

S A N Y A S A

Journal of Consecrated Life

The Word of God in Consecrated Life



Vol. III, No. 2 July - December 2008

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EDITORIAL

In the history of the Catholic Church, the year 2008 is going to be a memorable one, since, many Assemblies and Seminars globally and locally have already chosen the theme, "*The Word of God*" for their serious and systematic theological reflections and discussions. The most important ones are the following: The 5th South Asian Workshop of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) was held at Sarvodaya, Mumbai from 2nd to 5th January 2008 on the topic, "*Word of God: Source of Justice and peace (in the Context of South Asia)*." The 7th Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania from 24th June to 3rd July 2008 was also held on the theme "*Word of God: Source of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*." As the climax point, the most significant event, as it has already been announced, the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will take place from 5th to 26th October 2008. The theme of this Synod of Bishops, as many might have come across, is "*The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*."

After having successfully organized the XI Ordinary General

Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on "*The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church*," there was an inner urge prompted by the Spirit to pay attention to the Word of God. Going a step further, after forty years of the declaration of the Conciliar Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, the Church wanted to make an introspection of its impact on the people of God and "to promote an inspired rediscovery of the Word of God as a *living, piercing and active force*" in the life and mission of the Church. Hence the Church has come out with the idea of organizing the Synod of Bishops, 2008 on the Word of God. The rationale behind this Synod, as its *Lineamenta* or draft guidelines make it clear to us is that it "wishes to set forth, in continuity with the preceding one, the intrinsic connection between the Eucharist and the Word of God, since the Church must receive nourishment from the one 'bread of life from the table of both God's word and Christ's body'" (EV 21). In short, the underlying purpose and primary goal of the Synod is "to fully encounter the Word of God in Jesus the Lord, present in the Sacred Scriptures and the Eucharist."

By drawing inspiration from the theme of the Synod of 2008, Sanyasa Institute of Consecrated Life took the initiative to do the theological reflections locally in accordance with the nature of the Institute and in taking into consideration the signs of the times of the local Church. Hence, the theme, *"The Word of God in Consecrated Life"* was chosen for this seminar, signifying the role of the Word of God in the life and mission of every Consecrated person. The main theme of this seminar was divided into four sub-topics by taking into account the constitutive components of Consecrated Life, namely, *"Word of God in Our Call and Consecration," "Word of God in Our Spiritual Journey," "Word of God in the Fraternal Life in Community,"* and *"Word of God in the Mission of Consecrated Persons."* Each day, one of the above-mentioned topics was dealt with by a competent person.

In general, the perception of the Word of God goes beyond considering it as "mere external utterance or intellectual discourse." It is basically viewed as God's communication of Himself to His creation. In the beginning, God's self-communication, the manifestation of His infinite love, was revealed through His creation. Therefore, every created reality is broadly seen as the Word of God. But in course of time, the Word of God was

also associated with the person of Jesus, the Word became flesh, the Sacred Scriptures and the proclamation of the Church. So, the Word of God is endowed with different forms. In this context, it is worth mentioning the expression of St. Bonaventure *"liber naturae, liber scripturae and liber vitae,"* the book of nature, of scripture and of life. All these forms ultimately manifest God's love to the world. Today, it is interesting to note that the Word of God plays a vital role in all branches of theology, catechesis and the liturgy and thus inviting us to fully encounter God's Word in our day today life. As Religious, it is all the more vital to know the relevance of God's Word in Consecrated Life.

Consecrated Life is a way of life in the Church to be lived by following and imitating Jesus Christ, the divine, eternal and incarnate Word, who is present and speaks to us through his Word. Hence, the Religious are expected to view the divine scriptures as the 'excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Phil 3:8). Having understood this notion, St. Jerome rightly indicated that those who are ignorant of the scriptures are ignorant of Christ himself. Thus, the spirituality of Consecrated persons is intimately connected to God's Word because it is the Word of God, which is perceived as "the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life" (DV 21). Prayer

as well as contemplation, which are considered to be part and parcel of Consecrated Life, "provide the ambient for the reception of the Word of God and at the same time they spring from listening to the Word" (SA 25). It is all the more significant to remember that the Religious cannot think of achieving their holiness without adhering to it. Basing on this perspective, Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic letter at the beginning of New millennium, insisted: "It is especially necessary that listening to the Word of God should become a life giving encounter... which draws from the biblical text the living Word which questions, directs and shapes our lives" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte* 39).

While speaking about the inter-connectedness between the Word of God and the fraternal life in Religious community, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life underlines that "fraternity is not only a fruit of human effort but also and above all a gift of God. It is a gift that comes from obedience to the Word of God..." (48). Moreover, the mutual love that needs to exist in order to bring about and strengthen the communion among the members of the community is certainly nourished by both God's Word and the Eucharist. From the perspective of the mission of the Religious, they are specially consecrated for mission

depending upon the charism of their own congregations, but ultimately for the mission of establishing God's Kingdom on earth. If they want to be faithful to their mission it is absolutely necessary that they renew their lives in the light of God's Word (VC 85). Above all, their mission consists in bringing His Word to others. The successes of their mission purely depends upon in knowing God's will and acting according to it by constantly being in touch with His Word.

It is not an exaggeration to say that, in the recent past, there is a rapid growth among the laity in terms of reading the Word of God. But are we in a position to say the same trend is prevailing among the Consecrated persons? The reality makes us to understand that it is not something positive and there is a lot to improve. Thus, it is of great importance that we should be much more familiar with His Word. But it does not mean to restrict ourselves to the mere reading of the Bible in the liturgical celebrations. Instead we are expected to go further in terms of reading it personally and in community. Here we need to be extraordinarily prudent in not yielding to the temptation of clinging to the fundamentalist reading. As a whole, our constant and consistent touch with the Word of God will ultimately enable us to be competent, relevant and effective in our life and mission.

This issue of our journal basically contains the papers presented during the seminar about which I mentioned above. Besides, it also carries two other articles, namely, "*Democratized Holiness amidst Conflicts: Biblical Perspectives*" and "*Prophecy of Religious Life Today*." The article of Arul Jesu Robin basically consists of three parts. In the first part, he examines how the Word of God plays a vital role in the call and consecration of a few saints and a biblical hero. In the second, he shows that many people of the Old Testament were transformed by the Word of God. In the third section, he underlines that the words of Jesus become the powerful means of transformation. Finally, he concludes his article by requesting the consecrated people to build up their lives on the foundation of the Word of God.

While dealing with the essential elements of the biblical spirituality, R.J. Raja invites the Religious to be basically communitarian in their approach, to be the sharers in the poverty of Christ, to balance the double dimensions, namely, contemplation and active love, to be filled with joy, and to find God in everything that He created. In the second part, he gives us a vivid picture of some of the models of discipleship which are based on the only model, Jesus. He exhorts the Religious either to follow any one of these models or to

come out with their own by emulating Jesus.

Through his article, Augustine Mulloor cautions today's Religious to become aware that the community life is slowly being influenced by the superficial culture, that is developing in our society, promoting individualism, destructive competition, exploitation and profit-orientation, professionalism, workaholism, activism, lack of respect for life and so on. In this background, he sincerely calls them to work for the emergence of Religious community as an authentic Word-centred and Word-witnessing fellowship and communion which is based on authentic values.

Jose Maniparampil interprets the mission of Jesus and his disciples in terms of a war against the satanic forces manifested in different forms. In his article "The Plot of the Gospel of Mark" he analyses how Jesus, who belongs to God's party, enters into conflict with the evil forces, which work against the Kingdom of God. Certainly, Jesus seems to be an isolated and abandoned person in his fight against them but ultimately becomes victorious over them on the cross and thus to be acclaimed as the Son of God. Thus today's followers of Jesus should be daring to take up the cross daily in their commitment to the poor and the oppressed.

Maria Arul Raja is of the view that the suffering, marginalized and victimized people can enter into a new form of life and create a new space of 'heaven' here on earth if they really search for authentic holiness. This is the ever-recurring experience of the anawim of Yahweh in the Old Testament and the unjust victims of Jesus' times. But it is an on-going process that the Word of God facilitates and hastens the same. Finally the author invites each one to partake in the struggle of creating a just and egalitarian society strengthened by the Word of God.

Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes in his article "Prophecy of Religious Life Today," examines the use of the language of prophecy, its roots and illuminating principles and the traits of the prophetic alternative towards which the Spirit is leading us. He further deals with the different dimensions that are involved in the prophetic ministry of Consecrated Life namely the prophecy of hospitality, of the meaning of life, of the voluntary impoverishment, of realism, the prophetic beatitude and wisdom and prophetic imagination.

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Chief Editor

"The task of ordained ministers is to instruct the faithful in a proper conception of the Word of God by avoiding erroneous or over-simplistic approaches and any ambiguity. Emphasis needs to be placed on the Word of God's intrinsic connection to the mystery of the Trinitarian God and his Revelation; its manifestation in the world of creation; its germinal presence in the life and history of humanity; its supreme expression in Jesus Christ; its infallible confirmation in Sacred Scripture and its transmission in the living Tradition of the Church. Since the employment of human language is part of the mystery of the Word of God, research in the sciences of language and communication will necessarily be involved." (Linamenta of the Synod of Bishops, 2008, n. 10f.)

"For various reasons, many people's knowledge of the Scriptures and their recourse to the Bible in the church is not totally satisfactory. At times, there is a reluctance to take up passages from the Old Testament which appear difficult. These run the risk of being set aside, considered arbitrarily or never read at all. The faith of the Church considers the Old Testament a part of the one Christian Bible and acknowledges its permanent value and the bond between the two testaments (DV 15-16). This situation urgently requires a formation centred on a Christian reading of the Old Testament. This task can be assisted by liturgical practice which always makes the reading of the Old Testament essential for a full understanding of the New Testament. Jesus himself confirmed this in the Emmaus account where the Master, 'beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures' (Lk 24:27). The liturgical readings of the Old Testament can serve as an invaluable tool in providing for a specific, working encounter with the Sacred Text, which consists in using both the responsorial psalm as an invitation to pray and meditate on what is proclaimed, and the thematic link between the first reading and the Gospel in light of the general plan of the mystery of Christ. In this regard, it can truly be said, 'The New is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed: Novum in vetere latet et in Novo Vetus patet.' (Linamenta of the Synod of Bishops, 2008, n. 17.)

THE WORD OF GOD IN THE CALL AND CONSECRATION

Arul Jesu Robin, CMF

Introduction

There is going to be the Synod of Bishops (12th Ordinary General Assembly) from 5th to 26th October 2008. The theme for the Synod is "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church." Already we have received the "lineament" (*lineamenta*) for discussion and suggestion. In the lineament, the Pope says, "Let the Word of God be the guiding principle to you all." This is what the Psalmist says: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119:115).

On 9th April 2006 while addressing the youth in Rome on the occasion of

21st International Youth day, the Pope said, "I urge you to become familiar with the Bible and have it at hand so that it can be your compass pointing out the road to follow."

This happened in the life of Viktor Frankl, a popular Jewish psychotherapist and writer. He was arrested by the Nazis and made to undergo inhuman forms of sufferings. Many of the prisonmates died in the concentration camp. He was one among the few survivors released after the Nazis regime. While in prison, he was haunted by this question, "All the prisoners face similar forms of torture. While many died of this, a few

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survive. What makes them survive?" After deep study, observation, and reflection, he came out with the answer, "Those who survived either lived for something or somebody." He himself wanted to complete his research, and that kept him going. The others wanted to meet their friends or the children left at home. Based on this, he developed the Meaning Therapy. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, he observes, "Teach people why they are living and they will live somehow." The meaning becomes so central in their life that in realizing it they are ready even to vouch their life. God called Paul to be an apostle among the gentiles. For Paul, this became the sole purpose of his life. To achieve this everything else was considered rubbish. For Solomon, the wisdom to discern good from evil was far superior to long life, wealth and power. For the merchants, purchase of the treasure and the pearl is important. For this sake, they are prepared to forfeit everything else.

In the life of many persons, who are called for special consecration, what pushed them and gave meaning for their life was Jesus and his words. When we reflect about the Word of God, we should not be narrow in understanding the written words or what we call the Scripture alone as the Word of God. In fact, Jesus himself is the Word of God, the incarnate Word. This is what John

the evangelist says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life" (1 Jn 1:1). So John clearly states that Jesus is the Word of God incarnated, who took human flesh.

The lives of many saints are beautiful examples of the importance of the Word in the call and consecration. We shall reflect only on the lives of a few saints and see how the Word of God played such a decisive role in their call and consecration.

St. Antony, the Abbot felt his vocation while he was 18. The words 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), touched him. All he had was a piece of farm. He sold it, gave some portion to his sister who was orphan like him, gave the rest to the poor and began to follow Jesus. He dedicated his entire life to reading, meditating and praying the Word of God.¹

St. Francis of Assisi loved the church and his mother country. He was at Spoleto and there he heard Jesus' voice: "Where are you going? Whom do you

want to serve? Go back to Assisi and you will be informed what you should do?" He too heard the same words that St. Antony, the Abbot heard (Mt 19:21). He gave up everything even the cloths that he was wearing and became a great follower of Jesus.

St. Francis Xavier was born into a rich family. He was a professor in Paris with all types of attachments with worldly desires. He came into contact with St. Ignatius of Loyola, who wanted to change the attitude and life style of Francis Xavier. Yes, the Word of God transformed him: "For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?" (Mt 16:2).

We know the life of St. Augustine. He was much fascinated by the pleasures of the world and indeed he was just slave to them all. One day, he realized his sinfulness, was so confused about his life and his state of being. There he heard the inner voice, "Take and read, take and read." Immediately, he ran to his room, found the Bible on his table, opened the passage and read, "the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for

the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom 13:12-14). Well, the rest is an extraordinary history. He simply could not read any further. He closed the book. Tears began to roll down his cheeks. He put an end to his sinful and lustful life and began a new chapter in his life and became a remarkable saint.²

St. Anthony Mary Claret, the founder of the Congregation of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary popularly known as the Claretians, was indeed great lover of the Word of God. It was the Word of God that helped him discern his call and sustained him in his vocation. One of the biblical passages that helped him discover his vocation was, "For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?" (Mt 16:2).³

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was much moved by the sufferings of humanity specially the sufferings caused by poverty and sickness. She wanted to do something for them. It is the Word of God that shaped her "call within the call" to dedicate her life fully for the poor and unwanted. The words of Jesus, "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) enabled her to see the smile of Jesus in the smile of the poor.

We shall turn our attention now to a biblical hero, king Josiah who was consecrated and made the king of Judah at the age of 8. He reigned Judah from 648 to 609 B.C. When the Scripture speaks of him, it says, "Josiah did what was right in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left" (2 Kg 22:2). This is the greatest compliment. Why is it given to Josiah? He wanted to reform his kingdom at the age of 26 because he went around the country and found only evils. He went around the Jerusalem temple. There were many priests but their worship was far away from YHWH. He was shocked. He wanted total reformation in politics, religion and society. He began the reformation from the Jerusalem temple. There they found the archive in a bad condition, opened it and found the book of the law. When he heard the book of the law, he tore his cloth (2 Kg 22:1). On the basis of the Word of the Lord, he began the reformation. He removed everything that was against the Word.⁴

The Word of God and Consecration in The Old Testament

1. The Vocation of Israel as the People of God

"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples

on earth to be his people, his treasured possession" (Dt 7:6). This text speaks of the consecration of the Israelites as the people of God, as those who are specially chosen and set apart by YHWH. Consecration here means that the people of Israel belong to YHWH and only to YHWH. There are supposed to be at the service of YHWH always and they are sacred for YHWH. Immediately, YHWH instructs them how they should live if they really wanted to be the people of God. "Now therefore, if you *obey my voice* and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6).

The Israelites belongs exclusively to YHWH. They are people consecrated to YHWH. It is a free gratuitous gift from YHWH to the people of Israel. They do not deserve it. What should they do for having received this great gift? They should listen to the voice of God and live accordingly. God's will should be their will and God's project should be their project as well. They have a common vision and common project. But they have to give primary importance to the word of God.⁵ We find it clearly in Dt 5:4-9, "Hear, Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with

all your might. Keep *these words* that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

The phrase, “these words,” recalls the opening words of Deuteronomy (1:1). The commandments are to be *upon your heart*; that is, the people are to meditate upon them to the point that the law is internalized, exactly as Jeremiah saw so clearly when he spoke of a new covenant in which YHWH declares, “I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts” (Jer 31:31–33). By reflecting on God’s words (6:1), and by knowing the path of life set forth through the commandments, the people would discover for themselves the way in which God’s love for them was shown.

Having understood these commandments in depth, they were then responsible to teach them diligently to their children. The commandments were to be the focus of constant discussion inside and outside home. In short, they were to permeate every sphere of human life. The injunctions of verses 8-9 led in turn to specific practices which, at times, caused people

to lose sight of the remarkable vision of an internalized covenant suggested in verses 5-7. These words were taken literally in subsequent Jewish history. The frontlet, or phylactery, came into use as a small container for a parchment containing certain biblical verses. Verses 8-9 clearly show that the individual Israelite, his home, and his community were to be distinguished by their obedience to the commandments as a response of love for God.⁶

There is another interesting passage which points out the importance of the Word of God in the life of the Israelites. It was said in the context of the miraculous feeding of Manna by YHWH. “He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Dt 8:3).

2. The Call of Abraham

Right from the beginning, we find the importance of the Word of God in the call of Abraham. He was asked to give up all that he held as dear. He had to give up his security and hold the Word of God as his only treasure and security. The Word of God commanded him to detach himself from persons, place and things, “Go from your country and your

kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Gen 12:1). His obedience in a way changed the curse of disobedience to the Word of God that began with Adam and Eve. His obedience gave way to blessing, and blessing after blessing, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:2-3).⁷

Certainly Abraham must have been surprised and even to some extent afraid by these challenging and demanding words of YHWH to give up everything and follow him trusting in his Word. But he put his complete trust in the words of the Lord, "Do not be afraid, Abraham, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great" (Gen 15:1).

3. The Vocation of Moses

His mission was to communicate the words of liberation of YHWH to Pharaoh and the Israelites. He had to say that the Lord had heard their cry and seen their sufferings and thus come to liberate them from the land of slavery. But to carry out this mission, Moses had to communicate. He needed to be an excellent orator. Here came the difficulty, the objection. "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the

past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Ex 4:10). Once again, YHWH reiterated that Moses' mission was not to communicate his words but the words of YHWH. So there was no need for him to worry about what to say and what not to say. God would take care of him: "Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak" (4:12).

4. The Vocation of Joshua

For the first time, we find the imposition of hands in the vocation of Joshua. By this act of Moses in the presence of Eleazar, the priest and people, Joshua received two missions: charismatic and politico-military. He was a charismatic leader. So he was full of wisdom (Dt 34:9). He was also a spiritual leader. So what should he do specially? "The book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous and then you shall be successful" (Jos 1:8). He was given the mission to transmit the Word of God to the people (Jos 20:1-6).

Generally, in the Bible, we have reactions or expressions of inadequacy and unworthiness to the call received. But in the case of Joshua, we do not have anything of that sort. But we know that

he was assured of God's help with the traditional, "I will be with you." But in the case of assurance too, the importance of the Word of God was stressed. "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go" (Jos 1:7).

He was faithful to the Word and he taught his people to be so also. "Therefore be very steadfast to observe and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right nor to the left so that you may not be mixed with these nations left here among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them to serve them or bow your selves down to them but hold fast to the Lord your God as you have done to this day" (Jos 23:6-8).⁸

5. The Vocation of Samuel

It was 12th century B.C. and the "Word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread" (1 Sam 3:1). It was in this background that Samuel received the call from the Lord to preach the Word.

Samuel was still young being formed by his spiritual guru Eli. He had not yet reached the stage to discern the voice of God and to respond to God's

Word. Hence he needed the guidance and assistance of his master Eli. Eli understood that it was the Word of God that called the young boy Samuel. So he advised him, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, speak, Lord for your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:9). The Word of God came again. This time, Samuel was not afraid. He had been informed sufficiently by Eli. So this time, he was well prepared. He identified rightly the Word of God and responded joyfully and positively, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:10). YHWH spoke and Samuel listened and without any objection, he accepted the mission that YHWH entrusted to him. His mission was to be prophet (1 Sam 3:20) and judge (1 Sam 7:16). As a prophet, he was to be the mouthpiece of God. He had to listen to the Word of God and to communicate the same faithfully to people of God. It was not his words but the Word of the Lord that had to be communicated to the people. Since he communicated only the Word of God, all that he said would come true (1 Sam 9:6) and none of his words would go in waste (1 Sam 3:19). He was indeed the mouthpiece of God and people really understood that his words were the words of the Lord: "As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD. The

LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel." (1 Sam 3:19-4:1). And the New Jerusalem Bible adds, "The word of Samuel was as the word of YHWH."

Samuel lived his vocation in two phases: as Levite nazirite,⁹ he took care of tabernacle in the temple of Silo and as prophet-judge of Israel, he proclaimed the Word of God and liberated the Israelites from the oppression of Philistines. It was these two aspects that enabled him to be faithful to his vocation and that merit our special mention: consecration to the Lord and obedience to the Word of God.

6. The Vocation of David

In the vocation of king David, a special stress is seen about consecration. In the case of David, he was not only elected but also consecrated to the Lord. The expression "consecrated to the Lord" (*m^ešîhō*) underlines the intimate relationship between the one who calls and the one who is called. In order to consecrate David, God sent Samuel to Jesse of Bethlehem with oil in the horn. As David, the last entered in, YHWH told Samuel, "Rise, and *anoint* him; for this is the one" (1 Sam 16:12b).

The call of David was accompanied by a sacred rite, consecration conferred by a mediator, Samuel in the presence of his father and brothers. Because of the consecration, David was mightily filled by the spirit of the Lord. It was by anointing that David became a consecrated person. It is to be noted how much David himself had respect for the anointed. He refused to attack Saul though he got clear chances simply because he was anointed to the Lord: "Do not destroy him; for who can raise his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?" (1 Sam 26:9; see also 24:7, 11; 26:11, 23; 2 Sam 1:14-16). The consecrated David received his strength from the Lord and from His Word. He challenged the Philistines with these words: "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of armies of Israel" (1 Sam 17:45). Even Saul recognized that the Lord was with him, the power of God's mighty Word was with David, that he was afraid: "Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul" (1 Sam 18:12).¹⁰

It was only at the end of his life that the sacred author highlighted his faithfulness to the Word of God in spite of his human failure in committing adultery and killing Uriah. He was about to die and his son Solomon was to

be a new king. He advised the new king with the following words exhorting him to be faithful to the Word of God: "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn. Then the LORD will establish his word that he spoke concerning me: 'If your heirs take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel'" (1 Kg 2:1-4).

7. The Vocation of the Prophets

Nabi is the Hebrew word for prophet, which means messenger of God. The English 'prophet' comes from the Greek word *prophetēs*, which means mouthpiece or speaking on behalf of someone. So prophet is the mouthpiece of God or one who speaks on behalf of God. Prophets are called by God to communicate the Word of God to the people. There is no prophet without communicating the Word of God because his very vocation is by the Word of God and his mission is to communicate the Word to the people. There is an interesting incident in the life of prophet Jeremiah. King Zedekiah

sent for Jeremiah and asked him, "Is there any word from the Lord?" (37:17).

Let us look at another example. It was the time of great famine and Jehoshaphat wanted to know the mind of the Lord. So he said, "Is there no prophet of the Lord here, through whom we may inquire of the Lord" (2 Kg 3:11). So we can even say that the personal charism of any prophet is to communicate the Word of God. The people themselves realized it when they said, "Come let us make plots against Jeremiah ... instruction shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet" (Jer 18:18).

The prophets before communicating the Word that was revealed to them by God should proclaim it in their own lives. That is the reason for many symbols in their lives. Prophet Hosea married a prostitute Gomer and gave symbolic names to his three children (Hos 1-3). Prophet Jeremiah simply renounced marriage: "The word of the Lord came to me: You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place" (cf. 16:1-9). Prophet Ezekiel was asked not to mourn the death of his wife (Eze 24:15-27). Thus they actually lived the Word that was proclaimed to the people.¹¹ In that sense even to the prophets, the words of John the evangelist can be applied

to: "The Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1:14).

