

S A N Y A S A

Journal of Consecrated Life



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EDITORIAL

One of my good friends called me other day and challenged me with a throbbing question: “Friend, where is our God in this ruthless and painful pandemic (Covid-19)? Has he gone hiding?” Shocked was I. I could not answer her convincingly but made me to think, think and think. I was reminded of Psalmist’s agonising dilemma, “My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, “Where is your God?” (Ps 42:3). Many of you too may be asking the same question and still looking for convincing answers!

We are all going through a very terrible and unprecedented time these days. I do not think any one of us would have had in our life time experiences like these. Look at the entire world. The world has changed and it will never be the same again! Practically, the whole world is in silent or standby mode or with pause button on. Entire space is totally free of aircrafts. Railway lines remain completely idle. Roads are so empty making ways for the wild animals to play and dance. Most of us are inside the four walls of our homes doing unusually strange things. All of us are going through anxieties, worries, tensions, disappointments, depressions, frustrations, uncertainties, etc. The degree may vary but none is exempted.

As Christians, as consecrated persons, what are we supposed to do? Obviously, we have to strictly adhere to all the guidelines and standard operation procedures (SOP) laid down by the government, the civil authorities. Well, as consecrated persons what more should we do?

Certainly, as consecrated persons our primary duty is to be with the Lord (cf. Mk 3:14). This is the time to pray, pray and pray. It is a time to pray for all the victims of this virus and all those who are suffering as the side effect of this pandemic. Imagine the sufferings of the poor, homeless, migrants, daily coolies, those living in the slums, path vendors, shop owners, auto and taxi drivers and so on. The list of the most vulnerable people in this punishing pandemic will go on and on. Our prayer and solidarity can be our valuable contribution. But let us not limit with this. Perhaps, we can also do whatever material help is possible by us, including opening our halls and kitchens for them.

It is also a time to listen, listen to the silent whisperings of God. Possibly our God is speaking to us through the happenings of these days. As the psalmist says, “The mighty one, God the Lord speaks” (cf. Ps 50:1). Our God is not dumb.

He is not a silent God. He speaks to us through different ways. Of course, he speaks so powerfully through events and experiences. In the book of Exodus, God spoke to Pharaoh of Egypt through plague. Prophet Amos mentions of God speaking to the people of Israel through nature, pestilence and plague (cf. 4:6-13). It is a time to tell God like Samuel, “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening!” (cf. 1Sam 3:10). God is speaking and he wants us to listen to him attentively. Often this busy world of computers, internet and mobiles is so noisy that we do not listen to the gentle voice of God, the silence of the heart. What is the message that God wants to communicate to us individually, to our community, to our Church and to our country and to the world at large?

As consecrated persons, we are all used to big institutions and magnificent buildings — Churches, universities, colleges, schools, social centres, retreat and renewal centres, training centres, hostels, hospitals, big formation houses, etc. We are used to institution-centred life, work-centred life and “Martha-like” life. These days most of our Institutions are closed. Our regular activities including celebrating the Holy Mass every morning is stopped. For most of the consecrated persons, with the pausing of the institutions, their life has lost its meaning and purpose. Life has become so boring with no thrill and frill. Perhaps God is inviting us for God-centred life than institution-centred life, activity-centred life and ministry-centred life. As God reveals through prophet Hosea, “I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offering” (6:6).

Prophet Haggai warned the people of Israel that all the misfortunes happened because the temple was in ruin. He exhorted them to consider how they had fared and encouraged them to rebuild the temple (cf. 1:3-11). Prophet meant rebuilding Jerusalem temple after the Babylonian destruction. But what does “rebuilding the temple” mean to us today? Paul beautifully puts it, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1Cor 3:16). It is a time to rebuild our temple. Everything will be beautiful and wonderful once our temples i.e. our bodies, our lives are rebuilt. It is a time to consider how we fared so far and take necessary corrective measures in rebuilding our “temples”.

Though Churches are closed, masses are no more celebrated in public, we can still be very close to God. Genuine spirituality is not mere rituals. It is beyond that. Genuine spirituality is beyond religiosities, rules, routines and exterior observances. Perhaps, God is asking us today to move on from exteriority to interiority, from religiosity to spirituality, from duplicity to genuineness. This is what it means when Jesus teaches the confused Samaritan woman saying, “the hour is coming, and is

now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23-24).¹

Nothing happens without the knowledge of God. If God has allowed this devastation to happen, there must be some message that God wants to communicate. And it is our responsibility to listen, discern and find out that message. But who are we to question God? God’s ways are mysterious. Our small human mind can not comprehend many of God’s ways. It does not mean that God has abandoned us. He is with us. He is with us all the more. We need to be strong and courageous. We should not be frightened or dismayed for the Lord our God is with us where ever we go (cf. Jos 1:9). All we need to do is surrender to Him and to His will. Like Job, we too should surrender and acknowledge, “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42:2-3).

The present issue consists of seven articles of varied topics with the common thread *consecrated life* binding them together. The first article is by Paulson Veliyanoor, CMF on “Breast Function of the Eucharist in Anthony Mary Claret: A Psychoanalytic Reading of the «Great Grace».” Anthony Mary Claret, a 19th century saint, archbishop, and founder of the religious order of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary a.k.a. Claretian Missionaries, was a mystic whose spiritual-charismatic core had a triple theme: the Eucharist, the Word of God, and the Cordi-Marian sonship. In the final decade of his life, he received two great mystical graces: the preservation of the sacramental presence of the Eucharist in his heart from one communion to next and the infused love of enemies. In this article, the author analyses Claret’s first great grace, the eucharistic presence. Drawing from the perspectives of object relational psychoanalysis and depth phenomenological psychological research into the structure and dynamics of the experience of the eucharistic transformation, the author argues that the Eucharist served a breast-function in Claret, alpha-bet-izing his suffering that emerged from the psychic wounds of primal losses and sustained persecution, and enabling him to live the highest stage of transformation in the kenotic-agapeic position. The analytic reading enables the readers to recognise the deep existential relevance of the Eucharist and thereby appreciate and live their lives eucharistically.

¹ I was inspired by the beautiful reflection of Fr. Anil Dev, IMS. His message to priests and religious can be listened at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=721L0vY4ROM&t=267s> (access: 06.06.20)

The second presentation is by Babu Sebastian, CMF on the theme, “Unmasking Moral Hypocrisy among the Consecrated: Some Psychodynamic Considerations”. The author insists that we live in a society that lays much importance to appearances which necessitate hypocritical behaviour to some extent as a strategy of everyday living. However, the practice of hypocrisy becomes worrying when those expected to give a living testimony to moral and religious values, such as consecrated persons, end up living lives that reek of interpersonal deception and moral hypocrisy even at disturbing levels. Such hypocritical behaviour may range from the alarming cases of immorality, abuse of power, position and money involving religious who otherwise are the champions of virtues and ideals in the eyes of the most people, to everyday instances of interpersonal deception and keeping up appearances by religious in order to feel morally superior to the rest. Babu Sebastian, through this paper attempts to take a close look at the practice of moral hypocrisy among some consecrated persons, its psychodynamic roots, its effects on personal and community life and what may be done to help such individuals to begin to embrace the truth, wholeness and beauty of their real selves.

Then, we have a very relevant paper for the situation of today with the title, “Corona Virus (COVID-19): An Eco-theological Approach” by eco-theologian S. Devadoss, CMF. The author begins appreciating the consecrated persons for their selfless contribution during this unprecedented painful time of COVID-19. Then, he proceeds explaining in detail about Novel Corona Virus. He goes on explaining biblical understanding of pestilence and plague from both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. After giving a theological outlook from the Scriptures, the author rapidly glances through the history beginning with 3000 B.C till the modern time presenting different epidemics and pandemics one by one with a short description. Following that, the author presents the common causes for epidemics and pandemics and then the impacts. After that, the author presents the ecological outlook of Covid-19. The author concludes his paper narrating Covid-19 as a challenge to the mission of the consecrated persons.

The fourth article is by Martin George, CMF on “Ritual Substitutes for Ethical Living: The Matthean Lesson”. He probes a common problem found in different religions: instead of trying to live the ethical principles upheld in their religion, many prefer to substitute that moral responsibility with ritual acts because it is comparatively more convenient and easier. The article analyses this problem in the light of some relevant New Testament texts. The author claims that Jesus was very well aware of this problem in the religious praxis of his time; so, he vehemently denounced that trend and tried to correct it through his deeds and teachings. Hence,

the Gospels and other New Testament books exhibit a clear insistence on ethical principles over against their apparent 'ritual substitutes'. It is a misinterpretation of the Scriptures if some Christians still believe that rituals and prayers can substitute one's ethical duties, such as the responsibility to love his/her neighbour.

Then Fr. Cristo Rey, CMF a renowned theologian of modern time presents a paper on "The Critical Issues Faced by the Church Today and Their Effects on Consecrated Life". Taking glue from Pope Francis' Christmas speech on the joys and afflictions facing the Catholic Church to the members of the Roman Curia on December 21, 2018, the author divides his paper into three parts: 1) The Message of the Pope to the Roman Curia; 2) Strong Winds and Tempests: Critical Issues and Their Effects on Consecrated Life and 3) The Processes of Transformation: New Wine, New Wineskins. He concludes saying that the time for creativity and innovation have arrived so that the new wine could maintain its flavour.

The next paper is on "The Healing Ministry of Jesus and Its Relevance for Consecrated Life" by Arul Jesu Robin, CMF. The paper deals in detail the healing ministry of Jesus as seen in the Gospels. He argues that the healings and the exorcisms carried out by Jesus is the manifestation of the dawn of the Kingdom of God here on earth. Finally, he points out certain implications for the life and mission of the consecrated persons of today.

The last article is by Fr. Justin Thomas Kuzhivelil, CMF on the theme, "The Art of Happy Living of Consecrated Life as Ordained Ministers with Special Focus on Integral Formation". He argues that the problems and scandals that are caused by the consecrated persons are because of faulty and insufficient formation received. He proposes better and integral formation for happy and meaningful living of consecrated persons.

At this unprecedented and unparalleled time of anxiety and uncertainty caused by Covid-19, let me present this issue for your critical reading and deep reflection. May the Almighty who is with us always enable us to trust in His providence and care!

M. Arul Jesu Robin, CMF
Chief Editor

BREAST FUNCTION OF THE EUCHARIST IN ANTHONY MARY CLARET: A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF THE “GREAT GRACE”¹

Paulson Veliyannoor, CMF

Anthony Mary Claret (1807-1870) was a giant of a saint of the 19th century, who was known for the scope, diversity, and creativity of his apostolic ministries as well as his defining eucharistic and cordi-Marian spirituality. One of the two “great graces” he received in the last decade of his life was the preservation of the sacramental species of the Eucharist within him, day and night, a grace that artists have captured in his portrayals by placing a bright light emanating from the chest. This eucharistic grace has been a subject of much reflection and research over the years.² Most of the scholars have focused on the theological and spiritual meaning of the miraculous grace as well as its implications and consequences in Claret’s life and in the spiritual patrimony of the *Congregation of Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, which he founded. Few studies have looked into the precipitating and predisposing conditions in his environment both within and without.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the eucharistic grace from the vantage point of object relational psychoanalysis. No singular event in anyone’s life is the result of a single cause, but is overdetermined by several interacting factors. It is my argument that, among several factors that shaped Claret’s eucharistic grace, some of the early object relational experiences were significantly formative in predisposing Claret towards such an experience. The eucharistic grace served to fill in his psycho-spiritual needs and worked within him with a goodness of fit with the shape of his psyche, enabling him to rise to the heights of human transformation and live his mission to the full.

1. Saint Anthony Mary Claret: A Brief Profile

Antonio María Adjutorio Juan Claret y Clará was born in Sallent (Province of Barcelona, Spain) on December 23, 1807, as the fifth of the eleven children of

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Juan Claret and Josefa Clará, whom Claret characterized as “married, upright, and God-fearing people, very devoted to the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Most Holy” (Aut. ¶ 3).³ We can immediately recognize the source of his own devotion to the Eucharist and Mother Mary. In fact, the name “María” was not originally part of his name: he formally added it to his name at the time of his episcopal consecration in 1850, for the reasons he himself so stated: “Out of devotion to Mary Most Holy, I added the sweet name of Mary, because Mary Most Holy is my mother, my patroness, my mistress, my directress and my all, after Jesus” (Aut. ¶ 5).

From his early days, Antonio showed remarkable spiritual fervor. At age five, he spent nights thinking about eternity and dreading the state of the lost souls and wanting to do something to save them. He loved Holy Mass and Rosary; and would make frequent visits to the little Marian shrine at Fussimaña. He longed to be a priest. However, as he moved to Barcelona to train himself for the family business in textiles, his fervor cooled and he dreamed of becoming a worldly success. But, the Word of God confronted him and re-ignited his passion for priesthood. He gave up his worldly ambitions, entered the seminary at age 22 and was ordained a priest in 1835.

But his heart was still restless. His spirit was for the whole world and hence, could not be limited to a parish. He travelled to Rome to offer himself to the services of *Propaganda Fide*. But encouraged by a Jesuit who directed his spiritual exercises while in Rome, Claret entered Jesuit novitiate. However, frequent illness troubled him greatly there, and the Jesuit General advised him to return to Spain. Back in Spain and with permission from his diocesan superiors, Claret launched popular missions walking on foot all over Cataluña. Wanting to preach the Word by all means possible, he founded the *Religious Library*, a publishing house which in its first eighteen years launched 2,811,100 books, 2,509,500 booklets and 4,249,200 leaflets. With the outbreak of the Second Carlist War, he was sent to the Canary Islands, where, in less than a year, his ministry was so fruitful and he was so beloved that he is still fondly remembered with the sobriquet “El Padrito” (=the little Father) and, along with the Virgin of Pino, is the co-patron of the diocese of Canarias.

On his return to Spain, with the blessings of his superiors, he realized his long-standing dream: On July 16, 1849 (Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel), in a little room in the seminary of Vic, together with five other priests of similar passion, Claret founded the Congregation of the Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CMF).

However, soon came his appointment as the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba. Consecrated bishop on October 6, 1850, he left for Cuba where he plunged into a missionary renewal of the diocese. Besides the directly pastoral services, he undertook massive efforts to transform the deplorable socio-political-moral situation of the country. He fought against slavery, set up schools for the poor, founded savings banks and libraries, wrote books on agriculture, etc.⁴ His reforms did not go down well with everyone: he was viciously attacked and near-fatally wounded in 1856.

Queen Isabel II of Spain succeeded in getting Claret transferred to Spain as her personal confessor. She also placed him in charge of reviving the Monastery of Escorial and the church and hospital of Montserrat. Amidst these responsibilities, Claret still found time to engage in active and direct pastoral ministry. Though he remained politically neutral, his association with the Queen brought him many enemies and he suffered intense humiliation and hatred from the enemies of the Church and the State. Following the Revolution of September 1868, The Queen had to go in exile, and being her confessor, Claret accompanied her. In 1869, he attended the First Vatican Council, after which he returned to France, only to be pursued by his persecutors. He took refuge in the Cistercian monastery in Fontfroide, where he died on October 24, 1870.

Claret was an itinerant missionary in his life; he has remained so even after his death! His mortal remains have been moved seven times, thanks to the persistence of enemies of the Church wanting to destroy his remains. Currently, his remains are at Vic. Claret was beatified by Pope Pius XI on February 25, 1934 and canonized by Pius XII on May 7, 1950. The words of Pope Pius XII at his canonization beautifully sum up the life of Claret:

A great soul, born to embrace contrasts; of humble origins yet highly esteemed in the eyes of the world; small in stature, yet gifted with a magnanimous spirit; modest in appearance, but commanding the respect of the most powerful and influential. He was of strong character but gentle as the result of austerity and penance; always in the presence of God even in the midst of his prodigious activity; slandered and admired, celebrated and persecuted. Among so many wonders, like a soft light that illuminates everything, his devotion to the Mother of God.⁵

2. Primacy of the Eucharist in Father Claret

If one were to identify three pivotal elements in the spiritual-charismatic core of St. Anthony Mary Claret, they would be the Eucharist, the Word of God, and cordi-Marian sonship, in that order. Claret was a mystic⁶ and the Eucharist was his first love.⁷ Everything he was and everything he did emerged from this first love;

every other love—be it love of Mother Mary or the Church or the Congregation he founded—emerged from this primal love of the Eucharist. So did every grace he received. As John M. Lozano observes,

What distinguishes our Saint from other great Latin mystics is the preeminent role the Eucharist plays in his mystical experience, both as a source of illumination and as a means of mystical transformation. One has only to read his spiritual notes to become convinced that the greater number of his mystical graces were granted by way of the Eucharist. The Mass and visiting the Blessed Sacrament were the spiritual high points of his entire day, and it was during these visits that he received many of his inner locutions. His most intense awareness of union with the Lord also came to him at these times and during his thanksgiving after Mass.⁸

This pre-eminence of the Eucharist in the life of Claret is consciously acknowledged in the coat of arms he adopted as a bishop—at the very center of the coat of arms, Claret superimposed the Host over the central letter “M” that stood for Mother Mary. In his letter dated July 25, 1850, addressing a religious entity in Manresa, Claret wrote thus: “The Host that is pictured in Mary’s Heart signifies both her being the Mother of God and the faith and devotion I wish to have towards the Blessed Sacrament.”⁹ Indeed, Claret was “one of the most eucharistic Saints” of the 19th century, as asserted by João de Castro Engler.¹⁰

This love of the Eucharist was evident from his childhood, as Claret himself has indicated in his autobiography: “I used to attend the Holy Mass on all feasts and holy days and on other days, too, when I possibly could. On feast days I usually attended two Masses, a Low Mass and a High Mass” (Aut. ¶ 36). Being a child with deep religious fervor, he would attend all Church-related celebrations; but the eucharistic practices were his most favored ones: “The services I liked best were those connected with the Blessed Sacrament, and I attended these with great devotion and joy” (Aut. ¶ 37). The reception of the First Communion was momentous: “Words cannot tell what I felt on that day when I had the unequalled joy of receiving my good Jesus into my heart for the first time” (Aut. ¶ 38).

This fervor did cool off during his youthful days when he had become worldlier and engrossed in making a niche for himself in the weaving business. Yet, he continued to attend Mass during Sundays and holy days of obligation, though, in his words, “there seemed to be more machines in my head than saints on the altar” (Aut. ¶ 67). However, given his deep-rooted foundation in faith, it was only a matter of time that the Eucharist would serve as the privileged place of his conversion: It was while attending Mass towards the end of his third year of studies in

Barcelona that the words of the Gospel “went like an arrow that pierced [his] heart” (Aut. ¶ 68). There was no turning back then for Anthony. Love of the Eucharist would become an integral part of his daily aspirations: “Long live the holy Sacrifice of the Mass! Long live the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar!” (Aut. ¶ 269). In fact, love of the Eucharist was an invariant through all phases of his life.¹¹

3. The Great Eucharistic Grace

The highpoint of Claret’s eucharistic experience happened at the Church of the Rosary at La Granja de San Ildefonso on August 26, 1861, nine years before his death. Claret used to pray before the statue of *Cristo del Perdón* (Christ of Forgiveness) inside this church. He first described this event in the *Lights and Graces* for the year 1861, and later quoted it almost verbatim in the autobiography:

On August 26, 1861, at 7:00 in the evening while I was at prayer in the church of the Rosary at La Granja, the Lord granted me the great grace of keeping the sacramental species intact within me and of having the Blessed Sacrament always present, day and night, in my breast. Because of this I must always be very recollected and inwardly devout. Furthermore I must pray and confront all the evils of Spain, as the Lord has told me. To help me do this, I have engraved in my memory a number of things, such as that without any merit, talent, or personal recommendation, He has lifted me up from the lowest of the low to the highest post, at the side of the kings of this earth. And now He has put me at the side of the King of Heaven. *Glorificate et portate Deum in corpore vestro* (1 Cor. 6: 20). (Aut. ¶ 694)

Could it be possible that this was just a fleeting thought, a fantasy of Claret, while at prayer? It looks like Claret himself doubted the authenticity of this experience for some time. But another locution seems to have put his doubts to rest:

On the morning of May 16, 1862, at 4:15 while I was at prayer, I thought of what I had written down the day before concerning my experience of the Blessed Sacrament the previous August 26. I had been thinking of erasing it and was still thinking of it today, but the Blessed Virgin told me not to erase it. Afterward, while I was saying Mass, Jesus Christ told me that He had indeed granted me this grace of remaining within me sacramentally. (Aut. ¶ 700)

The significance of this experience is evident in that Claret uses the phrase “great grace” only in two contexts: once here, and other, when he writes about the grace of infused love of enemies, which he received in 1869, just a year before his death.¹² The traditional understanding within the congregation of his missionary sons (Claretian Missionaries) has been that this great grace of “uninterrupted sacramental presence of Christ,”¹³ which began on August 26, 1861, continued until his death on

October 24, 1870.¹⁴ The experience effected an interior transformation and released unprecedented apostolic fervor in Claret who decided to take on the ills of the entire Spanish society and convert Spain for Christ. Much study has been done on the authenticity and nature of this eucharistic experience as well as its meaning and effects in Claret. None of the studies has doubted the authenticity of the experience, given Claret's balanced temperament, humility, realistic and sometimes skeptical approach to mystical experiences, and the manner in which he often restrained those whom he had been helping as spiritual director from being too interested in such lofty experiences.¹⁵

However, there have been divergent views about the nature of the experience and its meaning. Whereas mystical experiences can often have correlated physical expressions, was Claret's eucharistic grace of preservation of species a miraculous suspension of the biological action of the digestive juices on the sacramental species consumed, until the next reception of the sacrament? We would not know for sure, as Claret does not give us any further information on the experience; perhaps he did not even know how it worked within him, except that he was truly convinced, reaffirmed through an interior locution from Jesus, that Christ would remain within him sacramentally (cf. Aut. ¶ 700). Giving a protracted analysis of this aspect, Lozano concludes thus:

The interior grace granted to St. Anthony Claret must be situated along the lines of the two inner levels of the Eucharist: Christ and the church, the *sacramentum et res* and the *res tantum*. This would lead us to surmise that it must have consisted of a special grace of communion with Christ-as-Sacrament and, as such, that it would terminate in a particularly intense experience of Claret's being-in-the-church. These are exactly the two directions toward which the Saint's notes point: his inner devotion and his *vivit vero in me Christus*, on the one hand, and his desire for an apostolic confrontation with all the evils of the church in Spain, on the other.... The grace of communion with Christ and with the church seems to have been habitual with the Saint, if we understand the term as the mystics do when they speak of the habitual sense of the presence of God.¹⁶

As to the consequence of the experience, the scholars are unanimous in upholding the intensification of Claret's apostolic fervor: Claret receives an insight, on the very next day following the great grace, into the specific evils draining the church in Spain, and resolves to confront them all.¹⁷ However, there are differences of opinion if the experience was an indication of Claret having arrived at the stage of mystical marriage. Whereas some¹⁸ argue that the great grace signaled Claret's mystical marriage or his arrival at one of the final steps of realizing the union,

Lozano¹⁹ concludes that the eucharistic experience at La Granja was a grace granted to prepare him for the heights of mysticism, where he would arrive later.

