the dictum in 1 Jn 4:8 (‘God is love’). In its introduction, he underlines the relevance of the theme of ‘love’ in the modern word:

“In a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence, this message is both timely and significant. For this reason, I wish in my first Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others. That, in essence, is what the two main parts of this Letter are about, and they are profoundly interconnected.”³⁴

As John and Paul have stated, God is the source of Love. It is his love that prompts the Christian to love. The Pope reiterates that the essence of Christian vocation is love. He explains at length, the significance of *agape* in the Christian theology, as against other forms of love. All Christians have the duty to love his neighbour. As a practical suggestion, he reminds the personnel who carry out the Church's charitable activity, that they must be guided by the faith which works through love (cf. Gal 5:6). “Consequently, more than anything, they must be persons moved by Christ's

love, persons whose hearts Christ has conquered with his love, awakening within them a love of neighbour. The criterion inspiring their activity should be Saint Paul's statement in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: "the love of Christ urges us on" (5:14)."³⁵ Towards the end, he says that the whole encyclical can be summed up in the 'hymn of love' in 1 Cor 13. He writes,

"Saint Paul, in his hymn to charity (cf. 1 Cor 13), teaches us that it is always more than activity alone: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing" (v. 3). This hymn must be the Magna Carta of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter. Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift."³⁶

4. *Agape* is not Exclusive Love

We are living in an era that witnesses quite a lot of unfriendly competitions between different religious communities, between Provinces of the same

Congregation, between Congregations and denominations. Instead of widening the horizons of our heart, are we narrowing them down to exclusivism? It is very evident from our study and from our experience that *agape* cannot be restricted to one's own community, province, Congregation or even the Church; true *agape* extends to the whole world. Therefore, when we think of keeping our community united, it is not simply our attempt to love exclusively our community members that will play the trick; instead it is the overall presence of *agape* in our lives that will work the wonder. For example, how much hate some Muslims and Jews

***Agape* cannot be restricted to one's own community, province, Congregation or even the Church; true *agape* extends to the whole world.**

(who love their communities exclusively) have been able to generate in the world, should serve as an eye opener. Can we love our community members while ignoring those outside? I have seen members of religious communities collectively mocking at the less fortunate ones who come to them for help. Will that act unite them as a community or haunt them with a prick?

Psychologists who have analysed the functioning of religious communities enumerate several reasons like person-

ality conflicts causing difficulties in our communities. However, one thing that I have not seen listed among the reasons which adversely affect the smooth functioning of religious communities is the following. I have observed that many of us religious have 'disabled' or switched off our human faculties to love, to feel compassion, to sympathise etc. and are into 'pure business' carried out through our institutions. Such people can love no one, except probably their 'business partners and collaborators', for obvious reasons. And if they can't love anyone, they can't love their community members, for sure. So there is no wonder if they find their community life troublesome. In this case, we have only two options: either re-enable our 'disabled' faculties by

Paul considered love as the only force which holds a Christian community together and builds it up.

relaxing our business tactics or forget our religious life and concentrate on business. Ironically many have chosen the latter, forcing the major superiors into a frantic run to settle problems in the communities. Needless to say, they will find no success.

One example of 'pure business' with human faculties 'turned off' is the following incident that I listened to with

a shudder. A girl had taken admission in a Catholic nursing school, paying 50,000 rupees. Two days later when she was invited by another Catholic institution of better choice, where she had applied too, she wanted to change the school and approached the first one. There, before returning her certificates, she was made to sign a document stating that she had donated the 50,000 rupees to the institution. The school may be justified in doing so as per their statutes, but did the girl get justice or was looted of her money? Does the act reflect *agape* or love of money? And the irony is that the looter wants to live a peaceful community life!! As far as I can understand, it is impossible to mix these two kinds of love. In any case, Paul would never know the secrets of this special mixture that we are trying to make; nor would Jesus. Their concept of *agape* rules out quite a few things that unfortunately today we try to incorporate in our community living.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have been trying to look at the importance of Christian love, as described by Paul in 1 Cor 13:1-3 and relate it to our religious communities. In the first section, analysing the Pauline Hymn of *Agape* in 1 Cor 13, first we tried to understand the background and importance of 1 Corinthians where we saw Paul addressing the problem of divisions, caused by an immature understanding

of the gifts, in the Corinthian Church. Then we dealt with the place, nature and relevance of chapter 13 and its relation with Chapters 12 and 14. There we realized that Paul considered love as the only force which holds a Christian community together and builds it up; without love, no fellowship or shared life is possible. Coming to the study of the meaning and significance of *agape*, we looked into some NT texts including some other Pauline Letters and concluded that 1 Cor 13 is the summit of the Pauline concept of *agape*. In the second section, we undertook a brief study of the text, 1 Cor 13:1-3, and learnt that *agape* is indispensable for any disciple of Jesus. Paul presents love as a 'more excellent way', without which other gifts like the gifts of tongues, prophesy, knowledge, faith or even works of charity become worthless. In the third section we listed three examples of the use of the passage in Church teachings: Chrysostom, Augustine and the encyclical '*Deus Caritas Est*'. Finally we saw that *agape* cannot be restricted to any exclusive love, but is open to the whole world.

I must acknowledge that I did not attempt to study the characteristics of *agape*, which we find in the paragraph next to the one we analysed above. The eloquent personification of love in 1 Cor 13:5-8 almost makes love and Christ interchangeable. Paul's notion of

love is based on the self-giving of Christ, who loved us not because we were good, but while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8). Inspired by Christ's *agape*, we religious are called to become the channels of passing that

Inspired by Christ's *agape*, we religious are called to become the channels of passing that love on to others.

love on to others (in our own community and outside), not evaluating their goodness and without selfish motives. It is only then we become true followers of Jesus who said, "Love one another, as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12).

This being the theory, I am aware that its praxis is rare and difficult. It was not my intention to deal with those practical aspects in this article; instead I would invite the readers' attention to at least three articles published in previous issues of Sanyasa Journal (besides the ones in the present issue and numerous others), which dealt with the modalities of the praxis of *agape* in religious communities and in religious formation houses:

- 1) Religious Life: An Invitation to Love "As I Have Loved you" (Jn 15:12) by Joseph Mattam, SJ

- 2) Formation for Love in Religious Life by James Kannanthanam, CMF and
- 3) Formation as Transformation into the Image of Christ (Pauline Formative Paradigm for Christian Living) by V. Lawrence, CMF.³⁷

Endnotes:

- ¹ James D. G. Dunn, *1 Corinthians* (*New Testament Guides* - gen. ed. A.T. Lincoln), Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997, p. 9.
- ² J. M^a. Viejo, *Charisms: 1 Cor 12 - 14*, Rome: Angelicum, 2007, p. 55.
- ³ William Klassen, *Love*, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4 (ed. David Noel Freedman,), New York: Doubleday, 1997, p. 393.
- ⁴ J. M^a. Viejo, *Charisms: 1 Cor 12 - 14*, p. 55.
- ⁵ Cf. Jan Lambrecht, *1 Corinthians*, in *The International Bible Commentary* (ed. William R. Farmer), Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998, p. 1623.
- ⁶ J. M^a. Viejo, *Charisms: 1 Cor 12 - 14*, p. 56.
- ⁷ Stephen C. Barton, *1 Corinthians*, in *Eerdman's Commentary on the Bible* (ed., James D.G. Dunn), Michigan: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2003,

p.1342.

