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EDITORIAL

In the history of Religious life, we can observe, constant and continuous attempts were made to explain religious life through varied ways and means. Hence, so many theological reflections have emerged with regard to the perception of Consecrated life. In the recent past, in bringing a radical revitalization about its understanding, the International Congress on Consecrated Life in 2004 came out with the vibrant caption “With a Passion for Christ and Passion for Humanity.” This Congress, led by the Spirit, tried to explain the Consecrated life basing on two biblical icons, namely the Samaritan Woman at the Well (Jn 4:5-42) and the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). Besides these icons, we also come across a few other biblical figures from whom we draw inspiration to emphasize the constitutive components of Consecrated life.

In the year dedicated to St. Paul (June 2008 – June 2009) on the occasion of the 2000th year of his birth, we tried to visualize in him such an icon. It is true, he was neither a priest nor a religious; neither a founder nor a co-founder of a religious congregation as per the contemporary understanding of these terms. However, he is seen as a model or an exemplar for today’s Consecrated persons because he is a *Christ-mystic* and a man of action with his daring missionary enthusiasm. His Christ-mysticism is perceived as only a part of his entire spirituality, which is constituted of Theocentric, Christocentric, Pneumatological and other dimensions. Before we begin to present Paul as the role model for today’s religious, it is essential to know that his insights and exhortations that we come across in his epistles are fundamentally directed towards the Christian life. But they still serve

as sources of inspiration for every Consecrated person who is called to live in a radical, profound and new way the Christian life in today's society.

Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee, a learned Jew and a tent maker was very much exposed to Roman, Greek and Jewish cultures. He was committed to the transmission of the interpretation of Torah since he was of the opinion that one could reach God through law (cf. Phil 3:5-6). Thus he could not tolerate the Christians who were spreading the message that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and Saviour and started persecuting them. Such a zealous Saul was encountered by the Risen Lord on the way to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:4-18), which made him Paul, a witness to the risen one, an apostle, a minister, an ambassador, a servant, and an imitator of Christ Jesus.

Paul duly acknowledges that it was during this event that God the Father revealed His Son to him (cf. Gal 1:16). This extraordinary encounter is viewed as a *mystical experience*, the decisive moment in his life during which he could obtain an experience of the revelation of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of God's promises. Above all, Christ is understood as the 'end of the law' (Rom 10:4). Hence, a transition from law-centered spirituality to

Christ-centered spirituality takes place in the life of Paul. This transformative experience is considered as only the starting point, which brought in him a new birth to be intimately united with Christ. In the course of his life, this mystical union with Christ was deepened and he continued to live in the irresistible presence of Christ. This prompted him to declare, "I am in Christ" and "Christ is in me." His sense of belonging to Christ was so intense that it made him to say, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Realities of his life enabled him to sense that he was loved by Christ despite his weaknesses; it even induced him to challenge if there was anything on earth which could separate him from the love of Christ (cf. Rom 8:38-39). This new life in and with Christ paved the way for a radical transformation, which led him to reverse his values by considering as rubbish and loss everything that he was upholding so far as the highest ideal (Phil 3:7ff). He wanted gradually to have the heart and mind of Christ and to imitate Christ in every way possible. His intimacy with Christ grows further by realizing that it is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which makes us the children of God. The Christ event is seen as the inauguration of our life in God which will be realized in its fullness

at the *parousia*. Hence, he exhorts us to actively participate in the event of Christ as he did. As a matter of fact, Paul's Christocentric approach leads us ultimately to Theocentrism which in turn obliges to have a Missiological orientation.

The Damascus event is seen not only as the revelation of Jesus Christ to Paul but also as a commissioning to universal mission and more particularly to preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (Gal1:15ff). Thus, there exists an intimate connection between the revelation and mission; that is to say that Paul's mission is the outcome of the revelation that he had. That is the reason why Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians: "God chose to reveal his son to me, so that I shall proclaim him." Consequently, we find in him a paradigm shift from being a persecutor of the followers of Christ to becoming a staunch proclaimer of God's gospel. His communion with the crucified and risen Christ impelled him to commit fully to making known to others what he had experienced; in fact he considers the sharing of such an experience as a primary obligation (1Cor 9:16) that he needs to fulfill. Therefore, Paul undertook different missionary journeys to carry out the message of the risen Lord that the gospel be proclaimed everywhere. The

outcome of his proclamation is the emergence of Christian communities outside Jewish circles, which he humbly acknowledges as the work of God. In this sense, it is justified to say that next to Christ he was the one who contributed most to the spread of Christianity. Besides establishing Christian communities, he continued to guide them to grow deeper in their communion with the Lord and to lead them towards an edifying life. When some of these communities were in need, he was taking efforts to help them even materially. Trials and tribulations are part of his missionary endeavours and he feels that they are necessarily linked to entrance into the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). As Christ could give us reconciliation, salvation, redemption, justification etc., by his death on the cross and rising to life, Paul believed that he could bring life to himself (2Cor 4:10) and to others (2Cor 4:12) through his innumerable sufferings (1Cor4:9-13; 2Cor 4:8-12; 6:4-10). It is also interesting to note that he carried out this work of importing life to others as a team with the collaboration extended to him by his co-workers. Hence, Paul becomes a source of inspiration to all of us through his mystical life and untiring missionary enthusiasm.

As God revealed his son to Paul in a vision, He also reveals him to us through different ways and means: through Scriptures, our spiritual activities, the people whom we encounter and live with and through the entire cosmos in which we undertake our life journey. Hence the Consecrated people are expected to be open to the revelations of Christ, to encounter him whenever and wherever possible and deepen their intimacy with him. And this intimacy will enable them to give up their life so that others may have life. In this way, like Paul they can become true witnesses to the Risen Lord, the servants, apostles, ambassadors and imitators of Christ Jesus.

This issue of our journal comes out with the title St. Paul and Consecrated Life. It mainly consists of the different papers presented during our yearly seminar organized at Sanyasa Institute of Consecrated Life on the occasion of the Day of Consecrated Life, which is celebrated on 2 February. Besides, you also find in this issue some other relevant articles for priests and religious. We hope and wish that the insights and reflections that are shared with you will enable the life and the mission of Consecrated people to become more credible and effective.

Xavier Terrence interprets basically the Damascus encounter of

Paul as a call to obtain perfect, right and fuller knowledge of Jesus Christ and the knowledge of his mission. In the same way he invites all the priests and religious to undertake the process of acquiring fuller knowledge of Christ and that of their own vocation in the midst of the society in which they live and exercise their different ministries.

In the context of the discrepancy that exists between the priestly/religious training and its outcome, Lawrence emphasizes that the contributions of St. Paul with regard to the Christian formation, that is, dying to sin, law, flesh, and the world but embracing the sacrificial love of Christ, can be of great help. They serve as the vibrant sources of motivation for the transformation of every formee through the process of conformation to the image of Christ.

Thomas Vattukulam, in his article, shows us how Paul's call to follow Jesus Christ and be the proclaimer of the gospel to the gentiles and his perception of apostleship are intimately related to prayer. He also carefully brings out some of the characteristics of the prayer of Paul for the Churches.

Joe Mannath, with the intention of improving the quality of the priestly and religious formation, objectively evaluates the different dimensions of their formation in India basing on

his personal experiences and enables them to grasp the prevalence of disparity between the rhetoric about ideal formation and its practice. He comes out with a few practical and concrete guidelines which will be of vital importance for all those who are involved in the field of priestly and religious training to serve better the Church and the society.

Xavier E. Manavath, in his Keynote Address delivered at the XIV Annual Assembly of the Karnataka Regional Conference of Religious (KRCR), 2008, briefly examines how the Word of God and Christ, the *Eternal Word Made Flesh*, plays a vital role in the

life and mission of Consecrated men and women.

Paul Dominic, in his article, deals with the document: *Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian reflection on the "New Age,"* which is the outcome of the study of the New Age movement by three Pontifical Councils. While analyzing the different features of the dialogal Church in terms of dealing with the New Age fellowship, he invites today's religious to make use of the natural endowments of religious life namely the enriching tradition of spirituality, its commitment etc., to become effective partners in dialogue with the New Age people.



CONVERSION OF PAUL AND ITS RELEVANCE TO OUR VOCATION

T. Xavier Terrence

The great 'deal' between Yahweh and Moses was 'liberation in order to know' (Ex 6:6-7 and many other references in Exodus; Deut 7:9). Yahweh liberated the people of Israel from the Egyptian bondage and in return He expected that the people would know Him and the covenant He would make on Mount Sinai (Ex 24). All along the unsettled life the people of Israel mostly remained faithful to this 'knowledge of God.' But, once settled well in the Promised Land they slowly started ignoring Him and His covenant. Time and again God chose various persons to remind the Chosen

People of their God and His plan for them. The core of the message of Yahweh which He conveyed through Isaiah is, "The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand" (Is 1:3) and "Go, and say to this people: 'Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive'" (Is 6:9). Jesus repeated the same accusation against those who did not believe in him (Mt 13:13; Jn 8:42-43). Yahweh accused His own chosen people of ignorance, an ignorance of the source of their existence as well as the divine plan for them.

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When the fullness of time came (Gal 4:4) the same God spoke through His Son (Heb 1:1-2). A fuller revelation was offered to humanity through Jesus Christ. The same God testified this fact and instructed the people to listen to him (Mt 3:17; 17:5; Mk 1:11; 9:7; Lk 3:22; 9:35). Jesus chose disciples to announce this testimony and the Good News offered through him. This Good News is the 'fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies' and the 'new strategy' of the Kingdom of God. Some believed this testimony and others did not. But God continued His choice of various persons to announce the person and the message of Jesus. About 2000 years ago His eyes fell on Paul of Tarsus and in our time, on us gathered here and on many others. Why should God choose Paul extraordinarily? Why did God choose each one of us to be His herald? Did Paul understand Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies? Do we know really the person and message of Jesus? Do we preach the 'reality' of the person and message of Jesus? Where do we stand now? In the wake of decline in the number of vocation to priesthood and religious life and of the standard of the ministers of God, an answer to these questions will surely help our understanding of our vocation and make our ministry more effective.

1. Paul – The Choice of God

The moment we hear the name 'Paul', what may come to our mind first are his courageous words and the suffering he endured for Christ. "In order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, I consider everything as loss" (Phil 3:8); "It is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). What made Paul utter such words as these? How could Paul have endured such sufferings as he enumerates in 2Cor 11:23-29? How could Paul who persecuted the Christians suffer for Christ in his turn? How did the disciple of great Gamaliel go to the extent of preaching Christ even to the Gentiles at the cost of throwing away his own Jewish laws and customs? How did he dare to be beheaded for the sake of making Christ live in the hearts of both Christians and non-Christians? Whence did this change come? What does this change point to? What do we mean by the 'change' in Paul – of his heart or of his religion or of something else?

2. Religious Background at the Time of Paul

At the time of Paul, the Greco-Roman religious and cultural norms were dominating the countries of the Mediterranean Sea. Even the Jewish religion could not keep away from this influence. Because of the Jewish

Diaspora/Dispersion the influence of Greco-Roman religious tradition was a bit too strong among the Jews; it included the city of Tarsus, the native place of Paul. As a result, the Jews were familiar with the pagan religions, gods, and their customs. Paul also refers to this practice in 1Cor 8:5. The Greeks and the Roman world worshipped many gods and goddesses. Nevertheless, the Jewish religion and its worship were strongly rooted at Jerusalem and the surrounding regions of Palestine. And Christianity was considered as an offshoot of Judaism. The Jews considered Christians to be agitators, imposters, and separatists. They were afraid that the Christians would cause the collapse of the Jewish religion and culture. Fearing this, the Christians were expelled from the Jewish synagogues (Jn 9:22-34; 12:42; 16:2; 19:38). There was enmity between the Jews and the Christians. Because the Jews were very precautious about the possibility of getting their doctrines disturbed by that of the Christians, there was a strong urge to destroy both Christians and their doctrine (Acts 8:1; 22:4). Yet, it is still a question mark whether the Jews considered Christianity as a separate religion.

3. State of Paul's Mind

Paul was born at Tarsus, a city under the influence of the Greek religion, as the son of Jewish parents who migrated from the Promised Land. But he did his higher studies at Jerusalem, the cradle of the Jewish religion, doctrine and tradition (Acts 22:3). Therefore, the influence of the Jewish religion and tradition was excessively strong in Paul. And that has its roots in the fact that his *guru* was Gamaliel, a famous learned and strict Jewish teacher. Like his teacher Gamaliel, a moderate and tolerant Pharisee (acts 5:34-40), Paul too made it a point to learn Jewish regulations in all its totality (Acts 22:3; 26:24). So Paul had the experiences of two sets of religions and their customs. Hence, he had the potential to accept with his heart and mind the customs of his birthplace and also that of Jewish religion to which he belonged. He was able to follow the law in its entirety (Acts 26:4-5; Phil 2:5-6). It is with such a strong background, tradition, and state of mind that Paul encountered Christianity. It is with this proud attitude that he got to know the truth of God revealed through Moses and offered himself completely to terrorise and destroy the religion of Christ. He felt that he was called by God to protect the Jewish religion and its greatness and so Paul gave his life to this felt

call of God. Little by little he gave expression to it in his actions. He was a silent co-operator in killing Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1), then as a terrorist he began to destroy the Christians both in Jerusalem and outside (Acts 8:3; 9:1-2; 22:4-5; 26:9-12; Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:6; 1Tim 1:13). Thus he made himself the guardian of Judaism. Unfortunately, the openness of Tarsus Diaspora community and the moderate and tolerant nature of Gamaliel did not have any influence and impact in Paul.¹

4. The Fact that Paul did not understand in Jesus of Nazareth

It was true that the education he had at the feet of Gamaliel gave Paul a clear knowledge of the Law. He was a staunch believer in the truth of God's revelation made known through Moses to the people of Israel. But Paul failed to grasp the meaning that the promise of redemption made through Moses would be fulfilled one day; and he did not expect that fulfilment in Jesus, neither did he accept that fact when he was told. In Deut 18:15, God gave a promise through Moses: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet." God had promised that once their nomadic life in the wilderness was over, He would bring them and

settle them in the Promised Land and give them a great prophet (Deut 18:18). Peter preached in the Temple precincts that this great promise was fulfilled in and through Jesus (Acts 3:22). And Matthew preached through his words that the prophecy made through Isaiah (7:14) was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus (Mt 1:23). The prophet Micah foretold the place of the prophet's birth "But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrata, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel" (Mic 5:2). In Mt 2:5-6 we see that the priests and scribes recounting this prophecy to King Herod. Therefore the prophecy and the promises made through Moses, Isaiah, and Micah were fulfilled in Jesus at Bethlehem.

Moreover, the truth of the birth of Christ was clouded by a few circumstances. Joseph and Mary along with the child Jesus had to migrate to Nazareth that was in Galilee from the land of Bethlehem due to the reckless and violent attitude of the kings of Judea (Mt 2:13-23; Judg 13:5-7). Luke states it in a different manner that Joseph and Mary had migrated from Judah to the region of Galilee and lived in Nazareth even before their marriage. And they had to go to Bethlehem because of the census ordered by Augustus Caesar. It is under such circumstance Jesus was

born at Bethlehem, in the land of his forefathers (Lk 2:1-20). After carrying out all the rites and ceremonies connected with birth they went back to Galilee and lived at Nazareth. Therefore there was no chance for the Jews to understand the truth about the origin and background of Jesus. We can see a reflection of this in the attitude that Jews had towards Jesus. Both Nazareth and Galilee were not considered to be the place and the region that would normally give a prophet or Messiah, because there is no mention of Nazareth in the Old Testament. When Philip reported to Nathaniel “We have found Him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth,” Nathaniel mocked, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (Jn 1:45-46). Similarly when there was a dispute on Jesus, some said, “Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?” (Jn 7:41-42). In the same dispute the Pharisees retorted to Nicodemus, “Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee” (Jn 7:52). Therefore the majority of the Jews neither knew nor accepted that these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Paul was not an exception.

The words and deeds of Jesus, the son of Joseph of Nazareth (Jn 6:42;

9:29) seemed far superior to the sacred laws given by Moses (Jn 5:16-18; 9:16). Hence, many looked at Jesus as an enemy. They failed to understand that He came to fulfil the laws (Mt 5:17; Jn 6:49-50; 7:21-24). Only a few realized and understood who Jesus really was (Lk 23:40; Jn 6:14; 7:40-41).

Moreover, they did not expect that the Son of God, the expected Messiah of Israel and the Saviour of the Jews, would suffer with bloody wounds, then brutally die on the cross (Mt 28: 40; Lk 23:35-37, 39). Finally they could not accept the fact of the resurrection of Jesus (Mt 28:11-15). It is regrettable and sad that the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus could not understand and accept the revelation of the Lord God made through Moses and the prophets (Mt 8:17; 21:4; 26:56; Mk 14:49; 15:28; Lk 4:21; 24:44; Jn 17:12; 19:24; Acts 13:29; Gal 5:14) and neither could Paul who was saturated in the tradition of Pharisees (Acts 26:5).

5. The Revelation of Jesus to Paul

As the first step of revelation of His holy laws to the chosen people, the Lord God appeared in the form of fire to Moses and called to him “Moses, Moses” (Ex 3:2; 19:18). When the time was fulfilled (Gal 4:4) this same God made Jesus appear to Paul in the form of bright light and called him “Saul,

Saul” (Acts 9:3-4; 22:6-7; 26:13-14; Gal 1:11-17; Phil 3:4-17; 1Tim 1:12-17). Both these callings have the suffering of people as their important issue. Yahweh told Moses that He heard the suffering of the people and wanted to deliver them (Ex 3:7-8). Jesus states categorically to Paul that persecuting his followers is equal to persecuting Him. Paul never directly persecuted Christ but only the Christians (Acts 9:4-6; 22:7-8; 26:14-15). Moses was chosen only for the people of Israel (Ex 3:9-12; 20:1-26). But Paul was chosen for all the people (Acts 9:15; 22:14-15; 26:16-18). Paul should have realised that his call was the continuation of the call to Moses, but he did not do so. Jesus makes it known to him in and through the means that he took to reveal Himself to Paul. Christ appeared to Paul brighter than noon day sun that made him go blind (Acts 9:3,8; 26:6,11). What did Jesus want to convey to Paul through this event, except that Paul was blind even though he had eyes? (Acts 9:8). The conviction of Paul that Judaism and the laws were the fullness of God’s revelation was equal to darkness. Jesus made Paul blind only to enable him to understand that whatever Moses and prophets had spoken concerning the Messiah have been fulfilled in Him and that Paul failed to understand that the laws were made complete by Jesus.

Jesus removed Paul’s blind pride that “Judaism was all” and made him see the facts as they were. He made Paul understand the fact that it was not the laws that would bring salvation but Jesus the Son of God and entrusted the task of making it known to the whole human race. In and through this, Paul proclaims that his mission is contained in the events connected to his conversion itself. He was called and appointed to open the eyes of the people and bring them from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan (Acts 26:18). So Jesus opened the eyes of Paul and brought him from darkness to light and made him realise the truth (Is 42:7, 16) and entrusted this as his mission for the people (Acts 26:18). So Paul realised the prophecy of Isaiah that ‘God would glorify even Galilee, the region of the gentiles’ (Is 9:1) being fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He enabled others to understand this through his preaching (Acts 13:26-31). The Lord God brought to fulfilment in Jesus who appeared to Paul as light by the prophecy of Isaiah that “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness- on them light has shined” (Is 9:2).

6. Conversion or Call?

Paul was not a sinner who rejected and lived against the law instead he was a perfect Pharisee who followed all the laws meticulously. We hear this in his own words (Gal 1:14; Phil 3:4-7; Acts 26: 4-5). Therefore, there was no need for Paul to leave behind any sinful activities and embrace a holy life. Jesus did not call Paul to repent from sinful life as the Lord God did through the prophets. There was no need for a change of religion in the case of Paul as God expected from the people of Israel whom He liberated from the Egyptian slavery, who in turn became faithless and worshipped the pagan gods. The prophets compared them to the prostitutes (Is 1:21; Hos 2:2-24; 3:1). Actually, Paul had offered himself entirely to his one true God. And from this follows that Christianity was not considered to be a separate religion since what the apostles and the disciples preached were not a new set of doctrines and regulations but only the fulfilment of Jewish prophecies and truths spoken by God. Therefore Jesus could not have called Paul to change from the Jewish religion to the Christian religion. It was neither the change of heart nor the change of religion; then what was the change called for in Paul through Jesus' revelation?

We can describe this as the change from imperfect knowledge to perfect knowledge, from nothing to everything, from darkness to light and a move towards the truth revealed through Moses. The fact that the promise of Yahweh made to the people of Israel was fulfilled and perfected in Jesus (Acts 26:6-7) led Paul to become knowledgeable. This is what Paul writes in short to the Philippians "I want to know Christ" (3:10). In order to know Christ Paul was ready to lose his Jewish tradition and holy laws. Paul who held the Jewish tradition and the holy laws in great respect before his conversion, considered them as rubbish after being called by Jesus (Phil 3:4-8). When he came to know Christ, Paul accepted the sheer nothingness of the holy laws that he learned under Gamaliel (Eph 2:15). It is fitting to say that when Paul realised his 'call within his call' he changed from the state of ignorance to the state of knowing everything (fuller knowledge, deeper wisdom).

7. The Importance of our Vocation to be the Servants of God

The post-modern insecurity in all walks of life, in every sector and in every corner has been offering to humanity preoccupation, stress, depression, competitive attitude, insensitivity, impatience, etc. One finds

rarely time for oneself and for others, if not for God. This post-modern insecurity, while offering attractive but temporary solution, systematically silences the voice of God which has the capacity to give real meaning and purpose to human life. Humanity seeks 'instant' solution to cover up and not 'permanent' solution which can heal and give growth. Church at large is not an exception to this trend of our time. God's voice in the world and especially in the Church is heard in its most feeble tone today. He wants to 'address' the problems in order to heal and give growth. He wants those whom He called to be instruments in addressing the problems and neither to shun them nor to ignore them. He needs men and women with proper knowledge of God and His strategy along with 'sensitivity' to God as well as to the concrete setting of the people in which one lives. Indeed, there are thousands of men and women who, after realising their 'vocation' from God, say that they work in the vineyard of God. There are new martyrs (*those who witness Jesus Christ through their suffering and death*) and confessors (*those who witness Jesus Christ through suffering and not through death*) in our time. Against the background of these heroes and heroines of faith, there are many who maintain the status quo and a few who do not know what to do after

their official liturgical obligations. Hence, it is right time to reconsider the understanding of our vocation in order to rejuvenate our own status in the vineyard of the Lord. Paul could be a model for us in this post-modern era.

8. Continuity of Vocation

The Clergy and the Religious have realised a specific 'call' from God and have committed themselves to the cause of God and His people. Those who are preparing themselves to this dedicated life have been trying to understand and clarify a 'call' from above. It is an ongoing event in the Church through the centuries. The words of the Servant of God John Paul II would be appropriate to be mentioned here: "In every age there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father's call and to the prompting of the Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ, in order to devote themselves to him with an "undivided" heart (cf. 1Cor 7:34). Like the Apostles, they too have left everything behind in order to be with Christ and to put themselves, as he did, at the service of God and their brothers and sisters. In this way, through the many charisms of spiritual and apostolic life bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit, they have helped to make the mystery and mission of the Church shine forth, and in doing

so have contributed to the renewal of society.”²

The late Pope makes clear the following points in order to help the ‘called’ to realise the goal of their ‘call’: the divine call of the biblical time continues to our day; the ‘called’ are generous to respond to the ‘call’ positively; after the positive response, one needs to persist and have Christ as one’s preference; one needs to be at the service of God and his people; one receives specific and particular charism from the Holy Spirit; this charism should be used to make the mystery and the mission clear to oneself first and then to others which finally helps the renewal of the society. Among these characteristics of the ‘call,’ two things are very clear:

- a. The ‘call’ is from God and not a human choice.
- b. The objective of this ‘call’ is not merely self sanctification of the one ‘called’ but primarily the people of God, in making the mystery and the mission of the Church clear to them and to renew their way of life. Hence, the one ‘called’ should have a better knowledge.

Now our concern is to question ourselves: Are these two things being realised in my vocation? Am I really interested in knowing the person

and mission of Jesus Christ? Do I progressively realise my own vocation from the day I felt it till today? Do I know really what God wants me to do through my pastoral ministry or through the charism of my congregation? Am I, as a superior or formator, interested in imparting sound knowledge on those who are formed in seminaries and noviciates? Do I instruct the formees about these things and encourage them to go ahead?

One is called in a concrete situation with a specific purpose in order to better the situation. In the first level one is called by God to serve Him and His people and in the second level one is called to serve Him and His people through a specific mission. Samuel and David were called by God to serve but each in one’s own way. They did not interchange their mission: Samuel prophesied and David ruled the people. Isaiah and Hosea were called to prophesy, but in different ways: Isaiah through words and Hosea through life. God the Holy Spirit inspires men and women in multiple ways giving them the necessary talents. Each talent or gift of the Holy Spirit is of same value and of same importance (1Cor 12:4-6). One should not attach hierarchical value to these gifts based on the popularity in the society or in the history. All these gifts are to be used for the sake of

the believers and for common good (1Cor 12:7-11). Hence, one needs to understand 'in what way' one is called to serve God and His people. He/she needs to know the gift God has given and accept it as divine gift to be used in the service of God and humanity. When one does not understand this, one does not know what to do!

9. Perceiving One's Vocation

One of the most vivid, attractive and picturesque scenes in the Bible is the call narrative. The calling of Moses from amidst the burning bush (Ex 3), the calling of Isaiah amidst the scene of Heavenly court in the Temple (Is 6), the embryonic and prenatal consecration and calling of Jeremiah (Jer 1), the calling of a betrothed young woman Mary (Lk 1:26-38), the terrific calling of Paul amidst a fall (Acts 9:1-9; 22:6-11; 26:12-18), etc. stand as the best examples of the call narrative in the Bible. It is the personal intervention of God in humanity in order to choose various persons for various purposes. God first identifies a person with a particular talent through which He wants to act. Then He proposes His plan to that person and either persuades him/her (Isaiah, Mary) or forces (Moses, Jeremiah, Paul). When God decides, there is no escape for anyone from His plan.

There are two types of call in the Bible: Individual and Collective. The examples above stand for the individual call in the Bible. God chooses an individual from among the people in a concrete setting for a specific purpose. The objective of this call is God's concern for the people and not the concern of God for the individual. However, in this process of call and mission, the individual also is affected positively in his/her personality and spirituality. The person called becomes an instrument of God, doing what God wants and not his/her own plan. Collectively, God called Israel to be His own (Is 41:9; 42:6; 43:1). Again here the choice and call of God of Israel is not only for the sake of Israel but to reach out to other nations (Is 2:2ff; 60:1ff). This collective call has its roots in the call of Abraham: Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 'I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves'" (Gen 12:1-3).

The objective of the call of Abraham is to reach out to all the families of

the earth and not merely the family of Abraham. The name 'Israel' was given to Jacob who became the icon of God's chosen nation (Gen 32:28; 35:10-12). In both the cases, it was God who called either the individuals or Israel as a whole. This call was not given because of the merits of an individual or of Israel, but of God's free choice (Is 41:14; Ezek 16:3ff; 1Cor 1:27). In both, the objective is the wellbeing of the people and not of the individual or Israel alone. Individual call was intended to help the collective call of Israel towards holiness (Lev 11:44; Mt 5:48) and wellbeing (Deut 30:19; Jn 10:10).

This call from God can be direct (Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah, Paul) or indirect (Saul, David, Mary, John the Baptist) or circumstantial (Deborah, Isaiah). When we consider the call of God in the Bible, what comes to the forefront is the classical calling of Moses, of Jeremiah, and of Mary because of the lively interaction between God or His messenger and the one called. We find four steps in these call narratives:

- a. Proposal from God or His messenger
- b. Hesitation from the one called
- c. Divine assurance and sign
- d. Acceptance on the part of the one called.

The well-defined nature of this type of calling is very impressive and attractive. One is given enough time to clarify one's capacity and divine assistance to execute the mission given by God. God's direct intervention makes this type of call more elegant. In indirect call a mediator, either an angel or a human being, communicate the plan of God to the one called and commissions him/her in the name of God. Saul (1Sam 9) and David (1Sam 16) received their call to rule the people of Israel from Samuel to whom God had revealed His plan. Mary had the message and plan of God through Gabriel, whom God sent to Nazareth (Lk 1:26-38). John the Baptist, however, came to know about his mission through his father to whom Gabriel, the angel of the Lord, revealed (Lk 1:5-17; 67-79). Finally in the circumstantial call neither God nor a mediator is directly involved in order to communicate the mission plan; but the one called realises the urgency and volunteers to do the urgent mission. Most of the judges of Israel, especially Deborah (Judg 4), Micaiah son of Imlah (1Kings 22) will fall under this category of calling. God's call, in their cases, came through various situations. The call of Isaiah is the best example of this circumstantial call. Isaiah overhears the preoccupation of God and volunteers to help God in doing

the mission (Is 6). They are given the understanding of their call through a circumstance or situation or necessity. Most of our call can be attributed to this category, however, not undermining a direct or indirect call from God.

The beauty of the call in the Bible is God's free choice and not the worthiness of men and women. It is strange but interesting to note that God called even non-Israelite enemies to be His instrument. He calls Assyria as the 'rod of my anger' (Is 10:5), Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, as His 'servant' (Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10) and Cyrus, the king of Persia as 'my shepherd' (Is 44:28) and as 'his anointed' (Is 45:1). These titles are normally attributed to Jacob (Is 44:1; Jer 46:27-28) and David (Jer 33:21-22). This shows that God can choose anyone for his purpose, even if one does not belong to the chosen Israel. Similarly, Jesus Christ called Paul, who was persecuting the Christians, in order to announce Christ to the Nations (Acts 9:1-9; 22:6-11; 26:12-18). Hence, biblical call is not limited only to the Israelites and Christians. God is free to go beyond and call anyone He likes.