8. The Call of Prophet Jeremiah

Jeremiah was called by God in 7th century B.C. to communicate His Word. He had to undergo sufferings, insults and humiliations on behalf of the Word. Yet he loved the Word so much, and with great courage, he ministered to the Word. He communicated the Word through his own life, words and symbols.

The important Hebrew word that we find in the book of Jeremiah is *dabar* which means "Word." We find it at least two hundred times in singular or plural form. Though it does not mean always the Word of YHWH, on many occasions, it does denote the Word of YHWH. Jeremiah was called to listen to this Word, without fear, he had to communicate this Word to the people. Without closing their eyes and hearts, people should also listen to this Word and keep the Word in their lives (cf. 7:21-28).

His call and the Word of God

The call was communicated to him through the Word of Lord (Jer 1:2, 4). In the origin of his call, there was "the Word of God," a creative word that created the universe at the beginning and the first parents, again

created Jeremiah anew. In the case of Jeremiah, the Word of God came to him with an amazing preface: "Before I (Word of God) formed you in the womb I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you (note again the concept of consecration of those called specially); I appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (5).

Jeremiah hesitated to accept the call saying that he did not know how to speak. God assured and strengthened him saying that he would be speaking only His words and He would teach him what he should speak: "You shall go to all to whom I send you and you shall speak whatever I command you" (1:7). In order to stress that the prophet was only a mouthpiece of God and he communicated only the words of Yahweh, the Lord put his hand and touched his mouth and said, "Now I have put my words in your mouth" (cf. 1:9).

We find also an interesting event in the life of prophet Ezekiel to highlight the fact that the prophets' main mission was to communicate the Word of YHWH. God stretched his hand and handed over a written scroll and asked him to eat. He ate and it was as sweet as honey (cf. Eze 2:8-3:11). He had eaten the Word of the Lord and was filled with it. So he could communicate the Word of YHWH to the people. Prophet Jeremiah himself said, "Your words were found and I ate

them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart for I am called by your name" (Jer 15:16).

The words that Jeremiah spoke were real, effective and powerful. People committed sin and refused to live according the Word of YHWH. So they were to be punished: "Because they have spoken this word, I am now making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood and the fire shall devour them" (5:16), "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" (23:29).

False Prophets

At the time of Jeremiah, there were also many false prophets who did not receive the vocation to communicate the Word (5:13) but they themselves became prophet for money (23:21). Instead of communicating the Word, they communicated their own words, whims and fancies being dictated and influenced by the ruling class (23:16, 22, 25-32). They preached in the name of Baal and led the people astray (23:13). Jeremiah accused them of committing adultery and telling lies (27:14, 16; 29:23) and strengthening the hands of evildoers (23:14). They did not stand in the council of the Lord, they did not see and hear the Word of God and proclaim it to the people (23:18). False prophets

did not intercede for the people (27:18) as the authentic prophets of YHWH.

The Sufferings for the Word

When the Word of God is proclaimed courageously and faithfully, the minister of the Word has to undergo a lot of sufferings and humiliations and to face a lot of challenges. Even his life may be in danger. Jeremiah, who was called to pluck up and to pull down was faithful to the Word and courageously proclaimed the Word. So he had to face a lot of difficulties, challenges and sufferings (23:9). At one time, so frustrated and disappointed by facing problems after problems, he cried out, "O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. For I hear many whispering: 'Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!' All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him" (cf. 20:7-10).

He even seemed to tell God, "Enough is enough and leave me alone. I do not want to continue serving the

Word.” “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name” (cf. Jer 20:9). But how can prophet Jeremiah who was called before he was formed in the womb of his mother (cf. 1:5) to serve the Word be silent without proclaiming the Word? On the one side, there were sufferings, insults, humiliations and fear because of the Word and on the other side, a great burning desire to proclaim the Word and his inability to control it. He added, “then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (20:9). In another occasion, he cried out, “My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war” (4:19).

Even in these moments of pain and frustration, he was consoled and strengthened by the same Word: “the Lord is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten” (20:11).

9. Prophet Ezekiel

When Ezekiel spoke of his vocation, he narrated so dramatically and explained so powerfully that the Word of God was his only source of

vocation. “But you, mortal, hear what I say to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you. I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe. He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey” (cf. Eze 2:8-3:3). “Eat what I give you” - What does it mean? It means that it is the Word of God that transforms the ordinary person. Prophet Ezekiel accepts the Word, meditates it and interiorizes it. And thus he is completely transformed and influenced by the Word. This is the prophetic experience of the Word of God.

Word of God and its importance in the NT

In the OT, the Word transformed many people. Jeremiah was a great prophet simply because he allowed the Word of God to touch him, question him and transform him. As Jeremiah, Jesus too came as the image of the Word of God. John spoke of him as the

“Word that became flesh” (Jn 1:14). Jesus himself said, “the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63). Jesus was the Word that took flesh. His powerful words transformed the lives of so many people. We shall see here only a few of them from the NT.

1. The Disciples

Jesus of Nazareth began his mission of preaching the good news to the poor (Lk 4:18). He wanted companions, partakers of his mission. He called Peter with these words: “Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people” (Lk 5:10). From Mark, we know that even his brother Andrew was with him by the time of this call. While James and John were fishing with his father, Jesus called them saying “follow me.”

These four as well as other disciples of Jesus were urged by his words as well as deeds. They were slowly transformed and formed in the style of Jesus himself. Jesus clearly stated how the disciples of him should be: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mk 8:34). Jesus did not want his disciples to be governed by the values of the world. So he warned them saying, “whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” He also imparted to them the same lesson

by his own life example by washing the feet of the disciples (Jn 13:5).

The Apprenticeship of the Disciples of the Lord by the Word

The twelve disciples, united around Jesus, before being sent to mission, should go through a period of special formation by his very being and words. We call it apprenticeship of the disciples of the Lord. Jesus, who was teaching his disciples with words and miracles, took up the role of their spiritual formator. Let us see now the different aspects of his formation by the Word.

1) The apostles should be mindful that above all they were called to render the cult of God. But then they should know exactly in what consists this cult. The Pharisees accused the disciples of the Lord of eating without following ritual ablutions (Mk 7:1-14; cf. Mt 15:1-14). The apostles are accused of transgressing the prescriptions on ritual purity. The response of Jesus to these accusations is directed directly to the pharisees but indirectly it serves to teach the disciples. This indicates that it is not enough to honour God with the mouth, but it is necessary to be united to him with the heart (Mk 7:6-7); that one cannot force the people to observe the precepts of the men, transgressing that of God (Mk 7:9); that the laws and prescriptions of men cannot annul that of God: “In this way you make God’s

word ineffective for the sake of your tradition which you have handed down. And you do many other things like this" (Mk 7:13; see also Jn 4:23).¹² Certainly, these teachings are very general but fundamental! The apostles should work in the Jewish background that some times hampered their mission. So they should abide according to the principles exposed above. They can never forget that the things of God preceded always the things of men; that the cult of God is above in every respect to that of men.

2) The pastoral formation of the apostles passed through the solutions of different cases of conscience. One of them was the attitude of the disciples of Christ towards the official Judaism and law. At times the necessity of observing the law was in contrast to the natural sentiment to do good. For example, the apostles knew that their teaching and their beneficence should be limited to the people of God. But behold a Cannanite woman, i.e. pagan, asked for the healing of his daughter! The apostles suggested sending her away so that she did not disturb the master. But Jesus being moved by the faith of the Cannanite woman, answered her prayer (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30). Another example was his sensibility towards people who are suffering for their dear ones; to alleviate the pain of the neighbour, it was necessary sometime to soften the rigid applications of the

principles. In such a way, Jesus taught the apostles the art of listening, the prayer of the poor people, an art not less necessary than preaching. Then the apostles, in the occasion of the miraculous multiplication of the loaves, had another possibility to learn how they should be sensible and charitable towards the poor people and the needy ones by Jesus' words (Mk 8:1-9; cf. Mt 15:32-39).

3) Jesus taught the disciples not to be dominated by natural sentiments. Passing through the lake of Geneserth, the apostles realised that they forgot to take loaves with them (Mk 8:14-21; Mt 16:5-21); it seemed as if they had no other preoccupation than the forgotten loaves. In this context, the Word-Made-Flesh asked, "Be careful and take care of the leaven of the pharisees and Herod" (Mk 8:15). The apostles thought that Jesus was alluding to the bread forgotten. But Jesus was alluding to the recent dialogue with the pharisees, directed before the apostles. The pharisees asked for a sign from heaven. Jesus therefore admonished his disciples to avoid the danger of leaven of the pharisees (Mk 8:17). As it is clear from the context, the apostles did not understand the sense of the multiplication of the loaves, i.e., the providence of God could take care of their needs. Jesus therefore condemned the natural inclination of the disciples; their superficial approach of the

problems of God, their excessive care of the body.

4) It seemed that Jesus did not want his identity to be revealed to the people. Mark showed it clearly (Mk 8:30; 9:9). Not only the disciples or beneficiaries but also demons received the order not to reveal. The discretion willed by Jesus was not only assured by the orders concerning the miracles but also by the circumstance in which they were done. The majority of the healings, narrated by Mark, were done by Jesus while he was found alone, away from the crowd. It is to be noted that the apostles often did not understand why the miracles were done before their eyes; not only because of their little faith (Mk 7:17; 9:8, 28; 10:24) but also and perhaps more importantly, because these events surpassed every human intention (Mk 4:41; 6:55 f.; 8:16-21; 9:33f; 10:35, 41). Of course, Jesus followed a precise scope in his pedagogical strategy in not revealing his identity. Perhaps, he wanted to avoid nationalistic interpretation. Perhaps he wanted to avoid that the people—sometimes even the apostles—saw him only as the political liberator; in the virtue of his thaumaturgic potency, he could free Israel from the Roman domination. But above all, Jesus intended not to reveal the fullness of his messianic divinity before his death; only at his death and consequent resurrection, he would

manifest his greatness not only with words but also with facts.

5) One day there came a man to Jesus whose son was suffering from epilepsy. The father informed Jesus that he had already presented the case to his disciples but they failed. Jesus then healed the person. The disciples were astonished of their inability. Jesus responded saying it was because of their little faith (cf. Mt 17:20-21; Lk 17:6; Mk 9:28). Here is the profound reason for every apostolic success: faith--the disciples' faith needed to be nourished much more.

6) The evangelists (cf. Mt 18:1-4; Mk 9:33-37; Lk 9:46-48) narrate that the apostles wanted to know the greatest and first among them in the kingdom of God. How could they have such a discussion? Possibly, there existed certain kind of ranking system in the group with Peter, James and John at the top three positions. Perhaps they wanted to know the merit of following this man. Who was the greatest among them? Jesus being aware of their discussion, gave a beautiful lesson: "He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:2-3).

The attitude of the apostles rather of all the creatures towards God, the Creator must be similar of a child towards its parents: humility, unlimited trust and ardent love. Jesus wanted these virtues to be inculcated in his disciples.

7) Jesus insisted on the necessity of avoiding scandal. This admonition was directed first of all to the apostles. Jesus after recommending the apostles to become like children, added these menacing words: "But anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones who have faith in me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea with a great millstone round his neck" (Mt 18:6). Jesus is very rarely so severe as in the case here.¹³

In the context of Matthew (18:6), it is not only little ones in the physical sense of the word, but also little ones in figurative sense, i.e., the poor (Mk 10:42), orphans, widows, simple and ordinary people (Mk 9:42).

Jesus, taking up a concrete case, taught the disciples how to avoid the scandal. The tax collectors of Capernaum asked Peter why Jesus was not paying taxes (Mt 17:24); an embarrassing question to Peter. But Jesus, reading the thoughts of Peter, came to his rescue. It was not difficult for Jesus to give a just answer but he came out with a practical solution to avoid unnecessary scandal: "However,

so that we do not give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook; take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a coin; take that and give it to them for you and me" (Mt 17:27).

2. Paul and the Word of God

Paul was not only the messenger of God or mouthpiece of God preaching the Word of God (cf. 1 Tim 1:12) but he himself was moulded and formed by the Word of God. We know how fanatic he was about Judaism and how hateful he was towards Christianity. And God's Word came to this Paul, touched him and transformed him. He heard the voice of Jesus. Jesus called him by name: "Saul, Saul." It was this Word, "the Word made flesh" that changed the entire life of Saul. Saul (Hebrew name) became Paul (Greek name). He not only preached the Word to his fellow Jews but also to the non-Jews. The Word of God made a tremendous impact on the life of Paul.

The same man who wanted to destroy Christianity and never wanted the gospel to be preached to the people said, "If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16). A man who arrested men and women who professed Jesus and persecuted them, heard his Word and

“became all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:22) to bring at least a few to Jesus. This is what we call the paradigm shift, a gigantic leap caused by the Word of God. A man who boasted himself of being a Jew gave up all that was worldly and considered them as rubbish because of Jesus and his Words. “Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Phil 3:7-8). He wanted to kill all those who professed Jesus and his name and he was there at the martyrdom of Stephen. After being touched by the words of Jesus, the same Paul considered his own life as nothing (cf. 2 Cor 4:11).

3. A few more

Nicodemus did not know what it meant to be born again. But Jesus with his words transformed him and made him his disciple. This man really loved Jesus because Jesus’ words pierced him. We can see this at the time of Jesus’ funeral. Even the exalted apostles of Jesus were not there for the burial of Jesus. But this Nicodemus was there with Joseph of Arimathea (cf. Jn 19:39).

Jesus asked a woman of Samaria for a drink. She was so surprised that a Jewish man asked for a drink from a Samaritan woman. Then Jesus spoke to her about living water. Jesus’ words transformed her. In a society where women were not allowed to speak in public, she became a prophet and first missionary in the Gospel of John proclaiming to the people what she had seen and heard in the person of Jesus Christ and making many disciples of Jesus.¹⁴

A woman was brought before Jesus, being caught in the very act of adultery. All Jesus uttered were a few words: “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8:7). These words of Jesus touched the hearts of those people who came to kill her mercilessly by stoning. These words made them realize their own sinfulness and they left one by one beginning with the elders. They came with evil intentions but went back challenged by the Word of Jesus (cf. Jn 8:1-9).¹⁵

A man was born blind. Jesus, the light of the world asked him to “go and wash in the pool of Siloam.” He went and did according to the words of Jesus and began to see (cf. Jn 9:1-41). The mighty words of Jesus not only gave him sight but also transformed him. He became the disciple of Jesus and boldly bore witness to him.¹⁶

The two disciples of Emmaus thought that everything was over with the death of Jesus. They were frustrated and depressed that their master simply disappeared in this manner with cruel and shameful death on the cross. They did not expect it. They were not prepared to accept the fact. The risen Jesus appeared to these disciples and explained to them the Word of God right from the beginning. They were so amazed and exclaimed, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32). They were touched and transformed by the words spoken by the risen Jesus and by breaking of the bread. The sad, frustrated and depressed disciples returned to Jerusalem as zealous missionaries with enthusiasm and great happiness and began to preach the Word courageously.¹⁷

Conclusions

In the conclusions of the discussions on the Word of God in the call and consecration of the consecrated persons, I would like to point out certain aspects to be practised in the day-to-day life.

Why are we called and consecrated? There is a beautiful passage in the gospel of Mark that gives us the reasons. "He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve,

whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons" (Mt 3:13-15).

Jesus wanted us so much and so he called us and consecrated us. He wanted us to go out preaching but that can be done only if we know what we should preach. Where do we learn what to preach? Like Mary, we need to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to him and allow his words to touch us and transform us. So before being sent for mission, we need to be sitting at the feet of Jesus like Mary and listening to Jesus.

In the call of Isaiah, there is an interesting question by YHWH, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Is 6:8). Then Isaiah replied, "Here am I, send me!" Yes, he could because he had already had the vision and he had already listened to the voice of YHWH. There is no mission without vision.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta once exhorted the seminarians, "Do not dare to preach anything to people, which you have not learnt and listened from Jesus, sitting at his feet." How true these words are for the consecrated persons today!

Moses was a leader par excellence. He was specially called and entrusted with the mission of leading the people from the land of slavery to the Promised Land. But he could not accomplish

or complete the mission. The mission was carried out by his successor Joshua. There is an amazing difference between Moses and Joshua: "Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then he would return to the camp; but his young assistant, *Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the tent.*" (Ex 33:11). Since Joshua did not leave the tent, the meeting place of YHWH, YHWH himself would not abandon him. "No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you" (Jos 1:5).

The consecrated person is to build his consecrated life on the rock. Like Jeremiah, he has to undergo a lot of sufferings, humiliations and insults. What does it mean building consecrated life on the rock? Jesus himself answers: "Hearing the Word of God and living accordingly." If he does that, his life will be solid and firmly rooted and that he would not be swept away by difficulties, challenges and sufferings. "*Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man*

who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!" (Mt 7:24-27). The consecrated person has to make a choice between being wise and building the life on the Word of God or being foolish and building the life on worldly pleasures.

Endnotes:

- 1 R.S. Amalraj, *Saints for Every day*, Dindigul: Vaigarai Publications, 2006, pp. 36-37.
- 2 R.S. Amalraj, *Saints for Every day*, Dindigul: Vaigarai Publications, 2006, pp. 251-252.
- 3 Antony Mary Claret, *Autobiography*, Chicago: Claretian Publications, 1976, p. 21.
- 4 Frederic E. Greenspahn, "Josiah" in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2005, p. 510.
- 5 Cf., B.S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus. A Critical Theological Commentary*, Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1976, pp. 453-496.
- 6 Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Deuteronomy," *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Theological Publications in India, 2004, p. 99.
- 7 Cf., Martino Conti, "Le vocazioni individuali nel Vecchio Testamento," *Vocazione comune e vocazioni specifiche*, Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1981, pp. 85-90.

- 8 Cf., C. Romaniuk, *La vocazione nella Bibbia*, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1973, p. 34.
- 9 (1) The strictest abstinence from wine and from every product of the vine; (2) the keeping of the hair uncut and the beard untouched by a razor; (3) the prohibition to touch a dead body; and (4) prohibition of unclean food (Jdg 13:5-7; Nu 6).
- 10 Cf., C. Romaniuk, *La vocazione nella Bibbia*, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1973, p. 40.
- 11 Cf., Megan McKenna, *Prophets. Words of Fire*, Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2002, pp. 13-26.
- 12 It does not mean that the real cult of God should be without any sacrificial rites; but only that all the new sacrifices should be animated by the spirit of real charity.
- 13 Cf., C. Romaniuk, *La vocazione nella Bibbia*, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1973, pp. 83-100.
- 14 Cf., Raj Irudaya, *Mission of the Marginalized: A Subaltern, Feminist and Inter-religious Reading of John 4:1-42*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2007, pp. 165-193.
- 15 Cf., Michael Fallon, *The Gospel according to Saint John*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2004, pp. 169-171.
- 16 Cf. Neal M. Flanagan, *The Gospel according to John and the Johannine Epistles*, Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2001, pp. 42-45.
- 17 Roland Meynet, *Il Vangelo secondo Luca*, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2003, pp. 896-897.

"Today, the People of God are increasingly showing a hunger and thirst for the Word of God (cf. Am 8:11, 12). This vital fact should not be overlooked, because the Lord himself is prompting it. At the same time, sad to say, this need is not universally felt, because of little contact with the Word of God and a lack of adequate access to the Holy Book. To help the faithful understand what the Bible is, why it is there, how beneficial it is to the faith and how to use it, the Church has always responded, and needs to even more today, to the important demands contained in four chapters of Dei Verbum (cc 3-6). Our Church communities are faced with the task to adequately know them, in conjunction with other magisterial teaching and competent research." (Linamenta of the Synod of Bishops, 2008, n. 15.)

BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS DISCIPLESHIP

R.J. Raja, SJ

Introduction

The term **spirituality** which has acquiesced well both among evangelical Protestants and non-Christian circles as well, could mean in general the response of a man/woman to the call of God in **the Spirit** and all that this call involves. "Spirituality is a journey according to the Spirit of Christ."¹ **Biblical Spirituality** may thus be described as the responses that are expressed by the humans in the Bible with reference to this call.

Since the Holy Spirit is a divine mystery at once so near and yet so incomprehensible, it is **invasive (active)** rather than **pervasive (passive)**; "it

blows where it chooses" (Jn 3:8). "The risen Christ is working in the hearts of men/women through **the energy of His Spirit**" (GS 38). As a consequence, "impelled by a love which the Holy Spirit has poured into their hearts (Rom 5:5), the Religious **spend themselves ever increasingly for Christ**, and for His body the Church" (Col 1:24; PC 1). The Spirit thus gives us a capacity to go out of ourselves and transcend ourselves ('**exient**' rather than 'ex - sistent', '**ecbatic**' rather than 'ek - static'), which in fact is what Paul very appropriately calls "the fruit of the Spirit (in terms of) - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and

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self - control" (Gal 5:22-23), which is given to each one of us (1 Cor 12:7). We may mention below some elements of this spirituality based on the Word of God, the Bible, with regard to Religious life.

Characteristics

1. Trinitarian - Communitarian:

The Spirit of truth who comes from the **Father** (Jn 15:16, 26; Eastern Church) proceeds also from **the Son** ("filioque" – Western Church; Jn 14:18). Thus He embraces both "**the far-out people**," those of "the outer city" as well as the people of "**the inner city**". Genuine spirituality is hence concerned with attaining "the community of the Spirit" of all the people in the Trinity (Eph 1:13-14) or making the people **become persons in the fullest sense**. "In concrete it is simply the actualization of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity."² It envisages then a broader strategy than the spiritualization of the individual as individual. No man/woman is an island. The spiritual person has the innate capacity to go out of himself/herself, since he/she is for the other and is completed by the other.

Both the OT and the NT substantiate our contention that biblical spirituality is **communitarian**. The spiritual person is one who loves both the neighbour and the alien as himself/herself (Lev 19:18, 34); thus he/she should become light to

the nations (Is 42:6; 49:6) practicing the greatest of the three theological virtues, namely love (1 Cor 13:1-13).

The Council confirms this teaching of the Bible in the Constitution GS which affirms that "God did not create people for life in isolation, but for the **formation of social unity**... So from the beginning of salvation He has chosen people "not just as individuals but as members of a certain community... And Jesus Christ has "clearly taught the people of God to treat one another as brothers and sisters" (32). The Constitution on the Church too (LG) avows the same truth by saying: "It has pleased God, to make people holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds but by **making them into a single people**" (9). This societal build-up of the human race flows from God who is 'One in Three', the Trinity. Nourished by the abiding presence of the **Father** (Jn 14:23; I Jn 4:15-16), **Christ** (Jn 14:18-20; I Jn 3:24) and the **Spirit** (Jn 14:16; I Jn 4:13) the spiritual person de-centres himself/herself to walk into the wide world. Infact, in the words of Boff, "the Trinity is our true social program."³

2. Anawistic: Of the many terms used in the Hebrew Bible to denote the people of God, the poor, namely, '**ras**'-indigent, '**dal**'-frugal, meager, languishing, '**ebyon**'-mendicant, needy and '**ani**', '**anaw**', '**anawim**' (pl)-poor,

these last ones specify a class of people who in their utter misery hang on to, cling on to and depend totally on God (Pss 10:14; 25:15-16; 34:6; 76:8-9; 147:6). They find their joy and happiness only in Yahweh (Is 29:19) who is the saviour of the poor and the needy (Jer 20:13). No wonder, Jesus who was from the obscure town of Nazareth (Jn 1:46) and the son of a carpenter (Mt 13:55) represents the 'ani', 'anaw' of the NT, (cf. Lk 9:58; Mt 8:20) and at the same time challenges his followers to leave every thing and every one and follow him as "**anawim**" (Mk 1:18; Mt 4:20-22; Lk 9:23, 59).

Mary and Elizabeth (Lk 1:38-55), and the early Christians (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37) were surely the "**anawim**" of the nascent church. In the document on Religious life (PC 13) Vatican II affirms, the Religious 'must share in the poverty of Christ, who became poor for our sake... that we might be enriched by his poverty (2 Cor 8:9; Phi 2:5-8; Heb 2:14-18).

