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EDITORIAL

SANYASA OF OURS: A PEEP OF ITS SAT AND ASAT

Paul Dominic, SJ

The last bit of instruction that a Jesuit Novice Master used to give his novices ran thus: “You have finished your novitiate and soon you will be assigned to different houses. There you’ll find Jesuits of very different kinds. Some of them you’ll find strange, so strange indeed that you may wonder if they are Jesuits. Don’t be shocked, though. They are Jesuits, to be sure! We need them from time to time. But don’t become like them!” I am sure you like this story (especially if you are not a Jesuit), and I bet it whets your interest in the “story” that follows concerning all sannyasins.

Whatever his story that led to his wonderful view, the wise Master puts us wise with his humorous and yet realistic picture of sannyasa. Which of us will not feel drawn to try out his calm counsel? There must be a way to embrace our sannyasa in its light and shade. How we do it is perhaps a contribution we can make to continuing or changing the story. What follows is a Jubilarian’s contribution, starting with a recollection of the good news of Sannyasa, then picking up the “shadow” or the unfortunate bad news, and then hopefully shading and ending it all up in a pleasing chiaroscuro.

Paul Dominic is a Jesuit belonging to the Hyderabad province. Besides being a lecturer of Mathematics, he has his Masters in Spirituality. He writes frequently on Spirituality in many of the leading pastoral and theological journals. He has written number books. He directs retreats and offers spiritual direction. Currently, he is the USA.

Jubilarians are not necessarily old, especially psychologically, though even the youngest of them are necessarily drawn to look back over their past fifty years. With their experience of half a century they can be young and hopefully mature enough to look to the future and contribute to its shaping. It is with some such spirit that I would like to share with an audience wider than the Society I belong to a *postulatum* for genuine—I don't say better—service of faith and justice in religious life. No sannyasa is in a vacuum; it is always in a particular mould of one or another tradition started by a founder or foundress. If then my point of departure here is necessarily as an Indian Jesuit, still any religious with an open mind will read between the lines and find points of connection in our various religious styles or, following the principle of *mutatis mutandis*, make interconnections among them. Further, the general experience of religious men and women, I believe, cuts across our Congregations owing partly to the blurring of our charisms in post-Vatican II years¹ but primarily to our common humanity.

Sat at the start

Even as I am now primarily looking to the future I would like to start with a look back on my initial moorings. In the years preceding the

Second Vatican Council those of us who found ourselves within the Jesuit Novitiate sanctuary were trained to be Jesuits hundred percent though without the advantage of what is now touted as the exposure to the world! Our training was primarily by way of *learning to be and to do* taking after the Jesuit elders, living as a happy, praying community of Fathers and Brothers. We made the experiment of the *Spiritual Exercises* handed down by St Ignatius, and learnt more than we might have thought! I say this, retrospectively of course, because of what some hailed as the new wave of the *Exercises* in 1970s. There was a specialist who impressed his audiences with what he held out to be the Jesuit basics; as if to confirm his erudition he later became the head of the Secretariat of Ignatian Spirituality in Rome. I heard him myself only to wonder at the fuss people made of his lectures; for I heard nothing really new from him! He was a good speaker, clear and persuading; but I learnt hardly anything that my Novice Master had not taught me a littler over a decade earlier. Either I had had an unusual grasp of the Jesuit spirit as a sixteen year old or the Master, who had no special training for his office, had imparted it without his knowing it with all his occasional stammer! After all, the best spiritual trainers are those who teach by every action or inaction of

theirs, and the best disciple is one who knows to imbibe the true spirit from such embodied, unconscious spirits! Anyway, I drank the inspiring words handed down over four centuries by the living Jesuit tradition, particularly the divine locutions heard by Ignatius at La Storta on his way to Rome with his first companions. "I wish you take him as our servant," Abba God had said to the Son; and the Son in his turn had said to Ignatius: "I'll be propitious to you in Rome!" And we never tired of praying that we too would be placed with Jesus as Ignatius was, to be contemplatives in action as growingly we were to encounter the world! In sum, out of what we called the long retreat lasting for a month of the *Spiritual Exercises* we gained an experience which I would now express thus: "*Little to say; much to savor; and so to save some!*" It was an initial project that would hopefully unfold itself in us for the sake of the world as we would find ourselves more and more inserted into the world. It was *an initiation, first and foremost, into a new kind of being, i.e., of becoming what we ought to be, and secondly of doing out of our true being and so being incapable of doing out of our false being!*

This recollection of my novice-experience dates back to 1957. If

the thirtieth General Congregation² in session that year aroused much excitement in us there was little of it in relation to the thirty-fifth General Congregation in 2008, at least as far as I was concerned. Perhaps this is a story of all our religious life in its early stage versus later. Anyway, the first fervour proverbially cools down sooner than later! And so the original experience, as I now realize it, was a promise, only a promise. Who could say that it was to end in fulfillment except for a few? But those few are hardly in the limelight; they could be found normally only in the shade of Nazareth and the shadow of Calvary and not in the bustle and glare of mutual plaudits! They were the ones who really lost much-not perhaps of wealth but something greater such as dignity and rights-as Jesus bade them and so, though strangely enough, gained their life with him. Theirs would indeed be the story of the original promise ever refreshed, renewed, and realized partly through tests and trials caused by ungodly companions.

Subtle inroads of *asat*

For the rest who are by far the majority the promise turns out to be largely a promotional goal of a sort, however one names it. And so their department is not unlike that of the cardiologists who gathered to discuss

the food habits for hearty and healthy hearts and read papers on banning junk food, and broke up for lunch only to gorge themselves with the delicious, forbidden stuff! So I was not particularly shocked to see the smooth, comfortable way a privileged Jesuit spread the message of inculturation in 1970s: invited to speak on the novel theme in a big convent in Hyderabad, he was taken there and brought back by the convent car. And that was exactly contrary to the culture of the area where car was a luxury and even in the convent, car would not have been available to the majority. The closed female audience would have heard some new ideas on inculturation and formulating some related prayers with immense satisfaction; but nothing more would have come of it. Their life would have continued as before just as the Jesuit's, with little sign of the neighborhood culture affecting them. To be inculturated one must leave one's privileged culture and seek at least a temporary admission into another's. To give another example, at a meeting of Jesuits interested in making use of the *Spiritual Exercises* for express social involvement the resource person and the participants were viewing at how the *Exercises* could be adapted for opening up the exercitant's personal vision to a social vision till one suggested: "On these days of our

attempt at social involvement could we not make a change in the style of living here and now according to the customs of this house? All those who come for meetings here have to wash their plates and cutlery. Because we are Jesuits we are exempt from it in our Jesuit centre and the poor workers have to bear the brunt of the job. Why not do ourselves what others have to do here as visitors?" Even if the suggestion did not enthuse the participants they could not deny its pertinence to their supposed learning process; and so we did the dirty work, albeit unenthusiastically. It was certainly not a clever point worthy of print in an intellectual journal. But the "crazy" point is that *what needs to be done is not much talking or discussing but feeling and doing because of one's characteristic being! That is something of being contemplative in action!* If that was certainly in the curriculum of our training it is anybody's guess how much it became part and parcel of our daily agenda! And so there is little surprise when young formed religious blurt out that they will make use of the Congregation for their self-promotion and even their family's too.

See-saw of *sat* and *asat*

The simple and at the same time best way to conduct ourselves in this respect is to shun loftily all distraction and to be energized by the spirit of

pure intention-an ancient principle definitely-of doing God's will in the present moment, following the pioneer of our faith whose name we bear as a multifarious society of officially marked Christians, though not all worthily enough! To put it in another way, we begin to engage ourselves in the art of living the present moment which is simply doing at any time the good we are set to do personally or communally.³ A high goal here could take the form of a disclaimer and a declaration: the unashamed disclaimer of any ambition to say anything to the world primarily⁴ and a bold declaration of seeking one thing only, the only thing necessary, namely to embrace what is better for our own salvation (in its most radical and so relevant and rich sense) which incidentally cannot but prove to be the salvation of others too. A metaphor for this could be a cluster of seeds thrown into the soil, deriving life from it and not domineering it and yet invariably but inconspicuously making it fruitful and beautiful before long. It was in this way, I believe, Ignatius and his first companions went about their common discernment process quietly, thinking only of clarifying and forging their own identity and yet unsuspectingly making their debut in the world scene! A modern version of that experience became famous in 1970s: "What is

it to be a Jesuit today? It is to know that one is a sinner, yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was. What is to be a companion of Jesus today? It is to engage, under the standard of the Cross, in the crucial struggle of our time: the struggle for faith and that struggle for justice which it includes."⁵

Would that there were Jesuits, earnest or curious enough to dare examine if they had kept the hermeneutically framed new ideal glowing or smoldering or petering in their lives! It is the most natural and supernatural thing to do. In fact the above quote of the ideal is followed by the call to praxis of "acknowledging with repentance its (the Society's) own failures in keeping and upholding justice." It echoed the way, the hallowed way of the initial experience of the *Spiritual Exercises*, which itself echoes the primary and perennial evangelical call to repentance. If the way is thus not unclear the rub is to find companions ready to traverse the road, more known but less travelled! *Surely, not many will dare enter into the caves of their hearts, the crevices of their communities, and the canyons of their universal body to see their truth and worth in the sight of their Abba God! They are sadly like the proverbial visitors and tourists to an ancient cave of beauty full of adventure*

and discovery, who are interested only in boasting of having been there on a sight-seeing trip and not exploring with the aid of an ever ready guide. But, if anything, the early Jesuits, like every first generation of a new group of religious,⁶ were explorers of the inner world of spirit; and only such inner explorers felt the characteristic urge to traverse the various parts of the world and turn them all to God!

Making space for *sat* again

The conversion process, properly speaking, is confession of God's constant goodness in the face of our recalcitrant sinfulness of boastfulness. This confession must not stop within individuals, however great it is in itself, but must be contagious enough to affect their group too. If not an altogether new idea, it is ever a new grace that every Christian body has to discover (as the North American Church, for example, has had to, in the wake of the public exposure to the long hidden sin of clerical abuse of children). This confession must be infinitely superior to the quick, ritual confession at the beginning of the Mass. It must be an enduring confession whose fruits will be manifest sorrow and, strangely enough, bursting joy and gratitude as evident among prostitutes and publicans who sought the company of Jesus. In order to receive it from

our Lord and Master the sure way is to desire and ask for this communal grace from the Lord himself. Such an exercise of the spirit, ours and God's, will create a historic moment for us religious as a body in the Church. *If a single person's conversion as in Ignatius could be a turning point in history imagine what could be the potential of the conversion of religious as a world body!* It is a far cry from what happened once at the time of a public scandal in a men's community when a neighbouring Sisters' community observed an hour of prayer vigil to overcome the crisis even as the former kept talking about it.

The confession can be true on our part only if it is very concrete and not vague. Imagine the confession of a fifteen-year old clever fellow in a school run by religious men. "I have sinned against all the ten commandments," he began and stopped with that. Asked whether he had violated each and every commandment, he replied no; but still he would not specify any particular sin of his and stuck to his argument, "If I violate one commandment it is the same thing as violating all commandments!" If a clever devil could argue thus with his sort of repentance his clever mentors as a group could unconsciously argue no less unless someone, simple and innocently foolish, exposed them!

Like the one who suggested that many have twisted the new definition of a Jesuit as a converted sinner called to follow Jesus, and made of themselves confirmed sinners innocent of the grace of contrition! A small but revealing symptom of such a malaise is the retort from a Youth Director when questioned about his unfounded, damaging remarks about a companion in the same community. He blurted out: “Do we not all speak like that?” Or think of an outgoing Provincial who wanted blanket pardon from others as he cunningly invoked their magnanimity while showing little sign of regretting any of his offences and passing them all off as quirks of temperament. Such unrepentant behavior betrays a brazen habit of being at home with sin!

Against this what I would name *Sandanam syndrome*⁷ stands the public owning of our sin concretely as a corporate religious body; it calls for no small guts to be discerningly mature enough and go to *the roots of sin struck deep not only in its individual members but its big institutional existence!* How far does its institutional visibility serve or sever its mission: the mission of service of faith of which the promotion of justice is an integral part? I am afraid there has been a growing rift between the twin exercises of one new-found mission; what we discovered once

happily as one divinely united mission of faith and justice we have somehow come to separate. A symptom of such a sin exhibited itself in a gathering at the Province level. A good question came up for discussion: how the universal devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (for some the *munus suavavissimum or the most sweet duty*) could help the promotion of justice (the *munus modernissimum*, if I may say). A self-styled justice-activist held forth excitedly that men of his ilk needed no Sacred Heart Devotion for justice ministry; he was at once zealously seconded by a Novice Master who quoted the Bible like the devil, “Old wine in old wine bottles! New wine in new!” Both were ignorant of what a gathering earlier on the global level had said on this very matter in an official Declaration that had spoken of struggle of faith and justice as one.⁸ Compared to the negative influence in the sphere of faith exercised by the two self-protagonists of justice in their individual capacity, how far greater would be their harmful influence in their official capacity!

Towards the ascesis of sat

What way is there of assessing our performance on the justice front? All such performance must be judged in the light of not what is good and great but what is ever better and greater, that

is, the celebrated *magis*. But the *magis* will make sense only when proved by the scorching fire of truth. I am afraid here more than elsewhere we are more prone to be self-deceptive. God does not want great deeds but great obedience to His pure Will in deeds of obvious goodness. One sure way of checking ourselves on this is to look centrifugally and ask with whom we choose to associate in our life, work, and leisure! I know one who suggested this to a Provincial in connection with a boorish Head Master devoid of truth and justice in relation to his staff and charges. The response was one of disbelief! He would dare not question the offender nor solicit information from the offended about the fuming scandal! This reluctance and refusal to learn from willy-nilly watchful on-lookers the hidden shame clinging to our name is at once a sin of cowardice and conceit; it is tantamount to the breaking of the covenant of brotherhood, clouding ourselves in Cain-like compulsion. In this light, I would submit, from personal experience and friendly sharing near and far, that *whatever may be the success achieved by religious men and women in promotion of justice in the world outside, for example, among refugees we can hardly boast of justice within our own ranks!* Once, in a forum of religious men and women,

a lay Professor remarked in a serious vein that the Congregation that ran his College was as good as a multinational corporation! I espy more than a grain of truth in his odious comparison. Our religious institutions - I am speaking mostly from my experience in India, which accounts for a large percentage of membership in many international Congregations - are not generally known to be committed to our workers and to deliver them the legitimate goods, even when guaranteed by government laws and demanded by the Province! The institutional Directors and Superiors would think nothing of flouting even the Provincial policies and decisions regarding the welfare of our co-workers. On the contrary they could manoeuvre and make use of their prestige to obtain favours in the name of the institutions and end up siphoning them off to unrelated, and therefore, questionable purposes! It is robbing Peter and Paul to pay for one's own institution which becomes for an unspiritual authority nothing more than its extended ego! Another subtle form of institutional injustice is the violence done to the dignity of our helpers at various levels. The lower their grade, the greater the violence of their rights. The women labourers have been victims of even physical assault. What is worse, the guilty persons have gone scot-free! Which of our religious

institutions can face the scrutiny of an independent committee in such matters and come away unscathed? If all this is déjà vu out in the secular world, it only confirms that sadly enough the religious Societies (in India, at any rate, if not in the rest of the world) have become part of the corrupt world!

How does the multi-levelled administration of a religious Congregation come to deal with such a state of their injustice *ad extra*? My impression is that either it is in the dark or knows the closeted evil of injustice but does nothing or dithers doing anything to counteract it except by harmless counsels and appeals! Obviously, those most open to blame here are those who enjoy authority. There is almost a biblical truth in the adage of Lord Acton that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It is not cynical to add that religious power does likewise religiously. Can any religious power, whatever the name of the Congregation from A to Z, claim to be above such corruption? That suggests the latent danger of injustice in the activities of religious officials who are generally a self-complacent team, far from self-questioning and forever seeking approbation of one another rather triumphalistically and upholding the system willy-nilly. All that is clean contrary to a clear

Gospel bias: the clear denunciation of unworthy authority even while granting authority its due legitimacy! The time of redemption will be when legitimate authority knows humbly and boldly to *retrieve the revelation of Christ refining authority as plain service and subjecting all authority to the God of authoritative justice so that no authority pleads helpless and becomes willy-nilly an accomplice in untruth and injustice.*

In the matter of justice it is unfortunate but necessary to raise the question of a religious Society's justice *ad intra*. Here I would like to broach a theory about religious officials. Good superiors, quite a rara avis, will be necessarily and unjustly persecuted by their companions; and the bad ones, more often occupying the place of Christ, know no exercise of power other than standing on their officious dignity and resorting to all manner of ill-treatment of others! When you stand for principles that do not suit their pet projects you settle for persecution of sorts as your blessed lot (Mt 5:10)! It is proved by the sheer weight of facts I have heard, known, and experienced (just a few of which I list in the end-notes for doubters).⁹ To camouflage the wrongdoing—Sandanam syndrome once again—the victimizers will pretend to uphold

the propriety of their office and dare lie without batting an eyelid! After all there is no court among religious where they can be booked as in normal, civil life! If there is the Christian court as detailed by Jesus (Mt 18:15-17) I wonder how many superiors have noted and valued it enough to act on it, though the Jesuits had something bold to broach on the matter innovatively though not consistently enough to make it effective in the long run!¹⁰ The powers that be fear and are not ready for open, transparent channels of communication even within their own safe borders. The major superiors will seldom, if ever, side with you against the minor minions of superiors! Letting them down is taboo; that is simply not the rule of the game of authority despite what Jesus upheld in his conflicts with authority! Guarding the fraternity of power against a lone, principled, suffering member the chain of authority can only ignore “the weightier matters of the Law -justice, mercy, good, faith” (Mt 23:23). Jesus was not cynical as anyone speaking in such terms could be accused of being! So with all the mechanism in place in the local, provincial, and global level for consulting, reporting, and representing the ongoing situations of injustice to the higher and highest level you will be fighting a losing battle. Your companions will raise their

hands in despair and will even advise you on the uselessness of appealing to the General and they have not been proved wrong. Even friends in other congregations do not expect things to be different; it is certainly a universal malaise of injustice in religious life! It is confirmed by an unsuspecting high official who reportedly remarked: “When you appeal to Rome we are bothered about how to send you a reply, a safe reply, that is a non-committal reply; we are not interested in solving your problem or conflict!” There could be nothing more disingenuous and damaging in an administration that claims to be spiritual and discerning God’s Will! No wonder then that a Superior General was dubbed a scoundrel by an American member of the same Congregation! While discussing such goings-on that would seem unbelievable a new-found companion abroad agreed that religious life is not above hypocrisy! Even in government departments whether in India or elsewhere I would expect greater transparency of dealings between the people and officialdom (as was made possible, for instance, by the Indian legislation regarding the Right to Information about government doings).

In such a bizarre fair of double standards—again Sandanam syndrome—

who is to stem the tide? Would that even a single Congregation could *wake up to this rude reality, caused perhaps not by a vast majority but only the minority of a few or perhaps even one who, however, like the rotten apple, spoils its neighbours.*¹¹ Well, only then and not otherwise, can any Congregation worth the salt seek the answer to root out the evil! If there is any urgency in this regard it is that people had better discuss less and pray more insistently and receive the answer from the One who alone is the Answer for all of us who bear his name proudly in some way or other! His all-inclusive answer we learn standing under his Standard of the Cross we have sported! And it directs us first and foremost centripetally: to fight the forces of injustice raging right in our hearts against the God of justice, setting a brother against another or a superior against his companion or a powerful clique against a silent minority, or an ideological centre against the spiritually fruitful, etc. Only such a fighting for the cause of Christ within each one of us fits us with power necessary to stir outside and wage war far afield against cosmic injustice. The age-old proverb: “Medice, cura te ipsum!” (physician, heal thyself) has a primordial and perennial truth in our zeal for our transforming justice! “We have to carry on the struggle against the

evil that is in mankind ... by judging ourselves. Struggle with oneself and veracity towards oneself are the means by which we influence others,” as Albert Schweitzer thought.¹² “Sanctify yourself and you will sanctify society,” as St Francis of Assisi said and indeed any saint would!

So we are back again to the initial grace of the Gospel but at the higher level of living the Gospel, shelving all big imaginary projects we are used to and clearing the way for the hidden springs of Christ’s sure mission! It is not without reason that the risen Christ comes back to the grace of conversion, as clear in the celebrated letters written to the Seven Churches (Rev 2-3).

In my approach to my golden jubilee the worst odds I faced appeared as a spectre of injustice from within my immediate and mediate Jesuit setting which seemed to confirm the logion: “A man’s enemies will be of his own household” (Mt 10:36). If I withstood the evil onslaught and saved myself to cherish still my core Jesuit identity it was thanks to unusual “Jesuits” (that is, those like Jesus) in the wider society of Jesus. One of them I found among the Catechist Sisters of St Ann, another among the diocesan clergy, another among the Little Sisters and Brothers of Jesus, another among the Holy Cross of Chavanod, another among

the Focolare, etc. They were all rare soul friends of varying intimacy who proved to be real friends in the Lord. They could help me in my struggle because of their new compelling praxis of the gospel of faith and justice that was not so conspicuous in my nearest company. Inspired by them I would plead, “Whatever we profess to be under whatever name let us begin *to be* in our generation because we have till now hardly been anything of the kind! Yes, religious whose faith knows to do justice!”

How does such faith grapple with the injustice perpetrated by the strange kind of sannyasins mentioned in the beginning—the Sebastians and Sekharans and Stooges strutting in their characteristic Sandanam syndrome? I think I have found the answer: it is simply what the Novice Master had said! He did not explain nor can I. There is a sort of holy necessity about the whole thing, evil as it is. That is what Jesus said about the injustice he was victim to (Lk 24:26). To put it differently, I would apply here what he said about those who were a stumbling block to the faith of the innocent. “Alas for the world that there should be such obstacles. Obstacles indeed there must be; but alas for the man who provides them” (Mt 18:7)!