- ⁸ Jerome Murphy O'connor, *1 Corinthians*, (*New Testament Message*, vol. 10, eds. Wilfrid Harrington OP & Donald Senior CP), Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1982, p.123.
- ⁹ Cf. Ethelbert Stauffer, *agapao* in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol.1, Gerhard Kittel & Gerhard Friedrich (editors), Michigan: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1992, p. 35.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (*The Anchor Bible Reference Library*), Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2004, pp. 533-534. Nygren (*Agape and Eros*, 2 vols., London: SPCK, 1932-37) held the view that *eros* should be eradicated in favour of *agape*. However, in Christian love for another, there should be an aspect of the unmotivated, not dependent on how good that person is; but the Christian can scarcely not love the goodness of that other person (including God - Nygren held that loving God because of the divine goodness would be *eros*) as well.
- ¹¹ William Klassen, *Love*, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, p. 384.
- ¹² Cf. G. Schneider, *agape* in *The*

- Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, (Eds: H. Balz and G. Schneider), Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993, p. 10.
- ¹³ W. Günter. & H.G. Link, *Love in The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (vol. 2), ed. by Colin Brown, Exeter, Devon (UK): The Paternoster Press, 1976, pp. 546-547.
- ¹⁴ Ethelbert Stauffer, *agapao* in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 52.
- ¹⁵ Cf. William Klassen, *Love*, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, p. 385. As hinted in endnote 10, many modern scholars are of the opinion that Nygren's contrast between *agape* and *eros* was an exaggerated one.
- ¹⁶ Cf. W. Günter. & H.G. Link, *Love in TNIDNTT*, p. 547.
- ¹⁷ Cf. Jan Lambrecht, *1 Corinthians*, in *The International Bible Commentary*, p. 1624.
- ¹⁸ J. M^a. Viejo, *Charisms: 1 Cor 12-14*, p. 56.
- ¹⁹ William Klassen, *Love* in *ABD*, vol. 4, p. 393 (original quote from DeWitt 1954: 146).
- ²⁰ Cf. Jerome Murphy O'connor, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 123-124.
- ²¹ Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, (tr. by James W. Leitch, ed. George W. MacRae, SJ) in *Hermeneia*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, p. 221.
- ²² The wording does not in itself require the equating of angel's language and speaking in tongues. Moreover, the expression can also be understood as a mere hyperbole: and if I had at my command every linguistic possibility even to the language of God. Yet Paul is presumably, after all, thinking realistically of the language of angels (cf. 2 Cor 12:4; Is 7:15-37; Job's daughters speak in the dialects of various classes of angels). A realistic interpretation is indicated also by the word order.
- ²³ The 'cymbal' belongs more especially to the cult of Cybele. Herald Riesenfeld holds that Paul is purposely speaking the language of the pagan cults, he would disparage.
- ²⁴ Cf. Jerome Murphy O'connor, *1 Corinthians*, p.124.
- ²⁵ Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 222.
- ²⁶ The absence of the word 'piece', accompanying the verb, reduces the chance of this second meaning being intended here.
- ²⁷ It is difficult to choose between the two readings of the verse, though

a few modern translations including NRSV and NAB prefer the latter ('to boast'). Evidently, "so that I may boast" is more difficult to understand than giving away the body to be burnt. However, with regard to its relation with love, there is not much difference of meaning because both are rare actions of sacrifice. Undoubtedly, if one is doing a sacrifice in order to boast, we have a worse case there.

²⁸ Jerome Murphy O'connor, *I Corinthians*, p.124.

²⁹ William Klassen, *Love*, in *ABD*, vol. 4, p. 393 (original quotation from Weiss 1910: 315).

³⁰ J. M^a. Viejo, *Charisms: I Cor 12 - 14*, p. 58.

³¹ This should not be misunderstood as an attempt to alienate the spiritual from the secular; we are only trying to understand both in the right perspective. However, we cannot discuss this issue here because of the limited nature of this paper and considering the vastness of the issue involved. Taking up the example given, it needs to be acknowledged that

companies do contribute to the material well being of those engaged. But when judged with religious standards, material well being does not correspond to spiritual well being; hence in a spiritual evaluation, they are worth nothing, which is again a cruel judgement. This confusion will remain for ever.

³² Judith L. Kovacs (tr. & ed.), *I Corinthians*, (in *The Church's Bible* - gen. ed. Robert Louis Wilken), Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005, pp. 215-216.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

³⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, '*Deus Caritas Est*' (Encyclical Letter), Rome, 25 December, 2005, no. 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 33.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 34.

³⁷ Joseph Mattam, SJ, "Religious Life: An Invitation to Love "As I Have Loved you" (Jn 15:12)", *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life*, vol.I, no.1 (January-June, 2006), pp. 19-32; James Kannanthanam, CMF, "Formation for Love in Religious Life", *Sanyasa*, vol.I, no.1 (July-December, 2009), pp. 79-90; the last section from V. Lawrence, CMF "Formation as Transformation into the Image of Christ (Pauline Formative Paradigm for Christian Living)" *Sanyasa*, vol.IV, no.2 (January-June, 2006), pp. 160-168.

CONSECRATED LIFE

A CALL TO AN INCLUSIVE MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

Antony Kalliath CMI

1. Situating the Reflection

One of the salient cultural flows of the present historical ethos of multiculturalism and informatics is the ongoing silent ‘revisions’, ‘revisits’ and ‘reconstructions’ transpiring in all the spectra of human life whether be it politics, or economics, or science or religious faith or what not. Old paradigms which hitherto have outsourced integrity to identities of diverse groups and clans, class, and castes are upset on the onslaught of globalization supported by the global media and market, and knowledge revolution. Owing to this an identity crisis is sweeping across world in every strata of the society and every thing is interrogated and is brought under the “hermeneutics of suspicion” in the present age of creativity and innovation. The ‘past’ with its systems and

ideologies has become redundant while the ‘future’ with clear vision and roadmaps is not dawned! It is a ‘no-where’ scenario of flux and process. It could turn out into a *kairos* of new possibilities, promises and initiatives, or to chaos of anguish and fears. It all depends on how we take them on with a new sense of creative commitment and an inclusive openness.

When the whole human history is on crossroads, no doubt, ‘Consecrated life’ cannot remain aloof; it will naturally find itself embedded in this flux of identity crises which will tell upon its witness, priorities and options, and above all its credibility as a way of life in the society at large. We need new paradigms and praxes to uphold ‘truth’ of the consecrated life. Instead of leading from the front, often we find a withdrawing syndrome which indulges

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in self-complacency, or hold fast to the old stereotypes, or regress into a puritanist naivety in the name of legacy or tradition. The idea of identity must not be construed solely in the static *given* but also should be envisioned in an organic event. The genuine identity blossoms in a creative equity between 'root' and 'destiny'. This is possible only in a profound trust in the "Holy-Optimism" (as Karl Rahner put it) that is ever impregnating the fabric of reality in virtue of Resurrection. The following are a few reflections on how to transform Consecrated Life into relevant, meaningful and credible witnessing so that it becomes a new leadership and an innovative path and promise, when humanity finds itself in a defining moment!

Truth is not a mere fact or datum but is the integrating principle hidden in the facts bonding and weaving the various facets of data in a meaningful texture and text.

2. 'Truth' of Consecrated Life

One of the hermeneutical tools to explore the verity of truth is its 'reception' by the society. Truth becomes 'true' (*satyasa-satyam*) when it becomes relevant, sensitive and interactive to the ethos and responsive to the questions, claims and priorities of the contemporary era. That is to say

it must give an élan and horizon to the unfolding of life 'here 'and 'now' and offer a perspective towards future. It implies that truth is to be 'contextualized, 'socialized' and 'democratized' so that it becomes an inclusive 'shared-experience' of the collective. Otherwise it will remain a mere fact in itself, 'out-there', devoid of any significance. A fact becomes truth when it contributes meaning to our life in the sense that it helps us to interpret today's events happening in our life journey in a vision, and offers us clarity, intensity and focus. To phrase differently, a fact grows into truth when it is meaningfully incorporated and appropriated into the pursuit of life by balancing the past and the future in the travails of the present. Here truth is understood as significance, vision and an empowering dynamic rather than an objective data. Truth is not a mere fact or datum but is the integrating principle hidden in the facts bonding and weaving the various facets of data in a meaningful texture and text. It is more so in the matter of religious truths which are existential and are a question of significance.

It means that a fact, say, 'consecrated life' becomes 'truth' when it 'witnesses' that which is hidden and that which helps us to go beyond the obvious and the manifest. Truth is not the sum total of parts (say rules, rituals, way of life, ministries, institutions etc.) but the

plus, the *beyond* that which gives integrity, harmony and transcendence of the ‘sum-total’. It offers vision and experience of the ‘total’. It cannot be possessed rather we are possessed by it. To put in different words, ‘text’ (consecrated life) becomes the ‘revelation’ when it becomes ‘con-text’ ‘here’ and ‘now’, giving meaning to sundries of our life and empowers us to cruise on the uncharted ‘waters of life’ with a rhyme and reason. That is to say, a fact becomes truth when it becomes ‘dialogical’, and embodies a ‘public meaning’. Jesus could “bear witness to the truth” (Jn18:37) when he decided to come out of the ‘private-talk’ of Trinity and to become ‘public-walk’ in the incarnated flesh of time and space. If it is so, the truth of consecrated life is to be sought in its inviolable ‘missional’ dimension through which it acquires credibility and integrity; it implies that consecrated life is not a private ‘talk -walk’ in exclusion but a radical pursuit of life right in the hub and web of the world if at all it is patterned after the incarnational praxis.