Though there has been a quantum of studies and reflection into Claret's experience, as García Paredes observes, "the 'great grace', granted to Claret, needs a new approach today. The image projected on the screen of the tradition has faded over time and does not have the necessary clarity to avoid skeptical or indifferent attitudes towards the phenomenon."²⁰ One of the approaches that might arouse a renewed interest and heal indifference towards the phenomenon could be asking the question: *What prepared Claret for this experience? Was there anything in his environment or psychological architecture that predisposed him to such an experience?* It has been pointed out that some environmental factors in his life have been influential in his understanding of the experience. In his childhood, he was enamored by the book, *Courtesies of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament*, and learned it by heart (cf. Aut. ¶ 37). The book spoke of sacramental conservation in Mother Mary, which would have left a deep imprint in Claret.²¹ Further, the claim of his close associate and spiritual friend, Mother Antonia Paris, to have received the grace of conservation of the sacramental species within her for several days, would have had an impact on him as well. But besides these environmental influences, was there something deep within his psyche that predisposed him for such an experience? After all, grace works on nature and perfects it.²²

In the opinion of García Paredes, "in addition to the theological keys and the experience of grace, it is very enlightening to contemplate the psychological, emotional and spiritual experience of Claret." He goes on to explore the great grace from the Indian theory of heart chakra (*anāhata*).²³ However, his analysis focuses primarily on the psychospiritual fruition of the grace in the *anāhata*, and does not speak about the predisposing elements that led to such a fruition. Perhaps we need to plumb Claret's psychology a bit deeper. It is my submission that there were indeed some psychological dynamics that oriented him towards such an experience, with the great grace filling in for some psychic and developmental need of his with a certain goodness of fit. This does not invalidate the experience; rather, it only heightens the truth that God works through our personal history and grace often comes through our wounds.

In order to substantiate this claim, I shall first introduce and review some of the psychoanalytic concepts and how they apply to eucharistic experience. Towards this, I base myself on the findings of my previous research into the structure and dynamics of the eucharistic experience and their application to psychoanalysis.²⁴

Following this, I shall apply them to the life-context of St. Anthony Claret to facilitate a deeper understanding and appreciation of his “great grace.”

4. Object Relations and Human Psyche

Within the psychoanalytic school of thought, one of the many schools of psychological sciences, one can trace various perspectives and stances, which may be grouped under four major interrelated domains of drive, ego, object relations, and self.²⁵ Of these, object relations perspective focuses on the exploration and understanding of one’s relationship to one’s significant others—the primary care givers—as *experienced* and *embedded* in one’s memory, specially from the earliest moments of life. The word “object” refers to the real others in one’s life-world as well as the internalized representations of the same. It is these internalized objects that carry greater import for the psychic life of an individual. The earliest and most formative objects in a person’s life are the primary caregivers in his or her infancy; and among them, the mother or the mothering person becomes *the* primary object. The earliest experiences stamp an indelible mark in the psychic life of a person and remain more or less stable throughout one’s life span. I shall not explore the object relations theory in depth, but shall only highlight those elements that are of relevance to the focus of this paper.

Being human is to be capable of relatedness. Hence, human beings are born with a “phylogenetic inheritance”²⁶ of certain templates and mechanisms that spontaneously open them up towards other objects or persons in their world, much like the generative grammar and linguistic deep structure that we are born with.²⁷ The newborns seem to have an innate ability to perceive the other, an ability that is termed *alteroception* by Trevarthen.²⁸ Ogden calls this predisposition for object relatedness “psychological deep structure.”²⁹ With this psychological deep structure, the infant knows and seeks “an object of unique goodness”³⁰ which is normally met in the mother, the experience of whom becomes the foundation for its object relational world.

However, given its psychic and sensory limitations, a newborn child has no idea of a person, an object in its totality. Its experience of an object is through part-objects, which become the stand-in for the whole object. The earliest part-object an infant encounters is the *breast* of the mother, and as programmed from within by the mystery of life, it is this part-object that a newborn baby seeks in all its unconscious spontaneity and instinctual thrust. Based on its experience of being fed or not fed as well as its other needs being met or not met, it receives this part object as “good” or “bad”—in other words, as *good breast* or *bad breast*.³¹ The experience of being born

itself is a trauma,³² and an infant, who experiences hunger and thirst or cold and heat, but cannot name or comprehend such terrors, faces them as multifaceted “nameless dread”³³ or “formless dread”³⁴ and projects them on to the breast of the mother, in a native mode of communication. When the baby experiences being fed and soothed, its nameless dread subsides and experiences a nameless deep restfulness, and the breast is experienced as good breast. However, when the baby cannot be fed or its needs cannot be met, and it continues to experience the internal terror, the absent breast is experienced as bad breast. The infant identifies with such experiences that are subsequently internalized, giving rise to the formation of emotionally loaded internal objects and intrapsychic relatedness to them.

“Projective identification” is the mode of communication resorted to by the infant when faced with nameless feelings within. The term, introduced by Melanie Klein,³⁵ has gone through various nuanced transformations in meaning.³⁶ Projective identification is the process of splitting off parts of one’s own self and projecting them on to the objects in one’s environment. As Ogden defines it operationally: “Through projective identification the projector has the primary unconscious fantasy of ridding himself of unwanted aspects of the self; depositing those unwanted parts in another person; and finally, recovering a modified version of what was extruded.”³⁷ Such dynamics may serve as a defense against inner terrors or a means of communication by which the infant helps the mothering object make sense of its inner world; it is a form of object relation and a means for psychological change and growth.³⁸ It is a natural, spontaneous, and developmentally appropriate process for an infant as it learns to come to terms with its own inner terrors and develop a psychic life.

What primarily facilitates a healthy psychic development of the infant is “good enough mothering”³⁹ which provides a “holding environment”⁴⁰ for the infant and serves as a “container”⁴¹ (♀) for its terrors (the contained - ♂); and facilitates an “alpha-bet-ization”⁴² of the projected experiences of the infant. In other words, what a psychologically healthy mother does is to receive the infant’s fears and terrors that are projected on to her (the beta [β] elements in the language of Bion), contain them, process them, make sense of the same, and respond to the need of the infant with empathic understanding (a process that Bion⁴³ terms as alpha [α] function). What she does is to convert the unbearable, unnamable β-elements into α-elements that is digestible for the psyche of the infant. James Grotstein calls this process *alpha-bet-ization*. Through repeated encounters with such process, the infant learns to internalize this process of alpha-bet-ization and develop the capacity to self-soothe and deal with the internal and external challenges in life.

Mothers are naturally endowed with this capacity for alpha-bet-ization. They do it through several means—their very presence, soothing voice, motherese, holding, rocking, singing, feeding, and such similar mothering stances. However, the primary and most significant mode of alpha-bet-ization is through breast feeding. For an infant, mother's breast becomes the channel of life and two-way communication, and gradually, the experience of the "good-breast" is introjected and the child develops a good internal object that is stable and consistent.

Object relational psychoanalysts speak of several "positions" that an infant grows through in its psychological maturation. The positions are not rigidly sequential, but exist and function simultaneously. I will present them here in a capsule form for want of space and scope. The earliest is the *autistic-contiguous position*⁴⁴ which is sensory-dominated and pre-symbolic. The child's rudimentary sense of self is built on sensory contiguity and sensations arising from the skin being instrumental in providing a rudimentary sense of boundary and self. The "skin-to-skin 'moulding'"⁴⁵ provided by the mothering person becomes a stabilizing agent. The second position is the *paranoid-schizoid position*,⁴⁶ wherein the projective identification becomes the primary *modus operandi*. Next follows the *depressive position*⁴⁷ wherein the infant learns that the good breast and the bad breast are not two different realities, but one—the recognition of the whole-object results and reality testing begins here, leading to a capacity for reparation, love, and concern. The fourth position that emerges is the *transcendent position*.⁴⁸ Grotstein defines it as "the individual's gradually developing capacity, from infancy (or perhaps even fetalism) onward, to tolerate (suffer) and therefore to resonate with O, the ultimate reality of anything and everything."⁴⁹ I have proposed a fifth position, based on my study of the phenomenology of eucharistic transformation, *kenotic-agapeic position*.⁵⁰ Having grown through the other four positions and developed a healthy sense of the self, the person is now capable of letting go of the self and die for the sake of nurturing other lives. This capacity for self-transcendence and self-donation for the sake of the other whose face becomes an ethical imperative⁵¹ for the subject, is available for a person from childhood all the way to the last moment, in differing degrees. Though traditional psychoanalysis has not identified this position, the transformation facilitated through the eucharistic dynamics points to the possibility of such a position and the post-resurrectional incarnation it realizes. One is able to arrive at this position and die to one's self and live a life of other-centeredness precisely because one knows in one's being that he or she has been loved and cared for ever by a love greater than oneself.

One of the key losses across the initial positions is the *object loss* which is a highly formative phenomenon. Actual or perceived loss of the mother in early infancy can be devastating for the infant. Indeed, the presence of someone other than the biological mother, who can provide good-enough mothering, will suffice for the healthy psychological birth and growth of the infant. However, the loss of the innate bonding between the mother and the infant is a significant loss, indeed. Besides, in the depressive position, there is a loss of the hallowed image of the good breast, reconciling it with the bad as one. Writing about the various developmental positions that an infant grows through, Klein writes: "The object which is being mourned is the mother's breast and all that the breast and the milk have come to stand for in the infant's mind: namely, love, goodness and security."⁵² Pine observes that "all significant object relations, when lost, are replaced by an identification, thus leaving a mark upon the ego."⁵³ Sigmund Freud's famous remark captures it well: "The shadow of the object [falls] upon the ego."⁵⁴ However, when the experience is positive and fulfilling, it leads to a positive identification and consequently, the "bright radiance" of the object falls upon the ego.⁵⁵ It is, ultimately, the net balance of the negative and the positive experiences that determines the extent of the healthy psychic development of the person.

5. The Analytic in the Eucharist

What is the interface between psychoanalysis and the Eucharist? According to Carl Jung, though the Eucharist belongs to the realm of faith and, "the realities of faith lie outside the realm of psychology,"⁵⁶ the Eucharist is "a still-living mystery" and "it owes its vitality partly to its undoubted psychological efficacy, and ... it is therefore a fit subject for psychological study."⁵⁷ He continues to affirm that "the most important mystery of the Catholic Church rests, among other things, on psychic conditions which are deeply rooted in the human soul."⁵⁸ For Jung, *individuation* is the highest goal of human development, and the Eucharist becomes "the rite of individuation process" that "transforms the soul of the empirical man, who is merely a part of himself, into his totality, symbolically expressed by Christ."⁵⁹

Marcus Pound observes that "analysis is not a question of learning to live in an eternal present, but precisely the opposite: taking one's history seriously, where one has come from, where one is, and where one is going." And therefore, "Christ's repeated intervention in the Sacred Mass may be seen in terms of analytic intervention, and hence the Sacred Mass may be seen in terms of a social form of analysis."⁶⁰

Ritual becomes efficacious within a wound, a trauma. As Grimes observes, “For ritualizing to occur, the surroundings must expose a vulnerable (vulner = wound) side.”⁶¹ The concept of trauma is central to psychoanalysis as well as to the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the memorial of the sacrifice of Christ, his crucifixion, which is termed “the primal scene of Christianity”⁶² and is traumatic. Applying Lacanian analysis, Pound argues that the Eucharist is the trauma of the Real in the symbolic, and transubstantiation, which is the key dynamic within the eucharistic ritual, “is primarily a traumatic event and the eucharistic community a traumatic community.”⁶³ With these parallels, “Christ’s intervention into time serves as the paradigm for all subsequent analytic interventions.”⁶⁴ The structure and dynamics of the eucharistic experience also reveal not only that the four positions identified by object relational psychoanalysts are discernible in one’s lived experience of the Eucharist, but that there is a beyond—a fifth position of *kenotic-agapeic (K-A) position*, which invites us to grow into and which psychoanalysis can learn from. We will see how this applies to the Eucharist in the next section.

6. Breast Function of the Eucharist

The Odes of Solomon is a collection of 42 odes from the earliest centuries of Christianity and are believed to have been composed for liturgical use among the early Christian communities. Here is the first half of Ode 19:

A cup of milk was offered to me.
 And I drank it in the sweetness of the Lord’s kindness.
 The Son is the cup.
 And the Father is He who was milked.
 And the Holy Spirit is She who milked Him,
 Because His breasts were full;
 And it was undesirable that His milk should be
 released without purpose.
 The Holy Spirit opened Her bosom,
 And mixed the milk of the two breasts of the Father.
 Then She gave the mixture to the generation without
 their knowing.
 And those who have received (it) are in the
 perfection of the right hand.⁶⁵

The Ode goes on to speak of how Virgin Mary received this offering and gave birth to it for the good of the world. Referring to the eucharistic connotations of this Ode, James O'Connor observes thus:

The "cup of milk" is the Son, milked by the Spirit from the breasts of the Father The Son is of the substance of the Father, a truth that the Council of Nicaea in 325 would capture by its use of the term *homoousios*, one in being.... Thus, the Father's Milk becomes our nourishment; we feed on and drink of his substance.⁶⁶

The reference to the "two breasts of the Father" and "His milk" is curious and daring use of imagery, but shall not surprise us; for the fathers of the Church have used similar expressions to refer to Jesus being the food and drink of the world. Here are the words of St. Irenaeus of the second century from his pronouncements against heresies:

He might easily have come to us in His immortal glory, but in that case we could never have endured the greatness of the glory; and therefore it was that He, who was the perfect bread of the Father, offered Himself to us as milk, [because we were] as infants. He did this when He appeared as a man, that we, being nourished, as it were, from the breast of His flesh, and having, by such a course of milk nourishment, become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God, may be able also to contain in ourselves the Bread of immortality, which is the Spirit of the Father.⁶⁷

Jesus, "the perfect bread of the Father, offered Himself to us as milk," and the infant humanity drank at "the breast of His flesh." Jesus becomes the breast as well as the milk. The eucharistic symbolism is hard to miss in these words.

St. Ephrem the Syrian, a fourth-century theologian, speaks of the same symbolism in his reflection on the Nativity:

The High One became as a little child, and in Him was hidden a treasure of wisdom sufficing for all! Though Most High, yet He sucked the milk of Mary, and of His goodness all creatures suck! He is the Breast of Life, and the Breath of Life; the dead suck from His life and revive.... When He sucked the milk of Mary, He was suckling all with Life. While He was lying on His Mother's bosom, in His bosom were all creatures lying.⁶⁸

Again, note Ephrem's reference to Christ as "the Breast of Life." Here too Christ becomes the breast itself, full of milk, and as breast, "He was suckling all with Life." The mode of offering the life-giving milk is, indeed, the Eucharist. For, in the Eucharist, God offers us His own very substance, the primordial and foundational food for our soul. In the Eucharist, we eat the body of Christ and drink his blood, for our spiritual sustenance, our life eternal. In the Gospel according to John, Jesus has made it unequivocally clear:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.... Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. (John 6:51, 53-56, *New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*)

The eucharistic meal is an oral act. "Mouth," as the organ of receiving nourishment, has great significance not only in physical growth, but in psychological development as well.⁶⁹ It is the mouth that connects the infant to the source of food, the breast of the mother; and in feeding at the breast, there is an ingestion of the mother, her attitudes and feelings, into the psyche of the infant. Oral dynamics also becomes the primary means of communication of one's fears and anxieties, hopes and peace. Jackson argues that the Eucharist serves as a privileged moment of expression of the spectrum of our feelings and emotions, helping us find solace and peace.⁷⁰

In analytic terms, the Eucharist serves the breast function. We have already seen how breast becomes, not just the source of food and life for an infant, but the primary and necessary object for a child in its psychological birth and growth as well. The breast also becomes, through oral engagement, the two-way means of communication for projecting the nameless feelings of the infant, and for the child to introject the alpha-bet-ized and digested mental content from the mother.

One of the rudimentary experiences of the newborn is the terror of disintegration, falling apart; and it is necessary that someone provides an experience of being contained in one's skin. The mother, by holding the infant close to her body, provides a skin-to-skin molding which gives the infant a sense of continuity and boundedness, resulting in a soothing experience of "going-on-being."⁷¹ The "good-enough mothering" necessary for the infant to grow into a healthy individual includes not only holding the child physically "but also the total environmental provision prior to the concept of living with."⁷² Many faithful engage the Eucharist from their places of woundedness, existential trauma. They bring to the Eucharist their secret shames and sins, burdens and dreams, hopes and fears, their inner selves going to pieces; and the Eucharist becomes the holding environment, the skin that provides them with a sense of coherence of self. The Eucharist is both a spatiotemporal reality and a person—Christ. It provides them with an experience of boundedness and being held. In Bionian analytical language we can say that the Eucharist offers the maternal container ↔ contained function (♀♂). The Eucharist, as both a ritual and a person, becomes a container for the existential terrors of a soul in pain.

This is especially so in the paranoid-schizoid (P-S) position that an infant goes through. Eucharist is a space and an event wherein one can live through one's P-S position.⁷³ The Eucharist provides us with the freedom—the freedom of a child of God—to hold God responsible for the pains and terrors in our lives and accuse Him. God becomes the “bad object,” the “bad breast,” who is absent in our life when we most need Him; the one who has abandoned us. The cry of Jesus on the cross, borrowing the words of the Psalmist (Psalm 22:1), *Eli, eli, lema sabachthani?*, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46) is such an expression of angst, emerging from the freedom of a true child of God. This freedom is beautifully captured by John Shea in his story of a “down-and-out disciple” who is in deep spiritual angst and is about to quit on Jesus. Jesus walks into his room and initiates an “analytic” session and tells him at one point: “Love me because I am large enough to betray.”⁷⁴

Just as a mother, with deep empathic attunement and love, can take in the violent fears and terrors projected on to her through the breast by the infant who cannot make sense of the nameless and formless dread (β -elements), Christ in the Eucharist takes in our violent projections of sins and shame, agonies and fears, and transforms them into energies of love (α -function or alpha-bet-ization) and returns them as life energies for our nourishment. In communion, we receive the alpha elements, the very substance of Christ, which will enable us to grow into fullness of human and divine maturity as him. As our eucharistic engagement deepens—as we continue to drink at the breast of the Father, there comes a qualitative shift in our projections, and we learn to trust God and what God does in our lives, and with Jesus on the cross, we are able to say, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

Thus, Eucharist facilitates a depressive position by helping us face the existential realities without masking them or running away from them; to walk the valley of sorrow and death. At the same time, the eucharistic practice moves us to transcendent position by enabling us to connect with and trust the providence of God who gently guides our lives and the course of history. One can then leave the eucharistic space in peace to pour out one's life in the *kenotic-agapeic position* for the life of the world.

For this to happen, we need to feast at the eucharistic breast. Without this food and drink at the eucharistic breast, we can never enter the fullness of life to live, work, and play in authentic human freedom. Two scriptural narratives containing eucharistic motifs that capture this breast function and alpha-bet-ization are: the feeding of Elijah in his depression and labored journey to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19) and the Emmaus Journey of two disciples shattered by the loss of their

loved object (Luke 24:13-35). In both cases, the protagonists are in a paranoid-schizoid position. They are then invited to engage in a eucharistic encounter wherein they pour out their agonies only to receive succorance and new life. Indeed, the Eucharist serves the breast function in our inner birth and growth into the fullness of being.

7. Breast Function of the Eucharist in Claret's "Great Grace"

It is time to return to the eucharistic experience of Anthony Mary Claret. I had suggested that, besides other factors, there were some psychological dynamics as well that might have predisposed Claret towards having such an experience that would fill in for a psychological developmental need of his.

Anthony Mary Claret had a *primal loss*. Loss of the breast of the mother.⁷⁵ *Not once, but twice*, in two different modes. Here is his own account of this loss:

My mother always breast-fed her children, but in my case she could not do so because of ill health. She sent me to stay day and night with a wet nurse who lived in our town. The owner of the house of which the wet nurse was mistress had made a fairly deep excavation beneath it in order to enlarge the cellar. One night when I happened not to be there, the foundations, weakened by the digging, gave way. The walls buckled and the house collapsed, killing my wet nurse and burying her and her four children under the rubble. (Aut. ¶ 7)

Not only did Claret lose his mother's breast due to her ill health, but he lost also the breast and the person of the wet nurse who substituted as the mothering person—two successive losses both of which were of the nature of the same primal object loss. It was a significant and formative deprivation.

Claret mentions this experience as his earliest memory at the very beginning of his autobiography. Equally significantly, the "first ideas" he can remember also relate to an experience of loss, a permanent and far more significant loss that some people experience: at the age of five, he was unable to sleep thinking about eternity. It was not the blissful thought and imagery about the eternal life in heaven that kept him awake, but the frightening thought of those souls who would *lose* this gift and suffer an eternity of pain! Incidentally, it is also worth recalling that, after a period of worldly and business interests in his youth, what shook him up and drove him back to spiritual quest was a scriptural question that he had heard in his childhood years and that now returned while at Mass one day to sting him about the possibility of the same loss for himself! "For what does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?" (Mt. 16:26, as quoted in the *Autobiography*). These words "went like an arrow that pierced [his] heart" (Aut. ¶ 68). Great was the

existential angst of the possibility of a terrible loss of eternal life becoming his own, a loss the thought of which had kept him awake at age five:

The first ideas I can remember date back to when I was five years old. When I went to bed, instead of sleeping – I never have been much of a sleeper – I used to think about eternity. I would think *forever, forever, forever*. I would try to imagine enormous distances and pile still more distances on these and realize that they would never come to an end. Then I would shudder and ask myself if those who were so unhappy as to go to an eternity of pain would ever see an end to their suffering. Would they have to go on suffering? *Yes, forever and forever they will have to bear their pain!* (Aut. ¶ 8)

Both the earliest memory and the earliest idea have to do with losses, personal and of others; and one cannot but wonder if both these memories have some linkage at the level of psychic rhizome. The significance of earliest memories and their impact on one's personality have been widely studied and documented.⁷⁶ The entire second chapter of his autobiography is his reflection on how the losses and misfortunes of others—material as well as spiritual—have moved his heart and shaped his choices. Definitely, these losses have their formative influence on Claret and the ministry he would choose later in life.⁷⁷ As Mosak and Pietro observe:

Early recollections hold valuable information for those who are able to determine their true meaning. Early recollections hold the key to understanding how individuals choose to see themselves and the world and what they value in life. Choice is the fulcrum that changes the balance of the individual. Choosing what to focus on determines an individual's emotions and actions.⁷⁸

That the loss of the maternal breast becomes a key factor in the psyche of Claret is further evident in his use of the imagery of the breast in his communication with his own spiritual children. Words related to breast-feeding—such as breast, nurse, feed, wet nurse, bosom, milk, etc.—keep recurring in his writings. Reflecting on the life of St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi whom he was very fond of, Claret recalls some of her writings that impacted him deeply. Note how central are the images of breast, milk, and feeding in her stream of thought that he quotes:

Then, speaking of infidels in general, she would say, "If I could, I would gather them all together and bring them to the bosom of the Church, that She might purify them of all their infidelities and regenerate them as her children, drawing them to her loving heart and nourishing them with the milk of the holy sacraments. How well she would feed and nurse them at her breasts! Ah, if I could bring them to her, how gladly would I do it! [*sic*] (Aut. ¶ 260)

On the feast of Ascension in the year of his death (1870), while praying in front of the altar of Mary Most Holy, Claret had a revelatory intuition about the very nature of the Congregation he founded, and he wrote the following. Note the repeated use of the images of breast, wet nurse, and feeding in his words (*italicized here for the purpose of emphasis*):

The arms of Mary are the Missionaries of her Congregation, who will work zealously, embrace everyone, and pray to Jesus and Mary. Mary Most Holy will avail herself of them as her arms and *maternal breasts to feed* her little ones, like a Mother who seeks out the services of a *wet nurse*. The Missionaries are *wet nurses* who must *feed* poor little sinners with the *breasts* of wisdom and love; and both of these *breasts* must be in equal supply. (Aut. pp. 969-970)

It is evident, from the brief discussion above, that breast was an image of great significance for Claret and the roots of that interest may be linked to the primal loss of the primary object in his early formative years. Did the unconscious awareness of this loss trigger the kind of hatred that he developed towards his mother at some point of his youthful years? “I conceived a great hatred and aversion for her, and, to overcome the temptation, I forced myself to treat her with much tenderness and humility” (Aut. ¶ 52). Claret does not give us too many details about his relationship with his mother, and there are very few studies on this subject matter either;⁷⁹ but we can conclude with reasonable certainty that Claret had ambivalent feelings towards her at some point of his life, like any ordinary human being would feel at some stage of one’s life.