By their vows the Religious are obliged to become and be '**anawim**', which expects of them: i) that they completely entrust themselves to the **providence of God** (Mt 6:25); ii) that they do not disregard **labour, even physical** (2 Thes 3:6-13); and iii) that they come to **the aid of the poor and the needy** (Mt 19:21; 25:34-46; Jam 2:15-16; I Jn 3:17).

3. Contemplatively active: The call of Israel to holiness, namely, "you shall be holy, for the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:2; 20:7; 21:8 etc) applies equally to all Christians, much especially to the Religious. This call is not merely in terms of cult (Ex 29:37; 30:29; Lev 6:11 etc) but also in terms of neighbourly love (Lev 12:34). In the words of prophet Micah, "to walk humanly with your God" (6:8b) is at the same time an invitation "to do justice and to love kindness" (6:8a).

No spirituality, Christian or Religious can afford to bypass this double dimension of biblical spirituality. The question is not as to which is prior or more important between the '**ad-extra**' and the '**ad-intra**' aspects, but to strike a balance and bind the two in a 'harmonious matrimony'!

The Religious therefore is one who must reconcile in himself/herself this bipolar reality. He/She must emulate both the Jesus of the mountains (Lk 4:42; 6:12; 9:18; Mk 1:35) and the Jesus of the market places (Lk 4:18-19; Mk 1:15). The one should not be eclipsed by the other. The call of the Twelve by Jesus in Mark "**to be with him, to be sent out**" (Mk 3:13-14), is a typically marken challenge (authours have pointed out that this double expression brings out the '**Marthan - Marian**' way of religious discipleship (Lk 10:38-42; Jn 11). The spirituality of Jesus did

not consist in running away from the maddening crowd but by being right in it. It was involvement far from escapism. A harmonious combination of work and prayer constituted the life of Jesus, which should also be the same for his disciples the Religious. Jesus shattered the boundaries that separate us from the Father's will and from each other and thus created a twofold fidelity to the Father and to each other.⁴ The Council too advises the Religious that "as they seek God before all things and only Him, the members of each community should combine **contemplation** and **apostolic love**. By the former they adhere to God in mind and heart; by the latter they strive to associate themselves with the work of redemption and to spread the Kingdom of God" (PC 5).

4. Transparent and open:

Transparency a characteristic that is typical of biblical spirituality is also something which plays an important role in the life of Religious. By transparency we mean openness to **God, to the world and to oneself**. Almost all biblical personages exhibit this characteristic. The "**Here I am**" of Abraham (Gen 22:1; 12:1-4), of Moses (Ex 3:4), of Isaiah (Is 6:8) etc, in the OT, and the '**fiat**' of Mary (Lk 1:38) and the '**Amen**' of Jesus (2 Cor 1:19), and of others in the NT are just acknowledgement of the working of the Spirit, in other words, being transparent and open to the Spirit.

5. Alleluiah - tuned: One of the most important characteristic notes of Biblical spirituality which should be assiduously cultivated today by Religious is **Joy**. For the God of the Bible is one "who will **rejoice** in Jerusalem and **delight** in (his) my people" (Is 65:19; 62:4-5) and at the same time one who invites his people to "**be glad** and to **rejoice** for ever" (65:18; 66:10). This Isaian portraiture of a Joyful God and a rejoicing people is something unique in the whole Bible or in any and all religious literature.

That is why Paul pointing out that joy is the sign of the presence of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), is not only joyful himself in the midst of his sufferings, but also exhorts the Christians of Philippi "to **be glad and to rejoice** with him" (Phi 1:8; 2:17-18; 3:1; 4:4, 10). The apostles "**rejoiced** that they were considered worthy to suffer for the sake of the name of Jesus" (Acts 5:41). At the glad news of the spread of the Word, "the disciples were **filled with joy** and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52). Baptized with the Spirit, the eunuch "went on his way **rejoicing**" (Acts 8:39). Thus joy seems to be the trade-mark of all spiritual persons.

Speaking of Joy among the **Religious**, Vat II says that "a religious community is a true family gathered together in the Lord's name and **rejoicing** in His presence" (PC 15; Mt

18:20). A Religious therefore is one who is not only happy himself/herself, but one who spreads also this joy and happiness to others, as if by contagion. We may say that a sad saint is a sour saint and has to be shunned. In fine, Religious cannot afford to miss this finer aspect of a deep Christian commitment under the inspiration and guidance of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). Let us remember that we (Religious surely) are **Alleluiah people and Joy is our birth-right**.

6. Sacralizing of Secularity:

At the beginning of creation "God saw **everything** that He had made and indeed **it was very good**" (Gen 1:31; cf. also Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Since "all things are **from him and through him and to him**" (Rom 11:36; Col 1:16; Jn 1:3) and since "at the fullness of time God will **gather up all things in Christ**" (Eph 1:10; Col 1:20), we should appreciate, admire, affirm and authenticate, the goodness, the truthfulness and the beauty of all creation.

For Religious, as well as for all Christians, this means, in the words of Ignatius "to find God in all things" (Sp. Ex. 233-237; end notes 120-124). John of Damascus says, "I should not cease to honour matter for it was through matter my salvation came to pass... Do not despise matter, for it is not despicable, nothing is despicable that God has made."⁵ Thus 1) **The whole**

of creation becomes the sacrament of God, a vehicle which tends always God-ward, leading the humans to the creator (Wis 13:1-5; Rom 1:19-20; Acts 17:24-28). 2) **The time** and all times are good since physical time as such ('**chronos**') has become in Christ the time of refreshing, restoration and re-establishment ('**kairos**': Acts 3:19-21). The physical presence of Jesus ('**chronos**') has bathed every concrete moment of time with the water of divine salvation ('**kairos**' cf. Lk 13:32; 19:5; 23:43). 3) **Wealth** is good since it has acquired anew and positive meaning in the building up of the '**koinonia**' of the Christian community (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37; 11:27-30). 4) **Work** (physical) in the age of computer technology, may seem demeaning, ignoble and menial but, for Paul who took pride in "working for his living with his own hands" (1 Cor 4:12) work meant service to oneself (personal dimension) and service to the neighbour (social dimension) (Acts 20:34-35). 5) Finally, **all People are good**, especially **Women and Gentiles (other castes, other religions etc)**, usually relegated to the last rung of the ladder. Luke for example uses the term '**woman**' (gyne) 39 times in the Gospel and 19 times in the Acts and lets them parade in colourful procession all through the Gospel and the Acts (Lk 1-2 etc; Acts 1:4; 25:13-23). At the same time, Luke gives also a positive picture of the

Gentiles. There is a certain partiality which is patently manifested in the very composition of these two volumes by Luke (cf. Lk 3:4-6; 24:47; Acts 1:8; 28:28 - Beginning and End in both). It looks that Luke has demythologized the separation between man and woman and Jew and Gentile and thus has rung the death knell on the sacred - secular dichotomy and rung in the joyous bells of a sacralized secularity, inviting as well as challenging the Religious to overthrow the gender - divide and the caste - divide etc, etc.

Conclusion

The elements of spirituality for Religious which we have pointed out as revealed in the Bible are just a few samples only. The essential character is that in the words of Jesus "we must be about our Father's business" (Lk 2:49) and our food must be "to do the will of Him" who has called us and sent us on the mission (Jn 4:34).

NEW TESTAMENT MODELS OF RELIGIOUS DISCIPLESHIP

Introduction

There can be **only one model** for all Christians, much especially for Religious who have deliberately opted to follow Him and this Model is only Jesus who has said "I am **the way**, and **the truth** and **the life**" (Jn 14:6) and who has also invited us to "**follow him**

(me)" (Mk 1:17; Mt 4:19; Lk 5:10), to "**come and see**" (Jn 1:39) and **do as he has done** (I have done)" (Jn 13:12-16). Thus Jesus is the true disciple as well as **the only way** (the 'Marga') to the Father. The Religious are challenged to follow him and him **only**, invited to come and see him **only** (stay with him) and do **only as he has done**. A Religious is one who is invited and challenged to say with a Tamil Vaishnavite saint, "**For thee (Jesus) alone my passion burns**".

The N.T gives several models of discipleship based on Jesus, which we Religious may profitably emulate. The following are some of these.

1. Call- Response Model: This is patterned on the OT calls of people by God (Gen 12; Ex 3; Is 6; Jer 1 etc). This call is an act of God and a persistent one (Ex 3:4-16; I Sam 3:2-11). The call in the NT comes from Jesus who says "you did not choose me but **I chose you**" (Jn 15:16, 19; 6:70; 13:18). "He is reached by him **whom alone He chooses**" (Mund. Upanishad). This initiative of God demands from the disciple the answer in the pattern of a **radical "no"** to things and persons and a **radical "yes"** to God and Jesus and the Good News. We may call this the Jewish or Matthaean **Model** (Mt 4:18-22; 9:9-13) since Matthew being a Jew, writing to the Jews, presents the call in such a way that the Jews understand (cf. OT above).

2. Mountain - Market place Model: The call is extended once again “to those **whom he wanted**” (Mk 3:13). The purpose of the call is double-pronged “**to be with him and to be sent out**” (3:14), a vertical as well as a horizontal commitment, a **mystical** as well as a **prophetic** involvement. The call is to be at the mountain (‘to be with’) and to go down to the market place (‘to be sent out’) and vice versa. The phrase ‘**to be with**’ is used 20 times in Mark of which 13 are his own (1:36; 4:36; 5:18, 40 etc). The phrase ‘to be sent out’ is also used 14 times (1:38; 6:12-13; 8:35; 10:29 etc). The frequency of this double usage in Mark makes us call this **the Markan Model**.

In Mark we also find another model as given below:

3. Journey - suffering Model: In his portrayal of the **3 predictions** of Jesus before his passion, Mk paints the picture of a Religious with his **3 vows** of poverty, chastity and obedience. Jesus is portrayed as one who is **on the way** (8:27; 9:30; 10:32), accompanied by passion, suffering, death and glory, **the paschal mystery** (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34) and foreshadowing the three vows of **poverty** (8:34-36), **chastity** - charity (9:35-37) and obedience (10:44-45). This re-reading of Mark will surely apply to all Religious. Did Mark intend this? Why not give him the credit?

4. All or Nothing Model: A radicality which may be called a **costly commitment** is the Lukan way or the **Lukan model** of discipleship as it is delineated in the various calls narrated in his gospel. The first disciples “left **everything** and followed him” (Lk 5:11.28). Jesus himself demands that **total renouncement** from all his disciples. One cannot become his follower “if he/she does not give up **all his/her possessions**” (14:33); one must “**sell all** that he/she owns and distribute to the poor and then follow him” (18:22). Besides, following Jesus, far from fair weather fellowship, is a daily affair. Hence one who wants to be his disciple must “take up his/her cross **daily** and follow him” (cf. ‘**daily**’ used only in Lk 9:23). Further, in somewhat un-Lukan way, since he is called the evangelist of women, Luke mentions, in the list of persons to be left behind by the disciples also “**his wife**” (14:26; 18:29) who is neither mentioned in Mark nor in Matthew among those to be left behind (Mk 10:37; Mt 8:34). It is worthwhile noting that Luke the evangelist of mercy could also express so radically the demands of discipleship. This radicality is to be exercised not only at the first moment of the call, but at every call within the call, so much so there should never be in our life an admixture of “yes and no” but always and only “**Yes**” after the example of Jesus himself (2 Cor 1:15-22).

5. Absorption - Witness Model:

We may name this both the **Johannine** and the **Pauline Models**. The disciple is invited to be **God's own**, a "participant in divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4; 1 Pet 2:4-10) so that there is a near identification of the disciple with Jesus and his values, as is expressed by the Johannine term '**abiding**' used 9 times (in Jn 15:1-11) and the expression '**in Christ**' and similar terms used in Paul about 380 times (Gal 2:15-21; 3:27; Rom 8:10; Eph 3:17 etc).

For John the 'abiding' must lead to '**bearing fruit**' (7 times used) and for Paul the '**in Christ**' situation must lead to a '**Pro-Christ**' situation, namely 'to proclaim him' (Gal 1:16). In both cases the disciple is called to be a Christ-bearer "**Christopher**" ('abiding') and is commissioned by that very call to be a Christ-giver, "**Christodor**" ('bearing fruit').

6. Head - Heart - Hands Model:

No less a person than **Mary** who is called **the type, model and exemplar** (LG 63-65) of Christians, portrays and represents eminently this model. She is the one who attentively **listened (head)** to the word of God (Lk 1:38; Is 55:1-3), reflected, **pondered**, meditated and contemplated (**heart**) over that word (Lk 1:29; 2:19, 51; Ez 3:1-3) and **acted (hands)** on that word (Lk 1:39-56; Jn 2:1-11; Is 49:6; 52:7). She was the one "who **heard** the word of God and **did** it" (Lk 8:21), "who **heard** the word and

obeyed it" (11:28). Thus she becomes an ideal model for all who want to follow Jesus in any vocation, especially the religious vocation.

Conclusion

Jesus has shown us the way to the Father. That way is unique, but it has been preached and lived out in various ways. The various Gospel writers themselves have delineated for us their own way of following Jesus. Mark for example, has painted the way of '**Karma Marga**', Matthew '**the Jnana Marga**', Luke '**the Bhakti Marga**' and Paul and John a marga which combines all the three which we may call '**the Mystical Marga**'. Shall we follow any or all of these or shall we launch out our own marga?

Endnotes:

- 1 G. Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, London: SCM 1984, pp. 59, 73, 88.
- 2 J. Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Towards Political Holiness*, New York: Orbis Books, 1988, p. 124.
- 3 L. Boff, *Trinity and Society*, New York: Orbis Books, 1988, p. 16.
- 4 Jose Comblin, *Sent from the Father: Meditations on the Fourth Gospel*, New York: Orbis Books, 1979, pp. 16-19.
- 5 G. Wakefield (Editor), *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, London: SCM, 1983, p. 362.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY: A CALL TO WORD CENTRED AND WORD WITNESSING FELLOWSHIP

Augustine Mulloor, OCD

Introduction

The year of the Word of God is a challenge to experience the sharp-cutting edge of the Word of God disturbing us at the core level of our existence in order to imbibe the values of Biblical culture, to assimilate them and to be assimilated by them and thus becoming authentically and radically biblical. The year of the Word of God should not be reduced merely to the distribution of the Bible at cheaper rate and organization of many seminars and courses. It must really help us be formed into persons in whom the Word is like a fire within our bones which we

cannot control but are controlled by it (Jer 20:7f), dynamically inspiring our daily life, being “lamp to the feet and light to the path” (Ps 119:105).

The scope of this article is to show how a religious community has to translate this disturbance into becoming an authentic Word-centred and Word-witnessing fellowship. The hermeneutic principle that leads to such pragmatic effect is the two-dimensional interpretation, letting the life to be interpreted by the Word and the Word to be interpreted by the life. In this process the text, the reader/the listener and their situation are interpreted. This is the

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path of interculturalisation in which the biblical culture and the readers/hearers' culture find a meeting point, leading to the emergence of a counter-culture. Becoming "biblical" is, therefore, not to be evaluated on the basis of quantitative use of the Bible but on the qualitative living of biblical values. In this article our aim is to discover the biblical roots of religious community life and consecrated communitarian expressions of biblical values.¹

We begin with an evaluation of the situation of religious communities disintegrated by modern culture and then move to the Word-centredness and Word-witnessing effect of the religious communities.

1. Modern Culture and Disintegration of Communities

The culture that is developing in our society today promotes individualism and selfishness that in turn disintegrates the families and communities. Through this superficial culture, the basic values of community life namely, presence, rootedness in tradition, sacrifice, and service are degenerated. A community is founded on these four pillars. Presence is the core value because a community cannot be unless persons in community are present on the being level to each

other. In a family the husband and wife, and parents and children must be essentially present to each other, not merely physically but heartily or really and substantially. There are a lot of deceptive, fake and hypocritical presences today. It is a fine form of infidelity. Biblical culture, must recreate this value of authentic presence.²

Every community is based on

tradition or history. Modern culture promotes superficial newness at the cost of the tradition-base or rocky foundation. The communities are disintegrated due to natural and human perspectives that lead to division. People

are reduced to be tourists instead of pilgrims, workers instead of ministers, professionals instead of servants and competitors instead of partners. Tourism which is by nature exploitative and profit-oriented, workaholism and activism creating unwanted tension, professionalism promoting efficiency and success at the cost of fidelity and effectiveness, and competition that paves the way for egoism, individualism, and self-enclosed life are the four leading trends of modern culture that influence religious communities negatively. It is a basically deceptive culture because globalization which is supposed to

There are a lot of
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today.

create a global community is causing communalism, division and increase of poverty; because religiosity that claims to be the source of communion has become like a commercial product and political commodity for sale and purchase; because the media that promises to make communication faster and easier fails in the depth level of communication; because biotechnology that revolutionizes the possibilities of life has not succeeded

in promoting pro-life attitudes but has diminished the respect for life. So duplicity and hypocrisy are inevitable but falsely legitimized elements of present culture and social life.

This is the context of community life that requires radical transformation through the biblical culture. Biblical culture must facilitate the promotion of God-tradition leading to supernatural perspective generating the spirit of communion. Naturally, a Word-centred and Word-witnessing religious community must create a counter-culture by regenerating the authentic values in favour of depth level fellowship and communion.³

2. God Speaks Towards Fellowship

The letter to the Hebrews begins with a synthesis of the salvation history

in four verses (1:1-4). The author refers to the “speaking” of God as paramount to “self-revelation.” So God who reveals himself according to the biblical revelation is a speaking God. His speaking is the interpretation of His inner being, His heart. So from His words we know who He is.

But why does God speak and what for? God does not need to speak.

But God is open to relationships. So, if God has never interrupted His speaking with us, it means that He always wanted to preserve relationship with us, in spite of our attempts to cut this relationship.

Further, God did not stop speaking to us taking us to be unworthy of talking with. Rather, God took us to be His partners in dialogue. Hence basically God’s speaking is for creating a community or fellowship.

In 1:1-4 crystallizes the relationship between Word and fellowship. John claims to proclaim the Word of life that he and the other apostles have seen, heard, and touched so that the listeners, the Christians may have fellowship with them. Their fellowship is with the Father and the Son Jesus Christ. So the proclamation of the Word ultimately leads to the

Biblical culture must facilitate the promotion of God-tradition leading to supernatural perspective generating the spirit of communion.

formation of a community through the experience of communion.

Therefore the primary purpose of God's self-revelation, which began with creation and continued through call, election, promise, and covenant, is the establishment of a community and realization of communion.

3. Position of a Religious Community in Salvation History

In order to identify the relationship between the Word and a religious community it is necessary to locate its position in the history of salvation. Salvation history, beginning from creation, is the narration of the process of unfolding of God's plan to form a community. God, the creator, God the recreator, God who calls, promises, makes covenant, liberates, and finally judges, is God the formator of a community. Through creation God brings order in the midst of chaos, through call, promise, and election, God is opening up the infinite possibility of prosperity, fertility and fruitfulness. Through covenant God recalled the beauty of a committed and faithful relationship and the need for an authentic community. Through liberation God created the decisive turning point for the same.

God who dreams of a community envisages it as spirit-centered and spirit-filled.

Through judgment God brings his plan and project to completion. These are really the different stages of formation of a community.⁴

God who dreams of a community envisages it as spirit-centered and spirit-filled. Spirit-centredness is inseparable from Word-centredness. The people rejected the spirit by rejecting the word of Yahweh expressed in His commandments and laws. Infidelity is a regular fruit of the behaviour of Israel, the people of God. In the book of Judges this has been presented through a formula repeated at the beginning of the description of every crisis. Israel did what was evil in the sight of God; God handed them over to the enemies (2:11; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). The controversies in the prophetic books are expressions of the unfaithful life of Israel (Is 1; Hos 4). They are accusations made by God through the mouth of the prophets. The failure of the people of God is stubbornness and non-cooperation in the realization of God's plan regarding a community.⁵ In spite of struggles and failed attempts, God dreamt of an ideal new covenantal community which will be founded on the transformed interiority which will be docile and open to the Spirit. Through Jeremiah God revealed this dream:

“Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.... I will put my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people...” (Jer 31:31-33). This was confirmed by God through prophet Ezekiel: “... A new heart I will give you and a new Spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my status and be careful to observe my ordinances...” (Ez 36:26-27).

In this prophecy, the relationship between Spirit and Word/commandments/statutes is evident. Through the presence of the Spirit in flexible hearts, the people will be empowered to live according to the Word of God. This prophecy was fulfilled through the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ. Jesus was born through the Spirit and he is the Word-become-flesh and the definitive new law of the new covenant. At Cana Mary said to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). Jesus is the definitive turning point in the salvation history and at the same the one who carries all the values of newly

evolved situation in his own person and life. Jesus reinterpreted the law with the authority of the lawgiver and was himself the new law, the measuring rod for human existence hereafter. The new commandment given by Jesus (Jn 13:31-35) is the commandment of love; it is the Spirit dwelling in the interiority of disciples (Jn 14:15-17). It is the spiritually transformed interiority, the transformed conscience.⁶

Jesus, by calling the disciples, electing the twelve apostles and giving them special formation manifested his option for the formation of the new covenant community. By narrating the miracle of opening the eyes of a blind man at Bethsaida (Mk 8:22-26), the evangelist Mark shows the struggle involved in the transformation of the interiority of the disciples because of blindness. Later, through the healing of blind Barthimeus (Mk 10:46-52) the disciples are empowered to follow Jesus accepting the path of suffering.⁷

Jesus was the source of Spirit (Jn 7:37-39) and gave the Spirit to the world at the moment of death (Jn 19:30). John brings to climax his teaching on the Spirit in 19:28-30 and 19:34.⁸ From the cross Jesus expresses his thirst saying “I thirst,” not to drink but to give the

Through the presence of the Spirit in flexible hearts, the people will be empowered to live according to the Word of God.

Spirit. Symbolically this was realized through water that flowed from the pierced side of Jesus. The new community is the charismatic life that flows from the side of Jesus who is the symbol of perfect self-surrender. The resurrection of Jesus is the assurance and guarantee of the new community based on the Spirit and centred on the Word. The perfect form of this community, therefore, will emerge at the end time. This is synthesized in Cc 21-22 of the book of revelation.

The position of a religious community is between Christ-event and Eschatological event. Its responsibility and mission is to witness to the decisiveness of the event of Word-become-flesh and to proleptically present the final stage of the Word-centred, Spirit-filled community (Rev 22:1f). Hence the very nature of the religious community is inevitably linked to the Word of God. A religious community is called to be embodiment of the living Word.

4. A Word-centred Community: Foundations

Now it is necessary to explicate the expressions of Word-centredness of a religious community on the basis of biblical texts.⁹ This is not an

The qualification for membership in the new family is doing the will of the Father.

ideal community, but a community that has a clear ideal and is on the move towards its realization. It is a community that struggles consciously to become an authentic community.

The consciousness is the sign of authenticity. It expedites the attitude of dynamism, evaluation, hopefulness, and creativity.

The fundamental point of view of the members of this community is supernatural and faith-based. Every member of the community is concerned about doing the will of God or listening to God's Word and keeping it. The qualification for membership in the new family is doing the will of the Father. When Mary and brethren approached Jesus, one from the crowd told him about their presence (Mk 3:31-35). Jesus responded to the man, giving to Mary his mother, the greatest compliment possible and thereby proving that she is his best disciple and the member par excellence of the new family. Jesus spoke of their mutual relationship transcending the blood-relationship as deeper and real on the basis of the will of God which both were trying to fulfill. Lukan language of community is "listening to the Word of God and doing" (Lk 8:19-21).

A religious community is not based on natural qualities, likes and dislikes. Through the satellite of the will of God or listening to and doing the Word, the community members communicate with each other effectively and experience and express communion. This is the faith perspective and supernatural viewpoint that serves as the basic connecting link. The members have to go on deepening the depth level and rising up to the satellite link.

In the letter to Galatians Paul articulates this principle of community formation as "faith active through love" (Gal 5:6). It is faith that saves and not the law. Faith that saves, leads ultimately to the formation of a community. Faith is lived through active love. Dynamism of faith is love. By faith Paul is referring to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in whom God has revealed himself. This personal commitment in turn, becomes an inner urge to obey the will of God (obedience of faith). Hence faith as relationship to God in Christ expressed in listening to and doing God's Word and love as the source and expression of fellowship are the principles in the formation of a Christian Community, and for that matter of a religious community.

