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A Girardian Reading of Consecrated Life
Empowerment of Women
Appreciative Inquiry for Community Living
Religious Community - Sign of the Ecclesial Communion
Religious: Called to be Apostles

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Life in many poor countries is still extremely insecure as a consequence of food shortages, and the situation could become worse: *hunger* still reaps enormous numbers of victims among those who, like Lazarus, are not permitted to take their place at the rich man's table, contrary to the hopes expressed by Paul VI [Cf. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 47: *loc. cit.*, 280-281; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42: *loc. cit.*, 572-574]. *Feed the hungry* (cf. Mt 25: 35, 37, 42) is an ethical imperative for the universal Church, as she responds to the teachings of her Founder, the Lord Jesus, concerning solidarity and the sharing of goods. Moreover, the elimination of world hunger has also, in the global era, become a requirement for safeguarding the peace and stability of the planet. Hunger is not so much dependent on lack of material things as on shortage of social resources, the most important of which are institutional. What is missing, in other words, is a network of economic institutions capable of guaranteeing regular access to sufficient food and water for nutritional needs, and also capable of addressing the primary needs and necessities ensuing from genuine food crises, whether due to natural causes or political irresponsibility, nationally and internationally. The problem of food insecurity needs to be addressed within a long-term perspective, eliminating the structural causes that give rise to it and promoting the agricultural development of poorer countries. This can be done by investing in rural infrastructures, irrigation systems, transport, organization of markets, and in the development and dissemination of agricultural technology that can make the best use of the human, natural and socio-economic resources that are more readily available at the local level, while guaranteeing their sustainability over the long term as well. All this needs to be accomplished with the involvement of local communities in choices and decisions that affect the use of agricultural land. In this perspective, it could be useful to consider the new possibilities that are opening up through proper use of traditional as well as innovative farming techniques, always assuming that these have been judged, after sufficient testing, to be appropriate, respectful of the environment and attentive to the needs of the most deprived peoples. At the same time, the question of equitable agrarian reform in developing countries should not be ignored. The right to food, like the right to water, has an important place within the pursuit of other rights, beginning with the fundamental right to life. It is therefore necessary to cultivate a public conscience that considers *food and access to water as universal rights of all human beings, without distinction or discrimination* [Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for the 2007 World Food Day: AAS 99 (2007), 933-935*] (*Caritas in Veritate*, 27).

EDITORIAL

As we are aware, the First Asian Mission Congress, on the theme "The Story of Jesus in Asia: A Celebration of Faith and Life," was held in 2006 at Chiang Mai, Thailand. Its main objective was to "develop among Catholics in Asia the awareness of being missionaries in their own continent and to reinforce their identity." This Congress was organized in response to the wishes of the late Pope John Paul II, who mentioned in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* that "Christ was born in Asia"; thus Christian faith was not something new to the Asians although the Christians happened to be a small minority. Hence he wanted that in the beginning of the third Millennium attention must be paid to the evangelization of Asia. Furthermore, it was during the Seventh Mission Congress in Guatemala, 2003, he explicitly expressed his aspiration that such Congresses be held in all the continents of the world, and every year in one of the continents.

The First Asian Mission Congress, in turn, came out with the resolution that Asian countries would hold mission congresses at national, regional and diocesan levels. It is this resolution of Asian Mission Congress, which gave birth to the historic and memorable event of the Mission Congress in India. The First Indian Mission

Congress was organized at St. Pius X College, Goregaon in Mumbai on 14-18 October 2009. It was attended by 1200 participants from 160 dioceses of India belonging to three Catholic Church rites in India -- the Latin, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara. The theme that was chosen for this Congress, was "Let Your Light Shine." The objective of organizing this Congress, in the words of Cardinal Oswald, was "to joyfully share our faith in Jesus Christ, to express the joy of believing in Him, to exchange our experiences, to inspire others to continue to work in the spirit of the Gospel. It is hoped that as a result of this Congress, the participants and the whole Church in India will have a deeper awareness of what it means to be a Christian, a greater consciousness of our calling, and a more sincere commitment to live as Christians."

To be conscious of our calling as Christians and above all as Consecrated men and women means to be aware of and to rededicate ourselves according to the vocation that we received. Before we begin to illumine others we need to be illumined by Christ, the light of world (Jn 8:12; 9:5) and the Spirit who indwells in us. This illumination, which is an ongoing process, will definitely bring about changes in the perception of our lifestyle, values,

interests, way of thinking, criteria of judgment, and so on. This light not only has the capacity of leading me from darkness to Light (*Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya*), but also from untruth to Truth (*Astoma Satgamaya*) and from death to Immortality (*Mrutyormamrutam Gamaya*). It is because Christ, who is the Light, also manifested himself as the Way and the Life (cf. Jn 14:6). Besides, this illumination will impel us to go out of ourselves and to be at the service of others as the light, salt and leaven. This impelling actually strengthens us for the fulfillment of our baptismal promise according to which we allow our light to shine and reach out to others. Here comes to the forefront the missionary dimension of our vocation. "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16). The intensity of our missionary commitment varies depending upon the form of Christian life that we are called to live.

As far as Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are concerned light is a metaphor or a symbol which is used basically to signify God's life and love. The importance of God's love and life in God must be made known to others through our life of witness in order to become credible in the society. "The witness, which involves presence, sharing, solidarity, and which is an essential element, and generally the first one, in evangelization" (EN 21).

There is no doubt that in this process of witnessing we are sure to come across sufferings, trials and persecutions. In this regard the Indian Mission Congress was very explicit in indicating that neither opposition nor fear of persecutions should deter us from radiating the light of Christ to others.

As a whole, in Asia and more particularly in India, it is not an exaggeration to say that we come across the situation of hunger and poverty, materialism, consumerism and hedonism, sickness and suffering, hatred, violence and death, forgetfulness of God and loss of sense of sin, injustice and inequality. We are equally confronted with the religious fundamentalism and terrorism in our pluralistic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. Such situation demands that our mission of spreading God's love and life should be carried out in the above mentioned areas, namely, liberation of the poor and the marginalized and promotion of dialogue among the different religious traditions and cultures. In this way we also contribute for the promotion of equality, peace and harmony in our nation.

Our charitable and developmental activities may enable the poor and the marginalized to experience God's love. However, such activities are seen only as an entry point for our commitment to issues of justice. Jesus came to "proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to

the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (Lk 4:18). The liberative actions of Christ are the sources of inspiration and above all motivation to reject any form of injustice and to participate in the struggle for righteousness. True liberation from deep rooted enslavement will certainly make them to feel the greatness of light of Christ.

As we are living in the midst of people belonging to different religious traditions, it is expected of us to engage in inter-religious dialogue. It is all the more vital to remember that in our over enthusiasm in spreading God's life and His love, we must be extraordinarily sensitive and respectful to the beliefs of the people and their religious practices. It is expected that we try to familiarize ourselves "with the country's national and religious traditions and discover 'with joy and reverence the seeds of the Word hidden in these traditions.'" Our initiatives with regard to inter-religious dialogue "should result in collaboration, harmony and mutual enrichment" (EA 31).

We are also equally called to enter into every culture in order to radiate the light of Christ. We are blessed with variety of artistic means of different cultures such as poems, songs, dance, plays, films, paintings, writings, etc. When we carry God's life and love through these cultural expressions people will really be disposed to receive the true light of the world. Moreover, there is the need for every culture to be evangelized so that the

unwanted elements like caste system, child marriage, infanticide, ethnic communalism and so on can be uprooted by the light of Christ.

Depending upon the charism of each Congregation we are exhorted to do the works of liberation and dialogue. We believe the different charisms are the gifts of Holy Spirit which are given to the founders and foundresses to respond to the particular needs of God's people. The more we use our creativity and innovative methods the more we will be relevant and effective in our mission. As Consecrated people our life and mission should ultimately, as our Pope Benedict XVI rightly expressed in his message for the 83rd World Mission Sunday, 2009, "illumine all peoples with the light of Christ that shines on the face of the Church, so that all may be gathered into the one human family, under God's loving fatherhood."

This issue of our journal consists of five articles dealing with the issues like the revitalization of Consecrated life by using the mimetic theory of René Girard, the empowerment of women, the application of Appreciative Inquiry into the community building of Consecrated life, community living as a sign of Ecclesial communion, and our call to be apostles. We are sure that the insights and reflections that are expressed in these articles will enable today's Consecrated persons to live a credible and vibrant life in our society.

Paulson V Veliyannoor, in his earnest effort to revitalize the Consecrated life, attempts to interpret it from the anthropological and theological perspectives. In this regard he makes use of the mimetic theory (which deals with 'the role of imitative desire in human life') proposed by René Girard. His article, as he acknowledges, consists of both theoretical knowledge as well as lived experience of consecrated life, which, we hope and wish, will make the Consecrated persons to be the salt to the salt and light to the world.

Joseph Mattam deals with one of the challenging issues: "Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society." In this regard, he examines in a detailed way how the perception of priesthood was distorted over the centuries. He makes it very clear to us that the empowerment of women is not to be understood as a sharing of power that got developed in the history of Church rather as a sharing of power that Jesus gives to the members of His Body without making any gender distinction.

James Kannanthanam, moving away from the traditional problem-solving approach, attempts to show us that the new paradigm of Appreciative Inquiry, a scientific process of discovering the positive elements found in a person, will be of vital importance for an effective

formation of candidates of Priestly and Religious life and, above all, to build up happy communities of consecrated persons. He is of the opinion that while emphasizing on the areas of strength we are automatically able to resolve our negative forces or at least capable of reducing their impact.

Sr. Tresa Purayidom indicates that from the beginning of the universe, human beings are called to live as a community. In this way, Religious life too, which is modelled on Trinitarian, Apostolic and Jerusalem communities, is a way of life in the Church, expected to live as a community in a radical way. Therefore, she goes on to explain the uniqueness of a religious community and its challenges. Finally she comes out with certain practical guidelines for a meaningful community living.

John Sankarathil, in his article, "Called to be Apostles: Dynamics and Challenges of Consecrated Life in India," tries to deal with the implications of our vocation to be apostles of Jesus Christ within the renewed perception of apostleship. He does so in the context of both positive elements of scientific and economic advancement and progress in different spheres of our life as well as the growing challenges of our modern society.

***S. Devadoss, CMF
Chief Editor***

PASSION FOR CHRIST, PASSION FOR HUMANITY: A GIRARDIAN READING OF CONSECRATED LIFE, AND ITS FORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Paulson V Veliyannoor, CMF

It was the year of my priestly ordination, and I was on a temporary assignment at the Claretian renewal center in a place that teemed with religious houses. One day as I was taking an evening stroll along the road flanked by many formation houses, I was pleasantly surprised and overjoyed to see my former philosophy professor, a religious priest, coming up the road towards me. He was a man greatly loved and respected by students for his simplicity, integrity, and commitment to consecrated life. I was meeting him after ten long years, but he still recognized me and warmly greeted me. We walked along, briefly sharing our thoughts. At one moment, he stopped, looked right into my

eyes, and said, with a tinge of sadness, “You know, Father, religious life is already dead. We are merely prolonging the funeral.”

A cursory look at theological journals, especially those that deal with consecrated life,¹ will reveal, directly or indirectly, a certain desperation to keep it alive and relevant. As one reads between the lines of the many articles, one can indeed sense either a skewed denial of the present state of religious life or excessive fear and worry about its decadence. Are we merely prolonging the funeral, because we cannot let it go? Or, could it be that the religious life is not dead; it is merely in a coma or just sleeping?² Perhaps, in the

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present crisis, we have an opportunity to re-assess, re-vision, and re-vitalize consecrated life so that it wakes up from its slumber and returns to its youthful splendor.

One of the several ways it can be done is by re-imagining its theology. There is, indeed, an urgent need for a new theology of consecrated life,³ a theology that captures its reality and relevance in the world, not merely from ideological heights, but also from human anthropological depths. “There is nothing more practical than a good theory,” wrote Kurt Lewin.⁴ This article is a brief attempt to engage in a hermeneutic of consecrated life from a blend of anthropological and theological perspectives, using the mimetic theory of René Girard. The article is theoretical, but it is also grounded in the lived reality of consecrated life, though no empirical data analysis will be attempted. I hope the Girardian lens will help us appreciate the unique assets and liabilities of consecrated life, and draw insights as to how we can revitalize it, because the world does need consecrated life as an authentic model worthy of imitation.

Mimetic Theory of René Girard

René Girard (b. 1923), one of the 40 *immortels* of the Académie Française,

France’s highest intellectual honor, began his academic career in the United States as a French historian and literary critic. His intellectual curiosity led him into the varied disciplines of philosophy, mythology, religious studies, and cultural anthropology. His research finally resulted in the formulation of a groundbreaking perspective on human nature, the *mimetic theory*, which has now found great explanatory power and application value in fields as diverse as literature, anthropology, theology, philosophy, sociology, psychology, economics, cultural studies, international relations, and neurobiology. Girard currently lives a retired but intellectually active life on the Stanford University campus where he had served for fourteen years as Andrew B. Hammond Professor of French Language, Literature, and Civilization.

Essentially, Girard’s mimetic theory⁵ is a theory about the role of imitative desire in human life. According to Girard, human beings are uniquely gifted and burdened with desire that is mimetic—we imitate the desire of others. We borrow our desires from others in the sense that our desire for an object is a consequence of another’s desire for the same object. Thus, human desire is mimetic, imitative. The mimetic desire is metaphysical—the desire is not essentially for the external good that is pleasing to the eyes, but for

...the world does need consecrated life as an authentic model worthy of imitation.

“personal significance understood as substantial being,”⁶ an inner worth that we believe the other possesses. We are thus driven by a desire to be like the other. The other becomes a “model” (worthy of imitation) as well as a “rival” (for he/she possesses what I do not have). This gradually becomes a mutual experience—the other comes to experience me as rival and model. Thus, I and the other become “mimetic doubles,” both fascinated and repelled by each other. Thus, mimetic desire invariably leads to competition, conflict, and rivalry. Gradually the mimetic conflict and chaos intensify and reach a flashpoint where we might explode violently against each other. However, at this point an unconscious mechanism usually emerges—the mimetic doubles unconsciously seek out a third, a victim, who is then held responsible for the chaos and conflict. Such victimization unites the mimetic doubles and they turn violently on this “surrogate victim” or “scapegoat” and murder or expel him/her. This, in turn, brings a certain remission of violent impulses, a bonding between the doubles, and “peace” returns to their lives—a sacrificial catharsis.

Such mimetic desire with its crisis and resolution through the sacrifice of the surrogate victim is not merely an

individual phenomenon. They occur on massive scale in societies. Mimetic conflict intensifies in a society as members turn into mimetic doubles through the mechanism of desire, leading to explosive violence which threatens the very survival of the society. Here the unconscious mechanism of surrogate victimization happens on a societal level—the society unconsciously identifies a victim, usually an outsider⁷ (individual or group) who is similar to them, yet different, who is then

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found guilty of the societal disorder and chaos. The “wisdom” of Caiaphas that “it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish”⁸ is indeed the core dynamic of the

scapegoating mechanism. Thus, the “all against one” phenomenon occurs, and the victim is lynched or violently expelled. A miraculous effect results at this juncture—the violence within the mob is attenuated (the thirst for blood is satisfied) and a sense of unity and peace within the mob results. The society then sees the victim in two roles—the victim was guilty of the chaos, but is also responsible for the peace through his or her surrender to sacrifice. Thus, the victim takes on divine properties. Indeed, the victim is now raised to the status of a god/goddess. For Girard, the beginning of human culture, institutions, and religion can be traced to such foundational murder. He goes one

step further and suggests that the very process of hominisation in evolution happened through this victimage mechanism or scapegoating resulting from mimetic desire and crisis: “Human societies are obviously not based on dominance patterns, and we can see why: mimetic rivalry among human beings results easily in madness and murder [T]he ineradicable character of mimetic rivalry means that the importance of any object as a stake in conflict will ultimately be annulled and surpassed and that acquisitive mimesis, which sets members of the community against one another, will give way to antagonistic mimesis, which eventually unites and reconciles all members of a community at the expense of a victim. Beyond a certain threshold of mimetic power, animal societies become impossible. This threshold corresponds to the appearance of the victimage mechanism and would thus be the threshold of hominisation.”⁹

Girard is not the first one to suggest that a foundational murder lies at the beginnings of human culture. Freud had spoken of patricide at the origins of culture and religious sacrifices. He famously closed his classic *Totem and Taboo* with the line borrowed from Goethe’s *Faust*, “In the beginning was the Deed.”¹⁰ Mircea Eliade spoke of a “creative murder” (meurtre créateur) that

is an essential ingredient of founding myths across the world.¹¹ For example, Sumerian mythology talks of the emergence of cultural institutions from the sacrifice of a victim, be it Ea, Tiamat, or Kingu. In Indian mythology, the sacrifice of *Puruṣa* becomes the origin of culture. Such stories are found across cultures. However, Girard’s perspective is unique in that he argues for not merely one foundational murder at the beginning of human culture, but repetition of the same,

in subtle and gross forms, in every human cultural undertaking.

Religion originates in response to mimetic conflict. Violence and sacrifice lie at the heart of religion. From the

very beginnings, religions are characterized by two features—proscriptions that seek to regulate desire, and prescriptions as to ritual sacrifices. Through their proscriptions religions seek to contain mimetic desire and thus avoid a crisis and resultant violence. However, mimetic desire is so endemic to human nature that a crisis cannot be avoided. Thus religion also provides for a safe discharge of violent impulses through its well-choreographed rituals wherein all the proscriptions are suspended and an artificial mimetic crisis is created (well controlled and regulated in time and space), guided to a frenzied intensity, and then resolved through the sacrifice of a

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victim (initially human beings, and later animal substitutes) to please an original god/goddess whose own sacrifice had healed human violence and brought peace and order. The victim selected for sacrifice is also believed to be sacred, and people eat of the sacrificial victim in order to share in the victim's divine powers. Myths developed in order to perpetuate the original story of the chaos and its resolution through the godly intervention of the victim, who had both a maleficent (responsible for the chaos) and beneficent (responsible for peace) dimension. Myths and rituals of the primitive religions thus served to keep unconscious the guilt of the majority and innocence of the victim. According to Girard, this mechanism had to remain unconscious for the sacrificial system to be effective in producing the desired results. Girard meticulously analyzes myths and ancient texts across cultures and civilizations and claims that such sacrificial systems and their unconscious dynamics are at the heart of human community, except in a single textual system—the *Judeo-Christian Scriptures*. This unique research finding was to revolutionize his perspective.

According to Girard, the stories in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures are without precedence. They are unlike any mythical narrative in existence until then. The Bible does contain stories that refer to foundational murder—the story of the murder of Abel by Cain who then went

and founded a city.¹² However, unlike other mythical narratives, this biblical narrative does not uphold the guilt of the victim (Abel) or make a god out of him. Nor does the narrative make Cain innocent. Instead, God, who is above and beyond humanity, takes the side of the victim, declaring his innocence, and at the same time prohibiting anyone from taking revenge on Cain, thus terminating the mimetic cycle of violence.¹³ The story of patriarch Joseph and the mob violence on him resulting in his expulsion to Egypt and further trials in Egypt is a classical story that runs parallel to the Oedipus myth, but with a very different ending—Joseph's innocence and goodness are proclaimed by the text, and Joseph himself embraces his brothers, thus defeating the mimetic cycle and violence.¹⁴ As Girard observes, "A thoroughgoing refusal of mythic expulsions: this is what the biblical account teaches us."¹⁵

However, the Hebrew Bible is not perfect in totally and permanently denying victim mechanism, for we do find sporadic examples of scapegoating and violence, as the process of such victimization still remained unconscious and efficacious in the human psyche. The final, once-and-for-all unmasking of the victim mechanism and its total repudiation is revealed in the Gospels, in and through the person of Christ. Through his teaching and proclamation of the new Reign of God, Jesus reveals the lie at the foundations of the world. Jesus said: "I will utter what is

hidden since the foundation of the world.”¹⁶ According to Girard, what had been hidden since the foundation of the world was the victimage mechanism and violence that infected every human endeavor. Girard equates mimetic contagion and the victimage mechanism with the Satanic force and Satanic kingdom, which Jesus makes conscious, and thereby renders ineffective. Consider these words of Jesus to his enemies: “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”¹⁷

Satan was a murderer from the beginning, and a liar who kept the truth hidden. Satan could only perpetuate his reign by keeping the victimage mechanism unconscious and thus thoroughly effective. By revealing the truth of human nature that was hidden from the foundation of the world, Jesus releases humanity from its hitherto inescapable conundrum, and shows the only way out

of the mess—through the high road of *inclusive love* by which enemies are forgiven and embraced, violence is met with non-violence, a culture of death is substituted with a civilization of love, a banquet where everyone is welcome, without any differences whatsoever. Jesus not only taught this through his words, but he attested to its efficacy through his very life. He himself became a victim of the mimetic contagion and violence, a victimization that he surrendered to without a trace of hatred, vengeance or evil in his heart, but offering forgiveness and inclusion of the highest order. Unlike the mythical texts, the Gospels and the remnant of the disciples refused to buy into the guilt of the victim, and a counter-cultural movement began that declared the innocence of the victim and invited the majority to repentance and conversion of heart.

For Girard, given the universal, unconscious grip of the victimage mechanism that amounts to original sin,¹⁸ it was impossible for humanity to redeem itself, and hence, help from outside the human realm was absolutely necessary. Hence, incarnation was a necessity for human redemption, and there is no way

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other than Christ's grace for humanity to be healed of its ills. Satan, the accuser of the victim is now displaced by the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, Advocate for humanity especially the victimized, who continuously empowers humanity and works towards a kingdom that is inclusive.

Mimetic desire, in itself, is not bad. On the contrary,¹⁹ Mimetic desire is an ontological dimension of human nature, and is the *sine qua non* of the radical opening of the human person towards the other. There is a deep-felt longing within the human heart for personal signification through identification with another. What goes wrong is when this mimetic desire settles for less than perfect object, in an act of "deviated transcendence."²⁰ The true and perfect object of this ontological mimetic desire is God Himself. This is

The humankind graduates from being a crowd to being a community.

what St Augustine confessed when he said: "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." It is Christ who shows us the way to realize this union. Thus Christ serves as the perfect and true model for positive mimesis of the human heart. Such imitation becomes positive and redemptive, which no longer leads to

violence, for all is in Christ and Christ is in all, and the other is no more a rival, but a brother or sister in Christ. The humankind graduates from being a crowd to being a community. It is here that we will explore the relevance and dynamics of consecrated life in the modern world.