However, given the spiritual ambience in which he grew up as well as the spiritual inner disposition he had been gifted with, it was only natural that the compensation for the object-loss would be sought instinctively in the spiritual realm. It is important to note that the earliest memories of the primal loss are placed within the *inclusio* of “divine providence.” Claret prefaces his memory with these words: “Divine Providence has always watched over me in a special way, as will be seen in this and other instances I shall relate” (Aut. ¶ 7). He then goes on to narrate the deprivation of breastfeeding by his mother and the death of his wet nurse, and ends the paragraph with these words: “Blessed be God’s Providence! I owe so many thanks to Mary Most Holy, who preserved me from death in my childhood and has freed me since then from so many predicaments. How ungrateful I am!” (Aut. ¶ 7). The sense of the divine runs through the entire chapter.

God’s grace often enters us through our wounds. For Claret, the primal loss was a primal psychic wound, into which flowed divine grace. It is noteworthy

that immediately after his reference to the divine providence, he invokes Mary, Most Holy—she would now become his mother who would never deprive him of spiritual milk, his wet nurse who would never die on him. We know how central and deep-rooted was his Marian spirituality—as mentioned at the beginning of this article, one of the three pillars of Claret’s spirituality was his cordi-Marian sonship. Mother Mary becomes his mother par excellence, and he would not let go of her, ever. He belonged to Mother Mary so intimately that he would insert her name permanently into his:

I was christened Anthony Adjutor John.... Later, out of devotion to Mary Most Holy, I added the sweet name of Mary, because Mary Most Holy is my mother, my patroness, my mistress, my directress and my all, after Jesus. Thus my name is Anthony Mary Adjutor John Claret y Clara. (Aut. ¶ 5)

More importantly, he was the son of her “heart.” It is to her heart, located at the breast, that he gravitated. When he founded the Congregation, it would be named as the congregation of missionaries, sons of the *immaculate heart* of Mary (cf. Aut. ¶¶ 488-494). He truly believed that every member of his congregation would de facto be a son of this heart of Mary. And, as we saw already, he wrote, in the year of his death, that he was convinced that Mary would avail herself of them as “her arms and maternal breasts” to feed people, that his missionaries should be like “wet nurses” feeding the poor sinners with “breasts” of wisdom and love, with “both these breasts” in equal supply. It was all about mothering and feeding.

But Mary would be his second love. Mary was his “all, after Jesus” (Aut. ¶ 5). His primary love was Christ. Hence, the Eucharist. But Mary and her son are always together, never separate. One points to the other. Mary would say, “do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). And Jesus would tell Claret: “Do what my Mother tells you” (Aut. p. 956). The Eucharist and Mary go hand in hand in Claret’s spiritual phenomenology. Recall that the authenticity of the great grace was affirmed by Mary. Months after writing down the event of the great grace, Claret had doubts about it. He writes: “I had been thinking of erasing it and was still thinking of it today, but the Blessed Virgin told me not to erase it” (Aut. ¶ 700). Mary stands affirming the eucharistic experience of Claret. We have already referred to the coat of arms of Claret wherein he deliberately superimposed the picture of the Host (the Blessed Sacrament) on letter “M” that stood for Mother Mary. Hence, Mary was a constant presence, in close association with the Eucharist. Such closeness of association is beautifully captured in Ode 19 from the *Odes of Solomon*, the first part of which I have already quoted. The Ode then continues with reference to the “womb of the Virgin” who took the milk from the breasts of the Father

and conceived, gave birth, and became a “mother with great mercies.”⁸⁰ Thus, the Eucharist and Mother Mary are integrally linked; in the life of Claret too, for good reason. For Claret, Eucharist comes to fill in as the breast he missed and Mother Mary stands beside as the Mother and the wet nurse for life.

For Claret, the Eucharist served the breast function in his psychological and spiritual self. The “great gift” he received was an assurance and experience of permanent presence of the Eucharist, where else, but in his breast. He has now introjected the breast once and for all. He would never lose it again. Both Christ and Claret have become one. Indeed, this oneness had already begun in 1850, with Christ no longer being someone “out there,” but an “inner force” driving from within, as noted by José María Viñas:

In 1850, he no longer regards Christ simply as the “Captain” he must follow, but above all as the inner force that drives him on in his apostolate – *Charitas Christi urget nos* – as he chose to proclaim on his episcopal shield.⁸¹

And this union is specifically under the eucharistic symbol:

In 1857 he has the idea of union with Christ the victim under the Eucharistic symbol of water and wine: ‘Oh my Jesus! As water unites with wine in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, I want to unite with you offer [*sic*] myself as a sacrifice to the most Holy Trinity’ [*sic*].⁸²

Having introjected Christ within and becoming one with him, the Eucharist would now serve as a perennial fountain of nourishment springing from within, never to cease or be lost. “The Founder found in the Eucharist a permanent spring of missionary dynamism,” writes Josep Maria Abella.⁸³ It was a spring, a fountain, milk, and an energy source for him.

Ever since he was gifted with the great grace, his gaze was constantly directed towards his chest, just like the gaze of an infant at the breast of the mother is directed towards the face of the mother. Here is a recollection from one of the novices of those times who was privileged to observe Claret in his final years from close quarters. At the time the gaze of Claret captured his attention, he was not aware of the great grace the founder had been gifted with:

In the chapel, in the refectory, and in the garden during recreation, which were the places where we saw the Venerable Father, everything in him was edifying; but what drew my attention specially was that whenever I saw him, he had his eyes fixed down, looking at his chest. Soon after receiving the news of his death, among the various eulogies that Fr. Clement Serrat, our Novice Master, gave to us,

revealed [*sic*] the extraordinary favor the Venerable Father had received from the Lord in conserving the sacramental species from one day to another, converting his chest into a living tabernacle. I know that upon hearing this revelation, I exclaimed: “Now his continuous look toward his chest is understood and explained.” (Aut. p. 994)

Claret’s internal movements before the Eucharist capture dynamics similar to that of an infant nursed at the breast of the mother. He writes:

When I am before the Blessed Sacrament, I feel such a lively faith that I can’t describe it. Christ in the Eucharist is almost tangible to me; I kiss his wounds continually and embrace Him. When it’s time for me to leave, I have to tear myself away from his sacred presence. (Aut. ¶ 767)

It is an experience that is almost pre-verbal: he finds it difficult to describe it in words. Christ becomes tangible for him, and like a little baby, he goes on kissing Christ and embracing him. That he has to tear himself away from the presence of the Blessed Sacrament invokes for us the image of a child at the breast who has not drunk to its utmost satisfaction, and therefore, refuses to be separated from the breast of the mother and resists with all its force.

An infant, fed to its heart’s content at the breast of the mother, generally tends to experience such calm and restfulness, to the point of even falling asleep, in a delightful lightness of being. Claret’s experience of being “totally annulled” after the Mass resonates with similar dynamics.

During the half hour after Mass, I feel that I am totally annulled. I desire nothing but his holy will. I live by Jesus’ own life. In possessing me He possesses nothing, while I possess everything in Him. I tell Him, “Lord, you are my love. You are my honor, my hope, and my refuge. You are my glory and my goal. My love, my happiness, and my preserver. My delight, my reformer, and my master. My Father, Spouse of my life and soul.” (Aut. ¶ 754)

As we have seen, when faced with agonizing terror, it is to the breast that an infant turns. To the breast and through the breast, the preverbal infant communicates the terrors and fears—the beta elements—to the mother who converts them into alpha elements through the process of alpha-beta-ization and consoles the infant. The breast is the safe haven for the infant. It was no different for Claret, in the spiritual realm. In his study of the great grace of Claret, José Puigdesens argues that the first of the three purposes for which God granted such a grace to Claret was to offer him consolation in his great afflictions:

The first [purpose] is *to console the afflicted*.

The life of the Venerable Fr. Claret was a continual moral martyrdom, according to the opinion of all those who knew him; but in the last years of his life this martyrdom reached such an intensity that it does not seem possible that even a man of such virtue as the Venerable could support himself with the equanimity and meekness with which he did so without any extraordinary help from above. This help could be linked to the conservation of the eucharistic species. Patriarch Job, in the midst of his untold sufferings, raised his eyes and heart to the Almighty and said: *Pone me juxta Te, et cujusvis manus pugnet contra me*. How many times would the Venerable Fr. Claret have made this prayer his own, when he found himself the object of the most vicious slanders, the most Machiavellian intrigues and even the most criminal attacks! Well, what better way to put it together than to unite it physically and sensibly with the same God and this in a permanent way by the continuous eucharistic presence in his chest?⁸⁴

The “good breast” becomes the *presence* that comforts the baby and feeds him with love, security, and peace. How terrified would the baby be to lose such a presence, caught in such dire need! For Claret, suffering intensely from “moral martyrdom,” missing the Eucharist for even one day would have been unthinkable. Hence, the great grace comes as a presence that can never be lost: the Eucharist, which serves the breast function, now becomes localized forever within his chest, present 24 x 7, for him to connect with and draw succor from, whenever he needs. Once the baby is at the breast, there is no need even to verbalize feelings: the presence is enough, and in the presence, there is an osmosis of nonverbal communication. Puigdesens’ analogy helps us here: “One of the greatest consolations an afflicted person can experience is the presence of a faithful friend. It is not necessary for this friend to utter a word or do any favor: his company alone consoles us.”⁸⁵

The alpha-bet-ization that happens at the breast of the mother is about making sense of what is happening around and within, also with a clarity of perception as to what lies ahead. The capacity to make sense of the world within and without is born. See how an alpha-bet-ization happens to Claret on the very next day after the “great grace” and during the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament:

On August 27, 1861 in the same church, during Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament that I was conducting after Mass, the Lord let me know the three great evils that were menacing Spain: (1) Protestantism, or rather, the loss of the Catholic spirit; (2) the Republic; (3) communism. To combat these three evils, He showed me that three devotions should be practiced: the Trisagion, the Blessed Sacrament, and the rosary. (Aut. ¶ 695)

I had argued that the final stage of development that a human being is able to arrive at is the *kenotic-agapeic position* (K-A) with its capacity for self-sacrifice for the lives of others, without any fear of consequence. A profound sense of mission, purpose of life, is a cardinal feature of this position. We do find this possibility as an actuality in Claret. As has been pointed out already, several studies on the life of Anthony Claret have confirmed that Claret's sense of mission got an intensified thrust after the great grace, giving him a firm conviction that it was his duty to work towards saving the whole of Spain. We have just seen how he got clarity of knowledge as to the three evils he had to fight in Spain. He would soon offer himself up for the same:

On May 11, 1862, at 6:30 in the evening, while I was in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament at the palace of Aranjuez, I offered myself to Jesus and Mary to preach, exhort, labor, and suffer even death itself, and the Lord accepted my offering. (Aut. ¶ 698)

Clearly, Claret had offered his life for the same from the time he embraced his vocation; but what we find is a passionate rededication, with a willingness to embrace death as well. There is a greater identification with the Victim par excellence, the victim who is present in the Blessed Sacrament, who is now within him and one with him. Claret's life has already been configured to Christ in the sacrificial passion of the Eucharist, through the sufferings he had desired and endured for the sake of Christ and the Gospel.⁸⁶ His desire to "work and suffer" (cf. Aut. ¶¶ 424, 761) was in the same mode as that of Christ's desire to do the works of the Father and suffer for the salvation of the world.⁸⁷ And this desire intensified after the great grace. As Viñas has pointed out,

After 1861, when he was granted the grace of preserving the Blessed Sacrament within him, his Resolutions reflect this privilege more from the viewpoint of a victim than from that of a contemplative lost in recollection. There are also numerous allusions to the cup of Gethsemane and desires for martyrdom.⁸⁸

"In the mystical stage the human being transcends the masculine and the feminine; he releases unprecedented energies into action; he enters a phase that is difficult to describe with our usual categories and which we could call 'trans-'.⁸⁹ Observing thus, Garcia Paredes explains how Claret came to combine masculine and feminine energies within, as he reached mystical heights. Such capacity for transcending dichotomies—of men and women; enemies and friends, slaves or lords, etc.—and to experience the oneness of all being is typical of the *kenotic-agapeic* (K-A) *position*. The eucharistic transformation Claret underwent validates

this phenomenon. Having fed at the eucharistic breast, Claret now *becomes the breast, feeding his spiritual sons and daughters*, thereby reaching the zenith of the K-A position. He combines the feminine and the masculine within. We also know that a year before his death, he received the grace of the infused love of enemies as well. While being the archbishop of Cuba, he was an early fearless voice calling for humane and fraternal treatment of slaves, defending the equality of the blacks and the whites, a stance that contributed in no small measure to realize the freedom of slaves later.⁹⁰ His love energies were not kept back from anyone. The “great grace” was also the grace of being a “temple in the market place,”⁹¹ bringing the presence of Christ into the ordinary lives of people with whom he lived and worked on a daily basis. In this, Claret fulfilled a maternal function, the function that he had asked his missionaries to fulfil by being the “maternal breasts to feed” the little ones, by being “wet nurses who must feed poor little sinners with the breasts of wisdom and love; and both of these breasts must be in equal supply” (Aut. p. 970).

Thus, the Eucharist filled in the trauma, the wound left by the loss of the maternal breast and in turn became the introjected breast providing Claret with constant spiritual milk and good-enough mothering for his soul by becoming a container for his thoughts, facilitating two-way-communication, and enabling alpha-beta-zation of his experiences which would ultimately enable him to go-on-being, living his *kenotic-agapeic position* of transformed humanity to the full. In turn, the Eucharist enabled him to be the eucharistic presence before the world, feeding the world with the heavenly milk.

8. Conclusion: Psychological Reductionism?

Some of the readers, fearing the danger of psychological reductionism in the above analysis, might ask: “So, are you suggesting that the ‘great grace’ was *purely* a psychological phenomenon, necessitated by a lack or a trauma in Claret’s formative years? Wouldn’t that invalidate the authenticity of the spiritual gift that he received?” To this concern, my simple answer would be: “No, not at all; on the contrary, it only enhances the authenticity of the grace.” Let me flesh it out with the following arguments.

We have no scientific, objective, foolproof evidence that Claret was truly gifted with the grace of physical preservation of the sacramental species within his breast. No biological examination was done. Moreover, as Lozano has argued, it is the *sacramental presence* that has been indicated, and not necessarily the physical presence of the bread-body and wine-blood. However, we have *phenomenological evidence*—Claret’s own phenomenology of the great grace and the locutions he had

affirming the truth of his experience have been already referred to in my discussion. Given that Claret was not a person susceptible to naivete or mystical excesses, we can definitely take his word for granted and confirm the truth of his *experience*: the “great gift” was definitely granted to him as an authentic spiritual experience, *though we do not know the exact modality of the same*.

The gift was not simply a psychological phenomenon; rather, it was a truly spiritual and mystical phenomenon. What has been argued in this article is that the psychological dynamics of Claret had predisposed him towards the possibility of such an experience or giftedness. This is not psychological reductionism. As other scholars who had studied the phenomenon of the great grace have pointed out, there were environmental factors that had predisposed Claret towards the possibility of such an experience, preparing his psyche with an openness to its actualization. I have referred to this already. What is supplemented in this article is that in addition to the environmental factors, the early formative experiences that configured his psychic architecture too contributed significantly towards an inner unconscious readiness for such a spiritual gift.

That the spiritual gift Claret received was in attunement with his psychological givens and dynamics only enhances the credibility of the holiness of Claret. That the great grace Claret received had a goodness of fit with his psyche validates the usefulness and relevance of the gift. Grace enters us through our wounds and, as Thomas Aquinas observed, grace perfects our nature. The response of Jesus to St. Paul’s embarrassment of having a thorn in the flesh is worth recalling here: “My grace is sufficient for you, for [my] power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9a). Therefore, like Saint Paul, Claret could truly sing: “So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” (2Cor. 12:9b-10).

On a passing note, I cannot help wondering the timing of Claret’s great grace, viewing it from the point of his death. It is exactly *nine years* before his death that the great grace is granted to him. In 1861 he “conceives” the Eucharist in his breast, a presence that will last nine years, a duration that symbolically invokes the nine-month gestation period of a baby in the womb, after which, in 1870, he will leave for his heavenly abode to behold the “child of his breast” face to face: Just as the *Odes of Solomon* tells us that Mary received the milk from the two breasts of the Father in her womb and gave birth. Perhaps it is a great spiritual inversion: The eucharistic breast nourishes him in his final gestation period and births him into the fullness of life eternal.

Claret's existential reality and eucharistic experience give hope for us too. The insights inform us that Claret was, after all, not a superhuman who was far removed from our life-world and struggles, gifted with spiritual graces that are beyond our reach, who should, therefore, be honored and envied only from a reverential distance. Instead, the psychological analysis of Claret's spiritual experience comforts us with the possibility of God's grace reaching down to us through our many existential wounds and providing for us what is lacking in our being and building us up from within. We too, like Claret, can become tabernacles of Christ, drinking at the two breasts of the Father growing into "the perfection of the right hand," living our *kenotic-agapeic position* as "wet nurses" for the life of the world and, in the fullness of time, being birthed into the fullness of life.

Endnotes

¹ This article is a slightly revised and updated version of the article published in *Studia Claretiana* XXXIII (2018) 140-172.

² Some of the studies on Claret's great eucharistic grace are: JOHN M. LOZANO, *Mystic and Man of Action*, Claretian Publications, Chicago 1977; JESÚS ÁLVAREZ GÓMEZ, "La conservación de las especies sacramentales de una comunión a otra: una experiencia mística de San Antonio María Claret" in *Studia Claretiana*, XIII (1995) 7-16; LUCAS GUTIÉRREZ-VEGA, "San Antonio María Claret, sagrario viviente" in *Ilustración del Clero* 43 (1950) 303-314; FRANCISCO JUBERÍAS, *La permanencia eucarística*, Granada 1975; NOBLE MANNARATH, "The Great Eucharistic Grace of Anthony Mary Claret and It's [*sic*] Apostolic Significance" in *Studia Claretiana*, XXIX (2014) 72-85; JOSÉ MARIA MESA, "Una Gracia Grande: La conservación de las Especies Sacramentales en el pecho de San Antonio María Claret" in *Studia Claretiana* II (1964) 45-134; JOSÉ PUIGDESENS, *Espíritu del Venerable P. Antonio María Claret*, Editorial del Corazón de María, Barcelona 1928, 349-366.

³ ANTHONY MARY CLARET, *Autobiography and Complementary Writings*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore 2011. Hereafter, citations from the autobiography of Claret will be referred to in the running text itself, by the relevant paragraph numbers or, in their absence, by page numbers, to avoid too many and repetitious footnotes.

⁴ Claret's reforms in Cuba and stance on slavery were so prophetic that it made news in the United States. See the details here: ROSENDO URRABAZO, "Archbishop Antonio María Claret in American Newspapers (1851-1951)" in *Studia Claretiana* XXXIII (2018) 98-123. Downloadable from: www.cescvic.org/studia-claretiana/

⁵ CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES. *Annales Congregationis*, t. 39 (1949-50) 366-367.

⁶ JOHN M. LOZANO, *op. cit.*

⁷ JOSEP ÀNGEL SAIZ MENESSES, "Claus de l'espiritualitat del Pare Claret" in *Studia Claretiana* XXIV (2008-2009) 116-118.

⁸ JOHN M. LOZANO, *op. cit.*, 289.

⁹ ANTHONY MARY CLARET, *Autobiography and Complementary Writings*, p. 196, footnote 51.

¹⁰ JOÃO DE CASTRO ENGLER, “Influencias de autores portugueses sobre la espiritualidades de Santo Antonio Maria Claret” in *Studia Claretiana* II (1964) 19.

¹¹ TIMOTEO URQUIRI, “Historia de los fervores eucarísticos de San Antonio María Claret” in *Ilustración del Clero* 43 (1950) 285-302.

¹² J. M. LOZANO, *op. cit.*, 291.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ J. M. LOZANO, *op. cit.*, 292-293.

¹⁵ Cf. AUGUSTO ANDRÉS ORTEGA, *Espíritu y Misión del Padre Claret*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1981, 135; J. M. LOZANO, *op. cit.*, 292-293.

¹⁶ J. M. LOZANO, *op. cit.*, 295.

¹⁷ NOBLE MANNARATH, *op. cit.*, 75ff.

¹⁸ JOSÉ PUIGDESENS, *op. cit.*, 360-362; J. ARAMENDIA, “La unión transformante en el Beato P. Claret según la doctrina de la Escuela Carmelitana” in *El Monte Carmelo* 36 (1934) 195-ff; AUGUSTO ANDRÉS ORTEGA, “El Padre Claret” in *Studia Claretiana* I (1963) 95-96.

¹⁹ J. M. LOZANO, *op. cit.*, 298.