3. Christological Angle

To phrase Christologically, the Consecrated life is to be radically and prophetically incorporated into Jesus’ redemptive work which is still continued in the mystery of resurrection until it climaxes when “God will be all in all” (1Cor 15:28). Jesus says in his farewell discourse that we are

consecrated in truth so that his joy is completed in our life while being in the world but not of the world (Jn 17:11-19). Jesus who is consecrated by the Father at the river of Jordan has been a radical agent of life through and through his Kingdom ministry by bringing the good news of the liberty to the poor and of the arrival of the Lord’s year of mercy (Lk 4:18-19). And finally he has become the ultimate icon of the fullness of life in the mystery of resurrection which was possible through his “second baptism” on the cross (Mt. 20:22). Jesus was consecrated in his journey between these two baptisms while the first baptism signifies the death of the old wo/man as well as the birth of the new wo/man. The second baptism is “hour of glory” when the *life* overcame *death* finally.

The truth of consecrated life is to be sought in its inviolable ‘missional’ dimension through which it acquires credibility and integrity.

It is through the progressive journey from the ‘River of Jordan’ to the ‘hillock of Calvary’ that a religious is consecrated. And a Consecrated life is not to be lost in the journey but is a singular vocation to witness the mystery of resurrection, which is to be seen as the very blossoming and very destiny of Existence. This radical missional

witness of a religious must be an empowering presence both in life and ministry to help the people of God to live out the life in and through the world (but not of the world) so that the joy of Jesus (joy of the Holy Spirit Rom 14:17) is completed and celebrated 'here' and 'now' in the New Light that the Risen one has brought about. 'Consecrated life' should be the joy of Jesus. Often a crucified Christ was disproportionally projected by the missionaries in their evangelical deed. But such a strategy failed in Asia. Christian demography speaks of itself about this fact. In Asia we will not find a god or goddess who is a victim. For example all Hindu gods and goddesses are always victorious. A victim God doesn't evoke Asian imagination in the long run especially in the Asian situation of poverty and exploitation. As history says, at the initial periods the Chinese showed great interest in Christianity. But eventually they rejected Christ because they could not entertain a God who was crucified and was a total fiasco. The risen Christ was not projected and propagated enough in the Chinese mission. What the early missionaries preached, as someone put it, was 'crossianity'. It is indeed a great injustice being done to the whole message of Jesus. Jesus, the Risen One (the Buddha, the Awakened) is the ultimate Gospel of Christian religion. His is the Gospel of the abundance of

life. The Resurrection is the ultimate *utopia* of human evolution and this *utopia* is now the *topia*, the possibility, optimism and promise of humanity in the Risen One. Jesus' Gospel is not an ideology, and Jesus is not an ideologue. He has become the dialogue of Life in its variety and creativity by being the very exuberance of existence par

A victim God doesn't evoke Asian imagination in the long run especially in the Asian situation of poverty and exploitation.

excellence!

The mystery of resurrection is no more either a past event or a future one. Its presence is immediate, and the whole reality is impregnated with its power. And the Risen one is now 'buried' in the womb of reality. He is the Kingdom within and without. He is the King in the matrix of reality because he has transcended time and space; he is unbound, unfettered, universal, immediate and ubiquitous because he is the very pulse of Reality. Jesus the risen one is the abundance of life available and accessible to anyone anywhere. What is needed is that his presence is to be invoked and the immense creative energy that is being brought about in the event of Resurrection is to be unleashed, to be made known and available by the

obedience of his disciples. The unique witness of Consecrated life is specifically to make the truth of resurrection relevant, existential and credible in the present era and ethos, and make it its *eros* and *logos*.

The joy of the Resurrection can credibly be translated in Jesus' own words, namely, abundance of life (Jn 10:10) which is holistic and total, and is the harmony of life and integrity of reality. It is a creative and inclusive redemption in which nothing is lost but everything is restored, reconciled and healed in the effulgence of the New Light emanating from the empty tomb which is transformed into a womb of new life, hope and promise. This re-created and re-constructed Reality is a possibility and a potential; it is like fire in the fuel but it is to be ignited. Jesus has opened the floodgates of this immense energy which encompasses the whole reality. This new life which is born in the empty tomb (womb) is a total reconciliation and healing. 'Hell' and 'heaven' cannot exist together in this new redeemed scenario. There can only be heaven. In this context I would like to narrate a story from Indian tradition. King Vipascit was being taken to heaven by the messengers of Indra, the King of gods. On the way the servants of Yama summoned him to hell to pass a few minutes in hell in expiation of some fault that he had committed. The king then saw and realized for

himself the torments of those who were detained in hell, many of whom had been his friends and relatives on earth. When Dharma invited him to leave the place and proceed on his journey, he bluntly refused. He said: "Thousands of people are suffering here. How can I leave them behind?" "They are sinners" explained Dharma. "They have to pay for their crimes, whereas you must go to the abode of the immortals and receive the reward of your good deeds." But Vispascit remained adamant on his decision. His heart forbade him to go to heaven alone! Since hell could not detain him, Indra obliged him and all the others could not but be taken along with Vipascit to the city of Indra and so hell was emptied!¹ Indeed 'hell' and 'heaven' cannot exist in the restored Kingdom. How can there be a heaven

But we have to resurrect from the tomb of ignorance and corruption in this new Reign of God by walking the way that Jesus has shown us.

when there is a hell! How can people be happy in a heaven when their kith and kin are struggling in hell? Jesus has liberated us from the 'hell' of ignorance and brought us in the heaven of new "Earth and New Heaven". But we have to resurrect from the tomb of ignorance and corruption in this new Reign of God by walking the way that Jesus has shown us. As Asian tradition

says, “we seek not to imitate the masters rather we seek what they sought”.

Often Consecrated life is interpreted as a private, exclusive path of salvation. It is oft ‘heaven’ or ‘reward’ oriented. Psychologists would say that ‘heaven’ is the ultimate icon of human greed and ‘hell’ as the unconscious projection of human fear. But in Jesus’ Reign of God, the idea or experience of salvation is inclusive and total, not partial and exclusive. The chaotic existence is restored in the One (*Tad Ekam*) again, and is healed and reconciled in the Risen. The victim has become the Victor, the Enlightened, Jesus the Buddha - the ‘first fruit of Resurrection.’ The special and the unique call to the consecrated life is the missional witness primarily to the Risen

Thus critical balance between the cult and charism is sustained in the history of Judaism.

One so that the religious become a radical agency to empower the humanity in its pilgrimage to the New Life Jesus has brought about.

4. Prophetic Nuance

Consecrated life in this sense embodies greater prophetic potential to go beyond set stereotypes and used and abused paradigms of holiness and perfection. Jesus himself hints at the

imperative of exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees to enter the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20) when he visualizes a new community.

Judaism has a systemic dynamic to keep alive and sustain the ‘transcendence’ of its institutional religiosity through its well acclaimed prophetic tradition running along the orthodoxy. Judaism is oft called as religion of ‘Law and Prophets’. Whenever the Israelites go astray from the Covenantal path the Prophets play their vital role to bring them back to Yahweh. Thus critical balance between the cult and charism is sustained in the history of Judaism. Jesus comes in this prophetic lineage. To a great extent this crucial balance is lost sight of when religious Orders became clerical. Indeed it happened owing to the contingent historical situation when there existed the scarcity of priests to administer the sacraments. Clubbing Consecrated life and priestly life turned out a fatal misconceived policy in the life of the church in the long run because it erased the vital prophetic dimension of Christianity to a great extent. By doing so, the cultic compulsions suppressed the prophetic role of the religious. Nowadays even the women religious are becoming more cultic and ritualistic in their policies and programmes maybe because they are too dependent on priestly class.

The missional nature of the Consecrated Life is to be searched and

realized in this plane of going beyond the *status quo* (*ad hocism and ad hominem!*) of the Church and by breaking new grounds and engaging in ‘break-throughs’ so that the energy unleashed by the Resurrection of the Lord leads the Church to the Kingdom. If that’s the case Religious Life vibrates more with Jesus, the prophet. Jesus was seen by himself as well as by the people more as a prophet than a cultic priest. He was rather a radical critic of the priestly class. In the early church this prophetic dimension was quite vibrant. Revolutionary nature of the Church was quite conspicuous especially in the relationship of its members. There was a fraternity and egalitarianism in the new community in which Jew and Roman, Greek and barbarian, free and slave, rich and the poor woman and man formed one community around the Risen Lord. It was a revolutionary movement and a “social impossibility” in the contemporary pagan world.² Owing to the revolutionary nature of the new community they were called “Third Race” after the Romans and Greeks (first race), Jews (second race).