Consecrated Life as Witnessing to Corrective Mimesis

The motivation of consecrated life emerges from the invitation of Jesus given in the Gospel: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."²¹ A religious does so, in response to God's call, by consecrating oneself to Him through the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience, in imitation of not only the words of Jesus, but his very example.²² This assertion of the Vatican Council II be-

comes the point of departure for Pope John Paul II in his much celebrated apostolic exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, which begins thus: "The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. By the profession of the evangelical counsels *the characteristic*

features of Jesus — the chaste, poor and obedient one — *are made constantly “visible” in the midst of the world* and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven.”²³

Through its dynamics of consecration (“confessio trinitatis”), communion (“signum fraternitatis”), and mission (“servitium caritatis”), the consecrated life provides a *model*, helping the world to keep its gaze on Christ and to realize the mystery of his Kingdom “already at work in history.” A consecrated person does it through living the evangelical counsels, which the Church calls the *foundation* for a life of perfect charity.²⁴ The very use of the word “foundation” in the Church document is noteworthy. If the mimetic desire gone wrong and the resultant scapegoating and violence became the foundation of human culture, here is a model for a corrective and redeeming foundation which leads to a communion of perfect charity: positive mimesis of Christ through the evangelical counsels.

Does it mean everyone must embrace the evangelical counsels and enter

religious life? Hardly. God calls people to diverse ways of life. However, each way of life can enrich and empower the other. What we can essentially conclude is that we have in the dynamics of consecrated life a blueprint for a refoundation at the service of a new heaven and a new earth, a new humanity, which the world can embrace in its ways of being and doing. In such a perspective, consecrated life can serve as a powerful witness to positive mimesis that is God-centered and Christ-mediated.

Religious Life as Consecration

One enters religious life in response to God’s initiative. As Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.”²⁵ No one takes it upon oneself; no one should.²⁶ Primacy belongs to God, and God chooses. One responds to this call from God, “in the footsteps of the Son”²⁷ Jesus Christ, “consecrated by the Holy Spirit.”²⁸ This consecration is fulfilled by a life of evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Thus, consecrated life is a resounding public pro-

Consecrated life is a resounding public proclamation that one’s whole being truly belongs to God and God alone...

clamation that one’s whole being truly belongs to God and God alone, and the desire of one’s heart is God and God

alone. Indeed, as Teresa of Avila said, “God alone suffices.”

Religious consecration gives the world a glimpse into the life of the Holy Trinity (hence *Confessio Trinitatis*). The life of love, communion, and self-giving within the Holy Trinity is the blueprint for an ideal and perfect human community. To the extent the human society approximates and imitates the Trinitarian community dynamics, a new heaven and a new earth would become a reality in our midst. Reflecting along these lines, Pope John Paul II writes: “The deepest meaning of the evangelical counsels is revealed when they are viewed in relation to the Holy Trinity, the source of holiness. They are in fact an expression of the love of the Son for the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. By practising the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person lives with particular intensity the Trinitarian and Christological dimension which marks the whole of Christian life... The consecrated life thus becomes a confession and a sign of the Trinity, whose mystery is held up to the Church as the model and source of every form of Christian life.”²⁹

Chastity as Singular Desire for God

A piece of dialogue from the movie “Romero”³⁰ has always remained fresh in

my memory: “The Church is a whore. She will spread her legs to the highest bidder.” My initial response to the statement was one of shock, but it soon changed to laughter. Partly because of the weird imagery there, but more because of the truthfulness of the accusation which is in fact an honor for the Church! For the bridal Church, who else can be her highest bidder than Christ himself, her groom? Indeed, like the bride in the *Song of Songs*, the Church contemplates and desires with her whole being her lover, Christ who has offered the highest price one can ever offer for another—his own very life.

The life of love, communion, and self-giving within the Holy Trinity is the blueprint for an ideal and perfect human community.

Ideally, the same holds good for a religious who is in consecration. His or her whole being is singularly directed towards God in Christ. Chastity or celibate sexuality is no absence of love, rather it is an intensification of

love towards God, in response to the commandment that Jesus upheld: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind with all your strength.”³¹ Virginity is thus a radical, dynamic, and passionate openness to God and His Reign. Jesus’ own embracing of celibacy “was tied to his proclamation and was at the same time a symbolic reality, a drama-tized parable whereby he confronted others

with the transcendent importance of the kingdom.”³² Celibacy is undertaken for the sake of the Kingdom, and hence has a prophetic character. The prophetic character is to serve as a constant reminder for people that our heart’s true and authentic desire is God Himself, and every other desire has to flow from this primary desire. Celibate sexuality thus models for the world a hierarchization of desire, directing and subordinating lesser human desires to the primacy of desire for God. For, anyone who loves his father or mother or son or daughter more than God becomes unworthy to belong to the Kingdom,³³ and would easily fall a prey to the disorders of desire and the resultant mimetic contagion. It is God’s Will that humanity may come to share in the love the Divine Persons share in their Trinitarian life, thus becoming one God and one people. Consecrated life becomes a privileged reminder of this dream of God. In the words of John Paul II: “The *chastity* of celibates and virgins, as a manifestation of dedication to God with *an undivided heart* (cf. *1 Cor 7:32-34*), is a reflection of the *infinite love* which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity, the love to which the Incarnate Word bears witness even to

the point of giving his life, the love “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (*Rom 5:5*), which evokes a response of total love for God and the brethren.”³⁴

Poverty as Treasuring God Alone

“*Poverty* proclaims that God is man’s only real treasure. When poverty is lived according to the example of Christ who, ‘though he was rich... became poor’ (*2 Cor 8: 9*), it becomes an expression of that *total gift of self* which the three Divine Persons make to one another. This gift overflows into creation and is fully revealed in the Incarnation of the Word and in his redemptive death.”³⁵

The vow of poverty thus becomes a corrective response to the acquisitive mimesis that destroys human communities...

If destructive mimesis is narcissistic and concerned about possessing every good possible, positive mimesis in the Kingdom of God operates by an other-centered *kenosis*, the self-emptying principle that Jesus perfected.³⁶ Through the vow of poverty, a consecrated person puts this positive mimesis into action. One voluntarily renounces whatever one has and can legitimately claim, and embraces a life of minimal needs and security. The vow of poverty thus becomes a corrective response to the acquisitive mimesis that destroys human communities and drives nations to wage

war, plunder resources, and rob one's neighbour of dignity and wealth.

Paradoxically, this vow of poverty is also an affirmation of a higher acquisition that does not have scope for competition—desiring God as one's true and only treasure and security. God is the highest good that can be desired. In this desire there is no competition, for God as a resource never runs dry³⁷ and gives Himself totally and completely to each and every human being. There is no scope for envy or jealousy, as God can belong totally to every person who so desires Him. More importantly, the vow of poverty is more than desiring and posse-

ssing God—it is an act of giving oneself to God to be possessed by God as His own property. It is an act of self-giving, like the total self-giving of the Divine Persons in the Trinity, who give to one another absolutely and unreservedly. For a world that is blinded by materialist and consumerist passions, can there be a better model worthy of imitation?

Obedience as Desiring God's Will

The vow of obedience arises from Jesus' own poignant surrender to God's Will, even in the most trying situation of his life. While in agony over his impending

trial, Jesus surrenders himself to his Father's Will saying: "Not my will, but Thy Will be done."³⁸ "*Obedience, practised in imitation of Christ, whose food was to do the Father's Will (cf. Jn 4:34), shows the liberating beauty of a dependence which is not servile but filial, marked by a deep sense of responsibility and animated by mutual trust,*

which is a reflection in history of the loving harmony between the three Divine Persons."³⁹

Indeed, such obedience emerges from and results in perfect harmony of wills within the Trinitarian community, and serves as a model for human communities. Such obedience is quali-

tatively different from the servile and instinctual obedience of infra-human beings,⁴⁰ as well as the blind obedience to mimetic contagion that sweeps one away in irrational violence and cruelty to fellow creatures. Instead, consecrated obedience is a conscious act of surrender to "the whole and Holy,"⁴¹ "a sharing in the obedient listening of Christ to all manifestations of the will of his Father in people, events and things."⁴² In short, it is, again, an act of self-emptying of one's narcissistic obsession with one's own designs and a radical desiring of God's Will in one's life and in the world.

The vow of poverty is an act of giving oneself to God to be possessed by God as His own property.

Religious Life as Communion (“*signum fraternitatis*”)

The consecration that is at the heart of religious life is to be concretely expressed in a life of communion. The passion for Christ is to be authentically lived in a passion for humanity. Hence, the evangelical counsels are lived out in communion with one’s own brothers and sisters. Thus the religious life becomes a sign of fraternity in Christ, modeled after the Trinitarian community. *Vita Consecrata* states: “By constantly promoting

The passion for Christ is to be authentically lived in a passion for humanity.

fraternal love, also in the form of common life, the consecrated life has shown that *sharing in the Trinitarian communion can change human relationships* and create a new type of solidarity. In this way it speaks to people both of the beauty of fraternal communion and of the ways which actually lead to it. Consecrated persons live “for” God and “from” God, and precisely for this reason they are able to bear witness to the reconciling power of grace, which overcomes the divisive tendencies present in the human heart and in society.”⁴³

God in Christ is the *summum bonum* of human desires. However, this God has, in unambiguous terms, clarified that He is loved and served in and through human beings, very specially those on the margins, the widows, the orphans, the outcast, the poor—in short every member of the society who is at risk of being victimized and expelled.⁴⁴ In short, life in communion after the heart of the Trinity, is a clear mandate towards inclusive societal living. A consecrated person primarily lives this communion in one’s own religious community, where members are not chosen by one’s personal likes or preferences. As *Potissimum Institutioni* states: “The community is established and endures, not because its members find that they are happy together due to an affinity in thought, character, or options, but because the Lord has brought them together and unites them by a common consecration, and for a common mission within the Church.”⁴⁵

Such a life definitely serves as constant reminder and model for the society at large to live together in harmony, peace, and love, even when the fellow members are not eminently likeable. The Kingdom that God desires for humanity is one where the lion and the lamb can graze together,⁴⁶ without fear of violence and expulsion, but in oneness of heart and mind, modeled after Trinitarian life of true fraternity. Søren Kierkegaard so famously said: “The crowd is untruth.”⁴⁷

Indeed! The task of consecrated life is to show the way to transform us from crowd into community that witnesses to the Truth.

Religious Life as Mission ("servitium caritatis")

The third core component of consecrated life is its missionary mandate. The Church is by nature missionary,⁴⁸ as it is her duty par excellence to proclaim to the world the Truth of the Gospels and Jesus Christ as the Way. The very mission of religious life is to manifest and model God's love in the world, primarily through personal witness and secondarily through acts of charity for the poor and the marginalized.⁴⁹ Indeed, the passion for Christ must be translated into an authentic passion for an inclusive humanity.

"Indeed, more than in external works, the mission consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness. This is the challenge, this is the primary task of the consecrated life! The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all. . . . When the founding charism provides for pastoral activities, it is obvious that the witness of life and the witness of works of

the apostolate and human development are equally necessary: both mirror Christ who is at one and the same time consecrated to the glory of the Father and sent into the world for the salvation of his brothers and sisters."⁵⁰

Such missionary witnessing is done by loving all God's people with the heart of Christ, with a preferential option for the kind of people society tends to consider unproductive and displaceable, and thus often victimized and anathematized. Thus, the heart of the mission in consecrated life is the prizing of *every* person, thus reversing the tendency towards expulsion, and affirming Christ's inclusive Gospel. It calls for a conscious option for empathy which is the very antithesis of mimetic contagion.⁵¹ Such empathy is realized by seeing Christ within oneself and every human being around, recognizing the oneness of all in Christ. Indeed, great and holy consecrated women and men of all times have modeled such empathy to thousands of people, moving their hearts towards compassionate inclusiveness at the service of the Gospel.

In summary, one can boldly affirm that the ideal of consecrated life is one of the robust models for healing destructive and acquisitive mimesis that with its

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consequent crisis and contagious violence has wrecked and continues to wreck human lives across the world. Through its evangelical counsels that tug at the very foundation of human propensities towards narcissistic acquisitiveness, consecrated life cleanses and purifies the metaphysical desire that informs our psyche and aligns it with its highest object—God in Christ. A religious who lives his or her consecration to the highest degree possible can indeed shock the human psyche and freeze it in its drive towards evil, and re-direct it towards its highest good. The world has seen what a simple life of a simple consecrated person can achieve in this regard—Francis of Assisi and Mother Teresa’s impact on human hearts serves as a worthy sample.

However, such lofty ideals of consecrated life are, at best, ideals. Given the tendency towards concupiscence in human hearts through the millennia-old acquisitive mimesis, living such ideals is a monumental task, one that can be achieved only by the Grace of God, and not by human effort alone. Thus, even in religious life, the destructive mimesis can raise its ugly head, lead to mimetic crisis and contagion, leading to violence and

victimization. It is to such dangers that I turn my attention now.

Devil Prowls Around: Potential for Mimetic Conflict in Consecrated Life

Christian life is characterized by the tension of “already, not yet.”⁵² This is the tension of the gap between the ideal and the actual. Religious life particularly inhabits this liminal space⁵³ of in-between

existence, and hence, is easily susceptible to regressions and breakdowns. Unless a religious continuously drinks at the fountains of living waters, one may find the mimetic contagion (the satanic dynamics in Girardian anthropology) raising its head in his or her life. One only needs to remember Jesus’ warning that a devil that is

cast out may roam around, return, and on finding the place empty, neat, and tidy (and not well guarded), will take seven others with him and make their dwelling within!⁵⁴ Thus the greatest of threats in religious life is to leave the inner *sanctum sanctorum* empty, instead of enthroning Christ in there, after having cast the demons out. Nature abhors emptiness, and hence it is easy for the mimetic contagion to re-infect inner spaces. Often

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this happens insidiously, without our awareness and worse, in spite of one's best intentions.

During my seminary days, we had a presentation on social justice for the poor by a nun who was practicing law. After the session, I had an informal chat with her. During our conversation, she proudly told me that she did not tell her clients she was a nun, or wear any habit or any external sign that indicated her religious commitment. She never used the prefix "Sr." to her name. "For me, serving people is my religion," she said. I thought to myself, "If that is the case, why do you remain a nun? Why not leave the Order and just be a social worker?" She being an invited guest and ours being a first time encounter, I did not voice my response. Her intentions may have certain validity and authenticity; however they are also fraught with danger, a danger that has come to infect several individual religious and Orders. If Christ is the *raison d'être* for the religious commitment, our passion for the people should necessarily emerge from our passion for Christ. Given the spiritual power that people generously give to the religious, and the organizational efficacy of many Orders, it is an easy temptation to forget that all glory belongs to God and God alone, and see ourselves as the narcissistic center of our charitable endeavors.

The psychology of self-actualization has contributed to this danger in religious

life. The ideal of "losing one's self" is predicated with developing one's self. There is, indeed, merit in this theory—after all, can one lose something unless one has possessed it in the first place? However, following the attractive theories of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, some religious have become obsessed with self esteem seminars, leadership skills, and management principles, conveniently forgetting the warning of Viktor Frankl that self-actualization is an unintentional by-product of self-transcendence.⁵⁵ History has indeed documented the disastrous effects of idealizing self-actualization in religious life, which I have discussed elsewhere.⁵⁶

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The very vows themselves can be threatened by unsuspected dynamics of acquisitive mimesis. When God no longer becomes the primary love, chastity loses its relevance, and we submit ourselves to many conflicting loves and low-price bidders. Poverty is easily displaced by various types of possession-material, psychological, intellectual, even spiritual. Obedience through discernment easily gives way to one's own pet plans and projects, as discussed above.

Religious communities, by nature, are exclusive societies, with a certain homogeneity of vision and mission. This, combined with the unconscious power that spiritual figures come to wield, can lead to a sense of privileged exclusivism and herd mentality, which leads to mimetic contagion and expulsion of outgroups. Thus, without the right disposition, the consecrated person may look down on the laity, the married, and the single, dismissing them as of low status, less holy, and unworthy of membership in the Kingdom. Though one may not always consciously verbalize such views, one's attitudes and actions may become infected by such expulsions. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple is a classic example of the same dynamics Jesus warned us about.⁵⁷

Religious communities, by nature, are exclusive societies, with a certain homogeneity of vision and mission.

One may also find such attitudes seeping into relations between two religious Orders or even between two provinces within the same Order. How often do we hear about competition and sibling rivalry between religious organisms that seek to monopolize ministries, resources, and areas for vocation promotion, instead of happily

sharing human and material resources at the service of the common mission! Similar dynamics happen at the micro-level as well. We do find instances of expulsions by an ingroup – outgroup mechanism along the lines of language, race, caste, talents, and many other subtle variables within a community. If one honestly examines conversations across the dining table, one may have to confess that a significant chunk those discussions has to do with victimization or scapegoating—be it of an individual, group, province, institutions, or other Orders. All these are manifestations of the mimetic contagion that plagues us, which gives us a false sense of unity and bonding.

Religious life's attitude and interaction with other religions and cultures may also carry seeds of mimetic crisis. In pre-Vatican times,

there was a tendency to reject other religions as evil and other cultures as opponents, an attitude that wrought much havoc. Ever since Vatican II, cultural dialogue and inculturation have assumed great importance, and necessarily so. They are essential in avoiding the perpetuation of scapegoat mechanism. Christianity should not become another

victimhood mechanism by which we expel other cultures, religions, and philosophies. The Theological Commission of the Union of Superiors General on Globalization has affirmed the need for a movement from the “culture of the opponent” to the “culture of the other.” In Cristo Rey’s exposition of this theme, one can easily discern the dangers of victimhood mechanism: “When in the persons we evangelize, we discover a culture that should be destroyed in order to implant a new Christian culture; when we condemn extensive areas of their cultural world in order to evangelize them with a new culture, the evangelizing process becomes war, confrontation, apology or defense, condemnation and threat. When we accept the face of the other, then, the evangelizer tries to know and accept the other’s culture. The face of the other is no longer the one of the “opponent” but of the different and divergent that evokes my interest, consideration, and amazement, enrichment and at the same time, it challenges me.”⁵⁸

Yet another danger is the reverse of this phenomenon, where the dialogue and inculturation are taken to the other extreme whereby the uniqueness of Christian faith is compromised and the

corrective counter-cultural prophetic role to be played by consecrated men and women are abandoned. Arguing for an *ashram* model for the formation of the religious, Manavath warns against a model of “eclectic inclusivism” or “mutual absorption” of religions. In defense, he quotes Bede Griffiths, a guru in the art and science of inculturated religious living, “I do not think that religious differences can be so easily resolved. In Christian belief, there is an essential truth which is not relative but absolute, not temporal but eternal, and which must be preserved in any meeting of religions. For a Christian, the meeting of religions can only take place in Christ.”⁵⁹

Another area where mimetic crisis may seep in is the leadership and governance within a religious Order. One may easily forget that the power within a religious Order is meant for fraternal service to one another and to facilitate the life and mission of consecrated living. Those religious authorities who are not sensitive to this imperative will engage in a victimizing and expulsive exercise of power. I refer the readers to an earlier issue of *Sanyasa* which has already dealt with different nuances of governance in consecrated life.⁶⁰ The fourteen practical

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suggestions offered by Archbishop Menampampil in that issue are excellent principles to be followed in governance that leads to positive mimesis and inclusive fraternity within religious orders.⁶¹

Yet another delicate area where one finds mimetic desire playing havoc is in the kind of love-hate relationships that develop between individuals within consecrated life. Such relationships are sometimes misunderstood as homosexual attractions. Girard has deconstructed the assumption of homosexuality through the mechanism of mimetic desire.⁶² Analyzing the phenomenon of paradoxical ambivalence haunting close relationships within consecrated life from the vantage point of the science of foundational human formation, Manavath identifies, among other things, deformed idealization of self-image coupled with intense desire for communal affirmation as one of the reasons for such paradoxical relationships.⁶³ Though he does not evoke Girardian dynamics anywhere in his thesis, it is evident that mimetic desire can give us deeper insights into such phenomena. The phenomenon of mimetic doubles formed in consecrated life, especially in the initial formative stages, does merit a separate comprehensive analysis from Girardian perspective. Given the limited scope of this article, I shall leave such an attempt for future exploration.

Formative Implications

As *Potissimum Institutioni* affirms categorically, formation, initial and ongoing, is the key to the proper renewal of religious institutions.⁶⁴ There is no scarcity for documents and journal articles that deal with formative demands and revisions. Hence my attempt here would be limited to spelling out a few implications specific to the Girardian analysis I have undertaken. I hope it will be a useful supplement to the already existing literature on formation.

Formation, from its initial stages, must focus on developing openness to cultures with a sense of inclusivity.

A majority of the religious orders have an international flavor in their constitution and mission. Many religious work in cultures that are distant and different from their original culture, and this is often demanded by the very missionary nature of consecrated life. Hence formation, from its initial stages, must focus on developing openness to cultures with a sense of inclusivity. However, one does find seminaries, convents, and even religious orders that are monocultural, monolingual, monoethnic, or even

monocasteist. A possible argument could be that at least in the initial stages a monocultural community is helpful, as the candidate needs time to feel at-home and get adjusted to group living. However, the argument does not hold any longer on several counts. These days, most candidates enter formation after higher secondary or graduation. Youth is the most resilient and adventurous of stages, and there is no better time to open their minds and hearts towards a more inclusive view of the world, teaching them multicultural and interpersonal skills. Formation in a monocultural group may often create too much tribalism and in-groupism that will later stunt the radical universal availability that is the hallmark of missionary consecration. The same applies to seminaries that are singlerite focused. Even when a religious order originates within a particular rite, it must always retain openness to other rites, and candidates must be given exposure and training in other rites. This will help them avoid rite-based tribalism and victimizations later.