Endnotes

- 1 This is reflected even in the indiscriminate admission of candidates with little appreciation of the charisms of the Congregations. Imagine a shop-worker writing to several Congregations for admission and joining the one that replies to him first!
- 2 A term used by the Jesuits for what others call Chapter.
- 3 A vibrant Christian version of it is practised daily by the members of Focolare founded by Chiara Lubich.
- 4 The unforgettable Belgian Jesuit, Fr. F. Timmermans, a former Professor of Moral Theology and Rector and Provincial, famously said he had nothing to say to his contemporaries, though it was a pleasure to listen to his talks and lectures. Just the opposite was another Rector who, when asked to attend a seminar on seminaries, asked back infamously, “What can I learn from it?”
- 5 *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, St Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977, p. 401, nn. 11-12.
- 6 This however is not necessarily the case with the mushrooming of religious Congregations in India for wrong reasons such as rivalry, egotism, and nepotism.
- 7 A yellow paste can pass for *sandanam* (fragrant sandalwood) at first sight but emit really bad odour!

- 8 See *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations*, p. 408, n. 41.
- 9 A Rector claimed in a community meeting that he was responsible to none but directly to Father General! A Superior told a community member brazenly, “Do what you want? You can’t pull out one hair of mine!” Another never convened the house consult because one of the consultors would not toe his line; he then began depriving his foe of community facilities like vehicle and phone. At the time of dismissal of a Scholastic, his Provincial demanded, “Write the letter to the General as I dictate; otherwise I won’t help you after you leave!” A small sample of violations of the rights, dignity, and conscience Jesuits have suffered, despite clear norms of *Manual for Juridical Practice of the Society of Jesus*, Rome: Curia of the Superior General, 1997, nn. 43 - #1, 51, 201, 275 - #1.
- 10 GC31 offered the possibility for a Jesuit to refer his conflict with a superior to the judgment of certain persons, *even non-Jesuits*, chosen by the consent of all those involved. GC 32 refined it further. See *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations*, p. 164, n. 279; p. 485, n. 256.
- 11 Another version of the proverb is: “One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel.”
- 12 See *All About Sin*, compiled by Peter Potter (New Delhi: Universal Book Stall, 1996), p. 103.

RELIGIOUS LIFE ACCORDING TO THE LITURGICAL TEXTS

Paul Puthanangady, SDB

Liturgy has a role to play in the renewal of the Church. Every Christian is called to contribute his share towards this renewal by his active, intelligent and fruitful participation in the Liturgy. Our purpose is to identify the specific role that the religious has to play as a member of the cultic community of the Church. For this, it is necessary to find out the authentic picture of the religious in the post-conciliar Church. The best way to do this would be to go through the documents of Vatican II, especially the Chapter on the Religious in *Lumen Gentium* and the

decree *Perfectae Caritatis*. However, since our objective is to discover the cultic role of the religious, or better, the physiognomy of the religious as a member of the cultic community, it would be sufficient if we examine the rite of Religious Profession.

This document directly places religious life in a liturgical context; besides the new rite had been drawn up taking into account the main doctrinal elements from the documents of Vatican II dealing with the theology of religious life.

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1. Historical Perspectives

The new rite of religious profession is a newcomer to the Roman ritual. There was no ritual for this celebration, meant for the whole Church. Each congregation had its own particular rite and these were merely approved by the ecclesiastical authorities. Hence we cannot speak of the history of the rite of religious profession. However, there were some rites in the Roman liturgical books, which may be considered antecedents of the rite of religious profession because of certain similarities which they have with the rite of religious profession. These are:

(a) *The rite of consecration of Virgins.* This rite existed from the 4th century. It was a liturgical rite by which the consecrated person vowed to observe perfect chastity for life. It did not necessarily imply a community life or entering monastery. The most ancient instance of a consecration of the virgins that we know of is that of the sister of St. Ambrose in the basilica of St. Peter between the years 350 and 400 C. E. Later on we find that the consecrated virgins also begin to live in a community, following the rules of religious orders and thus the rites of religious profession and the consecration of the Virgins are fused into one. It should be noted however, that the consecration as a liturgical act distinct from the religious profession continued to remain in the solemn

religious profession of some monastic orders.

(b) Another rite which was extant in the Roman Pontifical and which is now revised is that of the *Blessing of the Abbot and the Abbess.*

2. New Rite of Religious Profession

The Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship published on 2 February 1970 a new rite of religious profession. In this new attempt to bring out an official pattern for the rite of religious profession we must see the inauguration of a new era in the understanding of religious life, namely, its ecclesial dimension. However, it must be noted that the Church has no intention to impose this rite in a uniform manner on all the congregations. Each congregation is asked to adapt it in such a way that in their celebration of the religious profession, both the ecclesial dimension and the particular characteristics of each congregation are properly expressed. In presenting the new rite of religious profession the Church also wants to avoid certain defects that were contained in the old ceremonials. Some of these were: the presentation of religious profession as an act by which one consecrated himself or herself as individuals to God; as a consequence there began to exist a private relationship between God and the religious. Then, the idea

of contempt of the world was too much stressed. Again, the distinction between contemplative and active types of religious life was not shown very clearly. The sacredness of the religious habit and of other insignia of the religious was over stressed. The new rite of religious profession takes care to avoid these defects and tries to present the person of the religious in the right perspective placing him or her within the Church, which is a community of the covenant. They are persons in whom the covenantal reality has acquired a special dimension.

A. The exposition of the New Rite

a. *The liturgical inauguration of the Novitiate:* The novitiate is a time of initiation of the candidate into the congregation; therefore the rite of entrance into the novitiate should be simple and reserved only to the members of the religious family. This must be done outside the Mass.

No habit is given at this time. The novices should dress like any other boy or girl of their age in the world, of course, taking due care to preserve the norms of modesty and good Christian upbringing. This is an important change in the old Code of Canon Law which had stated: "Novitiate begins with the reception of the habit or in the way, prescribed in the constitution" (Canon 553). The rite of initiation into the novitiate is composed of the following elements: initial

interrogation, prayer, celebration of the Word, concluding prayer and the handing over of the Novices to the Novice Master or Novice Mistress by the Superior who presides over the function.

b. *The rite of first profession:* The rite of first profession or the profession of temporary vows signifies the perfect consecration of the candidates to God; but it does not signify the full juridical and public membership in the congregation; therefore it should not have any particular solemnity although it can be performed in the course of the Eucharistic Liturgy. The habit of the religious family can be given on this occasion for then it will serve the purpose, namely, to be a sign of religious commitment. In Institutes for religious women, the blessing of the habit and the ceremony of vestition can take place on the previous day. A priest blesses the habit. The superior of the Institute gathers together the community at a convenient hour; she addresses a few words to prepare everyone for the rite of the profession that is to take place on the following day and then hands over the habit except the veil, to each novice. In the congregations for men, the vestition ceremony takes place in the course of the profession rite. The main elements are the same as those for the perpetual profession except the consecration of the newly professed. The veil and other insignia are given immediately after the candidates pronounce the vows. They do not

sign their formula of profession on the altar as is done on the occasion of the perpetual profession.

c. *The rite of perpetual profession:*

The perpetual profession makes a Christian commit himself or herself perpetually to the service of God and of the Church. It is an indissoluble bond that signifies the unchangeable life of charity and fidelity that will be lived by the saved in the heavenly kingdom. Therefore it is not a mere juridical act, but a truly religious event. It should have its due solemnity and hence it should be celebrated in the course of a Eucharistic celebration and with the participation of the faithful. In order to highlight the ecclesial character of the event, it could be conducted either in the cathedral or in the main Church of the place. Even for the contemplative orders it is recommended that the rite of profession take place in the sanctuary of their church and not in the choir. The rite contains the following elements:

i) The making of the covenant: The first part of the rite shows religious profession as a response of the Christians to God who offers them His covenant of love. The rite begins with the entrance procession and the introductory part of the Mass. The liturgy of the Word follows. The Word of God that is read should be considered

the terms of the covenant on the part of God. It is the call from God addressed to the Christian. The homily that follows is the Word of God that is interpreted by the Church for the candidates who are going to enter religious life. The call from God comes through the Church. It is in the midst of the Church they receive their vocation. The interrogations that follow the homily spell out in detail the implications of this belonging to the Church that is present. The candidate inserts himself or herself into the ecclesial community before responding to the call that has been addressed to him or her. Then the formula of the profession is pronounced. This is the response to the Word of God. It is not a mere juridical contract; but a loving response to the call of a loving God. In fact the signing of the formula of profession on the altar shows the specific character of our religious profession as a response animated by love and therefore going to be expressed in the sacrificial self-gift.

ii) The sealing of the covenant: The second part of the rite of perpetual profession is called the 'solemn consecration' of the newly professed. The covenantal agreement receives its seal at this moment. The response of the religious to the call of God is accepted and ratified. With this, God accepts the religious

permanently into His special service by sanctifying him or her by the power of His Word. It is a real act of transformation effected by God. The religious insignia, if any, may be given at this moment. A rite of acceptance of the newly professed into the community is performed. This shows that the covenantal response is made to God in the Church through the congregation. Since the call came to the religious in the midst of a community, the response too must have a community dimension.

The Eucharistic celebration that follows expresses clearly the theme of the covenant made and sealed between the Christian and God in the midst of the community. The newly professed participating in the Eucharistic celebrates the covenant that has just been made. They share in a special way as religious, that is, as Christians with a particular mission, in the life of the Church.

- iii) The mission of the covenanted person: At the end of the Mass, instead of the usual dismissal formula and blessing, there is a special triple blessing pronounced on the newly professed by the celebrant. The covenant, which was made and ratified, has to become operative in the world. The religious has to bear witness to the transformed life. The response that they made to God's

call and the consecration of the religious on the part of God must become visible in the daily life of the Christian. It is for enabling the Christian to fulfill this mission of witness that the Church pronounces these blessings at the end of the religious profession.

- d. *The renewal of the religious profession*: This is a simple rite to be performed after the homily, either during Mass or in the course of the Bible service. It should be as simple as possible and consists of a prayer by the celebrant followed by the pronouncing of the formula by the religious. The purpose of this is simply to remind the religious of the response that he or she has made. This should not be done at the time of Holy Communion.
- e. *The rite of Promise*: In those Institutes where the promise takes the place of the temporary profession, a very simple ceremony is conducted in order to receive the promises. It can be performed in the course of a Bible service, or during the celebration of the Divine Office (as Lauds or Vespers after the singing or recitation of the psalms) or during the Mass (at the same place as the temporary profession).

B. Main themes of religious life, as found in the new rite of Religious Profession

- a. *Religious life is an extension of baptismal consecration*

- i) The first question that is asked of the candidates by the celebrant after his homily deals with this subject. The persons who become religious do not acquire any special status in the hierarchical order of the Church. They become more committed to the Christian ideal. The death and resurrection of Christ into which they are immersed on the day of their baptism will now onwards become more visible and effective in their daily life.
- ii) The three vows ought to be considered a mode of living out this baptismal commitment. They are the signs of their participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. The second question that is asked of the candidates expresses this aspect of the religious profession.
- iii) The religious vows by which the Christians manifest their baptismal insertion in the risen Christ ought to enable the religious to manifest their Christian life:
 - First, as a life that is meant to add to the efficiency of the Church in the fulfillment of her mission. This mission is expressed in the fifth chapter of the Constitution on the Church, namely the universal call to holiness. Hence the practice of the religious vows ought to make the religious manifest to the world the sanctity of the Church.
 - This would necessarily call for insertion of the religious into the

life of the world, for they cannot manifest the Church's holiness unless they live in the midst of the Church; since this Church is in the world, they have to be in the world. Hence the taking of the religious vows does not imply leaving the company of the ordinary Christians. Rather, I would say, the practice of the religious vows will not acquire its right dimension if it is not done in the midst of other Christians because only then will it become the sign of the efficacy of the genuine mission of the Church. However, it should be kept in mind that his or her involvement in the midst of other people implies also a certain amount of transcendence, that is, it is a presence like that of a sign, it must be sufficiently detached in order to be discerned by the others as a sign.

- The religious profession, like Baptism, is a consecration, namely an act of transformation effected by the Word of God. It is an act of consecration on the part of God and not merely the assignment of a task. The religious vows therefore, should not be taken merely as certain obligations to be fulfilled; they are rather, the expressions of a changed existence, of a deeper insertion into the Paschal Mystery of Christ.
- Finally, the baptismal dimension of the religious profession is brought

to light by presenting it as part of an over-all plan of salvation. The religious enters in a very special way into the history of salvation. Their vocation is therefore to be placed in the context of the history of salvation. This is very clearly set forth in the prayer of consecration. The connection between Baptism and religious profession becomes very evident when we look at the latter under this perspective. Baptism, in fact, is nothing but the participation in the total plan of salvation by sharing in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. This historical dimension of our religious life is another reason for our involvement in the world.

b. Religious life is at the service of the Church and the humankind

i) If we accept that our religious profession is a deepening of our baptism, then by that very fact it deepens also our relationship with the members of the Church. The religious, by their profession, enter into the heart of the Church. The new rite of religious profession puts this in evidence by asking the religious to make their profession in the cathedral or in the main church of the place. The veil (which once stood for contempt of the world) is now a sign of dedication to Christ and to his Church.

ii) On the day of our religious profession Christ presents us to the

Church; we are placed in the hands of the Church. We, therefore, are at the disposal of the Church. Our relationship to the Church can be seen under two aspects; first; we are placed at the disposal of the hierarchy, i.e., we have to serve the hierarchy by helping it fulfill its ministry of service on behalf of the people of God; second, we are at the disposal of the people of God, i.e., we become servants of our brothers and sisters. We have to meet them in their need. Thus we may say that the religious are a gift of Christ to the Church.

iii) The religious through their apostolate ought to build up the Church. The consecratory prayer as well as the final blessing clearly shows this. The covenantal relationship, which we have acquired, must make us fruitful for the Lord. The Word of God that we have received must spread in the whole world and effect the salvation of the world.

iv) The exemption of the religious ought to be seen as help to fulfill this service and not a privilege that separates them from the rest of the members of the Church.

c. Religious life is a life to be lived in community

i) In the past the religious profession was made in the presence of the 'whole court of heaven.' Today we are asked to make it in the presence

of our brothers and sisters with whom we have to live.

ii) The religious vows make us enter into a local community. Holding the hands of the superior of the congregation while one makes the profession symbolically proclaims this dimension.

iii) The community must be understood as companionship. The insertion in Christ through religious profession becomes visible in the local community in which we live. Hence community life is absolutely necessary for any authentic religious life. The religious vows have no meaning outside this community. They must be seen as a means for building up this community for companionship. The rule of this community is charity.

iv) Religious life is an eschatological sign:

- In the religious the basic hope of all Christian striving assumes a particular clarity. In the case of the contemplatives, this comes from withdrawing from active life; there is a witness to the kingdom of love through their acts of charity, manifested though self-gift.
- Besides, our celibacy stands for a special personal relationship with Christ and his members. This will be fully realized only in the eschatological kingdom. Our celibacy, in a certain sense,

anticipates it in this world. Thus we may say, the celibacy of the religious is sign of the eschatological fulfillment.

d. *The religious profession makes a Christian become a perfect worshiper*

We have seen that the role of liturgy is to renew the Church. Every Christian is called to belong to the community of worship. If our religious vocation is a deepening of our Christian vocation there cannot be any other identity for us except that of being more perfect members of this community of cult, which is the Church. Hence a religious is primarily a person with a special vocation to cult. The rite of religious profession makes us become such. The themes that we have discovered in the course of our analysis of the rite of religious profession very clearly show this cultic dimension of our religious life:

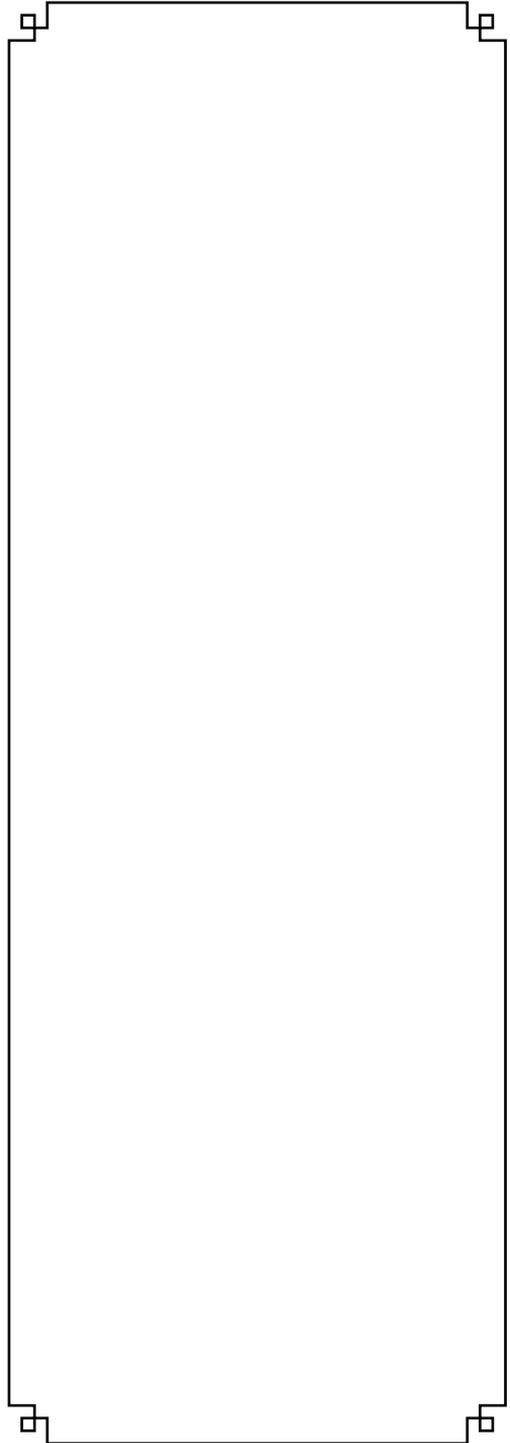
- a) The basis of our cultic life is baptism. It is baptism that makes us capable of offering a perfect act of worship to the Father. Our religious life, being a deepening of our baptismal life, strengthens our vocation to worship.
- b) Christian worship is the act of the Church. Religious profession makes us enter into the life of the Church in a particular way; makes us sharers in the cultic mission of the Church.
- c) Liturgy is celebrated in the local Church. Our religious profession

makes us enter into a community of Christians living in a particular place. We have to live our religious life in a local community. Gathered together by the Holy Spirit in order to bear continuous witness to the death and resurrection of Christ, we express this reality, especially when we participate in the Sunday Mass together with other Christians.

- d) Every liturgical act is the expression of the eschatological urge of the Church. We religious who have become in a very special way signs of the eschatological kingdom, express this reality in a particular way when we celebrate the liturgy.

Conclusion

The religious are persons called to offer a pleasing sacrifice to God. This is their vocation. They will fulfill this mission in the measure in which they will succeed in offering this worship with all its implications for building up the Kingdom of God. It will be a mistake to understand this mission of worship merely in terms of ritual celebration of cult. It should have both the ritual and life dimensions. In fact, we cannot conceive Christian worship without this double aspect. Celebrating the liturgy with their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, they get involved with them in the transformation of the world around them.



SPIRITUALITY OF THE OLD ESPECIALLY OF THE RELIGIOUS

Bandhu Ishanand Vempeny, S. J.

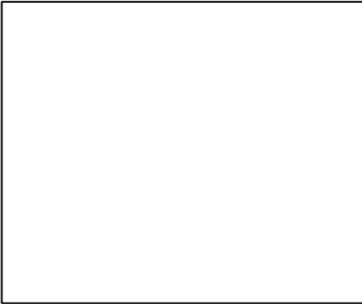
One of the most attractive “Jumbo Movies” often shown in the *History Channel* is ‘*St. Peter*.’ In this movie the old Peter gets a message through St. Mark from the Pauline Roman Christians. Mark tells Peter that the Christians in Rome are eagerly waiting to hear the precious teachings of Jesus from the mouth of the very leader of the Apostles. Peter in meditation gets the same message from Jesus Himself that he should go to Rome. Peter, the totally dedicated and generous disciple of Christ that he is, still remains the same old impulsive man. Walking rather nervously with

his swollen feet Peter shouts at the top of his voice, albeit reverently and prayerfully: “Jesus, you do not seem to know the problems of an old man like me. Remember, Rome is not in our neighbourhood.” Peter must have thought that Jesus, crucified at the peak of his youth, could not know from his own experience, the problems of the aged people.

When we look into Christian spirituality we hardly find anything serious about the spirituality for the ageing or the old. Both the Latin and the Cappadochian Fathers experienced

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the problems of old age. But their spiritual treatises were written mostly during their middle age or pre-old age situation. Hence, we see very little in their writings something specially valuable for the old. Of course, it is unrealistic to expect inspiring spiritual writings for posterity from the pens of senile, doting, cranky, weak, and sick old people. But the great medieval and post-medieval spiritual writers like Bernard, Aquinas, Bonaventure, Catherine of Sienna, Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila and Francis de Sales handed down their precious spiritual legacy in their late adulthood, middle age or pre-old age. With my limited knowledge of the teachings of these great saints and so, at the risk of being accused of presumptuousness, I venture to state, in terms of random sampling, that the massive writings of these saintly & learned persons do not seem to offer much materials for a spirituality for the aging clerics and religious. I was, however, pleasantly surprised recently to see some enlightening articles for the eldering religious in the Jesuit news magazine *Jivan* (May-June 2008) and in the Malayalam Theological magazine *Karunikan* (May 2008).



In the first part of this paper we shall have a close look at the reality of old age and the elderly. We shall do this first in a general way through some facts and figures. Looking at the eldering people from the points of view of physiology and psychology will follow. Then we shall get into the *ashrama* system of Hindu tradition that can make valuable contributions to the spirituality of old age. These views, especially the psychological ones emphasizing the “self-realization” or similar ideals and the ideals of the *ashrama*, system help us to focus on the final destiny of our ‘life-journey.’ It is on the background of these facts and data about the old that we are going to articulate our views on the Christian spirituality of the elderly religious. At the beginning of the second part some descriptive statements will be made about our concept of spirituality. We shall spell out the this-worldly (historical) and the other-worldly (eschatological) dimensions of Christian spirituality. I will make a few practical points when we deal with its this-worldly dimension. In the final part I will give a few exercises hoping that these or similar ones would help one to grow into healthy old age.

I. THE REALITY OF THE OLD AND OLD AGE

A. Some General Considerations with Facts and Figures

When we speak of old people we are tempted to think of them as a small minority. Four or five decades ago in a village of hundreds or even thousands of people we could point out just a handful of village-elders. Due to various factors like improved socio-economic structures, welfare systems and up-to-date medicines, life expectancy has been growing by leaps and bounds. Let us have a look at the statistical data on the growing population of the aged.