When we speak of 'call' in the Bible, our mind refers immediately to the call of the Prophets and of Mary. But the call of God in the Bible does not

have a strict definition and a delimited realm. Right from Adam till the least of the apostles, many were called by God for a specific purpose at different time, place, and level. Here are a few important aspects of the call of God:

- i. **A Call to be with God:** In the prehistoric narrative of the Bible (Gen 1-11), God called the human beings to be with Him in His presence. God's association with Adam and Eve (Gen 1:26-2:25) and the way He searched for them during His walk in the garden (Gen 3:9) show His delight when they were in His presence. But at the breach of this call, both Adam and Eve were afraid to come into the presence of God and hence they hid themselves when He was walking (Gen 3:8). Enoch, the walking companion of God, was called to be permanently in the presence of God and so God took him to Himself (Gen 5:22-24). To be in the presence of God or to walk with God also means to comply with the commandments of God and to be righteous. Noah is another example of this calling (Gen 6:9). This calling to be in the presence of God will be repeated by Jesus Christ (Mk 3:14).
- ii. **A Call to be in God's Stead:** At the beginning of the historical calling, Abram was called to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. God called him to be the channel of His blessing. Hence, he became the sacrament of God's presence (Gen 12:1-3). Further God changed his name into Abraham and made a covenant with

him that He will be their God and he and his descendants to follow the covenant faithfully (Gen 17:5ff). This historical call made Abraham 'Father of Faith' (Rom 4). Abram was called to be Abraham that God's blessing and covenant may reach out to all families of the earth. The way he pleaded with God for the sake of the families of Sodom and Gomorrah proves the goal of his mission (Gen 18:23-33). The simple but deep faith of Abraham would have impressed God for this choice.

iii. A Call to Liberate: When misfortune struck Israel, the chosen people of God was to leave the Promised Land given to Abraham and got settled in Egypt (Gen 46). Israel was not spared in Egypt and experienced for the first time slavery (Ex 1:8ff). The suffering and the cry of the children of Abraham made God restless and moved Him to act. He identifies Moses and calls Him to be the liberator of His people (Ex 3). The association of Moses with the royal activities of the palace of Pharaoh (Ex 2:1-10) and his zeal for his kith and kin (Ex 2:11-12) would have impressed God to call him for this purpose. However, the objective of the call of Moses was the liberation of the People of God and their wellbeing. With the help of God, Moses prepared a blueprint for the lifestyle of the Israelites (Exodus – Deuteronomy). But unfortunately he could not enjoy the promises of God in the Promised Land; he could only

see the land from a distance and be satisfied (Deut 34:1-6).

iv. A Call to Lead: When the ministry of Moses ended with his death, God calls Joshua from among the associates of Moses (Josh 1:1). God wanted a person who was aware of the whole liberation process and the ministry of Moses in order to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. The commission given to Joshua was precise: 'Be strong and of good courage' (Josh 1:2-9). God wanted him not to feel the absence of Moses and be afraid of the strategic task ahead of him. His message to Joshua was 'Go ahead; I am there with you.' He did it; got the people inside the Promised Land and recounted them the whole history of Israel up to this entry (Josh 24:1-29). The importance he gave to the source of their identity and the tradition, that the people should not forget the roots, was the culmination of his mission.

v. A Call to Settle Down: The long and tedious liberation process is over now and people were slowly settling down in the Promised Land. Now the priority is to regulate the life of the people in accordance to the norms of the Lord and to ward off the small enemies of the chosen people. Added to that a more serious problem was coming up: infidelity of the people against the covenant. To resolve all these problems God called judges. The famous ones are Deborah, one of the famous prophetess (Judg 4-5) and

Gideon, who had a direct call from God (Judg 6:11-8:35).

- vi. **A Call to Set Things Right:** The problem of unruliness of the people against the covenant was growing without control. Even those who were supposed to uphold the Law of the Lord and religiosity kept quiet, ignoring the problem (1Sam 2:22-36; 3:12-13). Hence God called Samuel to set things right that the covenant of the Lord may be restored in the land (1Sam 3:1-21). Added to this mission Samuel was called to be instrumental in establishing the chosen people as a nation or kingdom. At the revelation of God, he selected Saul (1Sam 9) and David (1Sam 16) to be the first kings of Israel. This was the beginning of the call of prophets in Israel to put the kings and the people back on the way of the Lord.
- vii. **A Call to Rule:** The kings of Israel and of the separated kingdoms (Judah and Israel) were called to rule the people as the regents of God. Though God did not call them directly, they had the mandate from Him. But wealth, power, and glory made most of them turn away from the Lord and sin. In this way most of them were not sincere in their duties and in their role as regents of God.
- viii. **A Call to Prophecy:** God called various prophets, especially during the monarchy of Israel, to warn the kings and the people whenever they went astray. The responsibility of the prophets was a key element in

bringing people back to the covenantal relationship. The sacrifice of the prophets was tremendous even to the extent of sacrificing one's own life. The fate of the prophets was normally ill-treatment and persecution. But they were faithful to the Lord and His commission, though some lamented. In short they were called to be the 'mouthpiece of God.'

- ix. **A Call to Give Birth to God:** This was the highest form of call from God and this was offered to a young girl against the call of so many men. This singular call was given to Mary, which cannot be repeated. This call was embedded in divine mystery, too difficult to understand and to accept. But she came forward. In her, God reversed the traditional manifestation. Israelites knew well the terrific manifestation of God on Mount Sinai (Ex 19:18-19), in the Ark of the Covenant and in the Temple of Jerusalem. But they could not identify His mighty presence in the womb of Mary at a small village Nazareth, away from the holy city of Jerusalem. Through her call, Mary brought the divinity down to the earth in tangible human form to be with us (Is 7:14; Mt 1:23). This unique, singular, and historical call cannot be repeated, which was carried out in an excellent way by a village girl Mary.
- x. **A Call to Witness:** Jesus, whom Mary brought forth, called 12 apostles to be more close to him and to give witness to him and his teaching to the ends of the world (Mk 3:14; Mt 28:18-20).

He called them from various walks of life, with various temperaments and with various levels of understanding. All of them were asked to leave their former profession. A common formation was given to them that they could live his teaching and bring people to the family of God. A detailed explanation on difficult points was given to enlighten them that they can strengthen their brothers and sisters in faith (Lk 22:32) and to lead and protect them (Jn 21:15-18).

- xi. A Call to Discipleship:** Jesus, apart from calling the apostles, offered a general call to discipleship (Mt 10:37-42; 16:24-28; Mk 8:34-38; Lk 9:23-27; 14:26-35). It was an open and free invitation to those who are serious about life on earth and in heaven. Each one responds to this call individually.
- xii. A Call to Right Knowledge:** This is a specific call given to Paul who thought he had the right knowledge. It was true that the education he had at the feet of Gamaliel gave Paul a clear knowledge of the Law. He was a staunch believer in the truth of God's revelation made known through Moses to the people of Israel. But he failed to grasp the meaning that the promise of redemption made through such a law would be fulfilled in Jesus. But the Damascus Encounter led him to a process of understanding the fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

The above consideration of biblical call is not exhaustive. A few things

are clear to us: many were called by God for various reasons; each one was sticking on to his/her mission and never interchanged conveniently; but for some of the kings, all were faithful in discharging their mission attentively; they did not bother about remuneration; they never considered their personal interests as priorities but the purpose of their vocation; they did not act according to their whims and fancies but according to the directives of the Lord; they had constant communion with God; even at the point of suffering and death, most of them never betrayed their God nor their vocation; though many times they were disappointed, they did not lose hope; they were not professionals, not intellectuals, not technicians, not rhetoricians, but they were men and women of God. That was their identity and their personality. For them the call from God mattered.

9. A March towards Fuller Knowledge

At the realisation of vocation, one cannot fully know what exactly it is. There would have been many reasons behind a young boy or a girl to express his/her desire to join a diocese or religious congregation. It could be a spiritual motivation or a material attraction or the status of a priest or religious in the society. But, the years of

formation have to give him/her a better opportunity to know and understand the truth and reality of vocation and the real attitude and motivation one should have regarding one's own vocation. The true knowledge of Jesus Christ, of his Gospel, of the Christian Faith, of the ministry, of the authority in the Church, of the pastoral ministry, of the charism and ministry of the congregation, of the role of the priests and the religious, of the priestly promises and religious vows, of the sense of sacrifice, etc. should be imparted in the mind of those who are formed. First, the superiors and formators should be convinced of this true knowledge of the above mentioned elements pertaining to vocation. At the same time those who are being formed also should have an attitude and aptitude to learn true knowledge and allow this true knowledge to change their initial fantasy of priestly and religious life and the concept they might have had about it. Each one should be sincere either in imparting the true knowledge or in learning it. This will indeed give one a proper and right orientation towards vocation and one's ministry in the Church.

One may be called to any type of vocation as we have seen above. But to live each type of vocation one needs fuller knowledge of Jesus

Christ. Hence one's life-long quest should be, 'knowing Jesus more and more.' This quest should continue each day we live our vocation. This is possible only through a personal encounter with Jesus. Such encounters are undermined in today's context due to 'too busy' attitude. One is ready to sacrifice one's spiritual life for the sake of active ministry. The advancement of communication technology too has its adverse effect on priests and religious: either one is glued to the television or one is browsing and navigating on the internet or one is hanging on mobile phone for hours together. This attitude demands cruelly the sacrifice of one's personal encounter with Jesus. Even amidst the noisy world and alluring elements of the hi-tech society, the busy schedules and the tiresome tasks, a priest or a religious needs to learn to encounter Jesus in the silence of the heart. Our ministry can be more effective only when we know him better. This will give meaning to our vocation and give us the original identity. While our ministry along with the fuller knowledge of Jesus can give us satisfaction and new spirit to continue, our ministry without Jesus will offer tiredness and frustration. Hence, a fuller knowledge of one's own vocation as well as a fuller knowledge of Jesus Christ would really contribute positively towards our noble ministry.

Conclusion

Being in the Pauline year, each one of us is called to strive for fuller knowledge, fuller knowledge of our call to priestly or religious life. One needs to know for what purpose God calls him/her. One needs to be precise in discerning it and to minister through it. I would like to compare the discernment of the call and the formation that follows it to the call of Samuel. Though it may sound silly I find meaning in it. God called Samuel four times (1 Sam 3:1-10). He heard the call but did not know it was God who called. He went to Eli for assistance. Eli was also patient in understanding the boy and the call he spoke about. He too was in the process of discerning the divine call. Eli was convinced at the third time that it could only be God who called Samuel and strengthened him to respond positively offering his availability. Samuel answered definitively to the Lord realising His call for a specific purpose. All these happened in the presence of the Lord and a mentor. The long years of priestly formation and the four stages of consecrated life – pre-noviciate, noviciate, juniorate and final commitment – are very important to discern truly the call of God. One needs to discern the call in the presence of the Lord and a mentor

(Superior/Formator). One tries in each stage and does not hurry to decide. Once the mentor is sure of the divine call towards the end of the formation, he/she guides the candidate towards conviction and commitment and leaves him/her in the hands of the Lord and disappears from the scene. Now the person ‘called’ starts his/her journey of knowing Jesus Christ and what he wants him/her to do. It is a slow process which extends till the end of our life. It is only this process which can give a person a fuller knowledge of Jesus and one’s own mission. If any one of the stages is not made use of properly and the candidate or the formator is not sincere in the discernment and in knowing Jesus, there may not be a fuller conviction and commitment to the divine call. The sufferers will be the People of God, because it is for the sake of these people one is called. The call of Paul is of great help to us. He grew in an open-minded inclusive Hellenistic culture at Tarsus. He studied under the guidance of Gamaliel, a moderate and respectful Rabbi who cautioned the council about the divine element among the Christians (Acts 5:34-40). But this open and moderate formation did not help Saul. He was aggressive towards the Christians. He neither learnt the openness of his native place nor the moderation of his teacher. But God had His own ways

of teaching Paul and making him a knowledgeable person. The change that took place in Paul must continue today. When Paul came to know that Jesus was the Messiah he was ready to lose everything, why even his own self! Like the man who found the treasure and the merchant who sought the pearls, who sold everything to possess them (Mt 13:44-46), Paul also embraced Jesus of Nazareth as his own when he found Him on the road to Damascus. Is it possible to achieve the same kind of change that Paul had? If we come to acknowledge and accept Christ the truth, we can also become the instruments like Paul in our environment, in our society and in our ministry place. Moreover, we can bring all those who are away from the truth towards the fullness of truth and knowledge. He did it, but it was hard, on the road to Damascus. Late but definitively, hard but convincingly Paul learnt a lesson and understood his real call. Should we wait for such a 'hard' Damascus event?

The need of the day is nothing but paying a serious, sincere and close look at our understanding of our vocation. Did God call me? Did I discern it with patience and sincerity? Did He give me a mandate? Did I clarify to understand my mandate well? Did I commit myself to that mandate? Did I

know my talent through which I need to execute this mandate? Do I have keen interest to know Him more? Do I discharge my responsibilities that are related to this mandate? Is there any vested interest which does not allow me to be sincere in my responsibility? Do I go ahead in my ministry like Paul, not minding the perils and sufferings on my way? Can I say like him "I want to know Christ" (Phil 3:10) even after many years of my vocation? These are a few questions to be asked personally right now, right here. Let those who are responsible to guide the candidates be more sincere in helping them discern the call properly and in imparting right knowledge. Let me first respect the call I received from God with dignity, because "*the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable*" (Rom 11:29).

Endnotes:

- 1 Cf. J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul His Story*, Oxford: University Press, 2008 (Indian Edition), pp. 1-12.
- 2 Vita Consecrata, 1.

PAULINE THEOLOGY OF COMMUNION: A CHALLENGE TO RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Jacob Parappally, MSFS

Every encounter is transformative. When the *other* encountered is the Ultimate Other, then the encounter effects not only an existential transformation but also an ontological one. When you have really encountered God, you cannot be the same. You are no more the same person you were. You begin to see yourself in a new light. Hitherto unknown and undiscovered areas of your life become revealed. You acquire a new meaning in your life. Your world-view changes for better. Everyone and everything become so significant and get integrated into

your vision of life. You cannot remain anymore an individual. You become a *person*. You see yourself no more an isolated individual, separated from other individuals and the entire reality but as a person within a net-work of relationships, indeed, you see yourself as a being in communion. Such a transforming experience was Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. This existential encounter was so radical that he was transformed into a new person, 'a new creation'. So he could affirm without any hesitation that 'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation' (2Cor 5:17). It was,

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indeed, an ontological transformation. He became a new being in Christ. In Christ he saw everyone and everything as inter-related realities: Paul, others and the whole world. He realized that everyone and everything originate from the Absolute communion, and are meant to live in communion and finally end in communion.

After his transforming encounter with Jesus, Paul lived a life of radical communion with him and everything Jesus stood for. He did not exclude anyone from his love and communion. He built up communities of believers that would be a sign to the world that God is a God of communion and Jesus Christ is the once and for all manifestation of that communion. In his Epistles he exhorted the believers that all are called to live what they really are, namely, images of the Absolute Communion.

To live in communion with God, others and the world in a radical way as Jesus did and as Paul did after encountering Jesus, is the vocation of every religious. Religious life cannot be thought of without this radical communion with God, others and the world. The history of religious life reports that even the Stylites who lived alone on the top of high pillars or the Dendrites who lived on the top of the trees in order to distance

themselves physically from the world to be in intimacy with Jesus and they lived in total communion with the entire reality. Their mystical union with God was such that they could see God in everything and everything in God. They lived alone but they were not lonely. However, consecrated religious life today cannot be understood without a community of brothers or sisters. We could say that communion and community make one authentic religious and the religious make authentic communities. Pauline writings offer meaningful and challenging theological explanation and solid theological basis for a radical commitment to Jesus through religious life.

1. The Christological Foundation of Communion

In the entire Pauline Corpus, including those epistles containing Pauline theology, we can see that the fundamental Pauline understanding of communion among humans and their relation to the world and God is based on unity of all humans in Christ and the revelation that humans are created in the image of God, the Trinity. Every one is united in the one Christ who is the Cosmic Christ (Col 1:15-17) and Incarnated Christ (Phil 2:6; Gal 4:4) and in the Risen Christ (1Cor 15:21-22, 45). All humans form one corporate

personality with him and are given the grace to respond freely in faith. All are given the grace to form one corporate personality with him (cf. Rom 6:1-12, 1Cor 12:4-12).

When the evangelists present the historical Jesus as he lived in Palestine and conclude the Gospels with the experience of the Risen Christ, Paul begins his presentation of Jesus as the one whom he encountered on the road to Damascus. This living Christ was the transhistorical Christ, the risen Christ and was encountered as the living one. He revealed himself as the suffering one because of the persecution of his followers. In his presence Paul realized that he was a sinner. He realized too that his sins were forgiven at this encounter and he was justified or made righteous by the grace of God through Jesus Christ. He thought he was righteous because he was blameless before law (Phil 4) but before the Lord he realized that his was only self-righteousness. He could boast about it. But in reality he was a sinner. From this experience he makes a general conclusion that the whole world is in a sinful situation. Humans did not deserve God because they alienated themselves from God, others and the world.

The entire humanity and the world did not deserve God's presence but at

the graceful time God sent his son born of a woman (Gal 4:4) as a gratuitous gift so that all could be justified or sanctified through him. Through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ God reconciled the world to himself (2Cor 5:17). All humans are a new creation in him (2Cor 5:17). In fact, they were chosen before the foundation of the world to be in him (Eph 1:4f) as Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of the entire creation (Col 1:16). Every human being is in Christ and therefore there is an ontological unity among them. This unity can become communion or a dynamic relationship only when one accepts Christ in faith and allow oneself to be filled with the personal presence of the Holy Spirit. Paul affirms that this ontological transformation takes place at baptism (Rom 6:3 ff). All the baptized become the Mystical Body of Christ, members of one another (Rom 12:4-7). This communion among the members of the Mystical Body and with Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is further nourished by the Eucharistic Body of Christ (1Cor 11:1-27). The intimate union or communion of the believer with Christ and the communion with all the members of the Mystical Body as well as with all humans and the world is because of him and through him. Paul calls for this life of communion with

Christ that the believer grows into the form of Christ (Gal 4:19) and grows into “full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:13). Paul reached that state of life that he could confess that it was no longer Paul who lived but Christ lived in him (cf. Gal 2:20). Paul became so identified with Christ that he suffered like Christ out of love for his brothers and sisters (Gal 6:16; 2Cor 11:23-33) which was an expression of his communion with them.

The dynamic relationship with Christ makes a disciple to break the boundaries of individuality in order to become a person in communion with others. In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free but only brothers and sisters. No one is excluded from this communion of persons. Its law is self-emptying love. The otherness of the other is not a hindrance to communion but a necessity for communion. To be in Christ means to be in relation with all humans because Christ includes all. Religious life as a deepening of the baptismal commitment to Christ cannot but be a commitment to become more identified with Christ. It means an intensification one’s communion with Jesus that the religious become that unique dimension of Jesus which only a particular person can reveal to the world. This identification

with Jesus cannot be expressed except in existential relationship of communion with others. The dynamic relationship with the risen Jesus or the transhistorical Jesus is manifested through following the life-style of the historical Jesus in whose presence everyone felt recognized, accepted, loved. In his presence everyone felt a belongingness. In his presence they felt themselves as authentically human. This radical identification with Jesus is the vocation of every religious. No other group of people are called and graced by God as religious or consecrated persons to live the person of Jesus Christ radically and live in total communion with him and with all humans and the entire cosmos.

2. God, the Trinity, the Source of Communion and Communities

In and through Jesus Christ, God has revealed that God is the Absolute communion of Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Pauline Letters bear witness to the early Christian experience of God as a communion of Father, Son and the Holy Spirit which was later termed as Trinity (2Cor 13:14; 2Thess 2:13-14; 1Cor 12:4-6; Gal 4:6, 3:11-14; Eph 3:14-17; 2:20-22, Tit 3:4-6 etc.). What is significant for us is that Paul emphatically expresses that the unity among the believers has its foundation in the absolute communion of the

Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and he exhorts them to live this communion in the actual life of the community (Rom 12:4-10; 1Cor 12:4-11). God, the Absolute Communion, makes all believers into one body and they belong to one another as members of the body.

God as the Absolute Communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit was a radically new revelation for the early Christian community. They were strict monotheists. They could not believe in any alterity or otherness in God. But the Easter opened to them to a new and challenging experience of God hitherto unknown to them. Once they encountered God anew they could see the progressive revelation of God as Communion in the Old Testament. But it all began with the Easter! They experienced Jesus as Lord and God after his resurrection from the dead. They knew for certain that the same Jesus called God *Abba* and related to him as a son would relate to his father. At the Pentecost they encountered the Holy Spirit. The early Christian community was certain these different experiences were of the same God but differently encountered. Thus the transforming experience of God as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit did not contradict their belief in One God. They did not speculate about it.

They knew for certain that the Father is not the Son or the Spirit but they were not three separate Gods. They experienced, believed and confessed the Oneness or Absolute Communion of God. In the context of explaining the different charisms in the community (1Cor 12:4f) Paul would affirm that the source of all charisms is the Father, effected through the Spirit and mediated through the Son for the building up of the community or the Church. Paul says, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; there are varieties of activities but it is the same God, who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1Cor 12:4f). The love of the Father, mediated through the Son is actualized through the communion of the Spirit (2Cor 13:13). It is the Spirit who builds up the Body of Christ, the Community.

The Trinitarian God or the God of communion revealed through Jesus Christ is the source, model and reference point for all human communities. Together with other Semitic religious traditions Christianity too affirms that humans are created in the image and likeness of God, *imago dei*, but with a difference. Christian faith affirms that human beings are created in

the image or likeness of God, the Trinity. Therefore, every human being is Trinitarian by nature, indeed, a reflection of that ultimate communion. All humans have the Trinitarian dimensions in them, namely, the transcendent dimension referring to the Father, the transparent dimension referring to the Son and the immanent dimension referring to the Holy Spirit.¹ In the Christian anthropological perspective the so called social nature of human beings is an expression of the fundamental Trinitarian nature of every person. Therefore, the Trinity is the source of any movement towards communion among humans which is eminently and symbolically realized in the religious communalities. Humans can live as authentic humans only in communion with God, others and the entire nature. Religious communities are the manifestations of the fundamental Trinitarian image of humans. Therefore, it is in the religious communities the maximum unfolding of humans as humans in the world is possible. The tragedy of religious life for some is that they do not realize that the grace offered through this vocation is to unfold themselves as humans. When such maximum possibilities are offered to make their lives a fulfilled and an unfolded one they would settle down with minimum or let themselves

be dehumanized by the systems and the situations of their lives.

The model of communion and community among human beings is the Trinitarian communion of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. In the Trinity there is no domination or subordination, no superiority or inferiority, no higher or lower. In the Trinitarian life communion is perfect and dynamic. There is complete equality of the three Persons. Real communion is possible only when the equality of persons are recognized, respected and nurtured in a community. Religious communities which are to mirror the Trinitarian communion sometimes degenerate into communities of inequalities and discriminations on the basis of age, caste, family background, educational qualifications, type of ministry or activity one is engaged in, the position one holds in the community etc. Even the traditionally accepted term “superior” is an anti-Trinitarian expression which pre-supposes inferiors. No authentic communion is possible where there are superiors and inferiors. In the Christian community and specifically in religious communities there cannot be any hierarchy of powers but only a hierarchy of self-emptying service. Therefore, leadership in a community is not to dominate and to control others by someone who is a superior to others

but to serve the community to facilitate communion among the members of the community. Everyone in such community loves and respects the other without being inferior or superior to others. In such a relationship, the oneness or unity is absolute and at the same time the different identities are not sacrificed. In fact, the difference in identity is necessary for communion. In this sense, a plurality without division or separation is constitutive of the entire reality. Following the insight of St. Augustine's dictum, "If you see love, you see the Trinity" (*si vides caritatem vides trinitatem*) could we say, "If you see plurality, you see the Trinity"?

The Trinitarian communion is also the reference point for all human communities and especially for religious communities to judge whether they are living in authentic communion. As the images of the Trinity humans by nature are inter-related and are called to become aware of, accept and actualize this mystery in their lives. Thus, the Trinitarian communion becomes the foundation and paradigm for all human relationships: familial, social, economic, cultural, religious and ecclesial.² What makes the communion absolute in the Trinity is the self-gift of one Person to another except that which cannot be shared,

namely, the Personhood. The Father gives everything to the Son and the Spirit except the Fatherhood. The Son shares everything with the Father and the Spirit except the Sonship. The Spirit shares everything with the Father and the Son except the Spirithood. What cannot be shared is the identity or the personhood. So in the Trinity there is absolute self-surrender of one to another, the absolute kenosis. Therefore, the Trinity is absolute love or communion. This self-emptying love and self-surrender among the Persons of the Trinity is the reference point for all communities. In a religious community where there is no self-emptying love there cannot be any true communion or love. Each one has to become truly a person who can offer himself or herself to others in self-emptying love. In such religious communities the differences are not sacrificed, uniqueness of each one is respected and the plurality is celebrated. Religious communities become anti-witness to the Trinitarian communion and the Kingdom values when they separate from one another on the basis of language, region, caste etc. The constant struggle of the religious should be to find what unites the community rather than what divides them. Those who seek division and separation can find many ungodly reasons to destroy communion. In

such situations it is imperative for the religious communities to take the Trinitarian communion as the reference point to discern whether their life is manifesting authentic communion or whether they are destroying the meaning of their religious vocation and commitment to live in communion. Whatever brings about authentic communion among human persons comes from the Spirit of God and whatever destroys the communion and brings about division and separation cannot come from the Spirit of God.

Conclusion

Paul's transforming experience of Jesus Christ made him realize that Jesus Christ is the beginning and end of everything that exists. In him Paul encountered the inter-relatedness of everything that God had created in and through Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ all humans exist but it becomes a dynamic relationship of communion only when one surrenders oneself to him in faith and identifies oneself with him as Paul did. Religious by their radical commitment becomes identified with Christ and therefore, they are in dynamic communion with all humans and the entire reality of the world. It is imperative that they live this communion in their actual life-situation and unfold themselves as persons. Paul builds up his theology of

communion not only on the foundation of Jesus Christ but also on God's self-revelation as a Communion of three Persons in and through Jesus Christ. However, this unique and foundational faith-experience of the Christian community has not often challenged Christians to a deeper commitment to promote authentic communion among the people of God. Karl Rahner has rightly remarked, "despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere 'monotheists'."³ A strict monotheism can be a powerful ally to support any oppressive social, political, religious or ecclesial order where there is the domination of one, whether a benevolent dictator or a patronizing group or a dominant ideology. The Christian experience of God as Trinity calls for a radical commitment to live and promote communion among different cultures and religions, races, ethnic and linguistic groups, castes, classes, genders and nations. Divisive forces are at work, especially in our times, destroying unity and concordance among people to promote their own selfish interests. God as Communion inspires and energizes us to raise our prophetic voice against everything that destroys communion among people. Religious men and women have a God-given vocation and mission to live a life of authentic

communion and to be mystics sharing in the Trinitarian communion and to be prophets who would stand against everything that destroys communion, and promote communion among people that would reveal a God who is the Absolute Communion.

Endnotes:

1 L. Boff, *Trinity and Society*, Kent: Burns & Oates/Search Press Ltd., 1988. For L. Boff, *transparence* of humans is the dimension of the Holy Spirit and immanence, the Son dimension. But from the Scriptural

and Indian theological point of view *immanence* refers more to the Spirit than to the Son. *Transparence* that makes communion possible refers to the Son. Cf. J. Parappally, "The Christian Experience of God as Communion," *The Divine Shepherd's Voice*, Vo.2, No. 2, 2004, pp. 83-93.

- 2 Cf. J. Parappally, "Communion among the Individual Churches: A Theological Reflection," *Vidyajyoti* Vol. 59, No.11, 1995, p. 754.
- 3 K. Rahner, *Trinity*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1970, p.10.



FORMATION AS TRANSFORMATION INTO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST

(Pauline Formative Paradigm for Christian Living)

V. Lawrence, CMF

St. Paul as a learned Rabbi must have definitely known the process of academic education and formation both in Greek and Hebrew circles. He refers to his training as a Pharisee in Phi 3:5 (cf. Acts 22:3) and it is widely believed that he had good knowledge of Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric too. Yet in his exhortation to Christians, his approach to formation is not academic but based on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. At the most one can think of certain items of 'paranesis' in his letters like catalogue of virtues and vices found in Gal 5:19-23; Rom 1:29-31; Col 3:5-17 and household codes like Col 3:8-4:1;

Eph 5:21-6:9 as part of the Jewish or Hellenistic academic backgrounds. He does make use of Christian traditions such as acclamations and confessions (1Cor 12:3; Phil 2:11; Rom 10:8-9) or creedal formulations (1Cor 15:3-5; Rom 1:3-4; 3:24-26) and hymns (Phil 2:6-11; Eph 5:14; Col 1:15-20) for his instructions. In all these, the subject matter is always Jesus (Eph 4:20) with faith and obedience as means of learning (Rom 1:5, 17; Eph 3:17). The goal of this learning is total transformation into the image of Christ. It is not merely an intellectual exercise but a deep interior experience

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of remaining united with him in all levels of individual existence, which slowly transforms one into a person solely motivated and moved by the love of Christ. Therefore, when we talk about ‘formation’ in St. Paul, we mean only Christian formation or faith formation, and not the kind of academic formation, which is post-Pauline and often offered in present-day seminaries and convents. All the same, the nucleus of any such formation is to be found in the faith formation that Paul presents in his letters. He is the only author in the NT who gives details on how a person who believes in Jesus and his redemptive good news can be transformed into a perfect human being, by adapting his mind, imitating his qualities, capable of sacrificial love that Jesus manifested on the cross.

Today the formation program in the seminaries and convents is quite good, fairly comprehensive, emphasizing all dimensions such as physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, doctrinal, etc., along with all sorts of skill training. The amount of years and resources spent in such formation is quite large. Yet the output of many of the formees in the mission field after the completion of their prolonged formation is generally disappointing. The intellectual inputs that they receive are not often

translated into living message of good news; their interior being is not touched and sufficiently transformed by the reality of Christ; their capacity for transcendence and sacrificial love is underdeveloped. In general, the gap between learning and living is not easily bridged even with the great help that is often sought from Modern Psychology. It is in this scenario we seek the help of St. Paul, whose birth jubilee we celebrate this year, to enlighten us with his understanding of Christian formation, which I hope will lead us to bridge this gap.

1. Formative Language in Paul

Any serious study on a biblical theme must begin with a search for appropriate and relevant terminologies connected to it. In such an exercise with the theme of formation in Paul, though fruits do not abound, it is not totally disappointing. He does make use of the verb ‘to form’ and its cognates in a few places and some other words related to it. Let us then begin our study on these words, which we believe would guide us into his insights on formation.

To Form or Fashion (morphōō)

Christ formed as Fetus

Paul makes use of the verb ‘form’ in Gal 4:19, “My little children for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.” This is the

only place where he employs this word, the exact meaning of which is not easy to determine. The context in which this sentence occurs is the Galatians' sudden return to the Mosaic Law soon after accepting Jesus as their personal saviour and his love as the new Law. In this, they were persuaded by rival missionaries probably from Jerusalem, who accused Paul of preaching a watered down gospel that lacked the full benefit of circumcision and Torah observance (cf. Gal 3:1-5). For Paul it was a disappointing experience similar to that of a mother giving birth to an aborted child.¹ Nowhere else in his letters does he portray himself as a pregnant mother giving birth to his converts!² Now again he has managed to convince them to abandon the Law and to accept his gospel. What is confusing in the image in Gal 4:19 is that while Paul is in pain again (*palin*), the Galatians themselves are bearing Christ as a fetus in their inner selves and community, needing a further gestation period for that fetus to be fully formed.

What does he really mean by this somewhat bizarre expression? He is trying to form Christ in the life of Galatians by the preaching of the gospel

and understandably it is a long and painful process of formation. Through the hearing of the preached word, the crucified Christ (Gal 3:1) enters into the interior being of the believers and stays there as a fetus; as they grow in faith and Christian virtues, incorporating Jesus' values, convictions and life-style, Jesus also grows in them, until they can say like St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). This is how Christ takes form in them, being incarnated in their hearts and coming to full growth, to maturity in the believer. In many places Paul talks about this growth in the believers. In Eph 4:13 he admonishes them to grow to "the mature (human)hood, to the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ."³

Growth from being Infants to Adults

In this connection, Paul calling the Corinthian Christians *infants* is illuminating: "I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready" (1Cor 3:2; cf. 1Cor 14:20). Here he highlights the importance of personal efforts the believer should take to grow in

Christ without which he/she would remain an infant in Christ-experience. He sees the Galatians similarly as long as they are under the Law (Gal 4:1). In another instance, he pictures himself as not having attained the perfection (in the sense of fullness), but assiduously seeking it: "Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Phil 3:12). Here Paul underlines the part to be played by the Christians, citing his own example of how hard-working he is to make Jesus his own, in the measure Jesus has made him his own. His efforts are only a fitting response to the grace he has already received. On two other occasions he summons his hearers to identify with adults, with matured people (1Cor 2:6; Phil 3:15). In 1Cor 13:11 he indicates that the growth from childhood to adulthood is natural and a must, and it should take place in their life and community in connection to formation of Christ: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, thought as a child, reasoned as a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways." He does however speak of the mature in Christ to whom he speaks wisdom (1Cor 2:6), who

have undergone a thorough formation in Christ, which is his target for all.