As the Church became institutionalized and acquired the status of a state religion, prophetic dimension is regressed. Nobody can be blamed for that. It is only a sociological process; when a movement becomes an institution it has to cater to cult and canon for its social status and security

and sustainability; it is compelled to be exclusive and inward-looking and is preoccupied to build walls rather than bridges.³ And naturally what got more priority and preference in the history of Christianity was founding of well-knit institutional Church well stipulated by canons and rituals and supported by whatsoever available political and economic power. Sadly, in the process the Church drifted away from the Kingdom vision. Alfred Loisy aptly articulates that “Jesus foretold the Kingdom and it was the Church that came.”⁴ The missional identity of the Consecrated Life is to be situated in the prophetic tradition so that the new promise of the Risen Christ always invokes and empowers the people of God beyond the ordinary. To phrase differently, it has to become the *change*

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that it wants in the Church and thus it should be “salt”, “leaven” and ‘light’ in the lives of the people. Light becomes light by burning itself, so also the case of ‘salt’ and ‘leaven’ that it exists by dissolving itself in the dough.

5. Kingdom Centric

The call to Consecrated Life is to build the Kingdom of God if we situate

its missional identity in the standpoint of Biblical prophetic legacy. The word 'Kingdom' in the Hebrew is *Malkuth*. It is a verbal noun implying that 'Kingdom' is not an immutable political entity or ideology but signifies a processive and dynamic reality, ever unfolding and evolving. May be because of this, Jesus resists defining it and always tries to explain it in parables, metaphors and social stories. Jesus' narratives are open-ended and inclusive; they invite the readers to be participant in them so that they complement and enhance them. Parables are more of dialogue than of monologue. Jesus recounts parables, and the listeners contribute to them by the change of their heart and way of life. The parable continues to unfold in the lives of the people and making the

As a prophet, Jesus was a radical critique of the religious establishments and its practices.

Kingdom of God a dynamic and ever evolving reality.

Moreover, Jesus brings the idea of the Kingdom through his various social interactions which are parabolic and embodies Kingdom vision and praxis: say for example, the interaction with Zacchaeus or the woman caught in adultery. The conversion of them is part and parcel of the whole event. This

conversion continues when one listens to the Gospel today in his or her contexts. This is how Jesus' stories are retold and revisited and thus they remain ever open, inclusive, universal, and evokes us to his vision and mission. The Kingdom of God that Jesus has inaugurated is organic and evolutionary by nature. It is like the tree in the seed which is to be nurtured so that it sprouts. Or it is like the fire in the fuel which someone should ignite. To make the seed sprout and to aflame the fuel in the new era of the Risen Christ what is needed is the Kingdom perspective as that of Jesus. And the religious are primarily called to become prophets, seers and pioneers to make Jesus' Kingdom ever creative and innovative while responding to the claims of the context and reading the signs of time.

As a prophet, Jesus was a radical critique of the religious establishments and its practices. His was not a negative criticism, but a proactive one by offering alternatives of a new community of love and righteousness right in the occurrences of the world through his Kingdom ministry. God sent his Son primarily because he loved this world (Jn3:16). Corollary to Father's wish Jesus understood his mission as bringing about "fullness of life" (Jn10:10) in all strata of the society. The future Kingdom is only a realization of what Jesus has initiated here and now (Mt 3:17). Jesus was consecrated

(baptized in the river Jordan as well as on the cross) in the public space and among the people so much so that he became a new agent of the new community of fraternity in which Jews, Greeks, pagans, sinners, women, the children, the sick, the poor, the last and the least are partners and collaborators to build up the Reign of God.

Jesus' community was not an esoteric, private one as that of the *Essenes* but Kingdom centric. It was public, open and inclusive fellowship and fraternity of equals without the discrimination of caste, creed, cult, and gender. The credibility of Jesus' community was assessed and accepted in the secular spaces not in 'desert' or enclosures! The new community was not of 'private-talk but a 'public-walk'. It was consecrated when Jesus was crucified "in the city" (Jn 19:20) outside the Gate, in the public space, not for religious reason but for political cause! It was through the "Liturgy of Life" that he formed the first community in the secular space. The death on Calvary was the hour of glory because Jesus' total obedience (consecration) to the Father transformed the cross as the womb of the new Reign of God. The missional call of the Consecrated is to become the agencies of God's reign in the bruised and broken world of sin and ignorance. As the Risen Christ still carries the scars of his passion, the Consecrated should

embody the brokenness of humanity and become first and foremost the witnesses of the Kingdom of God right in the heart of the world.

6. Consecrated in the Public Space

Evidently, the Consecrated Life has to fundamentally embody and enhance the Truth of the Kingdom and has to search its identity in the dynamics of its unfolding in the world. The Hebrew understanding of 'truth' would probably offer a new insight in this context. The Hebrew word for truth is '*emet*' which is organic, inclusive, and open and ever unfolding in the course of history. It is more an 'event', or a 'deed' or a 'narrative' unlike the Greek idea of truth (*althea*) which is notional, normative, immutable and objective. The Hebrew God who journeys with the Israelites is

He participates in Israel's history by hearing the cry of the poor and showing partiality to the marginalized...

more a process than a monad. He reveals himself by being coterminous with history. He participates in Israel's history by hearing the cry of the poor and showing partiality to the marginalized and by entering into covenants with them and thus He makes himself accountable to the humans. It implies that he is not revealing the truth through categories and notions but by

the deeds of covenants. The Old Testament, especially the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Prophets, speaks of God's manifold ways of being present in the journey of life. Again, peoples' keen recognition of God's ubiquitous presence in the book of Psalm is quite moving.

The very self-understanding of Yahweh speaks of the 'becoming' nature of Divinity in contrast to the immutable God of the Greek. Yahweh names himself: "I am who I am". As Meister Eckhart argues, the repetition of "I am" implies a 'becoming God' or a "processive God". Incarnation is the continuation of 'God becoming' in the Old Testament in a more definite way. It should be stated that Incarnation is not a mere one time past

Jesus was making a radical critique of the contemporary religion which was conceived and practiced as a private and esoteric affair without a commitment to the society.

historical event. It is the very style and substance of Christian God in his interaction with humans. What we find in the Bible is the 'walk of God's talk. Mystery of Incarnation is the natural flowering of the covenantal God who has journeyed with the Israelites. And the Incarnate God continues to be with

the trials and travails of humanity through the Spirit of the Risen who takes birth, dies and resurrects in our daily Eucharistic celebration and in every engagement in the world, which leads to the arrival of the Reign of God. Incarnational dynamic is the basic art and wise of the Biblical God who continues to journey with humanity and "who fills the whole creation" (Eph 1:23) in virtue of resurrection of the Lord, and thus renewing the whole Reality ever and forever.

The Consecrated Life is to be fine-tuned with this Biblical understanding of God's engagement with the world. In that case we have to revisit the meaning of religious life as a narrative in the story of God rather than as cultic and canonical "Order" or "Congregation" practiced in the confines of high compound walls. Jesus says, you are the light of the world and it should be put on the lamp stand so that it gives light to all (Mt 5:14). By saying so Jesus was making a radical critique of the contemporary religion which was conceived and practiced as a private and esoteric affair without a commitment to the society. Jesus' praxis of religion and his teaching gave a new translation of the very understanding of religion. It is practiced in the 'public space' and in an anthropological community in which all discriminations in the name of race, color, class, creed, caste, tradition etc., have no value. Moreover, it embodies

the brokenness of the humanity, especially of the marginalized and offers an alternative in which every one, the lost and the least are dear ones. It implies that the credibility of the new faith comes from its ‘public meaning’ in the sense that it is responsive to the people, especially to the claims of the “non-people” on the margins.

The implicit argument of Jesus is that religion and its practices are to be approved and appropriated in the ambit of contemporary cultural, social and political scenario. Otherwise religions become irrelevant, obstructionist and regressive historical data in the human advance. While discussing the meaning of the consecrated life, one should not entertain the idea that this way of life can be justified in itself and can be sustained in its exclusive purity, independent of the cultural and political underpinnings of the present ethos. If someone muses such a complacent approach and perspective it would be suicidal. If we pattern consecrated life after Jesus and his ministry, our religious community is radically challenged to be missional in the sense that a radical Christian life is not an option outside the occurrences of the ‘world’ but must be lived out through “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age” (GS #01) and should acquire credibility and mandate in the public space. If so, Consecrated Life is not a private talk

of holiness and purity. It should embody a ‘public-meaning’ as well implying that it should pulsate with the brokenness of humanity. If we look into the ‘insight’ of the founders of various religious congregations and orders we will not miss the nuance of ‘public’ in their charism. Holiness was often construed in ‘holism’ and thus their initiative acquired credibility in the public space. The public meaning of the Consecrated life has, by and large been obvious in the initiatives of the founders of various Orders and Congregations.