According to the statistics given by the UNO, by the year 2050 there will be 200 crores of people who are above sixty.¹ An article by N. Suresh in the *Nursing Journal of India* (October 2002) states: "It is estimated that there are 416 million old people (aged 60 years and above) around the globe and by 2020, 11.9% of the world's population will be above 60 years. In India also the trend is the same: 7.5% of the total population is above 60 years and the life expectancy is increasing gradually."²

Dr. Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, concentrating on USA gives some other interesting data about the growing number of old people: "In 1776, a child born in the United States had an average life expectancy of thirty-five. In a little more than two centuries, thanks to medical breakthroughs, public health campaigns and lifestyle changes, Americans have more than doubled that figure to seventy-five. By the middle of the next century, the National Institute of Aging projects that life expectancy will be eighty-six years for men and nearly ninety-two years for women. One hundred years ago, only 2.4 million Americans were over sixty-five, making up less than 4 percent of the population.... Throughout most of recorded history, only one in ten people could expect to live to the age of sixty-five.... Today, nearly 80 percent of Americans will live to be past that age."³

According to these data, old people constitute a large portion of the population today. As children deserve special care and consideration in welfare planning, the same could be said about the old, especially when it is guided by a value system, which respects human rights

and dignity. This consideration has to be on the micro level of the family or of the Religious houses and on the macro level of the states and Religious Congregations as well.

In Gujarati there are two words to express old age: *Ghadpan* and *Vrudhhavastha*. The first comes from the word *ghatavum* which means to get diminished, to become smaller, to shrink, etc. This term expresses that in old age, man's physical abilities and psychological aspirations, adventurism and dare-devilry, intellectual depth and achievements get diminished and become less and less. The latter word comes from *vrudhhi* which means growth, expansion, etc. These two terms bring out the positive and negative approaches to old age.

Today we live in a youth-centred culture very much influenced by Americanism. About this culture Zalman writes: "Everywhere you look, old age suffers from a bad reputation. Because of negative images and expectations shared by our culture, people enter the country called 'old age' with fear and trembling. Feeling betrayed by their bodies and defeated by life, they believe they're condemned to lives of decreasing self-

esteem and respect. As citizens of this oppressed nation, they expect to suffer from reduced vigor, enjoyment and social usefulness."⁴

Influenced by this youth-centred culture, many elderly people refuse to acknowledge their age and disabilities. Often elderly and even old people try to disguise their age and pretend to be young in their style of speech, dress and various other behavioural patterns. These people often look really ridiculous, or shall I say, old wine in 'new' wine-skins.

According to the positive point of view, an elder stood for self-control, impartiality and wisdom. Dr. Zalman writes: "Throughout most of history, elders occupied honored roles in society as sages and seers, leaders and judges, guardians of the traditions and instructors of the young. They were revered as gurus, shamans, wise old men and women who helped guide the social order and who initiated spiritual seekers into the mysteries of inner space. Beginning with the

Industrial Revolution, with its emphasis on technological knowledge that often was beyond their ken, elders lost their esteemed place in society and fell into the disempowered



state that we now ascribe to a 'normal' old age. Today, as the Age Wave crests all about us and we confront existential questions about the purpose of our extended longevity, we are searching for new myths and models to ennoble the experience of old age."⁵

In the ancient civilizations, the Greeks and the Romans could be contrasted to highlight the negative and positive attitudes towards old age. Dr. Zalman writes about the Greeks: "Since the Greeks valued youthful heroism, physical perfection and beauty, it's not surprising that they looked upon aging as a catastrophe, a form of divine punishment. 'The gods hate old age,' says Aphrodite in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*.... Greek literature reveals how pessimistic people felt about growing old. The poets Homer and Hesiod describe old age using epithets such as 'hateful,' 'accursed,' and 'sorrowful.' In general, poets and playwrights lampooned the elderly as ugly, feeble and worthy of social rejection.... In fact, in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle rails against old people, accusing them of being cowardly, selfish, suspicious, talkative, avaricious and ill-honoured."⁶



Now look at the Roman culture in contrast to the Greek. One of the most respected ancient Roman institutions was the Roman Senate. The words 'senate' and 'senator' come

from the Latin word '*senex*' which means old man, elder. In the senate, elders actively guided public policy following Cicero's maxim, 'Young men for action, old men for counsel.' Indeed, it was this Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero who wrote the well-known book *De Senectute* glorifying old-age, perhaps one of the first and finest books on old-age from the ancient West.

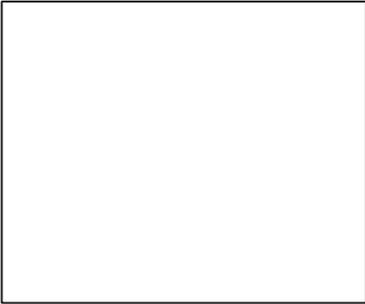
B. The Physiological Consideration

Recently I asked a man in his late sixties how he was. His answer was the following: "For a man in his late sixties, I am really well. Have you seen anywhere a pump functioning for sixty-five years without wear and tear and without repair work? Is there anything surprising that in my body there are a number of air-pumps, liquid-pumps and solid-pumps, all of which are clamouring for repairs? Do you know how many kilometers of piping system are there in my body? Without any repair work for more

than six decades the sewage system in my body has been going on with minor complaints. I cannot have the option of the man who imported two German cars, one for his use and the other for spare-parts for replacing the damaged parts of the car in use. May I stop here? This is the reality of the well-being of this old man who is very proud of being old and yet do not like to be unrealistic.”

It is not fully right to compare the human body with an aging car or, a dilapidated building. But in many respects they bear comparison. There is no point for an old man dyeing his hair with black paint, walking about briskly and upright in youthful dress. We have to accept the truth of the growing weakness and dysfunctionality of our body. But human body is not like an aging machine. The mind has great control of our body and its welfare. But it also must be stated that the body too has certain control over our mind. *Mens sana in corpore sano* (=A healthy mind in a healthy body).

Let us have a look at some research findings reported in the March issue of the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, headed by Dr. Nora Volkow. The article states: “This is the first study to look at



the significance – both for motor function and cognitive function – of the normal changes in brain chemistry that occur in healthy people as we age... And while we don't know for certain what might be

able to prevent these changes and slow these universal effects of aging, we think it should be possible... Previous studies had shown that the number of dopamine receptors in the brain decreases with age, and that the symptoms of Parkinson's disease are caused by dopamine problems. But none had ever looked at the physical and mental result of that decrease in healthy people.”⁷

Here I feel quite at home with the Jungian comparison of the journey of the sun with the human journey. William Sequeira comments on such imagery: “The sun once it rises in the morning climbs higher and higher in the sky trying to penetrate every nook and corner of this earth giving its light. But once it is noon the sun reaches its zenith beyond which it cannot climb... His ‘up’ moments are over, now its ‘down’ moments begin, its descent... The morning of one's life is marked by achievement, name and fame. The noon for a person is when he or she reaches

the mid-point of his or her life... The afternoon and evening of one's life are marked by signs of certain social withdrawal and fatigue. It is a period of interiority and self discovery."⁸

In depicting human life-journey, I am equally at home with the metaphor of the ascending staircases of a building connected with the descending ones on the opposite direction. Shankaracharya chides an old Sanskrit Pandit through the well-known poem *Bhaja Govindam*, for spending his old age wrestling with the rules of Panini's Grammar without giving any thought to God (Lord Govinda). To offer a glimpse into its beauty and depth, I shall cite its first verse:

*Angam galitam palitam
mundam*

*Dashnavihinam jatam tundam
Vruddho jatu gruhutva dandam
Tadapi munchayati asha pindam
Bhajagovindam bhajagovindam
Govindam bhaja mudhamate*

(Paraphrase: Your limbs are decaying, your head has become bald, your gums in the mouth are toothless, yet you go about with a stick in your hand without, however, getting rid of your attachments. Oh Foolish man,

worship Sri Govinda, I say, spend your time worshipping Him!).

C. From the Psychological Point of View

Carl Gustav Jung could be considered the father of Midlife Psychology. Dr. Zalman gives a brief description of Jung's view. First he gives a very important Jungian Principle from his book *The Stages of Life*, that "A human being would certainly not grow to be seventy or eighty years old if this longevity had no meaning

for the species... The afternoon of human life must also have a significance of its own and cannot be merely a pitiful appendage to life's morning... Whoever carries over into the afternoon the law of the morning...

must pay for it with damage to his soul." Zalman explains briefly Jung's views in the light of this principle: "Jung held that spirituality should take precedence in later life when physical energy wanes and we lose friends and family members. He also believed that having a spiritual goal that points beyond 'the purely natural man and his worldly existence' makes for psychological health. What cured patients in the second half of life,

he once observed, was cultivating a spiritual outlook on life.”⁹

Erik Erikson points out eight stages in human development. The first to the sixth relate to early infancy to young adulthood (the twenties). For our study of the aging, the last two are specially relevant. According to him, the task at this stage is to cultivate a proper balance of generativity and stagnation. Generativity is an extension of love into the future. It is a concern for the next generation and all future generations. As such, it is considerably less “selfish” than the intimacy of the previous stage: Intimacy, the love between lovers or friends, is a love between equals, and it is necessarily reciprocal. Of course we love each other unselfishly, but the reality is such that, if the love is not returned, we don’t consider it a true love. With generativity, that implicit expectation of reciprocity isn’t there, at least not as strongly. Few parents expect a “return on their investment” from their children; if they do, we don’t think of them as very good parents! Although the majority of people practice generativity by having and raising children, there are many other ways as well. Erikson considers

teaching, writing, invention, the arts and sciences, social activism, and generally contributing to the welfare of future generations to be generativity as well.¹⁰

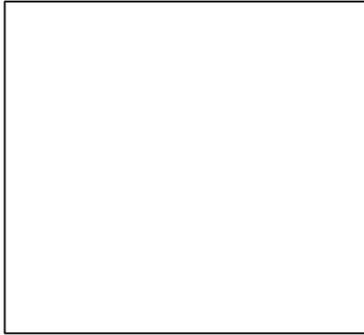
The eighth and the final stage, he calls, late adulthood, maturity or old age. The task of this stage is **ego integrity**. This concept bears comparison with Jung’s stage of spirituality and Abraham Maslow’s ‘fulfillment’ of “being needs” or “self-actualization” needs. This stage is understood in contrast to the non-integrated situation of old age. In the modern youth-culture a retired man can easily get into a sense of unwantedness and uselessness. Their parenting is not required nor their ‘wise advices’ solicited. Then there is a sense of biological uselessness, as the body no longer does everything it used to. Then there are the illnesses of old age, such as arthritis, diabetes, heart problems, concerns about breast and ovarian and prostate cancers. There come fears about things that one was never afraid of before – the flu, for example, or just falling down. Along with the illnesses come concerns of death. Friends die. Relatives die. One’s spouse dies. It is, of course, certain



that you, too, will have your turn. Faced with all this, it might seem like everyone would feel despair.

In response to this situation of despair some people get pre-occupied with their achievements of the past and with blowing their own trumpets to the boredom of people around them especially of the young. Some would be pre-occupied with their bad decisions and failures. Such pre-occupations make them depressed, spiteful, paranoid, hypochondriacal or developing the patterns of senility with or without physical bases.

“Ego integrity means coming to terms with your life, and thereby coming to terms with the end of life. If you are able to look back and accept the course of events, the choices made, your life as you lived it, as being necessary, then you needn’t fear death... We’ve all made mistakes, some of them pretty nasty ones; yet, if you hadn’t made these mistakes, you wouldn’t be who you are. If you had been very fortunate, or if you had played it safe and made very few mistakes, your life would not have been as rich as it is... Someone who approaches death without fear has the strength Erikson calls, wisdom.”¹¹



Now let us read Zalman’s comments on “ego integration”:
“According to Erikson, those who possess ego integrity defend the dignity of their lifestyles against all physical or economic threats. Their strength stems from the

development of wisdom, which he defines as ‘detached concern with life itself, in the face of death itself. Where do we find such wisdom? As the ultimate flowering of human maturity, ‘It comes from life experience, well-digested,’ asserts Joan Erikson, an artist and frequent collaborator with her husband, in a *New York Times* article published in 1988. ‘It’s not what comes from reading great books. When it comes to understanding life, experiential learning is the only worthwhile kind; everything else is hearsay.’”¹²

Abraham Maslow’s well-known “hierarchy of needs” shed further light on the dynamics of the old age. After responding to the physiological needs, security needs, needs for love and affiliation and esteem needs, we come to the final stage of self-actualization needs. If you have significant problems along your development – a period of extreme insecurity or hunger as a child,

or the loss of a family member through death or divorce, or significant neglect or abuse – you may ‘fixate’ on that set of needs for the rest of your life. This is Maslow’s understanding of neurosis.

After picking up a number of outstanding people like Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein and William James he points out certain qualities and characteristics in them which could belong to his self-realized persons. A few such qualities could be presented here paraphrasing them to suit our context, as ideals worth aspiring for by serious eldering persons: “These people were reality-centred, which means they could differentiate what is fake and dishonest from what is real and genuine. They were problem-centred, meaning they treated life’s difficulties as problems demanding solutions, not as personal troubles to be railed at or surrendered to. And they had a different perception of means and ends. They felt that the ends don’t necessarily justify the means, that the means could be ends themselves, and that the means – the journey – was often more important than the ends... Further, they had a sense of humility and respect towards others – something Maslow also called democratic values – meaning that they were open to ethnic and individual variety, even treasuring it. They had a quality Maslow called

human kinship – social interest, compassion, humanity. And this was accompanied by a strong ethics... Along with this comes their ability to be creative, inventive and original. And, finally, these people tended to have more peak experiences than the average person. A peak experience is one that takes you out of yourself, that makes you feel very tiny, or very large, to some extent one with life or nature or God. It gives you a feeling of being a part of the infinite and the eternal.”¹³

D. Old Age in the Indian Religious Context

In India the different stages of a person’s life are put under the *ashrama* system. There is no direct reference to this system in the Vedas though in the *Rigveda* (10:136:2 & 4) there are references to the last stage where the *sanyasins* are called *munis*. In the Vedic literature one who belongs to the fourth stage has various names: “It would thus be seen that a person who belongs to the last *ashrama* is variously called *parivrat* or *parivrajaka* (one who does not stay in one place but wanders from place to place), *bhikshu* (one who begs for his livelihood), *muni* (one who ponders over the mysteries of life and death), *yati* (one who controls his senses). These words suggest the various characteristics of the man who undertakes the fourth *ashrama*.”¹⁴

Kane summarizes what is said about these *ashramas* in *Manu Smṛiti*: “The theory of Manu about these *ashramas* is as follows. The span of human life is one hundred years (*satayur vai purusah*). All do not live to that age, but that is the maximum age one can expect to reach. This should be divided into four parts. As one cannot know beforehand what age one is going to reach, it is not to be supposed that these four parts are each of 25 years. They may be more or less. As stated in Manu IV.1 the first part of man’s life is *brahmacarya* in which he learns at his teacher’s house and after he has finished his study, in the second part of his life he marries and becomes a house-holder, discharges his debts to his ancestors by begetting sons and to the gods by performing *yajnas* (Manu V.169). When he sees that his head has grey hair and that there are wrinkles on his body he resorts to the forest i.e. becomes a *vanaprastha* (Manu VI.1-2). After spending the third part of his life in the forest for sometime he spends the rest of his life as a *sannyasin* (Manu VI.33).”¹⁵

Though it is difficult to find out the distinction between *vanaprastha* and *sanyasa* from our point of view, it seems to have been clear for the ancients. Quoting Manu, Kane describes the situation of a person who becomes a

forest dweller: “Manu (VI.2) indicates the age by saying ‘when a householder sees his skin wrinkled and his hair growing white and sees the sons of his sons he may betake himself to the forest. The commentators were divided in their opinions, some holding that all three conditions (wrinkles, grey hair and seeing son’s sons) must be fulfilled before one could become a forest hermit, others held that only one of them need be fulfilled and others again said that these conditions are only indicative of the age viz., that a man must be old or over 50.”¹⁶

In the Br. Up. (II. 4. 1) we see that *Yajnavalkya* when about to become a *parivrajaka* (a wandering ascetic) tells his wife Maitreyi: “Maitreyi, said *Yajnavalkya*, verily, I am about to go forth from this state (of householder). Look, let me make a final settlement between you and *Katyayani*” (p. 195). Kane comments: “This shows that a *parivrajaka* had been then to leave home and wife and to give up all belongings. The same Upanishad in another place (III.5.1) states ‘those who realize Atman give up the hankering after progeny, possessions and heavenly worlds and practice the beggar’s mode of life; therefore the *brahmana*, having completely mastered (and so risen beyond) mere learning, should seek to be like a child (i.e.

should not make a parade of his latent capacities or knowledge) and having completed (gone beyond) knowledge and *balya* (child-like behaviour) he should attain to the position of a *muni*, and having risen beyond the stage of a *muni* or non-*muni*, should become a real *brahmana* (one who has realized Brahman).¹⁷

Qualifications for Sanyasa

The qualifications for *Vanprastha* and *Sanyasa* are given in detail by Kane (chap. XVII & XVIII, Vol. 2, Part 2, pp. 917-975). To point out that there was not such a sharp distinction between both on the basis of *Sruti* and *Smruti* literature Kane describes these qualifications some of which we shall summarize and enumerate:

1. "In order to qualify himself for *Sanyasa*, a person had to perform a sacrifice to Prajapati in which whatever he had offered be distributed to priests and the poor and the helpless (Manu VI. 38, Yaj. III. 56, Visnu Dh. S. 96. 1, *Sankha* VII. 1)."
2. "After leaving home, wife, children and possessions, he should dwell outside the village, should be homeless and stay under a tree or in an un-inhabited house wherever he may be when the sun sets and should always wander from place to place; but he may remain in one place only in the rainy season (Manu VI. 41,

43-44, Vas. Dh. S. X. 12-15, *Sankha* VII. 6)."

3. "He should always wander alone without a companion, as by so doing he will be free from attachments and the pangs of separation." *Daksa* (VII. 34-38) emphasizes this point very well 'the real ascetic always stays alone; if two stay together, they form a pair; if three stay together they are like a village and if more (than three stay together) then it becomes like a town. An ascetic should not form a pair or a village or a town; by so doing he swerves from his *dharma*, since (if two or more stay together) they begin to exchange news about the ruling prince, about the alms obtained and by close contact, sentiments of affection, jealousy or wickedness arise between them.
4. "He should be celibate, should always be devoted to contemplation and spiritual knowledge and should be unattached to all objects of sense and pleasure (Manu VI. 41 and 49, Gaut. III. 11)."
5. "He should move about avoiding all trouble or injury to creatures, should make all creatures safe with him, he should entertain no anger towards him who is furious with him, should utter benedictions over him also who runs him down, should never utter an untruth (Manu VI. 40, 47-48, Yaj. III. 61, Gaut. III. 23)."
6. "He should beg alms from seven houses without selecting them

beforehand (Vas. Dh. S. X. 7, *Sankha* VII. 3, *Adi*, 119. 12 ‘five or ten houses’)...” According to *Parasara* I. 51 and the *Sutasamhita* (*Jnana-yoga-khanda* 4. 15-16) the first claim on the food cooked in the house is that of an ascetic and a *brahmacarin* and one has to perform the *Candrayana* penance for taking one’s meals without giving alms to them.

7. “He should hoard nothing and he should own or possess nothing except his tattered garments, his water jar, begging bowl” (Manu VI. 43-44, *Gaut.* III, 10, *Vas.* X. 6).”
8. “He should generally observe silence except when he repeats the Vedic texts learnt by him” (Manu VI. 43, *Gaut.* III. 16, *Baud. Dh.* S. II. 10. 79, *Ap. Dh.* S. II. 9. 21. 10).”
9. “He should recite the *vedic* texts referring to *yajnas* or gods or texts of a metaphysical character found in the Vedanta (such as ‘*satyam jnanam-anantam brahma*’ in *Tai. Up.* 2. 1). Vide *Manu* VI. 83.”
10. “In order to generate the feeling of *vairagya* (desirelessness) and to curb his senses, he should make his mind dwell upon the body as liable to disease and old age and as packed full of impurities; and should revolve in his mind the transitory nature of all mundane things, the trouble one has to undergo in body and mind from conception to death, the incessant round of births and deaths (*Manu* VI.

76-77, *Yaj.* III. 63-63, *Visnu Dh.* S. 96. 25-42).”

11. “He should endeavour to purify his mind by *pranayama* and other practices of yoga and thereby enable himself gradually to realize the Absolute and secure final release (*Manu* VI. 70-75, 81, *Yaj.* III. 62, 64)”¹⁸

Kane gives the various requirements of *vanaprastha* which look very similar to those of *Sanyasa*. Of course, a man could take his wife to the forest if she desires. But the author points out that “He should live a life of complete continence, should be self-restrained, friendly (to all), collected in mind, ever liberal but never a recipient and be compassionate towards all beings (*Manu* VI. 8, *Yaj.* III. 45 and 48).”¹⁹

III. A SEARCH FOR A SPIRITUALITY FOR THE OLD

Some years ago I was present for the Golden Jubilee celebrations of a CMI priest. As part of the ceremonies, a well-decorated ‘crown’ was placed on his head and a beautiful walking stick was handed over to him with great reverence. I consider this ceremony very significant. The crown represents the other-worldly (eschatological) and the walking stick represents the this-worldly (historical) aspects of the spirituality of the elderly. In this part of our essay we shall concentrate on these two dimensions of the spirituality

of the old especially of the Religious. Of course, if we consider the “already-not-yet” dimensions of the Kingdom of God and the process of our growth into the image of the Risen Christ, we cannot make sharp distinction between the two dimensions.