Agent of Formation as Role-model

Paul as an agent of formation was not merely a preacher in this context but mainly did his work by being a role model. He really lived the message of the crucified Christ in front of the Galatians' eyes, by the great endurance he demonstrated in the work of evangelization. For he says, "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as Crucified!" (Gal 3:1). The proclaimer manifests his identification with the crucified Christ through his words and deeds; he says, "...for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body" (Gal 6:17), which refers most probably to the scars sustained in the course of his apostolic hard work. We know that Paul suffered numerous floggings, beatings, and other forms of persecution (2Cor 11:23-25; cf. 6:4-5). Galatians are aware that one of such physical afflictions only occasioned his first visit to Galatia (Gal 4:13-14). Christ conception, thus, was realized in them through the hearing of the gospel and in particular through the imitation of the model presented by

the life witness of Paul. In 1Cor 11:1 he says, “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ” (cf. 1Cor 4:16; Eph 5:1; 1The 1:6; 2:4; 2The 3:7, 9).

The Cognates of To Form or Fashion (morphō)

Paul makes use of two other cognates of *morphō* namely, ‘to transform’ *metamorphō* and ‘to conform’ *symorphō* in 2Cor 3:18 and Rom 12:2, which are directly connected to the theme of Christ formation.

Formation as Transformation into the Image of Christ

Formation is transformation of the individual through the process of conformation with Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is becoming one form (con-form) with the incarnated Christ in mind and heart, because Jesus is the exemplar *par excellence* for humans. This conformation takes place through the working of the Holy Spirit. When Paul presented the Galatians Christ crucified through his proclamation, God gave them also the gift of the Holy Spirit. He asks them, “Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the Law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?” (Gal 3:2, 3). As they received the Christ reality (symbolically fetus, Gal 4:19) into

their life they also received the Holy Spirit as the one who directs them in Christ formation. He seems to be then the real formator! Paul says, “And all of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2Cor 3:18). In this passage Paul presents formation as transformation into the image of Christ (his mind, heart, and spirit), inspired by the Holy Spirit. Christ reality is implanted in the believer by proclamation and the Spirit from within realizes the growth.

Christians are to be conformed to Christ’s image (Christ as perfect human being, Rom 8:29; 1Cor 15:49; 2Cor 3:18),⁴ the original intent of the creator God to all humans but now lost due to disobedience. In Phil 3:10 it is conformation to his death, the starting point of new creation. It was on the cross, while dying, Jesus incorporated the fallen humanity in him (2Cor 5:14, 15) in a consummating salvific act. It was a death to humans as distorted image and likeness of God, and there they became one with his image, who is the original and perfect human form (*morphē*, Phil 2:7), to whom all are invited to conform.⁵

Thus Christ has restored the lost glory (the perfect humanity), as the true image and likeness of God, which is now conferred on the believers “from one degree of glory to another” (2Cor 3:28). He is the new Adam who perfectly embodies the authentic glorious humanity that was the goal of God’s creative act. This glorious transformation is carried out through the Spirit (1Cor 15:45; cf. 1Cor 2:14-15; Rom 8:11; 2Cor 3:6).⁶ Moses derived his facial glory from his exposure to the presence of God (2Cor 3:7, 13), which fades now due to discontinuity from being in his presence (cf. Ex 34:29-35). Now the Christians have the continued Spiritual presence of Christ in them and therefore, they too, like Moses, reflect his glory which will not fade as they continue to gaze his glory until they are totally transformed when they will bear fully the “image of the man of heaven” (Phil 3:21; 1Cor 15:43-44, 49; Col 3:4). It is a glory that in some measure the children of God already have received and the rest of creation longs to achieve (Rom 8:18, 21): the glory of the original image and likeness of God!

Having the Mind of Christ

In this formative process, the Christian should ultimately reflect the “mind of Christ.” Paul alleges that the contemporary non-believing Jews have “hardened mind” (*epōrōthēta noēmata*) that they do not really see and understand this process of transformation. Paul depicts a Christian as “Mind” or “Heart” in his/her thinking, knowing and willing capacity through the enlightening by the Spirit. Without this enlightening, the Israelites’ “minds were made dull,” because “a veil covers their heart” (2Cor 3:14-15; cf. Rom 7:14-23; Phil 4:7; 2Cor 4:1-6; Eph 1:17-19).⁷ He says, “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2Cor 4:4).

Paul claims that the Christians are now with unveiled face (by the influence of the Spirit: 2Cor 3:14), they have now the eyes to see and understand interiorly the glory (perfect humanity) in the face of Christ as mirror reflecting it (2Cor 3:18).⁸ The eyes of mind gaze on the face of Christ, which is like seeing in a mirror (not direct: 1Cor 13:12). In Eph 1:18 he speaks

about “the enlightening of the eyes of heart” by the Spirit of wisdom from the Father of Glory. Now, as the image of God, Christ is the visible representation (form) of the invisible God (Col 1:15) to the minds of the Christians, and so they set their minds on him (Rom 8:6), and ultimately have his mind (Phil 2:5) and his total form. The Christians are becoming evermore Christ-like, and this transformation takes place progressively in stages (from one glory to another: 2Cor 3:18).

Interior Awareness of Christ Reality

In Rom 12:1-2 such a transformation is portrayed as worship taking place in the mind, wherein presentation of the body as a living sacrifice “in accordance with thinking” is realized.⁹ The usual rendering “spiritual worship” in this verse is better replaced with “worship pertaining to reason or thinking,” for the Greek word used here is *logikos* and not *pneumatikos*. It refers to the continuous presence of God in thoughts (as the believer interiorly sees Christ present in him/her and has the mind of Christ, cf. 1Cor 2:16) that the words and actions that flow from them are the “living sacrifice” pleasing to God. This consists in the renewal

of the mind, in the sense of being conscious of the cosmic reality touched by Christ. In other words, it means “mindfulness” or “interior awareness” of the Christ reality. The pressure and temptation the present age constantly provides can often become diabolic distraction against this union with Christ. Paul insists in Rom 1:18-32 that the human mind and heart are, in their natural state, dark and rebellious, full of wickedness and evil, therefore this renewal of the mind is imperative so that what proceeds from the transformed mind does indeed reflect the image of God that is Christ himself. This transformed mind directs the body to obey the former’s inclinations, which is a continuous offering acceptable to God; in other words, perfect mind-body integration is realized as the fruit of this transformation.¹⁰ This is how human body becomes the temple of God (1Cor 6:19; cf. 3:16, 17; 2Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21). It means committing oneself in concrete and genuine love (Rom 12:9) for the service of the community, the one body in which all are members (v. 5). It is glorifying God in our bodies (1Cor 6:20). Such worship results in a life of transcendence expressed in Rom 12:3-21, which is

nothing but imitation of Christ, the image of God.¹¹

Putting On (enduō)

Meaning of Clothing Oneself with Christ

Paul's usage of the phrase "put on" is also closely connected with the language of formation. He employs it fifteen times in his writings. The most important of them is "putting on Christ" in the sense of "clothing oneself with the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27).¹² In the first text (Rom 13:11-14) the context is the dawning of the new age of the Risen Lord, when the Christians are asked to put on the armor of light. When a person gets up, he sheds his nightwear and puts on clothes suitable for the day. But here the contrast is between the works of darkness and the armor of light, of which the latter of course is part of clothing (armor). On the contrary, the works of darkness are wild parties, excessive drinking, sexual immorality and licentiousness, which are characteristically nighttime behaviours in the sense that they happen after dark (v.13). In metaphorical meaning they belong to the old age of sin and disobedience. Most items in the night

behaviours involve one's own and others' bodies. These behaviours are in fact their nightwear, which should be cast off and armor of light put on, which is soon clarified as the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 14), in the sense of his inclinations and behaviours. The light indeed is the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God (2Cor 4:4; cf. 4:6; 6:14; Eph 5:8, 9, 1, 14; Col 1:12; 1The 5:5), the defense against the works of darkness. In other words, "putting on Christ" means that the believers display outwardly (seen by others) what has already taken place inwardly, by practicing virtues associated with Christ. The reality of Christ put within the Christians has reached a matured growth and is given birth in the actions and behaviours of the body, in which Jesus is recognized by others.

In Gal 3:27, Paul writes, "...in as much as you have been baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ" (cf. Rom 6:3). The symbolism of putting on a new garment at the baptism ceremony is obviously alluded to here, which stands for the risen Christ. Behind this image may lie the background of the Greek drama where the garment put

on by an actor portrayed a particular character; in the garment the actor was supposed to have abandoned his individual identity to put on completely the character portrayed. In the LXX there are frequent references



human in us intended by the creator God. The most poignant presentation of this is found in Rom 7:7-8:4. He speaks here as the representative of all humans.¹⁴ In 7:7-13 he describes the human condition before the fall

to being clothed with righteousness, salvation, strength, and glory (2Chr 6:41; Job 29:14; Isa 51:9). To put on Christ is to put on the renewed image, humanity of the new age filled with the light of the resurrection, which he models and facilitates as last Adam (1Cor 15:45; Rom 8:29-30; 2Cor 3:18; Phil 3:21).¹³ It means clothing one's eyes with compassion, words with kindness, actions with humility and meekness, and the entire life with patience, which are characteristic of Christ himself (cf. Col 3:10, 12; Eph 4:17-24). They are in fact the armor put on as defense against the forces of darkness (Eph 6:11, 14-17; 1The 5:8). This eventually would lead the Christian to put on the heavenly dwelling (2Cor 5:2; 1Cor 15:53, 54).

2. Deforming Agents

Paul seems to present three elements namely, "Sin", "Law" and "Flesh", which lead to 'deformation' (crooked or twisted form) of the ideal

as characterized by 'life' in the sense of "perfect or full humanity" (v. 9), 'the ideal human self.' Sin entered into the world and began to operate in the human flesh aided by the Law; as the result, humans experience constantly an 'inner conflict' and Paul calls it 'death' in the sense of deformed humanity. This is the 'actual self' described in 7:14-24, the condition of humanity between the fall and Christ's coming; it is at this stage one is not able to do the good he/she wants but does the evil which he/she does not want, suffering from incoherence, a kind of schizophrenia (7:19). In 7:25-8:4 he explains the change brought about by Christ Jesus, which is 'self realization' in him, in the sense of recovering the original self, where sin and death are abolished and 'life' again is restored (8:2). The first and the third stages are marked by 'life' and the second stage by 'death.' The suggestion here is that the life enjoyed by Adam before the

fall is restored in the person of Christ, in the sense of fullness of life.

Sin

Sin is an alien, potent and active power keeping humans under its control (Rom 6:6, 12-20). It dwells in them (Rom 7:17, 20, 23), reigns as tyrant (Rom 3: 9; 5:21; 6:12, 14; Gal 3:22) and leads one to death (Rom 5:12; 6:16, 23; 7:9, 13; 8:2, 10; 1Cor 15:16).¹⁵ It is a drive to keep 'the ego' at the centre of life pushing others and even God to the fringes (Rom 1:18-32). It creates gulf between us and God who is the source of life (Eph 4:18; Col 1:21; Rom 1:21-23), disrupts relationship between one another (Rom 1:28-31) and alienates creation from humans (Rom 8:19-23). In Paul the soul of sin consists in 'covetousness' (*pleonexia*), greedy selfish desire (Rom 7:7-8).¹⁶ In Eph 5:3 he says, "Covetousness must not even be mentioned among you." In Col 3:5 "Mortify covetousness which is idolatry" (cf. Rom 1:29; 2Cor 9:5; 1The 2:5; 1Cor 5:10, 11; 6:10; 1Tim 3:3). The fall too was due to covetousness, greedy desire, an exaltation of ego which is the essence of sin. Through this, created objects take possession of the possessors. It is not limited to material things, it includes social status as well (1Cor 1:22; 8:1; 2Cor 5:12; 10:5; Gal 6:3; Col 2:8). It is seeking human glory

(1The 2:6; Gal 1:10) and boasting (Rom 11:8; 1Cor 1:29; 3:21; 4:7; Gal 4:7; Eph 2:9); serving the creatures without serving the creator (Rom 1:25). Thus sin as deep-seated drive makes humans fall below the mark and distorts them as God's image. It is essential for the students who undergo formation to demonstrate strong will and determination to transcend selfish and sinful inclinations in order to realize transformation.

Law

For Paul even though Law (Torah) is holy (Rom 7:12), good (7:13; 15:4, 1Cor 12:19-20) and promises life (Rom 7:10), it has its own limitations. It is holy in so far as its content is concerned i.e., the revelation of God's will (Rom 2:17-20). All the same, it remained only an external standard to which every Jew was expected to conform, which was never perfect. The Law did not have the power to move the hearts into a life of obedience. Paul alleges that both Jews and Gentiles are equally disobedient and sinful (Rom 2:21-29; 3:9-20). Paul says, "No human being will be justified in His sight by deeds prescribed by the Law" (Rom 3:20). This imperfect Law abidance remained on the external (Rom 2:28), without transforming the interior being (2Cor 5:12). It created only pharisaic practice resulting in guilt

feeling leading to rupture in the above mentioned threefold relationship. That is why Paul calls it “the law of sin” (Rom 8:2) holding humanity captive (Rom 7:6), ultimately resulting in death (Rom 7:10). Religion is meant to establish communion with God, brother/sisterhood with all humans and responsible stewardship towards cosmos; but when it is turned into a mere system of law abidance, it ceases to be life giving. On the contrary, when the Spirit indwells believers, he moves the hearts to practice obedience from the heart, which gives life (2Cor 3:6-11).

Secondly, the Law as national identity marker also created unpleasant social distinctions. The practice of circumcision, Sabbath and dietary laws served as national boundary markers, which gave them a superior feeling over other nations and they called others ‘gentile sinners’ (Rom 2:12-16), who do not have a well defined law as Torah. It served to maintain the division among the peoples as Gentile vs. Jews, male vs. female, slaves vs. masters, barbarian vs. Scythian which are divisions based on belief, sex, economic and racial statuses (Col :11; Gal 3:27; Rom 10:12; 1Cor 12:13). The divisions suggest not only failure to recognize the other, but an active repulsion of the other as

well. For Paul God is one for both the circumcised and the uncircumcised (Rom 3:30). Therefore, any practice of religion that caused division among people in the place of communion is anathema to him. Thus faith practiced as mere external observance and as boundary marker served ultimately to deform humanity as image and likeness of God.¹⁷ In our formative context, the formees should learn the art of convincingly using the statutes, rules and regulations in order to attain personal transformation, avoiding all attempts to please the authorities by such observance.

Flesh

The dominant meaning of ‘flesh’ (*sarx*) in Paul is ‘human weakness’ in the sense of ‘helplessness,’ being slaves to inclinations and temptations and rebelling against God. Paul’s treatment of flesh in Rom 7:1-8:13 and in Gal 5:16-26 points to this direction, where he contrasts works of the flesh with the fruits of the Spirit. To be ‘in the flesh’ means to be determined by the sinful conditions of the old eon (Rom 7:5, 14, 18; 8:3, 4-9, 12-13; 2Cor 5:16; Gal 3:3; 5:13-19). One gains the impression that Paul virtually identifies ‘sin’ and ‘flesh’ here. It is in human weakness (flesh) sin has its crushing foothold and therefore he can call it “flesh sold under sin” (Rom

7:14). On their own, without the help of the Spirit it is difficult for humans to conquer this weakness (debased inclinations and temptations). A life sold to the desires of the flesh indeed has a deforming effect on humans as original image and likeness of God. Acknowledging and accepting one's own weakness and seeking formative guidelines to come out of them is fundamental to any transformation.

World

The operational combination of Sin (Rom 5:12, 13; Rom 1:18-31), Law (Rom 3:19), and Flesh (1Cor 1:26, 27, 2Cor 1:12; 2Cor 5:16) is described as the 'world' or 'age' and the majority is conditioned by it. Paul himself is accused of taking decisions according to worldly values (2Cor 1:17; 10:2), which he stoutly denies. This world or age is evil and he exhorts the Christians not to be conformed to this age (Rom 12:2; Gal 1:4; 1Cor 3:19; 5:10; 1:20; 2:6, 8, 3:18; 2Cor 4:4; Eph 1:21). This world is ruled by the "elemental spirits of the world" (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20). The rulers (1Cor 2:6) and the god of this age (2Cor 4:4) are hostile to God. The deformed humanity belongs to this (1Cor 1:20-28; 2:12; 2Cor 7:10; Gal 4:3) and is in need of redemption (Rom 3:6, 19; 2Cor 5:19).

3. Cross, as the School of Formation

Cross as the Source of New Life

The cross and the crucified Christ occupy important place in the spirituality of Paul as the source of 'new life.' The cross shapes and cultivates Christian life, a fact he develops in a powerful series of passages (1Cor 4:9-13; 2Cor 4:7-15; 6:4, 5; 11:23-29) in which he shares his experience of the cross and conformation to the pattern of the crucified Christ. Therefore cross can rightly be called the 'school of formation.' When he talks about Jesus' historical life he highlights only his sinless state and his death (2 Cor 4:8-9; 5:21; 1Cor 4:9-13; 11:23-26; 12:10; cf. Gal 4:4-5; Phil 2:6-11; Rom 8:35-39; 2 Tim 3:11). He is not interested in any of his historical phases or aspects (2Cor 5:16). His death on the cross was for Paul the distinguishing feature of his humanity, when fullness of life was conferred on the deformed humanity. An abundance of texts presents 'life' (perfect humanity) as the fruit of Jesus' death (Rom 5:10, 17; 6:4, 10; 8:11; 2Cor 4:10, 11; 5:14, 15; Gal 2:20; Col 3:3; 2 Tim 1:10). 'Life' (*zōē*) is used frequently in Paul to mean a unique quality of life which comes through union with Christ crucified, assuming his own earthly form of life (2Cor 5:14-15) and abandoning

all that inflicts sin and death. Many times it is combined with (*aiōnios*) to mean ‘eternal life,’ a life qualitatively different from life as it is presently known, a life bestowed by God as foretaste of the age to come (Rom 2:7; 5:21; 6:22, 23; Gal 6:8; 1Tim 1:16; 6:12; Tit 1:2; 3:7).

Crucified Christ as Power and Wisdom of God

This qualitative life (perfect humanity) is the result of a new ‘empowerment’ (capability) and ‘realization’ (wisdom). This is so because the deformed (fallen) humanity is plagued by ‘weakness’ (Rom 5:6; 8:26; 14:1, 2; 15:1; 1Cor 8:7; 2Cor 11:29; and ‘folly’ (Rom 1:22, 31; 2:20; 10:19; Gal 3:1, 3; 1Cor 4:10; 2Cor 11:19; Eph 5:17; Tit 3:3), caused and aggravated by Sin, Law, and Flesh. Any formative process should aim at imparting skill (empowerment) and knowledge (realization). Paul presents cross as imparting both these, ‘power’ and ‘wisdom of God’: “But we proclaim Christ crucified . . . the power of God and wisdom of God” (1Cor 1:23-24; cf. 2:2; 6-12). In 1Cor 1:17-4:21 we have a number of references to ‘wisdom’ and ‘power of God.’ In Paul both these are operative through the mediation of the Holy Spirit, the formator. Holy Spirit is the only means by whom God’s wisdom may

be communicated to humans, for only the Spirit knows God’s mind (1Cor 2:11) and teaches wisdom 1Cor 2:13; 1Cor 2:4, 5, 10-16; cf. Rom 11:33). Paul denies that human wisdom may comprehend God and his working (1Cor 1: 18-2:16). Similarly, he inspires supernatural skills (power) for personal transformation and building up of the Church (1Cor 12: 7-11; 14:1-40; Gal 3:5; Rom 1:4; 15:13, 19; Eph 1:19-20; 3:7, 20; Phil 3:10; Col 1:11).

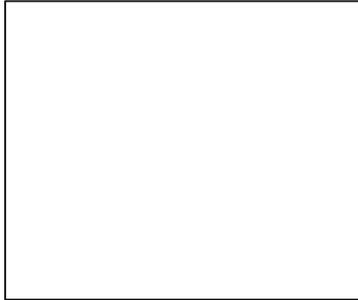
Since wisdom and power flow from the crucified Christ, the Holy Spirit, who is the mediator of these two attributes does bear the cross character. Therefore, those who tamper with the role of the cross in Christian formation only demonstrate that they are actually people without the Spirit, ‘carnal’ (1Cor 2:14; 3:1). That is why we have portrayed Him as the formator above! He is indeed the Spirit of Jesus (2Cor 3:17). The Corinthians have to be taught that, to be spiritual (persons filled with the Spirit) means not glory but suffering and weakness (2Cor 4:7-18; 3:7-8; 11:16-12:10). Jesus’ earthly life (form) is the pattern for the Spirit’s working in believers (2Cor 13:4). This Jesus-character of the Spirit explains why the supreme sign of the Spirit’s presence, the principal element of the fruit of the Spirit is

love (Gal 5:22; 1Cor 13:13). God's greatest act of love was shown to creation in Christ's death on the cross for its redemption (Rom 5:8; Gal 2:20); and this love is poured out into believers' hearts by the presence of the Spirit (Rom 5:5-8). Hence love, in one way, is the wisdom and power *par excellence*.

Our Crucifixion with Christ

The Holy Spirit conforms the believers to the crucified Christ, and it is done through an interior process of union with him. For them it is an experience of being crucified with him. The cross (believers' pain and suffering when identified with the Crucified Christ) imparts God's wisdom and power experientially with an exposure to the world of the crucified.

It is strengthening to note that Paul himself has undergone crucifixion with Christ in order to be released from the power of sin, law, flesh and the world (the deforming agents mentioned above). In Rom 6:6 he says, "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin may be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." Cross gives us the skill to understand the dynamics of



sin and empowers us to resist it. Concerning Law it is said in Gal 2:19, 20, "For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me...." This could be best understood against the background of Deut 21:23, "Anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse." Generally Jews believed that Torah was the embodiment of wisdom (Rom 2:20). But in this text Paul could not see wisdom, because contrary to its statement (curse), Jesus on the cross (tree) proved to be the channel of blessing to humanity; and therefore the entire law loses grip on him and by analogy on all believers. That is why he says, "through the law (i.e. Deut 21:23) I died to the law." And in its place, Christ, the new wisdom of God, now guides the Christians. In this experience Paul also dies to the "I" (ego or superiority feeling of practicing the Law). We saw above that the Law caused division among peoples too, which also is set right by the reconciliation brought about on the cross, "He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity ... and might reconcile both

groups to God in one body through the cross....” (Eph 2:15, 16).

With regard to flesh he says, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24). In spiritual union with Christ on the cross one gets from the tattered body of Christ light to illumine the bodily senses and power to resist the promptings of the flesh. And finally in connection to the world, Paul confesses, “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (Gal 6:14). On the cross Jesus embraced the whole world, the entire cosmos in a final act of love. In union with him Paul begins a new relationship with others and the cosmos as they are in the embrace of Jesus – a new realization and empowerment of peace and communion.

It is really enlightening to note that all the deforming agents die on the cross and the believers are born as new creation freed from all enslavements. Crucifixion in Paul means death with Christ for the imperfect humanity. The (*syn* = with) prefix of the verb (*synestaurōmai* = being crucified with) highlights the believer’s participation with Christ in his crucifixion. Paul is certainly not thinking here of a literal physical death on the part of the

Christian, but of his or her spiritual identification with Christ’s death on the cross. The perfect tense of the verb signals the believer’s once-for-all act of commitment, with that act having results and implications for the present.¹⁸

Formative Character of Suffering

In his ministerial life Paul proclaims “Christ crucified” (1Cor 1:23), which is not merely a verbal but experiential proclamation; for he asserts to the Galatians, “I bear on my body the Marks of Jesus” (5:17). The most likely meaning of the word ‘marks’ (*ta stigmata*) would be the scars and disfigurements left on his body as the effects of his sufferings in his apostolate (cf. 2Cor 6:4–6; 11:23–30; cf. Gal 4:13–14); that these were physical scars and disfigurements are made clear, by the phrase ‘on my body’ (*en tō sōmati mou*). ‘Marks of Christ’ definitely means the scars on the battered body of Jesus on the cross. In that case, the experience of being crucified with Christ is continued and reinforced by the many sufferings in Paul’s day-to-day life.¹⁹ By means of these sufferings Paul realized that he actually shared in the suffering of Christ himself, which conform Paul to him and so suffering is formative in Paul (Phi 3:8-10; Rom 8:16, 17; 2Cor 1:5).²⁰

In this way suffering and weakness (in the sense of debility) for him is Power; for he says, “When I am weak then I am strong” (2Cor 12:10). This way of thinking is markedly Christo-centric. In

2Cor 13:4 he states, “For he (Jesus) was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God.” In the suffering on the cross the human weakness of Jesus stood out in bold relief. But it was precisely in that weakness (Death) the power of God (Resurrection) lay hidden. From that time on, weakness and suffering would become the locus for the manifestation of God’s power.

Paul applies the same dynamics to his own suffering and sees it as carrier of God’s power. In 2Cor 4:7-11 its clearest formulation is found: in v. 7 he considers the ministry entrusted to him as “treasure” (power) and himself as carrier of this ministry as “earthen vessel” (weakness). And then he begins enumerating a list of his afflictions as carrier of the power of God in vv. 8, 9. He states, “We are afflicted in every way [weakness/death], but not crushed [power/resurrection]; perplexed [weakness], but not driven to despair [power]; persecuted [weakness], but not forsaken [power]; struck down

[weakness], but not destroyed [power].” He sums it up in v. 10 (cf. v. 11) by identifying his own suffering as participation in the death and resurrection of Christ: “Always carrying in our bodies

the death of Jesus [weakness], so that the life [resurrection/power] of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.” This is how one has to live out the paschal mystery (the mutual embrace of Jesus’ death and resurrection) in the ordinary events of life. Therefore, for a Christian cross (suffering) definitely is a symbol of power.

Suffering, apart from enabling us spiritually be united and conformed with Christ, according to Paul, is also a pedagogue which imparts essential lessons for life like humility, patience, endurance, fortitude etc. It teaches us the dangers of reliance on human potentialities and possibilities and makes us rely only on God (2Cor 1:9; 4:7; 12:7).²¹ And so, for Paul his sufferings and weaknesses have become matters of boasting (Rom 5:3; 2Cor 11:30), because suffering as pedagogue instills endurance, which in turn produces character and character gives us hope (Rom 5:3-5). This chain sequence certainly points out how

suffering leads one to greater maturity. Paul makes use here the common wisdom tradition found in all cultures very specialty in OT, nevertheless attaching to this pedagogue the Christ character.²²

4. Agape (Love) as Goal of Formation

Theological Character of Agape

There is no Pauline letter in which the term ‘love’ *agape* does not figure prominently. It occurs 75 times as noun, 34 times as verb and 27 times as adjective (beloved), apart from it, its cognates like *eleeō* (show compassion: 22 times), *phileō* (show affection: 18 times), *epipetheō* (show yearning: 11 times) et al. Love in Paul is the most important grace in Christian life and ethics. The central feature of *agape* is a sharing in the love of God clearly demonstrated in the sacrificial death of his Son on the cross. As it originates from God it is a theological virtue and as such it will have no end (1Cor 13:13), because as God is eternal, so is love. Since it is a supernatural gift, it is bestowed by the Holy Spirit, the best of his charisms (1Cor 12:31).

Agape as Sign of Graduation from the School of the Cross

Only with the pouring down of God’s love into the heart one is graduated from the school of the cross. Paul says, “...God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5); and again, “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ has died for us” (5:8). Therefore, *agape* flows from the cross, which is canalized into our hearts by the Spirit, the fomator. This is the cross and Spirit character of love in Paul.²³ Paul uses here vivid language ‘poured into our hearts’ like a heavy downpour on the parched land. Experiencing divine love then is a matter of saturation or better inundation, and not light shower. The apocalyptic tradition saw the Spirit as the gift of the end time – the creative force of the new creation as it had been of the old (Gen 1:2; 2:7). Through the Spirit the eschatological people of God was to be purified, cleansed and readied for the life of the new age (Is 4:4; 1Cor 6:11). Since water is the dominant symbol of cleansing and new life, the idea of ‘pouring’ is a natural association (Joel 2:28; Acts

2:17; 1Cor 12:13).²⁴ That is why Paul speaks about Christians made to drink of one Spirit (1Cor 12:13). But here the symbolism is about agape, the proof of Spirit's presence which means in this context agape and Spirit cannot be totally different. This love-rain falls from the cross and all are invited to fill their hearts with it.

Cleansing and Creative Effects of Agape

Agape performs the double function of cleansing and creating at the same time. It cleanses the old humanity of all its deforming agents, which we have seen above and their place is filled by creative love. In the old creation it was predominantly sin which urged humans to act (Rom 7:17, 23, 25; cf. 3:9), which is now replaced by the 'love of Christ' (2Cor 5:14; cf. Rom 14:15; 1Cor 16:14; Gal 5:6, 13; Eph 3:17; 5:2; Col 1:4; 2:2; 3:4; 1Thess 4:10). Law and legalistic approach to life are also washed aside and love reigns supreme in hearts as the law of Christ; the 'wisdom' of Torah is found now in the love of Christ (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14; 6:2). The human standards and fleshly ways of relating with others are done away with and now others are regarded

according to the love of Christ (2Cor 5:16). In Gal 5:13 Paul says "...do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh but through love become slaves to one another." Humans and cosmos are saturated by the love of Christ and that reality is called the 'New Creation' (5:17). The love of Christ is the new driving force (power) in the cosmos (2Cor 5:14). This creative love provides the ultimate sense of security, which will be the source of strength or power for us. Paul asks "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" This interior conviction arises out of the experience that love has made us victorious against all sorts of negative forces (Rom 8:31-39). The goal of any religious formation is that all are transformed into beings capable of the sacrificial love seen in the life and death of Christ.

Agape as Rooted and Grounded in the Community

He invites us to dive deeper into this love and to come to a full appreciation of its dimensions, breadth, length, height, and depth (Eph 3:17-19). It could well be a formula for the dimensions of the cosmos, which is now filled with Christ's love through the four arms of Christ's cross.²⁵

The grasping of his all-embracing love is an activity shared with other believers and that the context in which it takes place is, indeed, that of the whole Church, “with all the saints” (v. 18). The comprehension the writer desires for his readers is not some esoteric knowledge on the part of individual initiates, not some isolated contemplation, but the shared life of love in the community of believers. It is in the community that one is rooted and grounded in love (v. 17).