A religious community is not based on natural qualities, likes and dislikes.

It is expedient to recall the Johannine vision of a two dimensional movement: coming to Jesus and abiding in Jesus. The first is the beginning of conversion and the second is perseverance in the new relationship with God in Christ. The first stage is animated by faith, the second by love. It is an experience of the recognition of Jesus as the revelation of the Father, of decision to follow him and finally of perseverance in this option. Their love will be effective in the form of commitment stimulating to take responsibility for the mission and to suffer for the same (Jn 21:15-23).

Why did the author of letter to the Hebrews venture on a treatise on Jesus, the Priest to his community that was shaken in faith and was experiencing meaninglessness of Christian existence on account of persecution? He knew that a renewal of this community was possible only through a reinterpretation and reformation of the traditional faith. They needed to be brought back to the rootedness in the Word of God: "... in these last days he has spoken to us through a son..." (Heb 1:2). The practical result of this reinterpretation of the person and mission of Christ in terms of priesthood was the renewal of faith, hope, and love, the foundational

principles of Christian existence: "... But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed but of those who have faith and keep their souls" (Heb 10:39), "... Therefore let your drooping hands strengthen your weak and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed" (Heb 12:13); "... Let brotherly love continue" (Heb 13:1). The renewed experience of Jesus as the faithful and compassionate high priest, the word of the Father and the word incarnate, the community of believers experienced deeper communion and dynamic fellowship. The author refers to this experience as the transparency effectuated by the power of God's Word that is like a double edged sword that lays bare the interior most levels of human existence, the level of intentions of the heart (Heb 4:12).¹⁰

St. Peter in his first letter articulates the foundation of Christian existence as rebirth through the Word of God and not through the human power. "You have been born anew not of perishable seed, but of the imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God" (1 Pet 1:23). So Christian community is formed through the communion of such reborn persons. As religious life is

A dialogue that does not promote the Word-culture cannot create lasting communion.

the radical living of the baptismal consecration, the rebirth through the Word of God is the basis of a religious community and not the natural birth or family tradition, human qualities and qualifications or any other human tradition.

As Paul communicates with the Christians of Corinth, who were enslaved by divisional forces, immoral life, and scandalous behaviour, his pragmatic aim is to renew their life integrally. How does he realize this? He is leading this community back to the God tradition as crystallized in the Eucharist. He is, in fact, challenging them to be rooted in the Word of God (1 Cor 10-11). Seen within the arch of communication between Paul and Corinthian Church, the demand of Paul from the community is to deepen the consciousness about the God tradition to which they belong. Recalling the primary Eucharistic tradition namely, that of the last supper, Paul is leading them to the basic values of the Word-culture: presence, memorial, sacrifice, and communion or service. They can give them necessary impulses to transcend the situations of division, discrimination, and demoralization. A dialogue that does not promote the Word-culture cannot create lasting

communion.¹¹ This teaching of Paul confirms the relationship between Word and Communion in community.

The rootedness of a religious community in God is synthesized in Hos 11:1-4. The Fatherhood of God is a fundamental value of biblical culture. By the experience of the Fatherhood of God through the three basic expressions by Hoseah, the members of the community become media for deepening the communion. When we have the basic security in the hands of God and find the sufficiency in God's love and the surety of being guided on the right path, and the guarantee of being fed by Him, then we will become loving persons, generous persons, and available persons.¹² This is the basis of communion in a community. When this fundamental experience is lacking, then the dissatisfaction takes over leading to divisional, violent and disrespectful behaviour and life patterns. The community experiences the Fatherhood of God in his "lifting up of the community and keeping it close to his cheeks, in teaching to walk and in bending down and feeding." The religious community experiences the sufficiency of God's love and is committed to His cause by walking on His path and being fed

The religious community experiences the sufficiency of God's love and is committed to His cause by walking on His path and being fed by God.

by God. Then the community members can lift up each other, teach each other to walk on God's path and bend down and feed each other.

5. A Word-Centred Community: Formative Process and Qualities

Matthew thinks of Christian Community as the new and true Israel, the new Covenant Community. The formative process of this community can be identified on the basis of the five major discourses of Jesus as found in Cc. 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 24-25. The Sermon on the Mount (5-7) explains the basic qualities of Christian Community such as the beatitudes, reinterpreted laws and new attitudes. The beatitudes present the conditions for qualification to be part of the Kingdom of God (Mt 5:1-12). The anti-theses (Mt 5:17-48) are radicalized, interiorized and spiritualized new interpretations of the law leading the disciples beyond the righteousness of the scribes and the pharisees. The new attitudes concern almsgiving, prayer, fasting, judgment, anxiety, duplicity and so on (Mt 6:1-7, 23).

The Mission discourse (10) expounds the mission and its nature, as the community is essentially missionary. The parable discourse (13) expatiates how this community participates

in the deeper mysteries of the kingdom of God by listening to and understanding. The community discourse (18) teaches how they must organize themselves into a Jesus community based on the values of being like children, reconciliation, unconditional acceptance of a brother who errs, unlimited forgiveness, etc. Finally, this community must remain actively vigilant moving to the future and final events, as presented in the final of eschatological discourse (24-25). So the five discourses crystallize the five important dimensions of the Christian community.¹³

The qualities of this community are radical call, mission, blessedness, tolerance, Eucharistic dimension, listening and understanding, faith, service, vigilance, and submission to judgment. Ultimately it is a community that lives love in action in favour of the little ones (Mt 24:45- 25, 46) and is sent out by the risen Jesus to the whole world (28:16-20).

In the vision of Luke, this was a community with one heart and one soul and who had everything in common. Being of one heart and soul is the

Being of one heart and soul is the rootedness in the Word that unites them on the level of intention and purpose...

rootedness in the Word that unites them on the level of intention and purpose and having everything in common is the resultant expression of fellowship on the horizontal level (Acts 4:32). This community was a learning, joyful, sharing, Eucharistic, praying, apostolic and witnessing community (Acts 2:42). They had to face a lot of problems from inside and outside. Within the community there was the problem of infidelity, duplicity and divisions and disunity (5:1f; 6:1f). From outside they had to face persecution and opposition (4:1f; 5:17f; 6:8f; 8:1f). However, they had been sustained by prayer, apostolic teaching and persevering dependence on the Spirit. They faced the problems with the help of the Spirit and went through suffering and transcended the problems. That is a growing community, never stagnant but constantly moving towards the goal.¹⁴

6. A Word-Witnessing Fellowship

The Lukan vision of Community formation may be summarized in the parable of the prodigal son, which is really a parable of the family or community and the presentation of the dialogical principle for reconstituting a community (Lk 15:11-32). The father is the unifying and foundational aspect of the community. The sons become partners in the formation of the community in as much as they share in

the experience of the stable, faithful, unconditional and generous love of the Father. When the young son recognizes his submission to the father as source of sonship and freedom, the elder son must enter the house and get reconciled both with the father and the younger brother. It is through dialogue and communication through the father that the communion can be re-established and made authentic. This process is to continue through the mission of the Church. That is why the parable was left unconcluded (Lk 15:32).¹⁵ The witness to the word is realized by keeping this process of growing in communion through communication. John expresses this witnessing life in the washing of the feet (Jn 13). This is a concrete practical example of how we have to die constantly by serving each other with total involvement and commitment. The teachings in the final discourse of Jesus in John (Jn 14:1-16, 33) are relevant. They synthesize the principles not to be troubled in heart and to take courage especially with the help of the Paraclete who indwells, teaches, reminds, gives witness and leads to the full truth. Jn 15:1-17 is particularly notable. The Word-centredness is symbolized in the interior and intimate relationship between vine and branches, characterized as friendship articulated in self offering finds its witnessing mission in the abundant fruitfulness and unlimited joyfulness.

Conclusion

The Word-centred and Word-witnessing life of a religious community consists of an inward journey from the context of the world, bearing the armour of God that is faith, hope and love (through the vows) and taking the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Eph 6:10-18). "The Word of Christ must dwell in every one richly" as the community grows in the richness of fellowship and communion. It is a community that is always in the process of growth towards Word-centredness and while growing, becoming affective witness to the same. It is a community that lives "Confessio Trinitatis, Signum Fraternitatis, Servitium Caritatis."¹⁶

Endnotes:

- 1 Cf., A. Mulloor, "Development of Biblical Studies in Second Millennium: Historical Moments and Trend-setting shifts," *Jeevadhara*, Vol. 29, No. 173, 1999, pp. 341-354; F. Lentzen-Deis (General Editor), *Jesus in Exegetical Reflections and Community Experience*, Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1997; W. Egger, *Methodenlehre Zum Neuen Testament*, Freiburg, 1987; A. Mulloor, "The blind, the lame and the children in the temple. Mt 21:14-17 as a model of Action," *Bible Bhashyam*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1994, pp. 29-41.
- 2 Cf., A. Mulloor, "Eucharistic Traditions: Biblical Rereading," *Bible Bhashyam*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2000, pp. 5-21.

- 3 Cf., A. Mulloor, "Perspectives and Prospects of Spirituality: New Horizons," *Dhyana*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2007, pp. 9-25.
- 4 Cf., W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997.
- 5 Cf., P. Bovati, *De restabilimento della giustizia*, Roma, 1985.
- 6 Cf., A. Mulloor, "The Consoler and the Disciples according to John," *The Living Word*, Vol. 102, No. 3, 1996, pp. 199-205.
- 7 Cf., A. Mulloor, "And he followed him on the Way (Mk 10:52)," *Bible Bhashyam*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2003, pp. 89-100.
- 8 Cf., R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 2, New York: Doubleday, 1983, pp. 897-931.
- 9 Cf., A. Mulloor, *Called to be Special: Salvation – Historical Perspectives on*

Consecrated Life, Kalamassery: Jyothir Dhara Publications, 2002.

- 10 Cf., A. Vanhoye, *Our Priest is Christ*, Rome, 1977; R. Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, Leicester, 1991.
- 11 Cf., A. Mulloor, "Eucharistic Traditions."
- 12 Cf., A. Mulloor, *Called to be Special*.
- 13 Cf., A. Mulloor, *Jesus' Prayer of Praise*, Delhi, 1996, pp. 243-283.
- 14 Cf., *Vita Consecrata*, 41-58.
- 15 Cf., A. Mulloor, "Jesus, Understanding, Communication and Community: Decoding Jesus' language of Community building," *Jyotir Dhara*, Vol. 4, 2002, pp. 30-37.
- 16 Cf., *Vita Consecrata*.

"The Word of God displays all the qualities of true communication between persons. For example, it is informative, because God communicates his truth; expressive, because God makes plain his manner of thinking, loving and acting; and finally, it is an appeal addressed by God to a person to be heard and given a response in faith."

(Linamenta of the Synod of Bishops, 2008, n. 10f.)

THE PLOT OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Jose Maniparampil

Introduction

Though we say that there are four gospels in the New Testament, in reality there is only one gospel and that is the Gospel of Mark. Then, what did Matthew write? What did Luke and John write? Matthew begins his work in this way, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ" (Mt 1:1, in NRSV we read, "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah..."), a *biblos* *geneseos*.¹ The word for genealogy in Hebrew is *toledoth* (Gen 2:4; 5:1) and its translation in Greek is *geneseos*; both means "family history." The Greek word for "account" (NRSV) is

biblos and it means "a book." What Matthew has written, in his own words, is a "*book* of family history of Jesus," not a "gospel" in the strict sense of the term. He wrote a book or manual for catechesis.

How did Luke describe his two volume literary work- the Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles? He wrote, "I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an *orderly account* for you, most excellent Theophilus" (Lk 1:3). The Greek word for "account" here is *diegesis* and it is a technical term for "historical story."² What Luke

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has written is, strictly speaking, not a gospel, but a “historical story” or “salvation history” and he divides the salvation history into three: the time of the prophets (Lk 1:5-3:20), the time of Jesus (Lk 3:21-24:51) and the time of the church (Acts 1-28).

What did John write in his literary work? He begins his work in this way: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). The Greek word for “Word” is *logos* and John has written not a gospel, but about the *logos*, the Word of God. John sits on the top of the cross and looks at the Christ event from the heavens. He interprets the Christ from the perspective of the heavens.

How did Mark describe his work? He began his work, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus the Christ.” The Greek term for gospel is *evangelion* and it means “good news.” Therefore, we conclude that Mark wrote a good news while other evangelists described their literary work differently, Matthew a book, Luke a historical account and John the Word of God.

What is the good news in the Second Gospel? Mark has presented this good news in the format of a Greek drama that lasts for two and half hours.³ Mark is a story, a story of Jesus. A story is a plot, which is a struggle between good and evil. The struggle between good

and evil is placed at the entrance of the gospel itself: “this is the beginning of the good news of Jesus the Messiah” (Mk 1:1).

1. Suspense of the Drama

What Mark has written in his literary work is “the beginning of the good news of Jesus” (1:1), which is also the “good news of God” (1:14) or of the “kingdom of God” (1:15). As mentioned above, the Greek word for “good news” is *evangelion*.⁴ It has two meanings: (i) news concerning the king or princess (for instance, the birth of a prince) and (ii), it means “good news of victory in war.” In Luke and Matthew, good news is the news of the birth of the child. For instance, we read in Luke 2:10-11, “I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is *born* this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” (emphasis added.) Or, in Matthew 2:2 we read, “Where is *the child who has been born* king of the Jews?” (emphasis added.) But in Mark, we do not have an account of the infancy of Jesus. We meet Jesus in Mark when he is an adult already. Therefore, in Mark, *evangelion* means “good news of victory in war.” Therefore, Mark’s Gospel is the good news of Jesus coming into conflict with the powers of evil. To put it in today’s language, it is the Word of God coming into conflict with the satanic powers.

What is this conflict or war? Who are all waging this war? Who is victorious in this war? The gospel's climax is a surprise and shock for the reader. The hero of his story dies with a huge cry, in fact a howling, deserted by all, even abandoned by his God, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (15:34). How can the tragic death of a person, who is forsaken even by his God, be "good news?" This is the tension and suspense of the story of Mark.

2. The Plot of the Gospel

What is the Plot of the Second Gospel, the Gospel of Mark?⁵ What is its relevance in the mission of Jesus and the disciples? In the heart of the gospel, the plot of the story of Jesus according to Mark is further specified as the conflict between "who thinks the thought of humans" and "who thinks the thoughts of God" (8:33b). Jesus told Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the *side* of God, but of men." (emphasis added.) The Greek word for "side" is *phroneis*⁶ which has political connotations since it means "allegiance." It means political party. Therefore, there are two parties in the Gospel of Mark: God's party and Satan's party. Peter does not belong to God's

party. He belongs to another party, the party of Satan. Jesus belongs to God's party. Very interestingly, the thoughts of God are always about the welfare of human beings, while those who are on the opposite side think only about their own self. Jesus, who is on God's party, confronts the power of Satan every now and then, in different forms, but he gets divine power to conquer the demonic powers. Therefore, entire story of Mark is about good news of the Kingdom of God (or the Word of God, to put in Johannine terminology) coming into conflict with Satan in different forms. Let us make a survey through the gospel to get a grip of this conflict and see who is victorious in the war.

2.1. Jesus enters into a war with Satan in the wilderness (1:12-13): Jesus is driven by the Spirit to the wilderness to wage a war with Satan, which is the force opposed to God's Rule on earth. In Matthew and Luke, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness (the Greek word is *ago*), whereas in Mark he was "forcefully thrown into" the wilderness as though it was against his will. The Greek word is *ekballo*, which means to "throw vehemently."⁷ Jesus enters into an eschatological colossal war with Satan.⁸ On Satan's side, there are wild beasts and on Jesus'

...the thoughts of God are always about the welfare of human beings...

side, there are angels. It is a war between God's party and Satan's party. Is God's party victorious over Satan's party? Very surprisingly, Mark keeps mum as to whether Jesus was victorious or not at this moment. How can one say that one is victorious unless he is successful until the end of his life? The victory comes only on the cross.

2.2. The Kingdom of God enters into a conflict with people in Galilee: There are five controversies in Galilee (2:1-3:6): Galilee is the place of public ministry of Jesus and it is also the place of ministry of the risen Lord (Mk 16:7-8). Mark presents Jesus in conflict with people in Galilee. This is because "he belongs to God's party" and those who claim to be on the side of God (Scribes in 2:6, scribes of the Pharisees in 2:16) are not truly on the side of God. While Jesus, who is on God's party, brings forgiveness, healing and life to the people, those who are on the Satan's party accuse Jesus of blasphemy (2:7) and conspire to kill Jesus (3:6). Let us remember that the accusation against Jesus in the Jewish trial was that he blasphemed. "Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?' All of them condemned him as deserving death" (Mk 14:63-64). In the process of bringing God's rule on earth Jesus will be put to death, but that will be declared

the ultimate victory of God. Mark places Jesus, at the very beginning of his ministry, under the shadow of the cross. Markan theology is *theologia crucis*, theology of the cross. Mark sits at the back of the cross and look at Jesus whom he sees hanging on the other side of the cross. In Mark, you cannot see the face of Jesus, but the cross of Jesus.

2.3. Jesus enters into conflict with his natural family: Jesus enters into conflict with his own family members (3:21-35), who considered Jesus to have gone mad. They came to restrain him (3:21), and Jesus declared that the one who does the will of God is the member of his eschatological family (3:31-35). This is a warning to the biological family members to get converted.

In Mk 3:21, the family of Jesus in Nazareth set out to restrain Jesus because they thought that Jesus had gone mad.⁹ In Mk 3:22-30, an official delegation from Jerusalem accuses Jesus of black magic and sorcery: he is casting out demons with the prince of the demons! This is a serious crime worthy of capital punishment. The family members who set out to seize Jesus in 3:21 reach the house of Jesus (in Capernaum)¹⁰ in 3:31 and they "stand outside." A crowd was "sitting inside" the house. Jesus, looking at the crowd sitting around him in a circle said, "Here is my mother, my brother and my sister." He further specified it, "Whoever does the will

of my Father in heaven is my mother, my brother and my sister." The natural family is replaced by the eschatological family.

In the ensuing episode, the disciples asked Jesus, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" Jesus replied and said, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables" (Mk 4:10-12). Jesus is making a contrast between the insider and outsider: you who are insiders and those standing outside. In 4:13, Jesus asks the insiders, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?" What is the implication? Even those sitting in the circle around Jesus need not be an insider of the kingdom unless one is ready to do the will of God. Even those who are near Jesus by location have to be an insider in the real sense of the term by designs, words and deeds proper to an insider of the kingdom.¹¹ Immediately after this incident Jesus would categorically say, "To you (the insiders) is given the secret of the kingdom, to the outsiders everything is a riddle,"

that is, a story the meaning of which is not evident (Mk 4:11-12).¹² In the context, Jesus' natural family members are standing "outside" and for them Jesus and

his good news is a *masal*,¹³ not the secret of the kingdom.

2.4. Jesus enters into conflict with powers of nature (Mk 4:35-40): Jesus asks the disciples to the other side of the sea of Galilee, which is a region of the gentiles. Sea in the bible denotes the primordial black chaotic water, which stood against God's creation (expressed through words like formless, void, darkness, deep, mighty wind, waters, Gen 1:1-2).¹⁴ It is the power of Satan. It is Satan's party. Sea and the mighty wind or storm, which is against the Word of God reaching the gentile land to liberate it, rose in revolt against Jesus. But Jesus conquers them by his word: "Peace! Be still" (Mk 4:39). The Word of God fights against all evil powers. In this sense, the scientists who invent systems to warn people of tsunami or earthquake et cetera are on God's party waging a war against Satan's party. People who are engaged to eradicate superstitious beliefs of the people are on God's party and those who fabricate and spread superstitious beliefs are on Satan's party.

Even those sitting in the circle around Jesus need not be an insider of the kingdom unless one is ready to do the will of God.

2.5. The Word of God enters into conflict with the political hegemony (Mk 5:1-20). The episode of the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5:1-20) is basically an exorcism, but it also explains a

typical mission of Jesus. He goes to a gentile land, where everything is unclean. There are demoniac, tombs, fetters, swine, shouting, beyond control ("no one could bind him") et cetera. Entire situation echoes a culture of death and people are acquainted with grief, sorrow and slavery. The story can be divided into six parts:¹⁵

i. Arrival of Jesus in a pagan land. Presence of swine indicates that the land is not Jewish in nature but gentile. Everything in that land is unclean. Jesus meets a demoniac there

(5:1-2a, 6). A missionary arrives in a gentile land and confronts their culture (a culture of death!). He confronts it in order to transform it.

ii. The description of the demoniac (5:2b-5). He lived among the tombs night and day; nobody could bind him (rough and tough people!). He bruised himself with stones. It points to the gentile mode of worship. They cut themselves and shed blood in order to be heard by God (e.g., diviners cut their forehead in an ecstatic leap). He broke the chains and shackles. He howled aloud. All these details indicate not only the nature of the demoniac, but even point to the culture of the gentiles and their rude way of worship, and their acquaintance with a culture of death (represented by

tombs and the demoniac living among the tombs).

iii. Conversation between Jesus and the demoniac (5:7-10). Jesus confronts a culture of death. The demoniac calls the name of Jesus. In Hebrew tradition calling the name of somebody is to have control over that person. The people of the culture of death try to have control over the envoy of the culture of life. But, Jesus asks his name and conquers him.

There is both confession and hatred.

He confessed who Jesus is, but he hated Jesus.

This is typical of the culture of death. They know who Jesus is, and hate him. It is a culture that finds happiness in misery and bondage ("do not torment me"). They do not realize the need for liberation. People in bondage do not realize that they are in slavery. They are quite at home in their captivity! This is the biggest blockade for liberation that is brought by the introduction of the Word of God or preaching of the good news of the kingdom of God.

iv. The exorcism itself (5:11-13). Jesus offers a counter-culture, a culture of life. Jesus asked the name of the demoniac, which amounts to be a social analysis of the culture of death. The

word "legion" could refer to the Roman oppression because "legion" is a section of the Roman army present in the land of the Gerasenes. What is the implication? The presence of the foreign army reduced their life into dust and ashes. This is expressed through terms like tomb, howling, bruising, night and day, chains and fetters et cetera. Jesus saves them from any kind of bondage, even political captivity. Jesus, the "stronger one" of the parable of 3:27 plunders the goods of the "strong one." The plurality and the strength of "legion" were destroyed by the strength of the rule of God. It can also mean that Jesus brought an end to the foreign political domination (personally, the present author believes that Jesus must have spent there for about three to six months until he chased the foreign army out).

v. Reaction of the people (5:14-17). Since Jesus cleansed not only the demoniac, but also the society and the entire city by sending the evil forces into the swine, and making them drown in the sea, the people of the land reacted sharply. In fact the city people, who sided with the foreign domination for petty gains, asked Jesus to get out of the land. People witnessed the culture of life (they saw the man "sitting" in sane

People in bondage do not realize that they are in slavery.

mind and "clothed"). They do not welcome the mission of Jesus, nor the culture of life that he brings. People have their own vested interests in the material things (swine). They are "afraid" of the culture of life. When they lived with the legion they were not afraid. But, when he was cleansed, and when they found him sitting and in his sane mind, they were afraid. This is really shocking to us. They are afraid to welcome a new culture. They expelled Jesus from their land.

Expulsion from the land (or covenantal community) is death in the Bible.¹⁶ The missionary is defeated when he offers a "contrast society" of equality, justice, freedom, life, peace, welfare and harmony. This is the fate of all the "peace-makers."

vi. The healed demoniac becomes a missionary (5:18-20). The man wanted to be with Jesus (centripetal mission). But Jesus asked him to go and preach what God has done for him (centrifugal mission). He indeed preached. The man who became a beneficiary of the culture of life becomes an agent of that culture.

The defeat or death of Jesus is not the end of the story. The man took up the mission, for he "announced" in

all Decapolis what God has done for him. The defeat of the missionary is not the end of the story. His defeat will ultimately become a good news! There will be people to take up his cause. Thus the story of the legion is the good news of the kingdom of God waging a war against unjust political hegemony.