A. The Concept of ‘Spirituality’

Before we get into the different aspects of spirituality a word on the *concept of spirituality* itself is in order. From a commonsensical point of view, a person is considered spiritual or religious, if he/she is concerned with not only his/her mortal body and its needs but also the immortal spirit in him/her. To put it in a somewhat precise way, we consider a person spiritual if he/she is concerned with the other-worldly, transcendental, eternal realities in an emphatic way without however neglecting temporal, this-worldly realities, responsibilities and values. To express it in the terminology of *Sankaracharya*, a spiritual person is one who has made a discrimination between the eternal and the temporary (*nitya anitya vastu vivek*) and uses the temporary values such as *artha* and *kama* according to the dictates of *dharma* in so far as they lead to *mukti* or *moksha*. Our descriptive definitions of spirituality are not much different from the one given by *The New Dictionary of Theology*: “It means one’s entire

life as understood, felt, imagined, and decided upon in relationship to God, in Christ Jesus, empowered by the Spirit.”²⁰

From a Christian point of view, a spiritual person is led by the Spirit of God (*pneumatikon* of St. Paul in Rom 8:1-7) subordinating the demands of the flesh (*sarkikon*). To put the matter more elaborately, spirituality is the effort graced by God, leading to the *Abba-experience* (God as father-mother) resulting in whole-hearted trust in and surrender to God in love and dedication, and the experience of all human beings as one’s brothers and sisters who deserve our brotherly/sisterly love and care. To put the matter in another way, spirituality for us is the effort graced by God to enter into the Kingdom of God Ideal based on the ever-deepening experience of God as *Abba* and fellow human beings as brothers and sisters, with its this-worldly and other-worldly dimensions (already-not-yet). A true spirituality, together with the divine and human realms includes the cosmic realm as a whole in terms of ecological relations and concerns.

B. The Eschatological Dimension

One of the metaphors, which can give great meaning to old age and death is that of wheat-grain falling to

the ground. “Truly, I tell you, unless the grain of wheat falls on the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (Jn 12: 24).

This metaphor must be read in connection with Rom. 6 where Paul speaks how we share Christ’s death, burial and resurrection through Baptism: “So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glorious power, we too should begin living a new life. If we have been joined to him by dying a death like his, so we shall be by a resurrection like his; realizing that our former self was crucified with him, so that the self which belonged to sin should be destroyed and we should be freed from the slavery of sin” (4-6). This idea of sharing the life of Risen Lord is found in a slightly different way in Phil 3:10-11: “I want to know him and to experience the power of his resurrection and share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, so that I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” In the context of the fruitfulness of our life by union with Christ, he uses the metaphor of the union of the branches to the wine to produce fruits (Jn 15:1-10).

The idea that the Kingdom of God is partially present here on earth to be realized fully in the beyond, points out

to the life or the Spirit of the Risen Christ as a guarantee for our life in the beyond. The parables of growth (mustard seed, Mt 13:31-32; leaven 13:33, and the growing seed when the farmer sleeps, Mk 4:26-29) express graphically this view of the seminal presence of the Kingdom, growing into the future. Besides, the era of the Kingdom is understood as the era of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this Spirit is given *as aparxe* (first fruits) (Rom 8:23) or as *arrabona* (pledge or guarantee) (2 Cor 1:22 and 5:5; Eph 1:13) meaning thereby the partial experience of the Spirit promising a fuller realization in the future. According to Paul by sharing the life of the Risen Christ, Christ’s image (2 Cor 3:18) will grow in us. In Eph. 4:13 and 16, we have the well-known sayings of growing into the full stature of Christ, which can be understood in terms of the growth of the individual Christian as well as of the collective body of Christians.

When Paul speaks about the resurrection of the dead he uses a similar metaphor if not the same. “Someone may ask: How are dead people raised, and what sort of body do they have when they come? How foolish! What you sow must die before it is given new life; and what you sow is not the body that is to be, but only a bare grain, of

wheat I dare say, or some other kind; it is God who gives it the sort of body that he has chosen for it, and for each kind of seed its own kind of body... It is the same too with the resurrection of the dead: what is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable; what is sown is contemptible but what is raised is glorious; what is sown is weak, but what is raised is powerful; what is sown is a natural body, and what is raised is a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:35-38, 42-44).

Jesus says that by sharing His Eucharistic body and blood we share in his death and resurrection. "So Jesus replied, I am telling you the truth, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (Jn 6:53-54, cf. also 55-58).

It is said that Prince Siddhartha, after seeing the three scenes of an old man, dying man and dead man, one after the other, began to ask ultimate questions on the meaning of man's life and death until he became 'the Buddha' (= the enlightened one). The Second Vatican Council calls Religious Life "the blazing emblem of the heavenly Kingdom" (PC, No. 1). This is especially so through chastity "which is practiced 'on behalf of the kingdom'

(Mt 19:12) and which Religious profess" (PC, No. 12). Religious Life, in itself, symbolizes the other-worldly dimension of the Kingdom of God, the life of bliss in heaven. But when a Religious, especially an elderly one, experiences more and more deeply the life of resurrection and the gifts of the Spirit such as "charity, joy and peace, patience, understanding of others, kindness and fidelity, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:23). An old Religious with his/her very existence, especially with the above fruits of the Spirit and with the growing image of the Risen Christ, by his/her very existence is one of the most effective preacher of the Kingdom.

C. This-worldly Dimension of the Spirituality of the Elderly

We have seen some of the physiological and psychological problems of the elderly. It is well and good to soar into lyricism praising the glories of old age as Cicero did. It is great to speak eloquently about the *vrudhavasta* aspect of old age, but if we neglect the *ghatpan* aspect, we will not be fully awakened to the reality of old age. Tony de Mello would say that "Spirituality means waking up."²¹ Here I shall present just a few realities of ageing and I shall do it without sugar-coating. Then we shall see how these

problems can turn into opportunities of spiritual growth.

1. The Challenge of Outdatedness

Alvin Toffler has said that if there is anything permanent it is change. Today the world is changing far more rapidly than a few decades or few centuries back. With the TV, computer, mobile phone, etc., what a septuagenarian learned of geography or history within a couple of years, is learned by a schoolboy within a couple of weeks. During the 'pre-computer' age, the calculations made by a Nobel Laureate by years of hard work, can be made within a few minutes through a laptop.

If this is true it stands to reason that an elderly person should be aware that his/her 'Jewels of Wisdom', need not be such precious jewels for the younger generation. Somebody asked Bernard Lonergan, one of the greatest theologians of the Vatican II era, a few years after his retirement from the Jesuit Theologates, what the younger professors were doing at that time. Lonergan replied: "They are throwing imaginary pearls to real swines." In other words even such an enlightened theologian like Lonergan could not keep pace with the changing times. This means that even an *avant-garde*

thinker can become outdated within a few years of his retirement.

With certain reservations we too can say with Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, that age-ing leads to sage-ing. But the elderly have to be cautious. It can cause havoc in a community if two or three old Religious pose as sages or wise-men, always ready to scatter their 'Pearls of Wisdom' opportunely and inopportunately. The havoc may be more damaging if they are fifty or sixty percent deaf, as usually is the case. When I was a young Jesuit Scholastic I used to make appointment with such wise-men not earlier than ten minutes before a necessary community programme like meals and prayer, so that I might not be overfed with their wisdom.

"Old Sages" of Zalman may not be in the habit of listening. The following Gujarati proverb *satthe lap vadhe* (=in the sixties talkativeness will be on the rampage) has a point. The younger generation, especially those addicted to other sources of 'wisdom' like computers, TVs and mobile phones, are not very eager to listen to the old. However, today people search eagerly for those who listen with interest and empathy to disburden themselves of their personal woes. If an old Religious is really wise, affectionate, humourous and in the habit of listening with

interest and empathy, more and more people will seek his/her company.

2. The Challenges of Abnormality

Jung had said that if somebody were to say that he/she is not abnormal, he would be the person to treat that individual. This is especially so with regard to the old. If a child behaves quite differently from the norm set by the adults, it is understood as child's play, *lila*, childrens' pranks, and the like. As it is obvious in the pranks of Child Krishna, these mischiefs and pranks make the children all the more attractive.

The elderly people, physiologically and psychologically resemble children in a number of details. But an elderly man's abnormality often is interpreted as dotage if not madness. People forget that many of the abnormalities of old age are 'normal'. If an elderly person deliberately indulges in the pranks and mischiefs of children, it would look like the playfulness of the donkey of Aesop Tales, which did so imitating his master's puppy to get the attention, love and care the latter was getting from their master.

To face the problems of outdat- edness, the first thing to do is to educate oneself in self-awareness about the reality of old age. The second thing is to educate oneself to be a good listener

with interest and affection. If you put in a few words of wisdom, they must be in response to the talks of the young visitor. If you are partly deaf you should be and seem to be more attentive to the talks of the visitor in order to avoid making him repeat too often.

Abnormality Due to Our Religious Vows

As Maslow has pointed out, if our lower needs like the physical needs and recognition needs are not satisfied or sublimated, as we Religious are supposed to do, they would get "fixated" and would express themselves in the wrong way, at the wrong time and in the wrong place. Let us take the question of our vow of chastity. I remember the scene of a very highly enlightened man, known to be deeply spiritual, being led to his room after a TV programme by a Brother Religious who is in charge of the dispensary. He was holding with his one hand the shoulder of the Brother while the other hand was occupied with his walking stick. He saw two young nurses appearing on the scene. Suddenly he pretended to be falling down, crying "My lumbago is hurting me." Soon the nurses helped him to move to his room and lie on his easy chair. His lumbago-pain disappeared there and then. The Brother and the

Nurses were well aware of the source of his pain on the lumbago.

I can enumerate numerous cases of this type of fixated sexual needs in old Religious. The person whom I remember most is the one who was known all over the South Indian Religious communities as an exceptionally spiritual person with special charism for giving retreats and spiritual direction. His commitment to “angelic chastity” was so deep that he avoided looking at women as far as possible and if he looked at women at all, it was above the neck. When he was admitted in a nursing home, as a tired old priest, he was at first unwilling to have the services of female nurses. When at last he allowed their services reluctantly, to keep the vow of obedience to the superior, his attitudes began to change rather abruptly. He changed to such an extent within a short time that he could not do almost anything, including getting up from the bed, moving out to the bathroom, eating, drinking and bathing without the help of the female nurses.

These two examples were taken from many other similar printable ones. There is nothing to be surprised at such fixation if the sexual drives had been suppressed rather than sublimated. To avoid such unhealthy situations, the first thing an eldering

Religious should do is being aware of the possibility of one falling victim of this type of abnormal behaviours. Equally important is to get feed back from people who serve him/her.

It has been conclusively proved that touch (kissing, embrace, etc.) is vital for a child’s healthy growth. To some extent this need is felt very much by the elderly Religious. This is especially so since we do not experience loving and healing touches, as the married people get from their spouses or children. For some senior men and women religious, pet dogs, cats, squirrels, etc. do this service by way of substitution. Massaging by experts can partly fulfill this need thereby serving physical as well as psychological health.

Abnormality caused by Robotization

We know how our grandparents had their special chairs to sit down, special places for meal, prayer and watching the TV. For many elderly Religious their programmes from morning to evening go in a mechanical way. Hitches in their routine can cause great trauma to them and uproarious scenes in the community. I remember the trauma experienced by a retired mother superior when her hair-dryer could not function in a rural area where power-cut (scheduled stoppage

of electricity to save energy) was a usual phenomenon.

If old people develop self-awareness and are open to feedback from those who take care of them, many of the abnormalities can be avoided. All the same, a lot will remain with us till we close our eyes forever.

3. Some Practices for a Healthy Old-Age

For these practices I am indebted to Fr. Tony D'Mello's classes, Guru Goyankaji's course, Zalman Schachter-Salomi's book *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, my studies for yogic diploma in Kaivalyadham, Lonavala, and Ira Progoff's *Intensive Journal*. I shall give just a few exercises for samples. This can be useful for people in their middle-age and in their early old age. I know of old Religious who do these practices very profitably even in their late seventies and early eighties.

Exercise 1: Empowering oneself by activating the senses

- a. Sit down in a comfortable seat of your liking in a place where there is fresh air. Certain amount of privacy is valuable.
- b. First look at the atmosphere around you: trees, animals, birds, streams and the like. Just keep on looking at these things with minimum of thinking. Thank the Creator for all

these things. Thank the Lord for the eyes through which you have seen millions of beautiful things, and watched thousands of events all of which taught you to become a better human being.

- c. Close the eyes and concentrate on the sounds: singing of birds, human voices, movements of vehicles, sound of rainfall, storms, and the like. Soon you will hear sounds which you had not heard before or songs of birds which are new to you.
- d. Experience the touch of breeze, of the seat on which you are seated and of the ground where your feet are. In certain age and stage of one's life if one keeps up this practice, he/she can experience the inter-connectedness of all the realities in the cosmos and the feeling of cosmic embrace.
- e. Concentrate on the smell and odour around.
- f. Try to eat something that you like. Chocolate if you are not a diabetic and fruits of your liking. Drink something you like.
- g. After activating your senses for a few minutes, close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing in and breathing out. Deliberately try to breathe slow and deep.
- h. Think of God's children who are blind, deaf, crippled in various other ways. Thank the Lord for your senses and limbs.

Exercise 2: Getting into the Reality of Old Age and Death

Remember the Words of John Paul II: “If life is the pilgrimage to our eternal home, old age is the naturally given occasion (*kairos*) for peeping into the door of this home” (John Paul II, from his pastoral letter for the Old, Cf. *Karunikan*, May 2008, p. 23).

- a. Sit on a comfortable chair. Have a table or writing desk in front of you. Keep some blank papers and two ball-pens on the table.
- b. Place a picture of the Risen Christ on the table. Attached to it a caption with these words: “I am the Way, the Life and Resurrection.”
- c. Take couple of deep breaths. Close your eyes and listen to the sound for 2 to 5 minutes.
- d. Open your eyes and keep on looking at the picture for a few seconds. Close the eyes for a few seconds and mentally place the image of the picture between your eyebrows. Open your eyes and keep on looking at the picture on your table for a few seconds or even for a minute without blinking. Again close the eyes take in the image of the picture of the Risen Lord and place it between your eyebrows. You could repeat this exercise for a few minutes. This is a sort of Christianized yoga exercise called ‘*Dharana*’, for concentration.
- e. After doing the above exercise for some five minutes, bow to the picture on the table and touch it with both hands reverently. Read the above caption in a low voice looking at the picture. Again close your eyes, look at the picture of the Lord reverently and read the caption in a low voice. Repeat the exercise.
- f. Take a pen and a paper and write on it this question: *What do I expect from my old age?* Write down some of your positive expectations. Also write down your anxieties, concerns and fears, etc. of your old age.
- g. Write the name of one of the admirable and lovable old persons you have come across in the past. Write down the things you have admired in him/her and the qualities which made him/her very lovable. Write down the name of another lovable old person, then of another old person and repeat the exercise as with the first person.
- h. Write down the name of an old person whom you neither liked nor admired. Write down his/her unlikable qualities and character traits.
- i. Compare yourself with one of these model persons, try to walk in his/her shoes and see what characteristics are missing in you. Do the same with the negative model and see what are his/her negative and unlikable qualities in you. Write down both the positive and negative qualities in you.
- j. Once again focus your attention on the picture of the Risen Lord for a

few seconds, then bow to the picture in reverence and pray: “Jesus, you have told us that you would be with us till the end of time. I believe that you are present in our community and in my heart. Jesus, you were the friend of sinners and you could transform third-rate human beings into first-rate leaders. Jesus, give me the grace to give love, joy and encouragement to people whom I meet today. Lord, accept me as your friend, lead me to the Father and make me call Him as you called, *Abba-Father*.” (End with the prayer *Our Father*).

Exercise 3: Healing the Hurt-Feelings through Forgiveness

According to a Chinese Proverb, ‘*A revengeful person digs two graves, one for himself and one for his enemy.*’ Forgiveness is vital for a happy old age. Also for physical, psychological and above all for spiritual healing.

- a. Repeat the above exercise till ‘e’.
- b. Picture the scene in which you experienced true forgiving love from those people whom you have offended.
- c. Picture the scene in which you experienced God’s forgiveness.
- d. Picture the scene in which a person hurt your feelings and inflicted deep psychic wounds. If the other person is 90% responsible for the conflict, what is that 10% of your responsibility? Forgive yourself for that 10%. Try

to find out some good and noble qualities in the offender. Pray for his well-being.

- e. Concentrate on your breathing for 2 to 3 minutes.
- f. Look at the picture of the Risen Lord intently for a minute and pray: “Jesus, you have forgiven your enemies. Give me the grace to forgive my enemies. They are loved by you and by your and my father in heaven. Help me to accept (name the person) as my brother/sister. Lord, give him love, respect and recognition from others. May he experience true peace and prosperity.”
- g. Close your eyes. Concentrate on your breath for five minutes. Then say: “I send my love vibrations to (Name).” Repeat these words silently for a few minutes and say: “I send my peace and joy to (Name).” (Christianized version of *Metabhavana* of *Vipasana*.)

Conclusion

This paper is primarily meant for the aging people especially the Religious and the Clerics. Unless we know something about death and our final destiny we can know very little about meaningful life. Hence this paper is of some use for younger people as well.

As Pope John Paul II said, if life is a journey to our ultimate destiny, old age is the occasion for peeping

through the door of our Eternal Home. Our studies in the second part are meant to have a realistic view of old age liberating ourselves from the lyrically optimistic and exaggeratedly pessimistic understandings of the final stage of our life.

In the third part certain concrete and realistic problems of the elderly, especially of the Clerics and the Religious, were stated. The point made is that it is the very nature of old age to have these abnormalities. If the adult norms of today are applied to the behavioural patterns of the old, they are abnormal in many ways. Then what about the childish pranks and mischiefs of children? It is normal for children to behave in the way they do. It is taken for granted. "They are the future," we say. But what about the old? If they were to live according to the norms of the youth and the 'adults', they would look not only abnormal but also ludicrous. The rapidly growing percentage of the old people will make us consider them 'normally abnormal' in the sense that they are very different from the adults or the middle-aged, with all their 'normal abnormalities.' As quoted earlier, Jung would say that the presence of the aged, especially in growing numbers, is a great service to people of other age groups to be fully human.

I have focused on our final destiny in terms of 'Life of Resurrection' and 'The Kingdom of God'. Will it lead us to the escapist spirituality of the early Church? In order to avoid this danger, I have emphasized that Life in the Kingdom of God or the Risen Life is not a press-button reality. We grow in the Life of Resurrection and the image of the Risen Christ will grow in us. It is a process. Entry into the Kingdom, with its "already-not-yet" dimensions, is also a process. Understood in this way, focusing on our final destiny can make the life of the elderly more dynamic, joyful and hopeful. "In my estimation, all that we suffer in the present time is nothing in comparison with the glory which is destined to be disclosed for us" (Rom 8: 18).

The suggested exercises are just a few samples. Since the Religious and the Clerics are accustomed to these types of exercises, they may add to these insights and improve upon what is given. These exercises can make our life very valuable even after retirement.

Endnotes

- 1 cf. *Karunikan*, May 2008, p. 24.
- 2 www.findarticles.com
- 3 Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, New York: Warner Books, 1995, p. 4.

- 4 Z. Schachter-Shalomi, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, p. 12.
- 5 Z. Schachter-Shalomi, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, p. 6.
- 6 Z. Schachter-Shalomi, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, p. 61.
- 7 <http://bnl.gov>
- 8 William Sequeira SJ, "The Challenges of Golden Years," *Jivan*, May-June 2008, p. 4.
- 9 Z. Schachter-Shalomi, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, pp. 69-70.
- 10 Cf., Dr. C. George Boeree, "Erik Erikson" website.
- 11 Commentary by Dr. C. George Boeree on Erik Erikson, web-source.
- 12 Z. Schachter-Shalomi, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, p. 71.
- 13 Commentary by Dr. C. George Boeree on Abraham Maslow in <http://webpace.ship.edu/cgboer/perscontent.html>.
- 14 *History of Dharmasastra*, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. II, Part I, 1974, p. 417.
- 15 *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 417.
- 16 *History of Dharmasastra*, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. II, Part II, 1974, p. 918.
- 17 *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol. II, Part II, pp. 930-931.
- 18 *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol. II, Part II, pp. 931-938.
- 19 *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 920.
- 20 Joann Wolski Conn, "Spirituality," *The New Dictionary of Theology*, J. A. Komonchak & Co. (Editors), Bangalore: TPI, 1996, p. 972.
- 21 J. F. Stroud (Editor), *Awareness*, New York: Doubleday, 1990, p. 5.

THE WORD OF GOD IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS CHARISM

Arul Jesu Robin, CMF

Fr. Bandhu Ishanand Vempeny in his article on “Governance in Religious Life” quotes a parable to bring to our attention how far we have gone away from the original charism of our founders.¹ Taking the clue from Theodore Wedel, Fr. Ishanand speaks of “the Life-saving station” on the dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur. The life-saving station began with the original charism of saving as many people as possible from shipwrecks in a small hut with just one boat and a few devoted members who kept a constant watch over the sea. Their mission was to save people and

they dedicated day and night for the mission with no thought for themselves. As days went on, many wanted to be associated with the life-saving station offering their time, money, and effort supporting the mission. So new boats were purchased, new members were trained and gradually the poorly infrastructured station grew. Some members wanted to improve the infrastructure. So emergency cots were replaced with beds and better furniture beautified the enlarged new building. Thus the live-saving station became a popular and comfortable gathering

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place for its members. The mission station became a recreation club.

Alas, few members were not actually interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions. So they hired lifeboat crew to do the job. The lifesaving still prevailed in the club's decoration and there was a symbolic lifeboat in the room where the club meeting took place. At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Many members wanted to put an end to lifesaving missions as being unpleasant, out-modern and affecting normal social life of the club. Yet, some members insisted upon lifesaving as their original mission or charism. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of people shipwrecked, they could leave the club and begin their own lifesaving stations.

The parable needs no explanation. In the course of history, often this is what happened to consecrated life and its historical charism. Consecrated life itself was inspired by Jesus and his Word. The Word influenced the history and charism of the congregation and the Founder's call was to answer to the Word in a given historical situation. The Founder of a Congregation wanted to follow the Word of Jesus as close as possible in a historical situation and thus a congregation was

born. Possibly, we lost the Word of God today and began to concentrate more on the structure and the ways to save congregation from internal and external threats. It is not possible in this article to go back to the history of each individual congregation and analyze the role of the Word in its historical evolution. I highlight here only the milestones or peak moments of consecrated life and the role of the Word in shaping its charism as answer to the historical situations.