Love is shown by acts of showing kindness to others in the community (Rom 12:14, 17-21; Gal 6:10; 1Thess 3:12; 5:15), bearing one another’s burden (Gal 6:2), forgiving one another (Col 3:3) and so on. It is the outward expression of new life in Christ. Love knits the diverse members of the community together in perfect harmony (Col 2:2; 3:14). Christians are to care for (1Cor 12:25, 26), and build up one another (Rom 14:19; 15:2; 1Cor 8:1; 14:3-5). Faith in Christ the saviour is shown by loving others. It is grateful response to the divine love lavished on us by Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. It is being grateful for divine love (2Cor 8:1-9). Loving is imitation of Christ and that is why Paul often appeals to the example of Christ (Rom 15:2, 3; 1Cor 10:31-11:1; 2Cor 8:8-9; Phil 2:4-8; Eph 4:32-5:2; Col 3:12-14). The

characteristics of love spelt out in 1Cor 13:4-7 such as patience, kindness, etc., are in fact characteristics of Jesus himself. Real love is not self-centered, but is willing to sacrifice its own desire for the good of others. Therefore, everything one does is to be an expression of love (1Cor 16:14). It is the one grace that the believers are to seek above all others (Col 3:12, 14), the one unending debt Christians owe others (Rom 13:8). This sacrificial love is difficult and probably it is because of it its outcome is called ‘labour of love’ which means that love is much demanding and costly (1Thess 1:3; 5:12, 13; Gal 4:19).

Agape as Spirit’s Way for Total Transformation

The Holy Spirit, the formator accompanies the Christians always to make them capable for *agape*, the sacrificial love. That is why love is not a self-attained virtue; on the contrary it is the result of a transformed life filled with the Spirit of God, who pours it into our hearts. Lack of love therefore calls into question the presence of the Spirit in one’s life, and hence one’s whole relationship with God (Rom 8:1-14). The Spirit liberates us from all compulsions in us caused by sin, law, flesh and the world. He enables us to experience the freedom of God’s children to be led by the inner law of

love, which is his first fruit (Gal 5:22) and the way (1Cor 12:31) in which we walk with him (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:16, 25; Eph 5:2), until one day we are totally transformed into spiritual bodies (1Cor 15:44, 46) to enter into the promised inheritance, the eternal life. The perfection demanded on the last day of Christ is served only by love (Phil 1:9-10; 1Thess 3:12-13), which lasts for ever and ever (1Cor 13:8). The formation ends only there!

Conclusion

St. Paul is the only author in the NT who delineates a process of formation in Christ, which results in total transformation of Christians. The fruit is conformation to Christ who is the image of God. According to Paul, Jesus in his incarnation assumed the human form and all are invited to conform to him as exemplar and model of human existence. The process begins with the proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ, whom the believers receive in faith and he grows in them as fetus until they reach the mature humanhood of Christ. It is a long process in which

they assimilate and incorporate his inclinations, aptitudes, values, virtues and sacrificial love, until they could say, "It is not I who live it is Christ who lives in me." The Holy Spirit is the fomator who accompanies the believers and leads them to realize this conformation, through enlightening the eyes of their hearts to see the Christ reality in and around them. This is how ultimately they reflect the mind of Christ and the body becomes the temple of God obeying the dictates of the mind where Christ is seated. This is perfect mind-body integration that, according to Paul, is a continuous worship.

The cross is the school of formation where the power and wisdom of transformation is imparted, where the new creation has been set in motion. Jesus on the cross embraced the entire humanity and the cosmos in a perfect bond of love when the believers died with him for Sin, Law, Flesh, and the World, the deforming agents which kept them under their power. Thereafter the victorious love of Christ is the only urging and motivating power for the believers. As they practice this love that is sacrificial in nature, they may face apostolic suffering in different ways, which when consciously united with that of the crucified Christ, becomes means of union with him.



This is how one spiritually experiences crucifixion with Christ, a conscious and continuous abiding with him. From this abiding flows the love of Christ in the hearts of believers with which they fill the world. During the priestly and religious formation period the formees should be led to experience such a deep union with Christ, which leads them to self-transcendence where Christ's love becomes the only urging factor in their life, and self-sacrifice and total commitment stay as norms of life.

Endnotes:

- 1 It has been pointed out that 'birth pangs' is a stock image in apocalyptic literature for the suffering that accompanies God's eschatological action of bringing the new age into being (e.g. 1 Enoch 62:4; 4 Ezra 4:2; Mark 13:8; Rom 8:22; 1 Thess 5:3). Paul's apostolic 'labor' is part of the eschatological conflict whereby God is claiming and redeeming the world in Christ. B.R. Hays, *Letter to the Galatians*, NIB 9; Nashville: Abingdon, 2000, p. 296.
- 2 In fact, in 1 Thess 2:7 he compares himself to "a mother nursing her children," and in 2:11 with that of a father dealing with his children. But elsewhere in his usage, the birth simile is that of a father begetting children (cf. 1 Cor 4:15; Philem 10).
- 3 He longs to present 'every man mature in Christ' (Col 1:28), 'matured and fully assured in all the will of

God' (Col 4:12). Since Christ is the 'fullness of God' (Col 1:19; 2:9), they themselves have come to the 'fullness of life' in him (Col 2:10; Eph 3:19). Thus the whole community becomes the 'fullness of him who fills all in all' (Eph 1:23).

- 4 Paul assumes that humans are made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-3; 9:6), with a unique capacity to know and love God and to love other beings. Being the image and likeness of God means being his children (Gen 5:1-3) born out of his love. But Paul believed, as all Jews did, that due to disobedience and sin, the image of God in them was disfigured and corrupt and they lost the capacity for creative loving (Rom 8:14-17). It is only in Jesus Christ it is restored and that is why he portrays Christ as the image *eikōn* of God (2 Cor 4:4; Phil 2:6; Col 1:15; 3; Gal 4:4-7), who has initiated a "new creation" *kainē ktisis* (2 Cor 5:17), the new age of salvation and righteousness, freed from corruption and sin.
- 5 2 Cor 4:4-6 which portrays Christ as the image of God connects us with the creation narrative on three specific points. The most obvious is the presentation of Christ as "the image of God" (Gen 1:27), and the God in question is identified as the creator of light (Gen 1:3). Third is the affirmation that Christ possessed the "glory of God." This element is not found in Genesis but according to Jewish tradition, Adam possessed "glory" before the fall. In the *Apocalypse of Moses*, Adam after having eaten the apple cries to

Eve “O wicked woman! What have I done to thee that you have deprived me of glory of God?” (21:6). Here the ‘glory’ stands for perfect humanity. Paul expresses the same when he says “...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...in Rom 3:23 (cf. Rom 1:21, 23; 1Cor 11:7). J.M. O’Connor, *Becoming Human Together, Pauline Anthropology of St. Paul*, Dublin: Veritas, 1982, p. 44.

- 6 In the context of 2Cor 3:18, the Spirit and the risen Lord are identified as one, because Christ who is in the Christian is the glorified Jesus so thoroughly transformed by the Spirit (Rom 1:4; 8:11) and come into such full and permanent possession of the Spirit (Rom 8:9; 2Cor 3:17) that they are now inseparably one in the activity of giving formation to Christians.
- 7 The Roman Christians possess a debased mind (1:28); they were futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened (1:21). The mind can be depraved and can become corrupt (1Tim 6:5; 2 Tim 3:8; Tit 1:5). To the Corinthians he says “...do not be children in your thinking but rather be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults” (1Cor 14:20). As the serpent deceived Eve in the first creation, Paul fears that the Corinthians’ thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2Cor 11:3).
- 8 With the notion of gazing indirectly at God’s glory, Paul honors the Scripture’s general view that humans cannot bear to look directly at God.

In the original story, Moses asks God for assurances of protection from directly seeing the glory of God (Ex 33). J.P. Sampley, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, NIB 9, Nashville: Abingdon, 2000, p. 69.

- 9 Doing the will of God to which the sacrificial worship of the Jerusalem Temple had all along pointed takes place in the thoughts of the Christians now. Even though it is not a bloody sacrifice, it is not merely spiritual rather human bodies are presented alive to God. For Paul “body” represents the human person as bound in solidarity with the rest of creation, with humans in particular – a solidarity which can have either a negative (Rom 6:6, 12; 8:10, 13; Phil 3:21) or positive direction (1Cor 6:13, 19, 20; Rom 6:13; 8:11; 2Cor 4:14). The renewal of the mind helps in the redemption of its negative direction (Phil 3:21; Rom 8:2). In its positive direction, the human person as body carries the connotation of “union” or “communion” (1Cor 6:12-20) and with regard to Christ the bodies of the believers are his members (v. 15), W.D. Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man*, London: Macmillan, 1956, pp.181-93.
- 10 For Paul “body” carries often a negative connotation such as “body of sin” (Rom 6:6), “body of death” (Rom 7:24), and “body of lowliness” (Phil 3:21) but the transformed mind makes it possible to be the place of worship pleasing to God.
- 11 B. Byrne, *Reckoning with Romans: A Contemporary Reading of Paul’s Gospel*, Good News Series 18, Wilmington: Glazier 1986, pp. 130-31.

- 12 The other references are putting on “the imperishable, immortality” (1Cor 15:53) “our heavenly dwelling” (2Cor 5:2), “the whole armor of God” (Eph 6:11), “the breast plate” (6:14), “the breast plate of faith and love, helmet of hope” (1The 5:8), “the new nature” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:14), “compassion, kindness, lowliness and patience” (Col 3:12) “love” (Col 3:14).
- 13 B. Byrne, *Romans*, SP 6, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1996, pp. 400-401.
- 14 Many commentators have observed that Rom 7:7-25 must allude to the story of Adam, since only Adam can be described as alive before the commandment came in. See, E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, pp. 120-26; but a deeper analysis of the passage would reveal that Paul intends here the experience of the entire Israel for whom Adam is a fitting figure: as Adam experienced death as soon as commandment came in, so also Israel, see B. Byrne, *Romans*, pp. 216-21.
- 15 Paul employs a total of at least twenty four terms to convey different notions of sin, among them the most important are “*hamartia*” (sin) and “*paraptōma*” (trespass), Cf. L. MORRIS, “Sin, Guilt,” G.F. Hawthorne & R. P. Martin (Editors), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993, pp. 877-881.
- 16 In the Jewish apocrypha too “covetousness” *epithymia* is described as root cause of enslavement which leads to death that the Gnostic race is protected from it (Apoc. Adam 72: 12-13; 73:23-24; 75:1-4). Those uncorrupted by desire are blessed with true knowledge of God, with whom they live for ever (83:11-22) as quoted by, P. Perkins, “Pauline Anthropology in Light of Nag Hammadi” CBQ, Vol. 48, 1986, p. 317.
- 17 J. Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 103-107.
- 18 N. R. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1998, CD edition.
- 19 Cf. O. Betz, “stivgma,” *TDNT*, Vol. 7, pp. 657-64.
- 20 Cf. V. Lawrence, “Formative Character of Suffering in St. Paul”, *AJVF*, Vol. 24, 2000, pp. 35-45.
- 21 These verses appear in contexts where Paul denounces human “boasting”, a term characteristically used exclusively by Paul in NT (1Cor 3:21; 2Cor 7:4; 9:2; 10:15; 11:30; 12:9; Rom 5:2, 3). Paul sees it as the basic human evil attitude which seeks glory before God and which relies upon itself, see, *ibid*, 42-43.
- 22 Paul most probably draws ideas from the sapiential tradition of the OT for his reflection on “Suffering as Pedagogue” where it is abundant (Pro 3:11-12; Wis 5:6; 11:9; Sir 2:1-6; 4:17; Song 3:3, 4; 13:7-10; etc.). In particular the chain effects of suffering such as ‘endurance’ (Job 14:19; 4:6; 5:16; 6:8; Pro 10:28; 11:7; Sir 2:14; 16:13; 17:24; 41:2), ‘character’ (Job

- 2;10; Pro 8:10; 17:3; Sir 2:5; Wis 3:6) and 'hope' (Job 5:16; Qoh 9:4; Wis 3:4; Pro 10:28) as presented by Paul are portrayed as characteristic marks of the wise. Cf. V. Lawrence, "Formative Character of Suffering in St. Paul", pp. 43-44.
- 23 An another context to which the love of God is connected is the context of the specific calling and choosing of believers (Eph 1:4, 5).
- 24 B. Byrne, *Romans*, p. 167.
- 25 T. A. Lincoln, *Ephesians* WBC 42, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1998, CD edition.

PRAYER IN ST. PAUL: AN AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION OF HIS VOCATION AND MISSION AS THE APOSTLE OF GENTILES

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Introduction

St. Paul, the greatest missionary-evangelizer of Christianity, is the most important architect of the growth and development of the Church from its origins. His numerous epistles, which later became part of the New Testament canon, bear testimony to the abiding significance and enormous contribution to the followers of the way of Jesus Christ. His genius and the crucial role he played for the rapid growth of Church and its consolidation, especially in the territories outside Palestine, were so great that he is sometimes described as the second founder of Christianity. Of

such magnitude was his contribution through his eventful life as well as challenging and innovative mission of evangelization in word and deed that Paul and his epistles continue to have great relevance and appeal today. He had a special insight into the mystery of Christ, rarely seen in any other New Testament author. It comes across to us forcefully when we focus our attention on the letters written by him. Prayer is one of the elements that unmistakably points towards his profound understanding of the mystery of Christ. It is indeed an essential ingredient of Paul's Christocentrism. His deep

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knowledge of the Christ event is reflected in his rich prayer vocabulary and his wide-ranging prayer expressions. As indicated in many letters, he maintained an intimate relationship with Christ both in the proclamation of the good news and in his prayer. His repeated calls to pray and the constant use of various hymns, thanksgivings and doxologies are proof enough of that. He recommends and even insists that the Churches founded by him cultivate a life of prayer and remain steadfast in it (Rom 12:12; 1Thes 5:17). He employs a range of expressions to refer to prayer and to indicate various aspects of it.¹

One of the ways by which we come to know the Pauline understanding of the divine mysteries revealed in Jesus Christ the Son of God and in particular the mystery of Christ himself, and also of Paul's own personal relationship with the Risen Christ, is the myriad of prayers, prayer commands, and requests and reports of prayer in the letters he wrote to the Churches, not mentioning the wish-prayers, doxologies, hymns and thanksgivings which also abound in the Pauline corpus. They are indeed the most concrete expression of his Christocentrism which ultimately

leads to union with God. All his epistles contain frequent references and also many allusions to his own personal practice in the matter of communicating with God (cf. Rom 1:9; Phil 1:9; 1Thess 1:2). What interests the attentive reader is the richness and wide range of Pauline prayer expressions.

1. On the Way to Damascus

The New Testament bears witness to the fact that Paul was specially chosen by God for the cause of the Gospel.² There are references and allusions to his gratuitous and extraordinary election in his major letters.³ The divine initiative in his call is evident in the fact that his letters and also the Acts of the Apostles underline the zeal of Saul, the Jew and his persecuting activity prior to the light that shone on him near Damascus. Gal 1:23 and 1Cor 15:9-10 attest that Paul was known to the Church in Palestine as a persecutor of the followers of Christ. Paul's frequent use of the word "call" clearly shows that he understood the divine initiative behind his transformation from a zealous Pharisee to a fervent follower of Christ as a special vocation. The supernatural intervention in his life on the road to

Damascus is repeatedly brought home to us whenever he speaks of the call he received. "But when God, who had set me apart from the time when I was in my mother's womb, called me through his grace and chose to reveal his Son in me..." (Gal 1:15-16a; cf. also Gal 5:13). In the very first Christian document of the New Testament, Paul writes: "God called us to be holy..." (1Thess 4:7). Referring to the call (of Galatians) and the turning away from Christ he writes: "I am astonished that you are so promptly turning away from the one who called you in the grace of Christ..." (Gal 1:6; cf. also 1Cor 1:9; Rom 8:30). These and various other instances in his letters leave no room for any doubt that Paul understood the unique experience on the way to Damascus as a call to follow Christ. As he never uses the vocabulary of 'conversion' when speaking of his encounter with the risen Lord near Damascus but always refers to it as 'call', it would be unfair and untrue to Paul if we were to impose our understanding on to him.

Who is this God who called Paul? Is He the same God - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the Fathers, the God of Exodus - in

whom he believed as a Jew? Or is he referring to a different God? Paul's presentation of the faith of Abraham as the model of Christian faith in Rom 4:20-26 leaves no room for doubt about his strong conviction regarding the God who called him. Paul calls Him the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (2Cor 1:3) or simply God our Father (Rom 1:7; 2Cor 1:2). He does not at all reject the God of the Old Testament but presents that same God in relationship with humanity in a new perspective. Paul prefers to address him 'Father', the title for God that he uses most in his letters. He would have used *Abba*, the Aramaic word for father, a much more affectionate term, in his personal address to God. He might have got it from Church tradition with which he had got acquainted very early on. According to evangelist Mark it came from the mouth of Jesus during his prayer of agony at Gethsemane (cf. 14:36). When Paul says: "As you are sons, God has sent in to our hearts the Spirit of his Son crying, 'Abba', Father" (Gal 4:6), it is indeed from personal experience. He took over the term, made it his own and transmitted it to the Churches. He employs this unique title for God once again in Rom 8:15.

2. Unique Vocation

The tremendous significance of the experience of the one and only God, the one who threw him down from his horse on the way to Damascus, was going to turn his world upside down. The God who called him in Christ had greater plans for him. Before being an event of utmost importance for the nascent Church, Paul's vocation en route to Damascus was a momentous and intensely transforming experience for himself. Paul, the Pharisee, by his own admission was faultless before the Law (cf. Phil 3:6b). He admits that he outstripped most of his Jewish contemporaries in his limitless enthusiasm for the traditions of his ancestors (cf. Gal 1:14). This claim highlights his profound conviction and deep-rooted Jewish pride. In the miraculous divine intervention that followed he recognized a special call. But it was not just call only, where he was simply a passive instrument without having any dynamic role to play. The call necessitated a response to it. His affirmative assent was crucial. He had to recognize it, welcome it, accept it and make a positive answer to it in order that God's plan might become a reality at the appointed time.

Paul's response was a very fundamental element in the whole episode. We have an indication of his response in Philippians: "Because of the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, I count everything as loss. For him I have accepted the loss of all other things, and look on them all as filth if only I can gain Christ..." (Phil 3:8). Upon realizing the divine offer in the Christ Jesus for the cause of the Gospel Paul was ready to give up everything that he considered essential until then and all that was so very precious to him. The dialogue the author of Acts introduces in the episode on the Damascus road also highlights Paul's positive disposition (cf. Acts 9:4-6). That Luke presents him as praying adds great value to this spiritual element in the whole episode (Acts 9:10-11). Pauline response to the divine call poses before us certain questions about the type of Jew he was and the kind of life he lived prior to the unique vocation and the motives behind his transformation from persecutor of the faith to preacher of the same faith.⁴

We have already seen that the preferred mode of Paul to refer to his transformation is 'call' and nowhere does

he mention it as ‘conversion’. It was not conversion also because he did not perceive his new-found identity as completely different from that which he was already familiar with as a Jew. Whether he really thought of having a total break with Judaism is doubtful. Notice how absolutely sure Paul is, that God will not abandon His people (Rom 11:1.25-32). When he moved from his Pharisaic understanding to an eschatological and messianic understanding of Judaism which found its fulfilment in Jesus-Messiah, it was perhaps only a renewal of Judaism that he had in mind. The followers of Christ, including the innermost circle, initially went to the same temple for prayer, worshipped the same God Yahweh and prayed the same Scriptures (cf. Acts 3:1). Paul too followed the same practice. He continued to be a loyal and observant Jew. He faithfully followed its Scriptures and traditions. But one very drastic change had indeed taken place. The Christ whom he experienced on the Damascus road replaced the *Torah* and became the centre of his life and the ultimate point of reference (cf. Rom 8:3; Gal 4:6; 2:20; 1Cor 8:3; 13:12; Phil 3:8-10).

For our purpose it suffices to focus on his statements regarding the call, commissioning and the origin of his gospel. Paul makes a couple of affirmations concerning these in the space of a few verses in Galatians. He states that the gospel he preached was not from man (cf. Gal 1:11). This statement is explained further (in v.12a) by yet another negative assertion ruling out any human agency at all in his reception of the gospel. It actually helps to reinforce the previous negative. These two negatives then lead us to his most important positive affirmation: “but it came to me through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” At the very opening of his letter Paul has already given an indication with regard to the supernatural origin of his gospel (cf. Gal 1:1). But it could be argued that there he intends to show his authority as coming from Jesus Christ and God the Father. The affirmation that he received the gospel as the result of a revelation⁵ makes it amply clear that Paul is divulging aspects of the appearance of the Risen Christ and of his own unique experience, which resulted in his election and commissioning. If, by using *revelation* in v.12 Paul highlights the appearance of Jesus Christ, v.16 (“to reveal his

Son in me”) reinforces that idea. *In me* supports it. Both these verses emphasize the immense importance Paul gives to the experience he had, from which flows everything else. The Greek term denotes a disclosure from heaven, with heavenly authority (cf. 1Cor 14:6.26; 2Cor 12:1.6; Gal 2:2). Therefore it is abundantly clear that when Paul chose to use this term he intended not only the heavenly authority and the eschatological significance of the event from an objective point of view, but also of its unique subjective relevance for him. He was privileged to be commissioned with preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any possible doubt in this regard is put at rest later on in v. 16: “to reveal his *Son* in me”.

We come across a sort of reminiscence of his own personal history in Gal 1:13-14. Paul recalls an aspect of his life, which he presumes to be already known to his readers in Galatia, viz. that he was a persecutor of the Church of God (v. 13); he also evokes the fact that he was excessively zealous “for the traditions of my ancestors” (v. 14). Worthy of special note is the term zeal (zealous) which occurs rarely outside Paul in the whole

New Testament. It is used in Phil 3:6 - another autobiographical passage - where it refers to Paul’s zeal in persecuting the Church.⁶ He breaks off the first person usages and mentions the intervention of God, thus bringing to mind overtones of the call and commission of the great biblical prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah. The two important phrases “called me through his grace” and “chose to reveal his Son in me” were definitely intended to recall the Damascus road encounter. Unlike in 1Cor 9:1; 15:8 and 2Cor 4:6, where Paul describes his encounter in terms of ‘seeing’, a clear stress on being called is evident in Galatians.

3. Call and Mission

Paul became a follower of Christ in the very early years of the Church. Was it a complete break with his Jewish past, its beliefs and customs? There is evidence to suggest a negative answer. For one thing the Church had not yet parted ways with Judaism at the time of Paul’s Damascus experience *circa* 33 A.D.⁷ The first followers of Christ continued to fulfil their religious obligations as Jews. The Jewish Sanhedrin had not yet expelled the followers of the “Way” of the Nazarene. Moreover Paul’s

missionary style was to preach first in the synagogue proclaiming Jesus as the fulfilment of the promises of God to the Patriarchs. Therefore to say that Paul was converted in the sense of a total break from Judaism would not be true.

The call of Paul must be situated in the context of his religious experience as a Jew following the Holy Scriptures, the Law and traditions of Judaism. But in the post-Jewish phase of his life, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, became the centre replacing the *Torah*, though the latter continued to have a certain validity.⁸ The origin of Christianity as a Jewish sect necessarily implied that the Hebrew Scriptures had validity. The gospel that Paul preached was the fulfilment and flowering of the biblical traditions of Adam, Abraham, Moses, David and Elijah, to whose heritage he was loyal (cf. Rom 9:1-5; 10:1; 11:1). Therefore it is beyond doubt that the Hebrew scriptural tradition gave shape to his religious experience.⁹ But after his unique vocational experience near Damascus it began to go much further than a purely Jewish religious experience for the simple reason that the centre of gravity of Paul's God experience was no more the *Torah* but the Risen Christ who appeared to him. Hence we can affirm that Paul's

conviction of being called was the result of his Christ experience.¹⁰

We have already seen that the momentous revelation near Damascus was not just a one way process of call and commissioning alone. It had in fact very serious and enduring personal consequences for Paul. The Damascus encounter was the origin and the foundation of a lasting relationship with the risen Christ. It was indeed the springboard of his apostolic commission and of his theology in the same manner as it was the starting point of a new relationship. Joachim Jeremias considers Paul's encounter with the Risen Christ on the Damascus road as "the key to Pauline theology" because it enabled him to create his distinctive theology of the cross.¹¹

The vision of Jesus near Damascus left a deep and indelible imprint on Paul's entire life. He refers to it as follows: "It is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness' that has shone into our hearts to enlighten them with the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ" (2Cor 4:6). The vision and revelation of the risen Jesus was a powerful light that shone on him in the darkness of his hatred of the crucified Jesus and those who followed him, and he was well aware of the light that shone on him and penetrated into his innermost being.

There is no ground for us to doubt that when he speaks of “the light shone into our hearts” he is also referring to that magnificent experience of his. We may see here an allusion to the creation of light in the book of Genesis. That light was nothing in comparison to the miraculous light that shone through the dark recesses of his heart. The result was the knowledge of God’s glory, not an intellectual knowledge, but one of comprehension and acquaintance; an experiential knowledge which is beyond words.¹² In Phil 3:7-8 he makes a solemn declaration and a confident confession of faith to this effect. “But what were once my assets I now through Christ Jesus count as losses. Yes I will go further: because of the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, I count everything else as loss.” Here too knowing Christ, it is evident, is a “getting acquainted with.” Several years from his transforming experience the flames of that fire are still very much alive and he is ready to pay any price in order to keep that alive for ever.

In Rom 12:3 Paul recalls the special grace granted to him. This he does in his last letter probably more

than twenty years after the unique experience. He mentions the grace of God no less than three times in 1Cor 15:10. In point of fact “grace given to me” is a Pauline expression found in Rom 15:15; 1Cor 3:10 and Gal 2:9; cf. also Rom 2:6 and Eph 3:2.7. The special grace he is referring to could either be the grace of his vocation or the grace to preach the Gospel or his commission as apostle to the gentiles. In Rom 15:15-16 he specifies the grace further. “I was given grace to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the gentiles

dedicated to offer them the Gospel of God...”

Here Paul does not use the term apostle but instead he employs the expression ‘the grace to be a minister.’ This underlines the fact that he is truly conscious of

the nature of the mission to which he has been called. In Rom 1:5 he asserts: “...through whom [Jesus Christ] we have received grace and our apostolic mission of winning the obedience of faith among all the nations for the honour of his name.” He thus elaborates grace further describing it as the grace of apostleship. In Rom 11:13 too, explaining the reason of turning to the gentiles, he says that he is the apostle of the gentiles. And the basis of the grace of ‘apostleship’ and

‘minister-ship’ is nothing other than the unique experience he had of the Risen Lord. Paul seems to look at it both as a duty and as a privilege, a duty of service and a privilege of apostleship. Thus Paul binds his call and mission intimately together.

Another idiom frequently employed by Paul to refer to God’s working in him is the “mercy of God/Lord” (cf. 1Cor 7:25). It is not clear whether he alludes to the original vision/revelation and the consequent change over and commissioning to preach the Gospel to the gentiles or whether he refers to the subsequent personal revelations and visions given to him in various critical junctures of his life and mission of evangelization. In either case there is no doubt that we are in front of a clear admission of God working in him; in other words Paul’s own experience of God and His bounty towards him (cf. 2Cor 4:1). Paul’s transformation was an obedient submission to the will of God and not a conversion of repentance and it indeed provides the key to his theology.¹³ This is evident from the theological, anthropological and soteriological ideas put forward by him. His literary activity was confined to letters

written to the Christian communities he founded or he wished to visit. By their very nature those were not intended to be treatises of theology but straightforward responses to actual problems in the Christian communities.

4. God Experience and Prayer

Gal 1:12-16 and Phil 3:7-16 need to be carefully examined to comprehend Paul’s own elucidation of his privileged relationship vis-à-vis God and Jesus Christ. These autobiographical passages - and other texts which are much less detailed like 1Cor 15:8-10; 9:1 and 2Cor 4:6 - speak of Paul’s divine encounter and the special privileges granted to him.¹⁴ Two key texts mentioned above can be taken as fundamental passages where we get to know Paul’s own self-understanding. In Gal 1:12-16 he speaks of the origin of his Gospel as a revelation (cf. v. 12 and v. 16). Paul begins the defence of his Gospel with a summary statement: “Now I want to make it quite clear to you, brothers, about the gospel that was preached by me, that it was no human message. It was not from any human being that I received it, and I was not taught it, but it came to me through a revelation of Jesus Christ”

(Gal 1:11-12). He goes on to elaborate it in vv. 13-14 recalling his previous life in Judaism and he refers to his calling in vv. 15-17. In Paul's defense of the gospel he reminds the Galatians of various other significant events: his first visit to Jerusalem (vv. 18-20), the consultation with Peter and others at Jerusalem (vv. 2:1-10) and the incident at Antioch (vv. 2:11-14). The Pauline expressions - "it came to me through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:12) and "to reveal his Son in me" (Gal 1:16) - emphasize the rigorously personal character of the experience of the Risen Christ. Paul's testimony in Gal 1:16-17 makes it evident that the first thing he did after being chosen for the gentile mission was to go off to Arabia. We might be justified to look at his journey as one of intense interior preparation in prayer and communion with God for the mission ahead. These reminiscences are also in line with the three accounts of Acts 9, 22 and 26. Despite some divergences, Christ's appearing to him is emphasized in each narrative.

The statement of Gal 1:12-16 is taken forward in 1Cor 15:1-10. The text of Galatians focused on proving Paul's authority as an apostle. Hence he did not go far enough in communicating his own personal God-experience. In 1Cor 15:1-3a he again emphasizes

the same authority. He says that what he preached "I had myself received". And in vv. 3b-7 he outlines that which he received and in v. 8 how or by what means he received it. Paul considers himself the last and the least of all to whom the Lord appeared. He confesses his unworthiness to be called an apostle "because I had been persecuting the Church of God" (v. 9). In spite of persecuting the Church of God he had been given the grace of an exceptional vocation and he had been commissioned and sent to the gentiles. What Paul highlights is that his apostleship is God's doing and it is no merit of his. After describing step by step his unworthiness in such a way as to show the greatest contrast, he brings in the idea of grace (v. 10). He then repeats the term thrice in the same verse itself. Paul frankly admits that not only did he not merit the grace, but he indeed had several demerits. In spite of all the disadvantages Christ chose to make him an apostle similar to the ones he had chosen during his public ministry. "What I am now, I am through the grace of God, and the grace which was given to me has not been wasted." This is the most inspiring declaration of all from Paul. He expresses not only his profound conviction of being in union with God but also refers to the mission God accomplished in and through him. Thus he makes evident

the correlation between the communion and communication with God in prayer and his apostolic mission. He then adds that he also worked more than anybody else indicating thus that his apostolic and missionary efforts were proportionate to the great gifts he had received.

Paul gives a number of indications about his profound experience of God in 2Corinthians too. When he refers to the Damascus experience, he boldly admits: “all our competence comes from God. He has given us the competence to be ministers of a new covenant, a covenant which is not of written letters, but of the Spirit” (3:5b-6). He is deeply convinced that God is the one who gave him the wherewithal. Indeed in 4:1 he says that it is the mercy of God that he experienced that urges him on in his ministry. The strong conviction of having been given the competence or qualification through the Spirit to be a minister (3:6) is a very specific indication of his continuing experience of grace.¹⁵ Though there are not many experiences of Paul springing from prayer narrated in his letters, his frequent thanksgiving and intercessory prayers leave no room for

doubt that we are dealing with a person who led an intense prayer life and who continually experienced its power.