To cite a few examples, the “Rule of St. Benedict” was not written in a historical vacuum. Living in the twilight of Roman civilization and the dawning of the Dark Ages in Europe St. Benedict wrote the Rule, on the one hand, to take

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on the disintegration of Roman Civilization and on the other hand to bring about a new culture that could uphold the Gospel values as the people began to slip back to paganism. The Rule was a pastoral deterrent to the intellectual decrepitude prevailing in the then Europe of 6th century. Francis Assisi (13c) initiated a movement to

'renew the Church' that should pulsate with the lost and the least on the margin. Franciscan praxis was 'consecrated' by the crowd at the margins, not in the confines of the complacent compounds. Focolare movement (1940s), a new initiative in the Family apostolate in a context when the families were broken and the children were orphaned after the Second World War. It nurtures interfaith communities of solidarity, prayer and sharing in the very heart of the society. Mother Teresa's communities took birth at the 'cry of the dying', and centred on the lonely, the broken and the sick of Kolkata. The Covenant House Community started at Manhattan in New York (1977) makes 'covenant' with, as its mission statement says, with "the suffering children of the street" and committed to the homeless, and to the

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compounds.**

runaway and at-risk youth. Now it has built up a large network spreading from New York to the Latin American countries and serving thousands of the 'lost' and the least of the present Globalized society, and thus makes alive a God who always enters into 'covenant' right in the secular space. The Taize Community is centred on

prayer and a life dedicated to the unity of all the Christian Churches. The Community of Lanzo del Vasto (l'Arche) is centred on a way of life close to nature and on the principles of non violence. The basic communities in Latin America are centred on the poor, restoring to them their basic dignity and rights, and their voice and place in the Church and in society. Chavara Kuriakose Elias initiated a comprehensive revolution by founding a Congregation of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate in the 19th c in India; its contemplative life of prayer is envisioned in thick of the contemporary pastoral and social concerns. It had been a social agency of transformation through the education apostolate to all in a society ridden with caste discrimination and untouchability. He started a Sanskrit school for the Dalits when people of the lower caste were forbidden to learn that language. He introduced mid-day meal so that he could attract the poor children to the school!

If we look deep into the insight and vision of all Religious Congregations, Societies and Orders we will not miss the 'missional' of its genius; that's to say, they are not conceived as 'private club of salvation'. Rather there existed a creative insertion of the personal as well collective pursuit of salvation into the 'public space' which is ridden with social, racial, gender, economic

discriminations and political unjust practices. The credibility of its leadership abides precisely in the integration and balance between the private salvation along with the total liberation of the people. This discrete harmony between the 'public' and 'private' was lost sight of, often, in preference to the latter. The credibility of the religious life to witness the Good-News can be reclaimed only by an inclusive corporate identity nurtured and nourished by the "joys and sorrows" of the world.

To phrase differently, the Consecrated Life is to be 'missional' by nature rather than to be a 'missionary'. The word 'missional' is consciously opted instead of 'missionary'. The word 'missionary' is quite loaded with Church' mission history which reminds the Mediterranean cultural, racial and linguistic chauvinism, political colonialism, economic exploitation, and above all church's perverted praxes in the name of mission especially in the Asian, African and Latin American continents. To be 'missional' means to be existential, and to be open to the sobs and songs of the 'people in the public space.' It entails to be creative and innovative by being proactive, processive, and more linked to the destiny by trusting a God who wants to be reborn again and again by the power of resurrection in the present broken and bruised Reality due to human hubris and avarice in the neo-liberal world. The following lines of

thinking may offer new windows or paths to be missional in the present multi-cultural globalized world and thus recapture the losing credibility of the Consecrated life.

7. Ways of Being Missional

7.1. Being a Cultural Presence

In today's discourse human being is increasingly understood as 'cultural-being'. It is a dynamic way of interpreting human identity departing from the customary way of defining human being as 'political being' (*zoon politikon* Aristotle's Anthropology) or 'social being (*zoon koinonikon*, Stoic Anthropology) or a 'rational being' (Rene Descartes). It is a creative way of constructing human identity interactive with the 'other' and 'world'.

To be 'missional' means to be existential, and to be open to the sobs and songs of the 'people in the public space'.

The Human identity is not the 'given' or 'programmed' but it is processive, innovative and creative. Human being is a possibility, and a potential, and 'culture' is the epiphany of human consciousness. Consciousness is a unique quality of human existence. A buffalo can never become a Buddha or Christ. But a human being is also 'free' not to become a Buddha if he or she

does not positively engage in the river of life.

It implies that humans have to contest and construct meaning; their identity is organic and an ever evolving phenomenon. Here identity is not to be construed solely in the ambit of the 'roots' but in the boundless expanse and mystery of 'destiny'. The life is not a mere accident between Big-bang and black-hole. It is an incident in the vision and wish of the Creator. It means that humans have to engage themselves ever in the search of the significance of their existence in the *missio dei*. This is the pure delight of being human because we are endowed with human consciousness, so that we can participate in the ocean of existence which is total, immense, and ineffable.

The vocation to Consecrated Life is proactively to partake in the whole of existence and take a lead role in the process of its blossoming.

The import of religion comes precisely here. In one way we, as cultural beings, are fundamentally 'religious beings' in the sense that we are related (*religare*) to the totality of reality and build up friendliness with the whole of existence and give a new quality and a fresh fragrance to the travails of existence every day by

singing 'a new song and telling a new story'. Being a religious means being inclusive and open to the exuberance of existence, which is ever new and creative, bubbling with abundance of life. The vocation to Consecrated Life is proactively to partake in the whole of existence and take a lead role in the process of its blossoming. To put whole argument in different words, religion is fundamentally a 'culture-thing'. Our faith has to become our 'culture-thing' so that our consecrated life is 'incarnated' into the whole existence, and thus it becomes integral, total and holistic. Its call is to be a vibrant agency ('light'/'salt'/'leaven') of transformation and transfiguration in the glow of the Resurrection. As the late Pope Paul VI reminds us "the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the tragedy of our time" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* #20). Christianity belongs to the political, social and cultural order because Christian faith is resolved in a God who pitches his tent amidst the humans; he is Emmanuel. By saying that Consecrated Life is 'cultural', our religious life has a radical missional role to lead the whole of existence to a new excellence, quality and intensity.

Jesus was consecrated in the 'desert' of the public space and thus he could give a new meaning to the whole of existence through his death and resurrection. Jesus has shown the way of how to be really consecrated and how

to become a vital agency to give a new depth and dimension to the epiphany of human spirit and how to divinize/humanize the whole existence. If Consecrated Life is a cultural agency then it should be realized through the sobs, songs and stories of people upholding the 'civic nuance' and 'public meaning' of the Gospel; it is not a private, esoteric and exclusive way of life but it is a vocation to be responded right in the sundries of peoples' lives offering vitality and new hope in their journey of lives. Consecrated life is like the light on lamp-stand that exists by burning (consecrating) itself so that it sheds light in the lives of people.

7.2. Embodying a Multi-Faith Perspective

Once we try to see the Consecrated Life as a 'culture-thing' it is has to situate itself in the present historical, political and social scenario. The logos and pathos of the present era is indisputably pluralism which has percolated deep into post-modernist psyche. People live on border (luminal) space and boundaries are not fast defined; they are diffusive and porous. The art of a successful living demands a creative inclusiveness which blends and bonds paradoxical trends and strands and thus brings harmony to the varied options into an equitable correlation. A holy man/woman is like a person like Gandhi, who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his

own religion to other religions, and comes back again with new insight to his own. Passing over and coming back, it seems, is the spiritual adventure of our time.⁵ The consecrated life in today's world entails this spiritual adventurism. We are consecrated in a multi-faith scenario. And the Consecrated Life is to be incarnated into this fertile and fascinating text and context of dialogue of religions.

In today's political scenario, religions are positively treated as 'cultural-capital' in the sense that they are considered as agencies of lasting political resolve, and social cohesion and integrity. Political diplomacy and military solutions have limited role and scope. The ongoing riots and violence of Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin

A holy man/woman is like a person like Gandhi, who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions.

America are not yet contained by political equations. What we need are new paradigms and praxes of multi-faith psyche. Our consecrated life should become an art of living in a multi-faith context in the sense that it caters to and cares for a radical meeting of religious pursuits at the depth level. As Thomas Merton says, communication in depth across the boundaries of one's

religious faith is the most important in fashioning the destinies of future humanity.⁶ The religious should be the pioneers and path-finders in this regard. Consecrated life should, then, embody a multi-faith pattern and motif so that it vibrates with the *eros* and *logos* of the present era. That is to say, the Consecrated Life must grow into a radical experiment on the spectrum of diverse religious pursuits. We need Koran, Bhagavad-Gita, Dharmapada, and Sikh Grandhas, the insights of the Little Traditions of Tribals, Dalits, and Folks to build up a society in the vision of the Reign of God which should appreciate and appropriate the multi-religious claims.