²⁰ JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, “La ‘Gracia Grande’ 150 años después” in *Danos hoy nuestro pan de cada día* (Simposio “Eucaristía-Vida”), Prefectura General de Espiritualidad, Misioneros Claretianos, Rome 2015, 250.

²¹ JOÃO DE CASTRO ENGLER, *op. cit.*, 18.

²² THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 1, Article 8, Response to Objection 2.

²³ JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, *op. cit.*, 263.

²⁴ PAULSON VARKEY VELIYANNOOR, *Transformation in ‘E’: The Structure and Dynamics of the Lived Experience of the Eucharist*. Doctoral dissertation in clinical psychology. Pacifica Graduate Institute, California, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (UMI No. 3500726), California 2012.

²⁵ FRED PINE, *Drive, Ego, Object, and Self: A Synthesis for Clinical Work*, Basic Books, New York 1990.

²⁶ MÉLANIE KLEIN, “On Observing the Behavior of Young Infants” in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946-1963* (Vol. 3, pp. 94-121), Free Press, New York 1984/1952, 117.

²⁷ NOAM CHOMSKY, *Syntactic Structures*, Mouton de Gruyter, New York 2002; NOAM CHOMSKY, *Language and Mind*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2006³.

²⁸ As cited in STEIN BRÅTEN, “Infant Learning by Altercentric Participation: The Reverse of Egocentric Observation in Autism” in S. BRÅTEN (ed.), *Intersubjective Communication and Emotion in Early Ontogeny* (pp. 105-124), Cambridge, New York 2006.

²⁹ THOMAS H. OGDEN, *The Matrix of the Mind: Object Relations and the Psychoanalytic Dialogue*, Jason Aronson, Northvale 1986, 13.

³⁰ MÉLANIE KLEIN, *op. cit.*, 117.

³¹ JAY R. GREENBERG – STEPHEN A. MITCHELL, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1983.

³² OTTO RANK, *The Trauma of Birth*, Dover Publications, New York 1993. Original work published 1924.

³³ WILFRED BION, *Transformations: Change from Learning to Growth*, Basic Books, New York 1965.

³⁴ THOMAS H. OGDEN, *The Primitive Edge of Experience*, Jason Aronson, Northvale 1989, 39.

³⁵ MÉLANIE KLEIN, “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms” in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963*, Hogarth Press & Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London 1975.

³⁶ JAMES S. GROTSTEIN, “Projective identification reappraised—Part I: projective identification, introjective identification, the transference/countertransference neurosis/psychosis, and their consummate expression in the crucifixion, the pietá, and ‘therapeutic exorcism,’” in *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 30.4. (1994) 708-746.; “Part II: The countertransference complex” in *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 31.3. (1995) 479-511; ELIZABETH BOTT SPILLIUS, “Clinical Experiences of Projective Identification” in R. ANDERSON (ed.) *Clinical Lectures on Klein and Bion* (pp. 59-73), Routledge, New York 1992.

³⁷ THOMAS H. OGDEN, *Projective Identification and Psychotherapeutic Technique*, Routledge, New York 1982, 11.

³⁸ THOMAS H. OGDEN, *op. cit.*

³⁹ DONALD W. WINNICOTT, *Playing and Reality*, Routledge Classics, New York 2005, 18.

⁴⁰ DONALD W. WINNICOTT, “The Theory of the Parent-infant Relationship” in *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 41 (1960) 585-595.

⁴¹ WILFRED R. BION, *Elements of Psycho-analysis*, Basic Books, New York 1963, 3-ff

⁴² JAMES S. GROTSTEIN, *But at the Same Time and on Another Level: Vol. 1. Psychoanalytic Theory and Technique in the Kleinian/Bionian Mode*, Karnac, London 2009, 338; & *Vol. 2. Clinical Applications in the Kleinian/Bionian Mode*, Karnac, London 2009, 43.

⁴³ WILFRED R. BION, *Learning from Experience*, Basic Books, New York 1962.

⁴⁴ THOMAS H. OGDEN, *The Primitive Edge of Experience*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁶ MÉLANIE KLEIN, “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms.”

⁴⁷ MÉLANIE KLEIN, “Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-depressive States” in J.D. SUTHERLAND (ed.), *Contributions to Psycho-analysis, 1921-1945* (pp. 311-338), Hogarth, London 1968.

⁴⁸ JAMES GROTSTEIN, “Towards the concept of the transcendent position: Reflections on some of the ‘unborns’ in Bion’s ‘Cogitations’” in *Melanie Klein & Object Relations*, 11.2. (1993) 57-75.

Symington calls this position *tragic position* (NEVILLE SYMINGTON, *The Analytic Experience*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1986. Maizels calls it *spiritual position* (NEIL MAIZELS, "Working through, or beyond the depressive position? Achievements and defences of the spiritual position, and the heart's content" in *Australian Journal of Psychotherapy* 16.1-2 (1997) 56-93. There are great similarities and subtle differences in these varied conceptualizations.

⁴⁹ JAMES GROSTSTEIN, *A Beam of Intense Darkness: Wilfred Bion's Legacy to Psychoanalysis*, Karnac, London 2007.

⁵⁰ PAULSON V. VELIYANNOOR, *op. cit.*, 301-ff

⁵¹ EMMANUEL LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (A. Lingis, Trans.), Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 1969.

⁵² MÉLANIE KLEIN, "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-depressive States," 312.

⁵³ FRED PINE, *op. cit.*, 35.

⁵⁴ SIGMUND FREUD, "Mourning and Melancholia" in J. STRACHEY (ed. & trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 14 (pp. 237-258), Hogarth Press, London 1957, 249.

⁵⁵ KARL ABRAHAM, "A Short Study of the Development of the Libido, Viewed in the Light of Mental Disorders" in D. BRYAN – A. STRACHEY (trans), *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham*, (pp. 418-501), Hogarth Press, London 1949, 442.

⁵⁶ CARL GUSTAV JUNG, "Transformation Symbolism in the Mass" in H. READ – *al.* (eds.) & R. F. C. HULL (trans.), *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (2nd ed., Vol. 11, pp. 203-296), Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1969/1942, 203, ¶ 296.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ CARL G. JUNG, *op. cit.*, 267, ¶ 404

⁵⁹ CARL G. JUNG, *op. cit.*, 273, ¶ 414

⁶⁰ MARCUS POUND, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, SCM Press, London 2007, 142.

⁶¹ RONALD L. GRIMES, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (rev. ed.), University of South Carolina Press, Columbia 1995, 69.

⁶² CLAYTON CROCKETT, *Interstices of the Sublime: Theology and Psychoanalytic Theory*, Fordham University Press, New York 2007, 5.

⁶³ MARCUS POUND, *op. cit.*, xiii.

⁶⁴ MARCUS POUND, *op. cit.*, 154.

⁶⁵ JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH, *The Earliest Christian Hymnbook: The Odes of Solomon*, Cascade Books, Oregon 2009/1973, 55.

⁶⁶ JAMES T. O'CONNOR, *The Hidden Manna: A Theology of the Eucharist* (2nd ed.), Ignatius, San Francisco 2005, 12.

⁶⁷ IRENAEUS, “Against Heresies” Book IV, Chapter 38. (Translated by Alexander Roberts & William Rambaut, from *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1*. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, & A. Cleveland Coxe), Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo 1885. Retrieved from www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103438.htm

⁶⁸ EPHREM, THE SYRIAN, “Rhythm the Third” in *Select Works of S. Ephrem the Syrian* (translated out of the original Syriac with notes and indices by J. B. Morris), Oxford, London 1847, 22.

⁶⁹ EDWARD GLOVER, “The Significance of the Mouth in Psychoanalysis,” *The British Journal of Medical Psychology* 4 (1924) 134-155.

⁷⁰ GORDON E. JACKSON, “Eucharist: Feeding and Faith,” *Theology Today* 31/1 (1974) 19-29.

⁷¹ DONALD W. WINNICOTT, “The Development of the Capacity for Concern” in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (pp. 73-82), International Universities Press, Madison 1965.

⁷² DONALD. W. WINNICOTT, “The Theory of the Parent-infant Relationship.” 43.

⁷³ M. ROBINSON, “Transformation: Psychoanalytic and Eucharistic,” *Pastoral Psychology*, 57.5-6 (2009) 285-291. doi: 10.1007/s11089-008-0154-x

⁷⁴ JOHN SHEA, *The Spirit Master*, Thomas More, Allen 1996, 245.

⁷⁵ In her study on the effects of parental divorce on children, Leila Miller uses the phrase “primal loss” to refer to the loss of parents. Cf. LEILA MILLER, *Primal Loss: The Now-Adult Children of Divorce Speak*, LCB Publishing, Phoenix 2017. However, I believe the phrase “primal loss” must more fittingly belong to a much earlier loss when an infant is unable to make sense of this loss or experience, much like the “primal scene” Freud spoke of. The loss of the maternal breast, in my opinion, is more primal than the loss of parents.

⁷⁶ HAROLD H. MOSAK – ROGER DI PIETRO, *Early Recollections: Interpretative Method and Application*, Routledge, New York 2006; PATRICIA J. BAUER, *Remembering the Times of Our Lives: Memory in Infancy and Beyond*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New Jersey 2007; GILLIAN VAN DER WATT – DAVID COAL – ADELLN SNG – ALEKSANDAR JANCA, “Early memories: Clinical Relevance and Significance,” *Australasian Psychiatry* 24/1 (2016) 34-38. doi.org/10.1177/1039856215598867

⁷⁷ GEORGE VAYALIPARAMPIL, *Forged by the Word of God: Biblical Inspiration of Claret's Apostolic Missionary Vocation*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore 2014, 21.

⁷⁸ HAROLD H. MOSAK – ROGER DI PIETRO, *op. cit.*, 6.

⁷⁹ JOAN SIDERA, “Josefa Clará, Madre de S, Antonio M^a Claret,” *Studia Claretiana* XXIX (2014) 135-140.

⁸⁰ JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH, *op. cit.*, 55-56.

⁸¹ JOSÉ MARÍA VIÑAS, “Introduction and Notes to Retreat Resolutions and Spiritual Notes” in *St. Anthony Mary Claret: Autobiography and Complementary Writings*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore 2011, 739.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ JOSEP M. ABELLA BATLLE. “Vivir en Clave Eucarística” Carta de Octubre 2005, *Studia Claretiana* XXII (2005) 161.

⁸⁴ JOSÉ PUIGDESENS, *op.cit.*, 358-359.

⁸⁵ JOSÉ PUIGDESENS, *op.cit.*, p. 359.

⁸⁶ JOSÉ MARÍA VIÑAS COLOMER, “La Eucaristía en la vida del misionero apostólico san Antonio María Claret ministro de la Eucaristía,” in *El Ministerio de la Eucaristía y la Espiritualidad Claretiana*, IV *Semana Sacerdotal Claretiana Vic 1993*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1998, 9-33.

⁸⁷ CYRIAC NJAYARKULAM, *Work and Suffer for Jesus Christ: A Study on the Presence of Jesus Christ in the Apostolic Spirituality of St. Anthony Mary Claret*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore 1984.

⁸⁸ JOSÉ MARÍA VIÑAS, *op. cit.*, 739.

⁸⁹ JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, *op. cit.*, 259.

⁹⁰ ROSENDO URRABAZO, *op. cit.*

⁹¹ GEORGE LANITHOTTAM, “En Asia” in the section “¿Cómo estamos viviendo nuestra espiritualidad eucarística? (Reflexiones sobre las respuestas al cuestionario).” In *Danos hoy nuestro pan de cada día* (Simposio “Eucaristía-Vida”), Prefectura General de Espiritualidad, Misioneros Claretianos, Roma 2015), 66.

UNMASKING MORAL HYPOCRISY AMONG THE CONSECRATED: SOME PSYCHODYNAMIC CONSIDERATIONS

Babu Sebastian, CMF

“Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of a second person, hypocrisy begins. We parry and fend the approach of our fellow man by compliments, by gossip, by amusements, by affairs. We cover up our thought from him under a hundred folds.”
– Ralph Waldo Emerson¹

There seems to be a grain of truth in this apparently pessimistic reading on human nature by R.W. Emerson because the practice of hypocrisy is so rampant in our society. Hypocrisy in a broad sense is a strategy involving persistent interpersonal deception in order to safeguard one's interests while claiming for oneself a higher moral ground in comparison with the other. Hypocrites do so by feigning conformity to some positively valued norms, ideals and expectations in areas of life where sincerity is important and expected.² People generally associate some professions with hypocrisy such as that of politicians or lawyers who do not necessarily practice what they promise or preach. Politicians and lawyers apart, it may also be said that almost everyone engages in interpersonal deceit to a certain degree both in public and private life. We live in a society that lays much importance to appearances which necessitate hypocritical behaviour to some extent as a strategy of everyday living. However, the practice of hypocrisy becomes worrying when those expected to give a living testimony to moral and religious values, such as consecrated persons, end up living lives that reek of interpersonal deception and moral hypocrisy even at disturbing levels.³ Such hypocritical behaviour may range from the alarming cases of immorality, abuse of power, position and money involving religious who otherwise are the champions of virtues and ideals in the eyes of the most people, to everyday

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instances of interpersonal deception and keeping up appearances by religious in order to feel morally superior to the rest.

The practice of hypocrisy has an insidious effect on the personal and public lives of such persons and of those who live with them. This paper attempts to take a close look at the practice of moral hypocrisy among some consecrated persons, its psychodynamic roots, its effects on personal and community life and what may be done to help such individuals to begin to embrace the truth, wholeness and beauty of their real selves.

The Practice of Hypocrisy among the Consecrated

Among the consecrated persons, hypocrisy tends to become very evident in the compromises they make in living their vowed life. Regarding the vow of poverty, hypocrisy may be seen in a religious who assumes a public attitude of being very thrifty in the spending of money of the community for common needs of everyone. He or she may argue with conviction against any major spending decision during budget planning sessions, citing the need to live an austere life in consonance with the evangelical counsel of poverty. Outside such discussions, when left to himself or herself, in situations of no external surveillance, he or she may splurge on spending on unnecessary things for personal needs. This way, he or she has the advantage of being perceived by everyone as living a virtuous life of poverty and in turn obtain acceptance, praise, and admiration for being a very committed and exemplary religious. So much effort and time is spent on maintenance of the cover from discerning eyes so that he can pursue the game of deception undeterred. If he were to ever feel any prick of conscience about the deception he engages in, he would resort to rationalization to convince himself that he was only doing the right thing anyway. Another religious who lives hypocrisy at an affective level, may live the vow of chastity, striving constantly to give an appearance of being very puritan and rigid in the observance of the vow. He may be unforgiving in his criticism and intolerance towards the apparent fragility or failures of others in this area and assume a holier-than-thou attitude towards them. While this may be the case for the external eye, he could be struggling with several weaknesses in the affective area such as addiction to pornography, compulsive masturbation, or sexually inappropriate behaviour with others in discreet ways. Instances of this kind are galore in the recent cases of sexual misconduct involving catholic clergy and religious. As for the vow of obedience, the practice of hypocrisy may be noted in religious who pay excessive obeisance to authorities and speak only things that are very pleasing to their ears and yet would ruthlessly devalue and criticize the same authorities in their absence. When

members of the community engage in interpersonal deception and practice double standards, it erodes interpersonal trust in the community which is foundational to life as a group. The practice of hypocrisy is not just limited to the area of religious vows.

Some religious, even as they devotedly champion the cause of peace in the world, experience no qualms about investing in stock-market shares that finance armed conflicts around the world, because, according to their reasoning, such investments generate greater revenue for the mission expenses of the institute. Hypocrisy among the religious also may be seen in their practice of spirituality. For instance, there are religious who show off their piety and speak so profusely about their deep spiritual experiences, but their acts of piety serve as a cover up for a deeper sense of spiritual alienation which they feel and suffer within. There are elections to the office of authority in religious congregations where prayers to the Holy Spirit are made months ahead in preparation for the right discernment, but regrettably, in some cases at least, the decisions have already been taken by some vested interest groups, thereby leaving no room for the Spirit in the process of discernment. The Holy Spirit here is given only the role of “approving” what has been already discerned by the vested interest group. It is a type of spiritual hypocrisy which makes a mockery of the exercise of genuine spiritual discernment. Yet another form of hypocrisy practiced by religious is when they hold racial prejudices towards members from certain geographical areas. While in the presence of persons from such places, their behaviour and speech do not betray any trace of racial prejudice, and some could be seen even championing the cause of a prejudice-free environment in religious communities. However, when left to themselves, such persons could nurture deep racial prejudices and even discuss it with relish with those of their geographical or ethnic area. Mention is made here only of a few of the innumerable instances of moral hypocrisy practiced by the religious and the curious reader may find several other instances of the same in practice across different areas of religious living.

Hypocrisy: A Strategy of Interpersonal Deception

There are moments in the lives of everyone of us when we doubt the adequacy of our goodness, intelligence, attractiveness, and competence. This makes way for efforts on our part to appear better than who we really are so that we can make up for the felt sense of inadequacy. Hypocrisy is not about the occasional act of dishonesty, unforgiveness or lack of charity, but about pretending that one should never do so, as though it were possible to live by these moral principles without a singular exception, instead of admitting that, like everyone else, one has to deal with

moral dilemmas, deciding where to be honest and less honest, where to be forgiving and less forgiving, where to be generous and where to be less so. The hypocrite is caught in a cycle of persistent dishonesty and deception as he needs to keep up the appearance which he carefully constructs and maintains to convince others and at some level even himself that he is morally superior.

Hypocrisy involves the co-occurrence of immoral action and deceptive efforts to appear always morally superior to the other. In an interpersonal context, hypocrisy highlights the pursuit of a relational experience that can be obtained only by another's act of free will. For instance, things like love, acceptance and respect cannot be forced but are to be given freely by the other. The person wearing the mask of hypocrisy is unwilling to leave the attainment of such things to chance and would want to enjoy the benefits of acceptance and love without making sacrifices or assuming responsibilities which such expectations entail. The hypocrite wants to be liked and accepted. When he receives acceptance and trust from the person he deceives, there is no need for reflective self-awareness which would have made him face the unbearable shame about his personal flaws and fears of abandonment and rejection.

Roots of Moral Hypocrisy: Psychoanalytic Perspectives

Psychoanalyst R.C. Naso⁴ makes an interesting analysis of the phenomenon of moral hypocrisy, examining four psychoanalytic hypotheses which attempt to explore its psychodynamic bases. The first of these posits that *the apparently immoral behaviour in otherwise morally upright individuals is a form of excessive narcissism*. Narcissism unbridled, according to L. Rangell⁵, is the enemy of moral integrity in a person. The deceptive pursuit of self-interest is part of the larger repertoire of narcissistic aims, in addition to the libidinal or aggressive ones. Hypocrisy reveals traits that are often associated with narcissism such as excessive self-absorption, deceptive pursuit of self-interest, and search for admiration and approval. Through the subtle and manipulative pursuit of self-interest, the hypocrite attempts to secure the desired results of acceptance, recognition, and public approval without incurring great personal cost. Narcissists use the primitive defence mechanism of splitting in which the person's perception is neatly divided into all-good and all-bad mental representations. The all-good aspects of the mental representations are incorporated into the self in order to enhance one's self esteem in an unrealistic manner, while the all-bad aspects of the mental representation which are experienced as persecutory are projected on to outside situations and persons. The grandiose self in the narcissist, according to O.F. Kernberg⁶, results from the pathological fusion of the real self,

ego ideal and ideal object. The narcissistic hypocrite's internalized sense of morality suffers because of the incorporation of the positive aspects of the ego ideal into the self, resulting in a grandiose self which sees values and moral principles as self-serving and considers prohibitions as external to the self and not internal.

However, not all hypocritical behaviour stems from narcissism as is evidenced by the case of those who engage in deception in order to avoid an otherwise guaranteed unfair treatment, were the truth to be revealed. E.F. Kittay⁷ offers the example of a gay football player who hides his sexual orientation from homophobic teammates for fear of incurring discrimination and engages in criticism of gays in front of teammates to keep his cover safe. Although his action in this case is self-serving, it is engaged in with the clear intent of avoiding unfair treatment and as such, the attempted deception here cannot be explained fully when seen through the lens of narcissism.

The second hypothesis views hypocrisy as resulting from *compromise formations in the superego of the individual or due to weaknesses in the structure of the superego*. Superego integration is present when the person identifies with moral values, experiences normal guilt, abstains from exploitation, deception and mistreatment of others and remains honest and with moral integrity even when external controls are absent.⁸ When the structure of the weakly formed superego is overwhelmed by conflict, anxiety or by the breakthrough of a strong impulse, one may engage in behaviour that deviates from his deeply held moral beliefs, which in turn reveals the hypocrisy beneath his apparent moral stance. In the event of a conflict of interest between ego and superego, where the ego lacks a specific type of ego strength, compromise of integrity will affect negatively the exercise of moral responsibility.⁹

Consider the case of a religious who extolls the virtue of fasting to everyone in the community but finds himself yielding to the temptation to eat unobserved, despite knowing that he is violating his own principled stance. He would show discomfort and shame only when his hypocrisy is detected and unmasked by someone else. If he were to feel guilty, ashamed, and uncomfortable about his violation even before his aberrant act is exposed, then there is something more than moral hypocrisy at work. R.C. Naso argues that the hypothesis of superego weakness fails to explain the intentionally deceptive behaviour of the true hypocrite.¹⁰ The true hypocrite, although he demonstrates moral weakness, does not react with shame and anxiety until when he is exposed as he is more concerned about how he can maintain his cover undetected. He engages in deliberate acts of deception of those around him and is at pains to appear morally superior to them.