The numerous usages of the phrase “in Christ” mark Paul’s awareness of being united with Christ (1Thess 4:18; Phil 2:5; 3:9.14; 2Cor 2:17; 5:17; Rom 6:11; 8:39; 12:5). His prayer experiences are not limited to the above instances alone. There are also direct references to some of his extraordinary prayer experiences. The mystical experience narrated in 2Cor 12:1-6 as well as the community worship and prayer mentioned in 1Cor 11:28-34 and 14:18-19 are the most notable among them. Special mention must be made of 2Cor 12:7-10 as

well. It mentions a prayer of petition, regarding “a thorn in the flesh,” which Paul had made with great intensity but went unanswered. In spite of all these prayers he laments: “we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Rom 8:26). It shows his - and our - insufficiency in the face of prayer. That may be the reason why he looks at the “thorn in the flesh” as a reminder not to be too elated with visions and revelations in prayer (2Cor 12:7).

5. Prayer Experience and Apostleship

Paul's understanding of his encounter with the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus has had a very important bearing on his entire apostolic missionary activity. That he looked at the Damascus event as a call and not as a conversion has already been sufficiently discussed. One of the most important goals of his enrolment in to the Christian movement was to "preach him (Jesus Christ) to the gentiles" (Gal 1:16). This consciousness seems to have taken so deep a root in him that he refers to it several times in his letters. "To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles" (Rom 15:16), was his mission and he was quite convinced of it from the beginning. The post-apostolic Church too approved this mission of Paul. We have evidence in the accounts of the Acts of the Apostles (9:1-22; 22:3-21; 26:9-20) and in 1Tim 1:12-16. Though the way they interpret the event is different from that of Paul, the destiny of Paul as the missionary to the gentiles is unmistakably clear. In Paul's own statements too, there are indications regarding the Church's knowledge of his change-over from persecutor of the Christian faith to preacher of the same faith (cf. Gal 1:23).

The question that arises is as regards Paul's apostleship. Can he be called an apostle? ¹⁶ What was Paul's own understanding of apostleship? Is there support for it in the rest of the New Testament? Gal 1:17 gives us an important indication in this regard. In the context of Paul's controversy with the Galatians - he had to assert his independence of Jerusalem and at the same time acknowledge the authority of Peter and the rest of the apostles - he says he did not go up to Jerusalem "to see those who were already apostles before me". This usage is to be seen in the context of his self presentation at the epistolary introduction in Gal 1:1.

The phrase "Apostle of Christ Jesus" wants to convey the idea that Paul is clearly referring to his call and commissioning to bring the Gospel to the nations. The phrases "by the will of God" and "called by the will of God" clarify the idea further. The theological viewpoint in that usage cannot escape the reader. Rom 1:1 adds yet another term "servant". The term apostle is made use of in 1Cor 9:6; 12:28; 15:3-8 and many more texts. Paul's use of the term is in line with the rest of the New Testament. But it differs from the traditional understanding based on the Acts which identified the apostles with the Twelve (cf. Acts 1:15-26). But this is a later extra-Pauline understanding.

As far as the testimony of Paul is concerned (e.g. in 1Cor 15:3-8) he distinguishes between the apostles and the Twelve. Paul's understanding of apostleship is brought out clearly in 1Cor 9:1; 15:8-10 and Gal 1:15-16. It is interesting to note that when the epistolary introduction adds another name to his own - e.g. in Phil 1:1 Timothy - Paul drops the title apostle. Cf. also 1Thess 1:1. It cannot be considered a chance omission. The letters in the Pauline school and the pastoral letters as well followed suit (cf. e.g. Eph 1:1; Col 1:1, 1Tim 1:1; 2Tim 1:1; Tit 1:1; 1Pet 1:1; 2Pet 1:1). This suggests that post-Pauline tradition readily gave acceptance to the apostolic credentials of Paul i.e. to have seen the Lord, to have been commissioned and sent to preach the gospel to the gentiles and to have risen up to that call by hard work. "By describing himself here as a 'called apostle' he is pointing out that for him personally the vocation to be apostle and the vocation to be the follower of Jesus are one and the same thing: the risen Lord who 'called' him to faith on the Damascus road also made him, from that moment on, a 'sent' herald of the gospel."¹⁷

In 2Cor 2:12-6:10 Paul makes an assessment of his apostolate and in the course of the various considerations

he makes allusions to his apostleship based on the unique Damascus event. He clearly acknowledges God's graciousness (2:14) and His mercy (4:1) as the source of his apostleship but at the same time he admits that no one, he least of all, is worthy of it (2:16). The necessary qualifications can only be from God (3:4-6). He is indeed fully aware that it is God who made him a competent minister of the new covenant (3:6).

It can be affirmed categorically that it was the all important Damascus road experience that gave rise to all what Paul said and did subsequently. Of course the contours of that unique experience were not built in a vacuum but on his identity as a zealous member of the chosen people of God. Hence one naturally comes across traces of his Jewish past too in his theology. The radical shift, however, was that Christ replaced the Law. All his life experiences played a pivotal role in giving rise to his literary formulations and his Christology and his theology of the cross. From Paul's letters too it is abundantly clear that his thought and theology was integrally related to his experience.

The Acts of the Apostles recount Paul's experience modelling it on biblical theophanies. Luke underlines the fact that Paul saw the Lord, by

reinforcing the passive use of ὀραῶ (*horaō*) with the sense 'appear' (9:17; 26:16) and using the active with the sense 'see' (9:27; 22:14.15; 26:16). Though there is a difference between the appearances to the twelve immediately after the resurrection and the appearance of the risen Lord to Paul in the accounts of the Acts it is difficult to establish with absolute certainty that Luke did not want to include Paul in the same category as the Twelve because Luke portrays him as one qualified to act as a witness to his resurrection like the Twelve.¹⁸ Luke's intent in narrating Paul's extensive missionary enterprise, his 'speeches' and his participation in the Jerusalem council give us sufficient rationale to show that he is on par with the apostles. However Luke had no need to go beyond that like Paul who had to defend it in the face of attacks against his authority. "As regards Paul, he does not share the symbolic and authenticating roles of the twelve apostles which are peculiar to them. Luke does not portray him, however, as similar to Peter who was a witness to the resurrection, a strengthener of the Church and a key figure in the development of the gentile mission."¹⁹

6. Praying and Doing Mission Form a Unity

Paul's life as the follower of Christ began with prayer (cf. Acts 9:11) and it

ended also with prayer. His martyrdom in Rome was the most sublime act of prayer. Between these two landmarks of his life we know much about Paul from his own point of view and through that of others. From the data available to us in the New Testament we shall try to understand some of the characteristics of Paul's prayer. Pauline prayer was solidly based on the unwavering conviction of having seen the Lord (cf. 1Cor 15:8). During his whole life he never lost sight of the marvellous gift of God granted to him on the road to Damascus which constituted a very solid and unshakable foundation of the whole edifice of his being a Christian and an apostle. Everything else flows naturally from that unique event.

Paul's was a unique vocation for an unparalleled mission. He was the chosen instrument to carry forward an enormously important task. His call was intended for a specific mission that he later fulfilled in the best possible way. There is something extremely significant to know about his manner of going about his mission. A few pertinent biographical comments are required at the very outset because his life as a missionary and his prayer are two facets of the same reality and hence are intimately interconnected. Prayer, a constant and ongoing activity in the life of any Christian, cannot be

separated also from the life of Paul. In his attempt to establish his Jewish credentials and his legitimate pride in it in Phil 3, Paul underlines “the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3:8). For Paul the knowledge of Christ in prayer reinforces his apostolic commission and his firm commitment to proclaim the gospel.

Though there is a lot to be known about Paul’s prayer from the letters, we must hasten to add a caution. We might need to make a few deductions to arrive at his vision of prayer in its totality because it is seldom that we get a direct prayer of Paul. He very often gives us a prayer report rather than proper prayer. In almost all of his letters he is reported as praying for the communities. But the actual prayers are not mentioned. The reason for this is not easy to determine. It could be due to the nature of the epistolary correspondence or due to the reticence which he shows in divulging personal aspects of his spiritual life.

Almost all of Paul’s letters begin with some type of prayer. The only exception is the letter to the Galatians. Very often this prayer consists of a thanksgiving. Paul thanks God for the faith and love of the Thessalonians in 1Thess 1:3-5. It is a prayer of thanksgiving for the gifts of God in

the past and in the present. But it is at the same time a petition too for the future by way of a supplication for the fulfilment of the plans and desires of the apostle.²⁰ A second thanksgiving in 1Thess 2:13-14 continues the first one and more importantly it recalls 1Thess 1:2-5. This second prayer is almost a repetition of the first. Paul’s prayers of thanksgiving and supplication are not separate, one from another. They both are mutually interconnected. Cf. also 1Thess 3:11 and 2:13.

A question arises, was Paul really thanking God for the Churches and sincerely praying for them? Or was it merely part of the style of letter writing? This could be answered only by taking into account Paul’s great and sincere love for the Churches he founded and his genuine interest and concern for his spiritual heirs, their perseverance in faith and their growth in love and also in their day to day problems. In the light of what we know we can boldly affirm that it was not pure literary style that prompted Paul’s frequent mention of prayer and the constant use of the vocabulary of prayer in the letters but rather his paternal-apostolic (1Thess 2:11) and fraternal and service-oriented love. Prayer was the natural outpouring of his spirit, permeated by the fire of divine love and beacon of eschatological hope, which was an

unending source of spiritual energy to do mission.

In the prayer texts of 1Thess 1:2-3&13, Paul goes from prayer to remembrance of his personal relationship with the Christian converts of Thessalonica.²¹ What we see in Paul's prayer is not a mere 'I and my God' type of spirituality. The Christian communities were always at the centre of Paul's prayer as its object. We can therefore notice a sort of triangular movement: Paul- God - Church.

Opening prayers in the letters are also intended to act as a sort of introducing the theme/s which Paul is going to treat in the rest of the letter. E.g. Faith, hope and charity mentioned in 1Thess 1:3 are taken up in 2:19; 4:13 and 5:8. Very many times Paul's prayers reflect the constancy that he himself cultivates in his prayer; he also requires that constancy from others. In 1Thess 3:10 we can note a very special aspect of the prayer of Paul which goes beyond a simple articulation of petitions and thanks and supplication: it is nothing other than the continual interior disposition of Paul the apostle to pray and which is constantly eager to do mission.

We know that Paul's prayer is almost always addressed to God. It is amply clear also that the God to whom Paul prays is the One God, Yahweh, creator of heaven and earth (cf. Rom 1:25). The titles given to God frequently have an imprint of the Psalter (cf. 1Thess 5:23; Rom 15:5.33; 2Cor 1:8). It is evident that Paul, who understood Christ as the Messiah in whom the promises to the Fathers by the prophets found their fulfilment, speaks of the God of Israel (cf. 2Cor 6:16). The most striking thing, however, is that most often he mentions this God as Father. The recurring expression is "our God and Father" (cf. 1Thess 1:3; Gal 1:4; Phil 4:20 also Eph 5:20). Paul calls Him also 'the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Not only the prayers of praise, thanksgiving and petition but even the many wish prayers and doxologies too are oriented towards giving glory to God in and through Jesus Christ. Some doxologies that Paul employs merit consideration because they provide not a little information regarding his attitude to prayer. The closing doxology of the letter to the Philippians is apparently simple: "And so glory be to God our Father, forever and ever.

Amen.” It evidently highlights the Fatherhood of God. Jesus himself had taught it in the context of prayer and the gospels bear testimony to this (cf. Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:2-4). Paul, however, does not utilize the title ‘Father’ in isolation. He prefers to use ‘our God and Father’ or at other times ‘God our Father.’ The doxology is preceded by a very significant affirmation which is nothing other than a prayer. “And my God will fulfil all your needs out of the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19). This can be said to sum up Paul’s attitude to prayer. It underlines a firm faith in God’s action in and through Jesus Christ. No request or petition of any kind is excluded, for it says *all your needs*. This attitude of Paul reflects his own confident recourse in prayer for everything and anything to God the Father through Jesus Christ. To make the picture clearer, it is enough to recall the various Pauline exhortations to prayer: Cf. e.g. Phil 4:6; 1Thess 5:17; Rom 12:12.

Paul prays to God the Father. Yes, like Jesus his master he too says ‘my God.’ *Abba* the endearing term for father is a favourite of Paul. He employs it giving us the feeling that his prayer is truly filial in nature. In Gal 4:6 and Rom 8:15 he affirms the prayer of sonship. The strong parallel found in the texts cannot escape our

notice. The invocation ‘*Abba, Father*’ in the text above is surely a reflection and an expression of Paul’s unique spiritual experience. In his filial prayer Paul highlights also the role of the Spirit. According to Paul, raising our hearts and voices for which we are given the assistance of the Spirit, in order to cry/call upon ‘*Abba Father*’ is proof of our sonship. Therefore when one addresses a prayer to God as ‘*Abba Father*’, it is as son or better as son in the Son. Hence according to Pauline understanding (and his practice reflected in the use of *Abba Father*) sonship and prayer addressed to the Father are very closely related and the two cannot be separated. In fact any prayer to be real prayer has to be made to the Father as sons.²²

7. Praying for and with the Churches

Paul’s prayer for the Churches appears in his very first letter itself. It is in the form of a simple introductory wish: “Grace to you and peace” (1Thess 1:1). This wish-prayer is repeated in almost all his letters, often in a more expanded form: “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Cf. Phil 1:2; cf. also 1Cor 1:3; 2Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Rom 1:7.²³ In all the letters there is a concluding wish too which is also shaped in the form of a prayer: “The

grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” Cf. 1Thess 5:28; cf. Phil 4:23; Gal 6:18; 1Cor 16:23. In certain instances this basic form is expanded like in 2Cor 13:13; cf. also Eph 6:23-24. But the ending in the letter to the Romans does not strictly follow this general pattern. One of the important elements worthy of note in the concluding blessings is the predominance given to Jesus Christ as Lord. The opening and closing salutations in the form of an introductory wish and a final blessing from Paul can be considered sincere prayers which show the apostle’s serious and sincere interest in the well being of the members of the Church to whom he writes.

Paul’s apostolic concern is further made manifest in the various prayers for the Churches which the apostle of the gentiles makes in the body of the letters. We shall take up some of them below. The letter to the Romans, undoubtedly carrying the stamp of Paul’s profound knowledge of the mystery of Christ, begins with prayer. It is only after an unusually long self introduction that the author makes the customary epistolary prayer greeting. It opens with a thanksgiving prayer (Rom 1:8) which extends up to v. 17. Like in 1Thessalonians and Philippians here too the intercessory prayer report is incorporated into the thanksgiving

period. Paul’s thanksgiving is addressed to God with whom he has a very intimate relationship. It is expressed by the phrase “my God” (cf. also Phil 1:3; Phlm 4), recalling the same expression recurring in the Psalms - 3:8; 5:3; 7:2.4.7; 13:4 etc. - with which Paul was quite familiar. Thanks are rendered to God through Jesus Christ. The faith of the Christians in Rome is extolled - “your faith is talked of all over the world” - in hyperbolic language. The special emphasis on their faith must be taken in its specific sense of ‘the faith as you hold it’.²⁴

Of particular interest is Paul’s swift transition from the introductory thanksgiving to the following intercessory prayer for the believers in Rome and also on his own behalf. “God, whom I serve with my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness that I continually mention you in my prayers” (Rom 1:9). A distinctive element that must not escape our attention is that God is called upon as a witness to his prayers for all the Roman Christians.²⁵ He does it probably because nobody but God can be a witness to his inner life. Paul’s predilection for the Churches he founded is not difficult to understand. If he makes the same kind of constant and unceasing prayer for the Church in Rome, not founded by him, his

overriding sense of responsibility as the apostle of the gentile mission is beyond doubt. This is not surprising at all because he underlines his call to exercise the apostolic mission “among all the nations” (Rom 1: 5), Rome included. That he calls upon God to be his witness shows the seriousness and earnestness with which he approaches the issue.

A very important correlation can be noted in v. 9. Paul connects his spiritual service which he specifies as the preaching of the gospel with his prayer for them. Prayer forms a basis for his service and it nourishes and gives meaning to it. Praying for the Churches forms an integral part of his apostolic ministry and whenever he prays for the Churches he fulfils the divine plan cut out for him and carries out the divine command entrusted to him.²⁶ Thus Paul’s unceasing prayer of intercession for the Churches constitutes an essential dimension of his missionary ministry. It was an expression of brotherly love. His mention of the prayers would strengthen the relationship between the apostle and the Churches. It was an effective means to establish a lasting relationship. Even the divulging of his plan to visit Rome, shaping it in the form of a prayer request is extremely significant in this regard (v. 10).

Conclusion: Everything in Prayer; Prayer in Everything

What characterizes most the prayer of Paul is his continuing prayer disposition. Such an enduring prayer is echoed in Paul’s letters. “Never worry about anything; but tell God all your desires of every kind in prayer and petition shot through with gratitude” (Phil 4:6). In Phil 4:4-7 there are themes like joy, prayer, thanksgiving, peace etc. But the core idea is prayer especially the prayer of petition. Prayer is to be offered with thanksgiving. What strikes us is the repeated command to rejoice (v. 4). The pronouncement, “The Lord is near,” is also very significant. The context requires that we connect it with the actions recommended in the imperatives, both the preceding as well as the following. In the beginning of the letter Paul states: “the One who began a good work in you will go on completing it until the Day of Jesus Christ comes” (Phil 1:6). “The Day of Christ” is again mentioned in 1:10. The nearness of the Lord - either spatially or temporally or both spatially and temporally - therefore, could be taken as a motivation for a particular type of behaviour. The nearness of the Lord is a strong motivation to offer supplications with the confidence that they would be heard.

‘Prayer in all things’ is valid not only with regard to spiritual things but also concerning material things. Nothing is excluded from prayer. This idea seems to be behind Paul’s connecting the theme of anxiety with the petition for each and every need. What he urges is to avoid anxiety about anything but instead to offer in everything our requests to God by prayer and supplication. He also does not forget the need of thanksgiving which in fact forms a context for the petition.

In the context of prayer, time and again he exhorts to pray unceasingly using various adverbial phrases denoting time: ‘always’, ‘without ceasing’, ‘day and night’ etc; cf. 1Thess 1:2; 3:10; 5:17; Phil 1:3; Rom 1:9; 12:12. It is in this background that we have to see his admonition to pray ‘in all things’. He exhorts his listeners to rejoice always and to pray constantly and render thanks for all things; cf. 1Thess 5:16-18. The same is repeated in different words in Phil 4:4 and 6.²⁷ Nothing is excluded from prayer because evidently all spheres of human life have been sanctified by the salvific Christ event. Therefore nothing is outside the ambit and scope of prayer. “Whatever you say or do, let it be in the name of the Lord Jesus, in

thanksgiving to God the Father through him.” (Col 3:17)

The Apostle’s own example too illustrates that he cultivated such a habit of prayer. Wherever he invites people to pray for him (e.g. Phil 1:19; Rom 15:30-32) his request is not limited to purely spiritual matters but also for certain motives not strictly of a spiritual nature. E.g. He solicits prayers to escape the unbelievers in Judea and that the aid for the Jerusalem church will be acceptable to them (Rom 15:30-32). Paul’s request for prayer in 1Thess 5:25 is the briefest of all prayer requests. It is not indicating clearly the object of prayer or the duration of it. But the use of the present imperative implies that it is a continued prayer remembrance not merely a one-time petition. 1Thess 5:17 clarifies the idea further. V. 25 could be seen as following up on that and rounding off all the intercessory prayers of the letter because that verse is part of the concluding section of the letter.

Paul was a man of prayer through and through. His profound experience of God expressed itself in thankful prayer and acted itself out in the energetic proclamation of the Gospel. Thanksgiving prayer was the life blood of all his being and acting. Supplication and intercession too was not lagging behind. Paul’s unique

experience of the risen Christ became the cornerstone of the edifice of his prayer life. The great value Paul, a specially chosen instrument who was granted the privilege of supernatural revelations and visions and who was gifted with several supernatural graces, attributed to prayer is also evident from his many humble requests for prayers from the churches. His faith in the efficacy of prayer, both his own and that of others is manifest from his exhortations to pray and the various intercessory petitions that he offered throughout his letters. He was also fully convinced that prayer should be offered always and for all things.

Endnotes:

- 1 προσεύχομαι (*proseuchomai*) can be considered to be the fundamental Pauline term for prayer. It refers to prayer to God in the comprehensive sense and is generally used with the sense of “pray, utter prayers or petition for someone or something”. In the absolute sense it means “pray, utter prayers” or even worship (cf. Mt 6:5^{bis}, 6^{bis}, 7.9; 14:23; 19:13; 26:36.39; Mk 1:35; 6:46; 11:25; 14:32; Lk 1:10; 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:28.29; 11:1^{bis}.2; 18:1.10; 22:41; Acts 1:24; 6:6; 1Cor 11:4f; 14:14b; Jas 5:13). The term could also refer to various forms of prayer and aspects thereof, since it is employed as a comprehensive prayer term. Thus worship, supplication/petition, intercession, specific

individual prayer, persevering prayer and even communal-liturgical prayer are to be included among its various meanings. The particular meaning has to be uncovered from the thematic context as well as the specific manner of application. With 85 occurrences *proseuchomai* is the most frequently employed word for prayer in N.T. Other significant words referring to prayer in terms of frequency are: αἰτέω (*aiteō*); ἐρωτάω (*erōtaō*); προσκυνέω (*proskuneō*); εὐλογέω (*eulogēō*); εὐχαριστέω (*eucaristeō*) and δέομαι (*deomai*). Cf. Moulton - Geden, *A Concordance to the Greek New Testament*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978.

It is important to note that *proseuchomai* is the term that the Synoptics employ for the prayer of Jesus (cf. Mt 14:23; Mk 6:46; 14:32.38; Lk 5:16; 6:12). In the Pauline corpus there are 19 instances of this term and its cognates, 8 of which are in 1 Corinthians. Pauline prayer expresses itself by means of various terms and different forms. A brief glance into them will help us understand their import and meanings, usages and nuances. *Proseuchomai*, *eucaristeō* and *eulogēō* dominate the Pauline prayer repertoire. There are other verbs too expressing the richness and variety of the sentiments of prayer. In different ways such terms often further specify the concept of prayer and also the way one prays and its various modalities. Taken in and by themselves many of these terms may not mean prayer in

the strict sense of the term. They may also be used with other meanings in other grammatical contexts.

- 2 Born of Jewish parents at Tarsus in the province of Cilicia in Asia Minor, hence a Diaspora Jew, Paul had the best of both the worlds as far as education and formation was concerned. Acts testify that he was educated in Jerusalem under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He claims to belong to the strictest sect of the Pharisees. His proficiency in Law is evident from his writings. It suggests that he had received a good Pharisaic formation. We have only scanty references in the letters regarding his personal history and he is very reluctant to divulge anything about himself. Much of what we do find in them relating to his personal history is in the context of controversies. The dearth of personal matters may be due to the nature of the Greco-Roman epistolary genre. Wherever he divulges personal data, he does so with the greatest reserve. In spite of these lacunae his autobiographical references should be given priority over the data from the Acts.
- 3 References in the form of detailed narratives are to be found in the Acts of the Apostles.
- 4 It is argued that Paul was disillusioned by the legalism and by the sacrificial and cultic exigencies of Judaism and therefore was seeking an alternative. This argument is not tenable for lack of any textual evidence. To prove such a hypothesis one would have to resort to an

imaginative psychological interpretation which is often based on false assumptions. Moreover the picture that we get from the Epistles and Acts goes contrary to such a consideration. Paul himself confidently says: "as for religious fervour, I was a persecutor of the Church; as for the uprightness embodied in the Law, I was faultless" (Phil 3:6). Thus even his persecuting activity is shown as a sign of religious zeal and orthodoxy. However in his letters there are faint echoes of a person seeking to know more deeply the meaning of his election. E.g. Rom 11:33 betrays the state of mind of one seeking and trying to comprehend the ways of God.

- 5 Ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*) is a predominantly Pauline term in the N.T. It is regularly used in an eschatological sense e.g. Rom 2:15; 8:19; 1Cor 1:7; 2Thess 1:7. But Paul uses it here to refer to the appearance of Jesus Christ on the Damascus road. Could there be eschatological overtones too here?
- 6 It may be a coincidence that the same term is used in the Acts account in 22:3-4.
- 7 Cf. Murphy - J. O'Connor, *Paul A Critical Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 8.
- 8 A significant change has taken place in recent years from a Hellenistic approach to Paul, which considered him a Hellenized Jew of the Diaspora, to a Paul who is more Jewish in life, thought and expression. Paul's early upbringing, or socialization, as a strict Pharisaic Jew conditioned his *Weltanschauung*. cf. Rom 11:1; 2Cor 11:22; Phil 3:5. A close reading of his letters gives sufficient evidence of his Jewish identity. He

- looks back with pride on his life as a Jew of the Pharisaic tradition cf. Phil 3:5-6; Gal 1:14; 2Cor 11:22. The Jewish background of Paul is evident in his literary style filled with O.T. images and categories and also in the employment of *midrashic* interpretation of Scripture. The O.T. is indeed a treasure house of prayer into which Paul, like his Lord Jesus, delved deep. His understanding of Christ's Redemptive mission was based also on his deep perception of the O.T. He was convinced that "the Law found its fulfilment in Christ" (Rom 10:4)
- 9 Cf. R. Morgan, *Romans*, Sheffield: Academic Press, 1995, p. 97.
 - 10 There are different views regarding the nature of Paul's encounter with the Risen Lord. A doubt is often raised with regard to Paul's recognition of the one revealed to him. If he had not known the earthly Jesus and if there was no prior preparation by listening to others' testimony, how could he recognize that it was Jesus who appeared to him? Along with fellow Jews he awaited the Messiah. But how was he to understand that the same Jesus, who had been crucified and killed, rose again and was alive? The ground was already prepared as a result of Paul's arguments with Christians, whom he had originally hated and persecuted; it suddenly dawned on him who this Jesus really was, whom he had hitherto regarded as an enemy of Jewish faith and an accursed because he was killed by crucifixion. It might sound logical but it is not founded on textual evidence. Cf. G. Bornkamm, *Paul*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1971, p. 23.
 - 11 Cf. J. Jeremias, "The Key to Pauline Theology," *Expository Times*, Vol. 76, 1964-65, pp. 27-30.
 - 12 Cf. Rom 1:21; Gal 4:9; Phil 3:10.
 - 13 Cf. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1952, p. 188.
 - 14 Rom 8:14-28 outlines the role of the Holy Spirit. Praying in us with groans the Spirit makes acceptable prayers to God on our behalf: "The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God. And as well as this, the Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness, for, when we do not know how to pray properly, then the Spirit personally makes our petitions for us in groans that cannot be put into words; and he who can see into all hearts knows what the Spirit means because the prayers that the Spirit makes for God's holy people are always in accordance with the mind of God. We are well aware that God works with those who love him, those who have been called in accordance with his purpose, and turns everything to their good."
 - 15 Paul may be responding to objections from opponents with reference to his lack of due commissioning by competent human authority.
 - 16 The term 'apostle' generally meant messenger, envoy or ambassador. Paul uses it in this sense in 2Cor 8:23 ("apostles of the churches") and Phil 2:25 (Epaphroditus as apostle of the church of Philippi). But this general meaning is not what Paul intends when he employs the term in many other contexts referring to his own self.

- 17 B. Byrne, *Romans*, Collegeville (Minnesota): Liturgical Press, 1996, pp. 38-39.
- 18 Cf. A.C. Clark, *Parallel Lives*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001, p. 208.
- 19 A.C. Clark, *Parallel Lives*, p. 330.
- 20 Cf. L. Monloubou, *San Paolo e la Preghiera*, Torino: Editrice Elle Di Ci, 1988, p. 47.
- 21 Cf. L. Monloubou, *San Paolo e la Preghiera*, p. 46.
- 22 Cf. O. Cullmann, *Prayer in the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1995, p.128.
- 23 Could this combination of Grace and Peace to form a wish prayer have been a Pauline invention? Greek form of greeting (χαίρειν) and *Shalom*, the Hebrew word for peace and well being, stand behind the wish prayer so dear to Paul. A combination of Hellenism and Judaism indeed! Exactly what characterized the person of Paul! However it is also contended that the priestly blessing of Num 6: 24-26 which juxtaposes covenant favour with peace, stands behind this prayer. Χάρις also has connotation of the merciful bounty of God revealed in Jesus (Rom 5:1-11).
- 24 C.K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans, Black's New Testament Commentaries*, London: A & C Black, 1971, p. 24
- 25 Such oaths are used by Paul in 2Cor 1:23; Phil 1:8; 1Thess 2:5 etc.
- 26 The service denoted by λατρεύω (*latreuō*) is often interpreted as the ministry of prayer. E.g. Anna in the Temple (Lk 2:37); Israel's worship night and day (Acts 26:7). Cf. P.T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977, p. 211.
- 27 Those who may consider the Pauline language an exaggeration would do well to take note of the following observation: "The language is, of course, hyperbolic, but only in the sense that to believe always, to hope always, to love always is hyperbolic. The exegesis of these passages (not to mention our acting on their imperatives) has tended to be 'hyperbolic' (if I may coin a term), and to that extent we have not really seen the heart of Paul the apostle, totally concerned with 'the Lord's affairs' (1Cor 7:32) and 'anxiety' for all the churches (2Cor 11:28)." J.D. Quinn, "Apostolic Ministry and Apostolic Prayer," *CBQ*, Vol. 33, 1971, pp. 489-490.

PRIESTLY AND RELIGIOUS FORMATION IN INDIA TODAY: THE RHETORIC, THE REALITY AND SOME PROPOSALS

Joe Mannath, SDB

The following reflections are based on my experience of priestly and religious training, both as a trainee and as a formator. I spent fourteen years in formation, if I count the years from my novitiate to the conclusion of my theology studies (including higher degrees and three years of teaching). If you add the four years of high school and Pre-University study, which formed my aspirantate (during which, too, we were exposed to lots of friendly bombardment on the priesthood and religious life), it adds up to a whopping eighteen years! I have been a formator for over twenty years—including my

three-year regency and the long and happy years in Poonamallee (from 1975, with a couple of breaks, up to 1993, when I joined the University of Madras). During these years, I came to know from very close quarters a few hundred seminarians and young religious, as well as a couple of hundred priests and religious. In the following pages, I should like to look at some of the rhetoric we hear about the vocation, training and contribution of priests and religious. All professions and groups have a rhetoric of their own. The relevant question is: How much of it is true? This needs to be

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asked with particular urgency about priestly and religious formation, since it is among the longest, most expensive and most carefully worked out training programmes among all professions, and its possible impact on the lives of people is significant. So, too, the key role played by priests and religious in church activities (and beyond church boundaries) is undeniable. Let us have a look at some of the rhetoric, and see whether it corresponds to the reality. Empty rhetoric cut off from reality will make us live in a fool's paradise. The only solid basis on which we can build is reality, with its many positive and negative aspects, its limitations and question marks. Life is not a neat formula. Given the experiential tone of this paper, I have decided to skip the normal apparatus of scholarly articles, such as footnotes or references to church documents. The main documents are well-known to most formators.