If we continue to indulge in our absolutism, Christianity will eventually become an esoteric or occultist religion.

Moreover, when polities are increasingly looking up to the religions as their 'root-paradigms' in their identity constructions and religions become cultural, political and social agencies for nation building. Our Consecrated Life cannot be envisioned exclusive of this unfolding scenario. We have to engage proactively in a *Passover* from our normative claims and complacency to a dialogical religiosity and an interfaith consciousness. If we continue to indulge in our

absolutism, Christianity will eventually become an esoteric or occultist religion. Swami Vivekananda once said: "No individual or nation can live by holding itself from the community of others and whenever such an attempt has been made under the false idea of greatness, policy or holiness - the result has always been disastrous to the secluding one." The oft quoted saying of Mahatma Gandhi is called for: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown of my feet by any." Indeed we need our own shores of identity, tradition and genius. But if we do not build the bridges of understanding, partnership, dialogue the 'shores' of our religion become isolated islands irrelevant in the present ethos and logos. Swami Abhshiktananda, who 'consecrated' his whole life to experiment the question of multi-faith experience, speaks of the simultaneity of different faiths in the "Cave of the Heart". He calls this "bridge-consciousness", "profound-mutation or "multiple loyalties". No doubt, one will find oneself being lacerated, both physically and mentally between the turbulent 'borders' of diverse faiths. But this is possible, as Swamiji says, only when the seed of the faith is sown deeply. At the depth we will not be torn apart and dissipated.⁷

Rather it would be a greater celebration and a dawn of deeper consciousness of unity. There one becomes a sparkling and vibrant wave in the ocean of existence which is One (Tad-Ekam). One is to be consecrated in 'the depth' and by the 'depth'. The radical missional call of the Consecrated Life today is to realize this veritable dialogue both in the person and collective.

7.3. Being Dialogical

Dialogue has brought a new imaginary, a creative space, and an innovative praxis in the understanding of being missional. The late Pope John Paul II thinks of dialogue as a spectrum to build up a "new civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty"⁸. The Consecrated Life is to be 'consecrated' in this dialogical ethos for it should fundamentally embody the substance and style of a God who partners with the humans in history embodying its logos and pathos. Dialogue is the medium and message in today's ethos. It is the synergy, promise, faith and the very delight of the present epoch. We need fundamental studies and experiments to negotiate the frontiers of religions and must acquire the art and skill of creative receptivity to be transformed in this process while upholding our faith presuppositions. But we have no clear paradigms and paths to adventure in this uncharted ocean of human pursuits. We

It can be stated that 'being dialogical' is 'being missional' in the present cultural and religious scenario.

don't have beaten path. We are only wayfarers and pilgrims. The *way* is made by *walking* as the Spanish poet Antonio Machado says in his poem *Caminos*. Dialogue is more an unfolding and deepening and expanding scenario than a defined context; it leads us to realms of surprises and hidden promises. It has become the very goal when the style becomes the substance in the present world of media and communication. Dialogue is the new energy, new capital, the new optimism, the "New Pentecost" in the life of the Church.⁹

It can be stated that 'being dialogical' is 'being missional' in the present cultural and religious scenario. Scenario is not a static 'context'. But there is no constant in a scenario which is a conflux of flows, an ever expanding network ridden with promises in a futuristic horizon. We have to constantly search and discover 'constant' anew and afresh, and to be in the flux and to be on move; the 'change' is the 'constant' in today's globalized and media ridden world. It entails the Church to be 'missional' rather than a missionary. As already mentioned, to be *missional* means to be creative, innovative, alert,

sensitive, open, dialogical and ever open to *posteriori* truths evolving in the process. The disciple of Jesus should be like a tight-rope walker always balancing and alert in the 'middle' embodying the paradoxes rather than opposing them, and ever moving from one 'constant' to the other and thus making 'constants' a 'rosary' of ever deepening and evolving event and deed, a celebration. Here what is important is the thread that bonds the beads in a perspective. The mission of the Consecrated life is the space between the beads! That space is a space of exploration, breakthroughs, and new horizons. That space is the space of the prophets, pioneers and pathfinders. It is the Socratic space of dialogue. Here dialogue is not a conversation between two persons. The word dialogue comes

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from the etymological root '*dia*' (through) not '*di*' (two). Socratic space is a common, open-ended, inclusive and creative space in which seekers search together, bracketing out their *a priori* while being in search of *a posteriori* that are revealed in the common pursuit. There is no hidden agenda in a dialogical process; it is more of creative

receptivity, totally open, honest and transparent to the revelation of truth which transpires in the process. Dialogue in this sense is a mutual empowerment and a synergic partnership of all those who participate in it. What is needed is 'obedience' to the truth (*emet*) that is being exploded in the dialogical process. The real missional dimension of the Consecrated is this radical participation in the revelation of the Spirit in the dialogical multi-religious context. We need all the religions, cultures and faiths to unravel the Risen Jesus who is ubiquitous and universal in the whole of Reality and we have to collaborate with the Father who reveals his Son outside the confines "flesh and blood" (Mt. 16:17). The Church through its various documents and teachings promote to enter such radical dialogue of faiths.¹⁰ The Consecrated who have opted for and called to a radical witness are the veritable disciples to engage in this pioneer apostolate to make Jesus known and manifest in the present culture and ethos of pluralism. To equip ourselves what is needed is a radical reconstruction of our identity of Consecrated Life.

7.4. Being a Narrative Community

We have to engage in an exercise of a radical reconstruction of our identity consciousness to equip ourselves and to acquire the art and skill to be missional in a multi-religious context.

It entails a deconstruction or an unlearning of the existing praxes and paradigms patterned after mega/meta narratives built upon Classicist ideals of holiness and Aristotelian notional normativity. To fine-tune the Consecrated Life with the texture of multi-faith texture we have increasingly engaged in a narrative logic which resonates with the present pluralistic ethos. Life unfolds on a narrative canvas with its inborn spontaneity and creativity. Life is not arithmetic or a preconceived ideology. It is more a story being recounted in space and time ridden with God's benediction which is full of surprises and delight. Only a narrative has the flexibility, flow, flair and fire to embody the vibrancy of life and weave the varied experiences with rhyme and rhythm in the mystery of time. Paul Ricoeur, the seminal thinker of narrative hermeneutics, writes: "Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience"¹¹ In today's postmodernist globalized world of media virtuality, randomness and liminality of human life, what we need is a story that makes sense of the fragmented temporality.

Story as a figurative literature is different from a well-knit logistics of an ideology. Linguistics of a story offers a creative space that is inclusive, open

and organic and has the versatility to interpret and integrate paradoxical experiences in a narrative. The Bible,

We have to return to the narrative logic of the Bible while re-imagining the Consecrated Life in the present pluralistic ethos.

for that matter the Scriptures of all religious traditions, by and large is a narrative scenario of polyvalent and paradoxical treatises of contrasting themes recounted through a variety of literary forms like stories, myths, parables, narratives, stories, historical events, hymns, psalms etc. The Biblical literature does not stand for a notional reductionism of human life in the frame of a grand-narrative. Rather what is attempted in Scripture is to sustain a creative equity of the paradoxical events of human life (birth, death, life, sin, conversion, surrender etc) in a narrative scape and scene. We have to return to the narrative logic of the Bible while re-imagining the Consecrated Life in the present pluralistic ethos. It should be envisioned through the stories of the people right in the web of the world rather than Meta constructs of invented ideals and ideas. Life as a narrative flows in small narratives, not through grand narratives. In other words, the Consecrated Life should become more autographical in the sense that it should

be existential and experiential especially in the Asian logic and genius.

In this context, the theme of the Asian Mission Congress (2006) invites our attention. It advocates the rationale of the return to the art and craft of a story-telling while doing mission among the religions of Asia.¹² In Asia, narratives (*itihahas, puranas*, myths, poems, metaphors) are the vehicles for exchanging experience and thus they construct and constitute the identity of the community. By telling and retelling the stories communities are formed. So also is the case of Jewish society. Like in Asia they have a story culture. They even transform historical events into a story format and make them symbolic so much so that secular history becomes a revelatory medium.

Look into the ways of great seers, Sufis, Kabir, Rama Krishna Paramahansa, Ramana Maharishi, who communicate, by and large, through stories and anecdotes.