Formation houses are generally not inclined to admit to their communities formees from other Orders (that seek

such possibilities due to their own infra-structural or logistical limitations) on the grounds that it weakens the dynamics of their own formation and does injustice to the formees from outside. There is some merit in this argument, but steps can be easily taken to address such lacunae. Moreover, when such admission is optimally implemented, the merits far outweigh any possible drawback (which has been rectified), especially when such “mixing” is done in advanced stages of formation. Another trend seen among some Orders is to have their own exclusive philosophy or theology institutes even when such common institutes exist in the neighborhood. This leads to a betrayal of Ockham’s razor⁶⁵ and unnecessary financial, institutional, and personnel wastage. Such narrow focus is counterproductive as it may lead to greater ghetto mentality and tribalism among the formees, alienation from other religious, and make the task of shared mission more difficult.⁶⁶

Formation systems should seek to develop in the formees the twin-capacities for inculturation as well as ex-culturation. They should develop the skills needed for standing outside their own

Formation in a monocultural group may often create too much tribalism and in-groupism...

culture and evaluating it critically, as well as for inserting themselves with ease into newer cultures while still retaining the capacity to critically look at those cultures from a Gospel perspective. This will promote a healthy appreciation for what is good in every culture and a prophetic capacity for revealing to the culture its own foundational victimizations, offering Christ-centered healing.

One can never emphasize enough the necessity for a Christ-centered, Eucharist-focused formation. A religious community is a call to Word-centered and Word-witnessing fellowship.⁶⁷ *Vita Consecrata* exhorts the religious to constantly gaze at the face of the transfigured Christ: “Like the three chosen disciples [at Transfiguration event], the Church contemplates the transfigured face of Christ in order to be confirmed in faith and to avoid being dismayed at his disfigured face on the Cross... [T]hose who are called to the consecrated life have *a special experience of the light which shines forth from the Incarnate Word*. For the profession of the evangelical counsels makes them *a kind of sign and prophetic statement* for the community of the brethren and for the world; consequently they can echo in a particular way the ecstatic words spoken by Peter: ‘Lord, it is well that we are here’ (Mt 17:4). These words bespeak the Christocentric orientation of the whole

Christian life. But they also eloquently express the *radical* nature of the vocation to the consecrated life: how good it is for us to be with you, to devote ourselves to you, to make you the one focus of our lives!”⁶⁸

I have heard, from reliable sources, of seminaries that do not have monthly recollections or annual retreats. I have personally known novitiates that do not have daily meditation. I have also known theology study houses where, every time there is an examination, students are exempted from the prayers or the Mass, in order to allow them time for last minute preparation. These practices are unacceptable. How can we truly justify exempting students from prayers due to examinations, when the theology studies are meant to be ancillary to one’s personal experience and knowledge of God? These practices compromise the uncompromising centrality of Christ in the life of a religious, which in turn, can lead us astray from the life-giving positive mimetic model, and precipitate mimetic crisis.

Formative structures facilitative of internal and external silence are a priority. Manavath upholds the necessity of restoring inwardness through formative silence as a way to heal the paradoxical ambivalence in relationships within consecrated life.⁶⁹ Silence is a means for cleansing the soul of the disorders of

desire and re-focusing on the highest model and true object of desire, God Himself. This is also done through the traditional examen of conscience which should ideally have two criteria: the Decalogue and the Beatitudes. For, the commandments provide the proscriptions regulating desire, whereas the beatitudes provide the prescriptive models worthy of imitation.

Another area for formative attention is psycho-spiritual maturity. Psychological sciences have progressively matured over the years, and they have come to recognize the role of spirituality and religiosity in

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human lives.⁷⁰ A prudent and diligent application of psychological help by professionals trained adequately in Christian anthropology, formative psychology, and spiritual guidance can be of great benefit to the formees. This is especially so, because victimization often begins intrapsychically and self-referentially. In their initial stages of spiritual evolution, when faced with the lofty ideals of religious life, young candidates may resort to the primitive

defense mechanism of splitting. They split their own self into all good and all bad, reject the bad as not-me and live a life of narcissistic grandiosity and self-deception. The reverse also happens—they reject the good within them and consider themselves all bad, and live in covert narcissism. In either case, it is the victimization and annihilation of actual parts of their own being—one part plots against the other and casts it out. Often the cast-out part is projected onto those outside, and this then fuels the paradoxical love-hate relations, mimetic conflicts, and scapegoat mechanism within one's world. Spiritually informed psychological assistance can help the formee to own up his or her own unwholesome parts, which enables him or her to appreciate the necessity of the healing grace of Christ that alone can transform the inner, wounded self. This also, in turn, helps the person to be compassionate to others around, as one realizes that others also carry gifts and wounds as he or she does, and thus is a fellow pilgrim. Only such realization can lead to compassionate coexistence under the redemptive mimesis of God.

Ministerial exposure to other religions and anathematized sections of society are often part of initial formation. However, it is important that there is sensitive and skilled supervision so as to identify subtle and covert attitudes and feeling tones that color one's relationship with such groups,

and correct signs of mimetic power differentials which the formees themselves may often be unaware of.

In 2004, the World Congress on Consecrated Life identified seven virtues essential in formation for consecrated life. They are: depth through Gospel discernment and authenticity, hospitality and gratitude, non-violence and meekness, liberty of spirit, boldness and creativity, tolerance and dialogue, and simplicity through the valuing resources of the poor and despised.⁷¹ These virtues are at the service of a positive mimesis that is centered on Christ, and an inclusive life style that heals the disorders of desire and their resultant crises and violence. A formation program that takes these virtues seriously would indeed awaken consecrated life from its current coma and make it an authentic witness to the Truth of the Gospel before the world.

The same Congress adopted two Gospel icons to capture its theme, "Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity": the Samaritan Woman and the Good Samaritan.⁷² Indeed, no better icons, except that of the Blessed Mother, can capture the imperative and dynamics

of consecrated life as seen through Girardian lens. The Samaritan Woman is the quintessential icon of a loving gaze focused on the highest model worthy of imitation and a metaphysical desire that seeks living waters offered by God Himself. Like the Samaritan Woman, a consecrated person lives in the presence of Christ, beholding and beheld by a mutual passion that is life giving. Such presence must necessarily overflow into the society, to one's own brothers and

sisters, in a spontaneous act of loving inclusiveness that seeks to unite, embrace, and heal, even at one's personal expense. The icon of the Good Samaritan perfectly captures this dynamic of passion for humanity. It is indeed enlightening that both these icons are Samaritans, expelled victims of the societies of their day, who are now rehabilitated and placed at the center as models for

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us! Indeed, the task of consecrated life is to model a life of positive mimesis that desires the highest good and shares the same with the whole world. A tall order, indeed, but one that is absolutely essential for healing the universe. To the extent we can approximate this ideal, to that extent consecrated life will remain alive, vibrant, and relevant.

Endnotes:

- 1 In this article, the terms “religious life” and “consecrated life” are used interchangeably, with no differences intended in their nuances. Also, these terms, as used in this article, are intended to cover both monastic and ministerial forms of religious life.
- 2 For a humorous, but enlightening analogy of the present illness of the consecrated life, read Bandhu Ishanand Vempeny, “Governance in Religious Life,” *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life*, Vol. 3, No.1 2008, pp. 29-30.
- 3 José Cristo Rey García Paredes, “A Theology of Religious Life for our Times,” *Religious Life Asia*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2001, pp. 65-76.
- 4 Kurt Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science: Selected Theoretical Papers*, London: Tavistock, 1952, p. 169.
- 5 Given the limited scope of this article, it is impossible to do justice to the entire spectrum of the dynamics of the mimetic theory and its diverse applications. Readers are directed to: James G. Williams (Editor), *The Girard Reader*, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996, for a detailed and faithful description of the Girardian theory. Girard’s own books, especially the following, are highly recommended, though reading Girard can be intellectually challenging, given his style of writing and the diverse terrain he grazes: *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1965; *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977; *The Scapegoat*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986; *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987; *I Saw Satan Fall Like Lightning*, New York: Orbis, 2008; René Girard, Pierpaolo Antonello, & João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture*, London: Continuum International Publishing, 2007. In the last book mentioned, Girard offers a few correctives to some of his own ideas in his previous books, especially the *Things Hidden*, and hence, it is a must-read for an update of his ideas.
- 6 Robert Hamerton-Kelly, “A Tribute to René Girard on his 70th Birthday,” *Contagion*, Vol. 1, 1994, p. ix.
- 7 The surrogate victim could be an insider as well, as long as the victim is similar enough to be considered one like them, yet different enough to be considered uniquely alien. The victim thus becomes essentially an outsider, as he/she is held responsible for the chaos within the group.
- 8 John 11: 50.
- 9 René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, p. 95.

- 10 Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo," J. Strachey (Editor & Translator), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 13, London: Hogarth Press, 1961/1913, p. 161.
- 11 Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, Willard R. Trask (Translator), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- 12 Cf. Gen 4:1-26.
- 13 R. Girard, *I Saw Satan Fall Like Lightning*, pp. 82-85.
- 14 R. Girard, *I Saw Satan Fall Like Lightning*, pp. 107-112.
- 15 R. Girard, *I Saw Satan Fall Like Lightning*, p. 112.
- 16 Matthew 13:35.
- 17 John 8: 43-44.
- 18 For an excellent interpretation of original sin through Girardian perspective, see James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes*, New York: Crossroad, 1998.
- 19 One of the significant criticisms of Girardian theory has been its extreme emphasis on the link between mimetic desire and violence. However, such criticism emerges from an imperfect reading of Girard. Girard was initially struck by the link between mimesis and violence across cultures and myths that his initial writings were exclusively focused on it. This is also better understood in the context of original sin and the concupiscence that remains within us towards evil.
- 20 Robert Hamerton-Kelly, "A Tribute to René Girard on his 70th Birthday," p. ix.
- 21 Matthew 19:21.
- 22 *Lumen Gentium*, 43.
- 23 *Vita Consecrata*, 1.
- 24 *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1.
- 25 John 15:16.
- 26 Elijah of the pre-Horeb event of 1 Kings 19 is a classic case of a person who, in passionate love for God, takes upon oneself this consecration. God had to take Elijah through a corrective emotional experience in order to transform him and teach him of God's primacy. An analysis of this Elijah event and its implications for consecrated life may be found in Paulson V Veliyannoor, "Elijah's Call to Self-Transcendence: Learning the Fundamentals of Consecrated Life on

*Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity:
A Girardian Reading of Consecrated Life, and its Formative Implications*

- Mount Horeb,” *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life*, Vol. 2, No.1, 2007, pp. 37-54.
- 27 *Vita Consecrata*, 18.
- 28 *Vita Consecrata*, 19.
- 29 *Vita Consecrata*, 21.
- 30 John Duigan (Director), *Romero* [Motion Picture], USA: Paulist Pictures, 1989.
- 31 Mark 12:30.
- 32 John M. Lozano, *Life as Parable: Reinterpreting the Religious Life*, New York: Paulist Press, 1986, p. 108
- 33 Matthew 10:37.
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- 36 Philippians 2:1-11.
- 37 Cf. John 4:14.
- 38 Luke 22:42.
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- 40 Adrian van Kaam, *The Vowed Life*, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1968, pp. 24-26.
- 41 Adrian van Kaam, *The Vowed Life*, pp. 24-26.
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- 43 *Vita Consecrata*, 41.
- 44 Just a few samples: Deut. 15:7-8; Lev. 19:33; Is. 58:5-11; Jer 22:3; Amos 5:1-12; Luke 14:12-14; Mt 25: 31-46.
- 45 *Potissimum Institutioni*, 26.
- 46 Isaiah 11:6-10; 65:25.
- 47 Søren Kierkegaard, “The Point of View,” Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Translators), *Kierkegaard’s Writings*, Vol. 22, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
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- 50 *Vita Consecrata*, 72.
- 51 For a discussion of contagion and empathy, see Ann W. Astell, “Saintly Mimesis, Contagion, and Empathy in the Thought of Rene Girard, Edith Stein, and Simone Weil,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2004, pp.116-131.
- 52 “Already, not yet” is a concept first developed in the context of Kingdom theology by theologian Gerhardus Vos.
- 53 Cf. Diarmuid O’Murchu, *A Prophetic Vision*, Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1991.
- 54 Cf. Matthew 12: 43-45.
- 55 Viktor E. Frankl, “Self-transcendence as a Human Phenomenon,” A. J. Sutich & M. A. Wic (Editors), *Readings in Humanistic Psychology*, New York: Free Press, 1969.
- 56 Paulson V Veliyannoor, “Elijah’s Call to Self-Transcendence: Learning the Fundamentals of consecrated life on Mount Horeb,” *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2007, pp. 37-54.
- 57 Luke 18: 9-14.

- 58 José Cristo Rey García Paredes, "A New Style: 'The Culture of the Other'," *Religious Life Asia*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2001, p. 67.
- 59 As quoted in Xavier E. Manavath, "Christian Ashram: A Formative Habitus for Spiritual Formation in the Religious Diversity of India," *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life*, Vol. 3, No.1, 2008, p. 81.
- 60 *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2008.
- 61 Thomas Menampampil, "Leadership in Religious Communities," *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life*, Vol. 3, No.1, 2008, pp. 56-58.
- 62 R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, pp. 335-338.
- 63 Xavier Emmanuel Manavath, *Living Creatively the Paradoxical Conflict of Love-Hate in Relationships: A Spiritual Approach*, Unpublished Dissertation, Duquesne University, University Microfilms International, 1992.
- 64 *Potissimum Institutioni*, 1.
- 65 This is a principle attributed to William of Ockham, a 14th century logician and Franciscan friar: "*entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitate*," meaning "entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity."
- 66 Religious who have done their studies in common institutes generally speak of such experience positively. They find such interaction with other religious productive in terms of personal spirituality and future ministries, and they find themselves more open to shared mission. There are also novitiates that have experimented with inter-novitiate programs and have reaped benefits. However, care must be taken for ensuring optimal proportion between such shared formation, and formation unique and specific to each Order.
- 67 Augustine Mulloor, "Religious Community: A Call to Word centered and Word witnessing Fellowship," *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life*, Vol. 3, No.2, 2008, pp.139-150. See also, Arul Jesu Robin, "The Word of God in the Call and Consecration" *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2008, pp. 111-130.
- 68 *Vita Consecrata*, 15.
- 69 X. E. Manavath, *Living Creatively the Paradoxical Conflict of Love-Hate in Relationships: A Spiritual Approach*, pp. 271-324.
- 70 Harold G. Koenig (Editor), *Handbook of Religion and Mental Health*, New York: Academic Press, 1998.
- 71 For a fruitful discussion on these seven virtues, see Judette Gallares, "The 'Seven Contemporary Virtues': A Beginning Consideration," *Religious Life Asia*, Vol.7, No. 2, 2005, pp.1-19.
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EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

(COMMENTS ON THE CBCI DOCUMENT ON THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN)

Joseph Mattam, SJ

The 28th General Body Meeting of CBCI was held at XLRI in Jamshedpur, from 13 to 20 February 2008 in the context of the 20th anniversary of the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (the Dignity of Women). The participants—160 Bishops from the 3 *sui juris* Churches of the Catholic Communion in India, and 40 lay and religious women and 7 lay men representing all the 12 ecclesiastical regions of the country—produced a very challenging document on the “Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society.”

This is not the first time that the CBCI has taken note of this issue. Already in

1984, there was a CBCI-initiated *Consultation on Women* held in Mumbai, on the “Role of Women in the Church and Society.” In 1992, the concerns of women were taken up again at the Plenary Assembly of the CBCI in Pune, which led to the setting up of a Women’s Desk with the appointment of the first Woman Secretary to the Office of the CBCI. In 1996, the Women’s Desk was raised to the status of a Commission. There is a growing awareness among the Bishops that while the Church and society undergo rapid changes, women are being marginalised and continue to suffer, and that their concerns are not adequately addressed

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either in the Church or in society. This conviction led the CBCI to issue the present Document.

A Brief Synopsis of the Document

1. Actual Situation of Women

The Document begins by looking at the actual situation of women in the Church and Society in India. Though we have examples of empowered women in leadership positions and role-models like Blessed Mother Theresa . . . , nevertheless the reality of women of all sections reveals instances of domestic and societal violence on young girls and women...female feticide, infanticide, rape, molestation, kidnapping, abduction, battering, dowry deaths, murdering, trafficking for sex and slavery exist even today.” The condition of the marginalized groups such as Dalits, Tribals, backward castes and minorities is truly deplorable “due to poverty, ill-health, lack of access to literacy and appropriate knowledge and lack of hygiene and potable water.” Besides, they suffer from the displacement from their lands, and the “systemic and structural violence that enslave them and dehumanize them economically, socio-politically and religio-culturally.”

Gender discrimination is not without its effects on boys and men, as it “damages their psyche and increases the incidence of morbidity and crime among them,” leading to “distrust, conflict,

competition and many forms of subtle abuse... Such discrimination thus has negative consequences on human relations.”

Already in 1992 the CBCI had “noticed that the structures which facilitate collaborative partnership between women and men as well as clergy and laity need improvement.” The Bishops admitted that “the women feel discriminated against, even in the

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Church.” They recognized the near total absence of women’s presence in the decision making processes in the Church at various levels, and that “their potentials are yet to be sufficiently tapped in the administrative and executive roles, as well as theological, liturgical, pastoral and missionary apostolate of the Church.”

2. An Analysis of the Causes

The culture of patriarchy, preference for sons leading to the marginalization and exclusion of women, and male domina-

tion over women at every area of life perpetuate gender discrimination. Such a culture produces stereotyped notions that make women both victims and victimizers. The process of globalization, fundamentalism and communalism too lead to the increasing pauperization and violence against women. The absence of a spirituality based on women's experiences and insights into God, Mission, etc., have impoverished the Church.

3. Signs of Hope

The Catholic Church has played a prominent role to improve the status of women by education of girls and through its multiple interventions in the fields of

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welfare, health and the empowerment process to organize women. Government and non-governmental organizations, trade unions and social movements too have played a significant role in facilitating gender justice. These initiatives have

enabled many women leaders, both lay and religious, to emerge in the public sphere. The rise of counter-cultural literature and the revival of subjugated memories of resistance by women against oppression and exploitation are effecting change in mindsets of people. The Bishops seem to be satisfied that the "promotion of appropriate ecclesiastical ministries among women in the Church is another sign of their participation in the mission of the Church." This, however, seems to be rather a wishful thinking!

4. The Vision of Christ

In the context of Palestinian Judaism, we see not only Jesus' concern for women, "but also his radical re-defining of their place and role in their society." Jesus not only liberated them from their oppressive traditions but upheld their dignity, e.g., the Samaritan woman and Mary and Martha. He used women's life-experiences as a paradigm of God's love and Christian discipleship for all: woman and the lost coin, woman and the dough, and woman at birth pangs. Even at his death and Resurrection women were among those who bore testimony; it was to them that Jesus entrusted the mission to announce the Good News of the Resurrection to his disciples.

St. Paul reiterates the equality of men and women (Gal 3:28); the early Christian Community was sustained by

the deep faith of women who shared in the apostolic ministry, e.g., Priscilla, Lydia, Phoebe.

The Church continues to uphold the dignity of women, uniqueness of motherhood and the complementarity and reciprocity between men and women. The Church recognises the witness born by women in the face of

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persecution: Sr. Rani Maria in Madhya Pradesh, Mrs. Graham Steins in Orissa, as well as many women and men of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Chattisgarh, and now again in Orissa and Karnataka.

5. Commitment to Action

The Document makes a commitment to action: "It is necessary to mobilise our collective efforts towards elimination of the root causes of discrimination against women." It agrees "to evolve within a period of one year from now, a gender policy developed by each Regional Bishops' Conference with time bound action plans for their region with monitoring mechanisms. Basing on these, the CBCI Gender Policy will emerge."

The Bishops state that the following areas call for immediate action:

- i. To overcome the cultural bias against the girl child and sexual stereotypes, impart skills for effective parenting through Family Education programmes and Marriage Preparation Courses.
- ii. Encourage movements like 'Marriage Encounter' and 'Couples for Christ' to promote the fundamental equality of husband and wife.
- iii. Incorporate a gender perspective in all the Commissions of the Church and foster networking to further the goal of a gender-just Church and society.
- iv. Provide theological, biblical and canonical studies that promote gender justice and an ecclesiology of partnership.
- v. Provide scholarships and part-time courses for women for theological, biblical and canonical studies.
- vi. Provide opportunities for theologically-trained women to contribute as pastoral workers, researchers, faith formators, professors in theologates and spiritual counsellors.
- vii. Prepare audio-visual material as an effective tool for gender sensitisation.
- viii. Offer at least 35% (moving towards an ideal of 50%) representation of women as office-bearers and members on parish and diocesan pastoral councils, and other ecclesial bodies at local and national levels.

- ix. Recognise as *ministries* the pastoral work of women as catechists, animators of Basic/Small Christian Communities, counsellors, liturgists, and community workers.
- x. Work towards a commitment for the uplift of the tribal, Dalits and disadvantaged women, ensuring opportunities for employment in Church institutions.
- xi. Make concerted efforts to address the needs of migrants and domestic workers, and keep fighting against the trafficking of women and children.
- xii. Help women emotionally and legally through the canonical processes of separation of bed and board, and annulment.
- xiii. Support women in their process of political leadership for *Panchayat*, Legislative Assembly and Parliament.

Towards this end, the CBCI seeks to join hands with the Central and State governments and other groups to safeguard the rights and freedom of women, irrespective of caste, creed, and vocation. They plan to strengthen institutional mechanisms with adequate personnel and finances to inspire, motivate, coordinate, and monitor the process and results of the execution of the gender policy.

6. Conclusion

The CBCI concludes the Document recognizing the need to uphold the dignity

and role of women. It ends with a solemn reference to the Blessed Mother as the symbol of the mature feminine.

Comments

What the Bishops have produced is a good document, especially the section on the action plan. The intention of the CBCI is laudable, as are the efforts of the Universal Church to improve the lot of women, and to empower them, as the slogans go. In order to respond to this document we need to focus on a few areas. There are serious problems that have been left out and we need to address some of them. Without looking into the causes which have led us to the present impasse, we cannot just say, "it is necessary to mobilise our collective efforts towards elimination of the root causes of discrimination against women." This does not take us anywhere. What sort of power are we talking about? Hence we need to focus on an honest analysis of the causes of the present

"It is necessary to mobilise our collective efforts towards elimination of the root causes of discrimination against women."

...a wrong understanding of the priesthood, which has had a negative effect on the situation of women.

situation, much more than the current CBCI document does.

The Causes of the Present Situation

The document, as we saw above, has mentioned a few causes for the present situation. There are a few more serious causes to which we need to pay attention.