PART I: THE RHETORIC AND THE REALITY

1. Vocation as God's Call and a Free Human Response in Love

THE RHETORIC: In theory, a young person joins the major seminary or novitiate in a free response to God's call, which he/she discerns honestly with some competent person (usually a priest/religious selected for formation

work). The candidate's concern is supposed to be to deepen this call, to learn to respond to it more generously, and to commit oneself to doing God's work, according to God's will. If I go in for the priesthood or religious life for other reasons (family pressure, lack of opportunities, direct or subtle pressure from priests and religious, fear of leaving, etc.), then this would not really be a genuine vocation. That is the official rhetoric. How much of it is true?

THE REALITY: The reality, as I have repeatedly seen, is quite different. An ex-seminarian whom I had taught in Poonamallee illustrates this point. When he told his parents that he was thinking of leaving, they were furious. They were worried about what people in the village would say. The other reason for their anger was less subtle. They told him plainly that they expected him to "become a priest and help us, as other priests are doing." I admire the young man for sticking to his decision to leave, in spite of such family pressure.

I do not mean that there are no genuine vocations in our country. My own conviction (which I cannot prove or disprove scientifically) is that there is a *committed minority of genuine candidates* in every group. The rest seem to be more worried about not

getting into trouble or being asked to leave (hence the much-touted “fear complex” in seminaries), rather than about finding and doing God’s will. My experience of seminary formation does not lead me to believe that the majority of seminarians come to the seminary in response to an inner call or any strong religious experience. I am less familiar, as a formator, with the formation settings of women religious. But from what I hear, I would dare extend this doubt to women candidates as well. In fact, in our culture, it is much easier for a man to leave and try something else. This is, as we know, much harder for a woman. Hence, probably, the danger of staying in despite unhappiness or improper motives may be greater in the case of women candidates. This is all the more so in congregations that do not send their junior sisters for college studies or similar types of training.

The situation is not the same in all religious congregations or dioceses or in the different parts of India. The situations vary a lot from place to place. The seriousness and depth of the formation plan and its execution vary much from congregation to congregation. But, all in all, I would raise the doubts I have mentioned above about a good number, if not the majority, of our candidates.

2. Leaving Everything to Follow Jesus

THE RHETORIC: Church documents and edifying writings from the lives of the saints speak of a person leaving everything to follow Jesus. Once you have found the pearl of great price, all else looks cheap or less important in comparison. One is willing to make sacrifices (as regards food, clothes, work, travel, accommodation, etc), since one’s happiness comes from following Jesus, not from having more things. Haven’t we heard the stories of St. Antony of the Desert (who sold his vast property and gave it to the poor and withdrew to the desert), of Thomas Aquinas (the brilliant son of a nobleman who joined the begging friars of his day against his family’s wishes, and resisted their efforts to corrupt him), Francis of Assisi (that carefree, pleasure-loving scion of the wealthy merchant class who fell in love with Christ and found perfect joy in a life of poverty), Clare (who, moved by Francis’s example, made a similar choice) and many other outstanding human beings who counted wealth, pleasure and privilege as nothing when compared to the joy of serving Christ? These examples are true and challenging, and continue even to this day. But, once again, how many priests and religious are of this category?

THE REALITY: I have known exemplary priests, religious and seminarians whose choice of their state of life is along these Gospel lines. There are people who have left lives of comfort and voluntarily accepted a poor and simple life style out of their religious convictions. I remember a sister who had entered religious life in spite of her father's trying to keep her home with gifts and great freedom, and joined the convent with a deep desire to serve the poor, pleading with her superiors to send her among the poorest. There are such religious and priests in India, just as they are found in other parts of the world; it is really refreshing to meet them. I have known seminarians, sisters, brothers and priests who lead very simple lives, often inspired by some priest or religious they have known. I have also known candidates coming from poorer families, who have maintained a simple life style, and who bring to their ministry an experiential understanding of people's hardships and do their part to alleviate their sufferings.

But, once again, they seem to be in the minority. For the majority of young men (and women) coming into a major seminary or novitiate in India, *the change of life style is towards affluence*. Most of us are financially better off and live more comfortable lives than our married brothers and sisters. Add to this the fact that major seminaries

(and a number of religious formation houses) in India are amply financed by the church or the religious order, so that, when their peers are struggling to go to college or find a job, the seminarian and religious enjoy a carefree life in a setting that provides everything free of cost. This is not the case in many other countries of the world; but it is so in India at the moment. A Hindu doctor who knows our system well told me, "One thing that is not good in your church is that young men spend years without financial responsibility, getting everything free. Such a setting is not good for their growth."

If we add to the financial security the undeniable fact that most candidates to seminaries and religious orders do not belong to the brightest students in a school or college (see, for instance, the studies published in *Jnana Deepa Magazine*), then this question, uncomfortable as it is, must be faced: Are seminaries (and religious houses) becoming the refuge of the mediocre, of persons who cannot succeed in the tough, competitive world outside? (I must repeat once again, to avoid misunderstandings and useless arguments, that I do not imply that all or most candidates in India are joining to find a comfortable life; what I am saying is that our reality needs to

be faced, even and especially in its less palatable aspects.)

When most of the seminarians in a seminary where I taught were not graduates, I remember there was a bright philosophy student who had already finished his bachelor's degree. He had not only completed his undergraduate studies; he was evidently intelligent. One day, one of his companions asked him: "You are clever; you have a college degree. Why are you in the seminary?" I do not know whether to laugh or cry at this comment, but it does reflect a mentality—a thinking according to which priesthood, and more so convent life, is OK if you are not bright or gifted, but a deplorable waste for a bright and capable person, especially if he or she is also attractive. I have known cases where minor seminarians would decide to go ahead (to the major seminary) if they got a second or third class in their pre-university (or plus-two) exams, but would leave if they got a first class!

3. Vocation Promotion and Selection of Candidates

THE RHETORIC: We must help young people to say Yes to God and follow their vocation. The church needs good vocations. "The harvest is great, but the labourers are few..." Quoting such

texts, religious orders and dioceses set apart people for the task of "vocation promotion." Vocation promoters are supposed to help young people see life as God's gift, which we should use according to God's plans. They are expected to show the young how God calls us to a life of holiness and meaningful service, and help them choose that path where they will do God's will best. This is what "vocation promotion" is supposed to be—to help the young reflect on their future, and make choices in line with God's will, which is also what will bring true happiness to their heart. In itself, this is not only a healthy and wonderful bit of guidance; it should form part of all Catholic education. We should help all our students to live their lives as service to God, doing good according to their setting and abilities. We should help them to make choices based on God's will and the needs of people, rather than selfishness or the pursuit of money, pleasure and power.

THE REALITY: The reality, sadly, is quite different. When I addressed the major superiors of religious congregations (the national CRI assembly) in Chennai some years ago, I tried to look at the reality of religious life in India beyond the clichés. A lay woman working in a Catholic institution whose opinion I

trust read the manuscript and told me: “Somebody must say these things, but you will be attacked.” I was not attacked; far from it. The superiors were very receptive. In fact, during the break, some of them told me: “The actual situation is worse than what you described. You do not seem to be aware, for instance, of the nonsense that goes on at times in the name of vocation promotion.” They told me of cases in which a so-called promoter goes to a village, meets some girls, invites them to come to her convent, and the girls promise to come. Then, another congregation hears of this group of girls, and the promoter goes and meets the same group, promises them things (including, to my shock, things like financial help to the family, or promise to send the candidate abroad, etc), and gets them to join their group. How on earth such an approach can be called vocation promotion, I have no idea. *This is marketing, not promotion of vocations.*

I realize that what I am writing may be painful reading to those religious and priests who joined with the desire to belong to God, serve the poor, and who put God’s will and the good of the people—not their own comforts or convenience—in the first place. It is such people who form the backbone of religious life and the

priesthood. People, as well as other priests and religious, know it. I am not talking about these exemplary and highly motivated persons. I am talking of another side of our reality, which, too, we need to look at and face.

Just because someone joins the seminary or the novitiate, that does not mean he/she is called to that form of life. Vocation (in contrast to the use a number of priests and religious make of the word) is something everyone has. My father and mother have a vocation—and a holy one at that—just as I have. Vocation promotion, if genuine, consists in helping a person to choose before God that path in life where he/she will do God’s will best. Or, in simple words, that path is my vocation, where I will be happier and more loving, more true to the spirit and example of Jesus. For most people the right setting is marriage; it can help me to become a true disciple of Christ. What matters is to do God’s will and live a holy life, not which group I belong to.

If I forget this, or if I am more interested in the size or the survival of my group (religious order or diocese) than in what a young person is called to, then I will try to keep people in the seminary or religious life, without bothering about whether he/she seems to be really suited to this walk of life.

Let us face facts: Wherever families were larger and living standards poorer, there have been more candidates to seminaries and religious orders. Think of Ireland or Italy up to the 1960s, or parts of India up to very recent times. This does not mean all such candidates are on the wrong path (Don Bosco, for instance, came from a poor family), but it does raise doubts about the large numbers of “vocations” seminaries and religious orders are getting in poorer countries today. *A higher number of candidates need not mean more vocations.* People may be getting in (and staying in) for the wrong reasons—side by side with those who are joining and staying for very genuine reasons.

We must not also forget that there are many “vocations” in the church—not just to the priesthood or celibate religious life.

4. Perseverance in one’s Vocation

THE RHETORIC: Some of us may remember a time when a companion’s departure from the seminary or religious life seemed a tragedy, and such persons would not feel comfortable stepping into the seminary or religious house again. If the departure was from the priesthood, then the shock and scandal were really great. “Perseverance in our vocation” seemed the most important

value. A change of direction was at times called a “defection.” Some religious orders even discouraged their members from having contacts with former members. The good thing about that era was the readiness to put up with hardships and be faithful to what one had undertaken, even when the going was very hard.

THE REALITY: The truth is that none of us knows which path is better for a particular person. In case of doubt, it is better that a person leaves the seminary or religious order than that an unsuitable candidate should be ordained or stay in religious life. Perseverance in doing God’s will is essential; this is not the same as staying in the seminary or religious order. There can be good and holy reasons for leaving, just as there are for staying.

In my many meetings with ex-seminarians, most of whom I had known before they left religious life or the diocesan seminary, I remember only one case of a young man who was still convinced he was called to the priesthood, and wanted to go back. In all the other cases, the candidates were helped by superiors either asking them to leave, or making it easier for them to take that decision. As formators or superiors (or family members), the best we can offer to the young religious or seminarian is our sincere desire that

they be happy and that they take the right decisions before God. Our interest should not be to keep them in, or to drive them out. We are not God. We accompany people in their decisions, with genuine love and respect.

In Western writings on religious life—or in speeches by Indians who go mostly by Western literature on this topic—we often hear: “Today’s young people are afraid of commitment. So, they do not want to stay in religious life or take life-long commitments, like religious vows or the priesthood.” While there seems to be some truth in this in Western society at large—see, for instance, the high percentage of divorces—this same blanket statement cannot be made of candidates in India. Why? Here *the greater danger seems to be that a person may stay in out of fear of leaving, or for other wrong reasons*. Fear of staying within a state of life does not seem to be the major issue here. (The situation varies much from one part of India to another.) This is true of marriage as well. The lower incidence of divorce in India compared to the West does not mean that marriages are happier here. People tend to stay in for other reasons: absence of other options, especially for women, lack of acceptance in society, financial dependence (e.g., on a husband who may be abusive,

but who is also the only earning member of the family). What happens in families and marriages is likely to happen in religious life and seminary life as well.

Another thing I want to say is this: If we claim to love our formees (we formators and superiors claim this), *how can we stop loving them when they decide to leave and do something else?* If I love you, I will love you whether you remain in my religious order or join another congregation or decide to be a lay person and serve God in marriage. If my love for you can be “switched off” the moment you leave, or I lose all interest in your welfare once you make another choice, that means I never loved you in the first place. What do you say, reader?

5. A New Type of Priest and Religious for a Changing World?

THE RHETORIC: There is much talk about the changing times, the new global situation, the impact of the media and that blanket word, “nowadays” (as opposed to some supposedly less enlightened earlier era). Some of the more academically sophisticated church people will use words like “the postmodern era” or the age of information technology. A number of people assume that people’s religiosity or expectations have

changed drastically, leading to very different expectations from priests.

THE REALITY: Surveys show that what people expect from priests and religious has remained fairly constant. In the first place, they expect the priest to be a “man of God.” Especially in a situation where more and more people are getting qualified in a wide variety of fields, they know that the priest cannot and need not be a jack of all trades. In most secular areas of activity, there are lay people far better qualified than priests. “Man of God” does not mean he is only a liturgist. The religious dimension, if genuine, permeates all areas of one’s life. One plans, acts, leads, suffers, preaches, organizes, “with the mind and heart of Christ.” Seminarians would do well to listen to what lay men and women expect from priests, rather than listen only or mainly to one another and to the artificial questions that come up in the protected atmosphere of the seminary.

One simple way to check whether one is a good priest or religious is this: Do people come to us? I used to tell seminarians: A good priest has no free time; there are always people to see him. A bad priest will have all the time in the world, because people do not go to him. If we are not kind and helpful, if we are rude, or bigoted or partial,

people will not want to come to us. In our setting, a lay person may not shout back at us or fight against us openly—partly out of a cultural insistence on respect for religious figures and partly because in our institutions we are powerful persons whose displeasure employees are afraid of—but they are really put off when we treat them badly. Some become bitter and fume in silence. Others speak ill of us with unconcealed anger.

Kindness, godliness, a certain simplicity of life, availability for service, efforts to provide meaningful liturgy and preaching, and trying sincerely to live what we preach to others—these are qualities that people have always expected from their religious leaders, and still do. One study highlighted nine traits lay people expected from clergy and religious. The very first is: willingness to serve without looking for acclaim. If, instead of serving, we want to boss over others, or are jealous of our colleagues, or want our name on buildings and our praises sung in public, people will despise us—and with good reason.

6. Current Programmes of Formation

THE RHETORIC: The opportunities offered to future priests are vastly superior to what sisters in training get.

With a higher number of staff members with advanced degrees in philosophy, theology and other subjects, as well as better equipped libraries and other resources, major seminaries may believe that they are providing a better formation to seminarians and religious today than in the past. The choice of subjects is evidently larger, the books and journals available more numerous, the access to outside experts much freer. The accommodation and food are better than what older formation houses provided. Does all this mean a superior type of training?

THE REALITY: There is no evidence that we are turning out better priests or religious today. An experienced formator once gave me a reason for this. He said, "In my opinion, formation depends 70 percent on the candidate, 20 percent on the staff, and 10 percent on the programme." Two priests who go through the same seminary training can (and do) turn out to be remarkably different. There is no way we can "produce" good priests or religious, or make sure that a candidate grows into a sincere, dedicated, God-centred, compassionate and effective apostle. Revised curricula and an updated syllabus are important, but no programme, however cleverly thought out, can ensure the quality of the final "product."

Every congregation and major seminary, as well as every diocese or group of dioceses, certainly need a good, organic plan of formation. It needs to be discussed and brought up to date. It needs to be integral, catering to the various aspects of formation in healthy ways. All this is true. *But more important than the programme is the person of the formator.* A good formator's life and conviction and personally challenging way of communicating things is what helps a young person to understand the essentials and be gripped by this way of life. A book cannot do that. Formators do this above all by creating a healthy atmosphere in the formation house. An atmosphere is hard to define, but it is tangible, palpable. Just as we feel happy and at home visiting some of our relatives and friends, while other visits leave us cold, a candidate can sense the atmosphere. *Candidates are more influenced by the atmosphere of the formation house than by our conferences and learned lectures.*

While a healthy formation atmosphere needs to be marked by a number of qualities, the two most essential are: love and joy. Only in a loving and happy setting will formation take place. Fear-filled settings, for example, may appear to produce results; but people will learn

to hide and pretend, and will behave in very different ways when they are free and out of the control of the feared authority.

7. Liberation Theology and Socio-Political Analysis in Formation Houses

THE RHETORIC: If we are to believe the more vocal seminarians and religious, it would seem that liberation theology and socio-political awareness are strong in our formation houses, that people are keen on action for justice, ready to engage themselves in transforming society in the direction of justice and respect towards all. If we go by the rhetoric, it can look as if serving the most marginalized is the main dream of most candidates, and that many will take a stand for justice and be willing to pay a price.

THE REALITY: It is fashionable in a number of academic circles to speak of liberation and to mouth leftist slogans. Real liberation theology would have to start with committed action for justice among the poor. Theology itself would only be a second moment. We do not see much of this happening. So, too, talk about marginalization or subaltern perspectives (in the comfort of a seminar) is miles away from being close to the poor in life-style or commitment. What is happening is that priests,

religious and seminarians *speak* about justice and use *words* like “liberation,” “oppression,” “the marginalized,” “subaltern perspectives,” etc. To do this while enjoying the security and the relative comfort offered by (foreign) money is quite easy; but it is not very convincing. Unlike what some conservative churchmen fear, there is little danger of too much liberation theology or action for justice in the seminaries or in the church in general; for it makes serious demands on life-style, ministry, readiness to confront the powerful and pay a price. We should not also forget that all serious liberation theology includes a strong spirituality. Gustavo Gutierrez, for instance, clearly insists that the *first moment of theology is a double experience and commitment—the experience of God and committed action for the people*. Theology itself is only a second step. Liberation theology can be talked about in the classroom; it cannot be done or learned in a classroom.

While there is no great danger of a seminarian or young sister caring too much for the poor, or being too much taken up by the desire to create a better, more just world—for the temptation of selfishness and love of ease is much, much greater—there is one danger in being influenced by society that is doing havoc in the lives of some

priests, religious and seminarians. I refer to the danger of following the political trends of one's place, even when these trends are contrary to the Gospel. Thus, I may imbibe from my surroundings—including the political groupings of my home state or region—a deep caste-awareness or an intense tribal identity or the ideology of a political party, and make of it my main identity and point of reference, to the neglect of what Jesus lived and taught. Thus, for instance, *I may find my main identity, not in my Christian faith or the priesthood or religious life or my basic reality as a child of God (which I share with all human beings), but in my caste or tribe or language group or political party.* Then, I will fight for “my group,” “my people,” “our cause,” even if it means hating or neglecting or fighting against “others.” I may even be ready to use any methods to gain the group's stated goals, especially of capturing power.

This is a major issue the churches in India are facing; the intensity of such polarization varies from place to place.

8. Celibacy as a Special Call that frees Us to Love God and Neighbour

THE RHETORIC: The claim is that celibacy makes a person more single-

minded in God's service. It is also supposed to make us more available to people. Celibates may even develop a mentality by which we are somehow superior to married people, and expect special treatment. Some people think we are closer to God, or that our prayers are more efficacious.

THE REALITY: A person may remain unmarried for many reasons. Mere bachelorhood is not celibacy. What Jesus proposed (and lived) is “celibacy for the kingdom,” that is, the commitment of one's whole being to doing God's will, with a totality of interest. Putting God in the first place is also the vocation of married people. While there are very committed celibates who are a reflection of God's goodness, we cannot say that most celibates are very available or do more work and service than married people. In fact, we may find that a number of priests do far too little work. I remember telling seminarians that, in my opinion, a number of them would work harder and be more responsible and self-sacrificing if they were married and had to support a family. Many of them would agree. It is no secret that there are a number of “unwilling celibates,” that is, persons who wanted to be priests, but were not keen on celibacy, and “tolerate” it because it is a requirement for the priesthood, or

women who stay in for want of real options outside. So, too, in today's setting, we are not providing adequate training for celibacy. Exhortations are not enough, nor the easy assumption that all those who join the seminary want to be celibate. Thus, for instance, a comfort-loving or money-minded or power-hungry priest or religious may be a bachelor or spinster. He or she is not a celibate; for *celibacy means that you are gripped by Jesus' life and message, and eager to live the Gospel*. Psycho-sexual maturity—becoming a mature, loving, reasonably contented man or woman who is happy to serve is something we need to grow into. We need help for that. This is a big area of problems; many people need help, and are often not sure how or where to get it.

There is also the real danger that an institution—religious order or diocese—may be looking only for “hands for work” and not for God-centred or correctly motivated candidates. If so, we cannot expect these same persons to be gripped by Gospel values, or live enthusiastic celibate (not merely unmarried) lives. As one happy and very committed sister told me, “In every convent there are some celibates and some spinsters. The celibates are happy; the spinsters are not.”

9. Our Image of the Church

THE RHETORIC: Vatican II was over forty years ago, but its teaching and spirit have not yet percolated to the body of the church. The theory we teach is that the church is a communion, that the hierarchy and the priesthood are in the service of the whole body, that all of us have the same call, namely, holiness, that clericalism is an evil, that women should be respected and listened to, etc. There are papal documents on the apostolate of the laity, on social justice, and a host of other contemporary topics, and there are others like the recent CBCI document on women.

THE REALITY: Church documents are, as a rule, not well known to the laity (probably because they are not being read by the clergy). Many bishops, priests, religious and seminarians still have a feudal mentality, where privilege and distance mark their style more than pastoral availability. Accountability in financial and other matters is not the norm in most parishes. A seminarian knows that, whatever he may learn in the seminary, he can get away with a lot once he is ordained. He can take the people for granted without getting into serious trouble. He does not face much questioning by the people, unless he gives scandal in a sensational way. He knows, too, that a number of older

priests live mentally in a pre-Vatican II church, and often he too falls in line.

There is, generally, more accountability in religious congregations. But here, too, the church of communion is far from being a reality. The feudal mentality so prevalent in India seeps into religious life as well.

In the “pyramid” type of church (the Pope on top, the bishops below him, the priests below the bishops, the sisters next on the pyramid, and the lay people at the bottom of the pyramid) the term “vocation” was used to mean that some people in the church (not everyone) had something special called a vocation, which put them on a higher rung. Holiness was seen as the call of a select few. Priesthood and religious life were thought of as superior to the lay state, and celibacy as higher than marriage. Socially, too, priests and religious were treated as persons belonging to a higher group.

Vatican II presented us with another model of the church: *the church as the people of God, where everyone has the same vocation*—the call to holiness or the call to imitate Jesus. We live out this call in different settings—in this sense, we can speak of different “vocations,” but the basic

vocation to holiness is universal. It is not reserved to a few.

This vision certainly put a particular way of seeing religious life and the priesthood (as well as celibacy) in crisis. If all are called to holiness, if marriage is a holy vocation, just like celibacy, if there are no different tiers or rungs in God’s church, why join religious life? Why be celibate? These issues are being more openly discussed today, and need to. To pursue holiness, or to do ministry in the church, one need not join a particular special group—like clergy or religious—nor forsake marriage or lay commitments. All of us belong to the same church. All of us have rights and duties in the church. We are not one below the other, or one above. For the service-minded ministers of God, this ecclesiology is a freeing truth. For someone seeking the priesthood or religious life as “social climbing,” the pyramid model of the church is far more appealing.

10. Professors as Formators

THE RHETORIC: Most major seminaries and religious formation houses (of at least clerical orders) today claim to have better qualified professors than years ago. In the vast majority of cases, this means that the staff has post-graduate degrees in an ecclesiastical subject from a foreign

(usually pontifical) university or some similar centre. Unlike the less sophisticated type of theology and philosophy taught years ago by priests without advanced degrees, today's formation syllabus includes a variety of courses, taught, as a rule, by persons who have academic credentials to teach that subject (except in the case of smaller orders of women). To have studied abroad is often equated with being qualified to be on the staff of a formation house.

THE REALITY: To have studied a subject in, say, a Roman university or some other "higher institute," is not the same as having the preparation to be a formator. Again, to have a degree is not the same as being a good teacher or a good community member. Most of us do not use the matter of our doctoral theses in our teaching. For our classes we need to read up and prepare ourselves each time. Many of the questions that face us in India are not treated in courses done abroad. Even if they were, theoretical knowledge of a subject is not the same as the aptitude or the training to train people for priestly ministry and life. As a student of theology once told me, "Many of you are good teachers. But what I need most is not a clever teacher of philosophy or theology. I need priests I can look up to, priests from whom

I can learn how to be a good priest." This brings us to the need of selecting suitable persons to be formators. Cleverness is not enough, nor is it even the main requirement. A degree in a subject can be one of the requirements for a formator, but it cannot be the sole or even the main criterion. In fact, an aptitude for—and some training in—counselling and spiritual direction is more important in a formator than a degree in a theoretical subject, such as theology or philosophy. *Formation, like parenting, is a full-time activity based on a loving commitment and a shared life.* I can be a part-time teacher or a visiting professor. I cannot be a part-time formator or a visiting novice mistress.

11. Spirituality and Social Commitment

THE RHETORIC: Nobody directly denies the need and the importance of prayer, or the social dimension of a priest's or sister's life. Often, however, we hear of references to social involvement as a danger to one's spiritual life. Some even say that the role of the priest/religious is to be a "spiritual" leader, and not be involved in secular affairs. Others wonder how to combine their roles of teacher, pastor and prophet in today's world. Some fear that a serious interest in

socio-political issues will dampen and damage a candidate's spiritual life.

THE REALITY: The opposite of spirituality is not social involvement, but egoism. A priest or the member of an apostolic religious community must be a person of prayer (personal and communitarian) who can lead the community in prayer meaningfully and with conviction. At the same time, he/she has also to be involved in the pains, anxieties and the struggles of our people. S/he cannot be a detached observer who just prays for them. A number of seminarians and young religious admit that they attend the daily community practices of piety mostly because they have to. Many have not yet found meaningful ways of praying. Some admit openly that the easy life in the seminary or religious house provides no great incentive for developing a strong prayer life, while the hardships of life make their parents pray far more intensely. As for social involvement (e.g., among the poor), the danger is not that we priests and seminarians and religious will spend too much time and energy for and among the poor, but that love of ease (e.g., hours spent in front of the TV) and the pull of power and money will sap our spiritual strength and bleed our souls white. We also need to practice (and teach) a realistic and

integral Christian spirituality, which contains not only prayer, but personal integrity, genuine love and a clear stand for justice. It cannot be reduced to practices of piety.

12. The Generation (and Authority) Gap

THE RHETORIC: Older and younger people, some think, differ so much in ideas and mentality that it is difficult to understand those of another age group. The old may blame the young for being worldly and irresponsible. The young think the old do not understand today's world and are too narrow-minded. These divisions are unavoidable among priests, as in any other group. So, too, many seminarians feel they cannot relate to older priests in the diocese, and a number of older priests wonder what kind of formation today's seminarian is receiving.

THE REALITY: The real gap is not in years, but in our openness or the lack of it. There are older people who are very alert and close to the young, whom younger people love going to; there are others who are set in their ways and hard to relate to. But this is true of younger people as well. A seminarian may feel closer to, or better understood by, an older priest than a younger one. Openness and loving concern are not dictated by age.

As for authority figures being distant and aloof, this not inevitable at all. If you take bishops, for instance, there are some who are very informal, simple and easy to relate to, and others who are solemn, inaccessible and distant. If I may generalize a little (and say something undiplomatic), we see that bishops in certain parts of India are in general more informal and closer to their people and to their seminarians (whom they tend to know personally) than bishops in other states. Religious congregations differ a lot in the way superiors and others relate to each other, and how the younger and older members mingle. We priests too can do more to treat the seminarians with love, like our younger brothers and junior colleagues in the ministry. They learn more from how we treat them, than from what we tell them. To give one concrete example, when deacons (who have spent seven or eight years in the seminary) thank the staff before leaving, what they remember are the apparently small acts of kindness they have experienced rather than all our lectures and conferences. *The differences between generations can be a source of mutual enrichment; they need not form a gap.* In fact, in the ideal formation house, there will be formators of different age groups. If all or most belong to the same age group, that would be an impoverishment.

13. The Family and Other Influences

THE RHETORIC: We may think that through our long and carefully planned formation programme we can produce a group of committed priests, or that priests as a group are better or “higher” than lay people. We may speak as if listening to more religious talks and spending more time in religious activities (daily liturgy, recollection days, retreats, etc), we as a group must be more religious and exemplary. Is this the case?

THE REALITY: After all these years in formation work, I am convinced (like many others) that the main formation house is our family. *Most of our formation is over by the time we join the seminary or the novitiate.* I am more influenced even today by the memory of my father and mother (who died forty-eight and thirty-nine years ago) than by any priest or religious superior I have known. The testimony of the more convinced and generous seminarians, religious and priests I have known convinces me of the same. Their goodness and commitment was more the fruit of their family training than of seminary formation. I also meet a number of religious and priests who tell me they were better when they were at home than after joining religious life or the seminary.

Another factor I have noticed is this: The more convinced seminarians and religious had, as a rule, known some good priests or religious who inspired them, and whom they wanted to imitate. This, too, tells me that, all in all, what candidates experienced (for better or worse) before joining the major seminary or convent is more significant than what comes later. What is your experience?

I am not saying that formation plans or the long years of highly structured training that we provide for our religious and future priests is a waste of time. But just because someone spends a long time in a setting does not mean he/she is deeply influenced by it. More than the length of time, what seems to have a strong impact on a person are these four factors: *Deep experiences, deep relationships, deep reflection and challenging exposure.* These four have a much stronger impact than lectures, or sermons or a routine repetition of acts (work, community prayer, classes, etc). If we listen to the candidate with real interest and help them understand and sort out their deep experiences (whether pleasant or painful), explore their most significant relationships, help them reflect on their life (rather than just dish out advice and exhortations), and expose them in a responsible and graded way

to challenging situations, then we can help them grow up. Nobody can make another person grow up; but we can help each other in our growth. The best help for this is inspiring example; the next is loving interaction.

14. Values of the Kingdom and Service of God:

THE RHETORIC: Church rhetoric (e.g., on someone's ordination or profession day or silver jubilee) talks of priests and religious as people committed to God and God's Kingdom. We speak of the years so-and-so spent in God's service and in the service of the people. We say things like, "Today we celebrate the fifty years so-and-so has spent serving God and His people," or " Fr. Peter (or Sister Mary) gave himself/herself to the service of God's kingdom twenty-five years ago."

THE REALITY: Here again, it is unrealistic to generalize, for two reasons: (1) Everyone who lives well is serving God and promoting His Kingdom—a good priest or religious, a good married man or woman, a dedicated politician or journalist or teacher. The service of God or the promotion of His Kingdom is not restricted to any one profession in the church. (2) Secondly, what promotes God's kingdom or what qualifies as service of God is not the fact of being

a priest or the member of a religious order but how one lives. I serve God—I promote Christ’s Kingdom—when I live a life of truth, love and justice (as the preface of the Mass of Christ the King says). The sad reality is often less glamorous or can even be tragically different. *Priests and religious often pursue ungodly agendas—power, money, positions—and at times lead the divisions in the church.* Caste consciousness or linguistic and regional bigotry is by no means absent among clergy and religious. We come across instances where students speak of finding stronger caste prejudice or linguistic bigotry among the priests and religious teaching them than among the students themselves. And behind linguistic or caste-based or tribal rivalries and power games lies a hidden or open lust for power and money.

15. “God is blessing India with many vocations, unlike some other countries.”

THE RHETORIC: One hears this expression many times, although less frequently today than some years ago. Some superiors of international congregations say such things in public. Some vocation promoters use this expression. One hears of religious congregations shrinking or even dying in Western Europe and North

America, while some dioceses in India face the problem of having too many seminarians and priests. Seeing this sharp contrast in situations, a number of religious orders, especially smaller ones, build new formation houses in India where they take in boys or girls.