Jesus told and retold stories. And so many stories were told about Jesus. We too became part of an unbroken tradition of storytelling. Christianity is a community of story tellers (a community at table together).¹³ In the early Church disciples gathered at the table to tell the stories of their Kingdom ministry, thus they are empowered and

motivated mutually and such gathering naturally and spontaneously culminate in 'breaking of bread'! We have to return to Jesus' narrative praxis of story-telling. Indeed, Jesus was not merely 'telling' the story of God of the Old Testament but rather 'retelling' it from his 'telling' experience of his Father. In that sense his stories are autobiographical. In our turn, if the 'telling of the story' of Jesus were to become an engaging, and transforming narrative, it should not be parroting but a 'retelling' which implies a new hermeneutics and praxis. Then Proclamation becomes autobiographical, and only such language will be credible and convincing in a dialogue of religions. For one can really recount true stories from authentic experience. Our communities have become too serious and preoccupied with a million things. We become very formal, legal and ritual so much so that the spontaneity of life is somehow lost and we become forlorn. Kabir would say that for a man or woman of God experience must be spontaneous and will have many a story to tell. Look into the ways of great seers, Sufis, Kabir, Rama Krishna Paramahansa, Ramana Maharishi, who communicate, by and large, through stories and anecdotes.

The New Testament is abundant with the stories of such autobiographical 'retelling' of one's encounter with Jesus. The four Gospels are basically 'retelling' of the four Apostles' encounter

with Jesus from four different hermeneutical horizons. Late Pope, John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Asia* recommends an Asian narrative pedagogy which will introduce people step by step to Jesus. The Consecrated Life becomes credible and missional when our communities are transformed by the stories of people and become a 'story' abundant with life. Then only we can become empowering agencies to lead the people to Jesus and his message of the "fullness of Life". That's to say, our community life must embody a community sense which pulsates with the people outside the enclosures and 'common life' through fraternity, and solidarity with their struggles. People's stories must become the text of our prayer and mediation. In this way only, our community becomes really missional when it is thus transformed into an inclusive welcoming community.

7.5. Being a Welcoming Community

No one will disagree that today a silent crisis is eating into communitarian dimension of the Consecrated Life. We are living in an ego culture, and the autonomy of the individual is held on a high premium. Compared to the past generation the younger generation looks quite over/self-confident, assertive, and informatic-ridden; they seem to be very creative and innovative in their thinking and are daring in their options and priorities. But at the same

time the post modernist trends like antipathy towards the grand narratives built upon ideologies and universal theories, importance of 'here and now', media (visual) values, consumerist hedonism, pluralism, etc., have entered deep into their psyche. Owing to all these, individualism is menacingly finding logic in the community life. A privati-zation of religious life is happening through individual priorities and options. Individuals are slowly being estranged from the collective mission and an element of cynicism towards the common programmes and witness, coupled with an antipathy to the seniors, are shared in the not-infrequent 'batch meetings' and weekly or monthly get-together of the 'like-minded' in the name of prayer and fellowship! It kills the transparency and trust in a community vision and praxis. It disrupts the integrity of the

The Consecrated Life becomes credible and missional when our communities are transformed by the stories of people and become a 'story' abundant with life.

community at the seams.

In the church Consecrated Life, by and large, is envisioned and practiced in a community life. Corporate identity was held dear and uppermost. What we

find now is a shift from 'core' identity built upon charism to 'role identity' resolved around apostolate. In different words, identity is resolved around functional values sidelining the substantive values. This is what is happening also in the society at large. In the societal relations, we find a shift from tribal to rural to urban to post-urban identity constructions. This is again translated in the shift from clan identity to joint family to nuclear family to the present 'adult living together in friendship'. In the tribal/rural what is uppermost is the corporate identity. If the individual is ousted from the tribal or village community he becomes a non-entity. As we move into urban and post-urban identity constructions, the individual becomes the core and referent. These shifts are silently transpiring in the religious communities as well. Community becomes subservient and sub-ordinated to the

A radical 'individualization' or 'privatization' of community life is happening in every facet and front of the religious communities today.

individual, and his/her interests, claims and talents. Policies and programmes are increasingly worked out on the basis of individual initiatives and interests. A radical 'individualization' or 'privati-

zation' of community life is happening in every facet and front of the religious communities today. Moreover the ever expanding ministries and the dearth of vocations create greater elbow space for the individualism. As a consequence, the interface between religious life and community life is incrementally becoming feeble and frail.

In this context what is honestly needed is a paradigm shift from a centralized monastic identity to an apostolic community which is people oriented and Kingdom centric. What is to be aspired in the unfolding scenario is a fraternity sense nurtured on policies, priorities and options, not a community which depends on enclosures and common life. It should be a community that is nurtured on the apostolicity specific to the respective Order. It would be a community of shared *consciousness* which partakes in its respective charisms through apostolic activities. Praxis must be the hermeneutical principle of identity construction. It is in this context that identity of the Consecrated is to be expanded and extended to the people of God in the Kingdom vision. What is needed

is to envision the community of the Consecrated in a new Ecclesiology of welcoming community which practices a spirituality of hospitality after the pattern of Jesus' Kingdom community so that the missional of the Consecrated

life is upheld and promoted.

Hospitality was one of the missional praxes of the early Christianity. Paul exhorts the Romans to practice hospitality (Rom 12:13). In the letter to Hebrews, we note a step further to extend hospitality to the strangers (Heb13:2). This practice of ‘welcoming’ is a sequel of Jesus’ practice of Kingdom ministry. We find often Jesus offering hospitality: his ministry runs through the great feeding miracles and climaxes in the Last Supper which extends to the Eschatological banquet. His all healing ministries powerfully project God as the host, friend, and partner of humanity. Even after the Resurrection, Jesus did not rescind from this praxis of hospitality. It is heartening to encounter the Risen Christ who prepares the breakfast and waits for his disciples on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias and shares it with them (Jn 21:9-14). Moreover, he seeks and rejoices hospitality during his ministry. He is a frequent guest of ‘tax collectors and sinners’. As a whole we can see Jesus the host rather than the king of his Kingdom to which all of them are welcomed (Lk 24:30-31). Jesus says, hospitality is the better portion of a disciple (Lk 10:42). In the Emmaus story Jesus the guest, ultimately, through breaking the bread, becomes the host, who is the very bread of life (Lk 24:30-31). Radicalism of Christian hospitality runs provokingly through

parable of the Last Judgment (Mt: 25).

Especially in a multi-faith context, as Jesus has shown, the praxis of mission can truly be carried out by a Welcoming-Church in which a community of disciples (Mt 28:19) irrespective of creed, colour and caste is positively formed, sustained and celebrated. The Jews, the Greeks, Pagans, slaves (1Cor 12:13), the Hindus, Muslims, Buddhist and Dalits are all equal citizens in the polity of God. To phrase it in Indian idiom, Church is to become an ashram of inclusive space in which a spirituality of hospitality is practiced. First, what is to be aspired is an *ashrama-manobhava* in our inner space and in our community life. It is an atmospherics of inter-faith pursuit, and universal

His all healing ministries powerfully project God as the host, friend, and partner of humanity.

values of fraternity, equality, human dignity, righteousness. Therefore the missional community of the Consecrated has to gestate and nurture a Welcoming –Ecclesia. This is how the Consecrated have to become prophets, pioneers and participants in the movement towards New Heavens and the New Earth (Is 66:22; Rev 21: 1ff.) when ‘God will be all in all’ (1Cor 15:28).

Conclusion

Our argument has been that the religious has to be consecrated in the vulnerability of an incarnate God who proactively participates in the brokenness of humanity and pulsates with the groaning of creation to steward the whole of Reality to the “fullness of life”. Today we are re-discovering the message of Jesus’ Gospel of “Abundance of Life”. We are realizing that we have to construct a bio-centric world in which the whole existence, the earth, the sky, the plants, water animals, is part and parcel of human existence. Holiness is interpreted as holism and reconciliation in which the whole existence is redeemed and restored in a creative equity. Holiness is to be searched in holism of which the current idiom is Life. The whole cosmos bubbling with life is a ‘hello’ to the ‘hallow’ of Creator’s presence. The religious has to be consecrated in this abundance of life permeating every shred and share of Existence. Consecrated life is not something to be envisioned separate and excluded from the stream of life. Rather it has to become the current of the River of Life and eventually the ‘wave’ of the Ocean of Existence through obedience and surrender as the river becomes the part of the ocean. This is possible when the consecrated grows into a ‘seer’ (not mere a seeker), who is a sensitive, watchful, and alert agency and a catalyst

of life, and responds to its claims and yearnings, and thus becomes a proactive participant in the fullness of life. The missional being of the Consecrated implies this radical participation in the synergy of life and thus make the whole existence awaken to the New Light that our Risen Lord has brought about. Being consecrated means being missional in the mystery of the ‘empty-tomb’ of human travails and tragedies thus transform it into the womb of “Abundance of Life” bathed in the glow of the Easter Lamp!