2.6. Jesus went to the regions of Tyre and Sidon (Mk 7:24): Tyre and Sidon are the proverbial places of the ethnically unclean people. A doubly marginalized woman, a Syro-Phoenician by birth (linguistically and ethnically marginalized), asked a favor from Jesus for her daughter (a third marginalization was that she was a woman). Jesus, sharing the belief of the ordinary Jews of his time (Jn 4:22) said to her, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." The implication is very evident: Israelites are the "children" and the gentiles are the "dogs." Jesus thought initially that he came for the Jews, and he made it clear to the woman (Cf. Mt 10:5-6). But, the woman was witty. She countered Jesus' understanding of religion and said to him, "Sir, I didn't ask you the bread of the children, did I? What I asked is the bread of the dogs. The crumbs, that falls from the table, belong to the dogs, don't they?" Exclusive

An exclusive salvation is not worthy of its name.

salvation is a closed Torah. The woman questions the blind understanding of the Jews that salvation belongs to them only. She argues for an open Torah. If there is "bread of the children," then there should be "bread for the dogs" too! Jesus challenged others. But he also allowed others to challenge him. The Syro-Phoenician woman made Jesus understand that the salvation that he brings to the world is an inclusive one in which the gentiles too have a claim. An exclusive salvation is not worthy of its name. Jesus, since he was transparent to the will of the father, "got converted." He said to the woman, "For saying that, you may go - your request is granted." Jesus is open to accept God's will even when it is revealed through a marginal woman.

In the Matthean version of the above story, Jesus praised the faith of the woman and said, "O woman, great is your faith." There are two things that deserve our special attention. First, Jesus praised the faith of a gentile. In another incident similar to this, Jesus praised the faith of a gentile centurion and said, "Truly, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith" (Mt 8:10). The Second Vatican Council admitted that there are rays of truth in other religions. Communal harmony

in a pluralistic society does not mean tolerance of different faiths, but equal respect of different religions. Neither Jesus nor his church is exclusivistic. Why should, then, one choose to be exclusivistic?

Secondly, the "faith" that Jesus is referring to has a double connotation. In the primary level, her faith is her *disapproval* of the initial "belief" of Jesus that he was sent to the lost sons of Israel only. She questions such a faith. The spirit of true faith, as that of this woman, challenges distorted faith. In the second level, it is her belief that Jesus would change the idea of his religion and would accept her interpretation of the true religion and eventually act in her favor. Jesus agreed to both. Not only the sinners "get converted," but even the "savior!" Only a person of high nobility and integrity can get going in this way.¹⁷

Initially Jesus was on Satan's party (having an exclusivistic view of salvation) and the Syro-Phoenician woman enlightens Jesus about it and Jesus is so broad-minded that he accepted her view of religion and come to the side of God's party.

Communal harmony in a pluralistic society does not mean tolerance of different faiths, but equal respect of different religions.

2.7. The kingdom of God enters into conflict with Jesus' own disciples: Jesus and the disciples are travelling in a boat, and he asked the disciples to take bread except one bread. Jesus warned them of the yeast of the Pharisees. The disciples, who were always concerned about the material food, thought that Jesus was referring to their lack of food (yeast is used to make bread!). Their misunderstanding made Jesus angry. Jesus scolds his own disciples (8:14-21), who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear and have a heart that do not understand.

It is interesting to note that there are seven or eight rhetorical questions of Jesus here. It seems that Jesus becomes upset because the disciples' only concern is for material food (they are on Satan's side).

2.8. The kingdom of God enters into fight with Peter the prime disciple of Jesus (8:30-33): Though Peter confessed that Jesus as the Messiah, he was not ready to accept a suffering son of man as the Messiah. Peter's answer is a correct identification, but only partially. It needs explanation. Jesus gives this explanation by interpreting "the Christ" of Peter's confession as "the Son of Man." This Son of Man has to undergo the destiny of the sons

of men and is pictured as a suffering Son of Man, thus bringing forth the theology of Mark, the *Theologia Crucis*. Peter took Jesus away (to correct in private!) and even dared to rebuke Jesus. In the gospel tradition, usually Jesus rebukes evil spirits (Mt 8:26; 17:18; Mk 1:25; Lk 4:39). Previously Mark used the Greek term *epitiman* to rebuke evil spirits (Mk 1:25; 3:12) and the demon-possessed sea and wind (Mk 4:39).¹⁸ Here Peter rebukes (*epitiman*) Jesus. According to Peter, Jesus is on Satan's party because he is speaking about suffering and death. But, Jesus turned and rebuked Peter and even called him "Satan," which is a strong term in the Bible. The Satan, who appeared in the wilderness re-appears here in the person of Peter and God's party engages in a war with him. Those who refuse suffering and death for other's sake are on Satan's party!

2.9. The kingdom of God enters into a war with official Judaism in the capital city: In cc 11-15, the kingdom of God enters into a struggle with the authorities in Jerusalem both religious and civil authorities. The Five Judean controversies (11:27-12:37), the Jewish trial of Jesus before the High Priest and the Roman trial before Pontius Pilate

Those who refuse suffering and death for other's sake are on Satan's party!

et cetera are part of this official confrontation. Those who claimed to be on God's party (read high priests) are really agents of Satan. They oppressed people in the name of God, while Jesus came to set them free to have fresh air.

2.10. Jesus enters into a fight with his own Heavenly Father: Finally, Jesus comes into conflict with his own father. In the Garden of Agony (14:34-42), he addressed God as "Abba, Father" and asked him that if it were possible the cup of passion and death might be removed. Was that prayer heard? No. Why? The son was contradicting himself for he taught in Mk 8:35, "Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." Now, the Son wants to save his life! If he saves his life, according to his own teaching, he will lose it. The Son prays in contradiction to his own teaching. God would not grant the son's request. He must have reminded the Son of the double standard. The son accepts a defeat from his father. But, the Son decided within his own self not to call him any longer "Abba" but only God. For on the cross Jesus did not address "Abba," but "My God." His isolation is total and full. Even God (not his "Abba," but his

"God") has abandoned. This is simply terrible. One cannot withstand the pain of even God forsaking him.¹⁹ This is the final temptation, the culmination of the desert experience. One moment, Jesus is prone to take the side of Satan! Even the son was tempted "to have the thoughts of human" for a moment, but God the father corrects him and the son accepts God's will, "not as I want, but as you want."

The cry of Jesus on the cross in the loudest voice of his throat, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" is not merely a cry of dereliction. It is a shout of confrontation like Job of the Old Testament. Jesus cried and became human in its sheer form. When Jesus cried, the humanity liked him most, and accepted him as its own leader to stand facing his God, "My God, my God, why have Thou forsaken me?"²⁰ Authentic people are those who dare even to challenge their God. Jesus is the most authentic human being, and he challenges his God even at the last moment of his life. He is expressing the basic human experience in this world. In the process of Son of God embracing a weak and wounded humanity even God the father abandoned his beloved son. But the son decided to take the

Distress and anguish, alienation and abandonment are basic realities of life.

side of humanity even if his father and God abandoned him. It was a brave act. It was recognized by the Centurion, the representative of not only Roman Empire but also the whole world, who declared, "Indeed this man was the Son of God" (Mk 15:39). The humanity stretched out its hands to welcome the one who was forsaken by God. Distress and anguish, alienation and abandonment are basic realities of life. When the Son of God became totally human in distress and anguish, abandoned by his God, totally alienated by friends, relatives and enemies, the humanity accepted him as its own.²¹ Jesus' brave act was recognized and appreciated by God the father: "Indeed you have become my Son." To become the son of God one has to be forsaken even by his God. This is the only way to set the kingdom of God on the earth. Jesus has overcome the ultimate temptation and therefore Mark now can tell that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. Mark reserved his judgment after the temptation in the wilderness. But he now openly confesses. This is the creed of the Markan community. Mark and his community do not need even the resurrection to declare that Jesus is the Son of God. It is enough that he dies on the cross to release the criminal

humanity represented in the figure of Barabbas (his name means "son of the father"). The death of the innocent son of the father (Mk 1:11) released the criminal son of the father.

Mark began his gospel saying that this is the beginning of the good news of victory of Jesus the Messiah in a war with satanic forces and now the war is won on the cross, and the envoy of the kingdom of God, who set up God's kingdom on the earth, is acclaimed as the Son of God. We have come a full circle now. The beginning of the good news of Jesus has been fulfilled as the good news of the victory of the Son of God over evil forces. The tension of the drama is now released.

Conclusion

Christ on the Cross is the most unassailable sign of Jesus' dynamic social commitment to the entire humanity. The naked Christ on the Cross is the most influential icon of the materialization of the social dimension of the fundamental option for the poor and with the poor. Christ on the Cross is the supreme living icon that declares to the world that estranged and isolated man is an excellent idea in himself and a magnificent institute by himself. Christ on the cross and his message have been vibrant in his time and in our time.²²

Are you ready to love and embrace humanity and be abandoned by your God? It demands a death on the cross daily. If the answer is a definite "no," Jesus tells you, "Get behind me Satan! You belong to Satan's party." If the answer is an affirmative "yes" there lies before you the divine recognition: "You are my Son, my Beloved; Today I have begotten you." You belong to God's party.

Endnotes

- 1 *Biblos geneleos* bi, bloj gene, sewj is the first word in the First Gospel, and this Greek word means "book of generations," or "book of genealogy." The Hebrew word for genealogy or generation in Gen 2:4 is *Toledoth* (tAdl. At). Its best meaning could be "family history."
- 2 The Greek term *diegesis* (dih, ghsij) seems to be an ancient technical term for historiography.
- 3 If one reads the Gospel of Mark in one stretch, one can finish it in two and half hours, the ideal length of a Greek drama.
- 4 *Evangelion* (euvagge, lion) in Greek is a technical term which means good news, good tidings etcetera. The word occurs in the LXX version of Isa 40:1-11, God is coming as a shepherd with the good news of deliverance to Zion.
- 5 The Gospel according to Mark is called the Second Gospel, though this seems to be the earliest gospel, because it is the second in the canon of the New Testament.
- 6 *Phroneis* (fronei/ j) means "allegiance." In Acts 28:22, the leaders of the Jews, in the name of the whole Jewish community in Rome, ask Paul about his position vis-avis

- the "sect" of the Christians, they want to state his own view: a] fronei/j (TDNT IX 232).
- 7 The English word "ballistic" is derived from Greek *ballō* (ba,llw) meaning "to throw."
- 8 Some scholars argue that the presence of wild beasts with Jesus points to the restoration of Edenic experience where animals were friendly with the human beings. *Meta* with the genitive usually a peaceful company. And here "with (*meta*) wild animals" could indicate that Jesus was living peaceably with the animals, a relationship found only at creation (Gen 1:28; 2:19–20) and expected for the age of salvation, the new creation (The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together," Isa 11:6–9; 65:17–25; Hos 2:18). But, the Greek term for beasts here is not *zōon*, (zw/on), which is the normal word for ordinary animals, but Mark employs *thērion* (qhri,wn), which means wild monsters. Out of the 45 occurrences of *thērion* in the New Testament, 38 times it is used in the Book of Revelation to refer to the monsters. In Rev 13:1 *thērion* is synonymous with dragon. The mention of "Satan," "temptation" etc., also support that Jesus is engaged in a colossal war with the satanic forces of evil. Jose Maniparampil, *Reading the Synoptic Gospels*, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2004, p. 266.
- 9 In Jn 7:5, we have a clear statement that his brothers did not believe in him. During the earthly life of Jesus, his brothers were neither his disciples nor believers.
- 10 Raymond E. Brown et al, *Mary in the New Testament*, Bangalore: TPI, 1981, pp. 51–58. The family people came from Nazareth to Jesus who shifted his residence to Capernaum. See also, J. Lambrecht, "The Relatives of Jesus in Mark," *NovT*, Vol. 16, 1974, pp. 241–258.
- 11 Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, WBC, Dallas: Word Books, 1989, pp. 199–215.
- 12 The Greek word *parabole* parabolh, is the translation of the Hebrew word for parable is *masal* lv'm and it may mean either a "parable" or a "riddle."
- 13 *Masal* refers to proverbs, similes, allegory, as well as the more familiar narrative parables.
- 14 In the Old Testament wind and sea represent hostile forces over which God prevails. Cf., Ex 14:21ff, Job 12:15; 28:25; Ps 33:7; 65:7. See also, James Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar NT Commentary, Leicester: Apollos, 2002, p. 150.
- 15 J. Maniparampil, *Reading the Synoptic Gospels*, 199–200 based on the class lectures by Antony Samy at St. Peter's Pontifical Institute, 2000.
- 16 God told Adam and Eve that the very day they eat of the forbidden tree they would die. They ate the fruit. Did they die that day? No. What happened to them that day? They were expelled from the garden. It is in this Garden of Eden that God also dwelt (Gen 3:8). This is the walled garden of luxuries and delights where God and human beings dwell together. This is the imagery of the covenant community, where God and human beings dwell. They were expelled from the covenant community, which is their death in the land. Cain was expelled to the outer world and that was his death in the field (*adamah*). The father of the prodigal son interpreted his son's departure from the house as his death: "this brother of yours was dead, and has come back to life" (Lk

- 15:31). Jose Maniparampil, *Whisperings from the Clouds*, Aloor, Biblia, 2007, p. 101.
- 17 J. Maniparampil, *Whisperings from the Clouds*, pp. 127-129.
- 18 *epitima* *evpitima*/n is also used in Mk 9:25 in the same sense. Referring to the violence of the sea (Mk 4:35-40) and the words used by Jesus to still the storm, James Edwards writes, "Such language is more appropriate of demonic forces than of inanimate nature." J. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 150.
- 19 J. Maniparampil, *Reading the Synoptic Gospels*, pp. 592-594.
- 20 J. Maniparampil, *Reading the Synoptic Gospels*, p. 595 writes, "The one who
- chooses to be with the humanity even in its distress and anguish is indeed the Son of God." But authentic human being, like Job of the Old Testament, questions God's silence to man's cries and indifference to human suffering. But let us remember that God appeared and attested that Job spoke well of God and wanted to punish the friends of Job, who apparently spoke for God, but did not tell the truth. God is looking for authentic human being who dares, because they love human beings, to challenge God. It is a test of their love for humanity.
- 21 J. Maniparampil, *Reading the Synoptic Gospels*, pp. 592-594.
- 22 J. Maniparampil, *Whisperings from the Clouds*, pp. 592-594.

"This effort will determine the specific initiatives to be undertaken. For example, the Bible needs to be fully valued in pastoral programmes. Under the guidance of the Bishop, pastoral plans having the Bible as their foundation need to be formulated in each diocese. Such plans could well draw upon the Bible's already being present in the Church's great liturgical actions and offer on these occasions direct contact with the Bible, especially in the practice of *lectio divina* for youth and adults. Doing this will ensure that the communion of priests and laity, and thus, entire parishes, communities of the consecrated life and ecclesial movements, will be grounded in and make manifest the Word of God." (Linamenta of the Synod of Bishops, 2008, n. 27.)

DEMOCRATIZED HOLINESS AMIDST CONFLICTS: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

A. Maria Arul Raja, SJ

1. Holiness amidst Struggles

All along the human history there has been valiant assertion of the people thrown to the periphery against the aggression of the centralized powers with or without success. This phenomenon is experienced by the present generation rather acutely in various quarters across the globe. The disempowered lots are yet to make their impact in the national or international spaces. But the onslaught of the GLP,¹ along with the slogans of neo-Brahminism, further reduces them to be disempowered in claiming their due share of space even within our own

country. Their ability to bargain power from the estates of the democratic edifice is further in chaotic condition. It is here the victims of exclusion (of all brands) denied of legitimate opportunities, have to identify the epicentre of their inner spiritual powers and the ethical space from which they have to address the beastly powers while empowering themselves.

Could the experience of suffering itself be transformed as the raw material for evolving new discourses? Will their symbolic world produce new interpretation of enslaved life promoting social death through contemporary

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political idioms? Can they, without yielding to the outburst of unproductive expression even of the legitimate wrath, become bridge-builders between the caste segments warring with each other? Will they explore the possibilities of joining hands with those victims oppressed by other types of discriminatory hierarchical structures? Search for holiness, wholeness, fullness, or purity along these lines would create a new space of 'heaven' here on earth and generate a worthy ethical vantage point.

2. Transformative Reading of the Bible

2.1. Proximity between the Victims and the Bible

Being attuned to down-to-earth spirituality built upon material concreteness of here and now, the poor are at home with the anthropomorphism of God of the Yahwistic tradition (J). Moreover, this tradition is rather closely vibrant with divine-human continuum while experiencing God of Life. Monotheistic import of the Biblical world and especially of the Elohistic tradition (E) is required to come out with unambiguous orientations in spiritual searches and moral options. The One and the Only Righteous God projected to arbitrate immediate justice to the *anawim* thrown to the periphery is a felt

need for those who cannot raise their voice of dissent against the oppressive powers. Whatever be the original historical contexts of the evolution of the stipulations related to purity and pollution of the Deuteronomistic tradition (D), when they seek to serve the interests of the ruling elite, there arises a sense of repulsion against them in the minds of the poor. And when they seek to protect the endangered lives of the poor, they evoke a deep sense of social responsibility. Regarding elaborate liturgical prescriptions of the Priestly tradition (P), there is a love-hate ambiguity in the minds of the poor. Long narratives with minute details and stories with dramatic turns of events attract the listener/reader more effectively than the prolonged discourses with monotonous formulaic enumeration of codes or sayings.

The motif of promise-and-fulfillment of the Bible strikes a concordant note with their perennial act of hopeful expectation of a promising future. When the biblical stories portray the fulfillment of the humanly impossible things in the far or near future by God's direct or indirect intervention, the hope-generating mechanism within the wounded psyche and their collective consciousness is revived with new enthusiasm. The fulfillment quotations, nostalgic reminiscences of the past victory or the painful memory of any

defeat create a sense of solidarity with the victims of the Biblical world in their hope-filled aspirations.

As a people deprived of land ownership, the uprooted people actively vibrate with the themes and narratives related to the acquisition of land and becoming a nation. The early acts of purchasing and trading of slaves by the Israelites after their deliverance from Egypt is an eyesore to the sensibilities of the common folk.

The figurative language of prophetic poets and the parabolic and anecdotal modes of communication by Jesus forcefully rivet their attention. Many stories eyed through the lens of the victims come out with new perspectives different from the traditional ones. For instance, the story of the widow's mite read from perspectives of the poor does not emphasize her generosity but the exploitation of the religiosity of the widow by the temple treasury authorities in the name of religious commitment.

2.2. Ethical Imperative of Transformation

The duality experienced due to the struggles against any imposed oppression of every kind (social death vs. human dignity) is sought to be resolved through the possibilities of the eruption of the hope of a new life of equality as the dignified co-human

with others. It is in this conflict context the Word of God serves at once as a gift and a task in the on-going process of our becoming co-creators with God; co-workers with other humans; and co-born with the world of creation. It "is therefore the source of communion not only between humankind and God but also among people, one with another, all of whom are the Lord's blessed."²

The ethical necessity of constructing a new order in tune with the compassionate divine heartbeat proclaims a war cry to every type of discriminatory hierarchy. Such orientations consciously abstain from individualistic and a-political readings of the Bible. They may not be trapped into the culture of craving for the hair-raising thrill of dramatic miracles or magical solutions instantaneously presented on the golden platter. On the other hand, such communitarian readings with person-oriented concerns are tempered with the political agenda of gradually achieving collective self-empowerment with due human dignity. This has to be taken into serious account for any meaningful discourse on holiness.

The victims of any oppression (caste discrimination, patriarchy, racism, economic globalization, exclusion of the Tribal, exclusion of Dalits) are under the grip of their legitimate wrath against any discriminatory hierarchy.

And consequently their expressions and interactions with others would be constantly charged with intense emotional contents, especially in terms of depression or disappointment, seeking ‘imminent salvation’. And these are the entry points and fertile grounds for the active forms of fundamentalist and individualistic trends of seeking solace from otherworldly spiritual shops deploying Biblical texts.

Contemplative stillness and interior composure constitute the dominant knowledge system based on literacy, transcendentalism, or other worldly powers. These may not be the mainline categories in the life

- FROM**
- Imposed disempowerment
 - Experience of dishonour and shame
 - Being excluded in human relationship with equal footing yet imposed with menial labour
 - Acceptance and internalization of the discriminatory hierarchy
 - Denial of participation in decision-making everywhere
 - Being looked down upon as demerited beneficiaries of reservation
 - Deprived of land and other means required for decent life

struggles of the disempowered people. Rather differential and disadvantaged historical memories of their collective consciousness will be the platform upon which their meaning systems are constructed. What matters, here, then, is insight rather than instruction, bodily site than ideational site, action than reflection.

3. Convergence between Victims - Contemporary and Biblical

3.1. Victims of the Present World

The dynamics of the interior movements, both articulate and inarticulate, of the disempowered brokenhearted people could be portrayed as indicated below:³

- TOWARDS**
- Self-empowerment
 - Experience of honour and dignity
 - Being included in human relationship with personal choices of work with creativity
 - Eradication and annihilation of every form of hierarchy
 - Appropriation of participatory roles in every realm
 - Equal opportunities in every realm
 - Availability of the means needed for dignified life

3.2. Biblical Victims

Even a cursory reading of the stories from *Genesis* up to *Apocalypse* could disclose the following movements:⁴

FROM	TOWARDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaos and disorder • Accumulation of sin • Oppressing Settlement with policing • Wandering in search of land • Centralized monarchical governance • Rule of the whims of the minority elite • Retribution counting the under-privileged as sinful and favouring the privileged • Elaborate worship to cover up the commitment to justice • People as exiled refugees • Cursed are the poor • Exclusion of the poor as sinners • Pompous sacrificial worship • Ascribed purity of the cultural elite • External manifestation of piety to cover up internal contradictions • Status through social hierarchy • Justification through law • Heavens and earth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation and order • Annihilation of Sin • Wandering in search of becoming a nation • Settlement as a people in one's own land • Confederal tribal governance • Centrality of the agenda of the majority poor • Universal salvation through the affective embrace of the underprivileged • Interior worship in terms of promotion of justice • People as hope-generators • Blessed are the poor • Inclusion of all counted as sinners • Mercy is better than sacrifice • Achieved purity by the so-called impure • Internal worship through ethical options in favour of the needy • Status through radical egalitarianism • Justification through faith • New heavens and new earth

3.3. Points of Convergence

Bringing these two worlds together for dialogical purposes, the new alternatives projected by these two worlds are to be identified through their respective linguistic and symbolic world. The parameters for establishing justice here and now has to be evolved on the basis of perceptions of the sacred order and of the ethical choices

in the war between the good and the evil. The following table demonstrates some of the points of convergence between these two world-views, though each of them emerged from divergent locations in different times. Even from cursory glimpses into this initial hermeneutical effort here, it is quite impressive to note the crying urgency for explicitly identifying, implicitly naming and ultimately struggling to eliminate the anti-life forces in both the worlds.

Victims of the Present World	Victims of the Biblical World
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Memory of the on-going segregation and projection of new humanity of equal dignity.• Tyranny of the Empires of casteism, Mammonism, racism, patriarchy.• Resistance to the discriminatory hierarchy in multiple forms like casteism or patriarchy.• Victimization in one's own soil by native or foreign powers• The segregated victims as the symbols of assertion• Caste traditions as the extension of anti-human forces• Co-option into the culture of caste hierarchy and globalized market• Critique of cult based on arbitrary purity of caste hierarchy, economic exploitation, politics of seduction, violence and arrogance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Memory of the slain lamb and projection of the new heavens and new earth• Tyranny of the Empires- Colonial as well as oppression from within the Jewish world.• Resistance to the hierarchy of imperial accumulation of power• Roman crucifixion in Palestinian soil remembered wherever Christian communities lived• The crucified victim as the sign of hope• Roman empire as the incarnation of Satanic forces• Complacency with the colonial structures of Empire• Critique of imperial cult, economic exploitation, politics of seduction, violence and arrogance

With these observations, the ethical option for the disempowered people as their overriding concern seems to be the advocacy position consciously chosen by the living and enlivening God of the Bible. This is to enable them, as subjects of their own history, to move ahead from the existing disorder towards a new world with better possibilities. The reality of emancipation is a matter of dynamic tension between the 'already' and the 'not-yet'. The vision of liberation of the victims has to be tangibly enfleshed here and now, as well as the subject matter of contemplation through memory.