THE REALITY: A European formator who has worked several years in India, especially in formation ministry, told me one day: “I am not convinced that there are more vocations in India than, say, in Italy. It is much easier to get recruits here in India. But that is a different matter. For instance, when we visit villages and talk about our congregation, a number of boys and young men ask for our address. Some of them come and visit us, and say: ‘I want to join.’ Having lived and worked with candidates here for some years, I feel that what a number of them see is our external life. I do not know how many of them are seeking—or following—an inner journey. That is why I say *I do not think there are more vocations here than in Europe.*”

It is no secret that religious congregations are shrinking drastically and even disappearing in the West. The average age of nuns, for instance, is seventy-two years in most Western countries—which means that most congregations have not had young recruits for many years, or have had

very, very few. If such a congregation sells even a small convent in Europe or North America, that money is more than enough for building a large and comfortable residence in India. It is a counter-witness—and self-defeating—to put up a large and swanky building in the midst of the poor (as in an Indian village or many parts of our cities), surrounded by a high wall that cuts off the inmates from the local population. Into this posh building step in girls or boys who come, by and large, from very simple settings—poorer families from the rural areas of certain states. How will they learn commitment and mission? If the change is largely from poverty and deprivation to an artificial setting of security and comfort, what choices is a young person really making? Is such recruiting done to serve the people—and to continue the mission of the order—or to prevent the order from dying out? At times, these young people are taken for formation to Europe, where most of them do not really fit in. In other cases, they are sent to Europe to help out in the order's houses, where they are the only young members. Is this the mission for which we should recruit new members?

Choosing a vocation means several things that are often not present in the currently high numbers of candidates

in countries like India: (1) That the young person is in a position to really make a *choice*—with realistic options in both directions; (2) that s/he has some *God-experience* or religious convictions which is the main driving force behind the decision; (3) that the *community* (seminary, religious congregation or the formation setting) is really interested in helping the candidate to choose before God and one's conscience what seems to be the better (more genuine) option. There are seminaries and religious congregations where such helps are given, without undue pressure to stay in or go ahead, where discernment is serious and sincere, where competent and caring formators help the formees to discern and follow God's will. But in many settings, there is, sadly, a rush to get candidates somehow, keep them in, cut them off from real choices (e.g., by depriving them of college study or sufficient contact with their families and with other young people their age) and provide a comfortable (rather than a mission-oriented) formation setting. In these settings, there may be more recruits; but how many are genuine vocations, that is, persons called to this way of life, and choosing it for the right reasons, and helped by suitable formation personnel, is a different story.

PART II: PROPOSALS

Based on these observations, I should like to make a few suggestions on priestly and religious formation. They do not claim to be exhaustive, nor systematic. They are just a few hints on some areas which need greater attention today in our setting in India. I have not explained any of them in detail. That would require a much longer presentation. In the month-long seminars on the formation of formators which we run at Don Bosco Renewal Centre, Bangalore, we explore many other aspects and look at many more suggestions for a more effective formation ministry.

1. *Get to know the candidate's family:* If the family is our main source of values, it is important that formators have some contact with the candidate's family. How a seminarian or religious relates to his/her family members tells us more about them than their behaviour in the community. He/she and the rest of us have much to learn from the family that brought him/her up. Some formators do this regularly and with real interest. They visit the families of all their candidates. So, too, a parish priest often knows the candidate and his/her family very well. They are often surprised at the way "vocation promoters" zip in from far away and recruit young people without knowing anything about their background or previous history.
2. *Involve lay people in formation:* Priests and religious are trained for ministry in the church, which is made up of different types of members. We need lay people (and women religious) on the staff of seminaries and religious formation houses. Their participation will make formation more realistic (and in some ways more demanding). It can also show the future priest that lay people are not only a group to be taught but also persons to learn from. Seminaries and religious houses that have tried this seem to have benefited from the experience.
3. *Involve the family in formation:* The family has a right and duty to be involved in the formation of their son or daughter, without, of course, undue interference. Whether it be in the form of a financial contribution, or visits to the seminary, or being informed of how s/he is doing, it is an essential part of one's growth that one's family is made an integral part of this process. This makes all the more sense if we agree with the premise that each of us is much more a product of our family than of the religious congregation we belong to.
4. *Involve the candidate, in a planned and graded way, in mission and ministry:* One does not become a full-fledged apostle all of a sudden. Ministry is something one grows into, gradually and steadily. There must be graded forms of ministry all through a candidate's formation period. Theory alone, however good, does not prepare us for the apostolate.

I have seen young religious and seminarians become enthusiastic about their vocation and get really involved when they became active participants in ministry. This is all the more so when they work under priests or older religious who are really dedicated. Such guided ministry is, in many cases, a much better preparation for their future ministry than a lot of theory and exhortations.

5. *Involve the candidates in ministry among the poor:* If the church is meant to be good news to the poor—and in our country they form the majority—it is essential that all through our training we should be actively involved with the poor. It is not enough to have seminars on social analysis or prayers for the poor; the young person must be involved in initiatives that bring him/her into direct contact with poor people. Apart from its apostolic value, such contact will make us also see our own tiny problems and inconveniences in perspective. We have much to learn from the poor, as Mother Teresa would often say. So, too, a good test of right motivation for the priesthood and religious life is whether a candidate has an effective love for the poor. A seminarian or young religious who avoids poor people, or speaks disparagingly about them, or treats them harshly and without respect, shows very little aptitude for ministry. When ordained or finally professed or in power, such persons are likely to seek out the company of the rich,

accept favours from them, live a life of luxury, and be harsh with the poor.

6. *Train them in youth ministry:* One form of ministry for which the future priest and religious of today must be prepared is youth work. In our country, the majority of the population are young. Two-thirds of our people are below the age of thirty. About half are below the age of twenty-five. By the time a seminarian is ordained—or a religious makes his/her final vows—they are older than fifty percent of the Indian population. To minister to this young population, we need adequate training. Otherwise, we may be afraid of dealing with youth, or see youth as a problem or neglect them altogether. I have seen from direct experience the tremendous impact of training seminarians and young religious in youth ministry. Many do excellent work with the young. Some have become directors of youth ministry in their dioceses. And, beyond the particular activities they organize for the young, with their training in youth work (which includes lots of contact with the children and adolescents during their formation years), they are comfortable with the young, not afraid of them. They welcome the young, rather than keep them at a distance.
7. *Select the right people for formation work:* A formator must be someone the student can look up to, who relates well to the rest of the staff and with the students, who is interested

in ministry and has some experience of it, whose life-style is inspiring, whose judgement is sound, and who is intelligent enough to grasp and teach the subjects that need to be taught. The main quality needed in a formator is neither intellectual brilliance nor academic degrees. The main ingredient is that he or she should be a person the candidate can look up to. One's character, convictions and life-style matter much more than degrees and mere cleverness. To be an inspiring person and to be a good team-member (who promotes unity, not divisions) are more important qualities than advanced degrees or high intelligence.

8. *Provide training and updating for formation personnel:* Any professional who wants to be effective, must keep learning. A middle-aged medical practitioner once told me that most of the medicines available today were not even known when he was a medical student. Regular and periodic updating courses for the staff are a must in the seminary. The "brushing up" can be in the subjects one teaches or one's growth as a person. Thus, for instance, formators would do well to take part in training seminars (even short programmes) on such subjects as counselling, spiritual direction, prayer, social analysis, multiculturalism, etc.
9. *Provide a happy and loving community setting:* We train people not through exhortations, but by living with them and showing them through

our life how a particular life is lived. The participation of the staff in all the activities of the seminarians and young religious (prayer, manual work, recreation, outings, apostolate...) is an essential part of the training. The young observe us carefully and learn from all we do. Only in a happy and united community will the young person feel convinced of what he/she is being taught and be gripped by the mission. Otherwise, they will pooh-pooh the nice theories being taught, and become cynical.

10. *Provide a realistic formation for celibacy:* Studies on the celibate experience of priests and religious shows that the training for celibacy is not adequate. It is not enough to tell young people the gospel reasons for celibacy or imply that faults against it are serious. We need to do more to prepare them for life-long celibacy. There is plenty to be done in this area. In the gatherings of Indian Catholic psychologists, this need was expressed strongly. We need to prepare a programme/syllabus for training seminarians and religious in celibacy. Problems in this area need to be faced more directly; more effective helps are needed. So, too, formators need some training in how to help candidates with sexual problems, such as, masturbation, sexual abuse, handling sexual feelings and learning to relate in mature ways to men and women. Male and female candidates face different problems in the area of sexuality, and at

different ages. Among candidates to convents, the proportion of girls who have been victims of sexual abuse (before joining) is higher than what most of us may think. Sexuality is a wonderful God-given power that we have to learn to integrate, not deny or denigrate. Becoming and being a celibate is very different from just remaining unmarried. Its most manifest expression is a life of simplicity, love and joy.

11. *Provide normal contacts with men, women and children:* An artificial or over-protective environment produces strange characters or people who are obsessed with what they miss. If during normal contacts with families a candidate or novice finds that s/he is not happy with celibacy and prefers to marry, it is better that they find this out before their final vows or ordination. So, too, normal contacts with their families and with other lay people will, in most cases, help the trainee to become more realistic, less fussy and more aware of the much tougher situations that many lay persons face.
12. *Help those who leave:* A theology student who left the seminary made this suggestion to me, "If you can help those who are thinking of leaving to find a job or do some studies, many more seminarians will open their hearts to you about their problems." The present policy of several seminaries of admitting only graduates is good for a variety of reasons. Apart from the greater

maturity and preparation at the time of arrival, the degree also gives a young man greater freedom to leave if he is not keen on the priesthood. I still remember a conversation I had with a theology student: "How can I leave now?" he asked. "I cannot go back to my village. My house is already called 'Brother's House.' I have no qualification to get a job. So, what will I do if I leave?" He left later, as a priest. Wouldn't it have been much better if such a candidate had more options before his ordination? This question is all the more poignant in India when it comes to sisters. How do we help those who are not meant for religious life to leave and settle down? As I said earlier, if we show no interest in their future once they leave us, how can we say that we really loved them, and were interested in their welfare?

13. *Dissociate the financial operations of the church from the priesthood:* This and the following two suggestions regard church organization; they are not directly under the control of formation houses. A great source of abuses in the priesthood (and, to a more limited degree, among religious) is the availability of easy money that need not be earned or accounted for. I believe that, if the finances of a parish are administered by a finance committee (and not by the priest), with the result that a priest in a richer or larger parish will have no more money at his disposal than one in a poor parish, and if we de-link

money and mass intentions, we will attract more genuine candidates to the priesthood. This is already done in a number of countries. Right now in India, the pull of money is strong for a number of candidates (and priests). And with it come many abuses.

14. *Provide salaried posts for lay ministers in the church setting:* This is the case in many other countries. For many ministries in the church, we do not need priestly ordination, or a religious community, or even celibacy. Why concentrate all apostolate in the hands of priests (and sisters)? Teaching in a school, working in a hospital, managing an institution, doing youth ministry, or construction work or Sunday catechism can very well be coordinated by lay men and women. We need to provide structures by which a just salary is paid for qualified persons, just as it is done in schools or colleges. This will free the priest to do priestly work, and involve many gifted lay people in the running of the church. Vocation promotion should be really that—helping a young person to choose before God what his or her heart truly seeks, and to grow on that inner journey. It should not be a cover-up for “cheap labour,” that is, finding unsalaried persons for maintaining institutions. So, too, when the priest or religious leading an institution—parish, school, hospital or welfare work—is truly dedicated and detached from money and power, many lay people will volunteer to offer free service

or money or things needed. We have all probably witnessed this type of cooperation.

15. *Use church funds to train different types of ministers:* Right now, a great deal of money is spent for training future priests. A seminary provides the young man who joins with excellent quarters, free food and tuition, highly qualified faculty, a good library, competent visiting staff, many helps for personal growth, such as prayer, retreats, counselling and spiritual direction. Many in the church think that, for the amount of time, money and resources invested in seminary formation, the results are not proportionate. (The recent survey among formators, conducted by the department of sociology, *Jnana Deepa*, Pune, seems to have come up with disturbing results that should make us sit up and think. This study has still to be published.) Compared to the resources invested in a priest’s training, sisters and brothers get very little help; and lay leaders are given even less. If the church belongs to all and needs many forms of ministry, then this awareness needs to be shown in the allotment of funds as well. One way to start would be to use the large premises, libraries and qualified personnel of our seminaries to train a wide range of ministers. Some seminaries have started doing this,

e.g., by offering theology classes for the laity. The response has been very positive.

These reflections are, as I said at the beginning, based on my experience of formation work. They are not meant by any means to be rigid or unchangeable guidelines for others, but only an invitation to pause and look at this central activity in which we

invest abundant human and financial resources. That it has a significant impact on the lives of at least some of our seminarians and religious, and, through them, on a wider circle of people, cannot be denied. The question here is: What can we do to increase its impact and to provide a more committed body of priests and religious to serve the church and the world?

CENTRALITY OF CHRIST, THE WORD MADE FLESH IN THE LIFE OF THE RELIGIOUS¹

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF

As Major Superiors of Karnataka, we have come together for our XIV Annual Assembly. During the last Assembly, when we met with the Bishops of Karnataka (KRCBC), we discussed *Mutual Relations*, the theme of the relationship between Bishops and Religious. As Religious in the heart of the Church, it is good that we deepen our *sentire cum ecclesia* especially as the Church has initiated a process to revive herself on the theme “the Word of God.” I am referring particularly to the XII Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which will take place in Rome from 5 to 26 October 2008

and the theme chosen, as you all might know, is “*The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*.” You may have already read the *Lineamenta*, the draft guidelines that are meant to stimulate reflection and discussion on the theme. *Lineamenta* states that the underlying purpose and primary goal of the synod is “to fully encounter the Word of God in Jesus the Lord, present in the Sacred Scriptures and the Eucharist” (n. 4)

It is within the context of this Synodal topic, we have also chosen our theme, namely, the *Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Religious*. My

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intention in this address, is only to give you a framework for understanding the Word of God and also to show how Christ, the *Eternal Word Made Flesh* becomes the central concern in our life and mission as Religious. I hope that these reflections will be amplified and deepened by the more expert contributions from our resource persons and the resulting discussions during these days.

1. God Takes the Initiative in Communicating Himself

The Second Vatican Council masterfully and accurately set forth in *Dei Verbum* a summary of the faith professed by the Church throughout the ages. It is that God in his goodness and wisdom chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will. He makes himself “known in a gratuitous and direct way so as to enter into an interpersonal relationship of truth and love with humankind and the world he created. God reveals himself in the visible realities of the cosmos and history “through deeds and words having an inner unity,” thereby demonstrating an “economy of Revelation,” namely, a plan which seeks the salvation of humankind and,

through it, all creation (DV, 2). At one and the same time, this Revelation communicates the truth about God, One in Three, and the truth about humanity, loved by God and destined for eternal happiness.

This gratuitous communication, which presupposes a deep communion analogous to human intimacy, is characterised by God himself and his Word, that is, what *Lineamenta* calls, the “Word of God.” It is a “personal act of the Trinitarian God, who loves and consequently ‘speaks.’ God speaks to humankind so that each person might acknowledge his love and respond to him” (*Lineamenta*, 6). Bible, in its entirety, clearly

demonstrates that this communication has continually taken place from Genesis to Revelation. When the Word of God is read and proclaimed, the Lord himself makes an appeal to us to “become part” of a deeply profound and uniquely interpersonal event of communion between him and us, and each of us with one another.

2. Word of God: The Source of All Reality

This self-revealing and communicating Word of God is the source of all reality. God spoke and

everything came in to being. God said: “Let there be . . . and there was” (Gen 1.1f). “He commanded and things sprang in to being” (Ps 33:9). We read in the prologue of St. John: “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God. Everything that came into being, came into being through the word. Nothing that exist, exist without him” (Jn 1:1f). Truly, the Word of God is active and accomplishes what it aims (cf. Is 55:10; Heb 4:12).

Once this word has rung in the midst of the world, in eternity, in fullness of time, it is so powerful that it applies to everyone, addresses everyone with equal directness. No body is in a disadvantageous position, either in space or in time (Mt 13:3f; Lk 11:28).

The Eternal Word of God, however, is always mediated to us in particularities. The immediacy of the word is experienced through these mediations. God speaks in the sanctuaries of the universe, cosmos, history, and humanity in all its micro and macro-cosmic epiphanies. These are all “words of God” in their multiple and varied forms in their complexity and utter simplicity. So the Word

of God is endowed with different forms. In this context, it is worth mentioning the expression of St. Bonnaventure “*liber naturae, liber scripturae and liber vitae,*” the book of nature, of scripture, and of life. There is God’s word in the *people, events, and things* of our life even as He reveals himself in “burning bush” (Ex 3:1f.) or in the manger (Lk 2:2f)

3. Humans: Called to be “Hearers” of God’s Word

Thus for our sake, God has spoken first, and invites us to enter into communion with him. For the moment, we can only be listeners. We have to begin first of all by listening. And we are all called to be “hearers of the word.” God has created us in such a way that we have an existential ability to hear the word of God. Han Urs Balthazar says: “God, in giving us faith, has also given us the ability to hear.”² To believe and to hear him is one and the same thing. “The obedience of God is owed to the God who reveals” (DV, 5). A person is to listen to the

One who gives through speaking, “freely surrendering his entire self” (DV, 5). To believe is to recognize and accept our estrangement from God, and it is only in this recognition that

we recognize our ability to listen to his word. It is only in this *listening* that God further enables us to *respond*, and in responding, he takes us to *communion* with himself. Thus any dialogue with God, any communion with him is possible only on the basis of his word, his speaking, his language. *Lineamenta* states: “The Human Person Needs Revelation” (n. 7).

Allowing oneself to be “touched” by God’s Word can open a person to the Word of God in all its signs and languages. “Through the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit, the Word communicates truth to faith by means of a teaching or doctrinal formula. It recognizes that the Word is the basic force at work in conversion; a light in response to the many questions in the believer’s life; a guide to a proper and wise discernment of reality; an invitation not simply to read or speak the Word but to ‘do it’ (Lk 8:21); and finally, an everlasting source of consolation and hope” (*Lineamenta*, 11). From this follows, the task of acknowledging and ensuring the primacy of the Word of God in the life of believers by receiving it as the community of faith proclaims it,

understands it, explains it, and lives it.

Even though we are capable of knowing God by relying simply on God-given human resources (cf. Rom 1:20), in various circumstances in history,

as a result of sin, this knowledge of God has become clouded and uncertain and even denied by many. But God does not abandon humanity; he puts a deep longing in individuals for light, salvation, and peace, even if this is not always recognized.

4. Christ-Event: The Classical Locus of God’s Word

Perhaps, this explains why God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, who becomes the *Word Made Flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14), thereby becoming the fullness of God’s revelation. “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God... upholding the world by his word of power” (Heb 1:1-3). Jesus Christ, therefore, comes as the fullness of God’s word. Central to all the privileged places of God’s

speaking, stands the Christ-Event, which becomes, for a Christian, the classical and normative locus of God's word. "For he sent his Son, the Eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that he might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God" (cf. Jn 1:1-18). "Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word-Made-Flesh, was sent as 'a man to men.' He 'speaks the words of God' (Jn 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do (cf. Jn 5:36; 17:4)" (*Lineamenta*, 9). Therefore, through his life, words, and deeds, Jesus took upon himself and fulfilled the entire purpose, meaning, history, and plan of the Word of God. His reveals and makes plain God's manner of thinking, loving, and acting to humanity.

All the "words of God" uttered in cosmos, history, and humanity, therefore, stand in relation to the classical, normative, and privileged locus of God's speaking which is the Christ-Event. The Scriptures, being the recorded expressions of this Christ-event, and especially the Gospels which are "the heart of all the Scriptures" become the normative sacrament for the divine speaking in

the life of a Christian (DV, 18). It is the Christ-event that provides us with the criteria of the Kingdom within which all our listenings, perceptions, evaluations, decisions, actions, and relations are to be judged.

It is no wonder then that John the evangelist wrote thus: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon

and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest

to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete" (1Jn 1:1-4).

5. Understanding the Word in its Richness

Pastorally speaking, this truth calls for an understanding on how to gather the various meanings of the Word of God in the centrality of the Christ-event. This is why *Lineamenta* speak of the

Word of God as a “symphony played with many instruments” (*Lineamenta*, 10).³ We see in the Scriptures that Jesus Christ is shown to be the Eternal Word of God, “which shines forth in creation, is given a historical character in the message of the prophets, is fully manifested in the Person of Jesus, is echoed in the voice of the apostles and is proclaimed in the Church today. In a general sense, the Word of God is Christ-the-Word, who, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is the key to all interpretation” (*Lineamenta*, 9). Origen also states, “The Word of God, who was in the beginning with God, is not, in his fullness, much talk or a multiplicity of words; but a single Word, which embraces a great number of ideas (*theoremata*), each of which is a part of the Word in its entirety... and if Christ refers us to the Scriptures in testifying to himself, it is not to one book that he sends us to the exclusion of another, but to all, because all speak of him” (*In Ioannem* V, 5-6: SC 120, 380-384).

The essence of the Church’s proclamation is this richness of the Word in its various forms. The more the Church knows to understand herself in Jesus Christ, greater will be her renewal

by the Word of God. However, it is also true that the Word of God (which is Jesus) has also to be understood, as he himself said, “according to the Scriptures” (Lk 24:44-49).

We need to be vigilant in arriving at a proper conception of the Word of God by avoiding erroneous or over-simplistic approaches and any ambiguity. We need to perceive the Word of God in its symphony because of its “intrinsic connection to the mystery of the Trinitarian God and his Revelation; its manifestation in the world of creation; its germinal presence in the life and history of humanity; its supreme expression in Jesus Christ; its infallible confirmation in Sacred Scripture and its transmission in the living Tradition of the Church” (*Lineamenta*, 9). Because of its richness also comes the necessary and demanding task of interpreting the word of God in the Church.

6. Consecrated Life and the Centrality of the *Word Made Flesh*

Consecrated life, from its origins, beginning with the eremitical form, and in all its successive forms have

emerged from a lived familiarity with the Word of God in all its richness and, more centrally, with the Christ-Event. Down the centuries, the Gospel-- as it were, the supreme rule of consecrated life-- has continued to inspire it and, in turn, is called to refer constantly to the Gospel, to remain alive and fertile, bearing fruit for the salvation of souls. Hence, consecrated men and women are expected to view the divine scriptures as the “excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ” (Phil 3.8). The instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ* recalls: “It was the Holy Spirit who sparked the Word of God with new light for the Founders and Foundresses. Every charism and every rule springs from it and seeks to be an expression of it (n. 24). Every religious family is born which with its very presence becomes in turn a living “exegesis” of the Word of God. The Second Vatican Council says that the succession of charisms in the consecrated life can therefore be read as an unfolding of Christ down the ages, as a living Gospel that is actualized in ever new forms (cf. LG, 46). “Deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord,” consecrated life can be compared to a “plant with many branches which sinks its roots into the Gospel and brings forth abundant fruit in every season of the Church’s life” (VC, 1, 5). It is therefore, the special duty of consecrated life “to remind the

baptized of the fundamental values of the Gospel” (VC, 33). By doing so, their witness imbues the Church with a “much needed incentive towards ever greater fidelity to the Gospel” (VC, 3) and indeed, we might say, is an “eloquent, albeit often silent, proclamation of the Gospel” (VC, 25).

6.1. Conformity with Christ, the Word: The Heart of Consecration

This is simply because vocation to consecrated life has no other goal than that of becoming conformed with Christ Jesus. “In consecrated life, it is not only a matter of following Christ with one’s whole heart, of loving him ‘more than father or mother, more than son or daughter’ (Mt 10:37) -- for this is required of every disciple-- but of living and expressing this by *conforming one’s whole existence to Christ* in an all encompassing commitment” (VC, 16). By embracing the evangelical counsels, we commit ourselves to making “our own-- in chastity, poverty and obedience-- the way of life practiced personally by Jesus and proposed by him to his disciples” (VC, 31). We are called not only to make Christ the whole meaning of our lives, but strive to reproduce in ourselves, as far as possible, “that form of life which he, as the Son of

God, accepted in entering this world” (LG, 44). God the Father has chosen us so that we may make our own the *forma Christi* (cf. Rom 13:14; Jn 6:7); so that we might be conformed with the traits of Jesus and that His own creation plan might come to fullness in us. The “form” of Christ must become our “form.”

We are called to place the *Word made flesh* at the center of all things. We must learn to walk, fixing “our gaze on Christ’s radiant face” (VC, 14). By growing in conformity with Christ and reincarnating his life vision and mission contextually, meaningfully, and relevantly, consecrated life becomes “a sign and parable of God’s Kingdom” which alone is the “central motive of the expectation and preaching of Jesus.”⁴ “The diverse forms of religious life exercise among the People of God this admirable function as signs, as parables of the dynamic presence of God in the world, within the Great Sign and Parable which is the Church.”⁵

6.2. Charism: A Spirit-Filled Way of Encountering and Serving the Word

Charisms of Religious Institutes emerge from the ways in which the founders and foundresses have encountered Word of God as manifested

in the Christ-event. These men and women were fascinated by the person of Christ and felt deeply the ramifications of his life in their hearts. Because of their faithful contemplation of the Gospels and deep sensitivity to their own social milieu, they felt the Christ-event, not just as a historical event in the world’s past, but as a dynamic reality penetrating and subsuming their own times, challenging them to both mysticism and social action. Their following of Christ, therefore, had also elements that are both mystical (rooted in contemplative vision) and political (overflowed into expressions of love).

They saw areas of human life where there was a crying need for the Christ-story to be retold. They went into the dark places of human existence, its brokenness, poverty, illness, ignorance, degradation, misery, telling the story in words of proclamation and deeds of compassion.

It is good to remember that it was the Word of God that became the ultimate means for them to perceive the whisperings of God in the brokenness of the human reality which, in turn, became the means for them to interpret the Word of God. It is this Word of God that led them live as renewed and adapted persons. It is because of this transparency for the adaptation and renewal, that they remain effective

and inspiring for our congregations.

By this God-experience of being listeners of God from the Word of God, they remind and challenge us not to copy what they did but to live what they lived in creative fidelity. This is the call to convert their spirit as our heritage and prophecy by which we become the witnesses for the Lord.

6.3. Variety from the Richness of the Word and the Variety of its Experience

The variety of charisms emerges from the richness of the Word of God and the variety of its experiences and expressions. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1:1-3; cf. Col 1:16). The Mystery of the Word, with various nuances and a significant variety of aspects, thus, got personified in Christ of the Gospels and in his words and deeds, manifesting more clearly those innumerable dimensions of the Word. Each of the founders/foundresses was attracted and motivated by certain aspects of the mystery of Christ and re-lived

and expressed these aspects in tune with what they experienced. This experience and expression, therefore, become the foundation for the spirituality and mission of each congregation. It is

significant to remember that the vocational roots of their call are in the Gospels. The Christ-story, thus, with its enormous range and depth, were dealt with by focusing on particular aspects and got reflected in the social milieu in which the founders lived.

The Lord who called them spoke to them both from the gospel or the Bible as well as from the reality. The historical context and the human situation were the practical realities of the Word of God. Since they were keen listeners to the Word of God, they could grasp at once the call of God. No authentic founder is exception to this fact of being ardent listener of the Word God in his or her internal self and in the human and social realities. This capacity to listen to God both in their hearts and in the heart of the social reality produces in them an irruption of the Holy Spirit. This strong irresistible movement is the origin of their call to form a community for a particular way of life to live that special mystery of

Jesus and to do the apostolate in that light.

6.4. *Listening to the Word: The Constant Source of Nourishment*

If we have to keep our gaze fixed on Christ, imitate him and grow in conformity with him, there is no way other than that of reading, listening to, meditating, and embodying the Word in our life. It is this ongoing contemplation that will gradually and slowly transform us into him; the vision of the light makes us more and more luminous. This process is such that it can at length reach the point where “it is no longer we who live, but Christ who truly lives in us” (Gal 2:20). Pope John Paul II insists: “It is necessary that listening to the Word of God should become a life giving encounter..., which draws from the biblical text the living Word which questions, directs and shapes our lives” (NMI, 39). Jesus, the creative and redemptive Word of the Father, endowed with the full power of the Spirit, has an unimaginable power for transformation. “This Word created the world. This Word created the people of God. This Word has created the great vocations in the Church. This Word keeps on re-creating us, transforming us inwardly, even at times when we do not perceive it. The Word of God on our lips is the most effective weapon

in order to battle against the rule of evil one and to make the Kingdom emerge.”⁶

6.5. *Formation in and for the Word: An Indispensable Ground*

If this is so, *formation in and for the Word* is an indispensable ground for our life and mission as Religious in the Church. By this, I do not mean, just imparting the informational knowledge of the Scriptures, which, of course, is important. Today, however, information on anything is available on our finger tips through our effective net work systems. Thanks to our modern technology. By *formation in and for the Word*, I do mean a *teaching and learning on how to listen first to God’s own word and make all our other listenings subservient to this primordial listening*. You might ask why this is so important. This is because when we listen, we hear not only the word of God but also the voices that come from too many other sources especially in the present world governed more by “information explosion.” When we try to listen, we hear ordinarily too many voices, all mixed up and confused, even voices that contradict the voices of God. All kinds of human “isms” also speak each with its own language and expertise and area of knowledge. Sometimes, God’s word is subsumed under all these voices. His directives

co-exist with many other directives. We are being bombarded with directives that are both consonant and dissonant. This is a peculiarly modern phenomenon, especially in a world governed more by media revolution and globalization, remote-controlled by systems of collective global power and vested interests. In the past, at least, distinctions between good and evil were finely demarcated and so it was easy to recognize good and evil. The modern situation, when it comes to this recognition, can be very confusing and alarming.

Because of this, formation must help tune ourselves properly, discern, and develop the art of disciplined listening or contemplative listening through which we let ourselves be addressed by God's own word. It means a willingness to subject ourselves, our motivations, perceptions, decisions, judgments, relationships, possessions, positions and, in fact, our entire life-world under the all pervading horizon of God's word. It means to be open to the "sharpness" of His word, "piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12); it means, not only to be affirmed, cared, loved, accepted, but also to be challenged, confronted, and renewed personally by God's word.

This is, in fact, the essence of being in continual prayer.

6.6. *Lectio Divina*: The Most Effective Method

It is because of this reason that *Lectio Divina* or Divine reading in all its five stages (Preparation, Reading, Mediation, Prayer, and Contemplation) has been considered the most basic method that has been foundational to Christian practice even from the early Church and continues to remain as a classical method of *formation in and for the Word*, giving rise to "fervour in contemplation and the ardour of apostolic activity" (VC, 94). Even the study of the Scriptures has been inspired by *Lectio divina*. It is also considered the springboard or the source from which all forms of prayer emerge.

6.7. Lived Familiarity with the Word: A Protection from Reductionism

Another important aspect of this formation is attaining a *lived familiarity* with the Scriptures, resulting in a personally digested wisdom of the Scriptures. It means an "in-touchness" with the mysterious story of how we have been claimed, redeemed, and invited into the intimacy by the Holy Other-- a deep intuitive grasp of how, in the past, this Holy Other has initiated

covenants with persons and with groups-- an interiorized awareness of the content of those covenants and the immediacy of the implications on one's life. Speaking of this, John Paul II writes: "From familiarity with God's Word... they acquire a *kind of supernatural intuition*, which allows them to avoid being conformed to the mentality of this world, but rather to be renewed in their own mind, in order to discern God's will about what is good, perfect and pleasing to him" (*VC*, 94). Such a lived familiarity will liberate us from reducing the Word in a selective and impoverished reading of it; of taking in a reduced, monotonous and unbalanced "nourishment" from it by resorting to an excessively selective way of reading.