The third hypothesis posits that *the practice of moral hypocrisy is inversely proportional to moral integrity*. It is generally believed that if a person has an integrated superego and is committed to a normative value system, there is less likelihood of hypocritical behaviour as the higher sense of moral responsibility inhibits morally compromised behaviour. However, research findings of Bateson and others¹¹ fly in the face of this popular belief. Higher levels of moral responsibility seem to correlate with the practice of hypocrisy as greater efforts are seen to be made by such persons in order to appear moral. There are many reasons for the desire to appear moral such as, the social and self-rewards of being seen and looking at oneself as morally superior and to avoid the social and self-punishments for not being so. Moral motivation is to be distinguished from empathy-induced altruistic behaviour in which one does not seek to serve self-interest to look altruistic rather is interested in benefitting the target of empathy as the goal. The generality and abstractness of universal moral principles such as justice, and compassion make them vulnerable to moral rationalization, where the person attempts to justify to oneself — if not to others — why a situation that is advantageous to them or to their dear ones does not violate their moral principles. For instance, the case of terrorist attacks by one's own side are just regrettable yet necessary evils while the same act committed by the enemy becomes an inhuman atrocity. Rationalization of this kind become easy due to the abstractness of universal moral principles. The ability in dodging the binding nature of moral principles may explain the relatively weak empirical correlation between principled morality and moral action.¹²

The fourth hypothesis postulates that *moral hypocrisy involves the defence mechanism of disavowal*.¹³ The moral implications and consequences of hypocritical behaviour are disavowed in order to maintain the perception of self as honest and ethically upright. In consenting the discrepancy to exist, the individual deceives himself. While efforts to avoid the deep-rooted feeling of shame provides a motive for hypocritical behaviour, the defence mechanism of disavowal makes the dissimulation possible while lessening the possibility for reflective self-awareness. In disavowal, the moral lapses are not interpreted negatively as personal failures, instead, they get rationalized as actions which are uncharacteristic of one's self or reflective of one's personality. The mechanism of disavowal, combined with rationalization diminishes the sense of agency, self-experience, negative affect states such as shame, awareness of moral values and reduces the availability of cognitive resources necessary for critical thinking and judgement. The use of the mechanism of disavowal deprives the hypocrite of the ability to confront his discrepancies and, as a result, when unmasked, he is likely to be surprised by how he could act that way,

instead of assuming responsibility and ownership of the blame. Disavowal helps the selective compromise and waiver of conflicts among moral standards without their complete abrogation. It is as if the person can inhabit in two worlds simultaneously: that of his cherished moral standards and of his depraved desires at the same time without feeling any personal discomfort at the level of conscience. It may however be noted that, although there is widespread use of disavowal and rationalization, the hypocrite is very sensitive about other's perception of his self and his actions.¹⁴

The Deceptive Pursuit of Self-interest and the Need to Feel Morally Superior

Hypocrisy involves reaching a compromise among conflicting cognitions, values, and beliefs. The cognitive dissonance model of L. Festinger suggests that dissonance among various cognitions necessitates efforts to restore cognitive consistency. Based on this model, it may be argued that even the hypocrite, while violating some moral standards, is conforming to his other moral standards. It is as though he lives simultaneously in two moral universes that are mutually contradictory in nature. Compromise among conflicting cognitions enables self-deception while allowing contradictory sets of ideas and beliefs to coexist at a conscious level. Psychoanalyst and self-psychology expert Arnold Goldberg employs the term *sublation* to explain a mechanism which helps moral hypocrites to contemporaneously inhabit two contradictory moral universes. Sublation refers to what is both abolished and preserved, what is concealed yet saved and kept aside at the same time. Persons who live moral hypocrisy on a constant basis embrace and discard a part of their self. The disowned behaviour of the hypocrite is both scorned and retained and never discarded even after much resolve and is returned to periodically.¹⁵

Those who practice hypocrisy deceive themselves thinking, "I desire that people respect me. If they knew what I am really like on the inside, they wouldn't respect me. Therefore, I need to keep up a good image of myself. Besides, this is what most people do." And so, he tries to impress others and ends up deceiving himself in the worst possible manner. Hypocrisy involves the deceptive pursuit of self-interest where the person tends to violate his or her own ethical standards. If we regard the pure pursuit of self-interest at the expense of others, then arises the question regarding the keen interest of the hypocrite to appear morally better than he is. Therefore, the moral hypocrites are not like the malignant narcissists or sociopaths who have neither regard for other's interests nor interest in how others perceive their reckless pursuit of self-interest at the expense of others. Malignant narcissists and sociopaths do not feel any guilt or empathy for those they take advantage of, for all that matters to them is to succeed in exploiting others at any cost and create

doubt as to their true intentions in their game of deception. What distinguishes the hypocrite from the sociopath is not the absence of guilt but his ability to engage in immoral acts despite awareness of and commitment to internal ethical standards.

The deceptive pursuit of self interest in the hypocrite becomes even more interesting in the sense that he reacts with bewilderment about the motives for his deceptive behaviour and his failure to foresee the consequences of his actions. The hypocrite rationalizes the repugnance resulting from the awareness of each act of deception by finding some positive and noble motivations to continue the same. The hypocrite has the intense desire to be perceived as morally superior to others and has relative intactness of moral standards even when he engages in immoral acts. The need to appear morally superior makes him engage in dissimulation. The hypocrite does not desire to live a divided life. Faced with the cognitive inconsistency of his aberrant behaviour with his moral standards, he tries to rationalize his immoral behaviour as temporary lapses which he can remedy soon enough in the future and disavows the presence of uncomfortable affect states of guilt and shame from the psyche. The defence mechanisms of disavowal and rationalization play a significant role in the maintenance of moral hypocrisy.¹⁶ They rationalize and disavow inconsistencies in their behaviour which ordinarily should produce feelings of defectiveness, vulnerability and exposure that are usually associated with the emotion of shame. This helps them avoid being aware of the presence of shame in their ethical system and to hide awareness of their defects and inconsistencies from others and themselves.

The Pathology of Shame at the Root of Moral Hypocrisy

Recent psychoanalytic literature speaks of the pathology of shame that underlies the origin and maintenance of moral hypocrisy¹⁷. Hypocrites have an ethical system in which the emotion of shame is defensively denied its legitimate space. The emotion of shame is a very painful one for the one who experiences it as it signals one's diminished status in the eyes of other persons. People who suffer intense shame have an adversarial relationship with themselves. It makes one perceive oneself as defective and flawed as a human being, contributing to a generalized sense of worthlessness. One who experiences excessive shame will make efforts to cover it up and will avoid all efforts to reveal his inner self to anyone. In addition, he will avoid exposing himself to himself. Intense shame becomes so unbearable because in it the self becomes its own object of contempt and ridicule, someone who cannot be trusted anymore. This fills the person with a sense of emptiness and the person lives with the constant awareness of being defective and flawed on the

inside. Awareness of the core defective self makes efforts to cover it up necessary. The person does it by constructing a false self of pretences and make-beliefs. As the false self takes centre-stage, the real self goes into hiding.¹⁸ And as time goes by, the false self assumes several layers of defences and pretence that one loses touch with his core self and become a true hypocrite. It is as if he has a gaping hole in the core self which is covered up by several layers of pretence.

The hypocrite rarely ever allows himself to experience the feeling of shame in relation to his inconsistent behaviour. Anxiety about shame motivates the hypocrite's desperate efforts to hide behind the mask of apparent good behaviour and use of every opportunity to appear morally superior so that he can continue to enjoy acceptance and love from the ones he is able to deceive. Every success in deception further motivates the hypocrite to keep the cover even safer and to abrogate the conditions to let himself experience shame which otherwise would have rendered him capable of reflective self-appraisal. The hypocrite who suffers from shame can neither integrate nor escape the shameful self-image he is at pains to hide from everyone. He feels overwhelmed and powerless at its emergence in every meaningful relationship. Each time his cover of hypocrisy is blown away, he would oscillate between feeling that he was the innocent victim of the circumstances which were beyond his control and seek forgiveness for his mistakes. Yet, regrettably he does not recognize that his style of interpersonal deception reflects something important about him. In wearing the mask of hypocrisy and deceptive pursuit of self-interest, he can simulate conditions of mutual respect, trust, and confidence but at a much deeper level he is painfully aware that real acceptance in the world of reality is possible only with this mask of being a morally superior being and without it he would feel weak, exposed, ashamed and inherently defective. Thus, he settles for the less painful option which is carrying the mask of hypocrisy. Avoiding shame at any cost provides an indirect motive for the perpetuation of hypocrisy.

The hypocrite engages in deception by depriving the other of information important to establishing and maintaining relationships involving mutual trust. He betrays the trust he receives not only to hide shameful aspects of his self but also to ensure that he receives the love, acceptance, and trust that he cannot otherwise obtain from the other. The behaviour of the hypocrite also reveals that he tries to shift the internally felt sense of shame onto others by his moralizing, contemptuous, judgemental, holier-than-thou attitudes. Such behaviour shows the interpersonal transfer of shame. Judging others as bad and sinful is a way of feeling morally superior and avoiding inner self-reproach.

Hypocrisy and the Avoidance of Reflective Self-Appraisal

Psychodynamic perspectives also point out that the hypocrite avoids reflective self-appraisal despite his knowledge of moral norms neither because he is incapable of feeling shame nor because of the inability to assess his deviant behaviour from the perspective of the other. The hypocrite uses fantasies to substitute for the correct appraisal of reality and of the potential consequences of his dissimulation. This way he can diminish his shame anxiety about the bad behaviour.¹⁹ In hypocrisy, there are several things which take place simultaneously at different levels in the psyche. At one level, the defence mechanisms of disavowal and rationalization help avoid the experience of shame, reflective self-appraisal, and ownership of responsibility for the moral lapses. The hypocrite contemporaneously holds in mind disparate and contradictory cognitions and values coming from his actual and ideal selves, and only the more personally expedient one is attended to at a time. Because deception is necessary for the creation of a favourable impression in the victim, hypocrisy consistently implicates the intention to deceive. The hypocrite needs to be liked and accepted to avoid intolerable feelings of deep-rooted shame. There is also a self-deception that happens in which the hypocrite responds positively to the acceptance he receives through deception and as a result feels morally superior and more secure. This experience of self-deception present in the hypocrite depends on the relative disconnection among his core values, actions, intentions, and awareness of the consequences of actions as a result of the operation of the defence mechanisms of disavowal and rationalization. His core beliefs are altered to accommodate the immoral behaviour. The apparent non-awareness of the discrepancy between his words and actions because of disavowal and rationalization, increases his self-deception, emboldens him for further dissimulation and increases his felt sense of inner security and confidence in his ability to do so at will. In addition, there is something that happens at the interpersonal level. The hypocrite, although he experiences a diminished sense of personal agency due to lack of reflective appraisal, is however, able to influence and modify the perceptions of his victim in his favour and make the other attuned to his needs. Simultaneously, the hypocrite gleefully embraces the reflected gaze of the other about him as it satisfies his fantasy of receiving recognition and acceptance.²⁰

The Object of the Hypocrite's Deception

People often think that the object of the deceptive pursuits is the real person of the other. However, the reality is entirely something else. The object of the deceptive pursuit of the hypocrite is to be understood dynamically as it involves

the integration of three distinct dynamics. Firstly, the hypocrite wears his mask for the one who offers the desired for acceptance, love, and recognition. The other here is not be confused with the real other who is being deceived but rather stands for *an elaborately constructed other in the fantasy*, understood psychodynamically as a caregiver in the early life of the hypocrite. Early experiences of conditional acceptance and gratification of wishes through false self-relating stands at the root of this dynamic. Secondly, the mask is worn for *the real other* who offers love and acceptance as deception is essential to ensure this outcome because the hypocrite believes that rejection and disappointment are likely to ensue upon detection and accurate appraisal by the other. Thirdly, the mask is worn to deceive *oneself*. Only through the process of self-deception, the circle of hypocrisy becomes complete. If he does not deceive himself into believing that he is doing it right, he must constantly endure the agony of realizing that he deserves contempt and ridicule that he constantly and desperately avoids. In short, it may be said that in the circle of hypocrisy, there is deception of a fantasied other, a real other and of oneself.²¹

Moral Hypocrisy and Overpowered Integrity

People who are moral can at times face the possibility of overpowered integrity when they realize that their choice to remain moral will involve a personal cost. In such moments, the self-interest overpowers integrity and they end up behaving in a hypocritical manner. We can distinguish moral hypocrisy from overpowered integrity by examining the person's intent when initially faced with the moral dilemma. If there is no major personal cost, those with overpowered integrity will continue to act moral but when there is a personal cost, the need to safeguard self-interest takes over their integrity.²² This tendency may be noted among the consecrated persons as well. Those in positions of leadership can behave in a hypocritical manner by making compromises when the choice to be made in favour of a value involves a major personal cost. The desire to protect one's self interest and avoid the personal cost overpowers their already weak sense of integrity and they end up behaving like hypocrites. Studies have shown that even moral people often fail to act morally.²³ The horrendous and evil atrocities that our society has witnessed — the acts of terrorism, mass killings, religious wars, financial frauds, abuse of minors and large-scale cover ups even on the part of Church authorities — have borne testimony to the fact that such deeds are not done only by purely evil and wicked minds. Even persons who value morality can at times behave in ways that show utter disregard to the moral values which they hold important. They seem to be cases of overpowered integrity.

The Cost of Being a Hypocrite

The tragic part of the story is that, while the hypocrite manages to deceive and obtain the longed-for acceptance, love, and trust from the gullible other, he is permanently locked into a cycle of conditional acceptance and compromised intimacy that lacks genuineness. This makes him unable to enjoy genuine acceptance, trust, and love that he desperately seeks. He is forced to deceive himself and repeat endlessly the interpersonal deception to avoid the threat of rejection while hoping that his cover would never be blown by a discerning eye. The trust he obtains depends on deception, and the act of continuous interpersonal deception taints what he seeks and depends on. The hypocrite does not feel consciously that his transgressions are morally permissible, and he derives remarkably little pleasure from his acts of interpersonal deception. He rather experiences his transgressions as the only possible means to reconcile and deal with all the conflicting interests of his life. He avoids rather than struggling between the available alternatives, unable to choose between the morally right and the morally reprehensible due the psychological conflict.²⁴ In maintaining his cover constantly, he not only disavows the discrepancy between his acts and moral values, but also the need of choosing between them rather than deceptively maintaining the deception.

The fear of exposure and shame causes the hypocrite to take extreme measures to avoid it through further deception and as a result he compromises the very relationships he craves for and ruins his integrity even further. When the pattern of interpersonal deception is well set, hypocrisy further intensifies the need for its maintenance. The intrinsic connection between being oneself and feeling loved is rendered weak by the hypocrite's fantasy that acceptance can only be found by appearing to be someone else, an expurgated version of oneself. He desperately seeks a person who offers unconditional love and acceptance despite his shame inducing personal flaws but is unwilling to risk rejection if what lies beneath the mask is exposed. This potential risk sets the stage for a self-defeating cycle of avoiding shame by pretence and constant interpersonal deception and the hypocrite slowly but surely settles for wanting to *appear* moral rather than *being* moral.

The hypocrite is never a person who enjoys life or is happy. He should constantly stay on the alert so that his mask does not come off or that his lies are not subject to scrutiny. He has a negative and unloving relationship with himself. Exploration of the inner life of the hypocrite reveals disavowed and entitled expectations about life. He is caught up in a cycle of inauthenticity and shame where his apparently good moral motives are selectively dissociated. He likes to conform to social expectations to reap the benefits of acceptance and the security of attachment he gets in return.

Psychodynamic perspectives tend to view moral integrity of a person as dynamic and malleable rather than a fixed trait or structure. It is a process that involves both self-directed and unconscious elements. As a result, moral behaviour cannot be a direct result of rational deliberation and of character alone, but also depends on unconscious processes that impede the process of rational deliberation. Moral integrity paradoxically involves tolerance and intolerance to alternative courses of behaviour. One reason the hypocrite is adept at interpersonal deception is that he remains largely unknown to his own self. He deceives others as though with sincerity. The ability of a person to experience genuine guilt depends on the extent of integration of one's values, ideals, and commitments with the personal identity. As he desperately needs social approval and the security of attachments, the hypocrite often behaves morally in social situations because that is the least expensive way to be perceived as upright and moral. His behaviour is regulated by the need for shame avoidance and not by genuine guilt.

The Hypocrite's Relationship with God

There are several instances in the Bible of people practicing hypocrisy and then getting exposed. One such instance is of king David, who, after he commits adultery with Bathsheba, relates with her husband Uriah in a friendly manner to deceive him so that he could keep under the wraps the truth of his morally reprehensible behaviour. King David's moral hypocrisy is at its best when, confronted by prophet Nathan who narrates the story of a rich man who unjustly appropriates the only sheep of a poor man for his feast, he is enraged by righteous indignation and swears by the name of God to punish the unjust rich man. Only when the prophet tells him in his face, "You are that man", David begins to recognize and accept his moral hypocrisy and face the unsavoury and painful truth about himself. This eventually leads him to genuine repentance and conversion. Among the sins that Jesus denounced strongly stands the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who considered themselves morally superior and justified before God. In a recent homily at the Casa Santa Marta, pope Francis²⁵ said that hypocrisy was not the language of Christ and should never be that of Christians because the practice of hypocrisy can kill the Christian community. Following the example of Christ, the language of Christians should respect the truth and needs to guard against the tendency to adulation. Jesus calls the doctors of the law as hypocrites because they say and do one thing while in their mind, they have other things. A Christian can never be a hypocrite and a hypocrite can never be a Christian in the true sense of the term. A hypocrite is always an adulator and uses his language of praise to please the hearer in a dishonest manner to deceive him. The pope also reiterated in the homily that the language of hypocrisy is a language

of deception, the same that was used by the serpent to address Eve in the garden of Eden. It begins with a language of praise and ends up destroying the person of the other. From a psychological perspective, it may be surmised that even when they engaged in all sorts of interpersonal deception to project an image of themselves as religious, upright, and morally irreprehensible, deep inside they must have been painfully aware of their inconsistencies and perhaps even wished God didn't notice their deception. Jesus, in facing the hypocrisy of such persons, always responds with the truth and reality. The consecrated person who acts in a morally superior manner and is intolerant of the failings of others, has a need to feel right before God even as he knows in the depths of his self that he is inauthentic and needs healing.

The Effect of Hypocrisy on Interpersonal Relations in the Community

Sincerity is of utmost importance in close interpersonal relations because mutual trust and esteem form the basis of such relationships and such relations become difficult or impossible unless we believe and trust that the other is sincere in his dealings. Among the significant variables that stand in the way of building up transparent and loving human relationships within the religious communities is the difficulty members have with trusting one another when the behaviour and intention of the other is suspect. When persons who are honest and transparent in the community notice the practice of hypocrisy in some community member, the first casualty is the loss of trust in that person because he lacks integrity of character, is deceitful and therefore cannot be trusted. When there is no trust, there can be no genuine interpersonal relationship. Loving becomes a difficult exercise when you realize that the other is dishonest and hypocritical. Community life then becomes a farce of living together without genuine loving, giving and trusting. The effects are more insidious if the one practicing hypocrisy is in a position of leadership as those under his authority lose their esteem and trust in him. Resentment builds up when others realize the double standard of the leader that sets different rules for each. This can demoralize the weak ones and infuriate the strong ones who are honest and transparent. Hypocrites ruin interpersonal relationship also because of their tendency to hide their faults, blame the other and the need to feel better than the rest. In short, the practice of hypocrisy vitiates the life and relationships in the religious community.

The Role of Healthy Shame in Healing Hypocrisy

“Observe the right time and beware of evil; and do not bring shame on yourself. For there is a shame which brings sin, and there is a shame which is glory and favour” (Sir 4:201-21).

The shame that the hypocrite experiences is a toxic shame that does not help him accept and integrate the less honourable things about himself. It is, as the book of Sirach says in the citation above, a shame that brings one to sin, the sin of dishonesty, deception, corruption and eventual alienation from the self. The sense of shame that brings glory and favour from God is a dignified shame that is humble and accepts the truth about oneself, warts and all. The hypocrite experiences the excruciating pain of loneliness as he alienates himself further from his true self through his deception and loses the benefit of honest human feedback which could have helped him to be really himself. In choosing to deceive, he misses the empathic, mirroring and compassionate eyes of others. Feeling a healthy sense of shame is to recognise that we are all fundamentally limited, needy, and vulnerable human beings. One who feels a healthy sense of shame knows that he needs others and that he does not have to fake anything to receive acceptance and love. Author John Bradshaw²⁶ suggests that for people to experience healthy shame, they need to admit powerlessness and unmanageability, have faith that a higher power can restore them to sanity and decide to give up control and submit one's will to the care of God who restores them to feel healthy shame and grounds them in their fundamental humanness. To be truly committed to a life of sincerity, love, and truth, one needs to be willing to commit oneself to reality. This commitment calls for the willingness and the ability to undergo the pain of constant self-appraisal. Such an ability depends a lot also on the positive and loving relationship one has with oneself and from an openness to receive honest human feedback without the need to hide or deceive.

Helping the Hypocrite Heal

The consecrated person who practices hypocrisy can be helped to come out of it with the help of non-shaming trustworthy persons in whose presence the hypocrite can find empathy and non-judgemental compassion and less need to be on guard and to be defensive. Helping this individual to honestly share his feelings in a trustworthy environment can lead to healing. The hypocrite needs to be helped to recognize the split-off parts of his self and accept self with unconditional positive regard. As the central dynamic in hypocrisy is shame avoidance, the focus of help needs to be also on healing the toxic shame which binds him and makes him put on different masks to obtain love, esteem and acceptance by deceit. This will help him to eventually experience a healthy sense of shame and accept his defects with humility, courage and truth. Healing comes also from realizing that trust, esteem and affection are available even without having to resort to deceit and pretence. The hypocrite is also in need of healing from his false sense of self-sufficiency that makes him even relate to God with haughtiness and manipulation. This false sense of

self-sufficiency makes him think that no one is above his ability to manipulate and persuade. Greater awareness of his tendency to interpersonal deceit and its personal costs can help the hypocrite experience genuine regret and want to get closer to God and others in truth and humility and embrace the till-now-rejected parts of his self. When his ability for reflective self-appraisal is restored, he becomes able to make a realistic evaluation of the consequences of his actions and gradually experience genuine guilt and a healthy sense of shame which lead him on the road to healing and wholeness.

Endnotes

¹ R.W. EMERSON, *The Art of Successful Living*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi 2005, 37.

² Cf. E.F. KITTAY, "On Hypocrisy" in *Metaphilosophy* 13/3 (1982) 282.

³ I have explored elsewhere the psychodynamic roots of the divided self-experience of consecrated persons. See B. SEBASTIAN, "Being in Truth and Untruth. A Psychodynamic Reading on the Divided Lives of the Consecrated", in *Claretianum ITVC*, n.s. 7, t. 56 (2016) 339-358.

⁴ Cf. R.C. NASO, "Immoral Action in Otherwise Moral Individuals: Interrogating the Structure and Meaning of Moral Hypocrisy", in *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 23 (2006) 475-479; See also ID., *Hypocrisy Unmasked. Dissociation, Shame and the Ethics of Inauthenticity*, New York 2013.

⁵ Cf. L. RANGELL, (1974) "A Psychoanalytic Perspective Leading Currently to the Syndrome of Compromise of Integrity", in *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 55 (1974) 3-12.

⁶ Cf. O.F. KERNBERG, (1985) *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism*, Northvale 1985, 231.

⁷ Cf. E.F. KITTAY, "On Hypocrisy", 277-285.

⁸ Cf. O.F. KERNBERG, *Severe Personality Disorders: Psychotherapeutic Strategies*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1984.

⁹ Cf. L. RANGELL, "A Psychoanalytic Perspective Leading Currently to the Syndrome of Compromise of Integrity", 8.

¹⁰ Cf. R.C. NASO, "Immoral Action in Otherwise Moral Individuals: Interrogating the Structure and Meaning of Moral Hypocrisy", 483.

¹¹ Cf. C.D. BATSON *et al.*, "Moral Hypocrisy: Appearing Moral to Oneself Without Being So" in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77 (1999) 525-537.