1. Biblical Inspiration for Consecrated Life in General

The Bible does not present consecrated life as we have today. But the history of consecrated life itself and the different charism of the congregations are the response to the Word. The Founders facing a particular crisis in a given situation were moved by the Word. The Word inspired them to address the historical situation. Thus we have different forms and charisms of consecrated life. So, all forms of consecrated life and their charism were inspired by the Bible. In the course of its history, the Church has given birth to many forms of community life and all these communities were greatly inspired by the evangelical models and deeply rooted in the Word of God. The starting point was the first Christian community formed by Jesus

Christ and his disciples. The first Christians of Jerusalem continued this community living. The birth of each new community was an attempt to recreate the unique experience of unity and communion that Jesus taught in the Gospels to his disciples and shared with them personally and which was taken up and lived by the first Christians of Jerusalem. The dream was to be with Jesus as Peter, James, John and others had been, to be able to follow him always and everywhere and to recreate the first Christians' experience of unity around the risen Lord. Indeed, Jerusalem community was a privileged source of inspiration in the history of consecrated life. The entire Church looked at the first Christian community as the model to be reflected and an ideal to be attained.²

2. Different Forms of Consecrated Life

Beginning with monasticism to the modern new communities of 21st century, consecrated life has undergone various stages.

2.1. Monasticism

The formal persecution of the Church came to an end in the

fourth century and the eschatological expectations and tensions in the minds of the Christians too got slackened. As the persecution vanished, Christians began to reflect on the words of Jesus and the ways of following them as close as possible. This favourable ecclesial situation stirred up a strong desire and longing to return to the root, to the beginning. And this gave rise to monasticism. The inspiration for the birth of monasticism is the community of the twelve and the first Christian community of Jerusalem.

In the beginning, we do not find any community but only solitude.³ We could call it monastic life without community.⁴ This form of consecrated life, monastic life without community was born two centuries after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. St. Athanasius in his famous work *Life of St. Antony* considers Antony of Egypt (250-356) who chose to live radical solitude as the father of monasticism though St. Jerome claims hermit⁵ Paul emphasising his seniority. Other important hermit was Simon Stylites⁶ who lived in a 60 feet column in his last days. The setting for the birth of eremitism was the

desert, a typical place for flight from worldliness, a break with everything that impeded the way of God, the radical choice of celibacy, an exclusive dedication to the praise of God and communion with him, listening to his Word with attention and perseverance and uninterrupted prayer. From desert, Antony came to a hut just outside the village and then took up residence in an abandoned tomb and later went back to the desert and settled in a half-ruined fort. In his final years, he moved towards the Dead Sea, into an even more perfect and isolated solitude on a mountain near Sinai which still bears the name mount St. Antony.⁷

It was the Word of God that inspired the birth of eremitism. Let us substantiate with special reference to St. Antony. Antony was driven to the desert because he wanted to imitate the apostles who left all to follow Jesus. The saying of Jesus, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Mt 19:21) made him realize that he had to “escape” the world to attain perfection. Following these words of Jesus literally, at the age of 20, he sold everything that he had, gave a portion of it to his sister and the rest to the poor and followed Jesus radically (c. 270 AD). He was

also inspired by the daring example of the first Christians who sold their possessions and brought the proceeds to the feet of the apostles for distribution to the poor (cf. Acts 2:43-47). While leading an ascetical life and progressing gradually in his spiritual journey, he continually said to himself the words of St. Paul, “Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead” (Phil 3:13).⁸

Fuga mundi (flight from the world) and solitude is also deeply evangelical. The biblical tradition describes desert as a privileged place for knowing God and entering into deeper relationship with him. It was in the desert that the significant experiences of the people of Israel took place, beginning with Moses to Elijah to John the Baptist. Like Jesus, the monks too went to the desert to be tempted by the Satan (Mt 4:1), to defeat him and thus overcoming all evils, they found the only good, God himself. Thus, the ultimate aim of going to the desert is searching God and the motive is the love of God. They were urged by the love of Christ to leave everything and go to meet the Lord who comes. This ardent love for God and search for God is the radical following of

the first great commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and will all your strength” (Mk 12:30, see also Dt 6:4-9). So the primordial eremitic life was the proclamation that God is all and everything must be abandoned for him. “Before him everything loses value and becomes relative: God is all and you must give yourself wholly and unreservedly to him.”⁹

Hermits actually imitated Jesus who himself withdrew into solitude with the Father before he went to the crowds. Before he began his messianic activity, he withdrew to the desert (Mk 1:12-13). Before his day at Capernaum with its proclamation of the Kingdom, healings and immersion in the crowd, “Jesus went out to a lonely place (*erēmos*)” (Mk 1:35). He did the same before choosing the twelve apostles (Lk 6:12). It was Jesus’ habit to withdraw to solitary places (Lk 5:16) and to be alone on the mountain (Mk 6:46; Mt 14:23).

2.2. Dawn of Monastic community

The second stage of monasticism is the establishment of monastic communities (coenobitism). Pachomius (288-346), the father of coenobitic life had the vocational vision where an angel appeared and gave him the

biblical lesson that service of God is to be discovered in the service of others.¹⁰ Let us be reminded of what Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). In the context of a brother who nourished ill-feeling against another member, Pachomius, while requesting him to get reconciled, told him what Jesus would say if he failed to make peace, “Inasmuch as you hate your brother, I am he whom you hate.”¹¹ Horsiesios, the disciple and successor of Pachomius saw the birth of communities as modeling primitive Church. He said, “Let us carry out everything in conformity with the law of the holy koinonia... as one man, as it is written, ‘All who believed formed but one heart and one soul’” (cf. Acts 4:32).¹² The root of Pachomius’ vocation was a concrete act of charity. While he was in the prison to be enrolled forcefully in the Roman army, some citizens brought bread and compelled Pachomius and other recruits to eat. Pachomius asked, “Why are these people so good to us when they do not know us?” There came the reply, “They are Christians and they treat us with love for the sake of God of heaven.” He was so touched that he spent the whole night praying to Jesus and promising that he would serve humanity all the days of his life

if he would be delivered. Monasticism began in the love of God. But the Word gave a new impetus insisting that love of God necessarily meant love of neighbour. Pachomius encountered the Word of God made flesh in some Christians who came to visit him in prison. Thus the traditional ascetic practices of the hermit life were replaced by commitment to helping others and teaching them the way of God.

His first attempt at community life was a failure. The grave dissensions within the first group of disciples forced him to send them all away. But this experience taught him a valuable lesson: the need for communal order and obedience as a decisive element in community life. Fraternal unity and relationship are the basis for Pachomian community life. It is no surprise that the oldest legislative code, the *Praecepta atque Iudicia* begins with the words of Paul, "Love is the fulfilling of the Law" (Rom 13:10). The majority of the failings mentioned were offenses against charity.¹³

Pachomius' disciple Theodore, after the death of his master, alluded to many biblical passages that influenced the charism of Pachomius to found a

fraternal community. He discovered the Johannine text, "I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34) as the basis of Pachomius' charism and "they all be one" (Jn 17:21) as the distinguishing mark of his disciples. Other scriptural references like Paul's exhortation to practice the works of mercy and unity as a sacrifice pleasing to God (Pauline passages on charity) and the psalmist exclamation, "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity" (Ps 133:1), "Love your neighbour as you love yourself" (Mk 12:31), controlling once tongue (cf. Jam 1:26; cf. 1Pet 3:10), "Bear one another's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2) also emerged as inspirations for giving birth to the charism of Pachomian community.

2.3. *The Evangelical Brotherhood of Basil*

The Basilian community differed in many ways from the Pachomian community. Geographically, they were no longer in the desert but close to the city. It was not protected by an enclosure wall as the case was with Pachomian community. It was not a large village

but a small community. The superior was no longer regarded as the head of the community who is attentive and watchful with a suspicious eye. Basilian community was governed by a system of fraternal interpersonal relationships than a complex Pachomian system of rules. Instead of vertical relationship with the charismatic father, horizontal relationship was stressed among the members based on love, edification and correction. So the community was called “brotherhood” and the members “brothers.” Unlike Pachomius, the founder Basil (330-379) was an educated person and a theologian of monastic life.¹⁴

In the beginning just after his conversion, like Antony was inspired by Mt 19:21, Basil sold all that he had, gave to the poor and retired into solitude. He spent his initial years in total separation from the world. He considered it as the only way to follow the footsteps of Jesus. This is how he understood Jesus’ invitation: “If anyone wants to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mk 8:34).

For Basil, only his work the *Moralia* was the true rule. The *Moralia* is a collection of

biblical texts, about 1500 verses from the NT arranged according to theme. Though the work was an anthology of biblical texts, Basil considered it his fundamental work as it provided him with the evangelical inspiration for his ministry and literary activities. There were two decisive features that shaped the young Basil: the centrality of evangelical inspiration and renunciation as the basis of life according to the Gospel. So as a young man, his life was based on penitence, detachment and two commandments of love of God and neighbour.

Basil’s next work was *Asceticon*. Here we can find a different outlook for monastic life. Basil read the Scripture afresh and he no longer gave primary importance to penitence and detachment but to the two greatest commandments.¹⁵ The perceptible transition was due to his continual return to the Gospel and his realization that the heart of the evangelical life did not lie in renunciation but in the twofold commandment of charity (cf.

Mt 22:34-40). In the Basilian community, the central position was thus given to the twofold commandment of love. Even when Jesus wanted to sum up the essentials of the law

and the prophets, he did so by recalling the two commandments. Basil while defending community life against solitary life felt that God would be glorified in the community life, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16). Finally, he saw the first Christian community at Jerusalem as the model for his community. He wrote, "Let us imitate the first Christian community! They had everything in common: life, soul, concord, table, indivisible brotherhood, the unfeigned love which makes one body out of many bodies, harmonizing different souls in a single thought."¹⁶

Basil's insistence on the love of neighbour extended beyond the community of brethren and poured itself out on all people through the preaching of the Word and the service of charity to the poor. We can discern here how the Word gradually opens up monasticism to the important but forgotten dimension of ministry and evangelism.

2.4. The Trinitarian unity of Augustinian Community

Augustine (354-430), the doctor of charity surpassed the eremitic vision of Antony and the communal asceticism of Pachomius as well as

the moderate asceticism of Basil lived in common. Charity, fraternal communion and unity were to become the central components and characteristic factors of Augustine's community. He continued to inspire the Canon Regulars of the middle ages. In its very first line, the Rule states the purpose of the monastery: "The essential reason for which you have come together is that you may live with one mind in the house and may have one soul and one heart in God." Augustine too was attracted by the image of the first Christians who had one heart and one soul among themselves. He was spellbound by the sweet sound of Psalm 133: "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity." For Augustine, love of God and love of neighbour were inseparable and they expressed a single love.

Mutual love and common life were expressed primarily in the sharing of possessions as in the first community in Jerusalem. Finally, his point of reference reached beyond the community of the first Christians to the very source of unity, the Trinity. Augustine set the same ideal of unity for nuns too. He did not regard the community of women as in any way different from that of men. He gave the same Rule written for men to the

community of women presided over by his own sister.

2.5. The Benedictine monastery

Together with Pachomius, Basil and Augustine, Benedict (480-547) was the last pillar of the beautiful edifice of monastic life. According to him, the sacred scripture was the most direct rule for human life. The Benedictine monastic community had its roots in the model of individual life and the communal life derived from Basil and Augustine.¹⁷ Thus in him, we see a synthesis of these two great orientations which had been present from the beginnings of monasticism. It is to be noted that the eremitic ideal, made up of asceticism, solitude and prayer were never lost in the Christian life. In the same way, the ideal of communion and unity had come to occupy a predominant place in monastic experience creating communities whose aim was to attain one heart and one soul like the first Christian community of Jerusalem.¹⁸

The Benedictine community was portrayed as a coenobitic society seen as a place of formation for the journey towards God rather than as a community of fraternal life for itself.

It looked as a formation centered on relationship with the master while the relationship of the disciples among themselves seemed less obvious. The objective was to lead each person to eternal life than to enjoy unity among brothers here on earth. The Benedictine community had its own rule, the Benedictine Rule and formed of special obedience to the abbot. So coenobitism was essentially constituted by the relationship that united each of its members to a man who represented Christ. The coenobitic society existed firstly between the monk and his abbot, between the monk and God. Abbot was seen as the very presence of Christ in the midst of his disciples. The scriptural inspiration was no more Acts and Psalm 133, but Rom 8:15: “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!...’” So the biblical image for Benedictine community was the group of twelve apostles around Jesus. Often in the Rule, the monks were called disciples and the abbot continued to perform some of the functions of Jesus. His first task was to teach.

The structure of the community was hierarchical. The Benedictine monastery went back to primitive eremitism in which the disciples gathered around the charismatic “abba” to learn how to save their souls. Yet, there seemed to be evolution in Benedictine experience which led little by little to a discovery of the intrinsic value of community, not simply as a setting to strive for perfection alone. As Paul reminds, “God has no favourites” (Rom 2:11), the abbot must not show any personal preferences in his monastery. He must not be more loving to one than to another. The Benedictine Rule, chapter 4 dealt exclusively on the twofold command of charity. There were also allusions to the primitive community at Jerusalem. The Rule cautioned them not to have anything of their own. In the last part of the Rule, charity was given predominant place with Paul’s dictum, “Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom 2:10). At the end of the Rule, actually we were back to Basil and Augustine. It is to be noted that the Benedictine rule was to inspire later centuries and together with those of Basil and Augustine yielded

new forms of monastic community throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁹

3. Mendicant Movement

Franciscan Brotherhood

13th century’s new ecclesial needs gave life to a number of movements and demanded the same return to the form of primitive Church. Majority of the clergy in spite of Gregorian reform by Pope Gregory VII (1070-1085) were trapped in feudal privileges and embroiled in simony and nicolaism. On the other hand, countless lay movements with evangelical character had flourished since the 12th century with the aim of returning to a simple, poor and evangelical life of the early days. There was profound and widespread yearning for authentic evangelical life focusing on radical poverty and opposition to all formalism and legalism. It was a context full of contradictions. On the one hand, there was longing for luxury and well-being promoted by the development of commerce with its new economic boom. On the other hand, there was the desire for a pure and poor Church, a return to the primitive Church. It was in this paradox that the Word showed a way. As a result,

there emerged Mendicant Orders.²⁰ The inspiration was no doubt biblical and the objective was to reproduce the model of the life of Jesus and the disciples, above all its real poverty and itinerant preaching. Thus we have a new model of Consecrated life expressed in a new model of community – the mendicants. And we have the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Carmelites, the Trinitarians, the Servites, the Augustinians...²¹ We shall consider only the experience of the Franciscan community as classical of this shift in the consecrated life.

The evangelical inspiration behind this new form of community was no longer the primitive Christian community at Jerusalem. The model was the apostolic life, life in the footsteps of Christ, in imitation of the apostles who shared totally the life of their Lord and Master. Francis' only desire was to literally travel again in the footsteps of Jesus. The primitive first Rule which Francis (1182-1226) was to give to his friars would be only "the life of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."²² The second Rule would also begin with a similar statement: "The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is this, namely, to

observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ..."²³

Even primitive monasticism sprang from the desire to leave everything in order to follow Jesus. Now however, the discipleship did not force them to withdraw to the desert. Instead for Francis, following Jesus was imitating the apostles by taking the Gospel he lived to everyone and sharing with all, by witness and word, the experience of life with Jesus. Francis was a new evangelist who filled the whole earth with the Gospel of Christ. The Biblical inspiration was the missionary discourse of Jesus found in Mt 10 and Lk 10. So the idea of the apostolic life was going to preach conversion and the Word of God in poverty as the apostles did and going without purse or bag. Though Francis went beyond the Jerusalem community, the Franciscan brotherhood seemed to its contemporaries the perfect realization of the primitive Church as appears in Acts 4:32.

In contrast to the Benedictine monastery, the new community was a small brotherhood made up of a few members only. Jesus sent the disciples two by two. The members

were no longer called monks but friars, brothers because fraternity characterized their way of life. The houses of the community were no longer called monasteries but convents. The community was the result of a convergence of people, coming together, assembling of the friars rather than external structures. The community was no longer conditioned by place but ministry, the itinerant preaching. The community had to start moving to the people in order to be closer to them. The community went back into the city, into the working class neighbourhoods.

A movement of friars with no fixed abode, sent out two by two required one central superior whom all could obey and seek guidance from. Thus, the personal bond and relationship of obedience with the superior constituted the true “convent” of the first Friars Minor. The centralized government became imperative for evangelization. Consequently, other mechanisms to maintain unity of the Order such as the participation of all the friars in the General Chapters, the division into Provinces, the Chapters at Regular intervals, the visits by superiors and the possibility of appeal in case of difficulty, etc., gradually emerged.²⁴

The friars were bound to love one another because Jesus said, “I give you

a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (Jn 13:34). They have to prove their love by deeds as John says, “Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1Jn 3:18). The very terminology used to denote superiors revealed the new outlook. They were called ministers, custodians, guardians. They are titles of biblical origin with the focus on service. As Francis writes, “Those who are put in charge of others should be no prouder of their office than if they had been appointed to wash the feet of their confreres.”

It is to be noted that with the Mendicants, the Word of God had effected a turning point in religious community that would mark every subsequent form of community in the second Christian millennium.

4. The Society of Jesus: United in order to be scattered

Another significant turning point in the history of religious life came with Clerks Regular. The 14th and 15th centuries together with the aspects of decadence in the life of the Church had seen growing desire for reform. There happened self-reform of the older orders. New foundations were also born such as the Olivetans, Jesuits and Brethren of the common life. Yet

the reform of the Church happened so slowly until the two great events that dominated the history of the Church in the 16th c.: the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent. In this context, we have the foundation of the Jesuits, a typical example of those Clerks Regular who were to make a new contribution to the vision of the community going beyond monastic and conventual forms but adopting to modern times. It was characterized primarily by its apostolic aim. Once again, it was the Word that brought out this new perspective to consecrated life as the Church was facing serious problems of morality and needed urgent radical remedies.

Even at the beginning of the second millennium orders rose with the exercise of charity as the reason of existence such as the Hospitallers, the Military Orders, the Mercedatians and the Trinitarians. The association between religious life and pastoral ministry was also by then an established fact beginning with Eusebius of Vercelli, Ambrose and Augustine and continuing with the rise of the Canons Regular and the progressive clericalization of monasticism. With the Mendicants, the apostolic purpose became more obvious and central.

The rise of the Clerks Regular marked the start of a new type of

community. Originally they continued the medieval tradition of the Canons Regular: secular priests in search of community. It was the same with the first group: the Theatines and Barnabites. They were priests united by bonds of charity with the aim of living an authentic priestly life and also making their ministry more effective in an institutionalized form: schools, education, catechesis, helping in hospital, etc. Their habit was ordinary priestly dress, simplified choir office, dwelt in an ordinary house with Constitutions and not Rule.²⁵

To understand the shape of this new community better, let us present in a few lines the experience of Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) and the Society of Jesus. It was Ignatius who definitely freed the Clerks Regular from all forms of monastic observances. Ignatius after his conversion had a passionate desire to follow Jesus as closely as possible in imitation of the apostles. His outlook was undoubtedly missionary. The starting point of the mission was Jesus who called to himself those whom he willed and sent them out to extend throughout the world his mission of giving salvation to all. The aim of the New order was directly apostolic in the modern sense of the word. Its tasks were defence and propagation of the faith, the good of the souls, and the

practice of spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Its apostolic dimension and its call to mission characterized the Jesuit community.

The apostolic life no longer evoked the memory of the Jerusalem community united around the apostles but rather the dispersal throughout the world, which came about when Peter sent the apostles to spread the Gospel in the name of the Lord. The apostolate of helping the souls was not exercised primarily by the individual but by the society. Community life was only to achieve a common mission entrusted to it by Jesus who had called and sent his members to work together for a particular apostolic purpose.

The society's unity was that of a living being, not a federation of communities. Its mission was an extension and reproduction of the mission of the apostolic college that prolonged the mission of Christ. The local communities are given only relative role in favour of the one great community, the Society. Availability, universality and mobility were the characteristics of this community to achieve the mission. A Jesuit considers himself a member of the one great community, sent by it and embodying it. The real superior is the General rather than the local superior because

the whole society has to pursue a single apostolic plan.

The office in choir was suppressed and to safeguard apostolic freedom, it was not replaced by a series of devotional community prayers. The typical Jesuit prayer would be mental prayer and examination of conscience. Poverty was modeled as demanded by Jesus from his apostles when he sent them out on mission (cf. Mt 10).

The clear apostolic aim, the extreme mobility, adaptability to different settings and situations, its strong centralization, fourth vow of obedience to the Pope and its freedom from aspects of life previously considered essential to the religious state – all these led to a new kind of structure and formation appropriate to the modern society which had come into being along with Humanism and renaissance. This type of community would from now on be the pattern for new religious communities.²⁶

5. Congregation for Different Apostolic Activities (17th to 19th C.)

The 17th to 19th c. witnessed the rise of an extraordinary variety of new religious communities immediately following the Council of Trent. But the congregations did not apparently make any particularly important or new contributions to the doctrine

and spirituality of consecrated life. The Jesuit community continued to give a decisive imprint to the new communities that appeared during this period.

One of the prominent events of this time was the French Revolution which marked, on the one hand, the collapse of the religious life and, on the other hand, the providential circumstances for its renewal. Many European countries followed the French pattern: confiscation of monasteries, secularization of religious life and suppression of Orders. Simultaneously, the Revolution also brought about an extraordinary blossoming of the religious life with the rise of many new Congregations.

The new Congregations exhibited the following common features:

- They identified the local needs and responded to a variety of social and economical emergencies.
- There was a renewed dedication for mission. Congregations such as Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the White Fathers, the Society of the Divine Word, the Claretians, the Combonians, Verona Fathers, etc. came into being with this express aim.
- Another feature was their international character that called for greater centralization.

- In these communities there was an attempt for a synthesis between a community based on communion and a community based on mission.²⁷

The biblical inspiration for the Orders of this epoch was like that of the Jesuits: the apostolic model, the apostles being sent to proclaim the Good News and Jesus final commandment, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). At the same time, the modern congregations did not forget the aspect of communion being inspired by the biblical model of first Christian community of Jerusalem.

6. New Communities for Today’s Church (20th and 21st C.)

Finally we have arrived at our own times, our own history where we have a role to play. We no more report the past but the present. Have new and significant forms of consecrated life emerged in our times and are they still emerging? It is difficult to answer definitely as we do not have that historical distancing to interpret the moment objectively. Let us leave to the future generations to do that. But we can arrive at a few interesting and important reflections.