This is why the Constitution *Dei Verbum* asks us to read and meditate on the Word, taking into account the unity of the entirety of the Scriptures (*DV*, 12) which forms, so to speak, an admirably symphonic and many-colored whole. "Only the totality of it offers the complete sense of the Word of God. Only by discovering the effects that this totality produces in believers can we understand the ultimate intentionality of the Word of God."⁷

Conclusion

Nourishing ourselves with the Word in order to be "servants of the Word" in the work of evangelization should become a priority for us as consecrated men and women. This is a matter of urgency. Let me conclude with the words of Pope Benedict XVI on February 2, on the World Day of Consecrated Life, addressed to the Consecrated: "Nourish your day with prayer, meditation and listening to the Word of God. May you who are familiar with the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, help the faithful appreciate it in their daily lives too. And may you know how to express what the Word suggests, letting yourself be formed by it so that you bring forth abundant fruit, like a seed that has fallen into good soil."

Endnotes:

- 1 The Keynote Address delivered by Dr. Xavier E. Manavath, CMF (President, KRCCR) at the XIV Annual Assembly of the Karnataka Regional Conference of Religious (KRCCR), held from August 28-31, 2008 at Mount St. Joseph, Bannergetta Road, Bangalore, India.
- 2 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986, p. 33.
- 3 Lineamenta speaks of six fold analogous meanings of the Word of God, Cf.10.

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- 4 John M. Lozano, *Discipleship: Towards an understanding of Religious Life*, Chicago: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1980, P. 25.
- 5 Jose Christo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Foundation, Charismatic Roots and Identity*, Vol. 9, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2005, p. 26.
- 6 Jose Christo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Prayer in Religious Life*, Vol. 4, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2005, pp. 15-16.
- 7 J. Christo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Prayer in Religious Life*, p. 15.



CATHEDRALS VIS-A-VIS WORLDWIDE FAIR: THE CHURCH IN DIALOGUE WITH THE NEW AGE

Paul Dominic, SJ

In the world today what is the self-image of the Church with its well-organized structure of religion, ritual, and established doctrine? The question may not be—indeed, is not—a proverbial million-dollar question; but it affects millions of people who are religiously inclined in one way or another! Increasingly in recent years, the Church has had to reckon with growing number of people who would consider themselves unchurched or even unchristianized¹ and claim to live in a newly emerging theatre of new, alternative spiritualities of freedom, as the slogan goes. A vocal form of the

latter is certainly the New Age people who have made big news in the last half a century or so and especially at the turn of the millennium. How does the Church perceive itself in relation to them? Accordingly, how does it relate to them? And further, how does it perceive them relating to it?²

1. Necessarily Changing Church

One cannot think of the self-perception of the Church vis-a-vis the New Age religion,³ arising all of a sudden. With its past history and large world-wide membership, even if not the same as it used to be, the

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Church, like any comparable human institution, cannot and does not change its self-image often, or quickly on some immediate inspiration or provocation, but only gradually. If the cynics were to ask if the leopard could change its spots they would surely miss the point. It is not without reason that the Church can make haste only slowly as it responds to the happenings and goings-on in the rest of the world of vast proportions and divergent perceptions. In such a historical, social perspective it is legitimate to speak of the pre-Conciliar, Conciliar and post-Conciliar Church, from the standpoint of the last ecumenical Council as indeed of any earlier ones. The pre-Vatican II Church was tightly knit, self-assured, knowing all, and homely if in a traditional manner, and unsuspectingly patriarchal. Strangely, however, it was *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher)! The Conciliar Church was a fast changing Church by the very momentum the Council unleashed to the shock or surprise of some and joy and relief of others. Perhaps the Church as a whole never before changed so rapidly, not unlike the twentieth-century world of science itself. No wonder some called it the runaway Church! From being a ghetto Church, for long comfortably ensconced but feeling suddenly besieged, it became an open Church,

opening itself to all of the world as it was, starting first with its own members of all hues, then other Christians, then other believers, and even atheists or so-called non-believers. So it came about that the new Church excluded none while journeying as a pilgrim people. In its openness it surprised itself and others by its daring to learn humbly, if also to teach with due authority. In the process it met with much conflict to become a contested Church. Even the good Pope John XXIII's social encyclical *Mater et Magistra* drew the remark reportedly from one Buckley: "*Mater si; Magistra, no* (Mother, yes; teacher, no)."⁴ Still, for all the ups and downs of the conciliar Church, the post-conciliar Church was *ex professo* a dialogal Church. Pope Paul VI set the tone and course of dialogue, insisting that it is "demanded nowadays by the prevalent understanding of the relationship between the sacred and the profane... (also) by the very pluralism of society, and the maturity man has reached in this day and age."⁵ In course of time by trial and error the Church learnt the rule of dialogue, and advocated among members the rule-of-thumb dialogue covering life, action, religious experience, and theological exchange.⁶

2. The New Church and the New Age

What is the self-understanding of the present post-conciliar Church in relation to the New Age? While answering this question it is good to realize the recurring nature of the New Age. The New Age that has been on the world stage in recent history is far from being an altogether new phenomenon; surely indeed there were precedents to it. Like everything in history, the fervour, not to say, fever of the New Age is repetitive: it emerges, as historians may point out from hindsight, at particular moments of crisis, or at a climactic juncture of religious consciousness, or, of course, especially at the end of centuries and millennia. So, for those who have an idea of what has been called “the longer now,”⁷ it was nothing surprising to witness the New Age enthusiasm around the turn of the second millennia.

Was there anything surprising in the way the Church responded at the millennial turning point? In each previous occurrence of the New Age “conventional organized religion failed in one way or another to recognize, address and cope adequately with the crises of the times. Paradigm shifts did not occur fast enough for church leaders to seize the day. Rather, they more characteristically reacted by denying the manifest symptoms of change and,

when they could, aligning themselves with guardians of the status quo to suppress dissent and innovation.”⁸ The post-Conciliar Church surely does not invite the same kind of criticism about the way it dealt with the latest version of the New Age. The reason is that it had forsaken the cocksure, doctrinaire attitude of the past; and further it sought to meet others where they were at, not dogmatically but pastorally.

It is worth observing that the emergence of the post-Conciliar Church almost coincided with the beginnings of the New Age Movement in 1960s, though at the time of the event it went possibly unnoticed. In course of time both the parties concerned have acknowledged each other’s presence and, through their members, have reached out to each other at various levels. In assessing the extent of their mutual interaction or exchange there is a difficulty. Unlike the Church the New Age coterie is far from centralized; and so there is no certain way of knowing what could be considered their general policy and praxis in relation to the Church. It is in such a context that we should welcome (though now belatedly) the study of the New Age movement carried out by the three Pontifical Councils for Culture and Interreligious Dialogue and Christian Unity, and the Congregation for the

Evangelization of Peoples. Their study resulted in their publication in 2003 of *Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian reflection on the "New Age"* (hereafter CRONA). In this document one may discern the way the Church presents and poses as a spiritual leadership in dealing with the New Age as an alternative claimant and protagonist.

3. The New Church as Dialogal

Given the general nature of the post-Conciliar Church it cannot but be that in CRONA the Church appears with the lineaments of a partner engaged in dialogue. The dialogue in question is both internal and external. CRONA is directly addressed to Christians engaged in pastoral work and indirectly to New Age fellowship. It encourages the former to understand the new phenomenon reasonably and rightly, to relate to its followers in a way beneficial to both sides in the interest of truth, and so to go forward in building up the world of God in all the ways possible without narrowly restricting to so-called religious issues only. As the Foreword itself has it, "This study invites readers to take account of the way that *New Age* religiosity addresses the spiritual hunger of contemporary men and women." Again early in the document the writers say, "It is an invitation to understand the *New Age*

and to engage in a genuine dialogue with those who are influenced by *New Age* thought" (n. 1).¹⁰ Such dialogue is however out and out Christian, as it is based on 'the "new Advent" of the God who calls us to live in the dialogue of love' (n. 1.1).

The occasion of the publication highlights the seriousness of the dialogue (n. 2) on the part of the Church. Knowing full well the line of thinking of some that the New Age had certainly peaked only to enter a period of waning, still the Church thought it wise to bring out its study of and response to the New Age. The reason is simply that, as the Church saw it, "at least for the moment, the *New Age* is still alive and part of the cultural scene" (n. 1.5). Further, in the apparent success of the New Age the Church recognizes a challenge not simply to beat off but to benefit from. The Church views the New Age as a sign of the times that can help it to introspect and so to project itself properly outside. So, on the one hand it has no hesitation to appreciate the New Age appeal to genuine seekers of a deeper spirituality. On the other, it has the frankness and boldness to confess: "If the Church is not to be accused of being deaf to people's longings, her members need to do two things: to root themselves ever more firmly in the

fundamentals of their faith, and to understand the often-silent cry in people's hearts, which leads them elsewhere if they are not satisfied by the Church" (n. 1.5).

4. Seven Facets of the Dialogal Church

The dialogal Church is essentially pastoral; and, if missionary, it is so in an eminently pastoral way. "The pastoral effectiveness of the Church in the Third Millennium," it believes, "depends to a great extent on the preparation of effective communicators of the Gospel message" (n. 2). The document serves this purpose as it nurtures and guards the faith of the unwary from the danger of religious relativism (n. 4); and further suggests approaches to the New Age posers, which could be quite radical and complex and even apparently bizarre¹¹ to many.

One of the bizarre ideas of the New Age believers is surely the very concept of the new age; because people have heralded the so-called new age repeatedly in history, without however realizing it even once, according to their prediction. The Church has a serene and sober idea of new age, which is far from esoteric or gnostic.¹² Its beginnings were, of course, connected with the new age proclaimed and fulfilled by Jesus,

which might have looked bizarre then (comparable, *mutatis mutandis*, to the situation of Noah in relation to his contemporaries). It is in that new age, though, that the Church still lives in the tension of what has happened already and what is to happen yet! The characteristic of such living is that "Christians are in a constant state of vigilance, ready for the last days when Christ will come again; their New Age began 2000 years ago, with Christ... We live in the last times" (n. 4, see also n. 3.3).

If the New Age knows of no authority binding it the reason is that in its vision, as the document puts it, "Authority has shifted from a theistic location to within the self" (n. 4). The Church has its own appreciation of the basic insight in such a posture as it upholds the primacy and dignity of conscience, so strikingly enunciated in Vatican II.¹³ If the Church shares thus, with others, an aspect of the authority "within the self" it holds and values, also, a version of authority that is located outside the self. In this view, authority has shifted from a theistic location to a community location! The reason is not simply the social or communal or communistic nature of humans but that very human nature as affected by the coming in flesh of the Son of God into human society. The

very words of Jesus addressed to his disciples, conferring on them authority (Mt 16:18-19; 18:18-20), would bear this out.

Such authority vested in the Church is authoritative but not authoritarian (at least ideally speaking). The reason is that the Church is finally a communion of two or three or very many more gathered in the name of Jesus! “A genuine Christian searches for unity in the capacity and freedom of the other to say “yes” or “no” to the gift of love. Union is seen in Christianity as communion, unity as community” (n. 4). So “the appeal of Christianity will be felt first of all in the witness of the members of the Church, in their trust, calm, patience and cheerfulness, and in their concrete love of neighbour, all the fruit of their faith nourished in authentic personal prayer” (6.2). It is important to notice that here is no mention of doctrine, discussion, or debate.

This is not to say that there is no room for doctrine and things of the kind. For, as the Church sees it, the authoritative, dialogal service of its faith is modelled on Jesus Christ, that is, the one who is Jesus as well as the Christ, eulogized in Col 1:15-20. As the cosmic Christ he is present actively in the various members of his body, which is the Church, and becomes the

inner force of the dialogue the Church engages in (n. 3.3). As the Jesus of history he had blazed a trail of dialogue for us to follow. CRONA singles out the episode of his encounter with the loner of Sychar as a paradigm for our own contemporary engagement with truth. “The gracious way in which Jesus deals with the woman is a model for pastoral effectiveness, helping others to be truthful without suffering in the challenging process of self-recognition... This approach could yield a rich harvest in terms of people who may have been attracted to the water-carrier (Aquarius)¹⁴ but who are genuinely still seeking the truth. They should be invited to listen to Jesus, who offers us not simply something that will quench our thirst today, but the hidden spiritual depths of “living water”. It is important to acknowledge the sincerity of people searching for the truth... An invitation to meet Jesus Christ, the bearer of the water of life, will carry more weight if it is made by someone who has clearly been profoundly affected by his or her own encounter with Jesus... It is a matter of letting people react in their own way, at their own pace, and letting God do the rest” (n. 5).

Even such dialogue on the part of the Church may not always be a peaceful experience. Anti-Christian

voices may become strident. So we find the warning in CRONA: “It must never be forgotten that many of the movements which have fed the *New Age* are explicitly anti-Christian. Their stance toward Christianity is not neutral, but neutralizing: despite what is often said about openness to all religious standpoints, traditional Christianity is not sincerely regarded as an acceptable alternative. In fact, it is occasionally made abundantly clear that ‘there is no tolerable place for true Christianity’, and there are even arguments justifying anti-Christian behavior” (n. 6.1). Such statements may look exaggerated but one does come across such anti-Christian bias (as I did in 1990 at Oakland, California). In this context the Church sees itself as a Church of martyrdom in the original sense of the word, namely, witnessing; and that, not simply by the shedding of blood but by the spreading of love that costs, as taught by the Johannine Jesus (Jn 13:35; 15:12-13) and his followers (1Cor 13:1-3; 1Pet 3:15-18). CRONA rightly and pointedly refers to it in an early passage (n. 1).

There is one last self-image that the Church has discovered for itself, and to this CRONA devotes the very last paragraph. If the previous images arise from scripture or tradition, the last one derives from its dialogal

situation with the New Age. One of the New Age movement’s own exponents has suggested a comparison that is surprisingly far from odious: *traditional religions are like cathedrals, and New Age, a world-wide fair!* The Church cannot but appreciate this vividly positive, if at once flattering and humbling, image. Using this image the New Age movement surely holds out a standing invitation to Christians to take the message of the cathedrals to the fair spread around the globe. It urges that the contemplation and celebration in the cathedral is not to make us tarry there but walk over to our home and work-site, and indeed to the market place where people await us knowingly or unknowingly. It is high time that the Church responded to such an urgent wish positively and propitiously. Indeed that is what we should have been doing all along if only we had heeded the Church’s own daily bidding at the end of the Mass —“Go! The Mass is ended!”¹⁵ The fact is that there is an ongoing revival of spirituality in the world around, of which the New Age is surely a symptom, and religions have not been lacking in their response. Pointing this out Pope John Paul II called for our authentic, not competitive, contribution in depth: “But we who have received the grace of believing in Christ, the revealer of the Father and

the Saviour of the world, have a duty to show to what depths the relationship with Christ can lead.”¹⁶

5. Like Church, like Members

What the Church sees itself to be and to be doing while dialoguing with the New Age—that is what we have considered till now—will be necessarily reflected in each of its members more than its networks of learning or service or culture. Such will be the case all the more so in each grouping of Christians, for example, families, parishes, pious unions, *et hoc genus omne*. CRONA addressed itself to some of the related issues in the latter part of its last section that carries the subtitle: Practical Steps. One particular step will be of particular interest for the readers of *Sanyasa*. The document suggests: “Perhaps the simplest, the most obvious and the most urgent measure to be taken, which might also be the most effective, would be *to make the most of the riches of the Christian spiritual heritage*.” As a group who would be equal to the task but the religious communities of men and women? As the writers of CRONA comment appreciatively and encouragingly: “The great religious orders have strong traditions of meditation and spirituality, which could be made available through courses or periods in which their

houses might welcome genuine seekers. This is already being done, but more is needed. Helping people in their spiritual search by offering them proven techniques and experiences of real prayer could open a dialogue with them which would reveal the riches of Christian tradition, and perhaps clarify a great deal about *New Age* in the process” (n. 6.2). Indeed what the religious communities can do by their intense life dialogue will result in breaking of barriers and building of bridges between people. If, as someone has pointed out, the New Age in its core “has undergone a re-organization assumed under a variety of new names, names which many would argue actually better describe the community of transformed, spiritually-awakened, compassionate, earth-loving people the movement was structured to be”¹⁷ the religious are those who can prove to be their allies in the pilgrimage of life together.

Besides the cherished traditions of spirituality in religious life, mentioned by CRONA, there are other reasons that make religious life an ideal partner of dialogue with New Age groups. As the Church is, as one may well observe, so religious life is typically by virtue of its public character of commitment! So, the qualities that characterize the Church in dialogue are reflected more

in religious life than in any other of the ecclesial bodies. As the Church is pastoral, eschatological, authoritative (in the spirit of communion), Christ-centred, witness-oriented and spiritual like the soaring cathedral spires, so is religious life. The very last element of comparison between the Church and religious life provides the basis for CRONA's suggestion of how much more religious life could do to further ecclesial dialogue with the New Age with its bias towards spirituality. The other elements of comparison too can give a special orientation and edge to the dialogue that religious life can and must initiate and sustain with the New Agers who have, after all, their own somewhat similar convictions and concerns. Hopefully the result may well be that both sides, granting that they are sincere, come to have a better grasp of the reality they have been searching, and perhaps even realize happily at the end that they have been looking at the same reality, though confused and fumbling for proper words! Meanwhile, following the counsel of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the religious would conduct their Dialogue at four levels: life (living in neighbourly spirit), action (collaborating in common projects), religious experience (sharing

spiritual happenings), and theological exchange (discerning together the truth of God).¹⁸ The more happy they are in their distinct profession of being a people for people, living in the end-times inspired by Jesus in their midst binding them together, the more they will be an inviting poser to the New Age believers who have their own understanding of and commitment to the people, and the present times, and the cosmic Christ.

In our dialogue with the New Age people we may well find an extraneous reason for it in those people themselves. They are strangely and peculiarly like us religious and so make compatible partners in dialogue. In the surrounding cultural and religious world they are in some way dissenters, dreamers, spiritual upholders, mystics, social transformers and what have you; they would consider themselves the avant-garde in the present day. Religious in the Christian world have been just that, *mutatis mutandis*, right from their start. The great founders and foundresses, like Benedict and Scholastica, Francis and Clare, Dominic and Catherine of Siena, Ignatius of Loyola and Mary Ward, Francis de Sales and Jane Frances de Chantal, etc., were not common run of men and women in the ecclesiastical world of their times. They were people who had a new

vision of the old or forgotten Gospel to challenge the religious powers that be. Some, if not all, of them were considered dangerous to society and treated or rather ill-treated as suspected heretics or religious revolutionaries. But against all odds they proved in the long run their genuineness, if charismatic! Their descendants are we, the religious; rightly we have discovered and recovered our status as prophetic¹⁹ in the post-Conciliar Church. There is thus a streak in our make-up that is not unlike the New Age, though for different reasons. This constitutive nature of us religious should make us more attuned to dialogue with the New Age culture than others are!

The dialogue that we pursue with the New Age, whether for intrinsic or extrinsic reason, is to be sure an ideal that is far from attainment quickly. Religious, individually or collectively, can fail here by omission of dialogue²⁰ or commission of ill-considered dialogue.²¹ So they all had better heed the judgment of some: "It must unfortunately be admitted that there are too many cases where Catholic centres of spirituality are actively involved in diffusing *New Age* religiosity in the Church" (n. 6.2). If this remark of CRONA were to be faulted for exaggeration by some still it would

contain a bit of truth! Such failures are more likely to happen where a spiritual centre is run as one person's show or under one person's shadow²² or where a novelty is zealously offered or a disputed question is broached without a judicious guidance about how it fits in with the living spirit of Christianity. In India too one comes across such cases. For example, there is a centre called Bodhi Zendo in Tamil Nadu, promoting Zen meditation and attracting the moneyed seekers from the West, besides promoting abroad the spiritual merchandise. While legally a Jesuit centre, a new comer would be hard put to find anything Christian there, let alone Jesuit spirituality (at least till my last visit there some years ago)! (I am saying this though I have sat in *zazen* intermittently and found it good, though difficult)! What would you think of an Institute of Spirituality in a Christian college at Oakland, California, where a catholic student (a former Franciscan) staged in the college chapel a mono-drama of his gay living? One may wonder in such and similar cases what the concerned religious authority is concerned about! Countering such belying Christian centres that ought to be spaces for honest dialogue, the writers of CRONA counsel: "People's minds and hearts are already unusually open to reliable information on the Christian

understanding of time and salvation history” (n. 6.2). If we give credit to this there is no better way to respond to it than by “constantly revisiting the sources of our own faith” (n. 6.2). Here as elsewhere it is the religious who should serve others by their kind of leadership! If they fail it is a double failure: they fail others first, and themselves foremost!

We cannot obviously conclude with this note of possible failure. We shall rather recall what a couple of religious groups have aimed at doing and perhaps even succeeding to some extent. As a Jesuit I may recall what the Society of Jesus tried to do in its 34th General Congregation (GC). Referring to its decree on co-operation with laity the introductory decree says: “While the term was rarely used, GC 34 was touching upon the Christian virtue of hospitality, of making the Society a symbol of welcome – to the poor, to lay people, to those searching for meaning, *to those who want to talk seriously about religious issues.*”²³ Whereas there are no explicit references to New Age people, what is advocated certainly embraces what should be happening in relation to them as well. Whether it is happening generally I cannot tell, especially if Jesuits are perceived to be good at talking and stopping at it. But I can tell of what is happening

in another group, popularly called Focolare Movement, though officially named Work of Mary, founded by the Italian Chiara Lubich. Though they are not canonically religious they will put any religious to shame by their singular commitment! No wonder they seem to be very much in the global scene of action. A summary of their action is simply related by one of them thus: “I still remember that simple solemn occasion on the 19th August 1984 when Chiara presented the spirituality of the Work of Mary to the Pope and asked those involved in the various activities to speak briefly – those responsible for the Movement’s sections, the branches and the mass movements, as well as *those responsible for the dialogues which the Work holds with the other Christian Churches, with the great religions and with people of other convictions.*”²⁴ The Pope was amazed and the audience was elated. Indeed who would not be? That is the power of dialogue when it is conducted in the Christian spirit by committed Christians which the religious ought to be!

Endnotes:

- 1 “Literally millions of people had dropped away from the older churches and synagogues,” says J. Gordon Melton, “Whither the New Age?,” *The Way*, Vol. 33, 1993, p. 199.

- 2 To appreciate the import of these questions consider the statement: "Understanding refers to specific interrelationships that constitute a world in which one finds oneself... *Not only is all understanding basically self-understanding; the other way round, all self-understanding is understanding of the world in which one finds oneself.*" Francis X. D'Sa, "A Hermeneutic of theological language," *Third Millennium*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2000, p. 9.
- 3 In a pastoral letter on new religious movements Cardinal Godfried Danneels called the New Age a "new religion." Cf. John A. Saliba, "A Christian Response," *The Way*, Vol. 33, 1993, p. 228. Such a terminology is not without controversy.
- 4 See Aloysius Michael, *American Virtues and Cultural Values from the 1820s to 1990s*, Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000, pp. 247-248.
- 5 Cf. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, Austin Flannery (Editor), Bombay: St Pauls, 1995, pp. 880-881.
- 6 For the original reference see 34th *General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, Anand, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1995, n. 131, pp. 47-48.
- 7 I borrow the expression from James Redfield, *The Celestine Prophecy*, London: Bantam Books, 1994, p. 29.
- 8 Richard Woods, "What is new age spirituality?," *The Way*, Vol. 33, 1993, p. 185.
- 9 This important idea broached right in the beginning comes for repeated mention later in the document, e.g., nn. 1.3, 2.5, 3.1, etc.
- 10 The bracketed numbers in the body of the article refer to the numbers in CRONA.
- 11 Even some of the New Age leaders like David Spangler would consider elements such as channeling and crystal gazing bizarre. Cf. CRONA, n. 4.
- 12 As Pope John Paul II said gnosticism is "that attitude of the spirit that, in the name of a profound knowledge of God, results in distorting His Word and replacing it with purely human words." Cf. CRONA, n. 1.4.
- 13 Cf. *Dignitatis humanae*, 3; *Gaudium et spes*, 16.
- 14 The New Age people believe their age coincides with the impending or already dawning Age of the constellation of Aquarius (Water-carrier) following the Age of Pisces (Fish), as was announced by Carl Jung.
- 15 Compare this bidding with the daring dictate: "Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?" Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, Madras: Macmillan, 1973, n. xi.

- 16 *Novo Millennio Ineunte* n. 33 quoted in CRONA, n. 6.2.
- 17 Melton, “Whither the New Age?,” p. 208.
- 18 *34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, n. 131, pp. 47-48.
- 19 Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, n. 84; also *UISG* no. 122, 2003, on the theme: Reclaiming the prophetic impulse.
- 20 Mitch Pacwa may be mentioned as an example here. Cf. Saliba, “A Christian Response,” p. 226.
- 21 I may recall here an Indian Sister of a Belgian Congregation who in a seminar on alternative therapies at Nagercoil, India, suggested, one Sunday, having “surya namaskara” (a meditative homage to the sun in Indian Hindu tradition) in the morning rather than Mass!
- 22 One could think of Anthony de Mello as evidenced by the second book on him (*DIEZ AÑOS DESPUES: REFLEXIONES SOBRE ANTHONY DE MELLO*, only in Spanish) by Carlos Valles reappraising him frankly radically whom he had called the prophet for our times in his first book *Unencumbered by Baggage*.
- 23 *34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, n. 11, p. 7 (emphasis added).
- 24 Silvano Cola, “What kind of church for the third millennium?” *Gen’s*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2002, pp. 12-13 (emphasis added).



DOCUMENTATION

CORRESPOND FULLY TO YOUR VOCATION 'BE IMITATORS OF ME, AS I AM OF CHRIST'

[On Monday evening 2 February, the 13th World Day for Consecrated Life, the Holy Father (Pope Benedict XVI) spoke to men and women religious after the Holy Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at which Cardinal Franc Rode, C.M., Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, presided. In this year dedicated to the Apostle Paul the Pope reminded religious of St Paul's affectionate invitation to the Corinthians: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1Cor 11:1), and asked "What in fact is consecrated life other than a radical imitation of Jesus?" The following is a translation of the Holy Father's Address, which was given in Italian.]

Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate
and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I meet you with great joy at the end of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, on this liturgical Feast which for 13 years now has gathered men and women religious for the Day for Consecrated Life.

I cordially greet Cardinal Franc Rode, with special gratitude to him and his collaborators at the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life for their service to the Holy See and to what I would call the "cosmos" of consecrated life.

I greet with affection the men and women Superiors General present here and all of you, brothers and sisters who, with your witness as consecrated persons modeled on the Virgin Mary, carry Christ's light in the Church and in the world.

In this Pauline year, I make my own the Apostle's words: "I give thanks to my God every time I think of you - which is constantly, in every prayer I utter - rejoicing, as I plead on your behalf, at the way you have all continually helped promote the gospel from the very first day" (Phil 1:3-5).

In this greeting addressed to the Christian community of Philippi, Paul expresses the affectionate remembrance he cherishes of all who live the Gospel personally and toil to pass it on, combining the care of

their interior life with the effort of the apostolic mission.

In the Church's tradition, St Paul has always been recognized as father and teacher of those, called by the Lord, who have chosen unconditional dedication to him and to his Gospel.

Various religious Institutes are named after St Paul and draw from him a specific charismatic inspiration. One can say that he repeats to all consecrated men and women a forthright and affectionate invitation: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1Cor 11:1).

What in fact is consecrated life other than a radical imitation of Jesus, a total "sequela" of him? (cf. Mt 19:27-28).

Well, in all this Paul represents a sound pedagogical mediation: imitating him in the following of Jesus, dear friends, is the privileged way to correspond fully to your vocation of special consecration in the Church.

Indeed, from his own voice we can recognize a lifestyle that expresses the substance of consecrated life inspired by the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. He sees the life of *poverty* as the guarantee of a Gospel proclamation carried out totally gratuitously (cf. 1Cor 9:1-23) while at

the same time he expresses concrete solidarity to his brethren in need.

In this regard we all know of Paul's decision to support himself with the work of his hands and of his commitment to collecting offerings for the poor of Jerusalem (cf. 1Thes 2:9; 2Cor 8:9). Paul is also an apostle who, in accepting God's call to *chastity*, gave his heart to the Lord in an undivided manner to be able to serve his brethren with even greater freedom and dedication (cf. 1Cor 7:7; 2Cor 11:1-2). Further more, in a world in which the values of Christian chastity were far from widespread (cf. 1Cor 6:12-20) he offered a reliable reference for conduct.

Then concerning *obedience* it suffices to note that doing God's will and the "daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches" (2Cor 11:28) motivated, shaped and consummated his existence, rendered a sacrifice that found favour with God. All this brought him to proclaim, as he wrote to the Philippians: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21).

Another fundamental aspect of Paul's consecrated life is the *mission*. He belongs wholly to Jesus in order, like Jesus, to belong to all: indeed, to be Jesus for all: "I have become all

things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1Cor 9:22).

In him, so closely united to the person of Christ, we recognize a profound capacity for combining spiritual life and missionary action. In him the two dimensions refer to each other reciprocally. And thus we can say that he belongs to the ranks of those “mystical builders” whose existence is both contemplative and active, open to God and to the brethren, on order to carry out an effective service to the Gospel.

In this mystic and apostolic tension, I would like to remark on the Apostle’s courage as he faced the sacrifice of confronting terrible trials, even to the point of martyrdom (cf. 2Cor 11:16-33) and on his steadfast faith based on the words of his Lord: “my grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection” (2Cor 12:9-10).

His spiritual experience thus appears to us as a lived-out expression of the Paschal Mystery, which he investigated intensely and proclaimed as a form of Christian life. Paul lives *for, with and in* Christ. “I have been crucified with Christ,” he writes, “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20); again: “for to

me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil 1:21).

This explains why he does not tire of urging us to behave in such a way that Christ’s word may dwell within us in its richness (cf. Col 3:16).

This brings to mind the invitation addressed to you in the recent Instruction on *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, to seek “every morning... a living and faithful contact with the Word which is proclaimed that day, meditating on it and holding it in (your) heart as a treasure, making of it the root of every action and the primary criterion of each choice” (*L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 30 August 2008, n. 7, p. III).

I therefore hope that the Pauline Year will nourish still more in you the determination to accept the testimony of St Paul, meditating every day upon the word of God with the faithful practice of *lectio divina*, praying with “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness...” (Col 3:16).

May he also help you to carry out your apostolic service in and with the Church with a spirit of communion without reservation, making a gift of your own charisms to others (cf. 1Cor 14:12), and witnessing in the first place to the greatest charism which is charity (cf. 1Cor 13).

Dear brothers and sisters, today's liturgy urges us to look at the Virgin Mary, the "consecrated one" par excellence. Paul speaks of her with concise but effective words that describe her greatness and her task: she is the "woman" from whom, in the fullness of time, the son of God was born (cf. Gal 4:4). Mary is the Mother who today presents her Son to the Father at the Temple, also continuing in this action the "yes" she spoke at the moment of the Annunciation. May she once again be the mother who

accompanies and sustains us, God's children and her children, in carrying out a generous service to God and to the brethren. To this end, I invoke her heavenly intercession as I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to all of you and to your respective religious families.

(Courtesy: Indian Edition of
L'Osservatore Romano,
N. 5 (2080),
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