1. The kind of spirituality that had been imposed on women, through a misunderstood notion of Mary as the humble maid of Nazareth. She certainly was humble, but not in the way she had been made a pattern for all women, especially the women Religious, to be submissive, non questioning, passive, non critical, self denying and self effacing, 'handmaids' of the priests, accepting the *status quo* as God's will. We need to move beyond this type of spirituality to a 'fruit-bearing' spirituality, where *all the branches of the divine tree have equal responsibility* to bear fruit in mutual service.

2. Some of the early Fathers of the Church had a very negative attitude towards women; this has left its impact on the Church leaders' outlook on women down the centuries.
3. Terms like "God our Father," which were not intended to mean that God is a male, were taken too literally; we forgot that these words were used by a patriarchal society to speak of the unspeakable Mystery; and the feminine characteristics of God that Jesus often referred to have been left out and women were marginalized.
4. Denial of the God-given power: Perhaps the most important reason for the present situation is a wrong understanding of the priesthood, which has had a negative effect on the situation of women. What kind of power are we talking about when we speak of "empowerment" of women? To answer this we need to look at history.

The New Testament offers us the following data. In the early Church we find the Twelve, the Apostles, Elders, Overseers, and Deacons, none of these was a cultic figure, no one among these was a sacred person, no more than any other person. The Twelve and the Apostles were the foundation of this new community. A foundation is a once and for

all reality, not repeated, not followed by others; they remain the foundation. The Elders, Overseers and Deacons, all very secular terms, arose as a response to the situation and needs of the community (Acts 6). All these were at the service of the “body of Christ” - the Church. The early Christians saw themselves as a ‘priestly nation,’ as Peter affirms: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...” (1Pet 2:9). They recognized only the community as priestly, as a people set apart for God, holy; this title ‘priestly’ was not in terms of cult, but in terms of dedication to God and holiness. No particular individual was seen as a priest. This priestly community was to be a community of mutual service, symbolized by Jesus’ foot washing (Jn 13). In this community all were equals, for Jesus had said: “You are all Brothers/Sisters” (Mt 23:8f; Gal 3:27f). No one was to be given any title, not even ‘father’ or ‘teacher.’ The members of this community were like the members of a body: each member contributes to the well being of the whole through the charism gifted by the Spirit of Jesus (1Cor 12; Rom 12:4-8; Eph 4:4-6; Col 3:11) without any claim to any type of superiority. Paul was explicit in this matter: each member has a charism, a gift at the service of the Church, the Body of Christ. The charisms were to ensure that

the mission of the Church is carried out by all the members. They are like the various colours of a rainbow; each colour contributes to the overall beauty of the whole, at the service of one another.

Incidentally Paul does not refer to Leadership in the community among the charisms, nor does he regard presiding over the “Breaking of Bread” in homes as a special function, as it was done by the head of the family where the believers

gathered, precisely as head of the gathered community. I am not aware of any reference to the Twelve having to preside over the ‘Breaking of Bread.’

No particular individual was seen as a priest.

Jesus had envisaged a community of equals, at the service of one another and he entrusted the continuation of his mission *to the whole community* without any reference to gender, class, tribe, nation, etc., for the Spirit is the source of mission and all are baptized into the same Spirit. Baptism is for mission. In order to understand what happened after the NT times, we must take a look at the OT. In the OT the people of Israel understood themselves as a priestly people (Ex 19:5f; Deut 7:6f), and the traditional priestly functions were carried out by the head of the family, the king, and the like. But in the monarchical and post monarchical period there would emerge a priestly class, the

Levites, who would claim to come from the time of Moses, or even earlier,¹ and then the God who was with the people accompanying them day and night, as cloud and fire, would be “fixed up” in a temple where only the high priest could enter once a year. People had no more access to God except through the priests.

By the time of Jesus, the OT priesthood had become almost exclusively a sacrificing priesthood,² as the teaching function was taken over by the scribes. Jesus said more than once that God did not want sacrifice but fidelity, mercy, and love. Jesus’ words to the woman at the well also show that he did not think in terms of temple sacrifices; the worship of God in “spirit and truth” was a totally new type from that of the OT and hence without need of a priestly class (Jn 4:24). Jesus never spoke of himself as a priest, nor considered any of his followers as priests. Jesus was a thoroughly secular person, a layman. It is obvious that Jesus had a very poor opinion of the priests of his time (cf. Lk 10:29f). If Jesus had used the term ‘priest’ for himself or for his disciples, it would have led to a total misunderstanding of the person and mission of Jesus. Hence it is surprising that the *Magisterium* claims that Jesus

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ordained priests! To speak of Jesus ordaining anyone is sheer anachronism, as the idea of “ordaining” (entering into the order/rank) came in only around the 4th century based on the class divisions in the empire; there were many orders (grades – like Senators, Nobles, etc); the whole system of the empire was taken over by the Church from the 4th century onwards. The “servants” became, Reverends, Lords, Eminences, and the like. If at all we want to see an

“ordination” in the NT it is the story of the foot washing (Jn 13) – but it would not be proper to say that it was an “ordination.”

Only the Letter to the Hebrews called Jesus a priest, because the author of Hebrews had a

problem. The ex-Jews of his community asked themselves: “How can our community be a religion, since we have no priest and no sacrifice?” To answer and assure them the author made Jesus a High priest and his very secular ‘murder’ a sacrifice, though Jesus had not seen himself as a priest, and he could not have ‘ordained’ anyone as a priest. But as we saw above, obviously Jesus left leaders in his community - but what kind of leaders?

There are many areas and ideas in the Bible that can be disputed; even in the

New Testament there are areas of confusion, but there is one area where no ambiguity is possible: that is, about the nature and functioning of authority and leadership in the Church. On no other area was Jesus clearer than on this area. Jesus did envisage a group of people who would be leaders in his community, and he had laid down very clear instructions as to how they were to function. His understanding of leadership in the community was very distinct; he differentiated it from the way people exercised authority in the world. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve..." (Mt 20:24f; See: Lk 22:24-27; Jn 13:1-20; Mt 23:8f; Mk 10:41f). The visual image of chapter 13 of John, where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and affirms his role as the Master, can hardly be missed. "I am among you as your servant" (Lk 22:27). "The Twelve" were to represent the 12 patriarchs, and were to be the judges of the 12 tribes; hence we do not find women among them.

The expression "Body of Christ" which was used for the Church and for the Eucharistic body of Christ would eventually be used exclusively for the

Eucharist, and the Church would become the "mystical body of Christ." In the early Church one who presided over the community, presided over the celebration of the Eucharist as it was a community action (it was to be an orderly action); the whole community offered the Eucharist along with their president.³ Besides, the Eucharist which was a new covenant meal began to be seen as a sacrifice offered to God, requiring a priest. With the above changes, the priests saw themselves primarily as the "confectors" of the Eucharist (to use a term very dear to the Roman Congregations).

With regard to the priesthood we have to become aware of the process of legitimization that goes on in every society. By the 2nd century the overseer would be called *Episcopos* in almost the present day sense of the word, precisely because he was seen as the centre of unity in the community. Besides, thanks to the Letter to the Hebrews, and St. Cyprian's predilection for OT terminology, Old Testament language began to invade the Christian community. Yet, even up to the time of Augustine no one but the bishop is called a priest.⁴ But gradually what happened is unfortunate. The term priest which belonged to the community is taken over exclusively by some men. Today in the Catholic Church out of the 1.114 billion Catholics, some 405, 450 men alone are considered priests. They hold all the authority and power over the

life and mission of the Church, which in the beginning was meant for all, without any distinction of gender. Their understanding of power changed radically as we shall see below.

What did really happen?

The type of legitimization that happened among the Jews also happened in the Church. Perhaps in no other area has the Church sinned more grievously than in this.⁵ For, from around the 4th century the Church took on the ways of the world and the leaders who were to be servants of the community began to be called and lived as Lords, Eminences, etc. Those who have important positions, functions (like the Pope, Bishops, clerics in general) are considered to be more than others, more respected and honoured; they are *Reverends, Lords, Eminences, and Excellencies*. The ambition (often unconscious, of course) to be at least a monsignor, if not a bishop or a cardinal is not altogether absent among the clergy. The Church has followed and does follow the outlook of the world which is based on one's possessions, positions, actions, appearance and the like leading to competition; this is a sickly, self-destructive world, where people live in fear, hatred, enslaved by greed and ambition - a non-loving world. In this aspect the Church has failed Jesus; his new outlook has fallen on deaf ears. Due to the absence of Jesus' outlook, the Church has defended and practiced discrimination on the basis

of wealth, status, race, colour, gender, the position one held in society, etc. This is one of the major failures of the Church.

It is regretful to think of the position, the titles, the dress, the way of life of the leaders of the Disciples of Jesus. The early Church did have authority at its head, but that was an authority of leaders outstanding in spiritual gifts, of leaders of the spiritual life; the prestige of the leaders of God's people stood high, but we have no evidence that they used external means to support it. But in the new situation created by Constantine, external means of prestige were introduced.⁶ The idea the Fathers of the Church had of the Church as life and fellowship in the Spirit soon disappeared. What has happened to the Church is that "if we are always attended by thurifiers, can we avoid acquiring a liking for incense?"⁷

With the conversion of Constantine and other emperors, and the setting up of

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Jesus.

the Christian kingdoms, the practices of the feudal kingdoms and of the empire passed into the Church. The Roman civil administration had collapsed and the Church did fill in a social need and

created a structure that helped society. While one appreciates this, one cannot exaggerate the evils that have entered the Church through the policies of the Emperor and of the empire. Under Constantine and after his time, the bishops were given privileges and honours; they were ranked in the Order of the *illustri* and took their place in the hierarchy of the State. Though not exactly sure, the *pallium* made its appearance in the 5th century, and the *stola*, the *tiara*, the red cloak and the red shoes were introduced as early as the 8th century. These were the insignia of high officials. The crozier came in Visigothic Spain in the 7th century, in Gaul in the 8th; it was unknown in Rome before the 11th century; the Episcopal ring appears in the 8th century in Spain and Gaul. Thanks to the myth of the *Donation of Constantine* of honouring the pope with the emperor's honours, the diadem, the phrygium, the shoulder scarf, the purple cloak and the red tunic - in short, all the adornments of an Emperor, even down to the sceptre were taken over by the Church; similarly the pope, like the emperor, was to have his senate and his legates.⁸

The realities of the Church were modelled after the realities of the emperor: the genuflection and the kissing

of the feet. Just as the feudal lords, the Church too had its vassals and tenants; she too had a hierarchy of nobles. She too had bishops who were princes or counts; she had chapters and abbeys varying in degree of dignity. The dress too was an important sign of the dignity and rank of the person.⁹

The vocabulary in the Church was influenced by the court: the gospel became a "law"; God is the supreme emperor of the world, and the angels his

ministers, Peter and Paul are the *princeps* (princes) or *senatores mundi* - high dignitaries of the world.¹⁰ Titles like *Dominus*, "Dom so and so," and "my Lord Bishop" entered the Church. Eminence and Excellency came from the Byzantine court. To the pomp of Renaissance

"If we are always attended by thurifiers, can we avoid acquiring a liking for incense?"

times we owe many of the forms of ceremonial and protocol used today by the papal court. Much of this is changed in Europe and in the Latin Church, but in the Byzantine and other Eastern Churches one can see the remnants of the court dress.¹¹ Similarly, the liturgy changes its nature: now it began to develop a splendid ceremonial, many of its elements being borrowed from the court: processions, sumptuous vestments, gold furnishings and vessels - all the rich display of liturgical ceremonies.¹²

Though claiming to have authority from the Gospels, it was in fact the feudal authority that justified the use of the titles and insignia and the whole system, and the day to day administration of the Church on feudal lines come from this period. The *Dictatus Papae*, the list of propositions drawn up by Gregory VII in 1075, represents the legal basis of the claims he wished maintained. “*Quod solus (Papa) possit uti imperialibus insigniis*. Only the Pope is entitled to use the imperial insignia.”¹³ Gradually the cardinals, who elected the pope without any intervention of the lay people, were assimilated into the senate of the Church, and the word *curia* was introduced to designate the services of the pontifical administration and the pope’s entourage. St. Bernard repudiated the term as an indication that secular usages were invading the Church.¹⁴

St. Bernard wrote to his former subordinate Eugenius III (pope from 1145-1153): “When the pope, clad in silk, covered with gold and jewels, rides out on his white horse, escorted by soldiers and servants, he looks more like Constantine’s successor than St.

Peter’s,” and about bishops he said, that they “looked like young brides on their wedding-day.”¹⁵

The scholastic ecclesiology was entirely preoccupied with powers and rights. In order to extricate the Church from subjection to secular powers, Pope Gregory VII wanted to strengthen the power of the papacy; he sought the help of canon law. The struggle between popes and secular princes leads to the understanding of the Church in extremely juridical nature, in terms of authority and powers. “With Roland Bandinelli, who became Alexander III (1159-1181), canon law was firmly established on the pontifical throne. For two centuries thereafter, almost all the popes were canonists, sometimes doctors in *utroque jure*, in both Roman law and ecclesiastical law.”¹⁶

In the context of the pope’s struggle against Henry IV, Gregory VII spoke of the Church as “*ecclesia non est ancilla, sed domina* - the Church is not a servant but a mistress,”¹⁷ while well intentioned in the context, it is directly opposed to what Jesus desired, and it has led the Church away from what Jesus wanted.

Generally speaking, feudalism is a thing of the past. And yet surely there still

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clings about bishops and the Curia an aura of feudal privilege expressed in dress, insignia, retinue, the deference paid to them, all the trappings of heraldry. The economic and social structures of feudalism have disappeared, but some vestiges still remain on the surface, and occasionally titles and privileges still have some real value.¹⁸

The modern states have rejected what they have borrowed from the Church, but the Church has not rejected what it has borrowed from the state. It is unfortunate. Nowhere is a servant called “Lord, Eminence”, etc., except as a joke or an insult. If we use insignia or dress they ought to be intelligible to the people of the day, less weighted with history and always commensurate with the office, which is service, and therefore all these require a drastic revision and discarding.

“Surely it is high time, and surely it would be to everyone’s advantage to shake off the dust of the Empire that has gathered since Constantine’s day on the throne of St. Peter.”¹⁹ These words of Pope John are yet to be heeded to and acted upon. There is no harm at all in dropping the titles like Reverend, Lord, Eminence, the bishops’ special rings,

mitre, the red head cap, etc. These have to go - they have no right to exist except as remnants of the Roman Empire, which has nothing to do with the Church of the poor Galilean. There is nothing to commend the present practice. A radical re-thinking is needed. What Vatican II did was a good beginning; it spoke of the Church as the people of God, but it is

only too obvious how it has been effectively negated in the Church since then. That concept has been buried and its presumed hierarchical nature gained predominance. We need to return to the Gospels and the very early Church in order to properly understand the “empowerment of women.” Only when the Church becomes what Jesus had envisaged it to be, namely, a servant Church, the leaders becoming true servants, ceasing to be

Lords, then the Church regains its authority to speak for God and in His Name.

I do not blame the bishops for this anomaly; often they are not aware of its origins and implications. Once I was at a meeting in Mumbai with the bishops of the Western Region. The question of the titles for the leaders of the Church came

The modern states have rejected what they have borrowed from the Church, but the Church has not rejected what it has borrowed from the state.

up; one of the bishops of happy memory said: “My Lords and Rev. Fathers, you do not know what you are talking about; it is not that we want to be called Lords, etc., but it is what the Lord Jesus wanted” – some of us looked at one another and smiled; all kept quiet about the matter. In a recent meeting I had with the bishops and seminary formation personnel of Madhya Pradesh about priestly formation, the question of the titles again came up; I asked them what prevented the bishops in India taking a decision for the new Millennium that they would not be called Lords, Graces, Eminences, but simply brother so and so? They all agreed that there was nothing to

prevent them from doing it, but who will bell the cat? I further added: we speak to the seminarians and theologians about priesthood as service, not as honour, prestige, and power. But they look up to the Lords whom they now serve in the Church and are waiting to become like them, the moment they are ordained. Hence, if a radical change in the understanding of the priesthood is to be effected in the Church, at least in this matter a change has to come from the top. We are only too aware of how the priesthood was seen in terms of who has more power: the Pope, the Bishop or the Priest, and finally concluded that the Bishopric was not an order because the bishop had no more power than a priest

to consecrate the Eucharist.

The reluctance on the part of the hierarchy even after 20 centuries to give up this ‘pagan’ custom and to become ‘brothers’ to one another is baffling, to say the least. I hope, one of the first things that would happen in the new Millennium is that beginning with the bishop of Rome all the Church authorities would revert to Jesus’ understanding of authority and its ways of exercising it. Leadership in the

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different functions**

Church is for service as friends, and all the gospels show in no unclear terms that Jesus’ life was one of service and if anyone wishes to follow him, s/he will have to be a servant of all. Obviously the term ‘service’ is used in the Church, but

that is service of un-equals, of the high and the low, of the haves and the have-nots. Jesus meant service as friends, as equals, though with distinct and different functions (Jn 13). Jesus’ thought about his followers was clear: You are all brothers, you have no master except the Christ (Mt 23:8f) - the words of the Master are loud and clear. Obviously there are distinct functions in the Church which Jesus himself claimed when he washed the feet of his disciples (Jn 13:13-14). These functions do not depend on the gender of the person, but on the fact that the person is a disciple of Jesus and is willing to serve the community. Once the concept and practice of hierarchy is given up, there is a chance for the Church to become a

brotherhood/sisterhood. A participatory decision-making pattern has yet to be worked out.

When our bishops accept that we all make mistakes and are ready to own them up, abandoning all false claims and legitimization process that goes on in every society, the Church will become more humane, more approachable, less threatening and more like the servant Master. The Church has to accept that the arrogance of the Roman bureaucracy entered into the functioning of the Church authorities, and those who claim to be the direct successors of the Apostles have committed many blunders - which is certainly not surprising. Jesus himself made mistakes and was ignorant of certain things, which was not considered an imperfection in the Son of God. Everybody knows that mistakes have been made in the past and will be made in the future - there is nothing strange in accepting them, repen-ting of them, and starting anew. It is much more authentic and credible when the Church accepts herself as fallible, which in fact she is, yet trying to follow the path of Jesus, in spite of all her failures. Then she will be able to help fallible and weak humans, who would otherwise be intimidated by an infallible Church. Jesus opted to be like us, instead of threatening

us with his formidable divinity. The fact that false claims have been defended over the centuries is no reason for carrying on with them. The first pope was told immediately after he was given the mission to be the rock on which Jesus would build his Church, and the power to bind and lose (Mt 16:17f), “Get behind me Satan, you are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men” (Mt 16:23). The first pope had his failures, and so have those who followed him and no one needs to be surprised.

Empowerment of Women in the Church

Coming back to the empowerment of women, let us say that Christian women do not want power of the type that has developed over the centuries; they want to share the power Jesus gives to all his followers without distinction of gender, to carry out the mission he has entrusted to his Church. The God-given power to all the members of the Body of Christ was taken away from women, and now we talk of empowering them! Is it possible to empower them without going back to the New Testament basis and starting from there? In the one priestly community there are various ministries; some would be pastors or ministers (servants) at the service of the building up

Jesus himself made mistakes and was ignorant of certain things, which was not considered an imperfection in the Son of God.

of the community; this is not based on the gender of the believers, but as in the early Church, on the call by the community to be at its service. One is reminded of the well known story of St. Ambrose being dragged from his hiding place by the people and made a Bishop. The “Call” was by the people. Do we want to come to this New Testament and early Church vision of the community of believers? Then the much acclaimed ‘empowering’ will have some effect. This service in the Church is not a matter of honour, dignity, making you someone greater, more “Reverend” than anyone else. The foot washing pattern has to be taken seriously.

When we talk of empowerment, we should keep this background in mind. What kind of power are we talking about? The power as understood by Jesus (the power of self-giving love) or power as is understood in the Empire, of which the Church became a replica? If we want to really “empower” women, we must return to Jesus and his vision of his community where all are equals and the mission belongs to all, not based on the gender of anyone. Once the wrong idea of priesthood is discarded, there is a chance for the Church to become a community of sisters and brothers who would serve one another using the charism each one has.

We have to take seriously the reasons I have mentioned above and respond to them. The followers of Jesus were meant to be a “contrast community”; when they become such, the “empowerment” we talk of has a chance of becoming real, and the community of the followers of Jesus becoming the kind of ‘salt, light, and leaven’ that Jesus envisaged his ‘little flock’ to become.

Without taking these reasons seriously and remedying them, the ‘empowerment’ would be mere words, as it has been already for many years. I am reminded of the words of a Scripture scholar, Sr. Dr. Sandra Schneiders. In a meeting at Berkeley I was glad to hear her say: “Even if the Church allows the ordination of women today, I would not want

Women want to be prophetic; they want to use all their powers for the service of the Gospel...

to be ordained, as the present system has nothing to do with what Jesus wanted, and because as a Religious I would lose my prophetic voice.” Women want to be prophetic; they want to use all their powers for the service of the Gospel; they want to contribute in every sphere of the life of the Church without being barred due to their gender.

Some practical suggestions

We need to remember a few more important facts before we can effectively carry out the ‘empowerment’ process.

1. Women will have to become enlightened about the history of the Church (the above long description was a step in that direction) to reclaim their rightful place in the Church. They will have to move out of their accustomed pattern of piety, ritualism, individualism and from the tendency to conformism to exercise their prophetic mission in the church and the world by standing up for the rights of humans in communion with all fellow humans.
2. We must keep in mind that change is difficult; no society easily gives up acquired patterns of behaviour. For example, the founder of the Swaminarayans had spoken of stopping female infanticide some 300 years ago; we know even today it is rampant. Hence persevering efforts are called for.
3. The clerics will have to discover their true identity as servants of the community, not masters and lords. They will have to move away from a culture of command and control by threats and punishments to a culture of service and friendship as equals.
4. Women (Lay and Religious) who have theological/scriptural formation should form associations which could become think-tanks in the Church and help empower other women who have not had such formation and therefore tend to be satisfied with the *status quo*. Such groups will have to help bring about a new form of leadership, after the style of Jesus.
5. Gender sensitive use of words: explicitly use inclusive instead of exclusive language. For example, God is “Our Mother/Father God” or “God our Mother and Father.” In Gujarat this is common: we say *mabap* (mother-father) not referring necessarily to any one of the parents; God is not a “male” being; it was a metaphor used by a patriarchal society for its God, the unnamable Mystery.
6. Women will have to organize themselves to resist exploitation by priests; they should not leave any case of exploitation, over domineering attitude unchallenged. They will have to question any use of power that is contrary to the gospel understanding of power.
7. For this it is very important that they become aware of their own dignity as women, as “image of God,” fully empowered by God to represent God in this world and carry out the mission Jesus entrusted to his followers.