We are in a particularly rich and creative phase of Church's life with the Holy Spirit powerfully at work. As Secondin comments, multiple sparks are being struck under the impact of the Holy Spirit from the hard rock of our historical paths.²⁸ Cardinal von Balthasar remarked, "Perhaps we had to wait for our century to witness a similar blossoming and multiplication of lay movements in the Church, some of which do indeed keep to the great traditional charisms, while the majority have emerged as a result of new thrusts of the Holy Spirit."²⁹ New charisms of the Holy Spirit are no doubt at work that seem to be directed more towards the laity than the traditional religious life. Let us briefly present the appearance of new forms of community.

The Secular Community

The Secular community is typical of the 20th c. It opens up the new sensitivity to secular realities and a new kind of Christian presence in their midst. There is a marked attraction exerted by a Christian life penetrating social and political fields and divinizing them. There is a desire for consecration which unlike earlier patterns of the religious life, will not hold aloof from the world, rather make the secular realities of the world the proper setting of life and action. Secular communities have discovered the universal vocation

to holiness. The barrier between the so-called consecrated and the unconsecrated is broken down. This century has restored their full dignity to the laity as sons and daughters of God, people of God, called to the perfection of charity in the world. This aspect is clearly brought out by Chiara Lubich, "This is the great attraction of modern times: to penetrate the highest contemplation while mingling with everyone, as one person next to others. I would say even more: to love oneself in the crowd in order to fill it with the divine, like a piece of bread dipped in wine. I would say even more: made sharers in God's plans for humanity, to embroider patters of light on the crowd, and at the same time to share shame, hunger, troubles and brief joys with our neighbours. For the attraction of our times, as of all times, is Jesus and Mary; the highest conceivable expression of the human and the divine: the Word of God, carpenter's son; the Seat of Wisdom, a mother at home."³⁰ The first response to this contemporary sensitivity and the ability to permeate secular structures with the divine was made by the Secular Institutes.

The Biblical inspiration seems to be "You are the salt of the world" (Mt 5:13); "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid" (Mt 5:14) and the image of leaven (cf.

Mt 13:33). Let me quote the document *Primo Feliciter* to understand better the biblical inspiration of Secular Institutes: “Let them be the salt that does not lose its savour for this insipid and darkened world to which they do not belong but in which, nevertheless, they have to remain by divine arrangement; let them be the light that shines and is not put out amidst the darkness of this world, let them be the small but effective leaven which works always and everywhere and mixed with every level of the population from the humblest to the most exalted, tires to reach and permeate each and every person by word, example and every other means, until the whole is permeated and totally leavened in Christ (see also Canon 713).”

The Secular Institutes distinguish themselves from other orders by not appearing as religious in public. They have no public vows but they bind themselves to the Institute either by a private vow or by promise. They have no permanent community life. They live in private houses or apartments. They meet periodically and undergo intense training. They have no common apostolic work. The members engage themselves in different secular jobs and do them with a great sense of Christian dedication and responsibility.³¹

The apparent contradiction between consecration and secularity during a long history of monastic and religious life was overcome. Consecrated secularity is a possible reality. Consecration is not in fact to be understood as separation but as vocation, the result of a call and a response to that call. In the case of the members of secular Institutes, God calls them to live where they are already, to remain as seculars. Here we are reminded of the mystery of Incarnation. Jesus assumed humanity without destroying it in order to transform it and bring it to its full realization.

New Communities

Besides Secular Institutes, our time has witnessed the blossoming of a different style of consecrated life, expressed in the growth of a multiplicity of associations of believers in small, more or less informal groups. They share a similar aim. They are the so-called New Communities that reached their culmination in the 60s, 70s and 80s. Compared with the Secular Institutes, all the new communities have been marked by a powerful recovery of the common life.

They came into existence as an alternative to large religious communities and the monopoly of

evangelical perfection by religious. Their intention was to have a new experience of evangelical life outside existing institutions. They greatly emphasized shared life as the sign of a new sort of egalitarian and fraternal society as an alternative to a divided and classified society. They were sensitive to the earthly values of friendship. Almost in all these new communities, men and women lived side by side. They argued that this was what Jesus intended and was practised by the first Christian community.

Some of these communities are the Monastic Fraternity of Bethlehem, the Milan Centre Group, the Community of Monteveglio also known as Little Family of the Annunziata, the Bose community, Memores Domini (Mindful of the Lord), Seguimi (Follow me), Sant'Egidio, Redemptor Hominis (Redeemer of Man), Monastic Fraternities of Jerusalem and Montecroce, the Ecumenical Little Brothers, etc. There are also the experiments such as the Little Brothers and Sisters of Jesus that are closer to the Religious Congregations even though they have the new characteristics.³²

In spite of the varieties, they have common elements like emphasis on community life lived in a deeply personal way with sharing of prayer, ideas and feelings, hospitality, prayer

and service, ecumenism and a mixed membership of men and women which includes also married people with their entire families.

Conclusion

I have presented nearly two thousand years of the history of Consecrated Life in a few pages, beginning with monasticism and concluding with the New Communities for modern time. If we pay attention to the evolution of Consecrated Life, the importance of the Word and its driving force would be crystal. In every epoch, the Church was confronted with the existential problems. But God did not abandon her. Rather, he inspired the Founders and the Founderesses through his Word to respond to the situation, to act upon the crisis and to give answers to the problems. The Founders heeded the call and responded to the Word. Thus we have different forms of Consecrated Life, each form responding to a particular situation of the Church and the world but always inspired and influenced by the Word. Today, the Word is all the more active, inspiring millions and millions of ordinary lay people to realize their vocation in a meaningful way responding to the modern problems of the world. Where does the Word lead the consecrated persons today? Where will the Consecrated

Life reach? We have no answers but one thing is certain: Consecrated Life will continue to have relevance to this world and will continue to contribute to the fullness of God's Kingdom here on earth as long as this world lasts.

Endnotes

- 1 Bandhu Ishanand Vempeny, "Governance in Religious Life", *Sanyasa*, Vol. III, No. 1, 2008, pp. 36-37.
- 2 Cf. P.C. Bori, *Chiesa Primitiva: L'immagine della Comunità delle Origini – Atti 2:42-47; 4:32-37 – nella Storia della Chiesa Antica*, Brescia: Paideia, 1974, pp. 21-83.
- 3 Solitude was interpreted in the monastic context as a radical celibacy, the negation not just one form of society, marriage, but of every form of society, negation of relation with anyone else.
- 4 Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia. Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Community*, London: New City Press, 2001, p. 59.
- 5 Hermit comes from the Greek *eremos*, desert, ascetic from the Greek *askein*, to exercise, monk from the Greek *monos*, alone and single, anchorite from the Greek *anachorein*, to go away, withdraw, retire.
- 6 Stylites are those monks who practised asceticism remaining on a column, the Stationaries remained motionless, the Dendrites spent long years in a tree.
- 7 Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia. Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Community*, p. 60.
- 8 Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, London: SPCK, 1980, pp. 36f.
- 9 Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia: Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Life*, p. 66.
- 10 Cf. J.M. Lozano, "La comunità pacomiana dalla comunione all'istituzione", *Claretianum* 15, 1975, pp. 237-267.
- 11 *Instruction* 36-37 (Vol. 3, pp. 29f).
- 12 *Regulations* 51 (Vol. 2, p. 216).
- 13 *Precepts and Judgements Proemium* (Vol. 2, p. 175).
- 14 Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia. Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Life*, p. 91.
- 15 M. Augé, "La fraternità evangelica di Basilio" in *Storia della vita religiosa*, Brescia, 1988, p. 67.
- 16 *Hom. dicta tempore famis*, 8 (PG 31, 324B).
- 17 Benedict of Nursia established also a monastery for women under the direction of his sister Scholastica.
- 18 Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia. Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Life*, p. 117.
- 19 As the first millennium progressed, two distinctive types of community emerged, with different life styles: the *professio canonica* which followed the Augustinian Rule and the *professio monastica* which followed the Benedictine Rule.

- 20 Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia. Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Life*, p. 127.
- 21 “Mendicanti” in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, V, pp. 1163-1212.
- 22 *First Rule* (of 1221; *Regula non Bullata*), Title (*Omnibus*, p. 31).
- 23 *Second Rule* (of 1223); *Regula Bullata*), 1,2 (*Omnibus*, p. 57).
- 24 Cf. Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia. Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Life*, pp. 130-131.
- 25 Cf. Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia. Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Life*, pp. 143-144.
- 26 Cf. Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia. Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Life*, pp. 146-154.
- 27 Cf. Fabio Ciardi, *Koinonia. Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Life*, pp. 157-158.
- 28 B. Secondin, *I nuovi protagonisti. Movimenti, associazioni, gruppi nella Chiesa*, Cinisello Balasamo: Paoline, 1991, p. 8.
- 29 Quoted by P.J. Cordes, *Dentro il nostro mondo. Le forze di rinnovamento spirituale*, Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1989, p. 14.
- 30 Chiara Lubich, *Meditations*, London: new City, 1989, pp. 14-15.
- 31 Ignatius Puthiadam, *A Short History of Religious Life*, Bangalore: ATC, p. 260.
- 32 They come under the Societies of Apostolic Life in the Canon Law.

FREEDOM VS. FAME, SIGNIFICANCE VS. SUCCESS: TOWARDS A PARADIGM OF HUMILITY IN RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

John Sankarathil, OSFS

1. Introduction

Modern culture and mass media highly exalt values of self-esteem, self-sufficiency and self-assertiveness. Contemporary motivational theories and educational disciplines teach us to aspire for a life of abundance. Cumulative effects of experiential and educational processes have led us to boast about our achievements. Society tries to place emphasis on key words such as individual-rights, personal-decision and freedom. At times, they are necessary, right, and just for individual growth. However, what effect do

they have on our personal growth in relation to our religious commitment? Do they help in establishing human relationships? Do they help us to foster other values and virtues? These values are good; moreover, they need to be understood in the context of our particular way of life. In asserting individual rights, we should not trample down and destroy rights of others as well as the common good. In our growth process, to a certain extent, we are influenced and shaped by others. Does the community/society in which we live exist only for us? Or do we realise our obligations toward those

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others with whom, and among whom, we live? The world tends to lead us to think that everything we need is within our own power to grasp and achieve. This article is an attempt to understand the virtue of humility (*vinaya*) in our personality development in the context of religious life in India.

2. Etymology and Definition of Humility

The English word humility derives its origin from the Latin word *Humilis*, which means lowly, or near the ground and from *Humus* which means *ground, earth, soil*.¹ Humility can be defined as “the quality of being humble or having a ‘lowly’ opinion of oneself”; it also means “meekness, lowliness, the opposite of pride or haughtiness.”² In popular parlance, humility consists in having a low opinion of oneself, and in underestimating oneself. Humble people are expected to be modest and self-deprecating whenever they do something of which they would be proud.³ The etymological meaning presents humility as a process of the acknowledgement of having a low opinion of oneself. However, it could also be an enigma for understanding the reality of oneself. It is rather a delicate term to be understood properly with all its nuances.

A humble person does not pretend that he/she is worthless or useless, because the foundation of humility is truth. Humility is neither underestimation of our talents, nor overestimation of our fragilities and limitations. Humility is a matter of having a proper perspective of oneself. It understands things rightly, even in the face of various temptations to exaggerate.⁴ Thus the virtue of humility helps us to have a realistic and objective personal outlook that we are the children of God. It is a kind of knowledge in progress. Humility consists of clearly understanding ourselves and what we have done without exaggeration. To be humble means taking oneself no more seriously than one should and not having unreasonable beliefs about one’s moral entitlements. It also means knowing what kind of treatment to give to and expect from others. This ability to maintain a proper perspective is clearly a desirable characteristic.

In Christian theology, humility has an important role; it establishes the relation between God and human beings, the creator and the creatures, the omnipotent creator and the limited creation: “Humility is the moral virtue by which the human will accepts readily the fact that all a person’s good – nature and grace, being and action – is a gift of God’s creative and salvific love,

and by which one wants consequently to ‘unself’ the self radically in thought, word, and deed, in order to be true to his being.”⁵ It affirms that all the good that we have and that we are, belong to God; and we are called to be grateful to Him. It is a state of acknowledging that we are created in the image and likeness of God and God is the source of everything; it is the basis and foundation of other virtues.

Humility is an important virtue by which we can give witness to our Christian faith and commitment. After the theological virtues, humility is an important moral virtue as it regulates the whole of virtuous life by submitting it to the true order of being. It is interrelated with the theological virtues; it affects charity, hope, and faith as they manifest the divine nature of Christ; humility is their creaturely aspect.⁶ As a virtue, humility is a habit meant for action; it counts the altitude of the aptitude of human existence, and it enlarges one’s self and self-interest to the realm of altruism and other-oriented life. Humility moderates human action and behaviours. Humility is the true greatness of a human person; it is liberation from one’s limited selfhood.

2.1. Biblical Understanding: Old Testament View

According to Biblical scholarship, humility has a creative meaning. Humility is the recognition of our total dependence on God and a readiness to serve God selflessly together with our fellow human beings. In the LXX, the idea of humility is expressed by various derivatives and formations from the adjective *tapeinos* (lowly, small, oppressed, humble).⁷ This virtue in the Biblical context has a social depth which leads to the eschatological dimension too: “Humility in the Biblical world is a value that directs persons to stay within their inherited social status, especially by not presuming on others and avoiding even the appearance of lording over another.”⁸ It contributes a leading thrust in the development of biblical spirituality. God created the whole universe and the people of God (Dt 32:6) and thus humanity has a total dependence on God. In the Old Testament, humility is the attitude of the *anawim*, the poor of Yahweh, who have no resources of their own but submit themselves wholly to the will of God, who always hears the cry of the poor. Israelites’ deliverance from oppression and desolation gave them insights into God and an awareness of themselves which formed the central core of their theological

consciousness and eschatological message.⁹ In popular view, humility may not have much positive outlook. But on the contrary, in the Biblical view, humility is highly esteemed. For, humility involves a sense of complete dependence on God, in gratitude to the divine magnanimity.

2. 2. *New Testament Concept*

In the New Testament Theology, humility finds its thrust in the person of Jesus Christ. Through his momentous life, Jesus offers his followers the example of humility, and told them to learn from him: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29). Jesus did not wish to be ministered to, but on the contrary he wished to serve and to offer His life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). The New Testament concept of humility has positive values; it is more than simple material aspects of poverty: "The vast majority of references to humility in the New Testament refer to subjective traits of character, not tied up with an objective situation of affliction or poverty."¹⁰ It is mainly focused on the life and the mission of Jesus. Jesus not only demanded from his disciples humility before God, but he also taught them to serve each other in humility, imitating God himself in his condescension (Mt 5:45; Lk 6:36). Jesus' service to humanity is intended

for our imitation (Mk 10:43-45; Lk 22:26-27). In order to lead others, we must be humble. If anyone wants to be first, one must be the last of all and servant of all (Mt 18:4; Mk 9:35; 10:42-44; Lk 9:45). Humility is intertwined with the life of Christ so intimately that no act of His existence can be viewed apart from the self-abasement it implies.

According to Pauline theology, Jesus Christ was ready to obey to the level of offering his life to accomplish his Father's will: "He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). The abasement and obedience of Christ become the symbol of humility. In other words, Paul affirms that humility understood as submissiveness before God, is a virtue modelled on the example of Christ who humbled himself and became obedient unto death. The humility of God in Christ consists in his taking flesh and assuming a lowly human condition. He accomplished it by neither sacrificing his divinity nor destroying his humanity. In this perspective, Jesus Christ is the sublime and primordial example of humility. He has abandoned the honour of being equal to God so that God might be glorified and humankind be saved, and the process of humiliation has resulted in his exaltation (Phil 2:6-11). Saint

Paul illustrates to the Philippians God's infinite majesty of emptying himself to assume the role of a servant.

Saint Paul insisted that Christians should show humility towards one another, and that they should not strive in a spirit of arrogance and vanity for those things which they were not intended to possess, but on the contrary, they should rather adapt themselves to the measure of grace which is accorded to every individual (Rom 12:3-8, 1 Cor 12:12-30). The virtue of humility is sometimes connected with the example of Jesus (1 Cor 4:17-21; 2 Cor 10:1, Phil 2:8) and at times it is connected with the Old Testament passages that highlighted God's concern for and protection of the poor and resistance to the proud and haughty (2 Cor 7:6; Jas 4:6).

It is a complete theology of humility beginning with the ineffable humility of the divine consort with the human and concluding with the humility of the soul dwelling with God by faith and awaiting the reward of the humble. Such Christological theology is the Pauline portrait of a humble Christ and its reflection in a humble Christian made the nucleus of Christ-centred perfection and holiness. The term *tapeinos* and its derivatives are more often used in the Pauline

letters than anywhere else in the New Testament.

The theology of humility has its foundation and basis in the Sacred Scripture: "Humility characterises the attitude and behaviour of the man who thinks more of others than of himself, and who does not do this in order to achieve an ultimate superiority over them, but because he recognises, in a spirit of genuine modesty, what God has in fact assigned both to him and to others."¹¹ Humility plays an important role in prescribing the constantly threatened unity of the church. The demands of ambition in the church, religious communities and associations have to be renounced for the sake of unity, and this renunciation can only be achieved by humble endeavour. The disciples are to be governed and guided by humility. There is a constant interchange between and intermingling of unity, charity and humility. In the Pauline (Col 3:12 Eph 4:2) and Petrine (1 Pet 3:8; 5:5) lists of virtues humility appears as an important condition for love. In short, humility is that specific grace developed in us by the spirit of God where we as Christians frankly acknowledge that all we have and we are, we owe to God who is dynamically operative in us. We willingly submit ourselves into the hands and providential care of God.

3. Theological Development

In Christian theology, the concept of humility has an important role. Humility is a virtue that was taught by the early Christians to their descendants because it was the act that exemplified Jesus' life. In the early Christian usage, humility was applied to the voluntary adoption of a posture of self-degradation, usually intended to reinforce an appeal for God's mercy and assistance. In later Christian usage it came to mean primarily the virtue opposed to pride. However, for many centuries it could also be applied to outward gestures of self-abasement, such as bowing.¹² The Fathers of the church, Desert Fathers and spiritual leaders of the church extol the excellence of humility and point to Christ as its archetype. The humility of Christ in facing rejection, misunderstandings, humiliation, alienation, elimination and death (Mt 23:11-12) reflected his own teaching that "the person who humbles himself will be exalted" (Mt 18:4; 23:11; Lk 9:48; 14:11; 18:14). The divine Will to come in human form itself is an attribute of humility (Phil 2:1-11) in the Christian perspective: "The chief characteristic of Christian humility is this acknowledgement of total, absolute and utter dependence upon God as creator and redeemer, the beginning and the end of all life. It is a mature

rather than immature dependence in that human beings remain free agents in acknowledging and expressing faith in God."¹³

Throughout the history of the church and spirituality, many Fathers of the Church and theologians described distinctively the concept of Christian humility. Some of them extolled it as a principal virtue to grow in perfection and spiritual life. Among them are Saints Benedict of Nursia (480-550) Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), and Francis de Sales (1567-1622). They emphasise that the source of humility is to be found in the person of Christ. Our search to find holiness in the particular states of life in the image of Christ involves also an attempt to share his humility of living in dependence upon God. Although these spiritual masters belong to different centuries and epochs, their teachings contain insights on how to grow in humility.

3.1. Benedict of Nursia's concept of Humility

St. Benedict, who is well known as the founder of western monasticism, explains well the virtue of humility. The seventh chapter of the *Rule of St. Benedict* gives the twelve steps of humility, alluding to the ladder of Jacob from the Old Testament (Gen

28:12-17). St. Thomas Aquinas also analyses Benedict's view on humility.¹⁴ Since Benedict has written them for the purpose of the monks, the steps of humility were demanding, and they presupposed a certain kind of courage and patience to bear with difficulties in order to practise humility in daily life. He explains these steps by citing considerable quotations from the Bible in as much as the Word of God nourished his spirituality and life. To a certain extent, Benedict devalued human capabilities so as to stress that what gives real value for us is the love of God for us.

Humility is integral to the spiritual life. Although Benedict esteemed interior humility, he recommended the external expressions of humility that sprang from interiority. In the Benedictine tradition, the abbot stands in the place of Christ, so the monks are recommended to have a humble relationship with the abbot. It implies abnegation of 'self-will' and one can see 'the will of God' through the legitimate superiors and authorities to grow in devotion and spiritual journey. However, one is humble not out of fear of hell, but out of love of Christ. So, humility is a way to become God-centred persons, which is the goal of the ascent of the ladder of humility.

3.2. Bernard of Clairvaux on Humility

According to Saint Bernard, "humility is the virtue by which man recognizes his own unworthiness because he really knows himself."¹⁵ Humility is the virtue by which a human being truthfully acknowledges what one is—one becomes worthless in one's own eyes. No matter who you are, "if you examine yourself inwardly by the light of truth and without dissimulation, and judge yourself without flattery; no doubt you will be humbled in your own eyes, becoming contemptible in your own sight as a result of this true knowledge of yourself."¹⁶ Bernard associates humility with truth: "There are three steps of truth. We ascend the first by striving to be humble."¹⁷ There are various degrees of humility through which we can pass in our conquest of sin or grades of love, which finally leads to mystical union with God.¹⁸

Bernard of Clairvaux also connects humility with the virtue of love: "Love is the gift of the Holy Spirit; He gives it so that those who have already proceeded to the first step of truth by humility under the discipline of the Son may, through their compassion for neighbours, come to the second step."¹⁹ So, humility is the point of departure in spiritual life, and love is the point of arrival. The key to conversion and

progress in perfection and spiritual life depends on our free will.