¹² Cf. C.D. BATSON *et al.*, "In a Different Voice: Unmasking Moral Hypocrisy", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72/6 (1997) 1335-1348, here 1335.

¹³ When the person uses the mechanism of disavowal, what is perceived, while denied, is still perceived. It is not thus an absence of perception but a failure to fully appreciate the importance or implications of what is perceived.

Cf. E.E. TRUNNEL – W.E. HOLT, “The Concept of Denial or Disavowal” in *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 22/4 (1974) 769-784.

The person disavows a behaviour because it arouses a negative reaction from others owing to which he is forced to separate his misbehaving self from his well-behaved self that is acceptable to everyone. The aberrant behaviour then is resorted to each time he must manage painful affect states which are short-circuited and are never permitted to be fully experienced by the self. For a detailed note of the meaning of the term ‘disavowal’ see S. ZEPF, “A Note on the Application of the Term ‘Disavowal’ in Psychoanalysis”, in *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review* 36/1 (2013) 35-42.

¹⁴ Cf. R.C. NASO, “Beneath the Mask: Hypocrisy and the Pathology of Shame”, in *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 24/1 (2007) 121-123.

¹⁵ Cf. A. GOLDBERG, *Being of Two Minds: The Vertical Split in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy*, The Analytic Press, New Jersey 1999, 12.

¹⁶ Cf. R.C. NASO, “Beneath the Mask: Hypocrisy and the Pathology of Shame”, 113-125.

¹⁷ Cf. R.C. NASO, “Immoral Action in Otherwise Moral Individuals. Interrogating the Structure and Meaning of Moral Hypocrisy”, 475-479; See also R.C. NASO, “Beneath the Mask. Hypocrisy and the Pathology of Shame”, 113-125.

¹⁸ Cf. J. BRADSHAW, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*, Health Communications, Inc., Florida 1988.

¹⁹ Cf. M.F. BASCH, “The Perception of Reality and the Disavowal of Meaning”, in *Annual of Psychoanalysis* 11 (1983) 125-153; O. RENIK, “The use of the analyst as a fetish”, in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 61 (1992) 542-563; L. GROSSMAN, “The Perverse Attitude Towards Reality”, in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 62 (1993) 422-436; M. LEWIS, “Self-conscious Emotions and the Development of Self”, in *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 39 (1991) 45-73.

²⁰ Cf. R.C. NASO, “Beneath the Mask: Hypocrisy and the Pathology of Shame”, 122-123.

²¹ Cf. R.C. NASO, “Beneath the Mask: Hypocrisy and the Pathology of Shame”, 124.

²² Cf. C.D. BATSON – E.R. THOMPSON, (2001), “Why Don’t Moral People Act Morally? Motivational Considerations”, in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10:2, 54-57.

²³ Cf. C.D. BATSON – E.R. THOMPSON, (2001), “Why Don’t Moral People Act Morally? Motivational Considerations”, 54-57.

²⁴ Cf. R.C. NASO, *Hypocrisy Unmasked. Dissociation, Shame and the Ethics of Inauthenticity*.

²⁵ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, “Ipocrisia uccide le comunità, linguaggio cristiano sia veritiero” [accessed: 31.05.20], http://it.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/06/06/papa_a_santa_marta_ipocrisia_uccide_le_comunit%C3%A0_cristiane/1317164

²⁶ Cf. J. BRADSHAW, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*.

CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19): AN ECO-THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

S. Devadoss, CMF

I would like to start this article with the sense of gratitude and appreciation to the consecrated people because whenever and wherever calamities or catastrophes of either the natural or human induced occur, the consecrated men and women voluntarily come forward to demonstrate their deep concern for the victims of those disasters without any fanfare, propaganda, and hype but in a silent and simple way. This is what manifested when we analyze the history of the occurrences of different devastations like floods, earthquakes, tsunami, and different types of epidemics and pandemics. In the past, it even happened that they were not allowed by certain social forces to carry out neither the relief activities nor the rebuilding works by attributing religious colouring. In spite of different types of obstacles, the consecrated persons were committed in doing their philanthropic services whenever it was necessary. The Coronavirus is the latest and will not be the last catastrophe to be numbered in the long list of infectious diseases that brought about mayhem to humanity. Scientists have identified six most dangerous or deadliest viruses that broke out and consumed enormous human lives during this 21st century such as Marburg virus (mortality rate 90%), Ebola Virus (approximately 50%), Hantaviruses (38%), Japanese encephalitis Virus, (30%, but survivors [30% to 50%] experience serious neurologic or psychiatric sequelae), Lassa Fever Virus (from 15% to 50%) and Rabies (100% fatal if untreated).¹ The world Health Organization (WHO) declared H1N1 influenza a pandemic in 2009 and after almost eleven years, that is on March 11, 2020, it announced COVID-19 a 'global health pandemic' which is leading us towards 'global humanitarian catastrophe.'

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Novel Corona Virus: Covid-19

It will not be an exaggeration to say that the major concern or anxiety of the entire world today is the Novel Coronavirus, officially called Covid-19 (COVI – for the acronym of coronavirus, D – for the word disease, and 19 – for the year of the outbreak), a communicable, fast spreading illness. Some went to the extent of expressing that this is the worst humanitarian catastrophe after the Second World War. The Center for Disease Control made it clear that so far, we have neither vaccine to protect against nor specific antiviral treatment for Covid-19. And some expressed that if at all we want to come up with a vaccine, it will take minimum two years. Hence, very many scientists and researchers are in a war footing situation on the lookout to develop a vaccine which will give relief to humanity. It is believed that there is global co-operation between scientists, industry, governments and philanthropies for vaccine development. Going a step further, Pope Francis extends a sincere invitation not only for the global unity on coronavirus vaccine search but also for proper distribution of it. On 17th May, 2020, the World Health Organisation indicated that the vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease (COVID-19) infection has entered into the stage of clinical trial. There are as many as eight vaccine candidates for COVID-19 in the clinical trial while another 110 are in various stages of development at the global level.² Till then how can the common people protect themselves from it? In this regard it is all the more vital on the part of the people to have right and proper information concerning this pandemic. I am sure very many people especially the educated ones are rather well informed about this disease since there is proliferation or mushrooming of information which are available or circulated. But today the problem is our difficulty to discern which information are the genuine ones and not just rumors. It is denoted that certain amount of information are purely rumors which are circulated either knowingly or out of ignorance. Therefore, first of all, let us try to have certain basic information concerning Covid-19.

This disease is, in general, defined as a potentially severe respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV-2) officially called Covid-19, commonly named and spoken as Coronavirus (Corona means Crown), and sometime addressed as Wuhan Coronavirus. It is one of a group or family of Coronaviruses like Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), which was first reported in the Middle East in 2012, Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) was first identified in Guangdong Province, Southern China in 2003, and this Novel (new) Coronavirus (Covid-19) originated from Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, on December 31, 2019 and thus sometime called Wuhan Coronavirus. Comparing to the others (MERS and SARS), Covid-19 is regarded as a mild sickness since it takes longer period for

the symptoms to get developed. The common symptoms of it are fever, cough, tiredness, breathing discomfort which can lead the people to get affected with pneumonia and respiratory or multi-organ failure. Some infected persons may have other symptoms like aches, pains, running nose, nasal congestion, sore throat or diarrhea. In ordinary situation, it can take 14 days after having infected for the symptom of infection to come out or to be manifested. Lately, we are given the understanding that it is mostly asymptomatic.

This virus can enter into another person through his/her mouth, nose or eye. When a person who is already infected, sneezes or coughs or talks, the saliva droplets which come out from his/her mouth or nose can enter into the bodies of others if they have not covered their mouths, noses or eyes. This is the reason behind in requesting us to keep up the distance from others. There is also another way of getting infected that is, the droplets, which are on the surfaces or objects like clothes are capable of surviving for several days. So, the person who happens to touch his/her own mouth, nose or eye after touching those infected surfaces or objects will get infected with the virus. Thus, we are strongly advised to wash our hands regularly or as often as possible. As it was mentioned that some people might have been infected by this virus but we do not find any symptom of infection and still they can spread the virus to others. Therefore, it is regarded as an invisible enemy against which the entire humanity is waging a war. Consequently, we have created within ourselves a kind of tendency to have a suspicious look on everybody since all have the potentiality to transmit the virus.

It is all the more worrisome for the humanity since this pandemic is endowed with the vigour or vitality of affecting as many people as possible. Since we do not have the medicines either to control the spread of this disease or heal the persons who are affected by it, the best way to control its spread to others is to remain in self-isolation. In this way, today self-isolation is exceedingly advised in the context of Covid-19 wherever it shows its presence. Coronavirus by itself is not in a position to move from one place to another or from one person to another or from one species to another. Therefore, it makes use of the human beings as vehicles to travel to the other. That is why, self-isolation is very much insisted upon in order to control its spread to others. Although, it is fast affecting the human beings without showing any discrimination basing on nationality, gender, race, colour, religion economic condition, etc. It does not also bother about the socio-cultural, economic, political and religious factors. As a result, every one of us must be very much conscious about it and above all not to be indifferent towards it. A vital and fortunate element pertaining to this sickness is that its mortality ratio is minimal comparing to some other serious diseases which are indicated above. We are also informed that some

of the people who have already health problems face death, therefore, we cannot attribute the entire cause for death exclusively to Covid-19 pandemic.

Pestilence and Plague in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures

The modern, medical, and technical terms like ‘coronavirus’ and ‘pandemic’ are not found in the Bible. Instead we come across both Hebrew and Greek terms to refer ‘pestilence’ and ‘plague.’³ The Hebrew words like *dever* which means both ‘pestilence’ or ‘plague,’ *nega* means ‘plague,’ and *makkah* signifies ‘plague’; the Greek words such as *plege* is translated in English as ‘plague’ and *loimos* as ‘pestilence’, are found both in the Old and New Testaments. Here it is essential to note that although all the times when these words are used in the Bible, they do not signify the idea of infectious disease but many times, they communicate it. In the Old Testament the plague often is associated with the natural cause and other times it is seen in connection with the direct infliction of God. As far as New Testament is concerned, the word *plege* is used to signify a plague which does not always imply God’s judgement upon a group of persons, but sometimes it is indicated.

Some of the examples of plagues which we come across in the Bible are the following: The ten plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians who kept the Israelites as slaves. Those plagues are: 1. The Nile River becoming bloody, causing the drinking water to stink and the fish to die (Ex 7:14-24); 2. Frogs coming out of the Nile and moving to the dry land, invading Egyptian homes and die, thus leading to a great stench (Ex 7:25–8:15); 3. Turning the dust into gnats throughout the land of Egypt (Ex 8:16-19); 4. Sending swarm of flies over Egyptians (Ex 8:20-30); 5. The killing of different types of livestock by striking a deadly pestilence (Ex 9:1-7); 6. Festering boils on animals as well as humans (Ex 9:8-12); 7. Inflicting a severe thunderstorm with lightening and hailstones to destroy the crops which are ready for harvest (Ex 9:13-35); 8. Causing strong winds to bear swarms of locusts to eliminate remaining crops (Ex 10:1-20); 9. “Palpable darkness” obscures all light (Ex 10:21-29) and lastly 10. Initiating the firstborn Egyptians and their surviving firstborn animals to die, while Israelites and their livestock live (Ex 11:1-10).

Plagues were also inflicted upon God’s own chosen people as part of His judgement (Lev 26:25). The people of Judah came across a plague as part of God’s judgement A plague which lasted for three days to wipe out several thousands of men after the sin of King David (2 Sam 24:10-17); the infliction of plague upon the people of Judah (Jer 21:7; 24:10; 29:17). In the book of Revelation, we come across the mention of plague (Rev 11:6; 15:1). The different terms which signify pestilence and plague are used in three contexts namely, indicating the suffering of nations

(Ex 9:1-3; Num 16:41-50; 1Sam 5-6; 2 Sam 24; 1Chr 21:12-14; Jer 28:7-8; Amos 3:1, 7; 4:10; 5:6; Hab 1:5; 2:1-2; 3:1-2, 5, 13 and so on), individuals with this terrible disease (Job 1-2; Num 12:1-15; 2Kg 5:15; Mt 8:1-4; Lk 17:11-19), and pointing out the future occurrence of pestilence and plague (Deut 28:15-22, 58-62; Ezek 38:22-23; Jer 49:17-18; 50:13; Zech 14:1, 3, 4, 9, 12, 13, 15; Rev 6:8; 9:18, 20; 5:1; etc.).

It is something undeniable that the Old Testament presents God as the cause of several pestilences and plagues which were inflicted on the people or nations. But it does not certainly present God as a sadist, who is very much interested in inflicting sufferings on the people and enjoying by seeing their sufferings. In this regard what is vital to underline and remember is that hard-heartedness, stiff-necked, unrepentance of the people paved the way for the occurrence of such severe and terrible diseases. At the same time, we note the message of hope of restoration was also given to the people that the same God who allowed the sufferings and diseases to come upon them, would also come forward to eradicate them (Deut 32:39; 7:15; Ex 15:26; Hos 14:4; cf. Is 30:26; Jer 30:17; 33:6). And Jesus, through his life, teachings, and deeds, presents a different picture of God — not as the God of punishment but God of love. On the other hand, he emphatically insists on the need of repentance, to turn away from evil and return to God, to move from sinfulness to sinlessness and from wickedness to goodness (Mk 1:15; Lk 10:13; 13:5,7); etc.), which also reminds us about the call of God to repentance in the OT (to cite some references: Ex 13:17; Eze 14:6; Is 45:22; Joel 2:12-13). Jesus rejected the view that illness and sufferings are the punishments for the sins of human beings (Lk 13:2-5; Jn 9:3). However, when he healed the sinners sometime, he instructed them not to sin anymore (cf. Jn 5:14; 8:11). He had special concern and love for the sick and suffering people, he healed them and made them whole. He had given power and authority to his disciples to help the people to come out of their sicknesses (cf. Mk 3:15). He also appreciated those who were generous in extending their helping hand especially to the suffering persons (Mt 25:31ff; Mk 10:25ff).

Historical Occurrence of Global Epidemics and Pandemics

The occurrences of epidemics and pandemics are not new to the history of human existence which played a vital role in changing the human history. There are about twenty of them that are spoken of,⁴ starting from around 3000 B.C., till the arrival of Covid-19: 1. Prehistoric epidemic: Around 3000 B.C., that is, about 5000 years ago a prehistoric village was completely destroyed by an epidemic; 2. Plague of Athens (430 B.C) lasted for about five years and around 100,000 people lost their lives.

Epidemics and Pandemics between 2nd to 16th Centuries

1. Antonine Plague (165-180 A.D.) was considered to be smallpox that killed over 5 million people in the Roman empire; 2. Plague of Cyprian (250-271 A.D.) paved the way for the death of 5,000 persons per day in the city of Rome alone; St. Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage expressed that it was the sign of the end of the world; 3. Plague of Justinian (541-542 A.D.) consumed all most 10% of the world's population. This plague was named after the Byzantine Emperor Justinian, whose reign extended from the middle East to the Western Europe; 4. The Black Death (1346-1353) was expanded from Asia to Europe and believed to have wiped out over half of Europe's population. It was caused by a *Strain* of the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* that seemed to be extinct today; 5. Cocoliztli Epidemic (1545-1548) was a form of viral haemorrhagic fever that killed 15 million inhabitants of Mexico as well as Central America and 6. American Plagues of 16th century brought to America by the European explorers. These illnesses, including smallpox, contributed to the destruction of the Inca and Aztec civilizations and the death of 90% of the indigenous population in the Western Hemisphere.

Epidemics and Pandemics from 17th to 19th Centuries

1. Great Plague of London (1665-1666) caused about 100,000 people, including 15% of the population of London to die. Fleas from plague-infected rodents was seen as the main cause of transmission of plague. In 1666, the Great Fire of London destroyed a large portion of the city. 2. Great Plague of Marseille (1720-1723) led to the situation of the death of about 100,000 people in Marseille and surrounding areas. In this plague too, fleas from plague-infected rodents regarded as the fundamental reason for causing death. 3. Russian plague (1770-1772) killed as many as 100,000 people. In Moscow, the terror of quarantined citizens exploded into violence and the rioters finally killed the Archbishop Ambrosius, who discouraged the crowds to gather for worship. 4. Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic (1793) transmitted by mosquitoes led to 5,000 persons to die in Philadelphia, the United States' capital at the time. 5. Flu pandemic (1889-1890) first started to spread throughout St. Petersburg, then moved to Europe and final to the rest of the world. New transport links made it possible for influenza viruses to spread rapidly and killing 1 million people within a span of few months.

20th Century's Epidemics and Pandemic

1. American polio epidemic (1916) started in New York City caused 6,000 deaths in the United States. It affected predominantly the children and sometimes left the survivors with permanent disabilities.

2. Spanish Flu (1918-1920) affected as many as 500 million people from the South Seas to the North Pole and one-fifth of those died, thus some of the Indigenous communities came to extinction. Though this illness was called as Spanish flu, it was not started in Spain but some falsely understood that this flu was specific to Spain.

3. Asian Flu (1957-1958) was considered to be a global flu which started in China, spread to other countries and claimed more than 1 million lives.

4. AIDS pandemic and epidemic (from 1981 till day): HIV was that which caused AIDS, likely developed from a chimpanzee virus that transferred to humans in West Africa in the 1920s. Today, AIDS is found around the world and claimed an estimated 35 million lives so far and in the late 20th century it was declared to be pandemic. So far, we have not succeeded to develop a vaccine to heal the victims of AIDS, still it continues to affect the people.

Epidemics and Pandemic of 21st Century

1. H1N1 Swine Flu pandemic (2009-2010) was caused by a new strain of H1N1 which first started in Mexico in the spring of 2009, then moved to the rest of the world. In one year, the virus infected as many as 1.4 billion people across the globe and killed between 151,700 and 575,400 people according to the Center for Disease Control. It mainly targeted the children and younger adults but spared the elderly ones since they might have had strong immune system to resist against this virus.

2. West African Ebola epidemic (2014-2016) originated in bats and first occurred in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1976. Later it was reported in Guinea in December 2013, then the disease quickly spread to Liberia and Sierra Leone. This pandemic ravaged West Africa from 2014 to 2016. There were 28,600 reported cases and 11,325 deaths. A smaller number of cases occurred in Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, the United States and Europe.

3. Zika Virus epidemic (2015-present day) was found in South America and Central America and usually it is believed to spread through mosquitoes of the *Aedes* genus, although it can also be sexually transmitted in humans. It does not affect adults or children, but attacks infants who are still in the womb and cause birth defects. As a whole, at the end of the brief analysis of the occurrences of epidemics and pandemics globally, we can conclude that many of them originated in insects or animals, later transmitted to human beings.

History of Epidemics and Pandemics in India

At the outset itself, let me make it clear that due to lack of sufficient data availability and problems connected with data preservation, I would like to restrict myself to present only those epidemics, pandemics and outbreaks which occurred between 19th century to 21st century.⁵ Let us examine them briefly basing on the pandemics which took place in each century.

Pandemics and Epidemics in 19th Century

1. First Cholera Pandemic (1817): During the 19th century this was the first major epidemic happened in India. We are not in a position to give the total number of people died due to this Cholera since there was no data collection system in India which might have come to existence probably in the late 1860s. It started to spread after the heavy rainfall and thus causing flood. This illness mostly affected rural poor and the people who were living in the slums due to their living conditions, personal hygiene and practices.

2. Second Cholera Pandemic (1829): This Cholera originated from Bengal and spread through the rivers to various parts of northern India like the United Provinces (UP), affected much of Punjab and Delhi and later started to spread to countries like China and killed hundreds of people every day.

3. Third Cholera Pandemic (1852): It lasted more than 8 years and there were some cases reported in Bengal but India was not the most affected country. It spread to other nations such as Persia, Arabia and then to Russia due to the worldwide spread of El Tor serotype of *Vibrio* which was initially endemic to India.

4. Fourth Cholera Pandemic (1863): On the one hand, some expressed that it spread to Mecca because of the pilgrims from India. On the other hand, while others denying it, pointed out that it was a just a recurrence. However, it was agreed that from Mecca it spread to several other countries. The Kumbh Mela which took place at Hardwar in April 1867 was regarded as the cause for the spread of cholera in northern part of India. After ten years, the Madras Presidency was also hit severely by the cholera and led to the situation of about 10% of the annual mortality.

5. Fifth Cholera Pandemic (1896): Comparing to the other cholera epidemics, it did not cause many deaths. After undertaking research works on the outbreak of Cholera in Calcutta and Egypt, Robert Koch asserted that the facial-oral route was responsible for the cholera transmission. This epidemic spread to United Provinces and Punjab, later moved to other countries like Afghanistan, Persia, parts of Russia and afterwards to Europe.

6. Bombay Plague Epidemic (1896): When this plague begun in Bombay, it brought about social and political frenzy. On account of the growth of commerce, people migrated to the city which led to overcrowding. It was believed that the slums were the hot bed of infection and this plague killed thousands of people and many left the city by force.

7. Sixth Cholera Pandemic (1899): This cholera outbreaks were found in some of the cities like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras which was caused by non-O1 serotype of V. cholera, spread to many distant countries including the United States and for about 25 years it lasted.

20th Century's Pandemics and Epidemics

1. Influenza Pandemic (1918): It was called as the Spanish flu (1918-19) that paved the way for the death of 20-50 million people around the world and thus regarded as the most devastation pandemic which was caused by the severe H1N1 strain of Influenza. In 1918, it attacked twice our country and moved to different parts of the world. It was indicated that the factors like the improvement in the virulence and velocity of the virus strain and the monsoon which was instrumental in casing humidity played a vital role for the severity and the spread of the disease.

2. Polio Epidemic (1970-1990): Among the developing countries, India was the most affected country till 1990. Polio epidemic pierced into both urban as well as the rural states but among them, Uttar Pradesh severely suffered state. In Vellore district of Tamil Nadu around 6/1000 pre-school children were affected by post-polio paralysis. Even though OPV in EPI was introduced, we could not come across the fruit of it for ten years, but finally in 2011 India received Polio-free status.

3. Small Pox Epidemic (1974): In the 20th century, it was considered to be one of the most dangerous epidemics which began in three different villages of Bengal, Bihar and Odissa. It is estimated about 15,000 were dead and although thousands of people escaped from death could not escape from disfigurement and blindness. In 1980, the WHO declared that small pox was eradicated globally.

4. Surat Plague Epidemic (1994): Surat was the first place from where it began and spread to other cities of India. It was indicated that below 1200 people were affected by it and its duration was less than two weeks but created more fatality and worldwide impact. At the initial stage of this plague, we could not detect it but as soon as we diagnosed it, we could succeed in containing it.