In conclusion, let me say that the beginning made by the CBCI is creditable; it has to follow up the consequences of the premises it has recognised. The action plan should include a larger frame of reference; it should go back to the roots and begin from there. One of the most urgent tasks is that the priests change their present self-understanding and go back to the servant model of the NT and Jesus. Hence we have to take serious steps if we

want to achieve anything. We can be confident that the Spirit of Jesus, always alive in the Church, would guide us in this new venture, and lead the Church to become one flock, one people, one community that Jesus envisaged where every member contributes her/his gifts for the well being of the whole (Jn 17:11, 21).

Endnotes:

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- 2 G. Soares-Prabhu, "The Priesthood as a call in the Old Testament," *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action*, Scaria Kuthirakkattel (Editor), Vol. 3, Pune: Jnana Deepa, 2003, p.189- 204, see.189.
- 3 H.M. Legrand, "The Presidency of the Eucharist According to the Ancient Tradition," *Worship*, Vol. 53, 1979, pp. 413-438.
- 4 E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, New York: Crossroad, 1981; J.A. Mohler, *The Origin and Evolution of the Priesthood*, New York: Alba House, 1979; K. B. Osborne, *A History of the Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Tradition*, New York: Paulist, 1988.
- 5 J. Mattam, "An Inculturated Servant Church," Kuruvilla Pandikattu and Rosario Rocha (Editors), *Bend without Fear: Hopes and Possibilities for an Indian Church*, Pune: Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2003, pp.203-224.
- 6 Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, Baltimore: Helicon, 1964, p. 114.
- 7 Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, p. 112.
- 8 Cf. Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, pp.119-120.
- 9 Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, p. 122.
- 10 Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, p. 117.
- 11 Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, p. 126.
- 12 Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, p. 116.
- 13 Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, p. 123.
- 14 Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, p. 123.
- 15 Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, p. 125.
- 16 Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, p. 104.
- 17 Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, p. 105.
- 18 Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, pp. 122-123.
- 19 John XXIII, quoted in Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, p. 127.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: SHIFTING PARADIGMS FOR COMMUNITY LIVING

James Kannanthanam, CMF

Appreciative Inquiry is the new paradigm in the corporate world for organizational change. It could be meaningfully applied to community living in Consecrated Life. But first, what is Appreciative Inquiry (henceforth AI)? In simple terms, it is a process of discovering the positive things existing in persons and organizations and making them happen again. For example, look into the past three days and pick up the happiest experience in your community living. What was so exciting about it? What of your behaviours or attitudes enabled this happy experience? How can you make this experience happen again? As you inquire into the happiest experience, you discover the positive strengths already

existing in you and others to create a happy community. Identifying those strengths will help you to consciously use them for creating a desired situation. Inquiring into what is in place and amplifying them to create a desired future is at the heart of AI.

AI as a very effective process for change has been widely and enthusiastically embraced by many organizations worldwide for the last twenty years.¹ David Cooperrider, who developed AI, found that organizations can achieve better results by focusing on the good things already existing than with the prevailing strategy of fixing problems. Instead of focusing on what was not

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working, he and his colleagues began exploring what gave life to people and their workplaces when they were at their very best. They asked questions about hope and inspiration and began to see that organizations were not problems to be solved but miracles and mysteries to be explored and appreciated.

Thus AI focuses on the lived positive experiences. It is assumed that every organization, or person or community, however grim it looks, has something that works right. AI selectively focuses on such experiences that give life when it is most alive, effective, and successful. By highlighting the positive, “life-giving” forces already existing in the persons and community, AI shows the ways to heighten the energy and vision and how our future can be redesigned.

In the Consecrated Life too, AI can be an effective method for the formation of the candidates and building up happy communities. With good intentions, of course, Religious are used to finding out the failures, the things that do not work than the many good things we are doing well. By identifying the mistakes, we intend to find out the ways to avoid them in the future. But the efforts are often

unsuccessful. It is not very rare still to find religious communities which promote community meetings or sharing sessions in which the formees or members have to speak about the mistakes committed by others or themselves. Whatever be the merit of ‘humility’ inculcated in the members,

such ‘torturing sessions’ invariably create anxiety and ill-feelings for one another. Instead, if the members were to discover the good things that others have done and highlight them, the atmosphere of the community is bound to be one of joy and regard for one another.

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AI, hence, proposes to make a shift in the approach: focus on locating the good that is happening - successful moments, ennobling actions, peak experiences and the like. The power of attraction of positive further motivates us for positive actions. It is not denying the negative but only insisting that it is more useful to selectively focus on the affirmative for designing the future. In the course of time negatives lose their hold and get rectified as well.

A. THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF AI

There are five principles which are at the foundation of AI approach. The following section is mainly an exposition of these principles as given by Jacqueline Bascobert Klem in *Appreciative Living: The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*, and their possible application in our community living in Consecrated Life.

1. Constructionist Principle

“We don’t live in a world of reality; we live in a world of perceptions,” says Gerald Simmons.² We construct our reality perceiving things through the lenses of our beliefs, assumptions, traditions, and norms. As Anais Nin points out: “We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are.” We are never truly neutral observers. It implies, then, that we create our world we live in. Hence, it is within our capacity to create a happy community. Change the way we perceive from negative to positive and we construct a community vibrating positive energy.

In AI reality and identity are co-created. The constructions that we make of reality are primarily created through conversations. “Who we are and what

we believe about things are not fixed notions, but are continuously re-created in conversations and communications with others.”³

It is the stories that run in the communities that create the positive energy. The members in the community are to be good narrators of stories – lived positive experiences. Everyone in such a community is interested in sharing their inspiring experiences and listening to others’ stories. In such communities we don’t live as islands bothered about our work alone. In fact individuals realize that they are only participants in the fulfilment of a common vision co-created by all members. Hence everyone has a right to hear the experiences of others and a duty

to share. But going beyond the right and duty, the members feel excited to narrate their encounters as they meet formally or informally. If all the members were such story tellers at the dining tables and at leisure times about their experiences at the school, hospital and family apostolate, how lively

and participative our religious communities would be!

Constructionist principle reminds us that the words we use to communicate with others profoundly affect the meaning

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generated between us. Our words create our world. If we desire to create a happy community, the type of conversations we engage in, the stories of experiences we narrate, the words we use are to be life-promoting and positive.

2. The Poetic Principle

It means: “Pasts, presents or futures are endless sources of learning, inspiration or interpretation – precisely like, for example, the endless interpretive possibilities in a good piece of poetry or biblical text.”⁴ We

can find good and bad, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly according to our focus. In any given community or person we can find good or bad according to what we choose to focus. However hopeless it appears, there is no person or situation without

having some traits of goodness. One has the choice to focus on the positive. In other words the poetic principle implies that life experiences are rich and there are limitless number of things we can notice in any moment, and our choice determines the future. AI assumes that there are many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive in each person or organization. If we follow this assumption we will scarcely write off anybody as a

liability in our communities. Superiors will be, on the other hand, searching for the unique gifts and talents of the members and encourage them for their appropriate use for the common mission. People are differentially talented. Leaders’ greatness is in identifying them and enabling them to grow.

According to our beliefs we tend to notice the same things over and over in given situations and people. We have certain “habits” about how we look at what is happening. The poetic principle

challenges us to look into what we pick up from the numerous possibilities of interpretation of the reality. Community living would be happier if we were to see the positives and look at the possibilities underlying our experiences. Do we look at persons and communities as problems or possibilities?

What we focus on has great impact as whatever we

focus on will grow. “People become what they think about, most of the time.” Cooperrider and Whitney observed that human systems grow in the direction of their deepest and most frequent inquires.⁵ If one focuses on problems, he or she finds more problems, but if one focuses on successes, he or she finds more successes. In our community living there are many positive experiences worth discovering, appreciating and communi-

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cating. If we were to focus our attention on them we will find them growing further and creating positive atmosphere. Is it not that we are used to picking up the little mistakes happening around us than having our minds attuned to admiring the good works of the members in the community? Hence let us be keen on finding what we want more of than what we want less.

We can be more deliberate in finding, and hence creating, what we want. ‘Tracking and fanning’ is a technique for finding what we want in a person or situation and then magnifying it. It involves finding ways to appreciate and affirm the good, which makes it grow larger. It is a form of positive reinforcement as we notice, appreciate, and call attention to what we want in the moment. Gratitude is another powerful way to help automatically redirect our thinking to focus on what is good and right and create more of it in our lives. The essential idea is, Klem tells us, to spend time each day focusing attention on what we are grateful for. If we intentionally look for what is right or working in our lives, we will begin to create more of it.

It means then that we need to develop an “Appreciative Eye.” Cooperrider explains that the appreciative eye “apprehends ‘what is’ rather than ‘what is not’ and... not only draws our eye

toward life, but stirs our feelings, excites our curiosity and provides inspiration to the envisioning mind.”⁶ Appreciating is a more open and generative way of experiencing what is present. When we appreciate, we are inspired to inquire into what we like, and our curiosity causes us to notice new things. If we have an appreciative eye, then, we will highlight the positive things happening in our communities and cause them to happen more often.

“Quality questions create a quality life.”

3. The Simultaneity Principle

This principle asserts the power of inquiry. It tells that change begins the moment we ask a question. It means, then, the quality of questions is very important. There is no “neutral” question; every inquiry takes us somewhere. “Quality questions create a quality life.” It means that we live in the world our questions create: “Change your questions, change your life,” says Marilee Adams. The questions we ask steer our thinking, attention, and images in one direction or another, which in turn directs our decisions and create our experience. Marilee Adams again reminds that if we ask the right questions before we make a choice, we will shift ourselves away from automatic, repetitive cycles and toward deliberate, focused steps that will lead us toward the future we desire.⁷

As inquiry and change are simultaneous the first questions we ask in a situation are particularly important. Questions are openings for creating something new. “Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change,” comments Wayne Dyer. The unconditional positive questions are believed to be the most powerful means to create change. A positive question is an affirmatively stated question – a question that seeks to uncover and bring out the best in a person, a situation or an organization. It is generative, in that it stimulates new thinking and takes us beyond our current ways of knowing, and more expansive thinking.

It is said, “If you keep doing what you always did, you’ll keep getting what you always got.” If we are earnest about changes in the community we need to change the type of inquiry we make. Usually our questions are about what went wrong and they are often judgemental. In our living together we can create a family atmosphere and a sense of common mission through the shift of focus and the questions we ask to one another.

Questions will help us living with a sense of wonder. Albert Einstein says, “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is.” The positive nature of questions helps us in

living from a place of wonder and awe; we unleash the spirit of inquiry from deep within, where we are sincerely interested and curious about things in general. We develop a child-like sense of discovery and openness to what life presents. If we live from this place of wonder, positive questions begin to flow naturally as we eagerly inquire into the world around us. Cooperrider suggests a way to engage in a spirit of wonder by adopting the

metaphor of “life as a miracle.”⁸ If we begin to focus on the ‘miracle’ aspect of everyone and everything around us, community life becomes a thrilling experience of appreciation of the mystery.

“If you keep doing what you always did, you’ll keep getting what you always got.”

Having an attitude of seeing what is good, right, and miraculous about situations and people would unleash a great amount of positive energy in the community. It will lead to a mystical feeling of newness, wonder and well-being.

4. The Anticipatory Principle

It states in John Schaar’s words: “The future is not a result of choices among alternate paths offered by the present, but a place that is created – first in the mind and will, created next in actuality. The future is not some place we are going to; but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found but made; and the activity

of making them changes both the maker and the destination.”⁹ The anticipatory principle suggests that the images we create in our minds about the future guide our present actions and create that very future. Our future is an emergent reality created by our present images of what we think it will be like.

Positive images create positive futures. We continuously form and hold images in our minds and then live into those images. Images are a much more powerful method for mobilizing changes than concrete steps or programs. Visualization – to picture something in our mind and make the experiences as real as possible is a powerful way of creating images. Images of the future are rich with possibilities for ‘what might be’. The classic positive question in AI for creating ideal future images is the “wish” question. It basically asks us to describe three wishes for the future within some context, such as our organization or relationship.

This principle implies that we need to create a vision before a decision. If we decide and act in response to an image of what we want at the highest level, our actions will lead us to that future ideal. Debbie Ford suggests creating a vision map which is a deliberate plan for our future so that we are not guided by the default maps which are our repetitive,

automatic programming that we carry from the past.

We conceive what we believe. Our thinking around what is possible, likely, and desired in the future acts like beacons directing our current behaviour and actions. Big changes begin small. We can find some small ways to begin moving in the direction of our desire, and let positive spiralling work in our favour to create big changes.

Our future is an emergent reality created by our present images of what we think it will be like.

In creating inspiring communities, the members have to create a common vision. The process is one of co-creation so that all the members feel they were involved in its creation and thus feel a natural inclination for its realization. Religious are increasingly aware of the need for creating vision-mission statements for the congregation, communities and persons. The awareness of everyone in the community of the ideal to which they are moving together will create enthusiasm and collaboration.

5. The positive principle

The positive principle is at the very heart of AI. It has a bias towards positive! But it has a well-founded reason. The momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding. This means that positive emotion is essential for growth and optimal functioning.

The researches have shown that positive feelings have a much larger role in cognitive functioning, health and wellbeing than what we have previously thought. They broaden thinking and build physical, social, intellectual, and psychological resources that develop personal strength, resilience, and wellness. People are able to build capacity for dealing with future difficulties from the broadened thinking resulting from positive emotions in the present.

One of the ways to build positive emotion is to inquire into the “positive core.” Positive core of an organization is what it does best, most proud of, and positively identifies with – wisdom, knowledge, successful strategies, positive attitudes and affect, best practices, skills, resources, and capabilities. As we focus on the positive core it transforms and strengthens as it is noticed and affirmed. Focusing on our strengths makes those attributes come alive, become stronger and more present.

There are variety of ways by which we can identify and leverage our strengths and interests to enhance our effectiveness and enjoyment. We need to know our strengths, and then look for ways to incorporate them in as many areas of our lives as possible. This will bring greater

success and enjoyment to our lives than will trying to fix the areas where we are weak. Building on strengths is more effective than trying to change our weak areas. When superiors focus on the strengths of the members it will also bring the best in themselves as leaders. William Arthur Ward says: “When we seek to discover the best in others, we somehow bring out the best in ourselves.” In fact focusing on the negatives, we waste a lot of our energy and time. Becoming appreciative is a major shift that should take place among religious and priests. If we were to search and find the strengths of each person in the community, and make the best use of them in the projects and plans, what a difference we could make in the quality of our community living and effectiveness of our apostolate!

“When we seek to discover the best in others, we somehow bring out the best in ourselves.”

B. THE METHODOLOGY: 4-D CYCLE

The whole process of AI is systematically designed in what is called 4-D Cycle of AI. The four Ds are: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. AI has proved that through 4-D Cycle, we can transform the present state of our community into a future state by building on a “positive core” of strengths.



Fundamentally, AI is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. The process is of co-creating inspiring images of what we want, and then building on positive aspects to make them happen.¹⁰ Four propositions underlie its practice:

1. Inquiry should begin with appreciation;
2. Inquiry into what is possible should yield information that can be used, applied, and validated in action;
3. Knowledge that appreciates “what is” becomes provocative and can stir organization members to action;
4. Inquiry into human potential should be collaborative, assuming an immutable relationship between the process of inquiry and its content.

It is worth emphasising again that AI method is one of co-creation. The Religious and priests are used to the practice of Superiors making the plans and decisions and others often grudgingly

following the orders. In co-creation, everybody is involved in the construction of the vision and naturally there is voluntary commitment to what one has participated to create.

Stage One: Discovery

AI process starts with a choice of topic for inquiry. Once an affirmative topic is chosen, Discovery is the first stage of the 4-D cycle. It attempts to describe the best of the organization’s past and present. Story telling is the means to elicit the best. The members share the inspiring and exciting experiences in the organization in relation to the topic chosen. From the sharing the members discover and appreciate what truly gives life in their organization. In this phase the members of the organization develop an in-depth understanding of the life-giving properties that are present in those exceptional moments when the organization is performing optimally in human, economic, and organizational terms, and the structures, dynamics, and other associated conditions that allow those life-giving properties to flourish. The members of the organization are helped to focus on an appreciative view of the organization. Appreciative questions are used to bring the best in the organization and to provide opportunities for them to see themselves and their situation with new eyes.

AI initiative for forming a community vision could start with a co-discovery of the life-forces of the community focusing on questions like the following:

1. Describe a high-point experience in your community, a time when you were most alive and engaged. What makes it the high-point?
2. Without being modest, what is it that you most value about yourself, your work, and your community?
3. What are the core factors that give life to your community, without which the community would cease to exist?

Questions such as these can bring to fore the positive qualities that exist in the persons and the community which are valued and considered important for a vibrant community. These are the qualities that the members would like to carry forward.

Stage Two: Dream

It is envisioning what might be. It is to identify the best of the organization's or the person's potential future. In this stage the members articulate a meaningful picture of the future for the organization. They create shared images of what their organization would look, be, feel, and function like if those exceptional moments and life-giving properties in the system became the norm rather than the exception. A visualization such as the following would help to create the image of the desired scenario.

Assume to go into a deep sleep tonight, one that lasts ten years. But while you are asleep, powerful and positive changes take place, real miracles happen, and your community becomes that you want it to be. Now you wake up and go into the community. It is 2020 and you are very proud of what you see. As you take in this vision and look at the whole, what do you see happening that is new, changed, better, or effective and successful?

The dream embodies the 'life-forces' carried forward from the previous stage and other desired qualities envisioned by the members of the organization. All these are enshrined in the "**Provocative Proposition**" that the members create for the organization. It is a statement describing their ideal organization. It "lives" the qualities they most desire.

The provocative proposition bridges the best of "what is" with our own speculation or intuition of "what might be." It is provocative to the extent to which it stretches the realm of the status quo, challenges common assumptions or routines, and helps to suggest real possibilities that represent desired possibilities for the organization and its people.

In many ways, constructing provocative propositions is like architecture. In the context of religious community, the task is to create a set of propositions

about the ideal community: what would our community look like if it were designed in every way to maximize and preserve the thrust of the community.

Stage Three: Design

This third stage is the process of co-constructing the desired reality, a movement toward framing bold initiatives for change. It is about helping people direct their attention and plan action so that they become the designers of the future they most desire. In this phase the members agree on the principles that should guide changes in the organization's socio-technical architecture and develop the details of whatever changes are thought to be needed, based on the previously articulated guiding principles. It will delineate those things which will make the dream a reality with regard to the structures, strategies, style of leadership, shared values, skills, and internal and external relationships. It involves, then, identifying the small steps that the members of the organization need to take in order to make the vision come true.

Design Stage is to ensure that the members make proper choices and commit to meaningful actions. In the context of a religious community, the design should concentrate on the practical details for achieving the vision formulated in the previous stage.

Stage Four: Destiny

Once the persons begin to implement the identified concrete actions and practices, they step into the Destiny Stage. The focus here is of sustaining the process of change, the ways to foster commitment and sustain the momentum.

In the Destiny phase, sometimes called the Delivery phase, the organization evolves into the preferred future image created during the Dream phase using the work done in the Design phase. It is the time for organizations also to acknowledge and celebrate the accomplishments they are making in moving toward or actually realizing the dream.

For a religious community there is to be an on-going evaluation and recommitment to the vision to sustain the changes. There is to be also a prioritizing the action plans and deciding the short-term and long-term actions.

Although the 4-D process appears as a linear model, change is not something that comes at the end of the process. The change begins with the articulation of the image, and continues all through the virtuous cycle.

C. THE AIA PROCESS

Jacqueline Kelm has simplified the 4-D cycle into Appreciative-Imagining-Acting (AIA) process.



The steps in the AIA process are: Appreciating the present, Imagining the ideal, and Acting now in alignment. The purpose of these steps is to help us feel good about the current situation or person, get clear about what we want, and take action that aligns with our ideal future. The AIA process keeps us on course by asking three things in our daily interactions and experiences.

Appreciating is finding what is right with the present situation or person. The question asked in this process is: “Do I feel good about this person or situation?” If I am not appreciative about the present situation, I know I am not focusing on what I want in this situation. So how can I shift to see more of the good or more of what I want?

In the first step we learn to see the good attributes, the available learning, and the positive possibilities of our

present experience. In this step we learn how to appreciate what we have right now. Finding the good as well as feeling good is important. “When we are content, happy, excited, or passionate about something we want, our ability to create it escalates. This is why the first step is to appreciate, to get to a place of positive emotion so we have the cognitive and emotional resources to create positive realities and make wise choices while going forward.”¹¹

Imagining is the process of creating inspiring images of the ideal future. Here the question is, “Am I clear about what I want and is this where I am giving my attention?” My feelings again provide helpful information, because if I am not feeling good, I am not focusing on what I want. In this step of imagining the ideal, on a grand scale, we create an image of what we want most, or what things would look like if they were exactly as we’d have them. We learn to create visions that are so provocative and meaningful, we feel excited and inspired in our everyday lives. On a smaller scale, we decide what we want in the moment.

Acting is the process of taking small steps now to move forward. Here one questions, “Do my thoughts and actions align with my wants?” If they are not consistent, what small action can I take that would help to move me just a bit closer to my ideal?

This last step is about acting now in alignment. This means taking a small step forward to think or behave in ways that are consistent with our greatest future images. The change can be something small, and does not have to be a physical action. It can be a change in our focus, our questions, or our ways of perceiving.

D. EVALUATION OF AI

AI is conspicuous for its divergence from the traditional problem-solving approach in which the focus of attention is what is in disarray – what is not functioning. The distinction is evident also in all stages of the process. The differences are highlighted in the following table:

<p>Problem-Solving Organizations as problem to be solved Problem Identification Cause Analysis Solution Analysis Action Planning</p> <p>Appreciative Inquiry Organizations as mystery-to-be embraced Discovery: what gives life? Dream: what might be? Design: how it will be? Destiny: what we want to happen?</p>

It is noted that the Problem-Solving method has the following drawbacks:

- Dwelling on problems is inherently conservative, limiting and slow.
- It creates spiralling cycles of progressive enfeeblement.
- It puts the corporate attention on yesterday.
- It furthers separation of stakeholders.
- It reinforces hierarchy and power distance.
- It undermines community.