3.3. *Humility in the view of St Thomas Aquinas*

In defining the virtue of humility, Thomas Aquinas followed the Aristotelian context and classified it as a virtue moderating the irascible appetite in its tendency to excel: "Humility essentially lies in the appetite, and restrains its inordinate urge for things which are above us."²⁰ It balances the effects of magnanimity. Humility moderates passion and affection; it controls our inordinate appetite for greatness. Although humility has sometimes been seen as involving a refusal to regard oneself as superior to other people, Aquinas for instance, thought of it as meaning essentially submission to God and a consequent moderation of ambition to keep it within the bounds appointed for each individual by God. This is compatible with recognizing that in certain ways one may be better endowed by God than someone else is.²¹

Aquinas tried to link humility to Aristotle's doctrine of magnanimity.²² In-fact, he conciliates two ideals, of the Christian humble soul and the Aristotelian great-soul person. Humility regulates the soul's vivacity toward great things: "humility

controls those of sanguine self-assurance mounting to greatness.²³ It is concerned, accordingly, with the irascible side of the appetite: "the proper role of humility is for a man to restrain himself from being carried away by craving things above him."²⁴ The function of humility "is to put right and modulate the motion of the appetite,"²⁵ and it is the foundation of a 'spiritual edifice.'²⁶ The humble person restrains his/her estimate of oneself knowing one is unworthy of any good, and at the same time marks out for oneself a moderate goal. Whether one should gear the hope up and down, one advances always with an attitude of unworthiness. The saint teaches that "humility is caused by reverence towards God, and does not prevent it being a part of temperance and modesty,"²⁷ and the virtue of humility "gives us access to God."²⁸

3.4. *Key ideas of St. Francis de Sales*

In his theology, Francis unifies the whole life of Christ and the whole of Revelation with the single thread of humility. Humility is a virtue to establish a divine-human relationship; primarily, in his opinion, "humility makes us perfect towards God."²⁹ Humility is the quality and commitment of a true estimation of oneself in the context of our relationship with God, divine

blessings and personal limitations. He gives a descriptive definition of humility: “The true virtue of humility is the real knowledge and voluntary recognition of our abjection.”³⁰ It implies an acknowledgement of divine presence in oneself for the reconstruction and progress of the world, while understanding our limitations and fragilities and the destructive force of self-love, self-assertion and egocentrism. It is a dynamic conviction in practice, an interior recognition of oneself as a child of God.

At the very heart of the conception of humility is a love of our abjection. This gives it uniqueness and a refinement both in the manner in which it is presented and to be practiced.³¹ It requires a self-emptying modelled after the *kenosis* of Jesus that leads to a radical but gradual transformation of our lives. At first glance, the love of our abjection, of our meanness and lowliness can be daunting, because it appears to favour and facilitate self-disparagement and self-contempt. Yet, the genius of the saint is to balance this acknowledgement of our limitations with a profound sense of gratitude for all the gifts that God has given us, not the least of which is to be made in His Image and Likeness. The virtue of humility becomes more

understandable and attractive in the light of the compassion we have for ourselves in facing and dealing with our shortcomings, fragilities and failings. This leads not to self-esteem but rather to a realistic self-image and a healthy self-acceptance, an acceptance that makes us accept and love ourselves as God accepts and loves us, i.e., in our wholeness, in our blessedness and brokenness. This in turn opens us up to God’s love and to a genuine love of other human beings, to love and embrace them in their strength and frailty.

As humility encourages developing a correct self-knowledge,³² it has a deep psychological aspect in the development of personality and thus boosts interpersonal relationship in families and communities. When we become conscious of our limitations; we understand our blessings as pure gifts of God. Failures and limitations are not tragedies, but only invitations to opening ourselves so that God can work in us. This virtue is a touchstone of discerning God’s will: “Even in important matters we must be very humble and not think of finding God’s will by force of scrutiny and subtle discussion.”³³ It is an important message for today.

4. **Modern Theological Concept of Humility**

The development of the concept of theology of Humility shows that it is completely based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who was ready to be humble enough to die on the cross. The fathers of the church extol the excellence of humility and point to Christ as its archetype.³⁴

Bernard Haring, a modern theologian gives a compact idea of this virtue, and he unfolds the two dimensions of humility viz: (a) our basic attitude towards our superiors, (b) superior's attitude towards inferiors. Haring explains: "The first tendency is inseparable from every truly religious attitude...Humility is first of all the virtue of the creature-status, the response of a created being to its Creator, a recognition and affirmation of utter dependence on God. This aspect of humility as such is not yet typically or exclusively Christian, but rather something that Christianity has in common with every theistic religion. In Christianity, however, it occupies a pure position and is given its purest and deepest expression."³⁵

However, the second aspect of humility explains well the depth of humility in a Christian perspective: "...the second aspect is peculiar to

Christian humility as such; the humility of the superior toward the inferior, the gracious condescension springing from the rich inner source of grace. This God gave to us in Christ. Christian humility is the inner spiritual imitation of the grand and unique movement of God in Christ in which He freely renounces."³⁶ The culmination of this humility is manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. This humility "does not spring from baseness or inferiority, but flows from the heights above.... In the words of Saint Augustine, it is God who descends from heaven by the weight of His charity."³⁷

In Jesus, these two aspects of humility are combined: "The Incarnation is the very humility of God in condescension to man; all the acts of Jesus are of divine humility; but they are likewise the response of humility on the part of the humanity of Christ to the heavenly Father... His obedience unto the death of the cross is the humble submission of the human will of Christ to the higher will of the heavenly Father."³⁸ Christ taught us a truly unique humility; it is the model of supreme humility. The infeasibility of explaining the act of humility coincides on the one hand with the mystery of Incarnation with its intrinsic impossibility of explanation, and, on the other hand, with the infinite condescension and abasement implied

in the assumption of human nature by Christ. The humility of the incarnation must be shared and reflected in the hearts of Christians if they would be worthy of the name.

5. Humility: Relevance and Challenges for the Religious in India

India and its culture are well-known for its sages, humble (*vinaya*) people, its philosophy of non-violence (*ahimsa*), and inter-religious friendship (*mata-maitri*). She has the greatest respect for religious life and the monastic (*sanyāsa*) tradition. What is the specific contribution that the Indian religious can make to a modern developing India? Just as Mahatma Gandhi could achieve Independence (*swāthantria*) of our beloved *Bhārat Mātā* through *ahimsa*, religious can liberate India from the modern power-oriented society through the practise *vinaya* in everyday life. In fact, humility or *vinaya* has been a highly esteemed virtue in India from ancient history. In the religious life, humility has a vital role to play because it creates certain kind of mutual interest among the community members; and facilitates cordial discussions on the life and activities of the community. Each member expresses a reciprocal readiness to face challenges through frank dialogue and in an atmosphere

of sincere collaboration in favour of the wellbeing of the community. However, humility is not a kind of welfare activity left to others, but it has to be part of our inner nature, an indispensable expression of our being.

Our educational institutions, health-care centres, pastoral and communication centres, and our social work projects are our interface with the public at large and with people of all religions. It is in these arenas that people can see us as visibly spiritual, humble, prayerful and inspired by Gospel values. We cannot reduce our vocation only to become good administrators, directors, psychologists and therapists. We are called to be humble people led by the Spirit; our ministry becomes more effective by promoting harmony among people. We can be with and for the people, yet we can be different in our choices and value systems on account of our commitment to Jesus. It is not so much what *we do* in life but what *we are* that matters.

Humility is not simply a psychological phenomenon; in reality it requires a new focus, a more exact understanding of our relationship with God. When we encounter challenges and difficulties, humility enables us to broaden the horizons of our outlook. However, it can be understood as an opportunity to new openness,

overcoming old prejudices and obsolete viewpoints in order to open the way to a new understanding of our life in the context of our faith commitment in a multi-religious milieu. The apostles were true friends of Christ, they met Him and learned to love Him above all else. By washing the feet of the apostles, Christ taught them that real discipleship consisted in humble serving (Jn.13:1-20). Communion with Him will ensure serenity and peace even in the most complex and difficult moments of our life.

Humility consists in loving God and neighbour; this is what gives value to our religious commitment. Apart from the necessary theological and educational training, what is most important for the religious in India is that our lives and activities should reflect a faithful love of God that arouses in us a friendly concern towards everyone. Humility to God and unity with Christ is the secret of authentic significance of the ministry of the religious. Whatever ministry we undertake in the Church, whatever apostolate we are involved in, whatever work we do, and whatever success we gain either for the community or for ourselves collectively or individually, we can ensure that we always remain humble before God. Personal integrity, humility and holiness of life are

essential components of our witness as religious. These efforts to make genuine witness, however subtle and small, give effective support to the majority of our fellow citizens who uphold the noble tradition of *ahimsa* (non-violence), mutual respect, tolerance and social harmony.

When we meet with difficulties and sufferings either in community, or out-side, a humble religious refers it back to the humble Christ who taught humility par excellence: "He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). It is also human to experience moments of discouragement and failure. However, they are the precious moments; we can become humble to accept the will of God. The life of Jesus not only contains a serene and faith-motivated exhortation to humility, but also offers a vast and coherent set of guidelines for the exercise of authority, such as inviting people to listen, favouring dialogue, sharing, co-responsibility, and the merciful treatment of others. Humility is not just a passive and irresponsible execution of orders, but it is a conscious shouldering of commitments, which are a real actualisation of the will of God. Since Christ is the model of humility, we can give credible witnesses to others through humility.

The world that leads to individualism and secularism can be confronted by humility taught by Jesus Christ. His incarnation and sacrifice on Calvary upholds humility. By humility we can become confident in our God-given talents and accomplish them with the view of the common-good. However, by humility we realise our indebtedness and interrelatedness to God; acknowledging, on the one hand our fragility and limitations as well as the excellence and mercifulness of God, the creator and redeemer. Humility is a paradigm for becoming God-centred persons, and altruistic-minded rather than individualistic and self-centred. Even our very existence in the world is a sign of humility: our very life on earth invites our humility. Mother-Earth holds and sustains us. Through the Earth, God is blessing us, caring for us, and holding us. We are invited to transcend our attitude 'to use and dispose' into love, which implies an attitude of humility to God.

Humility is not an outdated virtue, but it is vital and active, which can strengthen our human relationships. However, it should neither be used as a trick to systematically put-down some in the community nor to rule over them. Mistreatment is part and parcel of the life of the vast majority; even the most fortunate might have

experienced it in one way or another. Whether we take it in a philosophical way or not, humility is an appropriate response to it. Humility is a virtue of personal growth to understand human indebtedness to God; it is an invitation to accept and acknowledge that we are children of God. It summons to continue our life in peace and harmony, contrary to the modern tendency of war and antagonism. When the modern world is dragged slowly into fundamentalism and racism, humility is an example to understand the need of our interdependence and human solidarity. Humility fosters equanimity to understand our talents and to make use of them in a fruitful manner of co-operation.

We can not only make our specific contribution, beginning with the decisive question of formation and community life, but also face challenges and problems with a constructive spirit. The modern civilisation and culture may tend to place the virtue of humility in parenthesis, to organise personal and social life. Although under the pretext of psychology and developmental sciences, at times, even in religious life people tend to lay aside humility, its esteemed importance is upheld by many spiritual writers from time to time. The wisdom of ancient spiritual masters has not lost its importance;

and the modern world cannot exhaust the implications of their teachings. The pattern and process of practising humility has varied over the centuries, but its thrust and meaning stand relevant and meaningful for modern spiritual seekers. The insights and inspiration of the spiritual masters on humility are important in the modern era where we encounter more and more psychological and social problems and challenges.

6. Conclusion

Natural reason establishes that inferiors serve superiors, and disciples obey their masters. However, never was it heard that a master exercises duties of subjection toward his disciples. Jesus Christ is the author of such a new paradigm of living humbly before God and others. In his life at home, he was subjected to his parents, Mary and Joseph, laying the foundations of obedience and humility. Through his vision and mission, Christ demonstrated to the world a new way of understanding, friendship and discipleship. He served them, washed their feet (Jn. 13:1-20), gave up his life and paved a new way of community and friendship. From time immemorial no such prodigy of humility had been heard, no such office of subjection was a model of leadership. Jesus brought the new paradigm of humility by voluntary

subjection. Humility is one of the best responses of the religious to face all that appears to be challenging in our lives. When in the modern world, some crave for authority and power, humility is a paradigm to serve others through genuine leadership and responsibility. It is, thus, an antidote to pride, power-struggle and authoritarianism. It is also an invitation to live in equality, equanimity, fraternity and solidarity. Humility has to be understood in terms of having oneself in a proper perspective. At no time in the history of civilization is humility needed more than in this era of globalization and information technology. There is a need for new prophetic leaders in this generation who can conduct themselves with humility.

Endnotes

- 1 A. Huerga, "Humility," *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, Vol. 3, 1978, p. 79. In classical Latin the word is used in a pejorative sense; applied to things, it means undistinguished, unimportant, insignificant, in reference to persons, it suggests lowly birth, lack of resources, and weakness of character. In ancient culture that prized freedom, power and self-aggrandizement, humility, far from being a quality to be admired, was viewed with condescension and contempt. W.H. Shannon, "Humility," *The New dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 1993, pp. 516-517.

- 2 'Humility,' *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. 7, 1989, p. 482.
- 3 N. Richards, *Humility*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992, pp. 1-4.
- 4 N. Richards, "Humility," *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, Vol. 2, 2001, p. 815.
- 5 G. Gilleman, "Humility," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, p. 205.
- 6 G. Gilleman, "Humility," p. 205.
- 7 The New Testament follows a similar linguistic usage. Since, in secular Greek literature, *tapeinos* and its derivatives generally imply a servile attitude of mind, a blend of fear and obsequiousness, some scholars have inferred that humility, as a virtue, was unknown in the Greek world. However, this is not the case; the Greeks understood the nature of humility. A. Stoger, "Humility," *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, Vol. 2, 1970, p. 385.
- 8 B.J. Malina, "Humility," *Harpers Bible Dictionary*, 1990, p. 411.
- 9 W.H. Shannon, "Humility," p. 517; A. Stoger, "Humility," p. 385.
- 10 G.E. Mendenhall, "Humility," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2, 1996, p. 659.
- 11 A. Stoger, "Humility," p. 389.
- 12 "Humility," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1997, p. 804.
- 13 Rex Chapman, "Humility," *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 1983, p. 200.
- 14 *Summa Theologiae* II, II q.161 art 6, Trans. Thomas Gilby, London: Blackfriars, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1972, pp. 108-109.
- 15 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Selected Works*, Trans. G. R. Evans, New York: Paulist Press, 1987, p. 103.
- 16 B. Clairvaux, *Selected Works*, p. 51. [Sermon 42 on Canticle 6].
- 17 B. Clairvaux, *Selected Works*, p. 116.
- 18 Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1980, p. 97. *Summa Theologiae* II, II q.161 art 6, pp. 109-15.
- 19 B. Clairvaux, *Selected Works*, pp. 116-117.
- 20 *Summa Theologiae* II, II q.161 art 6; p. 111.
- 21 *Summa Theologiae* II, II q.161 art 1& 3, pp. 99-101.
- 22 *Summa Theologiae* II, II q.129 art.3-4, pp. 96-109.
- 23 *Summa Theologiae* II, II q.161 art.4, p.103.
- 24 *Summa Theologiae* II, II q.161 art.2, p. 95.
- 25 *Summa Theologiae* II, II q.161 art.2, p. 95.
- 26 *Summa Theologiae* II, II q.161 art.5, p. 107.
- 27 *Summa Theologiae* II, II q.161 art.4, p. 103.
- 28 *Summa Theologiae* II, II q.161 art.5, p. 107.

- 29 *Oeuvres de Saint François de Sales*, Edition complète d'après les autographes et les éditions originales, Par les soins des religieuses de la Visitation de Premier Monastère d'Annecy, (Annecy: Imprimerie J. Nierat, 1892-1932). 26 vols, et vol. 27. III, 161; Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Trans. Antony Mookenthottam et al, Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2002, p. 164.
- 30 *Oeuvres*, III, 151; *Introduction*, 157. In Salesian theology, *abjection* is neither 'self depreciation' nor 'meanness'. See, Antony Mookenthottam, "The Word Abjection in St. Francis de Sales," *Indian Journal of Spirituality*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2006, pp. 278-282.
- 31 See, *Oeuvres*, III, 151-54; *Introduction*, 157-60; *Oeuvres*, XIII, 204-06; Francis de Sale, *Selected Letters*, Trans. Elisabeth Stopp, New York: Harper and Bros., 1960, pp. 122-23; Saint François de Sales, *Oeuvres: Introduction à la vie dévote, Traité de l'Amour de Dieu, Recueil des Entretiens Spirituels: Préface et Chronologies* Par André Ravier, Textes présentés et annotés par André Ravier avec la collaboration de Roger Devos, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1969, p. 1082; *Oeuvres*, VI, 298.
- 32 See, *Oeuvres*, [Pléiade], 1087; *Oeuvres*, VI, 400; *Oeuvres*, XIV, 236.
- 33 *Oeuvres*, V, 107; Francis de Sales. *Treatise on the Love of God*. 2 vols. Trans., John K. Ryan, Illinois, Tan Publishers, 1975, 2: 95.
- 34 For further study, See, Andrew Murray, *Humility: The Journey Toward Holiness*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Bethany House, 2001; Chaetan Mary De Bergamo, *Humility of Heart*, Trans. Herbert Cardinal Varghese, Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, 1978; Francois Varillon, *The Humility and Suffering of God*, New York: Alba House, 1983; John Macquarrie, *The Humility of God*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978; Sebastian Carlson, *The Virtue of Humility*, Dubuque, Iowa: W. C. Brown. 1952.
- 35 Bernard Haring, *The Law of Christ*, Trans. Edwin G. Kaiser, Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1966, p. 56.
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- 37 B. Haring, *The Law of Christ*, p. 57.
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LEAD US FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT: TOWARDS A THEOLOGY AND METAPHOR OF PREACHING

Jose K. Jacob, SMM

This reflection on the theology of preaching evolves out of my readings on homiletics, the discussions I engaged in with some of my colleagues in preaching, my personal reflection on my own life and ministry. Two unchanging aspects of one's ministry of preaching are one's religious identity and cultural background. Both have considerable influence in one's formation as a preacher. For this reason, I want to approach this paper focusing on these two aspects of my cultural and religious identities and formation insofar as they pertain to my preaching ministry. As a

preacher ministering to the people, I have served in India and Papua New Guinea, both of which are Churches of the Cross, devoid of political power and economic independence. Preaching in such context calls for empowering the faithful to work for liberation both within and without. The first part of this paper deals with some important theological aspects of the ministry of preaching. The second part uses a metaphor to capture the dynamics of the ministry of preaching.

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Divine and Human

Among the many theologians I have read till date in relation to preaching, the theology of Edward Schillebeeckx seems to resonate most with my understanding of God, humanity, and creation. Though the Hindu concept of creation as an extension of the Divine is not identical with the Christian concept of creation, the belief that God is continually present and involved in creation seems to make sense to me. As we read in the Hindu Scriptures, “Brahman, the principle and origin from which the creatures arise, in which they live, and to which they return, is immanent and transcendent at the same time. It moves and remains still, is far and at the same time is near. It is within every thing and outside of everything” (Isha Upanishad, 1, 5). It is comforting to believe that God is part of all our existence and experiences, including the most tragic ones. God not only walked with our first parents in the Garden of Eden, but God continues to walk with us in the history of humanity and the personal history of individuals. The Triune God who is relational in nature and totally self-giving is the core of that relationship. Creation comes forth as the result of God’s

self-giving. Interrelatedness with God and one another is also at the core of human existence. Just like every other relationship, each individual’s relationship with God is one that involves waiting, doubt, uncertainties, joys, and disappointments. This view of life has many similarities with the Catholic view of salvation history, especially the theology of Edward Schillebeeckx who describes creations as an ongoing adventure of God.

The view of creation as an ongoing expression of God’s involvement in our history is termed ‘sacramental imagination.’ Humanity is an unfinished product. Humanity is flawed by its selfishness and the wrong use of its God-given freedom. But, in tune with the sacramental imagination, I would say that humanity is neither totally lost nor abandoned. God created humanity in God’s own image, and some elements of God’s goodness are retained in humanity, human recklessness and pride notwithstanding. God is not yet done with us. This is because the fidelity of the creator to creation is greater than the rebellion or weakness of creatures in relation to God. God who was present at creation, walked with the people of Israel, led the Church

in its journey to this point in history, has been present to our ancestors, and is also present and faithful to humanity in our time in history. In tune with Edward Schillebeeckx's theology of creation I believe that, "Creation is not a single event somewhere in the beginning, but an ongoing dynamic event. God wills to be the origin, here and now, of the worldliness of the world and the humanity of man. He wills to be with us in and with our finite task in the world."¹

St. Augustine spoke beautifully about our inner longing for God when he spoke about our hearts being made for God and our inability to find real peace apart from God. Hans Staffner S.J. speaking on some striking features of Hindu-Christian spirituality says, "In our innermost being there is a desire for boundless truth, goodness, and beauty, a longing for God who is *saccidananda*, infinite reality, wisdom, and joy. When going the interior way we find that believing in God means believing in ourselves; it means that believing that what is best in us is not doomed to frustration, but is capable of fulfillment."²

My experience of working with people of different ethnicities and

nationalities confirms this. Even in the tribal cultures like that of Papua New Guinea, where people are mostly isolated and primitive, there is the sense of the divine and the sense of community. This sense of the divine among all peoples of the earth is a pointer to the presence of God's Spirit who hovered over the waters at creation and is leading it towards a definite goal or purpose. This presence is made real also in individuals like Mother Teresa or Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela who witness to peace, truth, and true freedom that liberates humanity.

St. Irenaeus declared that the glory of God is the human being fully human and fully alive. God sees creation as good. It was created in love and it is loved, in spite of its flaws. Humanity becomes co-creator with God when it promotes new discoveries and inventions. This belief opens the way to a positive and healthy attitude towards life and makes us capable of promoting and rejoicing in goodness wherever we encounter it, in the footsteps of Jesus.

Christology

The God who journeys with creation is made real to us in the

person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is the personification of God's compassion and care for humanity. The Christ experience is proof for us that God's love for humanity prompts God to risk becoming human and thus become vulnerable. The Jesus I like to proclaim is the ultimate perfection that humanity can reach in relationship with the divine, human, and rest of creation. The priest and scientist Teilhard de Chardin saw Christ as the perfection of evolution. He saw the evolutionary process marching towards "*Christosphere or Omega Point*" as the ultimate goal. Jesus the Christ is the glimpse of what humanity can become. This perfection is reached in total harmonious relationship with the created universe, fellow human beings, and God. The Divine Word, present with humanity from the time of creation in all cultures and religions, enters our history in a tangible manner in Jesus of Nazareth. It is then meaningful to believe that this Word was and is available to human beings of all times, places, cultures, and religions who could not come into contact with the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. It makes perfect sense - to believe that God is accessible to all humanity giving them



the freedom to respond to God's invitation to a relationship of grace. In the religious culture of India it would make sense to affirm along with Edward Schillebeeckx and the Vatican Council II that

other religious faiths are also capable of leading people to salvation.