Pandemics and Epidemics and Outbreaks of 21st Century

1. Plague of Northern India (2002): It was not regarded as a serious or dangerous epidemic. It first started in Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh in 2002. When it was diagnosed that it was a plague, preventive measures such as fumigation, evacuation, and chemoprophylaxis were immediately undertaken to bring it under control.

2. Dengue Epidemic (2003): In September, 2003, it started as an outbreak of DF/DHF in Delhi, reached its climax in the following two months and lasted till December. Only 3% of the people who were affected by it lost their lives but still it was considered to be a major epidemic.

3. SARS Epidemic (2003): At the beginning it broke out in the Guangdong province of China, 2003 and moved to almost 30 countries across Asia, Americas and Europe. Totally 8,439 people were affected by it, out of which 812 persons were dead.

4. Meningococcal Meningitis Epidemic (2005): In Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra, cases of meningococcaemia and meningococcal meningitis were noticed, but it was prevented due to case management and early detection.

5. Chikungunya Outbreak (2006): First it was found in Ahmadabad where about 3.4 million people got affected, but fortunately only 2944 were succumbed to death. Later, another epidemic was noticed in some states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Efforts were undertaken in a major way for the prevention of mosquitoes.

6. Dengue Outbreak (2006): The first case of this outbreak was found in Delhi. Within a month it started to spread to Rajasthan, Kerala, Gujarat, Chandigarh and Uttar Pradesh. Effective and efficient ways of handling the situation were undertaken by the responsible authorities.

7. Gujarat Jaundice Epidemic (2009): It was found that hepatitis B had its initial cases in Modasa town, Gujarat. In India usually, it was understood that the viral hepatitis began to spread on account of hepatitis E by way of feco-orally transmission. This epidemic lasted for a longer duration, so efforts were undertaken through public awareness and health actions in view of controlling it.

8. H1N1 Flu Pandemic (2009): It broke out first in May 2009 and within two months it started to show its colour globally. Thus in 2010, it was declared pandemic and it consumed 18,500 lives in different parts of the world. In those times, three strains of influenza viruses were existing out of which the Inf A (H1N1) and Inf A (H3N2) viruses were largely exchanged by the pdm H1N1 strain.

9. Odisha Jaundice Epidemic (2014): Its initial manifestation was seen at an interior place in Odisha. With the help of medical investigations, it was confirmed that it was nothing but jaundice due to Hepatitis E virus. It was something unfortunate for Odisha since it experienced many outbreaks including Jaundice because of HEV. It targeted mostly the people who were socially and economically at a lower level.

10. Indian Swine Flu Outbreak (2015): It was indicated that Swine flu was the rebirth of H1N1 flu pandemic which started in 2009. It is believed that the causes for Swine flu were the low temperature, decreasing host immunity and failure of vaccination campaign after 2010 and it affected Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Gujarat.

11. Nipah Outbreak (2018): This outbreak took place in Kozhikode District, Kerala in 2018 which was already faced by Singapore and Malaysia in 1990S. Factors like imparting of awareness regarding its spread, isolation of the infected, and post-outbreak surveillance played a vital role to control it.

Common Causes for Epidemics and Pandemics

While dealing with the historicity of the occurrences of epidemics as well as pandemics both locally (in India) and globally (around the world), wherever possible, depending upon the availability of the information, I mentioned about the reasons which caused their outbreak. But it was not at all possible to indicate all the reasons which were behind for the occurrence of all the epidemics and pandemics. Therefore, there is the need for us to come out with the general and common causes which led the humanity to get affected.⁶ Here I am spelling out only some of them.

1. Over Human Population and Mushrooming of Urban Centers

Now a days there is a rapid exodus taking place, that is, people move from rural areas to cities and towns. It is indicated that within 30 more years 66% of our population will be found in the urban areas. In urban centers, all of them may not afford to live in a comfortable and species buildings instead they will be settling down in slums and backward places which will be overcrowded and the living conditions will be pathetic, people will be forced to involve in immoral and illegal activities and finally they will be breeding centers of dangerous diseases. This is what the present Covid-19 pandemic indicating to us.

2. Occupying the Inhabitation of Other Living Beings

As we are very much aware, human population increases day by day. As a result,

they are in need of places to live on and so they move to places of uninhibited territories like forests and fields where the birds, insects and animals have been inhabiting for a long period. Therefore, once the people begin to occupy and inhabit and make use of their areas for cultivation where else they will go but they will be around. Thus, there are more possibilities for the human beings to be in touch with them and in this way those mosquitoes, rats, rodents, etc., who are already infected with certain virus will pass on that virus to human beings which will ultimately lead the people to face the situation of epidemics and pandemics. This is the reality which we are able to perceive in our analysis of the historical occurrences of epidemics and pandemics

3. Increase of National and International Voyages

With the emergence of industrialization and globalization, people started to travel far and wide within the country or outside of it. Today very many people travel to different countries for various reasons like trade, business, education, employment, visits, tourism and so on. Gone are the days during which people were particular to save their income for their own sons and daughters and thus they avoided to travel to different countries. Today people have good source of income and have money to spend. So some would like to spend them for travel. Without our knowledge that we have been infected with certain virus and with that virus when we travel to other countries and interact with the people over there, we transmit the virus to others. Likewise, we also likely to bring to our country those viruses that are unique to their countries. It is also interesting to note that the insects, food and animals which are moved from one country to another become the source for the spread of infections. Thus, travel plays a significant role in spreading the virus.

4. Changes in the Climate and Weather Conditions

Climatic changes pave the way for the occurrence of heat waves and floods and according to these situations certain illness will emerge. During rainy season waterborne diseases will occur through misquotes. As a result of good rain falls many plants will grow in which different kinds of insects begin to live and multiply but once the rain falls get reduced the plants begin to die but the insects especially misquotes will be close to the animals and human beings and so we are at the risks of getting certain infectious diseases and illness.

5. Mishandling of Technology

Right use of science and technology will certainly contribute a lot for the development. At the same time, if we happen to mishandle them there is no doubt,

we will be facing the destruction of our life. Due to the advancement that we have achieved in terms of coming out with new antibiotic and decontamination of food products have greatly contributed for maintaining good health condition and above all life expectancy. On the other hand, if we happen to bring in certain changes in technology, it will lead us to have the situation of facing new epidemics and pandemics. There is the possibility that when we do certain experimentations in the laboratories with regard to bio-technology and if we happen to dispose the wastes that come out from these experimentations in a careless way, it will put us into the trouble of having a new virus. There are some who are of the view that the eruption of Covid-19 might have been due to the mismanagement of the wastes of the bio-technological experimentations.

Impacts of Epidemics and Pandemics

Here my intention is not to enumerate all the negative impacts instead only a few of them which come up due to the occurrence of epidemics and pandemics. The impacts can be brought under the following categories namely, health, social, political, economic, religious, and security. “Pandemics are no longer simply the domain of public health and clinical medicine, but are a social issue, a development issue, and a global security issue.”⁷

Health: The infectious diseases are causing the wide-spread of illness affecting thousands of people. In the past some of them even caused disfigurement and loss of sight, paralysis, etc. They simply pave the way for the higher morbidity and mortality of people around the world. The present pandemic (Covid-19) has already made so many thousands of people to die.

Psychological: Here we are reminded about the psychological impacts like stress, fear, anxiety and so on are felt both by the people who are infected with the virus as well as the medical community especially the doctors, nurses, and lab technicians who work with the patients at the risk of even losing their own lives.

Social: They make the people to get isolated and there is no provision for social interaction. Some of the social factors such as travel, education, gatherings, marketing, and sports come to stand still until we have the vaccination to have control over the spread of infectious diseases. Such elements can also impel the people to face the situation of an increase in the number of deaths. Rumours concerning the epidemics and pandemics really contribute a lot for the spread panic, tension and preoccupation.

Political: There is the possibility that epidemics and pandemics are capable of creating political stresses and tensions in those countries where there are weak

institutions and the tradition of political instability. When the Governments enforce certain measures like quarantines, there can arise tensions between the Government and citizens. When the political authorities do not provide the basic necessities or impose certain ordinances which are against the good of the common people by making use of the critical situation of epidemics and pandemics, people will be forced to come to the streets to fight against the political authorities which will definitely lead to further spread of infectious diseases.

Economic: The economic impacts can be analysed based on direct costs (the amount of money that we spend in order to prevent the diseases from their spread and healing the people who are affected by them), the long term burden (the loss of income), and the indirect costs are considered to be very high (referring to everything which brings out the reduction in GDP). They also affect the international tourism, travel, and business sectors. We are also able to witness the negative impacts on the agriculture and manufacturing industries. Individual families are forced to reduce their expenses for food, clothing, travel and entertainment. The poor especially the daily labourers and migrant workers are the most affected people because they lose all the means of their income which can ultimately lead them to death due to starvation.

Religious: In view of keeping the people in isolation, they are prohibited to gather in large numbers at a particular place. Hence, we are advised not go to the worshipping places like temples, mosques and churches. People are mentally prepared to pray in their own homes (becoming semi-churches), take part in the Mass and listen to the homilies and read the daily reflections by making use of the social media. They have learned to live their lives without depending upon the priests and religious.

Global Security: The pandemics cause serious threat to security globally in relation to the lives and economic stability. In 2015, at the time of eruption of Ebola, the UN Security Council declared that the peace and security of the international community was under threat due to Ebola.

There is also an effort to invite us to look into the positive bearings connected to pandemics like Covid-19.

1. Any epidemic or pandemic shatters the anthropocentric, also known as homocentric or human supremacist approach. This approach is often considered to be the root cause of the problems created by human action within the ecosphere. A human being is “a mere ‘drop of the bucket’” and “not ‘the axle of the world,’” said by Maimonides (a scholar of the Torah who lived in the 12th century AD).

Therefore, Covid-19 invites all of us to check out our actions whether they are eco-friendly or leading us to the destruction of ecosystem.

2. People have been too busy with so many activities in view of meeting their ends. They have not spent much time to be with family members and relatives. Much importance was given in terms of enriching oneself financially, intellectually, and so on. But Covid-19 provides an opportunity to strength our social bond or to maintain relationship by spending time with others especially within the family, virtually relating with relatives, and for doing some of the household activities. It is also an occasion during which we spend more time for useful activities and avoid those activities which are considered to be useless or waste of time.

3. Covid-19 teaches us to have health consciousness and thus enables us to put into practice the hygienic acts like when you sneeze or cough covering your noses and mouth, washing your hands systematically and frequently especially after touching the surfaces or objects, greeting others with *Namaste* instead of shaking hands. These are the few ways through which we keep ourselves clean which is also important for our social bond.

4. It is noticed that there is an effort to deal with problem of Covid-19 globally in the sense that the world leaders express their unity in terms of finding out the ways and means to deal with the issues like how to prevent or stop the spread of this virus and to heal the people who are infected.

Ecological Outlook of Covid-19

Due to the lockdown on account of the spread of Covid-19 in different parts of the world, we have succeeded to bring down to certain extent the air-pollution at both ground and tropospheric spheres which is caused mostly by automobiles, industries and power plants. The number of airborne pollutants like CO₂, CO and nitrous oxides have been reduced. We have also managed to reduce the consumption of polluting fuels in power stations as the demand has come down. As a whole the coal consumption has been dropped. Thus, the air that we breath is becoming fresh and we are able to handle the respiratory problem in a better way. With reduction of pollutants which increase the intensity of air-pollution, there is the decline with regard to premature deaths of air-pollution. Basing on the lesson we have learned from this lockdown due to Covid-19, we need to find out sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels which we use for our transport and industries with the intention of reducing the pollutants which cause air-pollution.

By shutting down the industries which are one of the sources of water contamination, we could minimize the contamination of water bodies. It is brought to our notice that the world famous Venice canals have become clear and the people are able to see the fish in them. In India both the state and central governments have been spending several crores of rupees to clear our rivers especially Ganga but could not succeed in our efforts. Now, though its water is unfit for drinking purpose, at least we are allowed to make use of it for our bathing. Coronavirus led to the situation that almost all the vehicles are kept in the garages and depots, thus not only greenhouse gas emissions are controlled but also the noise pollution is brought to its lowest level. The wildlife is feeling the fresh air of freedom for free movement. Some of the animals are roaming around even on the urban streets and migratory birds are trying to get shelter in the lakes and other water bodies from where they left due to the pollution and human intervention. In brief we can say that the nature is undergoing the process of healing or it is expressed, “nature just hit the reset button on us” since the human beings and the vehicles are inside, the aeroplanes are grounded and completely stopped from flying, and the industries are shut.

As far as the cause or the origin of Covid-19 is concerned, still it continues to remain as a mystery. We are aware of the war of words which is going on between the US President and his counterpart of China regarding the source of this deadly disease. On multiple occasions US President blamed that China was responsible to spread the virus all over the world. Going along the line of the President of US, our Union Minister Nitin Gadkari expressed, “Coronavirus not a natural virus, created in labs” By looking at the situation objectively, we can say that there exist mainly two major opinions concerning the source of Covid-19 pandemic namely, Coronavirus has originated in an animal and later transmitted to human beings. Sylvie Briand, the WHO’s director of infectious hazard management told AFP outside the WHO’s headquarters in Geneva, “It is a virus of animal origin transmitted to humans. And so, we have to try to understand how the adaptation of this virus allowed it to invade the human species,”⁸ In the same way, many research scholars are of the opinion that Coronavirus might have originated from bat and transmitted to humans via another species. Bats are considered to be reservoir species for a number of viruses since they are endowed with the superior immune system which enables them to carry viruses that can spread disease to other species, like humans, without succumbing to illness. “Diseases like COVID-19 are caused by microorganisms that infect our bodies — with more than 70% of all emerging diseases affecting people having originated in wildlife and domesticated animals. Pandemics, however, are caused by activities that bring increasing numbers of people into direct contact and often conflict with

the animals that carry these pathogens.”⁹ I would like to proceed further basing on the assumption that this virus may have come from the animal because I have already indicated above that the source of many of the previous epidemics and pandemics was attributed to insects or animals. The different diseases like HIV, Ebola, Zika, Hendra, SARS, MERS and bird flu were transmitted from animals to humans (“zoonotic diseases”).

Inger Anderson, Executive Director of the UN’s Environment Programme, recently came out with his clear-cut statement that the Covid-19 pandemic is ‘a clear warning shot’ from the world of nature. And an Israel Rabbi expressed that it is ‘nature’s revenge against pride parades.’ Here we are reminded of the Spanish saying that “God always forgives, we forgive sometimes, but nature never forgives.” But Pope Francis pointed out that Covid-19 is not to be considered as nature’s revenge but nature’s response to climate crisis or to humans failing to save the ecosystem. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the nature is plundered or looted to its core by the human activities which are fundamentally self-centered and pride-oriented both individually and collectively. Three essential components geosphere, atmosphere, and hydrosphere of the planet earth have been damaged gravely. The land is being degraded by the improper cultivation, desertification, industrialization, urbanization, mining, deforestation, population pressure and accumulation of hazardous wastes, weapons of mass destruction, etc. Deforestation also leads to the problems of destruction of biodiversity, drought and flood. The water is contaminated by industrial effluents, sewage sledges, wastages coming from mining activities, marine dumping, oil spill, the burning of fossil fuels, fertilizers and pesticides from agricultural works, leakage from swage system, global warming, radioactive waste, urban development, etc. The air pollution is caused fundamentally by the sources such as automobiles, industries and power plants which in turn produce pollutants like Nitrogen oxides (NOX), Sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and Carbon monoxide (CO), methane and so on. Although different factors play a prominent role for the destruction of the natural world, there are some specific factors which pave the way for the emerging of epidemics and pandemics. In this regard, Mr. Boyd indicated, “Scientists warn that deforestation, industrial agriculture, illegal wildlife trade, climate change and other types of environmental degradation increase the risk of future pandemics, raising the probability of major human rights violations.”¹⁰ Let us analyse some of the factors mentioned by the scientists which have the potentiality to bring about the pandemics like Covid-19.

An individual human being needs the oxygen produced by 16 trees. It is estimated that presently we are around 1.3 billion people in our country. Is it possible for us

to say, we have got sufficient number of trees to supply fresh air to every one of us? And 30% of territory of any country is expected to have forests in view of providing fresh air for the people to breath. Do we have so much area of forest in our Country? We can buy food, water, clothes, shelter but is it possible to buy fresh air to breath? It will not be a surprising situation when all human beings will be expected to carry personally like a cell phone or a bottle of water or an oxygen cylinder to breath. As per the 2016 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) above 3.5 billion people which is considered to be the half of the world's population will be exposed to unsafe air quality which also includes 75% of India's population. Basing on the Ambient Air Pollution Database, WHO on May 2016 pointed out that India had 13 cities in the world's top 20 most polluted cities with Delhi leading the pack along with Patna, Gwalior, and Raipur respectively. Of 1,215 most polluted cities recorded, 133 were Indian with 31 in top 100 most polluted cities.¹¹

The Indian State of Forest Report (ISFR), 2015 indicated that India's forests now cover 701,673 sq km, or 21.34% of the country, compared to 640,819 sq km 29 years ago. It is something unfortunate that our country, which already lacks the 30% area of forest needed for a country, continues to lose its forest land by way of encroachment. The predominant causes of encroachment are identified as agriculture, population pressure, cash cropping, human settlement, pasture, road construction and shifting cultivation. According to the Indian State of Forest Report, 2019 as much as 29.5% of land classified as forests in India's government records does not have any forest cover.¹² Some environmentalists have received recent data from the ministry of environment and forest through RTI according to which, per day, an average of 135 hectares (around 333 acres) of forest land are being diverted across the country under the pretexts of coal mines, thermal power plants, industrial or river valley projects.¹³

As it was made clear that the scientists consider the wildlife trade is regarded to be an important factor which plays an essential role for the emergence of pandemic like Coronavirus. It is because Covid-19 is believed to have originated at the markets where wildlife trade was taking place in China and from which it was transmitted to human beings because of close contact between them and wildlife. There exists the Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972 which prohibits hunting as well as trade in endemic species of wildlife. It is unfortunate that this Act remains only in the paper and not implemented strictly. Consequently, the Indian animal protection groups are of the view that there are several wildlife markets found in our country, where we come across "exotic species alongside domestic animals under unhygienic and stressful conditions which have the potential for transfer of pathogens from one

species to another.”¹⁴ Therefore, they earnestly appeal to the responsible authorities to prohibit the wildlife trade.

We have already seen that automobiles, industries and power plants which produce pollutants which lead not only to air pollution but also those pollutants affect the climatic condition. India stands in the third place in terms of producing the emitter of carbon-dioxide, therefore, it is responsible for 6.9% of global emissions. Thus, India had undertaken a few steps like the reduction of the emissions intensity of India's GDP by 12% between 2005 and 2010; the making of a commitment, in October 2015, to reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 20-25% from its 2005 levels by 2020 and by 33-35% by 2030; and the formal ratification of the historic Paris Agreement on 2nd October 2016. India has committed to reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 20-25% by 2020.¹⁵ The ecological situation of India¹⁶ is that which faces the warming climate, a decline in monsoon rainfall and an increase of the frequency of heavy rainfall events, an increase in the number of droughts, our dependency on groundwater since more than 60% of India's agriculture is rain-fed. We also notice the threatening of the stability and reliability of northern India's primarily glacier-fed rivers because of the melting glaciers and the loss of snow cover over the Himalayas, the increase of the risks of sea water intrusion into urban centres like Mumbai. There exists a significant loss in India's rice production due to the rising temperatures with lower rainfall at the end of the growing season, the undermine of the two dominant forms of power generation in India namely hydropower and thermal power generation since both of which depend on adequate water supplies to function effectively, and so on.

When we deal with the ecological outlook of the outbreak of Covid-19, we need to underline duly its generation of medical waste which is not stressed very much and is ecologically dangerous. The medical waste of the COVID-19 outbreak consists of needles, sharps, material contaminated with bodily fluids (like gauze, gloves or gowns) and pathological wastes. There exists a tendency on the part of patients and health care workers who are quickly going through medical supplies and disposable personal protective equipment, like masks. Therefore, all that used gear piles up as medical waste which is supposed to be safely discarded. During this outbreak, not only the health care personnel make use of the gloves, masks and other personal protective equipment but also widely the public use masks and gloves especially when they go out. After their use, they must be safely and properly disposed. On the other hand, if we happen to simply throw them on the streets there will be negative consequences for wildlife and will pave the way for plastic pollution. Sometime it can also happen, after a rain they will finally land up in the ocean which will affect

the marine life. As far as the WHO is concerned, regular hand washing provides better protection from the infection of Coronavirus than the use of rubber gloves when we go out. Another option is to opt for washable materials which can be used for several times as the protective equipment. As so many lakhs of people are affected by this virus, it is inevitable in generating tons and tons of medical waste, therefore, what is vital is to dispose them properly. According to the guidelines of WHO, the People who are handling health care waste have the grave obligation to wear appropriate gear, including boots, aprons, long-sleeved gowns, thick gloves, masks, and goggles or face shields.¹⁷

Covid-19 – A Challenge to the Mission of Consecrated Persons

In general, every consecrated person is expected to exercise the mission which is timely and urgent and according to the signs of the time. As a result, they undertake different and variety of ministries depending upon the need, but I would like to focus on two ministries: ministries of healing and doing charity. In his life, Jesus focused his attention fundamentally in proclaiming the coming of God's Kingdom. At the same time, he inaugurated God's Kingdom on earth through his own words and deeds which becomes clear to us through his response to the two disciples of John the Baptist who were sent by him to raise an essential question to Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (Luke 7:19; Mt 11:3). He answered them by saying, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them" (Lk 7:22; Mt 11:4-5). In this way, he made them to understand that God's Kingdom has already come especially through his acts of healing. When we think about the healing ministry of Jesus very often we try to underline only the aspect of healing but there is another aspect which is also vital that is after healing the sick and suffering persons, he incorporated them into the main stream of the society from which they were excluded because they were infected with serious illnesses or diseases. The same Jesus when he was in the desert, after his forty days of fasting, was tempted by Satan to convert the stone into bread and to eat it but he did not yield to this temptation, had compassion towards the people who were hungry and multiplied the five small loaves and two piece of fish to feed five thousand men (Mt 14:13-21; Jn 6:1-14).

By taking up the mission of the Lord as her own, the Church was particular to involve herself in the works meant for the poor and the sick. Thus, from the beginning of the Church till today she has been showing interest in exercising the ministry to the sick and suffering and the works of charity, for which it is

being very much appreciated. The consecrated men and women who are part of the Church continue her mission which is ultimately the mission of Jesus himself. "The Church looks with admiration and gratitude upon the many consecrated persons who, by caring for the sick and the suffering, contribute in a significant way to her mission" (*Vita Consecrata* 83). There are some congregations which are predominantly involved in the healing ministry which consists of curative care, preventive, promotive & rehabilitative health care service. Some of them embrace the fourth vow of taking care of the sick to the extent of even losing their own lives. The history of consecrated life manifests that down the centuries, many consecrated ones by way of giving their response to the prophetic call came forward to dedicate themselves to serve the sick people and even had given their lives on account of their service to the victims of contagious and dreadful diseases.