On the contrary, AI method will enlarge the possibilities, empower the members of the community, unite the group and do away with hierarchy. It ensures greater commitment to the vision of the community as it is created together. It is not threatening to the members as the focus is on the positive. Thus the members do not need to resort to defences. It promises greater self-esteem and fulfilment for the members as the vision takes into account the members' potentials and encourages their achievements. The members become complementary in the fulfilment of the mission and not a threat to one another. There is a greater assurance of collaboration and team-work.

The question raised by AI's critics is, "Is AI pushing what is unpleasant under the carpet?" While AI has a positive bias, it is not denying the existence of the

negative forces and undesirable situations. The assumption is that by focusing on the strength and reinforcing them, the negative forces are automatically resolved or their impact is reduced. When we deliberately take our attention out of the negative, and focus on the positive, the power of the negative is weakened. We create what we focus on.

Conclusion

As noted by Cooperrider et al., “AI begins an adventure. Its call to adventure has been experienced by many people and organizations, and it will take many more to fully explore this new paradigm. These people and organizations sense an exciting direction in our language and theories of change; they sense an invitation to ‘positive revolution.’”¹² Need we as Religious and priests yet to wait to explore and revolutionize our communities and institutions with this new paradigm? If predominantly profit-based secular organizations can function on an appreciative model, how much more the Church can do so with such committed people and Kingdom oriented values!

Endnotes:

- 1 Sara L. Orem, Jacqueline Binkert, & Ann L. Clancy, *Appreciative Coaching: A Positive Process for Change*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., San Francisco: 2007, p. 12.
- 2 Jacqueline Bascobert Klem, *Appreciative Living: The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*, NC, USA: Venet Publishers, 2005, p. 9.
- 3 J.B. Klem, *The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*, p. 11.
- 4 J.B. Klem, *The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*, p. 31.
- 5 J.B. Klem, *The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*, p. 36.
- 6 J.B. Klem, *The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*, p. 47.
- 7 J.B. Klem, *The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*, p. 54.
- 8 J.B.Klem, *The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*, p. 67.
- 9 J.B. Klem, *The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*, p. 71.
- 10 J.B. Kelm, *The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*, p. 3.
- 11 J.B. Klem, *The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life*, p.149.
- 12 David L. Cooperrider, Diana Whitney, & Jacqueline M. Stavros, *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*, OH, USA: Lakeshore Publishers, 2003, p. xvii.

RELIGIOUS/CONSECRATED COMMUNITY: INTENSE SIGN OF THE ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

SR. TRESA PURAYIDOM, EF

According to the Christian tradition, as humans and as believers, we are called to community. The first humans came into existence as a community. In Genesis we have two creation narratives: Gen 1:1-30; Gen 2:4b-25. According to both, humanity was created as a community. The second narrative is much more anthropomorphic than the first, which narrates the creation of Adam (ha' adam = earth creature) (Gen 2:7). This creature was not happy because it was solitary. God decides that it is not good for the creature to be alone (Gen 2:18) and creates a second human being: "male and female" he created them.

If we look at the history of Israel, we see that God chose a community to

establish his covenantal relationship. He chose not an individual but a people. Jesus was born into a human family that was part of this community of Israel. Jesus then formed around him a community of disciples, whom he commissioned to announce the good news to the whole world. After the Paschal Event, a new community was born as a result of a new presence of Jesus and a new call. The first work of the Risen Christ was indeed the creation of a community, the beginning of a new people, which lives its unity in mutual love. The community of the twelve was reborn in the Spirit, whom the Risen Lord had sent on them at Pentecost (Acts 2:3-4; 1:15-26). This community was enlarged with all those who came

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together to be faithful to the teaching of Jesus. By baptism we too are incorporated into *the community of believers*, thus becoming the children of God and brothers and sisters to everyone. We observe here two dimensions: our being children of God emphasizes the *theological-vertical* dimension of our life, while our being brothers and sisters to one another points to the *fraternal-horizontal* dimension. Religious Life is a call to live both these dimensions in a radical way following the example of Christ.¹

The Ecclesial Awareness of Communion & Community

The Vatican II has awakened us to the concept of the Church as a community. The Church realizes that she herself is first and above all a community, which reflects and shares in the life of the Blessed Trinity. God's plan is not just to save individuals. His plan of salvation is to shape all men and women into a unity around Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. His plan is to build a fraternity, a communion. Salvation is a matter of each individual taking his/her place in the community of the Church.

The Church is indeed a mystery of unity and the holiness of the Church is to be discovered in unity. "Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the

whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission" (LG 1).

The Church is the body of Christ with Christ as its head. Communion and mission are the two important goals of the Church. *Lumen Gentium* No. 7 presents the Church as a *koinonia* of brothers and sisters who are called together from every nation.

Fraternal Life in Community: An Eloquent Sign of the Ecclesial Communion

Vita Consecrata affirms: The fraternal life, understood as a life shared in love, is an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion. It is practised with special care in Religious Institutes and in Societies of Apostolic Life, where community living acquires special significance (VC 42). The community of the consecrated persons is indeed called to make visible the Christian *koinonia* in the Church. Religious community, as *Perfectae Caritatis* states, is a community gathered together as a true family in the Lord's name and enjoys his presence, through the love of God which is poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (PC15). The *koinonia* which must be realized in religious community is no other than, nor inferior to or different from, that which Scripture in NT sets

before us as the soul and inner reality of the ecclesial community.

Religious life is indeed a striving towards true community. As religious we are called to work for the building of true communion in our midst. Only in this way can we manifest the true nature of the Church. Religious community is in fact called a “miniature church.” Only if the Spirit takes possession of our humanity, of our heart, of our need for love and tenderness, will religious communities be the “churches in miniature,” a sign of the Spirit’s presence. The Religious are called and consecrated to be “experts in communion.” In a religious community which experiences communion of hearts, the members have a common goal and this common goal becomes important. Personal preferences are overlooked. In such a community, love and service to one another become a fundamental choice, not optional. There is mutual understanding and prayerful support, sharing of responsibility, sharing one another’s joys and sorrows.

Magisterium on Religious Community

Perfectae Caritatis presents the vertical and horizontal dimensions of community: Let those who make profession of the evangelical counsels seek and love above all else God who has first loved us (cf. 1 John 4:10) This love of God both excites and energizes

that love of one’s neighbour, which contributes to the salvation of the world and the building up of the Church. This love, in addition, quickens and directs the actual practice of the evangelical counsels (PC 6).

Perfectae Caritatis presents community life as essential to Religious Life: Common life, fashioned on the model of the early Church, where the body of believers was united in heart and soul (cf. Acts 4:32), and given new force by the teaching of the Gospel, the sacred liturgy and especially the Eucharist, should continue to be lived in prayer and the communion of the same spirit. As members of Christ living together as brothers, religious should give pride of place in esteem to each other (cf. Rom. 12:10) and bear each other’s burdens (cf. Gal. 6:2 PC 15).

In *Codex Iuris Canonici* we read: The life of brothers or sisters proper to each institute, by which all the members are united together as a special family in Christ, is to be defined in such a way that it becomes a mutual support for all in fulfilling the vocation of each. Moreover, by their communion as brothers or sisters rooted and founded in charity, members are to be an example of universal reconciliation in Christ (CIC 602, cf. 607 §2, 608, 665 §1).

As the document *Fraternal Life in Community* states: Born not “of the will

of the flesh”, nor from personal attraction, nor from human motives, but “from God” (Jn. 1:13), from a divine vocation and a divine attraction, religious communities are a living sign of the primacy of the love of God who works wonders, and of the love for God and for one’s brothers and sisters as manifested and practised by Jesus Christ (FLC 1). It is therefore impossible to understand religious community, unless we start from its being a gift from on high, from its being a mystery, from its being rooted in the very heart of the blessed and sanctifying Trinity, who wills it as part of the mystery of the Church, for the life of the world (FLC 8).

Religious community, therefore, is a theological reality, a mystery to be contemplated and welcomed with faith. When we lose sight of this theological and mystical dimension, we forget the reasons of our coming together.

The document presents Religious Community as a place for becoming brothers and sisters (FLC title Part II), “a *Schola Amoris* which helps one grow in love for God and for one’s brothers and sisters” (FLC 35). Religious are not “called” to an individual personal

vocation. Their vocation is also a “con-vocation” – they are called *with* others, with whom they share their daily life (FLC 44).

According to *Vita Consecrata* the fraternal life plays a fundamental role in the spiritual journey of consecrated persons, both for their constant renewal and for the full accomplishment of their mission in the world (VC 45). This implies a spirituality of communion, which according to the document *Starting Afresh from Christ* is the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity, dwelling within us and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the faces of the brothers and sisters around us. It also calls forth an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body and therefore as ‘those who are part of me’... (SAfC 29).

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Models Reiterated: Trinity, Apostolic Community, Jerusalem Community

Trinity

The unity of the Trinity is considered the archetype and basis of *koinonia* in the religious community. In fact, religious life

is described as an icon of the Trinity for the unity practised within the community. Every Christian community is a place, where the life of the triune Godhead is mirrored, shared and lived. To live in this communion, to enter into communion with God and with our brothers and sisters is our highest vocation.

A Religious community is, in fact, founded on the Trinitarian life. Consecrated life is derived from the very mystery of the Trinity and it shares in its mystery of unity. *Lumen Gentium* chapter 6 presents Religious Life as ‘that precious gift of divine grace given to some by Father’ (LG 42c); it constitutes ‘an abiding re-enactment in the Church of the form of life which the Son of God made his own when he came into the world’ (LG 44c); it lives in docility to the Holy Spirit, ‘for the increase of the holiness of the Church, to the greater glory of the one and undivided Trinity which in Christ and through Christ is the source and origin of all holiness’ (LG 47). This communion with the Father, Son and Spirit is the source of our fraternal life in community.

Apostolic Community

The Apostolic community originated from the word of Jesus, who called each one of his disciples by name, and from the movement of following that resulted. When he met them and called them he had said: ‘*Follow me*’ ‘*I will make*

you...’ (Mk 1:17). ‘Follow me’ is an unconditional invitation. Jesus does not call one by one to follow him in a singular way. He forms them into a community: the apostolic community. He forms them by his word and example. What did those whom he called do? Did he send them soon to preach? No. They stayed with him, they listened to him, they moved around with him.

The focus of the apostolic community was the person of Jesus. The destination of the call was the same for all: follow *me*. The motive for renunciation was the same: it was for the sake of Jesus and the gospel (Mk 8:35; 10:29). For his sake they are able to leave everything. He becomes the centre of their every interest, he becomes their family, he fills their depths. He binds them together as a group and forms them to be a community of love. By being with him they learn the art of loving before they can preach the message of love and compassion in the world.

It is interesting to note what sort of persons formed the apostolic community. There was the tax-collector Levi, Nathanael the true Israelite, Simon the Zealot, Judas Iscariot the traitor, James and John who seem to be from a well-to-do family with connections in the High Priest’s family. Jesus calls people with divergent tendencies. He does not exclude persons because of their

weaknesses. Publicans and sinners, celibates and married men, fishermen and tax-collectors are members of his community. They differed in character. In fact, in the Gospels, we read about the disagreements and contrasts they had. Sons of Zebedee ask to be seated, one at the right and the other at the left (Mk 10:35-45). The apostles discussed who would be the greatest among them (Mk 9:34). The question how often one should forgive shows there were discord and offences (Mt 19:21). He bears with their weaknesses and teaches them patiently. Being with Jesus and travelling with him, they learnt to recognize him as their Master and Lord, the Messiah. As they grew close to him, they grew close to one another.

Characteristics of the Apostolic Community

Let us look at some of the basic characteristics of the apostolic community which can inspire our religious communities and nourish our community life.

- Apostolic community is a community of those who have been called. They did not get together by their own initiatives. They have been chosen and called: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (Jn 15:16).
- Apostolic community is the community of those who welcome and live the Word, in faith and obedience.
- Apostolic community shares radically in Jesus’ way of life, his total dedication to the cause of the Kingdom.
- Apostolic community is the true family of God, gathered around his Son.
- Apostolic community is a community of brothers and sisters where profound equality reigns.
- Apostolic community is a community of service, where members wash one another’s feet, the first is called to take the last place, the authority becomes service.
- Apostolic community is a community of the reconciled and, as such called to mutual forgiveness (Lk 17:3-4).
- Apostolic community is a community of people who pray. Following the example of their Master, the disciples turn confidently to the Father.
- Apostolic community is a Eucharistic community, united by sharing the one bread and one cup.
- Apostolic community is a community with one Rule: the Rule of Love. Towards the end of his earthly sojourn Jesus said: “Love one another as I have loved you. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples – when they see the love you have for each other” (Jn 13:34-35). Love is the characteristic by which the world must recognize them as Jesus’ disciples.
- Apostolic community is a community of those who are sent, wholly dedicated to the Kingdom of God.²

Did the apostolic community remain together all the time? At the arrest of Jesus the group got disintegrated (Mk 14:51). Jesus had pre-announced and pre-cautioned: “I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered” (Mk 14:27). Fr. Ciardi in his book *Koinonia* makes us note how the movement of *leaving everything and following*, which took place initially, now becomes a movement in opposite direction: abandoning Jesus and running away for physical safety. It is said that Peter followed him *at a distance* (Mk 14:54).

True following of Jesus should involve a total sharing of his life and destiny, even to the point of death. To become the servant of all, to be ready to deny oneself, to love to the point of giving one’s life, to put oneself in the last place – these are the ideals which can and

should continue to animate the Christian and Religious community.

Jerusalem Community

A characteristic note of the first Christian community of Jerusalem is its unity. Luke gives us a snapshot of the first Christian community: *koinonia*, *the breaking of the bread*, and *prayer*. All those who believed were together and

had all things in common. They sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking the bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people (Acts 2:44-47).

What stands out in this summary is the togetherness of the members. They were together. In the Semitic language being together means more of interior union rather than a unity in place and time. This

togetherness is a recurrent theme in *Acts* (1:14; 2:44, 46; 4:24; 5:12). Most of the times, the term occurs in a context of prayer. *Koinonia*, therefore, is not just sharing of material goods; it expresses a deeper reality of life: the sharing of hearts and souls. This unity is brought about and nourished by the Word

of God, the Eucharist, and the liturgical prayers, and expressed in daily life.

The Jerusalem community, in its typical unity, is a model for the Church and for religious communities. In *Vita Consecrata* our Late Pope John Paul II exhorts consecrated men and women to commit themselves to strengthening their fraternal life, following the example of the first Christians in Jerusalem (VC 45). The

True following of Jesus should involve a total sharing of his life and destiny, even to the point of death.

koinonia of Jerusalem community will be the ideal to be aimed at. When the heart and soul of the consecrated persons are one, the members have the same care and concern for each other, and they devote themselves to prayer and charity, we can say that they resemble the community of Jerusalem.

Religious Community: A Unique Form of Community

There are various forms of human community existing in the society: community of like-minded persons, community of professionals, intellectuals, artists, businessmen, employees union, etc. To none of these can the Religious community be compared. Religious community is not founded on the basis of such affinities. It is neither a family, nor a benign association of intimate friends, nor a task-oriented enterprise or company. It cannot be considered even a fraternity, as fraternities are primarily interested in fostering social togetherness.³ Religious community is unique as it is formed by the grace and gift of a call.

➤ *A Community Created by Charisma*

Before being a human construction, religious community is a gift of the Spirit. It is the love of God, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, from which religious community takes its origin and is built as a true family gathered together in the Lord's name (FLC 8). It is a

community created by Charisma, a Charisma offered by God to an individual, who is often referred to as Founder or Founderess. Such community becomes the locus of "unfolding" for its members, who are consecrated celibates. The members share the same charisma and are united among themselves by their common relationship with the Founder / Foundress. VC insists that each member should study diligently the spirit, history and mission of the Institute to which he or

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she belongs, in order to advance the personal and communal assimilation of its charisma (VC 71).

Consecration constitutes particularly fertile "humus" for community life. Religious life as a striving after perfect charity is lived in community and expressed in the living of evangelical counsels.

➤ *A Community Created and Nourished by the Life of Evangelical Counsels*

A Religious community is the community life of consecrated persons who publicly make the profession of the evangelical counsels. LG 44 expresses: ... in order to draw still more abundant fruit from the grace of their baptism they [consecrated persons] make profession of evangelical counsels in the church. The evangelical counsels by reason of the charity to which they lead, unite them in a special way to the Church and its mystery.

The importance of the profession of the evangelical counsels is seen in the fact that it fosters the perfection of love of God and love of neighbour in an outstanding manner (cf. LG 45). The three evangelical counsels, lived in community, are given their character by the community and at the same time give the community its character. Religious vows are not just personal gifts, they are to be lived and experienced in community.

➤ *A Community that Exists for a Specific Mission*

A Religious community does not exist for its own sake. The life of the consecrated persons is not a narcissistic turning in on oneself, but openness to the outside

in order to communicate to everyone the gift received and to involve everyone in the dynamics of unity. A Religious community, therefore, exists for a mission. The building up of the body of Christ is our mission (Eph 4:11-12). "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should **go and bring forth fruit**, and that your fruit should remain" (Jn 15:16). Like the apostolic community, the religious community is a community of members who are sent on a mission: In the image of Jesus, the beloved Son "whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world" (Jn 10:36), those whom God calls to follow him are also consecrated and sent into the world to imitate his example and to continue his mission. Fundamentally, this is true of every disciple. In a special way, however, it is true of those who, in the manner that characterizes the consecrated life, are called to follow Christ "more closely," and to make him the "all" of their lives. Religious life, moreover, continues the mission of Christ with another feature specifically its own: *fraternal life in community for the sake of the mission*. Thus, the more personal their dedication to the Lord Jesus is, the more fraternal their community life becomes, and the more ardent their involvement in the Institute's specific mission (VC 72).

Pope Paul VI wrote in *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) 77: The power of evangelization will find itself considerably

diminished, if those who proclaim the Gospel are divided among themselves in all sorts of ways.... The Lord's spiritual testament tells us that unity among his followers is not only the proof that we are his but also the proof that he is sent by the Father. It is the test of the credibility of Christians and of Christ himself. As evangelizers, we must offer Christ's faithful not the image of people divided and separated by unedifying quarrels, but the image of people who are mature in faith and capable of finding a meeting-point beyond the real tensions, thanks to a shared, sincere and disinterested search for truth. Yes, the destiny of evangelization is certainly bound up with the witness of unity given by the Church (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 23).

➤ *A Community Nourished and Patterned Upon the Eucharist*

A Religious community is a community in journey towards the Father's home. The members need food and drink to sustain them as they walk. Eucharist offers us the most nourishing food and drink. Eucharist is the great sign of the mystery of Christian togetherness.

The same Christ who called them, daily calls together his brothers and sisters to speak with them and to unite them to himself and to each other in the Eucharist, to assimilate them increasingly into his living and visible Body, in whom

the Spirit lives, on journey towards the Father (FLC 12). The community is built up starting from the liturgy, especially from celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments. ... "We must be concerned to deepen our appreciation of the great gift of the Eucharist and place at the very heart of our lives the Sacred Mystery of the Body and Blood of our Lord, alive and present in the community to sustain and inspire it in its journey to the Father." It is around the Eucharist, celebrated or adored, "source and summit" of all activity of the Church, which the communion of souls is built up... (FLC 14).

SAfC 26: The Eucharist, the sacrament of unity with Christ, is at the same time the sacrament of Church unity and community unity for the consecrated person. Clearly it is "the source of spirituality both for individuals and for communities" (VC 95).

"The *Eucharist* 'contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ himself, our Passover and living bread, who, through his very flesh, made vital and vitalizing by the Holy Spirit, offers life' to the human family. This is the heart of the Church's life, and also of the consecrated life." Our late Pope John Paul II asks: "How can those who are called, through the profession of the evangelical counsels, to choose Christ as the only meaning of their lives, not desire

to establish an ever more profound communion with him by sharing daily in the Sacrament which makes him present, in the sacrifice which actualises the gift of his love on Golgotha, the banquet which nourishes and sustains God's pilgrim people?" (VC 95). It is impossible for the consecrated persons to be witnesses of communion, unless their own life finds its centre in the Memorial of Christ's Paschal Mystery.

Cardinal Ratzinger (the present Pope Benedict XVI) explains how the Eucharist unites us: It is truly the one, identical Lord, whom we receive in the Eucharist, or better, the Lord who receives us and assumes us into himself... We all "eat" the same person, not only the same thing, we all are in this way taken out of our closed individual persons and placed inside another, greater one. We all are assimilated into Christ and so by means of communion with Christ, united among ourselves, rendered the same, one sole thing in him members of one another. To communicate with Christ is essentially also to communicate with one another... For this reason, in my prayer at communion, I must look totally toward Christ, allowing myself to be burned by his enveloping fire. But, precisely for this reason, I must always keep clearly in mind that in this way he unites me organically with every other person receiving him – with the one next to me, whom I may not like very much; but also

with those who are far away ... Becoming one with them, I must learn to open myself toward them and to involve

"The Word of God is nourishment for life, for prayer and for the daily journey, the principle which unifies the community in oneness of thought, the inspiration for ongoing renewal and apostolic creativity."

myself in their situations. This is the proof of the authenticity of my love for Christ. If I am united with Christ, I am together with my neighbour, and this unity is not limited to the moment of communion, but only begins here. It becomes life, flesh and blood in the everyday experience of sharing life with my neighbour.⁴

➤ *A Community Constantly Renewed by Listening to the Word of God*

Our life in community needs to be renewed every day through a constant listening to the Word of God, and a sincere "review of life" inspired by such Word. Unity is said to be "a special gift of the Spirit for those who place themselves in an attitude of obediently listening to the Gospel" (VC 42).

There is no doubt that this primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable

“Man is by very nature not only authentic but also unauthentic, not only saintly but also sinful, not only strong but also weak, not only directed toward God and others, but also closed in upon himself.”

without a renewed *listening to the word of God* (NMI 39). In many communities there is the practice of *Lectio Divina*: reflection and sharing on the word of God. The document FLC encourages such practices. Reading the Scripture meditatively changes our perceptions and helps us to tune our life with that of Christ. It unites us with the Triune God. When we experience oneness with the Triune God, we also grow closer to our brothers and sisters.