4. Historical Occasions for Becoming Holy

Through the prism of the assertion of the periphery against the aggression of the power-centres, let us undertake a brief sojourn through the semantic axis of the Biblical narratives which have emerged from the 13th century B.C.E. to the 2nd century C.E. The conclusion of each section below may indicate to us the occasions and opportunities thrown open to people, both the oppressed as well as the oppressors, to grow in holiness as expected by the Biblical God of history. In other words, the holiness is placed here as a process of growth of the people amidst conflicting situations.

4.1. Organizing People against Power-Accumulation

The foundational vision of the Exodus-community was evolved as the result of the organized confrontation of the run-away bonded labourers against the excesses of the imperial Egypt. Their communitarian venture of building an egalitarian society was animated by their experience of release from the oppressive forces of Egypt and of covenantal closeness with the redemptive hand of their valiant God.

The vision of this counter-cultural community became their unwritten constitution steering their pursuits

of seeking a land for them to dwell and revolting against the rule of the military-based totalitarian city-states of the aristocratic nobility or imperial monarchies of the ancient West Asia in 13th century B.C.E. This minority community of slaves and midwives energized by the leadership of Moses in Pharaoh's Egypt was quite articulate through oral traditions. Its faith was explicitly linked to survival in the face of a dominant and hostile culture. In the very act of countering the oppressive regime and of ushering in the politics of righteousness, justice and compassion, the marginalized (hapiru) seemed to have derived the image of God and become aware of his ethical demands in favour of the wretched.

God's unambiguous gesture of confrontation with imperial centres is in view of evolving a counter-cultural community of the oppressed. These unorganized masses organized themselves with self-governance of egalitarian sharing based on their faith in the same God.

4.2. Serving the Unorganized & Dispersed

The Israelite tribal confederacy lived in the Promised Land. It was comprised of the immigrants from Egypt and of those militant members withdrawn from serving the feudal aristocracy of the local Canaanite city-

states with military establishments. They seemed to have struck a definite chord of dissonance from the landowning rulers and their political structures in the Canaanite society. The security of the individuals and the society of the Israelite league of the tribes depended on the well-knit grass-root kinship and not on the centralized kingship of the Canaanite model.

The political rupture created by their revolt against the kingship was resolved only by the covenantal compassion and righteous commitment directed towards the peasants suffering under the yoke of the feudal lords. The emerging (Deuteronomic) criticism of the kingship and the violent hamstringing of the chariot horses of the enemies manifest their innate repulsion of the high handed militarization of any force. The convention of distributing the land for various tribes and its usage within the kinship with a need-based approach seemed to be the eloquent counter-cultural measures against the extravaganza of the vast network of land-owning monopolies.

The covenantal community sought to serve the legitimate needs of the unorganized and the dispersed, by way of countering the power-concentration with landowning military rulers.

4.3. Against Dominion of Ruling Class

Pre-monarchic Israel was founded on decentralized village community with occasional communal gathering of the common folk for fighting out the common enemies. In this model the micro-sovereignty of the village community was preserved.

With the emergence of Israel monarchy (by around 1000 B.C.E.), there was a dramatic transition from the modest court of Saul to the sophisticated military regime of David, and then to the proverbially magnificent imperialism of Solomon. The village economic production supported the village sovereignty in the pre-monarchical period, whereas the same was forced to serve the needs of the standing army and the royal ostentations in the monarchical period. This monarchical style of rule betrayed the expectations of the powerless common folk. The original egalitarian orientations of Israel as a counter-cultural people were thwarted by the unlawful seizure of the power and resources by the minority elite through the deviant monarchy. That is why anti-people monarchs were ruthlessly condemned by the prophets sent by God in the following ages.

Royal consciousness with its inherent centralization of power is a morbid development. The singular identity of Israel as a covenantal partner with Yahweh, the only God, judged monarchy as a deviant departure from God's salvific design.

4.4. Intervention on behalf of Victims

Israel's prophets (around 800-500 B.C.E.) were the charismatic spokespersons (on behalf of God). Their commitment to God's call propelled them to proclaim liberative message in the atrocious socio-politico-economic contexts. Rooted in the heartbeat of covenantal God (avoiding idolatry) and creating the resultant order of the society (socio-political justice) in favour of the victims of oppression were the twin dimensions articulately emphasized in prophetic discourses.

In general, the message of early prophets (Joshua, Elijah and Elisha) prior to the later prophets (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others) was directed mainly to the ruling kings responsible for anti-poor treatises with their neighbouring dictators. In response to their high-level negotiations, the former prophets addressed the Word of God mainly to the high level negotiators.

But the imperial Assyrian power shifted its foreign policy from top-level

negotiations with the aristocratic rulers and vassals to direct dealings with the masses in terms of large-scale massacres and deportations in 8th century B.C.E. In response to this new situation of direct terrorization of the common folk, the later prophets addressed the word of God mainly to the people as a whole seeking counsels and consolation.

The prophetic warnings attacking the power centres - royal courts, villa houses, shrines and the Temple - underscored the liberation of the afflicted masses suffering under the oppressive hands of the power-wielders. Rulers both from within and outside Israel were targeted for prophetic admonition for the situations of turmoil and anarchy. For instance, Amos spoke out against Jeroboam II, the king of Israel during 786- 746 B.C.E. And Isaiah's voice of dissent during the invasion of the Assyrian imperialism (732-701 B.C.E.) articulated the collective dream of re-establishing the self-rule in line with the dynasty of David their forefather. Any association with the alien suzerainty was condemned as a "covenant with death."

The soothing proclamation of Jeremiah (627-582 B.C.) had the flavour of the rustic symbolism through poems and actions. His rootedness in the village and country side and his awareness of the sources of Israel's identity as a people helped him discern the fundamental errors in the policies

of the kings. Whenever these ruling classes stepped up the militarizing endeavours by sapping the agricultural surpluses, the labourers were exploited. Jeremiah's message was at once an offensive against the rulers and the comfort to the voiceless.

Priestly Ezekiel himself being one of the 20000 victims exiled to Babylon (around 587 B.C.E. by Nebuchadnezzar's powerful army which completely demolished the venerable city Jerusalem) underwent the trauma of collective abandonment of Israel. As an 'insider' of the breakdown experience, he attempted to transform the drooping spirit of absolute hopelessness of his fellow Jews into an optimistic vision. The hope-generating mechanism was done by way of soul-searching in the collective consciousness of Israel in the alien soil. Comfort and reassurance evoked by the prophetic actions and oracles in the minds of the hapless victims amply bear testimony to the unfavourable attitude manifested by the biblical prophets towards super powers and their triumphalistic subjugation.

Power-wielders reigning supreme with their habitual or deliberate violation of justice and righteousness were spotted out for prophetic denunciation. The victims of such rulers were comforted with prophetic reassurance with optimistic alternatives.

4.5. Wisdom for Affirming the Marginalized

The statist system of societal organization with its associate centralized bureaucratic power structure was the order of the day in the Ancient West Asia during the pre-exilic, exilic, and post- exilic times of the history of Israel. This created the new need of complex scribal skills in order to serve and even to survive the whimsical dictates of autocratic administrators. Survival ethics, success-oriented servitude and pragmatic diplomacy were the background for the literary products from the pen of the scribes serving the royal needs.

During the transition of Israel from decentralized organization of tribal confederacy into highly centralized monarchical state, the power-hungry monarchs (David and Solomon) imported the bureaucratic apparatus and the required training for maintaining their status quo. These foreign scribes staffed the necessary infrastructure of the state. The Wisdom literature flourished from these circles of scribes.

The scribes, belonging to the leisurely class of royal patronage, applied themselves to problems related to a happy and successful life (e.g., the books of Proverbs and Quohaleth), or to the unresolved issues and mystery of life with actual or apparent skeptical note (e.g. the books of Job and Ecclesiastes).

By and large, there seems a tendency in the Wisdom literature to emphasize an order in every thing—nature, creation, life, mystery, suffering etc. When this order was conformed to with ethical decisions, well-being and righteousness were supposed to be achieved.

But this *status quo* Wisdom emerging from the elite of royal establishment underwent a painful transformation and became 'sub-altern' after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. Obviously the post-exilic Wisdom is tainted with pathos and tears of oppression in the hands of Babylonians and the Persians. Hence, any genuine rereading of wisdom traditions cannot afford to ignore the life situations of the politico-cultural abuses heaped upon the victims of colonization by various empires. And a close probe into the texts of Wisdom literature indicates a definite bias in favour of the impoverished. They were abandoned by the unjust social order upholding the interests of the powerful and wealthy elite but upheld by the main thread of the message of the Wisdom literature.

Religio-cultural resources, tapped by the wisdom traditions at the early stage for pleasing the rulers, were eventually employed to a large extent to energize the victims of the crisis-ridden phases of repeated colonization.

4.6. Emancipation of the Oppressed at any Cost

By 175 B.C.E., the so-called 'Hellenistic Reform' imposed by Antioch the power-centre, with the support of the aristocratic Jews sought to transform Jerusalem into a hellenistic city-state. Jewish cultural sensibilities and Temple sentiments were ruthlessly trodden upon by Antiochus IV the dictator. While some were silently agonized, some underwent martyrdom and some resorted to armed rebellion with guerilla warfare.

These rebels were countered by Seleucid military forces. But ultimately the rebels gained victory in capturing their dear Temple in Jerusalem for restoring its sanctity after its dereliction. This paved the path for the Hasmonean conquest in other parts of Palestine. Even the official annulment of the religious persecution of the Seleucid government did not satisfy the rebels. Their vehement protest supported by the majority of the local native population was still stepped up against the aristocratic Jews and Seleucid rule. In the ensuing negotiations and battles in view of achieving political independence for Judea, Judas the Maccabean (meaning hammer) hero was killed in 160 B.C.E.

By and large, the rebels readily awaiting to be martyred like Maccabean

heroes in defence of their religio-cultural roots, were the rural folk under the yoke of exploitative tax burdens of the Greeks (aliens) supported by the land-grabbing local Jewish elite. The force behind the indefatigable assertion of the rural folk was their zeal for revivalism of the original spirit of the Torah, given by God to their ancestors.

The voiceless people, in defense of their religio- cultural heritage and politico- economic autonomy, evolved a new theology of confrontation to fight against the militarised colonisers even at the cost of their lives.

4.7. Defiance of Domination System

The core of the new vision proclaimed in a nutshell by Jesus, the egalitarian prophet, was the dominion-free order of the rule of God. When power was sought after by his disciples to dominate others and especially the poor and the needy, he hastened to reject it. Never did he conform to the leaders' status-driven behaviour craving for the place of honour. Such conduct of the elite seeking the privileges was judged to be unchristian in the early Church.

Jesus' beatitudes, healing ministry and above all the table fellowship with the outcasts of his time are indicative of the irruption of the Reign of God. In marked contrast to his outright condemnation of the rulers' hegemony, we note how the suffering ochlos

(crowd of powerless masses) enjoyed his compassionate solidarity.

He discarded the royal titles like Messiah and Davidic king or other titles like Rabbi and teacher. In short, Jesus, who washed the feet of his friends like a slave, and was murdered as the abandoned servant of God, neither proposed nor submitted to any hierarchical system with centralized power.

In continuity with Jesus' assertion about the incompatibility of compassionate God and monstrous Mammon (Money), and his condemnation of the rich, the Eucharistic communities of the early Christianity practised egalitarian sharing and offered a privileged place to the dehumanized.

Jesus denied the equation of holiness with the culture of arrogant exclusivism and conceited legalism practised by the religio-cultural elite of his day. Rather he contravened the pre-exilic holiness code and the practice of purity- pollution system prevalent among the powerful among the Jews. Thus he worked against their ways of accumulating further power. He established a friendly rapport with the social outcasts, the sick, women, gentiles and sinners without any fear of defilement, creating thus a new order of radicalized purity. His followers in the early Church struggled a lot to break ethnocentric prejudices against the Gentiles.

Jesus' scathing attack aimed at the domineering institutions- Temple, priesthood, legal system- with high centralization of power working against the interests of the Palestinian peasants. His popularity with the impoverished masses seemed to have aggravated the wrath of the Sanhedrin, the highest religio-cultural assembly at Jerusalem. With a series of false accusations leveled against Jesus it is evidently clear that he was executed by the Romans as a politically dangerous popular leader and that he was arrested by the initiative of the priestly aristocracy. They had to kill him, for Jesus represented the most intolerable threat ever placed against the so-called spirituality, values, and arrangements of the Domination System.

The irruption of the salvific activities of God enfleshed in Jesus-event rejected any form of domination- system crushing the lives of the people at the periphery; it is vibrantly in active solidarity with the dehumanized.

4.8. Subversive Rebellion

With repeated aggression from imperial dominations (Babylonian, Persian, Hellenistic and Roman), the Jews lost the sense of controlling their own destiny and history. This was articulated in terms of certain disgust at the existing order, need for imminent

divine intervention, irreconcilable dualism between the good and the evil, inevitability of redemptive suffering, subversive rebellion against despotic powers etc. These sentiments were given expression through apocalyptic literature.

The protest of the common folk against the imperial Roman tyranny in the later half of the first century C.E. gave birth to the book of Revelation. The earthly powers and principalities with anti- Rule-of-God orientations are negatively portrayed through such symbols as Satan, Dragon, Hades, beasts, plagues, death, Rome, Babylon. When these evil forces reigned supreme demanding an unconditional obedience to them, the poor citizens were deprived of their legitimate socio- political rights and religio-cultural identity. In this context of serious crisis of injustice, the followers of Jesus were supported by the theological stance of an uncompromising refusal to dance to the Satanic tune of oppressive imperialism. This was given expression in the form of apocalyptic writings.

Apocalyptic outbursts were the dissenting expressions of a people in despair, tormented in the hands of the colonizing rulers. The groans of the victims were not oriented towards resignation but rebellion against imperialism.

5. Matrix of Holiness for the Disempowered

We tried to outline some of the Biblical orientations encountering the phenomenon of the assertion of the people of the periphery against the dominion of the dominant. These orientations can be succinctly recapitulated as follows:

- The people of Israel came into existence as a covenantal partner with the God of Redemption and a self-governing community with counter-cultural vision in the very act of collectively revolting against the ruthless powers of the ruling Egypt. God confronts the power-centres; he affirms and organizes the unorganized into a counter-cultural people in pursuit of democratization.
- As a counter-cultural community with fraternal egalitarian system of distributing the God-given resources for the needy, they had to confront militarized city-states in the neighbourhood while seeking a land for them to live. The intimate friendship of the bonded labourers with God impels them to revolt against the power-concentration with the ruling elite. In this process they create a self-dependent governance system with egalitarian sharing.
- Highly centralized monarchy serving the interests of the aristocratic minority at the cost of the majority of 'the people of the soil' was counted to be incompatible with the foundational vision of Israel. Royal consciousness and monarchy are

the deviant departure from the original identity of Israel and from the salvific will of God.

- Power-wielders are subjected to prophetic denunciation; whereas their victims are the recipients of the soothing message of prophetic assurance. The prophetic interventions are bent on condemning the violations of the covenantal implications with moral imports in favour of those oppressed by the unjust regimes. They rebelled against imperial aggression of the alien powers as well as the local powers. Restoring the morale of the afflicted people in order to empower them to design their own future destiny during the reigns of the centralized powers was part of their prophetic mission.
- Tapping the religio-cultural resources, the wisdom writings sought to widen the faith horizon of the victims of the exilic and the post-exilic generations in order that they encounter in a realistic manner, the stifling tyranny imposed by the alien or local powers. Religio-cultural resources are to be duly tapped for an efficient crisis-management of the sons of the soil while confronting the powers.
- The Reign of God can be said to be tangibly active through the rejection of any form of domination-system and the active solidarity with the impoverished victims excluded from the mainstream of the society at large. A valiant confrontation against anti-people orientation is imperative, at the moment of serious crisis caused by accumulation and abuse of power.

- The groans of the people in despair are not the symptoms of resignation but of rebellion expressed through multiple symbols with pluralistic varieties against the centralized powers.

In short, the Biblical response to the reality of 'Victimized Periphery vs. Terrorizing Centre' can be succinctly articulated through the conviction declared by Mary, a rural illiterate woman thrown to the cultural periphery in her days: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly" (Lk 1:52).

6. Holiness to be a Historical Reality

Amidst these conflicts faced by the disempowered, and the struggles undertaken by God, how is one challenged to become holy? The expectations of God seem to be along the following lines:

- "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev 19: 2).
- "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).
- "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6: 36).
- "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isa 6:8).

Interestingly the very Living God himself, ever enlivening all with his salvific embrace through the strategy of his preferential compassion towards

the victims of history is presented to every human as the only norm to be followed. It is for leading an enlivening way of living with others by becoming co-creators with God; co-workers with other humans; and co-born with the world of creation. For enfleshing this challenge of living with the divine-heart as the only norm, we shall spell out some orientations.

6.1. Futuristic Dreams amidst Brokenness

Those suffering under duress of the repression of the evil systems of oppression meticulously conceived, fiercely activated and deviously legitimized are called upon to seek alternatives to or annihilation of them. Such counter-cultural attempts will be eyed with suspicion from the range of creating simple law-and-order problem up to getting labeled as violent terrorism.

While having the on-going memory of imposed segregation, the victims are to keep on projecting their horizons in the direction of new hopes. Such exploratory ventures force them to rightly name the evil systems of oppression. Giving in to the determinism, as if the evil can never be overcome, leads to an anti-God orientation. It is here the holy dreams are the energizing factors in the lives of the people with wounded psyche. For instance, when Dalits give in to the

deterministic package that a casteless society is impossible, then it becomes suicidal. On the other hand, when they continue with their on-going struggles against oppression, with the dynamics of the 'already-not-yet' process, their hope for casteless utopia gets activated even amidst multi-layered conflicts.

Such dreams are articulated from the depths of the crises they encountered in concrete history. They function as the "spirituality of resistance" against the systemic evil enshrined in human societies and as the guidance for organizing an alternative world. This is how the dreams for alternative world shape up a moral ethos, not only for the struggling communities but also for the oppressing agents. The victims' rhetorical ethos and the narrative ethos seek to persuade both the fellow victims as well as the ruling elite.

Like the prophetic and wisdom movements in the early phase of the Biblical history, the apocalyptic movement too had its intense evocation through visions during the later phase (2 B.C.E. – 3 C.E.). Inevitability of the imminent closure of the present unjust order is caused by its own disorderly nature. Because of its anti-life orientations against the victims, the present order does not have the moral power to exist. Though apparently pessimistic with regard to the present or the past, the dreams of the victims have

a very strong sense of reconstruction of futuristic hope with the help of the divine intervention.

Amidst the multiple conflicts the only way-out for the hapless disempowered by the multiple forms of repression by the ruling elite is through the apocalyptic irruption. Abounding in rich symbolism, the wounded psyche of the victims seek to subvert or reject the existing order imposed on them while continuing to project and dream an alternative order in its place. The mega colonial or caste powers would be opposed by the powerless even within the limited politico-cultural space. In other words, the apocalyptic visions are the weapons of the weak against the dominant forces. This apocalyptic arena is the fertile location for identifying the implicit consciousness with their sharp focus on their genuine concerns of the Biblical subalterns rather than their explicit consciousness which may project certain ambiguity or confusion. One can be sure that the implicit consciousness both of the Dalits and the Biblical subalterns encounter each other in a deeply engaged manner without having any need for wearing cultural masks.

6.2. Divine Perspective for Earthly Transformation

In every conflicting situation, the victims have to establish their

authority as the arbitrators of justice. Their attempts at creating a space for a dialogical conversation between the heavenly and the earthly voices empower them further. The voice of Yahweh from the heavenly throne, thunderstorms, mountaintops, and the voices of the Risen Christ, the Spirit, angels, and other heavenly beings are made to affirm the divine perspectives. "If heaven is co-present with earth and the definitive manifestation of the real, Revelation's constant appeal to heaven is not abandonment of earth. On the contrary, the heavenly dimensions of apocalyptic discourse 'confirm its commitment to concrete history'."⁵ The 'earth' is the universe already constructed by the power-wielding empire with all its paraphernalia. The 'heaven' is the universe to be constructed by the divine perspectives amidst the disempowered victims of the empire. *Apocalyptic* world-view tries to tear apart the veils concealing the dynamics of the legitimization, status quoism, and pursuit of power at any cost.

6.3. Culture of Self-critique

Prophets and other interventionists' functioning on behalf of God for the welfare of the victims in history do not get bogged down in the same location of the co-victims in the name of solidarity. Rather, they seek to construct a unique space for challenging not only the

evildoers but also their own people calling upon them for perceptive discernment. Sometimes with a distance from one's own people, they offer some hermeneutical tools to them for rightly interpreting some of the complex situations.

In the light of the above dynamics of accompanying the victims of history at once as an insider and an outsider has to trigger off new horizons in imagination of the victims. Instead of getting bogged down within one's own habitual discourses and world-views, the victims have to challenge themselves to traverse across multiple world-views behind different symbolic worlds, heavenly or earthly, and even behind the subtle hermeneutical arms deployed by unjust or anti-people discourses. Only a constantly mobile and innovatively exploring imagination could relentlessly unsettle tendencies towards fossilization which blocks path-breaking new dreams.

While critiquing the evil forces, some times, in the name of God's vengeance- promoting justice, God's vengeful destruction is projected as the inevitable process of retribution. It is here the millenarian and other fundamentalist interpretations take the lead in terms of easy flight into the bloodshed in the enemy camp with a militant and triumphalist outlook. But on the other hand, the liberationist

interpretation comes out with a strong sense of ethical transformation at all levels.

The humanistic ethical trajectories of interpretation, while consciously not taking the cue from an easy flight into the cosmic order of justice to be established against the socio-political disorder, alert the readers about the intervention of the victims themselves with on-going conversion. It is very rare in the human history that the powers that be have voluntarily given up their privileges. All the same the oppressive powers keep on consolidating their roots by the perennial promise of 'one's own salvation through dehumanization of others.' That is why even the victims of the present day fall flat before the 'false-promise-of-becoming-the-future-oppressors' given by the oppressive systems. It is here the victims have to struggle against this beastly virus in every form both in the public realm as well as in the private realm. In other words, the oppression is not perpetuated by the so-called oppressors only, but also by its victims not internalizing the egalitarian values. The universal permeation of this spirit of 'dominating-the-weaker-than-onese' has to be acknowledged by everyone struggling to create an egalitarian society. When the evil anti-life forces are operative in others or one's own community, they are to be eliminated. This point of view

of self-critique is the indispensable element for guarding the victims from the danger of becoming loyal to the evil of oppression.

7. Challenges of Holiness

It is amidst multifarious conflicts that we need to evolve new discourses for creating an egalitarian society with the spirit of exploration. Especially the victims in every historical situation need to grapple with and probe into the following directions in their on-going struggles against injustice:

- The evil of discriminatory hierarchy in any form disrupts and destroys every initiative for humanization.
- The constructive agenda of building up ethical responsibility, both of the sinners and those sinned against, has to be creatively evolved as part of every struggle for liberation.
- The negativities experienced by the victims need to be transformed into creative expressions without yielding to the outburst of unproductive expressions resulting in further fragmentation of society. A wide range of networking among the victims could be undertaken by new initiatives like Dalit-Tribal efforts in fighting out the ill-effects of market forces.
- The victims are challenged to traverse across the vast spectrum of multiple world-views for creating new exploratory discourses from every cross-cultural and inter-religious dialogical attempt.

- The search for new humanity will be strengthened among the victims, when the culture of self-critique is cultivated for putting up a valiant fight against the all-permeating sin of 'dominating-the-weaker-than-oneself.'
- 3 A. Maria Arul Raja, 'Dalit Layers of Consciousness in Dialogue with Biblical World,' James Massey & Shimeingam Shimray (Editors), *Dalit- Tribal Theological Interface: Current Trends in Subaltern Theologies*, Jorhat: TSC/ WSC & New Delhi: CDS, pp. 196-197.