Soteriology

Salvation offered by the Trinitarian God is also communal in nature. The love of God and love of one another that Jesus preached was aimed at true communion. While personal relationship and commitment to God is essential, salvation is to be understood as a communal endeavor. The Eucharistic community is the foretaste or prefiguring of that salvation in its reaching out to one another, in genuine self-giving consisting of forgiveness, caring, and mutual respect. The call to all believers to work towards social justice and a preferential option for the poor attains meaning in this context. True peace is attainable only through true justice modeled after the justice of God in the Sacred Scriptures. It is a justice that hears the cry of the poor and disadvantaged.

Douglas John Hall emphasizes that the true freedom of Christians is a freedom that frees the Church from self-preoccupation or anxiety about self-preservation, and enables the Church to reach out in service.³ In the present Indian context the Church may not be seen as a Church of glory on the outside, though elements of this are present in its internal functioning. Especially in the post-independence India, Christians are a minority community without much political clout or influence. The Indian Church is often viewed as a presence in the service of education and health. Lately in some areas it is seen to challenge the established order where society is stratified on the basis of caste and other agents of segregation. This witness by the Church is a turn in the right direction of empowering the poor and marginalized in the spirit of the Gospel. In the given context of India, only such presence of service and witness will make the Church meaningful and a sacrament of salvation.

Preaching ministry holds enormous potential in the above task of empowering the marginalized. On the basis of above notions on history

and salvation I would like to present a metaphor to resemble effective preaching ministry.

Ministry of Preaching: A Metaphor

I propose an image from the Indian culture as a metaphor for the theology of preaching. The Indian culture is very religious in nature. There are many ways this religiosity is expressed in the day-to-day life of the people.

One such practice that is prevalent almost all over India is the lighting of the lamp at nightfall in every household and subsequent gathering of the family in prayer around the lighted lamp.

The most commonly used lamp for this daily ritual is made of pure brass and is set aside for use in family worship or individual prayer. The oil lamp in some way resembles a palm tree with a stem that rises from the base. At the top of the lamp is the figure of a mythical bird with a pointed beak. Below this bird figure there is the octagonal container that holds the oil. There are eight wicks that point outward from the eight corners of the octagon.

There is symbolic meaning attached to the shape and significance of

the lamp. The mythical bird that is figured on the top has a very special quality attributed to it according to the Hindu mythology. From a mixture of milk and water representing a world full of good and evil, darkness and light, kindness and cruelty, this bird is depicted as capable of separating the milk from the water, and drinking only the milk. The octagonal shape that holds the oil and the wicks that point in eight directions represent the universe. The mother who cares for and nourishes the members of the family usually does the lighting of the lamp at nightfall.

I offer as a metaphor for the theology of preaching the ritual of the lighting of this lamp for prayer, relating the different nuances of this symbol to the different aspects of preaching.

The Preacher

The mother of the house is entrusted with the task of lighting the lamp at nightfall. She is also the one who embodies care and nourishment to the members of the family. The figure of the mother is also an epitome of goodness and truth. She is the one who instills a sense of the Divine in her offspring. In other words the concept

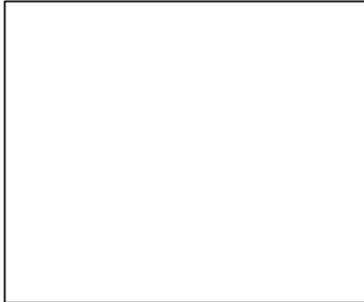
of the motherhood includes many ideals of humanity and embraces some attributes of God.

Similar expectations are placed on the person of the preacher. In the ministry of preaching the preacher is called and entrusted with this ministry by the community. He/she is the one who brings spiritual nourishment through breaking open the Word. The ethos of the preacher is of primary importance if the community is to hear

and accept the message from the preacher. In other words it is not only the words of the preacher but his/her whole life that stands as witness for the message. Andre Resner, quoting Daniel J. Baumann, outlines six characteristics of a

good preacher. They are: being called to apostleship; being healthy in body, mind and spirit; being disciplined; being compassionate; being humble; and being courageous.⁴ These qualities or expectations seem to resonate with those of the Christian community regarding the preacher as well as that of the ideal motherhood.

Another aspect of motherhood is that it is fully involved in the daily details of life and embraces successes and failures, sickness and health, joys



and sorrows under its mantle. There is hardly any aspect of day-to-day living that is alienated from her participation. Similarly a preacher is part of the life of the community he/she serves. Being involved in the day-to-day life of its members he/she is aware of the daily struggles, questions, uncertainties, failures, successes, and the mystery of it all. A man of God in the Indian tradition is called a *Yogin*. In the words of Thomas Kochumuttom, the former Director of the Centre for the Study of World Religions in Bangalore, India, “We may say that a *yogin* is a man of integrity. In him there is the harmonious blending of the spiritual and the material, the heavenly and the earthly, the human and the divine. In Christian terms a *yogin* is one whose spiritual, physical, and mental energies and capacities are integrated in and through Christ.”⁵ The preacher stands in the midst of real human experience and is not alienated from it. Hence he/she is able to proclaim God’s word of hope, comfort, chastisement, and direction for the community at a given time and place. He/she would also be in a position to seek God’s will for particular situations that the community faces.



As motherhood in the Indian culture stands more for service and nourishment than for power or authority, so is the call to preach one of spiritual nourishment and service of the community. In

the metaphor above, once her duty of lighting the lamp is done, the mother withdraws into the background and it is the light in the midst of the gathered family that is the focus of attention and devotion. An ideal preacher is also expected to draw the attention of the community to the presence and activity of God in their midst and aid the celebration of that divine presence rather than draw attention to the person of the preacher.

Christ as Light

In this metaphor the flame in the midst of the gathered family represents Christ in the ministry of preaching. The significance of light is that, by shining on objects around it, light differentiates one object from another. In the world of good and evil, certainties and doubt, Christ is the guide for the community. By His life and message Christ helps the community collectively and individually to discern between good and evil and choose the path that leads to life in abundance. It is Christ who

is the focus of attention for the community. As we pray in Psalm 36:9, “In His light we see light.” In that light the community is able to identify grace in their midst and acknowledge it as sign of God’s presence and involvement in their history. The same light will also help the community to point to the disgrace that hinders life and meaning. In each new event or situation the community can discern the right path in reference to Christ and the values of the kingdom of peace that He came to establish. The presence of Christ will also enable the community to remember God’s actions in history in favor of those who trust in God and move ahead with confidence that the God of history will be with them. Thus Christ will be the source of empowerment for the community.

Scripture and Tradition

The oil used in the lamp may be compared to the use of the Sacred Scripture and the Tradition in the ministry of preaching. As the oil enables the flame to shed light, so does the Scripture enables the community and the preacher to make the presence of Christ real and efficacious. The Tradition witnesses to the presence and guidance of the Spirit of God



that enabled those that went before us to be effective witnesses. It tells the story of how they walked the journey of life and faced the challenges of their day, hoping against hope and trusting in God’s

faithfulness. Scripture and Tradition are two sides of the same coin. Together they provide the believing community abundant riches to nourish their journey to God’s kingdom. Each community is therefore invited to write their own fifth Gospel by the way they see their life’s story unfold. In this context a word about stories and preaching is pertinent.

Stories in Preaching

The preacher uses all tools for the interpretation of Scripture available in the given time to discern God’s message for the community in different times and situations. The preacher invites the members to choose the path of life in Christ by searching the Scriptures, probing into the life situations, and sharing the stories. Modeled after the prophets of old, the preacher extends this invitation in forms of encouragement, challenge, or chastisement where needed. In some instances this message may even be countercultural after the model of

Christ. In some other instances the preacher will become a prophet of hope and new vision thus inviting the people in the community to become what God calls them to be. In the words of Mary Catherine Hilkert, “Shared stories fuel hopes, forge solidarity, and empower action... Christians are convinced that tragedy can be transformed precisely because the death of Jesus is not the end of his story. In the resurrection the Spirit of God has broken the power of the bonds of sin and death and does indeed make all things new. That same spirit has been poured out on all creation, holding open future possibilities in the most desperate of circumstances, sustaining the human capacity to endure and to hope, empowering a core of freedom in the depth of the human spirit.”⁶

In the context of India this prophetic call can become very real in empowering the community to find means to true liberation from demeaning structures of oppressions like the caste system and economic deprivation. Some of these invitations or challenges can find real resistance from both inside and outside the believing community. Prophetic

preaching makes the preacher vulnerable to hostility, inviting the person of the preacher to follow in the footsteps of the Master.

Finally, the mythical bird in our metaphor, should remind the preacher to draw strength from the good that is all around. Such preaching recognizes the finality of human existence and our powerlessness in the face of colossal evil without the help of God. Such

preaching trusts in the fidelity of God which is capable of bringing good out of evil, a fidelity that refuses to give up on humanity. Within the framework of a world where good and evil reside side by side, an ideal preacher

recognizes choices made in obedience to the promptings of the Spirit and looks to the future with confidence. In the words of Duncan Macpherson, “The preacher is called to affirm and to further everything that sets human beings free to fulfill their potential as children of God and to oppose whatever limits or undermines it.”⁷ Such preachers will be able to announce to the community that the plans God has for humanity are for good and not evil, for life and not for death. There is room for further interpretation of the

wicks in the lamp to the tools engaged in effective preaching, which is not taken up in this article.

Preaching aimed at Renewal

“And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God” (Phil 1:9-11).

Renewed commitment of the faithful is the need of the hour in our time in history, where indifference is the cancer that eats up our society. Preaching should invite the members to value their vocation as Christians, drawing inspiration also from the cloud of witnesses to the faith in history, and inviting them to be active in ministry, to speak for righteousness and justice, and to do this in love. Such renewal calls for new methods and imagination in preaching. Speaking of imagination Barbara Brown Taylor says, “Imagination is a way of seeing--a way of living--that requires a loosening of grips, a willingness to be surprised, confused, amazed by the



undreamt-of ways that God chooses to be revealed to us. To find the extraordinary hidden in the ordinary, we are called to participate in God’s own imagination--to see ourselves, our neighbors, and our world through God’s eyes, full of possibility, full of promise, ready to be transformed.”⁸

Such preaching will be possible as the result of daily study and search, willingness to try new ways, and courage to step into the unfamiliar. In relation to the metaphor, lighting of the lamp is an ongoing daily ritual similar to the task of renewal. The ministry of preaching too is taken up in response to the call to throw light on the presence and action of God in our midst proclaiming hope for a world that longs for it.

Conclusion

There is a renewed interest and a fresh breath of energy in the ministry of preaching in our times. This ministry is sure to undergo radical changes in tune with all the new challenges that are facing the Church today in different parts of the world. Speaking about the future of preaching Joseph M Webb writes, “Preaching in the twenty first century will provide the means by

which preacher and people will rethink and reformulate both the nature and content of Christian faith, will rework the Bible's role in the new time and place, come to terms with the nature of religion itself in this century and will explore in creative and meaningful ways the problem of living as an ethical moral person in an ambiguous and corrupt world."⁹

The sacramental imagination looks at the world not only as corrupt and ambiguous but also as graced by God's presence. Our call as ministers of the Word is to be prophetic and hopeful, to engage in the struggle with those who search for true freedom, and to be living witnesses to God's unfailing fidelity.

A Sanskrit prayer in the Hindu Scriptures, which is also commonly used in Christian circles in India, seeks for deliverance from untruth, darkness, and death:

Asathoma Satgamaya
Thamsoma Jyothirgamaya
Mruthyoma Amrutham Gamaya
(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad Part 1 Ch.3 V.8)

The translation of the verse is as follows:

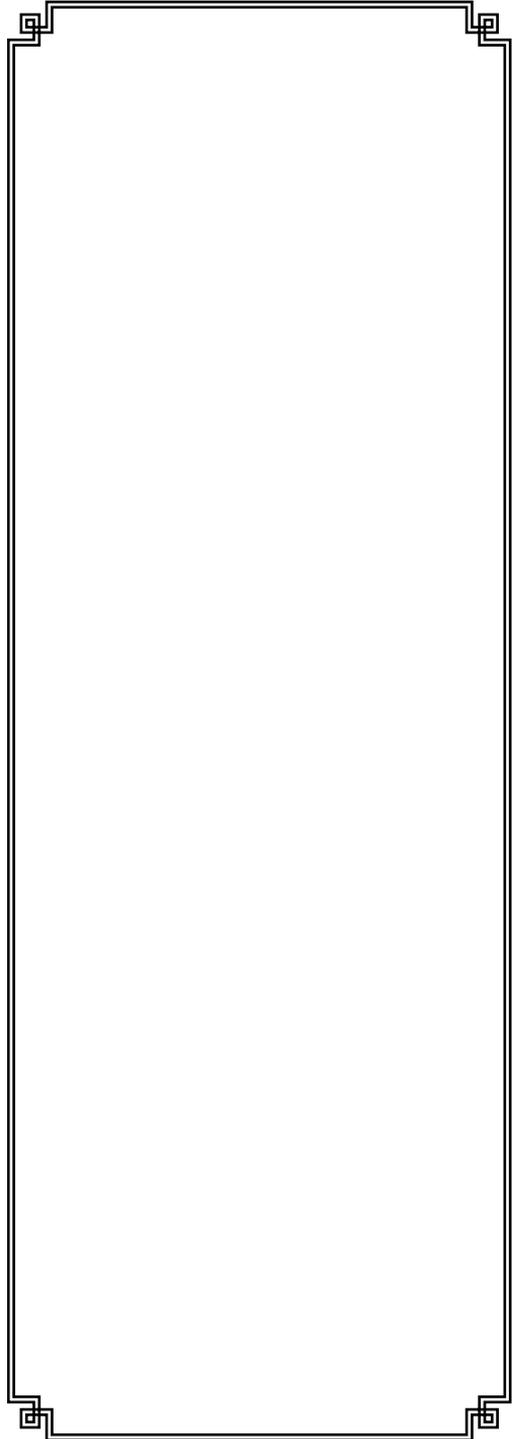
Lead us from falsehood to Truth
From darkness to Light
From death to immortality.

The Ministry of preaching is one that aims at leading the individual and the community "from falsehood to Truth, from darkness to Light and from death to Immortality." Thus the preacher keeps lighting the lamp to shine light and bring hope in the encircling gloom of our history and enables those who believe to make it the history of salvation.

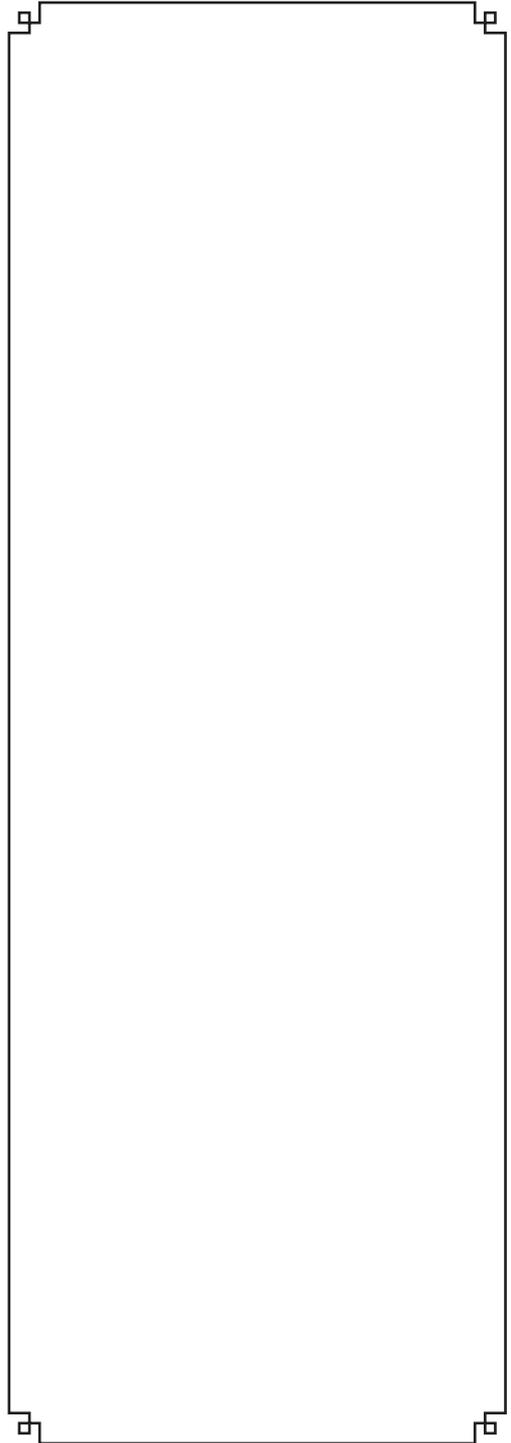
Endnotes

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BOOK REVIEW



DOCUMENTATION

STATEMENT OF THE XIV ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF KARNATAKA REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF RELIGIOUS (KRCR)

28-31 AUGUST 2008, MOUNT ST. JOSEPH, BANGALORE

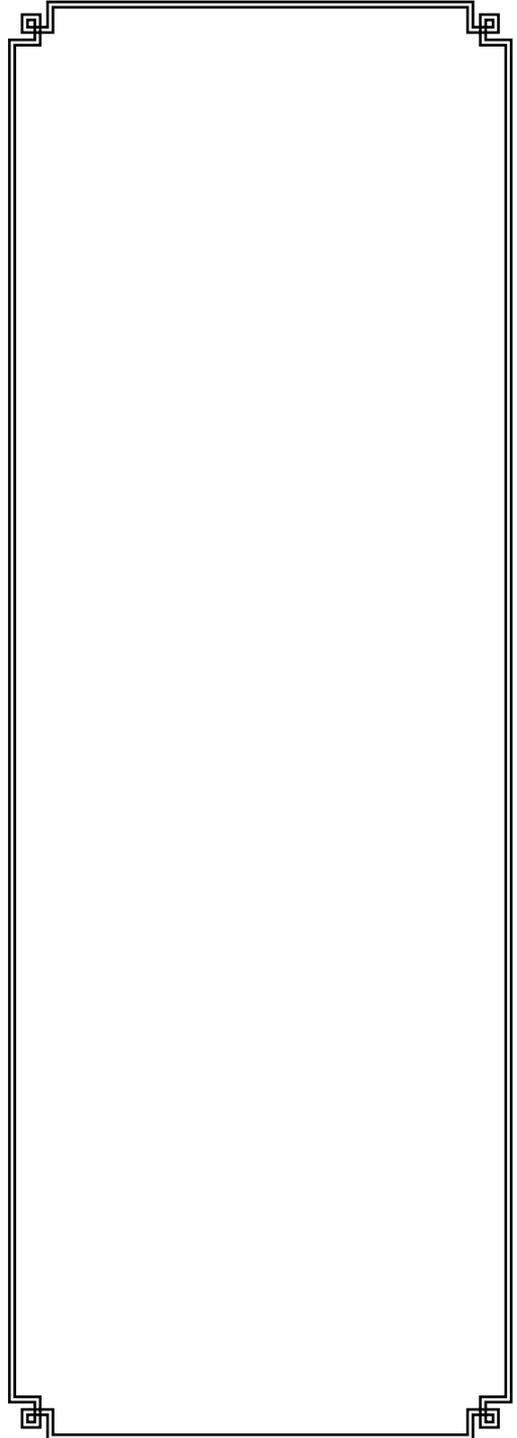
PREAMBLE: We, the 93 participants-Major Superiors, their representatives and the executive members of local CRI units have gathered for the XIV Annual General Assembly at Mount St. Joseph, Bangalore from 28-31 August 2008 to reflect on the theme, “*The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Religious.*” This General Assembly is very significant because of “*Kristotsava*” celebrated in November 2007 and the forthcoming XII Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to take place in Rome, from 5-26 October 2008, on the theme, “*Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church.*” We are also aware and are affected by the recent attacks on the Christian community in Orissa. It is in this context, we place before you the outcome of the input sessions, discussions and deliberations.

1. The Church has dedicated this year to St. Paul. We see in him a model for our life and mission as Religious: his passion for Christ crucified, radicality of his commitment to the Mission, his love for the Churches, zeal for the Word of God, his courage in the face of adversities, his concern for the weaker members and his positive attitude towards the ambient cultures.
2. Having studied his missionary thrust, we give a clarion call to all the Religious of Karnataka, to present Christ as the model of our faith, living our lives in His footsteps, following the values of compassion, forgiveness, service and openness to the people of other faiths.
3. The foundational Charism of every congregation is inspired by the Word of God, especially, the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth. The fundamental inspiration has found expression in the various apostolates

of different congregations, such as, healing, teaching, preaching, and a radical option for the poor.

4. Among the many challenges faced by the Religious in Karnataka today in living the evangelical counsels are: the influence of counter values, such as, materialism, consumerism, individualism, craze for power and the negative influences of the media. Confronted by these challenges, we return to the sources of our foundational Charism, in the light of the Word of God, reevaluating our goals and objectives in the context of India today, by renewing our formation.
5. We acknowledge that in some of our formation programmes, there are no adequate steps taken to promote the systematic study of the Word of God. Care should be taken to inculcate in the formees, love for the Word of God, through various ways and means. To facilitate this, we will: i) set up a commission to draw up a syllabus for different stages of formation. ii) draw up a list of Biblical scholars who are available to conduct Biblical courses. iii) arrange such courses in different centers to foster collaboration among congregations.
6. We propose that a new thrust be given to our apostolic commitment for the promotion of the Word of God by: a) making available the copies of the Bible in different languages b) promoting the study and the use of the Word of God as an integral part of all our apostolic endeavors.
7. We appreciate the presence of the *seeds of the Word of God* in other faiths and the values they uphold and together with them we respond to the threats of fundamentalism and to the recent attacks on our Christian sisters and brothers in Orissa by: i) fostering inter religious harmony through networking, dialogue, and collaboration at different levels to promote pluralistic values ii) create among all sections of Christian communities, especially the Laity, an understanding of the phenomenon of fundamentalism and evolve an adequate response, based on Gospel values, iii) create an office of PRO at all levels especially for crisis management.
8. In response to the invitation of the National CRI, to empower the CRI to be an effective organ in the life of the Church, we propose the following: a) participation by the Major Superiors at the Regional level and the Local Superiors at the local level should be mandatory b) care should be taken to facilitate the implementation of the CRI deliberations and decisions in every congregation c) the statutes, goals and objectives of the CRI should become part of the formation programme for all religious d) pooling of resources both at the local and regional level.

CONCLUSION: The deliberations of this General Assembly of KRCR convince us more than ever before, that the Word of God is the rock on which the foundational Charism of Religious Life stands. In the light of this conviction, we the Religious of Karnataka renew our commitment in our life and mission, facing the challenges of today, as St. Paul did in his own time.



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