SAfC affirms that “the Word of God is nourishment for life, for prayer and for the daily journey, the principle which unifies the community in oneness of thought, the inspiration for ongoing renewal and apostolic creativity” (SAfC 24). The Second Vatican Council had already indicated that the first great principle of renewal is a return to the Gospel (PC 2).⁵

John Paul II said: “You must not tire of meditating on Holy Scripture and above all on the Gospels so that they can imprint upon you the features of the Incarnate Word.”⁶

The essential message of the Word of God is Love: love for God and love for one another. The Word has power to transform our hearts and minds. It is said that the “Word of God is a double-edged sword.” It can penetrate our hearts and mend our lives, if we are open to the Spirit. We need to read the Scripture with reverence and respect in order to embody its teachings in our everyday attitudes and actions. We need to listen attentively and ponder over the Word as Mary did.

➤ *A Community that Recognizes Human Brokenness*

We should not look for perfect and ideal communities. “The communitarian ideal must not blind us to the fact that every Christian reality is built on human frailty... The perfect ‘ideal community’ does not exist yet ...” (FLC 26).

Let us remember that our religious community is made up of human beings, who are a blend of the perfect and imperfect. Van Kaam says: “Man is by very nature not only authentic but also unauthentic, not only saintly but also sinful, not only strong but also weak, not

only directed toward God and others, but also closed in upon himself.”⁷ Our behaviour, our choices, our decisions are influenced by a number of motivations; not all of them are genuinely religious motivations. Such awareness (of the presence of both positive and negative elements) can diminish the negative impact and lay the basis for a positive growth and unfolding of persons in community. However, we should not allow these passions to triumph and degrade the nature of our community.

St. Paul reminds us that “the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable... God has so composed the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior parts, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together” (1Cor 12:22, 24-26).

Conflicts in community

The document **FLC** says: “Communities cannot avoid all conflicts.” It is quite realistic about the problems evident in so many communities. It points out the poverty of communication as one of the problems: “The lack of our weakness in communication usually leads to weakening of fraternity: if we know little or nothing about the lives of our brothers and sisters, they will be strangers

to us, and the relationship will become anonymous... Communication [then] takes place ... around problems and issues of marginal importance but rarely is there any sharing of what is vital and central to the journey of consecration” (FLC 32).

There are conflicts in community arising in our interpersonal relationship: the relationship between members and Superiors, and between members themselves. Prior to Vatican II, the relationship between Superior and members was that of dependence. Today there is a risk of total independence in the way we run or manage our lives in community. We must move from dependence and independence to interdependence. At times there are conflict-filled relationship between the Superior and one or more members, between members themselves. We can overcome these conflicts, if we allow the grace of God to work in us. If, on the other hand, we keep ourselves obstinate, even God does not force any entry into our soul to transform us.

Conflicts arise also because of individual needs that are not in conformity with community goals. FLC speaks of achieving a balance “between the demands of individuals and those of the community, between personal charisma and the community’s apostolate. And this should be far from the disintegrating

forces of individualism and then levelling aspects of communitarianism” (FLC 39).

FLC No. 40 offers also some practical advice to achieve this balance:

- a) to celebrate and give thanks together for the common gift of vocation and mission, a gift far surpassing every individual and cultural difference; to promote a contemplative attitude with regard to the wisdom of God, who has sent specific brothers and sisters to the community that each may be a gift to the other; to praise him for what each brother or sister communicates from the presence and word of Christ;
- b) to cultivate mutual respect, by which we accept the slow journey of weaker members without stifling the growth of richer personalities; a respect which fosters creativity but also calls for responsibility to others and to solidarity;
- c) to focus on a common mission: each institute has its own mission, to which all must contribute according to their particular gifts. The road of consecrated men and women consists precisely in progressively consecrating to the Lord all that they have, and all that they are, for the mission of their religious family;
- d) to recall that the apostolic mission is entrusted in the first place to the community and that this often entails conducting works proper to the

- institute. Dedication to this kind of community apostolate helps a consecrated person mature and grow in his or her particular way of holiness;
- e) to consider that religious, on receiving in obedience personal missions, ought to consider themselves sent by the community.

Friendship in Community Life

In our day to day life, we relate with people in a friendly manner. We cannot, however, define every friendly relationship as friendship, though friendship always begins with a friendly association. Friendship is developed over a period of time. When Jesus called the twelve, he did not immediately call them friends. Towards the end of his earthly life he started addressing them as friends and revealing them his intimate sentiments. “I call you no longer servants, but friends because I have revealed to you all that I have heard from my Father. I call you friends” (Jn 15:15).

Of course, there are people with whom we suddenly click. A friendly relationship blossoms between two or more persons. This can happen also in our religious community living or in our encounters.

The following are some of the characteristics of a true and healthy friendship:

In religious life, friendship means to look in the same direction, rather than to look at each other.

- ◆ In a true friendship there is mutual respect and esteem. It may last long and progressively mature. Relationships that end suddenly and permanently on account of some unpleasant incident, or of separation, cannot be called friendship.
- ◆ It outlives physical separation and the stresses of life. There is less need of external proofs of affection. Their mutual affection is best expressed by spontaneous, deep understanding and trust.
- ◆ It is characterized by giving and receiving; there is meaningful dialogue and exchange.
- ◆ In religious life, friendship means to look in the same direction, rather than to look at each other. Religious men and women support each other, as they journey towards the goal, developing an ever closer friendship with the Lord who has called them to follow him.
- ◆ A good friendship is open; it tends to expand and welcome others.
- ◆ A healthy friendship is liberating and enriching, not absorbing. True friends

do not try to merge into one another, instead they help each other to become more genuine and mature in their own unique personality.

The more open and friendly the atmosphere in a religious house is, the less danger there is of emotional relationships that are unhealthy, narrow and exclusive. It must be the concern of every member to create positive conditions for growth, such as flourishing involvement, healthy relationships, meaningful dialogue and exchange, and intimate sharing of life experiences.

Dissatisfied People in Community

We do come across people who are constantly unhappy in community. They always find one or other reason to murmur and find fault with everyone and everything around. When they live in small communities, they want to be in larger ones, where there are more people, more activities, more facilities and so on. And when they are in large communities, they dream of small communities. Some may complain about the food, the time-table, the way guests are treated, the work that is too much and demanding... But these do not often explain how things could be improved. They have no proposals but only complaints and negative criticisms. These people are quite difficult to deal with. Often they are victims of their own past

life. They are unhappy with themselves and hence they find unbearable all that is outside of them too. Unfortunately these characters do not reveal themselves in the initial stage of formation. They often come to light in the late forties, fifties and sixties when they hardly accept to understand that something is wrong with them. The Jewish people only started to murmur against God when they had crossed the Red Sea. Before that, they were caught up in the extraordinary events and by the adventurous journey. Any burden to them at that stage seemed preferable to slavery. It was only later, when they had forgotten the way God had shown mercy to them and began the ordinariness of everyday life they murmured against Moses and God.

Now, what should we do with our murmuring brothers and sisters? Should we pay attention to their eternal complaints and try to satisfy them? It is impossible and it will never work because whatever you do or propose will again be unsatisfying to them. Should we then, ignore them? No, we have to love them, put up with them patiently, trying not to irritate them further because they are already irritated within. We have to take them to the Lord in prayer not only once in a blue moon but on a daily basis.

Community Challenges

- ◆ Become a witnessing community.
- ◆ Team work

- ◆ Use resources (time, talents, etc.) responsibly.
- ◆ Transform our community, neighbourhood: be committed in one's ministry, prayer, community life. Be accountable. Reach out to those especially in need. Be flexible in the search for truth. Build relationship with one's community members and the people. Learn local language and culture.
- ◆ Let there be more people to light the candle than to curse the darkness; more doers than talkers.
- ◆ Superiors as well as every member in the community be interested in building people rather than edifices.

Community Acts that foster Oneness

- ◆ Daily celebration of the Eucharist
- ◆ Liturgical prayers
- ◆ Spiritual reading (*lectio divina* and shared prayer)
- ◆ Monthly Recollection
- ◆ Community celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- ◆ Common meals
- ◆ Community meetings (planning, programming, evaluation, etc.)
- ◆ Work
- ◆ Recreation (which includes watching a movie or having a debate, going on a picnic and the like)
- ◆ Birthday or feast day celebrations

Suggestions for a serene and meaningful life in community

Recent documents from the Magisterium are rich with indications helpful for community living such as joyful simplicity (Cf. *Evangelica Testificatio* 39), clarity and mutual trust (Cf. PC 14), capacity for dialogue (Cf. can. 619), and sincere acceptance of a beneficial communitarian discipline (Cf. ET 39). We can consider these as the 4 pillars for building community life. We can also list other suggestions for living a serene and meaningful life in community:

1. *Have a real concern for person*
2. *Take time to pray - pray for one another*
3. *Decide, plan together the spiritual journey*
4. *Cultivate true love and esteem for one another*
5. *Forgive one another*
6. *Practise fraternal correction & 'carefronting'*
7. *Sharing of life*
8. *Knowing and accepting oneself and others*
9. *Transform difficulties as opportunities of growth*
10. *Not to be carried away by feelings of sympathy and antipathy*
11. *Avoid generalized statements*
12. *Avoid judgmental attitudes and words*

13. *Avoid curious and probing questions*
14. *Avoid gossips*
15. *Stop the litany of lamentations and count the blessings*
16. *Have a wider representation of reality (world)*
17. *Have a sense of humour*
18. *Have no unrealistic expectations*
19. *Develop social coping skills*
20. *Develop a pro-active behaviour*
21. *Develop reading habit*
22. *Become an inspirational human being*
23. *Maintain a dignified and respectful culture in the community.*

Before we conclude, we will turn our glance to a person who played an important role in keeping the apostolic community united after the death of Jesus. She is our Blessed Mother Mary. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the apostles were together in the upper room with Mary, the Mother of Jesus (cf. Acts 4:32). We can always invoke her presence and assistance in our community life.

Conclusion

The Religious life is a life to be lived in community. Community is a constitutive element of religious life, no matter one lives as member of a cloistered community

or as part of an apostolic community. Community is the fulcrum around which the whole religious life rotates. There, people with different temperaments, backgrounds, and subcultures attempt to live together for a lifetime, without losing their individual uniqueness. The evangelical counsels are a means for building communion in the community.

Evangelical or gospel friendship is the characteristic bond that must exist among the religious. It is mirrored on God's love for the world, Jesus' love for God, Jesus' relationship to his disciples and the disciples' relationship to Jesus, relationship of disciples among themselves, the relationship of Jesus and his disciples to the world.

Endnotes:

- 1 *Dizionario Teologico della Vita Consacrata*, (Diretto da Angel Aparicio Rodriguez e Joan Maria Canals Casas), Milano: Editrice Ancora, 1992, p. 345.
- 2 Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia: Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Community*, Quezon City, Philippines: ICLA Publications and Claretian Publications, 1999, pp. 36-37.
- 3 Cf. Adrian Van Kaam, *Personality Fulfillment in Religious Life*, Pennsylvania: Dimension Books Wilkes-Barre, 1967, pp. 117-118.

- 4 Card. Joseph Ratzinger, "Eucharist, Communion and Solidarity," *L'Osservatore Romano*, No. 46 (1768), 13 Nov., 2002.
- 5 The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time.
- 6 John Paul II, "Homily," *L'Osservatore Romano*, No. 6 (1679), 7 Feb., 2001.

Caring for the elderly and the sick has an important place in the fraternal life, especially at times like the present, when in some parts of the world the percentage of elderly consecrated persons is increasing. The care and concern which these persons deserve arises not only from a clear obligation of charity and gratitude but also from an awareness that their witness greatly serves the Church and their own Institutes, and that their mission continues to be worthwhile and meritorious, even when for reasons of age or infirmity they have had to abandon their specific apostolate. *The elderly and the sick have a great deal to give* in wisdom and experience to the community, if only the community can remain close to them with concern and an ability to listen (*Vita Consacrata*, 44).

CALLED TO BE APOSTLES: DYNAMICS AND CHALLENGES OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN INDIA

John Sankarathil, OSFS

Introduction

The present moment is a time of great promise because of globalization, technological advancement, growth in communication facilities, internet tools, etc. People have come closer and become more interdependent. Scientific and economic progress is the key term that proclaims the modern era of development. Yet, at the same time, we see some signs of a disturbing breakdown in the very foundations of society: increased violence, a weakening of the moral sense, increased rate of divorce and family rupture, a coarsening of social relations, and a growing forgetfulness of

God. Tensions and wars exist in various parts of the world, and even where the tragedy of war is not present, feelings of fear and insecurity are widespread. Furthermore, such phenomena as religious fanaticism and global terrorism distort the distinction between peace and war, seriously compromising the future hopes of humankind. How can we respond to these challenges? How can we recognise the signs of the times? How can we contribute to the good of the society through our primary mission of evangelisation? Although joint action on a political, economic and juridical level is possible, it may not be feasible for everyone.

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Progress is ambiguous; it opens up possibilities of both good and evil. So, it is necessary to reflect together, on a moral and spiritual level, on our vocation to be apostles in the modern world, to continue the mission and vision of Jesus Christ. What is even more vital is to recognise our apostolic vocation to encounter such situations in our daily life. The modern world has ever greater need for a culture of peace, serenity, harmony and a certain type of *rhythm* and harmony in daily life. In fact, the human right to peace is fundamental and inalienable, and all other rights depend upon the exercise of it. This article is an attempt to see the significance of our vocation within the paradigm of apostleship in the modern context.

The Terminology: A Bird's Eye View

The Greek root 'apostolos' occurs 135 times in the New Testament.¹ The apostle John in his writings gives it a special position, and he uses the verb 19 times in relation to Christology. The verb in the New Testament assumes the meaning of commission: Jesus calls for our obedience and willingness to serve as his messengers and apostles. He sends forth his disciples who represent him and substitute his own presence. They are given his own authority.

However, the Greek term 'apostelos' in its noun form means 'one who is sent', and it is equivalent to 'envoy' or 'emissary.' It is found 80 times in the New Testament: 34 in the Lukan Literature [In the Gospel 6 times and the Acts of the Apostles 28 times], 35 times in the Pauline letters, 11 in the remaining passages of the New Testament.² St. Paul calls himself an apostle (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:1): he affirms strongly that he is entrusted with the task of proclaiming the

Gospel, by the will of God (1Cor 1:1-2; 2Cor 1:1); and he ranks himself with the apostles (1Cor 15:3-12).³ According to Paul, an apostle is an authorised person, a messenger and representative of the crucified and Risen Lord, to bring the Good News to the whole world. For him, apostleship is a special charism (1Cor 12:28-29). In the

New Testament, the term implies a wide range of meanings, such as messenger, preacher (1Cor 9:5; 12:28; Eph 2:20), envoy (2Cor 8:23), ambassador, emissary or missionary, appointed by either human or divine authorities.

Call to be Apostles

Apostles are the privileged group of people who received their call directly from Jesus Christ during his life time. The

...the human right to peace is fundamental and inalienable, and all other rights depend upon the exercise of it.

Gospels agree in mentioning that the call of the apostles marked the first steps of Jesus' public ministry, after the baptism he received from John the Baptist in the waters of the Jordan (Mt 4:17; Mk 1:9-15). Jesus had begun to preach about the Kingdom of God and his gaze came to rest upon two sets of brothers: Simon and Andrew, and James and John. They were busy with their daily work, casting their nets and mending them. Jesus purposefully called them and they promptly followed him; subsequently, they were to become fishers of men (Mt 4:18-22, Mk 1:16-20; Lk 5:1-11; Jn 1:40-42).⁴ Their commitment to stand for their master and the commission which they have received not only establish their apostolic ministry but also affirm their flaming zeal to give witness to their faith and commitment. The destiny of those who are called to be apostles is to be closely bound to that of Jesus. An apostle is one who is sent, but even before that, he is an 'expert' or a 'specialist' on Jesus.

Although the apostles stand as a group, they have their differences and particular characteristics. There are few legends and stories about the lives of Andrew, James, Philip, Bartholomew, Mathew, and Simon. The epistles of Jude

and James and the apocryphal gospel of Thomas do not report much about the life pattern of the authors. However, there is no doubt that they received a particular vocation and they displayed the nuances of it in their personal life and commitment. For example, Peter, one of the most celebrated members of the group is a model of staunch character and leadership. Though Paul was not in the core group of 'the twelve,' he is still recognized an apostle, and he is well known for his missionary zeal and eloquence in sharing the faith through his epistles. Another example is John, who expresses a distinct grace and spirit. Through his gospel and letters, he imparts a spirit of love, a love that is nourished and purified in the heart of Christ.

The destiny of those who are called to be apostles is to be closely bound to that of Jesus.

In the New Testament, the call to become an apostle is concerned not just with communicating a message from God, but in witnessing to it. An apostle has to carry out the mandate of Jesus Christ and represent him in his entire being. He has to be available to the people or to the community to whom he is sent. The apostolic vocation thus implies that the one who is called to be an apostle has to empty himself of all his self-programming. Jesus, who 'empties himself, taking the form of a servant' is the

model for him (Phil 2:6-7). This is to be understood in the context of slavery in the ancient Jewish society which did not give a 'slave' or a 'servant' the right to his own thinking and his very life.⁵

Only the one who strives to empty himself can become an apostle and carry-out the commission of Jesus. He has to represent Christ to humanity in his total personality and it is his love that motivates him: "In the beginning and thereafter, what 'impels' the apostles (cf. 2Cor 5:14) is always 'the love of Christ.'"⁶ This commitment signifies the total availability, receptivity and openness to God and to his people. In the call narrative (Mk 1:16-20), the phrase 'net and boat' is a metaphor for one's self-dependence and self-direction. The term 'father and mother' also serves as a metaphor for the value-systems of the world which one has acquired from a particular culture and the society. In order to become an authentic apostle, one has to leave behind certain value-systems and give up one's emphasis on self-dependence.

The book of Revelation states the role of the twelve apostles in the eschatological perspective of the heavenly Jerusalem, presented as a city. "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them

the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev 21:14).⁷ When he chooses the symbolic number twelve, Jesus has a precise intention: He is founding the new People of God and he appoints the twelve patriarchs to whom he will entrust the responsibility of the people. The Gospel mentions the names of the twelve apostles.

An apostle is primarily one who is called and sent out for a particular mission. His call is not only to be with Jesus (interior life) but also to be sent out to bear witness to the world (exterior life). Apostles were called and sent out by Jesus Christ both to be witnesses and to bear witness. They shared his life,

and opted to give witness to what Jesus had said and done (Lk 9:1-2). According to Yves Congar, an apostle is essentially 'an envoy.'⁸ Apostles are directly sent by Christ with a mandate to bear witness to him. After the resurrection, Jesus Christ sent his apostles to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Therefore the apostolic call itself implied a mission, i.e. to witness to the one who had entrusted them with a specific task and message. Witnessing was part and parcel of their mission; and it was inseparable from their being. It was their very incorporation in Jesus, which made them witnesses to him. The

Only the one who strives to empty himself can become an apostle and carry-out the commission of Jesus.

universal character of the Apostles' mission was explicit in the mandate: Christ sent them 'to the whole creation' (Mk 16:15), to 'all nations,' (Mt 28:19, Lk 24:47), 'to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8).

The witnessing mission of the apostles began officially from the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39). Their fundamental personal experience (*anubhava*)⁹ of the Holy Spirit empowered them to witness to Christ. Pentecost was the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy, i.e. the universal out-pouring of the prophetic Spirit. The mission that Jesus entrusted to them was to make him present, through their witness, in the world. Their witnessing through word and deed came to its full manifestation in its association with witnessing in suffering and persecution. The motivation of their witness was to bring universal salvation to the whole of humanity.

Jesus called those whom he wanted; and designated twelve of them to be with him and later to preach, with the power of casting-out demons (Mk 3:7-13). He called them apostles. The Gospel speaks frequently about them.¹⁰ Jesus had made it clear that they were called 'to be with him' and also 'to be sent out.' Their physical proximity to Jesus gradually transformed them, and equipped them to learn from him. They received the opportunity to be close to him, to share in his ministry of proclaiming the good news,

even to the point of losing their lives (Mk 6:6-13). They grew in conformity with him, especially in his love, service and the laying-down of his life for others. The verb 'to follow' appears frequently in the four Gospels (79 times), referring to different persons and groups. Those who follow Jesus are, according to Mark, individuals,¹¹ or groups (Mk 6:1; 10:28. 32; Mk 15:41), even crowds (Mk 2:15;

To follow means to maintain a relationship of closeness with a person, to move according to his will and to accept that his values determine the way.

3:7; 5:24). The evangelist does not establish any kind of intensity in their following of Jesus, with the apostles it is different. To follow means to maintain a relationship of closeness with a person, to move according to his will and to accept that his values determine the way. It is not a material way, but a way of life.

Jesus gathered his apostles and carefully instructed them and prepared them to continue his mission. The basic requirement to be an apostle was neither intellectual nor moral aptitude; it was the call that came from Jesus. He invited his

disciples 'to follow' him (Mk 2:14). This following means attachment to Jesus as a human being (Mt 8:19-22). They were bound to him as to a human being more than to a doctrine. Pope Benedict XVI states: "Precisely because they have been sent by the Lord, the Twelve are called 'apostles,' destined to walk the roads of the world announcing the Gospel as witnesses to the death and resurrection of Christ."¹²

Through daily contact, they learn from him and his message of the Kingdom of God. Their encounter with Jesus changes them because he touches their hearts and demands a response to him and to his message. The follower is engaged in a lifelong process of learning how to act in accordance with the faith that has been proclaimed and received.¹³

Special Traits of the Apostles of Jesus

According to the gospel, Jesus not only called, but he also *appointed* them. The verb 'to appoint' indicates a definite act. From the human point of view, rarely will vocation promoters select such candidates to their community/congregation/institute. These apostles were of different temperaments and characters,

The follower is engaged in a lifelong process of learning how to act in accordance with the faith that has been proclaimed and received.

having little education and qualified skills. They were not socially influential people, but ordinary fishermen (Mt 4:18-22); one was a tax collector (Mt 9:9-11). John and James seemed to be ambitious (Mk 10:35-40), and they were known as 'sons of thunder' (Mk 3:17), for they were short-tempered people. Peter was presumptuous (Lk 22:31-34) and timid (Lk 22:54-62). Thomas was a

person of doubt and curiosity (Jn 20:24-25). Judas was a lover of money (Jn 12:6) and would betray the master for mere thirty silver coins (Mt 26:14-16). In the Jewish and rabbinical tradition, the disciples selected their Master under whom they liked to study. The rabbis of Jesus' time also had disciples, but the apostleship of Jesus had special traits.¹⁴

Divine Initiative

The call narratives of the apostles categorically underline the first and foremost characteristic of vocation by stating 'he called to him those whom he desired' (Mk 3:13). As in the other call narratives in the Bible, it emphasizes the sovereign freedom of the Master; and thus, it is Christ who takes the initiative.