Endnotes:

- ¹ Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point – Within the Cave of the Heart*, Delhi: ISPCCK, 1976, pp.122-123.
- ² J.C. Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out*, London: SCM Press, 1967, p. 245.
- ³ Richard H. Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959, p. 11.
- ⁴ Alfred Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976, p. 166.
- ⁵ John Dunne, *The Way of all the Earth*, New York: Macmillan, 1972, p. ix.
- ⁶ Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, New York: New Direction 1973, p. 313.

- ⁷ See, Antony Kalliath, *The Word in the Cave*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1996, pp. 336-340.
- ⁸ *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 2000, no. 52.
- ⁹ Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002, p. 350.
- ¹⁰ See, Antony Kalliath, "Mission among the People of Other Faiths: Catholic Church's Initiatives and Perspectives" *Ishvani Documentation and Mission Digest*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1 (Jan-Apr, 2010), pp. 56-63.
- ¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 3.
- ¹² See, Fr. Mario Saturnino Dias, *Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia: A Celebration of Faith and Life at the First Asian Mission Congress*, Goa: FABC-OE/OPH Secretariat, 2006.
- ¹³ Herald Weinrich, *Narrative Theology 9: "The Crisis of Religious Language"*, ed. Johann-Baptist Metz and Jean-Pierre Jossua, New York: Herder and Herder, 1973, pp. 45-46, in *Figuring the Sacred*, 241.

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI ON THE OCCASION OF THE 14TH DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Vatican Basilica, 2 February 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple we are celebrating a mystery of Christ's life linked to the precept of Mosaic Law which prescribed that 40 days after the birth of their first-born child parents should go to the Temple of Jerusalem to offer the infant to the Lord and for the ritual purification of the mother (cf. Ex 13:1-2, 11-16; Lv 12:1-8). Mary and Joseph also fulfilled this rite, offering to comply with the law a couple of turtle doves or pigeons. In giving a deeper interpretation to these things we understand that at this moment it is God himself who is presenting his Only-Begotten Son to humanity through the words of the elderly Simeon and the Prophetess Anna. Simeon, in fact, proclaimed Jesus as the "salvation" of humanity, a "light" for all the nations and a "sign that is spoken against", because he would reveal the thoughts of hearts (cf. Lk 2:29-35). In the East this Feast was called *Hypapante*, a feast

of *encounter*. In fact, Simeon and Anna, who met Jesus in the Temple and recognized him as the Messiah so long awaited, represent humanity that encounters its Lord in the Church. Subsequently, this Feast also spread to the West, where above all the symbol of light and the procession with candles which gave rise to the term "Candlemas" developed. This visible sign is intended to mean that the Church encounters in faith the One who is "the light of men" and in order to bring this "light" into the world, receives him with the full dynamism of her faith.

In conjunction with this Liturgical Feast, as from 1997, Venerable *John Paul II* decreed that a *special Day of Consecrated Life* be celebrated in the whole Church. In fact, the sacrifice of the Son of God symbolized by his presentation in the Temple is the model for every man and woman who consecrate their life totally to the Lord. The purpose of this Day is threefold: first of all to praise and thank the Lord

for the gift of consecrated life; secondly to promote knowledge and appreciation of it among the whole People of God and lastly to invite all those who have dedicated their life totally to the cause of the Gospel to celebrate the marvels that the Lord has worked in them. As I thank you for coming here in such numbers, on this Day dedicated particularly to you I would like to greet each one of you with great affection men and women religious and consecrated people and to express to you my cordial closeness and heartfelt appreciation for the good you do at the service of the People of God.

The brief Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews that has just been proclaimed, successfully combines the motives at the origin of this significant and beautiful event and gives us some ideas for reflection. This text—basically two verses, but they are heavily charged with meaning—opens the second part of the Letter to the Hebrews, introducing the central theme of Christ, the High Priest. One should really consider as well the verse immediately preceding them, that says: “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession” of faith (Heb 4:14). This verse shows Jesus who ascends to the Father; while the verse that follows presents him descending towards human beings. Christ is presented as *the*

Mediator: he is true God and true man and for this reason truly belongs to both the divine and human worlds.

In fact, it is precisely and only on the bases of this *faith*, on this profession of faith in Jesus Christ, the only and definitive Mediator, that consecrated life, a life consecrated to God *through* Christ has meaning in the Church. It has meaning only if he is *truly* the mediator between God and us; otherwise it would merely be a form of sublimation or of escape. If Christ were not truly God and at the same time fully man, the foundation of Christian life as such would be lacking as, in quite a significant way, would the foundation of every Christian consecration of man and woman. The consecrated life, in fact, “powerfully” witnesses and expresses the reciprocal seeking of God and man, the love that attracts them to each other. The very fact of being consecrated makes the consecrated person, as it were, a “bridge” to God for all who encounter him or her a reminder, a reference point. And this is all by virtue of the mediation of Jesus Christ, the Consecrated One of the Father. He is the foundation! He who shared our weaknesses so that we might participate in his divine nature.

Rather than on faith our text insists on “trust”, with which we may draw near to the “throne of grace”, since our high priest was himself “put to the test

in all things like ourselves". We may approach him to "receive mercy" and "find grace" and "help in time of need". It seems to me that these words contain a great truth and also a great comfort for us who have received the gift and commitment of special consecration in the Church.

I am thinking of you in particular, dear sisters and brothers. You have approached with total trust the "throne of grace" that is Christ, his Cross, his Heart, his divine presence in the Eucharist. Each one of you has drawn close to him as the source of pure and faithful Love, a Love so great and beautiful as to deserve all things, indeed more than our all, for a whole life does not suffice to reciprocate what Christ is and what he has done for us. But you have come close to him and every day you come close to him, so as to be helped in time of need and in the hour of trial.

Consecrated people are called in a special way to be witnesses of this mercy of the Lord in which human beings find their salvation. They have a vivid experience of God's forgiveness, because they know that they are people saved, that they are great when they see themselves as small and feel renewed and enveloped by the holiness of God when they recognize their sins. For this reason, for contemporary men and women too, consecrated life remains a privileged school of "compunction of

heart", of the humble recognition of one's poverty but it likewise remains a school of trust in God's mercy, in his love that never abandons us. Actually the closer we become to God, the closer we are to him, the more helpful we are to others. Consecrated people experience God's grace, mercy and forgiveness not only for themselves but also for their brothers and sisters since they are called to carry in their hearts and prayers the anxieties and expectations of human beings, especially those who are far from God. Cloistered communities in particular, with their specific commitment to fidelity in "being with the Lord", in "standing beneath the Cross", often carry out this vicarious role, united to the Christ of the Passion, taking upon themselves the suffering and trials of others and offering all with joy for the salvation of the world.

Lastly, dear friends, let us raise to the Lord a hymn of thanksgiving and praise for consecrated life itself. If it did not exist, how much poorer the world would be! Quite apart from the superficial assessments of its usefulness the consecrated life is important precisely because it is a sign of unbounded generosity and love, and this all the more so in a world that risks being suffocated in the vortex of the ephemeral and the useful (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 105). Instead the

consecrated life witnesses to the superabundance of love that is an incentive to “lose” one’s life in response to the superabundance of the love of the Lord who first “lost” his life for us. At this moment I am thinking of the consecrated people who feel the burden of their daily effort in which there is little human gratification. I am thinking of elderly men and women religious, religious who are sick and all who find their apostolate arduous. None of them is useless, for the Lord associates them with his “throne of grace”. On the contrary they are a precious gift for the Church and the world that is thirsting for God and for his word.

Full of trust and gratitude, let us therefore also renew the act of the total offering of ourselves, presenting ourselves in the Temple. May the **Year for Priests** be a further opportunity for religious who are priests to intensify their journey of sanctification and, for all consecrated men and women, may

it be an encouragement to accompany and sustain their ministry with fervent prayer. This year of grace will have a crowning moment in Rome next June: the international meeting of priests to which I invite all who exercise the Sacred Ministry. Let us approach God who is thrice Holy to offer our life and our mission, both personally and as a community of men and women consecrated to the Kingdom of God. Let us make this inner gesture in profound spiritual communion with the Virgin Mary. As we contemplate her in the act of presenting the Child Jesus in the Temple, let us venerate her as the first and perfect consecrated one, carried by the God whom she carries in her arms; Virgin, poor and obedient, totally dedicated to us because she belongs totally to Gods. At her school and with her motherly help let us renew our “here I am” and our “*fiat*”. Amen.

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