Endnotes:

- 1 The triple sweet-coated slogans of Globalization, Liberalization, and Privatization claim their toll from the lives of ordinary folk from every corner of the globe.
- 2 Nikola Eterovic "Preface," *Lineamenta-Synod of Bishops on 'The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church,'* Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007, p. 2.
- 3 A. M. Arul Raja, 'Dalit Layers of Consciousness in Dialogue with Biblical World,' pp. 197-198.
- 5 West Howard-Brook & Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999, p. 135 refers to Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988, p. 341.

"The Church asserts her freedom to proclaim the Word of God with the boldness of the Apostles (cf. Acts 4:14; 28-31) and maintains that 'easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful' (DV 22).

The Bible is a necessity in the Church's mission; it contains its fundamental message. Despite much insistence by the Church, it must be admitted that most Christians, in effect, do not have personal contact with the Scripture; and those who do, have many theological and methodological uncertainties in communicating their content. The danger exists that the Bible will not be a viable part of the Church and communion, but something open to subjectivism and arbitrariness, or even reduced to an object of private devotion as other things in the Church. Therefore, the Church must necessarily foster a strong and credible pastoral activity on the Word." (Linamenta of the Synod of Bishops, 2008, n. 27.)

"Drawing on the power of the Word is a constant element in the life of the People of God. This can be seen from the time when the prophets spoke to God's people, Jesus spoke to the crowds, and the disciples and apostles spoke to the first community, down to the present. For this reason, the presence of the Word, primarily in the Bible, is afforded attentive study as demonstrated throughout the ages in biblical studies and Church history.

In the times of the church Fathers, the Scriptures were the centre and source of theology, spirituality and the pastoral life. The Fathers are the masters, without equal, of what is called the 'spiritual' reading of the Scriptures, which, when done faithfully, does not destroy the 'letter,' that is, the concrete, historical sense, but allows a reading of the 'letter' in the Spirit. In the Middle Ages, Sacred Scripture was also the basis of theological reflection. The approach at the time distinguished four senses of reading Scripture (literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical) (Cf. *Catechismus Catholice Ecclesiae* 115-119). The age-old tradition of *lectio-divina* is a monastic form of prayer. It serves as a source of artistic inspiration and is transmitted to the faithful through various forms of preaching and popular piety. Today, a rise in a spirit of analysis, scientific progress and the division among Christians and its consequent duty of ecumenism, are leading, not without difficulty and debate, to a more proper methodological approach and a better understanding of the mystery of Scripture in the heart of Tradition. At present, the Church is experiencing a renewal based on the centrality of the Word of God, the great plan of the Second Vatican Council.

Besides a historical plurality of forms, a geographical plurality of forms can also be said to exist. Because of its ongoing presence in the Bible, the Word of God is spread in the work of evangelization to the particular Churches of the five continents. The Word is progressively being inculturated in them, thereby becoming a source of animation of the faith of many people, the basis of the Church's communion, a testimony to the inexhaustible richness of the mystery of the Word and the lasting font of inspiration and transformation of culture and society." (*Linamenta of the Synod of Bishops*, 2008, n. 19.)

PROPHECY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE¹ NEW PATHS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES, SOURCE OF PROPHECY

Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, CMF

Thank you for inviting me to develop the topic "Prophecy of Religious Life Today." I ask the light of the Spirit to adequately answer to the trust and expectations you have placed in my person.

My reflection should be inserted in the context of the reflections and debates already initiated. There was already a fundamental reflection about the biblical prophetism. Several experiences of prophetism in the present consecrated life were presented and many feelings, ideas and projects about them have been shared. Now, I am supposed to

share about the "prophecy of religious life today," by trying to discern the new paths being opened by it, the challenges or obstacles paralyzing it, and the opportunities, as well as the sources nourishing it.

My reflection is divided into three parts: the first is about the use of the language of prophecy; the second about some of its proofs or illuminating principles; the third, and more extensive, is about the traits of the prophetic alternative toward which the Spirit is guiding us at the beginning of the 21st century.

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First Part: The use of the language of prophecy

To speak about "prophecy" in religious life provokes mistrust today. This way of speaking does not please some of those in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, a number of members of Church movements, and even many committed laity. Nor, we, religious, feel at ease with this language. We are heirs of great traditions, but we do not spontaneously feel "prophets." However, we recognize that, among us, there are prophetic persons, prophetic actions and initiatives. But they are partial and fragmentary realities. It is not fair to denominate the whole for the part.

However, it calls our attention to observe that in the official documents of the church the prophetic dimension of consecrated life is stressed, as well as its counter-cultural character. The Second Vatican Council enabled that, by presenting religious life as a sign which manifests, witnesses, prefigures, proclaim and shows.² The apostolic exhortation *vita Consecrata* has been the ecclesial document which has more widely developed the prophetic dimension.³ In any case, it is important to detect that prophecy is never

considered a monopoly of consecrated life, but rather an expression of the prophetic dimension of the whole church. This leads me to reaffirm, together with the great theologian J.R.M. Tillard, that religious life "enhances the prophetic wing of the church."

The last Congress on Consecrated life sparingly used the terms "prophecy" and "prophetic."⁴ The *Instrumentum Laboris* stresses that: 1) thanks to the Holy Spirit and the return to the charismatic sources, the prophetic force of the charism and its permanent freshness are maintained;⁵ 2) the solidarity in the economy and the practice of the evangelical vow of poverty is an essential part of the prophetic dimension of consecrated life;⁶ 3) the commitment for justice, peace and care of creation is prophetic;⁷ 4) the living of celibacy in the middle of an erotized society is a prophetic gesture;⁸ 5) the fraternity is proposal and prophecy in a divided and unjust society;⁹ 6) the innovative and prophetic passion leads some religious to assume anti-idolatric attitudes;¹⁰ 7) the prophetic dimension, so essential to consecrated life, has to be nourished and promoted in the ecclesial system.¹¹ The theme of the Congress "Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity" is a perfect expression of a form of

To speak about "prophecy" in religious life provokes mistrust today.

life which defines itself for the “passion” (the divine pathos), proper to prophecy, in its double orientation: towards God, Christ Jesus, and towards humanity.

Within this panorama of contrasts it is very interesting, to detect how you have planned out the theme: “*Is Consecrated Life Prophecy for Today’s Culture*”? You want to focus your discernment in the cultural prophecy that consecrated life could offer today, much more global and intercultural than in other times.

The topic of inculturation has been very common in the post-conciliar years. Our intercultural sensibility continues to grow. We have asked ourselves how to proclaim the Gospel in the context of each culture and how to evangelize the cultures. Now, we want to go a step forward.¹² For this reason, we ask ourselves:

- Which ones would be the principal characteristics of the prophetic ministry of consecrated life in the different cultural contexts today?
- Looking at the global culture, neo-liberal, which is trying to impose itself all over, does consecrated life have prophetic words or gestures to propose?
- How do we promote the emergence of prophetic and charismatic persons in the

different cultures in which consecrated life is taking root?

- What managerial and formative improvements should be promoted so that the cultural prophecy would be viable among us?

Second Part: Going to the Roots of Prophecy

Let us remember, first of all, some clear theological assertions that would help us to adequately focus the topic of the prophetic ministry of consecrated life today.

Frist: If everything is prophecy, nothing is prophecy. It is necessary to describe the peculiarity of the prophetic ministry in relation to other types of ministeriality in the church: ordained ministry, social or pastoral action, government. The prophetic ministry cannot be identified with them. The prophetic ministry proposes radical changes in society, religion and in politics.

Second: Prophecy reveals a peculiar *sympatheia* between God and his/her prophet: the prophet feels the divine pathos as his/her own;¹³ for this reason is very sensitive to good and evil, is in favour of the Covenant and against anything blocking or preventing it.¹⁴ A

person is not a prophet for the mere fact that he/she is a devout, religious one. It is a very special gift which transforms the prophet. The prophet does not want to be a revolutionary or a conservative. He only wants to be a witness of the living and pathetic God.

Third: The prophet is aware of being called and sent by his God. He recognizes that his duty is to be always obedient to the one who sent him. He cannot keep silent about what he has to say, nor to ignore the God who sends him; he must be incorruptibly sincere.¹⁵ The false prophet, on the other hand, does not discern between what comes from God and what comes from himself; he shares his misunderstanding with those who listen; he is not independent in front of the religious or political system.¹⁶

Fourth: When the dominant system is opposed to God's project, prophecy becomes counter-cultural; there is critique, but also innovative energy for the political or religious community.¹⁷ The prophetic ministry nourishes, cultivates and develops an alternative conscience and perception of the reality; it influences the birth of an alternative community, which will anticipate the novelty of the Reign of God among us.¹⁸

The prophetic ministry nourishes, cultivates and develops an alter-native conscience and perception of the reality...

Fifth: The prophet does not make agreements or shady deals; in front of problems and obstacles, the Spirit habilitates the prophet with the poetic and lyric imagination. The prophet is connected to the future fantasy of a different world; he believes in the future of God and, for this reason, he sings, dances, heals and forgives sins; he uses symbols, evocations, metaphors. This attitude brings to him a lot of problems, because the practice of the creative imagination is detected by the political and religious system as subversion.¹⁹

Sixth: It is not easy to discern where the prophecy nourished and enhanced by the Spirit ("*qui locutus est per prophetias*") is acting. There were prophets among the Jewish people, in the first Christian communities; but there are also prophets among today's Christians, in the different confessions; there are also prophets in the different religions. There is also a "laical prophecy." The word "prophecy" is secularizing and it is a symbol of alternative, innovative and transcendent proposals. No one has the monopoly of the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit fills the earth. We are in the time of the mission of the Spirit. The collective prophetic movements are a call for all of us, for our discernment. At the end of history, the Lord

will also say: "Come, blessed of my Father, because you prophesied." They will then be asked in surprise: when, Lord, did we prophesy?...

Seventh: Consecrated life wants to discover today its prophetic potential, not as an exclusive monopoly, rather as a "shared prophecy" with many other persons and communities, inside and outside the church. For this reason, consecrated life feels itself called to be in solidarity and to promote other prophetic movements, but also to share its prophetic peculiarity, to enhance the prophetic wing of the church and society. Each one of our collective charisms points out the difference of our prophetic presence.

Third Part: The prophetic alternative today: new paths and opportunities

Without forgetting the previous evident assumptions, I believe that religious or consecrated life feels the challenge (as path and opportunity) to express its prophetic cultural capacity in the following fields: 1) The prophecy of hospitality or to embrace the difference; 2) the prophecy of the meaning of life; 3) the prophecy of the voluntary impoverishment; 4) the prophecy or

realism; 5) the prophetic beatitude; 6) wisdom and prophetic imagination.

1. The Prophecy of Hospitality: to embrace the difference

Without the virtue of hospitality, consecrated life will not be able to become the servant of the Covenant of God with the earth and with all its inhabitants. Without hospitality, our communities and persons will

Without the virtue of hospitality, consecrated life will not be able to become the servant of the Covenant of God...

remain closed in themselves, in their own culture, and they will miss possibilities of interacting with the whole. The opposite of hospitality is hostility, rejection of the different, violence. There is today in our world cultural violence, clash of civilizations, horrible confrontations which are born from the exclusion and rejection of the "different." The exclusion is becoming the primordial sin of the processes of globalization. But, even within the church, hostility is manifested in front of the "other" through intolerance, exclusion and lack of dialogue.

Hospitality, however, leads us to welcome "the other," the different, the stranger; it is even considered as one of the great ethical categories of our time, as a structural and architectonic element of human living together. There

are several authors who have started considering hospitality as an authentic theological category²⁰ - does not this virtue have its greatest expression in God our Father, who through His crucified Son opened up his arms to embrace all of us, without exclusions, while we were still sinners and unfaithful to His Covenant?

Hospitality – understood in that way – is a fundamental virtue which could be detected in all our collective charisms and which receives in each one of them a special colour. These collective charisms speak to us about how to welcome the other, the needy, the marginalized, the excluded, the victim of violence, the ones who belong to another culture, another religion, another race, another gender. And, as charisms, they invite us to prophetically exaggerate the capacity of welcome.

Consecrated life has attempted and continues to attempt to be a space of welcome of “the other.” She renounces – at least consciously- to fundamentalist and closed attitudes. She wants to be a “house and school of communion,” a space where the dialogue of civilizations could be possible. We try to create spaces where the different generations, the different cultures and races live and grow together. We have

The hospitality towards the other has made us more compassionate, less institutional and more liminal.

taken very seriously the themes of inculturation, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. The hospitality towards the other has made us more compassionate, less institutional and more liminal. For this reason, we have created institutional spaces for the shared mission with the laity, the cultural insertion and inserted communities among the poor. Some forms of religious life have opened themselves to the diversity of genre and, for this reason they welcome it in the same configuration of the community.

The hospitality “ad intra” builds the communities into schools of communion, where the difficult art of living together with “the other,” “the different” is learned. *The hospitality “ad extra”* energizes the missionary and enterprising consciousness in environments where danger and even martyrdom could take place. The participation in the extreme hospitality of Jesus and the trust in the Spirit of hospitality configure the consecrated life of our time.

We are gradually discovering that we are supposed not only to “learn how to live with the other,” that we have to give the dangerous and costly step of “opening ourselves to the other,” but, above all, that we have to include “the

other” within the same hospitality with which we feel ourselves welcomed by God. The God of the cross is the supreme manifestation of hospitality towards the different, the other. There, all of us are welcome in the same and only embrace.²¹

2. The prophecy of the meaning of life

Without meaning, human life becomes crazy, erratic, empty and desperate. The commodities offered by our well-being of society or economic prosperity do not satisfy the need for meaning enclosed in our human heart. We pay a high price when we are driven by the greed of acquiring new commodities: we renounce knowledge as well as solidarity, fraternity, and spirituality. Before the question was: how to live our life according to God’s plan? Now, the question is just, how to live? We have reached the total immanency. Without transcendence, humanity remains enclosed in itself. The “secularized” humanity does not feel itself in alliance with God, whether because she has forgotten it or she has abandoned or rejected. When we are disconnected from the divine, everything becomes trivial. The burden of daily life becomes heavy. Modernity has de-sacralized the world and has idolatrized the de-sacralized realities. The globalized culture affects almost all the nations of the earth and it has an

Our renunciations of vows do not emerge out of contempt of the values of creation; rather, they try to offer an alternative path.

increasing number of idolatric traits. There are persons who pretend that science would be like a theology that is able to explain everything. The economy pretends to be the new omnipresent religion; people worship money. For this reason, today, people confuse comfort with wellbeing and happiness. The new gods are unfaithful ones. They do not journey with human beings. They abandon humans to despair, especially in front of difficulties, sickness and death.

Our Christian revelation is opposed to any kind of idolatry and it is a great proposal of immanent and transcendent meaning (theology of creation and incarnation). In consecrated life we proclaim that “the gods and lords of this earth do not satisfy us.” We prophetically rebel against the idolatry of money, sex and power. Our renunciations of vows do not emerge out of contempt of the values of creation; rather, they try to offer an alternative path. We say “no” to the idolatric paths, but we say “yes” to communion with nature, to slowness, to the pleasure of living against current, to the liberation of the excessive needs created by consumerism; we say

“yes” to the essential, to the revision of our priorities. We have the luxury of being able to invent our life. We are opposed to the myths, simplifications and paradoxes of our contemporary society.

It is supposed that money liberates us from our worries; however, without our realizing, it becomes our greatest preoccupation.

Through our dissenting voice and behaviour we try to be prophets of the meaning of life. Where there is transcendent hope, there is meaning.

3. *Prophecy against “the misery of prosperity”*

Pascal Bruckner, in 2002, published a famous book which earned the award: “Book of Economy 2002” and entitled it “*Misery of Prosperity*.” The title was an echo of the phrase of Marx “misery of the philosophy.”²² Bruckner passionately defends in his book the European humanist tradition and he opposes that human beings will be at the service of economy risking its health, culture, education and moral enrichment. So that the proposal of Bruckner will not remain just an idea, within the market of ideas, it is necessary that it will be translated into an alternative lifestyle. We are calling it prophecy of the *voluntary impoverishment*.

Neo-liberals and anti-neo-liberal agree in one thing: they make the economy the new religion, with its

liturgy, its saints and oracles, its language for the initiated and even its redeeming message. The idol of the new economy is indecent because the rich do not need any longer the poor to become rich: after the

disgrace of the exploitation of the poor, it has arrived the much worst disgrace, that they are not exploitable any longer. For this reason, there is a perception that poverty will never be vanquished in the developed countries. If before it was expected from the economy to liberate from indigence human beings now we ask ourselves: Who will be able to liberate human beings from the economy? The line separating money as end from the money as medium is very subtle. It is supposed that money liberates us from our worries; however, without our realizing, it becomes our greatest preoccupation. In order to have money we have to pay a high price, which makes us miserable.

In this context the voluntary impoverishment emerges as a liberating, anti-idolatric alternative, as a denunciation of the misery of prosperity. We have been dealing with the subject of poverty in consecrated life in the post-conciliar years. We have discovered new aspects of this evangelical poverty: option for the

poor and excluded. Today, more than in other times, religious life is called to denounce the "misery of prosperity." We will be able to do that by defining, our priorities: if we do not want that our possessions will possess us, we have to limit our expenses, without constantly being in debt. In that way, we will be able to increase the space of our missionary service, of our spiritual life and of our relationships of friendship, love and charity. The voluntary impoverishment demands from us to get rid of certain things in favour of a *less limited life*. We want to renounce comfort in order to be freer from accumulation of things and money in order to overcome the anguish of death.

In the realm of mission, also our economy has to be openly de-idolatrized so that it will become just a mean. The prophetic imagination will lead us to new means of gratuity, of faith in the providence, of missionary, not mercantile, presence, of services not motivated by profit.

4. The prophecy of realism

Without realism life becomes full of anxieties and prone to depression. Without realism, the utopia, dreams and visions lose their transformative

capacity and become a good show but without dynamism.

Reinhold Niebuhr spoke several years ago about "Christian realism"²³ and Ronald H. Stone, inspired by him, has proposed not long ago, the expression "prophetic realism,"²⁴ which I find quite fitted for us religious. Stone studies which ones are the limits of a pacifistic attitude in front of the global conspiracy of terror. Should we renounce to the armies, to police and security forces? This kind of dilemmas is constantly emerging for us: absolute trust in God's providence or money reserves and savings? charism only or also institution? mere inspiration or also work and elaboration?

The principle of reality demands from – on the one hand – that we should not desire things exceeding our charismatic capacity (the talent we have received!), and on the other hand – that we should exploit all the possibilities of the charism received. In consecrated life we do not have spectacular charisms, neither high intensity prophecies. We are groups of pilgrims who, among worries, shadow and temptations, journey together with the whole people of God to the New Jerusalem.

Without realism life becomes full of anxieties and prone to depression.

To be a community limits quite a lot the edges of the individual charisms and prophecies. In our collective prophetism has to be integrated the dissimilar. For this reason, our prophecy is a low intensity one, but it is exercised in a very wide temporal field. In this prophetic model prevails realism over utopia, the day to day over the great event, the ordinary over the surprise, the century over the moment. Some authors have called it "prophecy of the ordinary life."

Christian revelation teaches us that the Kingdom is, at the same time, present and future: "already, but not yet." Our prophetic ministry negotiates with the "not yet" and with the "already." For this reason, we make concessions to the reality; we become understanding, compassionate, but sometimes also, rebels and apocalyptic. The prophetic imagination and the prophetic realism maintain a permanent tension and contrast. The Jesus of the three temptations in the desert becomes for us the paradigm of a prophetic realism. The apocalyptic Jesus who will cry in front of Jerusalem is for us the paradigm of a utopic prophetism.

Both types of prophetism, the realistic and the apocalyptic, have

The realistic prophet is humble in front of God and the human community; but still, he will try to promote impartial justice in favour of the poor and oppressed of our world.

coexisted in tension throughout history. In the history of Jesus, we find out this tension between realism and the apocalyptic utopia.²⁵ Like Jesus, we renounce dreaming about the coming of a millennium which will give solution to all the problems. We know that the sovereignty of God and the primacy of love, take place in the middle of so many limitations and struggles. Nothing is definitive. Because we count with reality, our prophecy also counts with the cross, with the limitation of our realizations, but always with the fidelity of God. Our prophetic realism is wrapped up in humility, in supplication and intercession, even in the tears of the one who proclaims: "Lord, I am not worthy," in the ignorance of the day and the hour. The realistic prophet is humble in front of God and the human community; but still, he will try to promote impartial justice in favour of the poor and oppressed of our world. For this reason, we are bearers of the "prophetism of the minority," of the small one and especially sensible to those who are prophets in that way in our world.

5. *The prophetic beatitude*

Our post-modern and globalized culture is obsessively searching for

happiness. To acquire happiness has been transformed into a publicity slogan. Capitalism equates happiness with pleasure and ties to acquire it through consumerism, squandering, care and enjoyment of the body, above all, of its sexuality. Health and sexuality have become predominant obsessions. The one not in line with cultural corporality and sexuality has nothing to do.²⁶

The desire for happiness is greater than its real enjoyment. When happiness is desired in that way, any delay, obstacle irritates and becomes a torture. The delay in the concession of something is considered an offense. The disagreeable is mistaken with the painful, the disgraced with the difficult. Anything which is not pleasure is considered unhappiness. How will the one who becomes upset in front of small things be able to confront the real dramatic moments? Today people feel unhappy because they are not happy. In this cultural context, how is suffering and evil explained? People experience them, but do not understand them. From these attitudes come our fears of sickness, of accidents, of old age, of death.

It is obvious that this culture also affects consecrated persons. However, in our ascetic tradition we have means which allow us to

cultivate our counter-cultural prophecy. We have learned the art of dealing with disgrace, in a way that we will not be overcome by it. We know that not any kind of adversity is a punishment, that nothing is acquired without effort. We know that we can live with suffering and that we can act against it. The fact that not everything is possible does not mean that nothing can be achieved.

Many of our brothers show a happy and blessed face, because they know they are inhabited by the joy that Jesus communicates to his disciples, through his beatitudes. Consecrated life becomes very fascinating when it is able to have a good sense of humour and joy, in the middle of personal and world's dramatic situations, when it is able to maintain a "permanent euphoria."

This is not an obstacle to recognize, through the prophetic realism, that this dimension of prophecy is mediated by the prophecy of tears.²⁷ The alternative living proposed by consecrated life implies the symbolic passage through Gethsemane, through the religious or political judgment, through the popular rejection, the way of the cross and Calvary. Like Jesus, we should also cry for the lost ones and for the drama of the cultures closing their doors to the visit of God.

Anything which is not pleasure is considered unhappiness.

The prophetic beatitude believes that “blessed are those who mourn” because God will wipe out their tears from their eyes. For this reason, in spite of everything, to mourn could become a smile and a hope.

6. *Wisdom and prophetic imagination*

Wisdom and prophetic imagination is the last prophetic trait of consecrated life that I would like to stress.

We can detect an increasing longing for wise men and women able to guide humanity in moments of confusion, chaos and change. We know very well that these wise people do not emerge from universities and centers of knowledge. Wisdom is something different.

Wisdom is a gift bestowed by the dynamic presence and welcome of God among us. Through the gift of wisdom, the Holy Spirit unifies our knowledge, feelings and living experiences. The gift of wisdom connects and integrates the three stages of time: past, present and future. Biblical prophecy has a lot in common with the gift of Wisdom. Wisdom is given to certain persons to illumine and guide humanity, the church. The person gifted with wisdom has not

only the capacity of information about what is happening, but also penetrates into the mystery of reality. Wisdom is given “to open the book and unseal the seals.” A wise person uses the “seven eyes” of the Spirit to read reality and human history with the sensibility of God. For this reason, the wise person has a solid foundation and is able to serve as support and guide to others. S/he is a guide who is able to see, to feel and to reflect in oneself the wisdom of God.

The gift of wisdom is able to see alternatives where apparently there are none...

Wisdom is trans-cultural. Wise people always value cultures, opening them to new horizons and giving them stability. Wisdom is the best mediation which makes possible the intercultural dialogue and the alliance of civilizations. For this reason, in our times of transformation, intercommunication and mutual inter-dependence, wisdom is such an invaluable gift.