The apostle is not the one who selects the Master in Christian perspective. However, Jesus selects the apostles and disciples whom he desires: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it you” (Jn 15:16).

An analytical study of all the call narratives in the Bible (Gen 12:1-5; Ex 3:1-12 Jer 1:4-10; Lk 5:27-32, Lk 5:1-11) reveals the emphasis on the divine initiation. The call narratives of Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Matthew, Paul, etc., are only a few examples. One is called not because of his personal qualities and talents, nor because of family tradition and wealth.

Immediate and Active Response

The call of Jesus demands an *immediate, active, and positive response*: “they left everything and followed him” (Lk 5:11); as if they were the first ones who repented and believed in the Gospel. They embrace the reality of the reign of God; for, the call to apostleship is a call into God’s reign and it is an act of grace. Apostleship begins and ends in God; however, specifically, it is the *human response* to the Holy Spirit, who communicates with us through human words and actions.

Life-Long Commitment to Christ

For the apostles of Jesus, the stage of discipleship is in itself the fulfilment of their destiny; it is a life-long engagement. However, unlike the Indian tradition of the *Guru-Shishya* relationship, in Judaism a disciple was a student of the Law, and it was a transitional stage in order to become a rabbi, or one who had mastered the Torah. The rabbis’ disciples

For the apostles of Jesus, the stage of discipleship is in itself the fulfilment of their destiny; it is a life-long engagement.

joined their master *to know the Law*. Jesus’ apostles and disciples ‘left everything’ not for the Law, but for Jesus’ sake (Mt 10:38): Jesus takes the place of the Torah. They had no intention to become the master, but chose to continue as followers, and apostles for the rest of their lives. It was neither to obtain knowledge or cognitive information, but to share their lives with Jesus. They wanted to live in spirit and truth to give witness to their Master and Lord.

Mission: A Call to Service

The apostles of Jesus have to continue the mission of the Master. Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and give up his life. Service and giving up one's life are essential parts of apostleship. However, the disciples in Judaism were only students, learning the knowledge of the rabbis. When we act as apostles, we enter into a realm where we are recognized as a resource, where we are needed and wanted, where we can make a corporate impact through ministerial service for the growth of the Church and society. Apostles follow Jesus because *they are called*; and they respond to a command: *Follow me*; Jesus takes the *initiative*, unlike in the case of the rabbis. It implies a two-fold mission: 'to be with him' and 'to be sent-out to preach and have authority to cast out demons' (Mk 3:14-15). Following Jesus and sharing in his mission go together; and the best way of sharing his mission is not just to teach what he taught, but being his witnesses, empowered with the same power of Jesus.

'To be with him' implies that the apostle has to live in intimacy with Jesus,

to be part of his group, to reflect, to pray, to work with Jesus. An adage says: "If you do not stand for some thing, you will fall for anything." Just before my priestly ordination, I asked my mother what gift she wished to have on my priestly-ordination day. She just hugged me and said: "You belong to God, and you should be holy, a saintly religious priest. That is the greatest gift which you can give me."

Like Jesus and with him, the apostle is also called to take away the sin and evil tendencies in human beings, to make love grow. As in the epoch of Jesus, the present world encounters evil nature and evil tendencies. Each and every consecrated person is also called to remove evil, corruption, bribery, injustice, exploitation, etc., from the world.

...the best way of sharing his mission is not just to teach what he taught, but being his witnesses, empowered with the same power of Jesus.

Apostles and Mission

The term 'mission' originates from the Latin verb *mittere*, which means 'to send.' It presupposes the one who sends, one who is sent, and the purpose for sending a person. Then sender invests his envoy with responsibility and authority. The one who is sent is expected to speak and act in the name of his 'master', interpret his mind and live out his values

and principles. In the Gospels of Mark and Mathew, Jesus' ministry begins with the proclamation: "*The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel*" (Mk 1:15) and immediately thereafter, the evangelists relate the calling of the first four disciples (Mk 1:14-20; Mt 4:17-22). This sequence of events is *not accidental*, but *intentional*. Mark has a missionary purpose in mind in his account of the calling of the apostles on the shores of the lake of Galilee. In the perspective of Mark, the lake is a bridge between the Jews and the Gentiles; thus, he puts a missionary thrust on his Gospel from its outset: *The apostles were called to be missionaries: fishers of men*. The calling of the apostles is a call *to follow* Jesus and a being set aside for missionary activities. In this sense, *apostolic vocation and mission belong together*; and this is so not only for the first apostles, but for all. So while every apostle is a missionary in a dynamic way, not every missionary is an apostle in the fullest sense.

For what purpose were these twelve apostles called? Jesus has specified the purpose: primarily to be with him, to live in intimacy with him. This intimacy leads to a personal conversion, a *metanoia*, and a complete change. They begin to act according to the mandate of Jesus. They are charged to continue the mission of Jesus, i.e. to

preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God as well as to fight against evil and injustice to make love grow.

Consecrated Life and Apostolic-Vocation: Challenges in the Indian Context

Why are there so many religious and so few apostles and prophets in our religious communities? Why does growth seem to stop at a less than fully mature level? The presence and the growth of a religious community's identity is not simply a question of numerical growth. It is a question of a fundamental conviction, to do what we really believe. Do we accept the truth Christ reveals? Is the faith tangible in our communities and institutions? The consecrated people should not let themselves be defeated by pessimism, lethargy, inertia or other

culturally sensitive challenges. The Lord calls each of us to continue contributing to the growth and the spreading of the Gospel values. We are called to stand against moral-confusion and

fragmentation of knowledge. Pope Benedict XVI urges in a creative way: "Never cede, therefore, to the temptation to distance yourself from intimacy with your Heavenly Spouse by allowing yourselves to be overly attracted by the interests and problems of daily life."¹⁵ The

The noble goal of any charism is founded on the unity of truth.

noble goal of any charism is founded on the unity of truth. It has to be expressed in service of the person and the community; and it should become an instrument of hope.

What is the ideal that attracts us to a particular community/congregation? How faithfully are we expressing it in our daily life? How authentically are we serving the Church as apostles? What does our institute offer to the Church and the society today? As modern apostles, with fidelity and courage, consecrated people can respond to the challenges raised by an increasingly secular and materialistic culture. The significance of such response depends upon our own fidelity in handing over the treasure of our charism in a creative and dynamic way. In fact, the challenges that are confronting us require a comprehensive and sound understanding in the truth of the faith. However, they also call for cultivating a mindset and a spiritual-culture that is genuinely Christ-oriented. Confident in the profound patrimony of our faith, each consecrated person, as an apostle, can bring the richness of his vision and mission into the reality of life.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his address on 11th World Day of Consecrated Life urges the consecrated people in the following way: "...never forget that the consecrated life is a divine gift and that it is the Lord in the first place who ensures

its success in accordance with his plans. This certainty that the Lord leads us to a successful conclusion despite our weakness; this certainty must be a comfort to you, protecting you from the temptation of discouragement in the face of the inevitable difficulties of life and the many challenges of the modern epoch."¹⁶ Consecrated life, like all Christian life, is a moment-by-moment response to God. We cannot separate soul from the body,

Consecrated life loses its significance when one attempts to live only on an abstract level.

individual from community, personal growth from building-up of the Kingdom and consecration from apostolic vocation. Consecrated life loses its significance when one attempts to live only on an abstract level.

Consecrated life implies a call to be apostles. Since our vocation is a radical way of life, it is not for our private self-assertion, but it is meant to serve others and to give witness to Christ. Consecration and mission are intrinsically and intimately related to one another and complement each other. The missionary call implies radical discipleship, because it implies total availability and surrender to

God. The apostles' vocation sprang from their personal call by Jesus (Mk 1:16-20; Mt 4:18-22), and their mission in the world.

So also, all consecrated persons' nature is to be radicals and to be apostles for the Kingdom of God, models of contemplation and commitment. Living as consecrated people in today's world requires faith, courage, and generosity. It is the privilege and responsibility of the consecrated people to share Christ's Good News with those who do not know about him and yet thirst for *satya* or truth. Following the example of the founder/foundress, each consecrated person has to be animated by apostolic ardour. The Universal Church and the particular churches expect from the consecrated people a presence marked by pastoral dynamism and daring evangelical zeal. The missionary mandate entrusted by Christ to the apostles involves us all. It can serve as an incentive and guide in carrying out our vocation. Pope Benedict XVI gives an inspiring message to all the priests and consecrated people: "Proclaim it yourselves, as you remain intimately united to Jesus, as you exercise your ministry enthusiastically, certain that nothing can be lacking in those who put their trust in him. Bear witness to Christ, through the joyful and consistent practice of the evangelical counsels, indicating where our true homeland lies: in Heaven... Jesus never abandons his friends. He assures us of his help,

because nothing can be done without him, but at the same time, he asks everyone to make a personal commitment to spread his universal message of love and peace."¹⁷

However, we cannot completely deny that, at least in some instances, there is a tendency to reduce consecrated life into a 'life of administration,' 'experts in running institutions' or 'specialists in certain works.' After the Vatican II, in the pretext of renewal, some laxity has crept into

When consecrated people live to their fullest potential as apostles, doing God's will, they give glory to God

consecrated life. To a certain extent, it may be one of the reasons for the fall in the witnessing-dimension of consecrated life. Now, the economically developed countries suffer from a lack of sufficient consecrated people. The consecrated life is not a call to be only 'good-administrators of well-known institutions,' 'easy-going' and 'goody-goody people.' It is a call to be genuine apostles and prophets for the modern world. Basically, our task is to live the Gospel according to the particular charism, insights and examples

of a holy founder or a patron. St. Irenaeus wrote thus: "The glory of God is the living human being."¹⁸ When consecrated people live to their fullest potential as apostles, doing God's will, they give glory to God.

Moreover, under the pretext of being with the people, and of being dynamically involved in social activities, at least in some instances, there are some tendencies among the consecrated people to abandon not only some of the ascetical disciplines but also some devotional practices that gave public witness to their

In order to become apostles, it is necessary that our courage be habitual and our faith be strong...

quest for holiness of life. To some extent, both this laxity in prayer life and the lethargy in 'being with him' have given counter-witness to our vocation as apostles. As apostles in the modern world, we have to possess enough courage to give witness to Christ. Without doubt, in certain circumstances we may have energy of will and strength of character; perhaps, simply an act of virtue may enable us to surmount a particular difficulty, or to achieve a victory. But that

is not sufficient. It is neither an accidental courage, nor a momentary effort that makes us real apostles. We have to be courageous and strong constantly: courageous in faith, in virtue, and in duties of our states in life. In order to become apostles, it is necessary that our courage be habitual and our faith be strong, that we carry this constant energy into each and every moment, difficulties and challenges notwithstanding.

The Gospel spirit, which constantly calls us to be good apostles, helps consecrated life to rise above the painful mediocrity of which it is often accused. The tension confronting the consecrated person in the modern world is that of holiness versus apostolate, and personal sanctification versus external works. The challenge is to achieve harmony in our life and commitment. This gradually enables us to find our holiness and sanctification, not apart from our daily routine, but precisely through and in it. The life of prayer and apostolate are two expressions of same reality, Christian charity.

Conclusion

Although the present situation in the world can give rise to a justified sense of discomfort and resignation, war is never inevitable and peace is always possible. The time has come to change the course of history, to re-discover trust, to cultivate dialogue and to nourish solidarity. The consecrated life depends upon a

commitment on each and everyone's part. It can progress in the modern world, towards the true and lasting peace for which it longs, only by pursuing an integral solidarity, in which non-violence (*ahimsa*) assumes a spiritual dimension. True and lasting peace is unimaginable without the holistic development of every one. The witness of holiness is according to the nature, purpose, and spirit of our institutes. We have to develop our theology and spirituality that will allow us to live and work together so that our efforts will build-up the Church. Our ministry, life, social-involvement and work should give striking witness to the mission of the Church, and inspire more vocations so that our charism will continue to be a gift to the Church. It is an invitation to all the consecrated people to affirm their identity and mission as apostles, to offer their contemporaries a convincing life of faith which inspires all, and to be renewed in missionary zeal for the extension of God's Kingdom. The world needs such witness.

Endnotes:

- 1 Mary Milligan, "Apostolic Spirituality," *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 1993, pp. 51-56; J.J.A. Bühner, "apostolos," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol.1, 1990, pp. 141-142; Francis H. Agnew, "The Origin of the NT Apostolic Concept: A Review of Research," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 105, 1986, pp. 75-96. In the early Church, Peter defined apostleship in terms of prophetic office namely transmitting words of the prophets and Jesus to the Church (2 Pet 3:2).
- 2 K.H. Rengstorf, "apostolos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, 1994, pp. 398-447; Francis H. Agnew, "Apostle," *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 1993, pp. 48-52.
- 3 In Lukan theology, the apostle must have been a witness to Jesus from the earliest days of his ministry (Acts 1:22-23). This would exclude Paul. Though Paul is an important person in the second part of the Acts, he is only once called apostle (14:14), which can be taken as a technical use of the term. The 12 become the apostles of Acts (1:26), and appear frequently in its first 15 chapters. The number 12 is significant as the account the replacement of Judas (Acts 1:15-26). Francis H. Agnew, "Apostle," *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 1993, pp. 49-51.
- 4 According to the synoptic gospels, the scene of the accounts of the call of the first apostle, is at the shore of the Sea of Galilee, while, John states that it happened at the banks of river Jordan.
- 5 The intention of the apostles in following Jesus was not pure in the beginning. They expected Jesus as a political Messiah and king who would

- defeat the enemies of Israel and establish a Kingdom. It was only the Pentecost event that eventually set matter in a right perspective.
- 6 Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the 45th World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, April 13, 2008, Rome.
 - 7 The group of apostles of Jesus was not reduced to twelve in number. The identification of the twelve with the apostles was a symbolic relation to the 12 tribes. The foundation of the people of Israel was the twelve tribes, traced back to twelve patriarchs, all sons of Jacob. Jesus came to found a new Israel, called the Church, and so chose twelve as the patriarchs of this new family. Jesus, after a prayer, set these twelve apart from the rest of his disciples.
 - 8 Yves Congar, *Priest and Layman*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1962, p. 3, 9. The Sanskrit term *anubhava* has a deeper meaning than the English term experience. Etymologically *anubhava* points to a certain union with or touch with reality (embracing), attaining something which was not within the reach earlier, a coming into being (realisation) and perceiving and understanding (a new knowledge) as a consequence of which there is fruition, enjoyment. See, Antony Mookenthottam, "Anubhava: Religious Experience in Hindu Scriptures," *Indian Journal of Spirituality*, Vol. 4, 1992, p. 436; Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.
 - 10 Mark refers to the 'Twelve' 6 times; Mathew 9 times; Luke 6 times; John 2 times; the expressions 'disciples' and 'the Twelve' are interchanged several times, in such a way that in Mark it seems they are identified.
 - 11 Simon and Andrew (Mk 1:18-20); Peter (Mk 14:54-58) Levi (Mk 2:14-17); the blind man from Jericho (Mk 10:46-52); the one carrying the cross of Jesus (Mk 15:21-22).
 - 12 Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the 45th World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, April 13, 2008, Rome.
 - 13 Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, p. 20.
 - 14 L. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, 1981, pp. 208-209; K.H. Rengstorf, "Mathew," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. IV, 1981, pp. 441-455.
 - 15 Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to the International Union of Superiors General*, May 7, 2007, Rome.
 - 16 Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to the Consecrated Men and Women on 11th World Day of Consecrated Life*, February 2, 2007, Rome.
 - 17 Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Turany Airport, Brno, Sunday, September 27, 2009, Czech Republic.
 - 18 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, XX, 7.

BOOK REVIEW

Marshall B. Rosenberg, **Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life**, Encinitas, California: PuddleDancer Press, 2003. Pages—xix+220, Price US\$ 17. 95.

Why attempt reviewing a book that does not touch upon consecrated life, in a journal that almost exclusively deals with the theory and practice of religious life? The answer lies in its very scope itself—the *practice* of consecrated living. A religious community is not a natural, spontaneous community. It is an intentional community, usually single-sexed, formed of individuals who choose to belong to one another on the basis of a common commitment rooted in Gospel values. The benefits and graces resulting out of such communities can be enormous; so are the pitfalls. The dynamics of communication among the members of such intentional communities can make or break their members. Indeed, learning non-violent, compassionate ways of interpersonal communication can work miracles towards making consecrated community a joyful place to live in.

Rosenberg's book can help learn the fundamentals of such compassionate, life giving communication. He has been a pioneer in systematizing the process of non-violent communication (NVC), and instrumental in negotiating peace among many conflicted groups globally. His NVC has been adopted by Fortune 500 companies, government offices, educational institutions, health care professionals, peace and social change advocates, correctional facilities, and many others. The foreword to the book is written by Arun Gandhi, the grandchild of Mahatma Gandhi, and founder-president of M. K. Gandhi Institute for Non-Violence. He endorses the value and efficacy of non-violent communication in enriching human lives and societies.

In the first chapter, Rosenberg explains the foundational philosophy of NVC—*giving from the heart*. It is rooted in compassion, which he considers the true nature of human beings. He also introduces the four components of NVC—observations, feelings, needs, and requests. The

simplicity of the components should not blind us to their efficacy. The later chapters elaborate on this foursome. Chapter two gives a brief analysis of communication that blocks compassion. They include moralistic judgments, making comparisons, denial of responsibility, communication of desires as demands, and life-alienating communication that seeks vengeance in stead of reconciliation.

Chapters three to six elaborate on each of the four components of NVC. Chapter three discusses the need for separating our evaluation from our observation. An example: A statement like “Mary, you are too generous” mixes evaluation with observation, which leaves Mary confused about what the speaker is referring to, and often evokes defensive or aggressive reaction. In stead, if the speaker were to separate evaluation from observation as in “Mary, when I see you giving money to anyone who asks for help, I think you are being too generous,” it gets specific and gives Mary space to explain. Chapter four suggests that we explain our feeling resulting from our observation. Often we tend to state our thoughts as feelings. E.g., “I feel like a failure” is a thought, not a feeling. An accurate statement of feeling in it could be “I feel sad/angry/disappointed.” The fifth chapter explains why and how we need to specify our unfulfilled need or desire that triggers such feeling. Chapter six

states that, after having expressed our observation, feeling, and need, we must request, in concrete action terms, the kind of enriching behavior/response that we want from the other. An example would sound like this: “When I learnt that you did not consult with me on the decision on the guest speaker, I felt hurt because I want to be part of the community decisions. Hence, would you please consult with me next time we need to choose a speaker?” Every chapter ends with exercises inviting readers to evaluate sample pieces of conversations in the light of NVC.

Chapter seven focuses on how to receive communication empathically. We might be conscious of NVC components, but others may not. It explains how, when someone communicates to us in unclear terms, we must receive such communication and request for clarification, with respect and compassion.

Chapters eight through thirteen further elaborate the conceptual foundations and specific techniques and processes to make our communication richer and life-giving. The topics covered are: the power of empathy, connecting compassionately with ourselves, steps for expressing anger constructively, how to use force protectively, how to free ourselves and others from old, destructive ways of programming, and how to express and receive

appreciation in NVC mode. Each of the chapters gives rich insights and practical suggestions to make our communication truly compassionate.

There is an element of sporadic oversimplification in some places. In resonance with his Buddhist moorings, he tends to present compassion as the true nature of human beings, but does not adequately treat the foundational violence that permeates human nature. Thus, the book might be light on theoretical comprehensiveness. However, it is clear that Rosenberg's intent is not to give a comprehensive theory of human behavior, but to offer a productive package for praxis, and to that extent, he is a winner. I believe this book must become a necessary resource material for formation houses. Religious formation houses will be able to further enrich the conceptual background of NVC through nuanced application of Christian teachings that pivot on non-violent loving. To my knowledge, there is no Indian edition of this book. I hope some Christian publications in India would bring forth an affordable Indian edition in the near future.

But there is more. In many places, there is a felt need for more intense communication among religious living together in the same community. The lack of or weakness in communication usually

leads to weakening of fraternity: if we know little or nothing about the lives of our brothers or sisters, they will be strangers to us, and the relationship will become anonymous, as well as create true and very real problems of isolation and solitude. Some communities complain about the poor quality of the fundamental sharing of spiritual goods. Communication takes place, they say, around problems and issues of marginal importance but rarely is there any sharing of what is vital and central to the journey of consecration. This can have painful consequences, because then spiritual experience imperceptibly takes on individualistic overtones. A mentality of self-sufficiency becomes more important; a lack of sensitivity to others develops; and, gradually, significant relationships are sought outside the community. This problem should be dealt with explicitly. It requires, on the one hand, a tactful and caring approach which does not exert pressure; but it also requires courage and creativity, searching for ways and methods which will make it possible for all to learn to share, simply and fraternally, the gifts of the Spirit so that these may indeed belong to all and be of benefit to all (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7) (*Fraternal Life in Community*, 32).

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The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa. This invites contemporary society to a serious review of its life-style, which, in many parts of the world, is prone to hedonism and consumerism, regardless of their harmful consequences [Cf. John Paul II, *Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace*, 13: *loc. cit.*, 154-155]. What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of *new life-styles* “in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments” [John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 36: *loc. cit.*, 838-840]. Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment, just as environmental deterioration in turn upsets relations in society. Nature, especially in our time, is so integrated into the dynamics of society and culture that by now it hardly constitutes an independent variable. Desertification and the decline in productivity in some agricultural areas are also the result of impoverishment and underdevelopment among their inhabitants. When incentives are offered for their economic and cultural development, nature itself is protected. Moreover, how many natural resources are squandered by wars! Peace in and among peoples would also provide greater protection for nature. The hoarding of resources, especially water, can generate serious conflicts among the peoples involved. Peaceful agreement about the use of resources can protect nature and, at the same time, the well-being of the societies concerned.

The Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction. There is need for what might be called a human ecology, correctly understood. The deterioration of nature is in fact closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: *when “human ecology”* [John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 38: *loc. cit.*, 840-841; Benedict XVI, *Message for the 2007 World Day of Peace*, 8: *loc. cit.*, 779] *is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits.* Just as human virtues are interrelated, such that the weakening of one places others at risk, so the ecological system is based on respect for a plan that affects both the health of society and its good relationship with nature (*Caritas in Veritate*, 51).

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