Prophetic wisdom is a necessary gift to overcome fundamentalist visions, dogmatisms, condemning attitudes in front of “the different.” The gift of wisdom is able to see alternatives where apparently there are none; it discovers life where apparently there is only death. Wisdom is calm, imaginative and creative; it makes possible the

unforeseeable, easy what is difficult, viable what is unviable. Jesus was the wisdom of God who proclaimed: "Learn from me... my yoke is bearable and my burden is light."

Prophetic wisdom facilitates alliances among nations, overcomes violent relationships, it makes viable the ecclesiology of communion, builds bridges among those who are enemies. It is a necessary gift to accompany the spiritual and intellectual journey of the believers in their processes of initiation and permanent formation.

Consecrated life has gone through a long historical journey. It is as an "old woman" who has been accumulating a lot of wisdom through the centuries. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, the old wisdom is constantly rejuvenating and showing itself with new forms. The particular churches should not reject this wisdom which is bestowed on them through the consecrated life. Consecrated life should never renounce to show her wisdom and to cry out against so many stupid forms of government, liturgy and pastoral work. Wisdom enables consecrated life not to enclose itself in a sterile traditionalism. The new movements could have a lot of dynamism, but, frequently, they are deprived of the gift of wisdom. Their

Wisdom enables consecrated life not to enclose itself in a sterile traditionalism.

"fundamentalisms" make them to focus their attention on secondary elements, as an expression of their identity.

We are living in times when consecrated life could nurture and enhance the prophetic wing of the church, precisely in the realm of wisdom. The fact that in the old churches consecrated life is also getting older, is an opportunity for her to show its prophetic capacity, creating spaces in which she could share her given and nurtured wisdom with the people of God and with society. It is the appropriate time to configure new models of spiritual paternity and maternity, as the bishops of Asia proclaim. In that way, it will come to fulfillment the prophecy that: "your old men and women will prophecy." This is the prophecy of wisdom.

Conclusion

I conclude my presentation by reminding that proper to prophecy is daring to sail against the current in the waters of lineality and conventionalisms. This daring emerges from a change of vision and thought; it emerges from the grace of an authentic "metanoia." The one who has received the grace of such a change, of such an experience is transformed into something

like an explosion, a detonation within an accustomed group. The prophetic ministry we need today has to emerge as a new consciousness that is not lineal, but integrating and relational. For this reason, it is a cultural and transcultural, religious and trans-religious, Christian and trans-christian prophecy.

This is the reason why I focused myself in the six dimensions of the prophetic ministry of consecrated life in the present actual moment, resumed in six words: hospitality, meaning, impoverishment, realism, beatitude and wisdom.

To enhance the prophetic wing of the church does not imply that we feel ourselves superior, absolutely different and unique. As communities, we desire just to be there where the prophetic spirit is alive and to become its humble collaborators from our peculiar charismatic inspiration. It doesn't matter, if people feel disturbed by our presence, if they do not believe us, or if they value us. The very important thing is that we are authentic, even if we are not perfect. The church needs our prophecy, even if some persons in the church or among us are trying to block it.

Endnotes:

1 Courtesy: Religious Life Asia, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2007, pp. 20-38.

2 This makes reference to Vatican 11, Lumen Gentium, 44, when it presents the profession of the evangelical counsels as a sign which can and should effectively inspire all the members of the church to unflaggingly fulfill the duties of their Christian calling. Besides, it states, that this form of life has the mission to imitate and represent in the church the lifestyle of Jesus, and to *manifest, witness, prefigure, proclaim, reveal* to all believers the heavenly goods which are already present in this age and the eternal life which we have acquired through the redemptive work of Christ. The reason of being of the religious life is "to be a sign." This is explained through seven verbs or actions. The beneficiaries of these actions are all the members of the church, all the faithful, all men and women. Post-conciliar documents have stressed the prophetic dimension of religious life: "In the variety of its forms, common fraternal life always has been manifested as a radicalization of the common fraternal spirit uniting all Christians. The religious community is a tangible manifestation of the communion at the foundation of the church and, at the same time, prophecy of the unity towards which she is tending as her final goal" (*Fraternal Life in community*, 10.) The instruction *Verbi Sponsa* about the cloister of the nuns, makes also reference to the prophetism of this form of life when it states: As a reflection and eradiation of their contemplative life the nuns offer to the Christian community and to today's world, more than ever in need of authentic spiritual values, a silent proclamation and a humble witness of the mystery of God, keeping in that way alive the prophecy in the spousal heart of the church" (VS, 7).

3 "The profession of the evangelical counsels makes them sign and prophecy

- for the community of brothers and for the world" (VC, 15). In the exhortation there is also a long section dedicated to the "prophetic witness of consecrated life in front of the great provocations of our time" (VC, 84-95).
- 4 The "*Instrumentum Laboris*" prepared for the Congress and ratified in it, gave seven numbers to stress the prophetic dimension of consecrated life: nn. 21, 26, 39, 42, 53, 73, 80). In n. 81 there is a reference to a consecrated life moved by the Spirit: "The Spirit of God continues to create the New, continues to speak to us through the prophets, and calls us to living fidelity and apostolic audacity (VC, 82)" (IL, 81).
 - 5 "The return to the original founding inspiration has allowed us to perceive the permanent freshness of its charism and its gathering, transforming and prophetic strength (VC, 84-85)" (IL, 80).
 - 6 "As consecrated men and women, we can picture ourselves involved in this economy which excludes many. We recognize that this solidarity is an essential part of our faith in Jesus, of the prophetic dimension of our consecrated life... The evangelical counsel of poverty should become more and more personal and communal practice of solidarity with the poor, of detachment, of giving freely, of trust in Providence, and of simple witness (VC, 82)" (IL, 26).
 - 7 "A prophetic commitment to justice and peace and care for creation is a dimension of the Christian mission, in which the church and consecrated life oppose the neo-liberal model of globalization and defend a model of global consciousness without excluding or impoverishing any one. This form of global sensitivity opens us to real possibilities for an inculturation and contextualization of our charisms and also for closer collaboration with other congregations and with other forms of Christian and human living" (IL, 21).
 - 8 "Consecrated life has also been affected by this situation both in the living out of celibacy or consecrated chastity and in community and interpersonal relationships. The constant flow of those who live this form of life, the sexual scandals, and the affective immaturity of members indicate that this situation is unsatisfactory to more than a few, who also do not find ways of getting beyond the obstacles and blocks. This celibacy that we profess in consecrated life demands a mature, generous, fruitful and healthy way of living our affectivity and our sexuality. This witness becomes a prophetic gesture in a society like ours so greatly marked by eroticism (VC88)" (IL, 39).
 - 9 "A consecrated life with new characteristics is being birthed under the impulse of the Spirit. The elements that have characterized this Christian vocation in history and express its great and rich tradition are gathered up in anew synthesis. This permits consecrated life to recapture the Gospel as its first norm, the great commandment of the Covenant as its nuclear element and community as both proposal and prophecy within a divided and unjust society, living passionately for humanity with a great capacity for imagination and creativity" (IL, 73).
 - 10 "Both in the church and in Consecrated life, the secular environment also favors a tendency toward idolatry that is expressed in the cult of the media, the powerful, of institutions, customs, ritualism, and laws. This makes conversion to the one and Only Absolute and Necessary difficult. The challenge of a deep experience of God and of passion, which is mission-oriented, innovative and prophetic, is seen

today as conversion to the living God. Hunger for God nourishes our Exodus and mission gives meaning to our Christian and consecrated vocation" (IL, 42).

11 "In the church, consecrated life finds living space, expansion, and growth within her. However, it feels blocked wherever a close ecclesiastical system dominates, be it on the universal or in particular local churches, where the system distrusts and is suspicious of the evangelical freedom so often moves consecrated life. In some places its initiatives and labours are dulled and suffer discrimination. If it then opts for conformity with the situation, it loses touch with its most prophetic source. If it opts for the exercise of its prophetic vocation, it is excluded. The prophetic dimension, so essential to consecrated life, needs to be nurtured and promoted (VC, 84-85)" (IL, 53).

12 Cf. Andrea Arvalli, *Vita Religiosa come profezia? Le lacrime di una difficile transizione incompiuta, en Credere Oggi*, Vol. 157, 2007, pp. 131-144.

13 Jer 9:23-24: "It is Yahweh who speaks: Let not the wise mean boast of his wisdom, nor the valiant one of his valour, nor the rich because of his wealth! But whoever wants to boast, let him boast of this: of understanding and knowing me. I am Yahweh, the merciful; I do justice and rule the world with righteousness. This is Yahweh's word: In such thing I delight."

14 Am 8:8; Jer 2:12-13; Am 6:6

15 1 Sam 2:12-13; Is 7:1-9; Jer 7:8, 14.

16 400 prophets of the royal court are opposed to Micaiah ben Yimla (Reyes 22), who predicts the political disaster of Ajab, while they predict success for him. The leader of the 400 prophets slaps Micaiah and the king put him in prison

until he will be back victorious from the battle. The future manifested who was the one speaking in the name of God. Micaiah was silenced because he allowed himself to be carried by the Spirit of God. Micaiah does not hesitate to proclaim that the 400 are possessed by the "spirit of lying." The false spirit of Ajab is at the root of his false prophecy. Also in the time of Jeremiah the false prophets herald peace, but there is no peace (Jer 6:14; 14:13). Jer 23:9-32 narrates how things are settled with the lying prophets (Ex 13:16).

17 Moses was the prophet who awakened in Israel an alternative conscience. It demanded a radical rupture with the social reality of Egypt and the Pharaoh. In relation to the religion of Egypt, he declared that the gods were not gods, In relation to the political system recognized the inefficiency of an oppressive system and its injustice.

18 W. Bruggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Augsburg: Fortress Publishers, 2001. It is the function of prophecy to awaken and communicate energies. The dominant conscience does not usually believe in the future, but in the prolongation of the present; for this conscience, the future is included in the possibilities of the present: "What was, will be; what happened, will happen again. Nothing new under the sun!" (Eccl.1:9-10).

19 Cf., Rubem Alves, *Tomorrow's Child*, New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

20 Cf., Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the atonement tradition*, Baker Academic, 2004; Leonardo Boff, *Virtudes para otro mundo posible. La Hospitalidad; serechoy deber de todos*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2006; Luke Bretherton, *Tolerance, hospitality*

- and education: a theological proposal, SCE, Vol. 17, No .1, 2004, pp. 80-103; Byrne, Brendan, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000; D. Inneraity, *Etica de la hospitalidad*, Barcelona: Pesninsula, 2001; Pohl, Christine, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Eerdmans, Grand rapids, 1999; L.Richard, *Vivir la hospitalidad de Dios*, OIUMSA, Buenos Aires, 2000.
- 21 Cf., Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A theological exploration of identity, otherness and reconciliation*, Avignon Pressm 1996; Id., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, Eerdmans Publishing, 2001. Miroslav Volf defends that we should listen today to the healing Word of the Gospel and find out paths to overcome hatred to the other and the different. Salvation arrives to us as reconciliation. Volf proposes the idea of embrace as a theological answer to the problem of exclusion.
- 22 Cf., Pascal Bruckner, *La miseria de la prosperidad*, Barcelona: Tusquets, 2002.
- 23 Cf., Reinhold Nieburh, *Christian realism and political problems*, New York: Scribners, 1953.
- 24 Ronald H. "Stone, *prophetic Realism: Beyond Militarism and Pacifism in an Age of Terror*, Continuum International Publishing group-T&T C, 2005.
- 25 Invited by the Evil One radically eliminate the problem of hunger, Jesus opted to live together with the problem to bring about alternative solutions rooted in the Covenant with God and in the attentive listening of His Word. Invited by the Evil One to eliminate the uncertainty implied by the prophetic ministry, through spectacular signs, Jesus opted to place his life and ministry in God's hands, carrying out his ministry in a humble and not ostentatious way, without putting God to the test at any moment of his life. Invited by the Evil One to realize the theocratic dream of a world guided by saints, as far as the worship of Satan, Jesus clearly manifested his anti-isolatic will by confessing that he would only worship and serve God. The diabolic compensation places Jesus in front of the political utopia of a world without hunger, the religious utopia of a prophetism without failure, the political utopia of a world governed by injustice. Jesus, however, opted for the limitation, for the prophetic realism, because he allows himself to be guided by the divine pathos.
- 26 Pasacal Bruckner, *La euphoria perpetua (Sobre el deber de ser feliz)*, Barcelona: Tusquets, 2001. Cf., Id., *La tentacion de la inocencia*, 1996.
- 27 I have found very inspiring the conference of A. Arvalli to the union of Major Superiors of Italy, Padua, 10 dicembre 2005 with the topic "Vita religiosa come profezia? Le lacrime di una difficile transizione incompiuta," instead of the original title "Vita religiosa, fascino e profezia nella chiesa d'oggi"; Cf., A. Aravalli, *Vita religiosa come profezia? Le lacrime di una difficile transizione incompiuta*, "Credere Oggi" Vol. 27, 2007, pp. 131-144.

"In penetrating the mystery of the Word of God, Mary of Nazareth, from the moment of the Annunciation, remains the Teacher and Mother of the Church and the exemplar of every encounter with the Word by individuals or entire communities. She welcomes the Word in faith, mediates upon it, interiorises it and lives it (cf. Lk 1:38; 2:19,51; Acts 17:11). Indeed, Mary listened to and meditated upon the Scriptures; she associated them with Jesus' words and the events which she discovered were related to his life. Isaac of Stella says: "In the inspired Scriptures, what is said in a universal sense of the virgin mother, the Church, is understood in an individual sense of the Virgin Mary.... The Lord's inheritance is, in a general sense, the Church; in a special sense, Mary; and in an individual sense, the Christian. Christ dwelt for nine months in the tabernacle of Mary's womb, he dwells until the end of the ages in the tabernacle of the Church's faith. He will dwell for ever in the knowledge and love of each faithful soul." (Isaac de Stella, Sermon 51: PL 194, 1862-1863.1865).

The Virgin Mary knows how to take into account what is happening around her and live the necessities of daily life, fully aware that what she receives as a gift from her Son is a gift for everyone. She teaches us not to stand by as idle spectators before the Word of Life, but to become participants, allowing ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit, who abides in believers. She "magnifies" the Lord, discovering in her life the mercy of God, who makes her "blessed," because "she believed that there would be a fulfilment of what had been spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45). She invites every believer to put Jesus' words into practice: "Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe" (Jn 20:29). Mary is the paradigm of the person who truly prays the Word and knows how to keep the lamp of faith burning in daily life. St. Ambrose observes that every Christian believer conceives and begets the Word of God. According to the flesh, Christ has only one mother; but, according to the faith, everyone gives him birth (Cf. S. Ambrosius, *Evang. secundum Lucam* 2, 19: CCL 14, 39)." (Linamenta of the Synod of Bishops, 2008, n. 11.)

BOOK REVIEW

Lawrence Venceslaus, **On Earth as in Heaven: Biblical Spirituality for Consecrated Life**, Chennai: Claretian Communications, 2007, Pages - x+131, Price - not mentioned

This book is dealing with Biblical Foundations of Consecrated Life. He clarifies that just as all Christian forms of life are based on the Word of God, Consecrated Life also owes its origin to it. He presents the different themes under the overarching theme of "Covenant." He begins the book with the title "Covenant and Consecration" which analyses the spirituality of covenant in the Old Testament and affirms that the core aspect of it is "keeping the Lord in one's thought." Covenant was the means through which the people of Israel were consecrated to the Lord and lived in communion with him. In Consecrated Life also one enters into a life of covenant with Jesus and therefore he says that the spirituality of covenant can serve as a fitting model for the Religious today. Here he highlights the importance of an emotional engagement with the Lord in the day to day life of the Religious and their consecration reaching a mature intimacy with him.

The second chapter deals with the "Figures of Consecration in the Old Testament," under which the persons like the Nazirites, Prophetic Community, Rechabites, Hasideans, the Covenanters of Qumran are presented as persons foreshadowing in their lives and ministries aspects of Consecrated Life today. Even though he affirms that there is no monasticism in the Old Testament, their radical commitment to the Word of God and the tradition of the forefathers are shown as resembling the radical commitment of the Religious today. In the third chapter titled as "Jesus and the New Covenant," Jesus is portrayed as a *Hasid* (pious man) in the line of figures mentioned in the previous chapter as bringing the spirituality of covenant to fulfillment in his life and ministry and teaching the disciples the same. The way he lived this spirituality and the communion that he maintained with God the Father and other humans are shown as shining inspiration for the Consecrated today.

Then he proceeds with explaining the vows based on the biblical texts. While presenting celibacy he explains clearly and elaborately Mt 19:10-12 and 1 Cor 7 which present celibacy as charism. Some other minor texts concerning celibacy are also touched upon. The importance of the vow of poverty is portrayed as a means of cutting ties with the world and establishing communion with the poor and the marginalized. His elaboration on how God was on the side of the poor in the Old Testament and how Jesus identified with them in his incarnation are elucidating and they are shown as models for the consecrated persons to

imitate in our context. And the vow of obedience is presented as participation in the eschatological obedience of Jesus. He elaborately deals with the community life taking inspiration from both Old and New Testaments and finally he explains Consecrated Life as Prophetic Witness elaborating the characteristic features of biblical prophecy.

The author has beautifully brought out nuances of Consecrated Life with a simple language. This book is a must for the libraries of every religious house. It can very well serve as a text book for the novices and religious in formation.

Arul Jesu Robin, CMF

The Church's primary task is to assist the faithful in understanding how to encounter the Word of God under the guidance of the Spirit. In a particular way, she is to teach how this process takes place in the spiritual reading of the Bible; how the Bible, Tradition and the Magisterium are intrinsically joined by the Spirit, and what is required of the believer to be guided by the Holy Spirit received in Baptism and the other sacraments. St. Peter Damascene states: "Whoever has experienced the spiritual sense of the Scriptures knows that the simplest word of Scripture and the most profound are uniquely one, both having the salvation of humankind as their purpose" (Petrus Damascenus, Liber II, vol. III, 159: La Filocalia, vol. 3°, Torino 1985, 253). (Linamenta of the Synod of Bishops, 2008, n. 19.)

DOCUMENTATION

‘Follow Christ without compromise’

[On Saturday evening, 2 February, the World Day of Consecrated Life, the Holy Father (Benedict XVI) spoke to consecrated men and women after Holy Mass in St Peter's Basilica, saying that Consecrated Life springs from the Gospel. Cardinal Franc Rode, C.M., Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, presided at the Mass. The following is a translation of the Pope's Address given in Italian.]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am very pleased to meet you on the occasion of the World Day of Consecrated Life, a traditional gathering whose significance is enhanced by the liturgical context of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

I thank Cardinal Franc Rode, who has celebrated the Eucharist for you, and with him the Secretary and other collaborators of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. With great affection I greet the Superiors General present and all of you who form this unique assembly, an expression of the varied richness of the Consecrated Life in the Church.

In his account of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, at least three times the Evangelist Luke emphasizes that Mary and Joseph acted in accordance with “the law of the Lord” (cf. Lk

2:22, 23, 39), moreover they always appear to be listening attentively to the Word of God. This attitude is an eloquent example for you, men women religious; and for you, members of Secular Institutes and of other forms of Consecrated Life.

The next Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be dedicated to *The Word of God in the life and Mission of the Church*: dear brothers and sisters, I ask you to make your contribution to this ecclesial commitment, witnessing to the importance, especially for those who like you, the Lord calls to a more intimate “sequela”, of placing the Word of God at the centre of all things.

In fact, the Consecrated Life is rooted in the Gospel. Down the centuries, the Gospel – as it were, its supreme rule – has continued to inspire it and the Consecrated Life is called to refer constantly to the Gospel, to remain

alive and fertile, bearing fruit for the salvation of souls.

Put Christ's Words into practice

At the root of the different expressions of Consecrated Life there is always a strong Gospel inspiration. I think of St Anthony Abbot who was moved by listening to Christ's words: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mt 19:21) (cf. *Vita Antonii*, 2, 4). Anthony listened to these words as if they were addressed to him personally by the Lord.

St Francis of Assisi in his turn affirmed that it was God who revealed to him that he should live according to the form of the holy Gospel (*Testament*, 17; *Franciscan Omnibus* 116). "Francis", wrote Thomas of Celano, "who heard that Christ's disciples were supposed to possess neither gold, nor silver, nor money, nor purse; were to have neither bread nor staff, were to have neither shoes nor two tunics... rejoicing in the Holy Spirit said: 'This is what I want! This is what I ask! This is what I want to do from the bottom of my heart!'" (I Celano 83; *Franciscan Omnibus* 670, 672).

The Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ* recalls: "It was the Holy Spirit who sparked the Word of God

with new light for the Founders and Foundresses. Every charism and every Rule springs from it and seeks to be an expression of it" (n. 24).

And indeed, the Holy Spirit attracts some people to live the Gospel in a radical way and translate it into a style of more generous following.

So it is that a work, a religious family, is born which with its very presence becomes in turn a living "exegesis" of the Word of God.

The Second Vatican Council says that the succession of charisms in the Consecrated Life can therefore be read as an unfolding of Christ down the ages, as a living Gospel that is actualized in ever new forms (cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 46).

The mystery of Christ is reflected in the works of Foundresses and Founders, a word of his, an illuminating ray of his radiant Face, the splendour of the Father (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 16).

In the course of the centuries the proposal of the following of Christ without compromise, as it is presented to us in the Gospel, has therefore constituted the ultimate and supreme rule for religious life (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 2). In his *Rule* St Benedict

refers to Scripture as the "most exact rule of human life" (n. 73:2-5).

St Dominic, whose words and works proclaimed him a man of the Gospel at all times (cf. *Libellus de Principiis Ordinis Praedicatorum*, 104; in P. Lippini, *San Domenico visto dai suoi contemporanei*, Ed. Studio Dom., Bologna, 1982, 110) desired his brother preachers also to be "men of the Gospel" (*First Constitutions or Consuetudines*, 31).

St Clare of Assisi imitated Francis' experience to the full: "The form of life of the Order of the Poor Sisters", she wrote, "is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Rule*, I, 1-2; *Franciscan Omnibus*, n. 2750).

St Vincent Pallotti said: "Since the life of Jesus Christ is the fundamental rule of our small Congregation... we must aim at what is most perfect always and in everything" (cf. *Complete Works*, II, 541-546; VIII, 63, 67, 253, 254, 466).

And St Luigi Orione wrote: "Our first Rule and life is to observe the holy Gospel, in great humility and in loving sweetness and on fire with God" (Letters of Don Orione, Rome, 1969, Vol. II, 278).

Share the 'lectio divino'

This rich tradition attests that consecrated Life is "deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord" (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 1) and can be compared to "a plant with many branches which sinks its roots into the Gospel and brings forth abundant fruit in every season of the Church's life" (*ibid.*, n. 5). Its mission is to recall that all Christians are brought together by the Word, to live of the Word and to remain under its lordship. It is therefore the special duty of men and women religious "to remind the baptized of the fundamental values of the Gospel" (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 33). By so doing their witness imbues the Church with "a much-needed incentive towards ever greater fidelity to the Gospel" (*ibid.*, n. 3) and indeed, we might say, is an "eloquent, albeit often silent, proclamation of the Gospel" (*ibid.*, n. 25).

This is why, in my two Encyclicals as on other occasions, I have not failed to cite the example set by Saints and Blesseds belonging to Institutes of Consecrated Life.

Dear brothers and sisters, nourish your day with prayer, meditation and listening to the Word of God. May you, who are familiar with the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, help the faithful to appreciate it in their daily

lives too. And may you know how to express what the Word suggests, letting yourself be formed by it so that you bring forth abundant fruit, like a seed that has fallen into good soil.

Thus, you will be ever docile to the Spirit and you will grow in union with God, you will cultivate fraternal communion among yourselves and will be ready to serve your brethren generously, especially those in need.

My people see your good works, a fruit of the Word of God that lives in you, and glorify your Heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:16)!

In entrusting these reflections to you, I thank you for the precious service you render to the Church and, as I invoke the protection of Mary and of the Saints and Blesseds, Founders of your Institutes, I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you and to your respective religious families, with a special thought for the young men and women in formation and for your brothers and sisters who are sick, elderly or in difficulty. To all, I assure you of my remembrance in prayer.

(Courtesy: Indian Edition of L'Osservatore Romano, N. 6 (2030) - 6 February 2008, p. 2.)