Today the entire humanity is prone to covid-19 pandemic. Several lakhs of people have been affected by it and so many thousands have succumbed to death globally. The number of people who are infected with the virus and have lost their lives in India is less comparing to some other especially developed countries. The consecrated persons in India came forward together with diocesans to offer their schools and colleges to keep the persons who are in quarantine, besides offering the service of their personnel. In India, among the consecrated persons, there are thousands of nurses, doctors, and para medical personnel who are very much committed to the health care ministry. In India we have already heard that some of the secular medical staff were affected by this virus and a few of them even sacrificed their lives. The consecrated medical staff dare to work among the affected ones since we have got a long history of establishing centers and taking care of those people who are infected with the most dangerous or life-threatening diseases. Now the major difficulty that they come across is the financial crisis since the income that they used to get from their hospitals has drastically gone down. Thus, they are finding it extremely difficult to do much in the context of Coronavirus. During the period of lockdown due to covid-19 pandemic, thousands of people of different categories have become so helpless even in getting their basic necessities. The consecrated persons also are so much involved in doing the works of Good Samaritan to such people without any publicity and advertisement. They provide provisions, food, medicines and distribute free masks, sanitizers to several thousands of people like daily labourers, migrant workers, slum-dwellers, health workers, police personnel, physically and mentally challenged persons, street children, domestic workers, the poor, and so on.¹⁸

Conclusion

Covid-19 is in the mind of everyone since this pandemic outbreak continues spreading like wildfire across the world and more particularly in India. And so far, it remains as a mystery and thus new and new revelations are coming out every day. There is no doubt, every one of us is eagerly waiting for the exit point of our lockdown of covid-19 pandemic. At least there are two lines of thoughts with regard to the end of this virus. We cannot think of it until we come out with the development of a vaccine. Concerning the discovery of vaccine there exists the opinion that efforts are on in different parts of the world to come out with the vaccine within one or two years. On the other hand, another view is also expressed that the covid-19 will never disappear from us therefore, we have to learn the art of living with it. But one thing is certain that the emergence of covid-19 has taught us several lessons and more particularly about our approach to the Mother Earth. In the context of the global fight against covid-19 in a brief and simple way, Dalai Lama expressed, “This blue planet is a delightful habitat. Its life is our life; its future, our future. Indeed, the earth acts like a mother to us all; as her children, we are dependent on her.”¹⁹ Thus, let us have the filial relationship with the Planet Earth through our sustainable living and working for sustainable development.

Endnotes

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RITUAL SUBSTITUTES FOR ETHICAL LIVING: THE MATTHEAN LESSON

Martin George Mankunnam, CMF

Most people are fond of short-cuts in different areas of life, because short-cuts are convenient and save a lot of time and energy. This fact is more visible in the present era of rapid technological advancement: new easy-to-use and customer friendly applications and short-cuts are being developed on a daily basis for transactions, travel, purchases, communication, entertainment, education, industry, banking, health care, and almost every other field of life. Naturally, also in religious praxis, people regularly resort to various short-cuts. One of the most common short-cuts used in different religions is what we may call 'ritual substitutes.' Instead of trying to live the ethical principles upheld in their religion, many prefer to substitute that moral responsibility with ritual acts because it is comparatively more convenient and easier. The world of religions abounds in numerous examples of this short-cut. Having failed to care for an old parent, the children organize an elaborate *puja* after his/her death; to wash the stain of bribes, oppression, exploitation and cheating, one makes a sizeable donation to the temple, church or mosque; instead of showing real concern and collaborating with one's life partner, one offers a special prayer or *puja* for him/her; if you have a quarrel with someone, you resort to the sacrament of confession in Christianity, or a *puja* or similar rituals in other religions; to attain holiness instantly, you make a pilgrimage to river Ganga, or to Jerusalem, Mecca, etc. And, of course, special *pujas*, prayers and 'tricks' are promoted in every religion for the attainment of one's needs and desires: one for healing diseases, another for obtaining wealth, job, etc., and others for winning elections, defeating one's enemies, and every other conceivable wish. In every such case, the ritual substitute proves to be a more convenient and time/money-saving exercise; hence people are inclined to heavily depend on them. What happens here is clearly the neglect of

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ethics and the proliferation of ritual practices. Unfortunately, this trend results in the degradation of religion, ethics and morality and many right-thinking people tend to alienate themselves from such ‘frivolous’ religious praxis or from religion itself. Needless to say, this is one of the main reasons why religions do not often bear the desired fruit; instead, they turn out to be like ‘opium’ sometimes, or at other times even give rise to fundamentalism and terrorist activities.

This short article attempts to analyse this problem in the light of some relevant New Testament texts, especially from the Gospel of Matthew. From my reading of the New Testament, I am convinced that Jesus was very well aware of this problem in the religious praxis of his time; he vehemently denounced that trend and tried to correct it through his deeds and teachings. Understandably, the evangelists and the early church faithfully imbibed his spirit and have presented in the New Testament a Christian religious praxis which was substantially different from the rigorous Jewish religious praxis of the time, represented by the Pharisees in the Gospels. The Pharisees emphasized strict adherence to the law and the traditions of the elders, especially those related to Sabbath, tithes, ritual purity, etc. On the contrary, the focus of the New Testament books is on a religious praxis based on ethical principles, such as love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, service, justice, equality, sharing of wealth, truthfulness, inner purity, etc. This is clear from the numerous New Testament texts that promote ethical values; some of these texts will be discussed in this paper. In addition to this clear emphasis on ethical values, we notice in the New Testament books an almost complete disregard for ritual practices, and at times such practices are either degraded or denounced. Not surprisingly, Jesus and his disciples are not reported to have performed any Jewish ritual except a Passover meal. Hence, the New Testament does not evidently foresee any ritual substitute for the ethical duties of a believer.

At the outset, it needs to be clarified that the case discussed in this paper is not about rituals as such but about ritual substitutes, i.e. when rituals are considered substitutes for ethical living. We are aware that rituals themselves are probably inevitable in any religion, and they do serve some very useful purposes in religious praxis.¹ But when one neglects the ethical principles of one’s religion, and is simply

¹ Religious praxis, perhaps, cannot go on without rituals because they are necessary ingredients in a holistic approach to religion. cf. V. TURNER, *The Anthropology of Performance*, New York 1948, 48. They often provide encouragement, comfort, healing and consolation to those attending the rituals (e.g. Sacraments of Eucharist, Confession, Anointing). They also promote order, unity and transformation in the community of believers: cf. T.F. DRIVER, *Magic of Ritual. Our Need for Liberating Rites That Transform Our Lives and Our Communities*, New York 1995, 131-191; B.C. ALEXANDER, *Victor Turner Revisited. Ritual as Social Change*, AAR Academy Series 74, Atlanta – Georgia 1991, 151. They reaffirm the group’s beliefs and helps generate religious conviction.

content with its rituals alone, it turns out to be a problem or an aberration called ritualism.² This misinterpretation of religion is common in almost every known religion, and ironically, most believers and religious leaders don't even realise that it is a misinterpretation; hence this humble attempt to throw light on the issue by a simple analysis of a few selected texts from the Gospel of Matthew. We shall also corroborate the theme with a few other relevant New Testament texts.

1. "Mercy, not Sacrifice" (Mt 9:13; 12:7)

In Matthew's Gospel, countering the Pharisees, Jesus quotes twice Hos 6:6a – "I desire steadfast love (*hesed*), not sacrifice."³ Matthew's quotation is based on the Septuagint version, where the original Hebrew word *hesed* is translated into Greek as *eleos* (mercy). This small verse in Hosea presents God's mind as delighting in steadfast love, and averse to sacrifice, revealing the prophet's disenchantment with the cultic practices and his craving for the rule of *hesed*. Unlike in most other Old Testament usages of *hesed*, in Hosea, it is often a summary term for Israel's covenant obligation: according to Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, here *hesed* "represents the entire Decalogue in a single word."⁴ The immediate context of Hos 6:6 is an invitation to the people to repent and return to YHWH. The complaints about the people in the following verses are about their unjust and unethical practices (Hos 6:8-10), not about their failure to offer regular sacrifices in the temple. So, they have to repent and return to YHWH through just and merciful deeds, not through burnt offerings.

Religious worship in a group forms, integrates and develops that religious group (e.g. *kumbh mela*, group pilgrimages, processions, etc.). They promote group consciousness and conserve group values. They make social interaction easier in the group (e.g. in a parish); they often break down egoism and sociological differences (e.g. the master and the servant can sit on the same kneeler and attend mass in a parish). Thus, religious rituals have much to contribute to the well-being of individuals, societies and the environment.

² Every religion has a ritual component as well as ethical and social components. What we mean by ritualism is an overemphasis on the ritual component, coupled with a neglect of the ethical and social components. In other words, when rituals do not reverberate into the social, ethical and moral life of the participants, it becomes a problem called ritualism. It commonly manifests itself in a proliferation of rituals on the one hand and a lack of moral integrity on the other. A ritualist usually considers rituals as essential components of faith, whereas ignoring or neglecting ethical/social values may not affect his/her faith. The extent of ritualism present in one's religious praxis may vary in degree and undergo changes in the course of time.

³ He quotes only verse 6a; the remaining verse (6b) also repeats a similar message: "the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." In Hosea, the knowledge of God refers to a life fulfilling God's will.

⁴ KATHERINE DOOB SAKENFELD, "Love (Old Testament)," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 4, 380. Hosea uses *hesed* six times (2:19; 4:1; 6:4, 6; 10:12 and 12:70). Out of this, only in the first use (2:19), it refers to God's steadfast love. In other instances, the term refers to what Israel must do to God, not vice versa. Considering the common use of the word to refer to God's steadfast love to people, Hosea's use must have sounded nonsensical and illogical. However, Hosea's use of the marriage image to describe the covenant relation between Yahweh and Israel enables him to present YHWH as demanding faithful response (obeying the Decalogue) from Israel, like a husband demanding faithfulness from his wife. Hosea uses *hesed* to refer to this faithful response of Israel to YHWH.

That is why Jesus throws at his opponents this quotation where mercy is placed before all other considerations, including sacrifices. Jesus does not accept any substitute for works of mercy. Hence, in Mt 21 when Jesus finally reaches Jerusalem temple, the place set apart for offering sacrifices to God, Matthew presents him as engaged in works of mercy (healing in 21:14), not offering sacrifices; instead, he is seen disrupting the sacrificial system by chasing out the merchants. However, this may not imply that Jesus rejected all sacrifices: according to Brendan Byrne, “the phrase, ‘mercy, not sacrifice’ does not imply the complete exclusion of sacrifice. Operative in the text, both in its original location in Hosea and as quoted by Jesus, is a Hebrew idiom lending the sense ‘mercy before sacrifice’ (cf. Mt 5:23).”⁵ Pope Francis says, “We are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives” (*Misericordiae Vultus* 3). Let us look at the two pericopes where this quotation occurs in Matthew.

a) Jesus’ Dinner with Tax-collectors and Sinners (Mt 9:9-13)

The first pericope is set in the context of Jesus’ meal with tax-collectors and ‘sinners’ after the call of Matthew. The meal with the so-called ‘sinners’ is a concrete expression of Jesus accepting them unconditionally, without following any standard procedures of repentance or conversion. Procedures like confession of sins or a sin offering or other forms of restitution would have convinced oneself and others about a sinner’s repentance; but in Jesus’ company, in the absence or postponement of such procedures, the sinner has to prove his/her repentance through corresponding action in his/her life. Matthew would evidently do it by abandoning his ‘sinful’ profession and becoming a full-time follower of Jesus. Since Jesus’ demands in morality are always deeper (cf. Mt 5–7) than simple law-keeping, no follower can escape from ardently fulfilling God’s will and producing the fruits of the kingdom; clearly those ethical demands are more difficult than ritual demands like a sin offering or confession of sins. Thus, Jesus here disregards the prevalent ritual substitutes for conversion; he expects real conversion of heart and the resultant changes in the way of life.

Jesus accepts the ‘sinners’ unconditionally because he is the messenger of mercy; his approach to humanity is one of indiscriminate love and acceptance, like that of his father (Mt 5:45). But, following the principle of distancing from sinners, the Pharisees complain about Jesus’ act (11), because they would naturally consider eating with sinners as offensive and a very bad example from a teacher like Jesus.⁶

⁵ B. BYRNE, *Lifting the Burden. Reading Matthew’s Gospel in the Church Today*, Collegeville 2004. 81.

⁶ Groups like the Pharisees use the polemical term ‘sinner’ to identify, distinguish and disapprove of those not

M. J. Borg thinks that Jesus is challenging the dominant holiness paradigm of the Pharisees with an alternative one based on inclusive mercy.⁷ In this paradigm, the so-called sources of defilement will not make him unclean: in the previous chapter, Jesus touched a leper (8:3), healed a gentile (8:13) and ventured into a land infested with pigs and demons (8:28-34); in this chapter, he will be touched by a woman with a haemorrhage (9:20), and will touch a dead girl (9:25). These seem to illustrate what he means by ‘mercy, not sacrifice.’ Jesus showered God’s mercy and forgiveness to repentant sinners on various occasions. In the previous pericope (9:1-8), he grants forgiveness and healing to the paralytic; and now, when Matthew has left his job and followed him, it is understood that he deserves mercy and forgiveness because of his conversion of heart. Jesus here finds the quotation from Hosea apt to point out the refusal of the Pharisees to be agents of mercy and compassion of God. Jesus is asking them to ‘go and learn’ the meaning of the prophetic verse. One ritual substitute for living an undefiled/holy life is to distance oneself from sinners, point fingers at them, judge, condemn and throw stones at them; but Jesus would not subscribe to this substitute; instead he wants his followers to attain holiness by showing mercy to all, including the so-called ‘sinners’.

b) The Disciples Plucking Grains on Sabbath (12:1-8)

The second pericope is set in the context of a Sabbath controversy, once again with the Pharisees. The verses preceding this pericope (11:28-30) give an invitation to go to Jesus for rest with his ‘easy yoke’ and ‘light burden’, as against the heavy burden imposed by the Pharisaic legalism. Naturally then, one would expect Jesus’ interpretation of the law of Sabbath to be more humane than the Pharisaic insistence on strict adherence to the legal prescriptions. Jesus interprets and applies the law, including the law of Sabbath, based on the ‘core values’ of love and compassion. This is clear in both the Sabbath controversies in chapter 12. The summary statement of this approach to the Sabbath law is given in the next pericope: “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (12:12). Thus Matthew is showing that one commandment can take precedence over another: the law that overrides the Sabbath law is the

living in accord with the group’s claims. In their perspective, judgment awaits them: cf. W. CARTER, *Matthew and the Margins. A Socio-Political and Religious Reading*, Sheffield 2000, 219. Jesus’ statement, “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (Lk 5:32; Mt 9:13) must have been very offensive not only to the Hebrews but also to the Greeks. A necessary characteristic of the Greek Gods was that they always kept the wicked away, even if they called to them and brought costly offerings. But for Jesus, no one is beyond God’s mercy; so, he welcomes and eats with them.

⁷ Cf. M.J. BORG, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*, New York 1984, 124-143. While the Pharisees’ holiness paradigm concentrates on separation and insulation from those things that have the power to defile, “in the teaching of Jesus, holiness, not uncleanness was understood to be contagious” (135). He says that the holiness of Jesus could overpower the uncleanness of the sinners, and not the other way.

obligation to do good. For Jesus, doing good was the leading principle for all his actions, whether on Sabbath or on other days, whereas for the Pharisees, the Sabbath law seemingly obliterated all other ethical values. Thus, Sabbath rest and other associated rituals became a ritual substitute for them.

Plucking and husking grain are included in the 39 categories of work forbidden on the Sabbath.⁸ This seems to be the basis for the Pharisees' complaint/warning.⁹ As in the Synoptic parallels (cf. Mk 2:25-26; Lk 6:3-4), in the Matthean version also Jesus begins the justification of the disciples by citing 1 Sam 21:1-7 (cf. Mt 12:3-4). When David and his companions were hungry, they entered the temple and ate the bread of the Presence, though it was prohibited for them. The action of their hero David is cited as an example of how hunger/starvation justifies the otherwise 'illegitimate' act. In the rabbinic teachings, human emergencies like 'ravenous hunger' could take precedence over Sabbath regulations. But if that privilege could be invoked in the case of the disciples is a disputable question: were they dangerously hungry? Anyway, their state of hunger seems to provide reason for their action. That is why Jesus is asking the Pharisees not to condemn the guiltless (Mt 12:7). By citing the example of the priests in the temple breaking the law of Sabbath rest, Jesus again reminds them that there are greater values to be considered. Jesus was aware of the deeper meaning of Sabbath rest; unlike the Pharisees, he did not consider it a rigid ritual to be strictly followed, but only as a tool to show mercy to others, especially to the vulnerable — the slaves, the workers, the aliens and the animals.¹⁰ So, if not to feed the hungry, they should on the Sabbath at least allow the hungry to eat. Hence, he quotes Hos 6:6, probably ignoring the texts that demand strict adherence to the law (a hallmark of the Pharisees), such as Ex 31:15; Lev 18:4-5 or Deut 27:26. Jesus would not allow any ritual or law to substitute mercy.

⁸ Cf. *Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 73b. Deut 23:25 permitted people to pluck grains from anybody's field and satisfy their hunger. But was it permissible on the Sabbath was disputable. Later rabbis classified plucking as a form of reaping that is forbidden on the Sabbath (Ex 34:21; *Mishnah Sabbat* 7:2, PHILO, *On Moses* 2:22).

⁹ David E. Garland thinks that the Pharisees' charge could be a warning too. The later rabbis stipulated that a warning was to be given prior to prosecution (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 7:8). Considering the seriousness of the issue and the severe punishment meted out to such offences, this warning cannot be ignored; therefore, Jesus begins justifying his disciples: cf. D.E. GARLAND, *Reading Matthew. A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel*, New York 1995, 135.

¹⁰ Based on the reason cited for the third commandment in Ex 20:9-11, there was a common misunderstanding prevalent among the Jews (and later among many Christians) that Sabbath rest was an imitation of God's rest on the seventh day. What kind of God is that, who needs rest? The actual sociological reason for Moses or the later leaders to insist on a day's rest once in a week must have been to ensure rest to the slaves, workers, aliens and working animals (Ex 23:12). But, if not in the name of God's rest, the masters would not probably accord this privilege to the workers. Hence, the principle of rest is ascribed to God at the end of the creation story. Thus, in fact, the Sabbath rest also was an act of mercy to the vulnerable groups.

2. Doing Good More Important than Sabbath Rest (Mt 12:9-14)

Sabbath observance was one of the main features that distinguished the Jews from other peoples. Most Jews took it very seriously and offenders were severely punished (Ex 31:15). The Pharisees were eager to enforce the law in whatever way possible; hence, they question Jesus if healing is lawful on Sabbath. Since Matthew has already stated in 12:8 “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath,” the question is about Jesus’ interpretation of the Sabbath law; the Pharisees already ‘knew’ that it was forbidden. Regardless of the numerous prohibitions attached to Sabbath observance, for Jesus, it was an occasion to do good. According to their own oral tradition, if a sheep fell into a pit it was lawful to lift it up on a Sabbath;¹¹ if so, how much more meaningful it is to do good to a human being (Mt 12:12) on a Sabbath! All later rabbis agreed that saving a life could take precedence over the Sabbath, but “minor cures are on the whole forbidden.”¹² The man with a withered hand was not in danger of death — he could very well wait one more day to be healed. That was all what the law-abiding Pharisees wanted; they were not against healing or getting cured, but Sabbath law would take precedence over such ‘not-so-urgent’ works. Here lies the difference between the approach of Jesus and that of the Pharisees: Jesus cannot wait any more, when he sees someone in pain or need, because his ‘love principle’ overrides other concerns. The Sabbath ritual could not substitute his eagerness to do good.

In Matthew, good works are considered a characteristic of his followers. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus invites his followers to do good works: “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (5:16). In the last section of the Sermon (7:12-27), Jesus repeats the same idea in different ways: the Golden Rule (12), the narrow gate (13-14), knowing through the fruits (15-20), doing the will of the Father, not simply saying ‘Lord, Lord’ (21-23), and acting on Jesus’ words is like building house on the rock (24-27). In Mt 11:5, Jesus’ testimony about himself to the messengers of John the Baptist consists only of such good works — “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.” And in the last judgment account in Mt 25:31-45, only those who do good works (by meeting the needs of others) are rewarded.

¹¹ Some early rabbis would agree with Jesus’ argument: cf. *Babylonian Talmud*, *Shabbat* 14:3. However, others would not permit lifting animal on the Sabbath; instead they could make provisions to save its life. *Qumran* documents specifically forbade lifting an animal that has fallen into a pit on a Sabbath day (CD 11:13-14).

¹² Doubt about danger to life is a valid reason to override the Sabbath rule (*Mishnah Yoma* 8:6); this principle is attributed to Shemaya and Abtalion (1st century BCE), hence, accepted in Jesus’ time. But when danger to life is not perceived, it is forbidden to break the Sabbath rule (*Mishnah Shabbat* 14:3-4; *Talmud Shabbat* 12:8-14; cf. *Qumran Scrolls*, CD 11:10).

Other Gospels also present Jesus' understanding that Sabbath is meant for doing good. It is reported in all Synoptic Gospels that after the curing of the man with a withered hand, "the Pharisees began conspiring how to destroy Jesus" (Mk 3:6; Mt 12:14; Lk 6:11). Jesus' new interpretation of Sabbath was what irritated the Pharisees most. Luke has two more Sabbath stories of similar nature (Lk 13:10-16; 14:1-6): in both, the interpretation is oriented towards caring for the needy. Two of the few healing miracles in John's Gospel happen on the Sabbath. The healing at Bethzatha (Jn 5:9) leads to a bitter controversy with the Jewish leaders in the temple. The second one, healing of a blind man (Jn 9:6-7), also leads to a long investigation by the Pharisees, who keep accusing Jesus of being a sinner. In all these controversies, Jesus never allows the Sabbath rituals to substitute the ethical principles, such as love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

3. Inner Purity rather than Ritual Purity (Mt 15:1-20)

This pericope is one of the clearest examples in the Gospel tradition that demonstrates how ritual substitutes are often coupled with a neglect of ethical principles. The starting point of the dispute is Jesus' disciples' neglect of a ritual washing of hands¹³ (15:2b), which was an important tradition of the elders. But as Donald A. Hagner says, "Ritual purity, so important to contemporary Judaism, plays no role in the teaching of Jesus."¹⁴ Therefore, when the Pharisees complain to Jesus about his disciples' lack of respect for the tradition of the elders (Mt 15:2a), he questions their overemphasis on the tradition of the elders and the resultant neglect of ethical behaviour and the breaking of a commandment of the Decalogue (Mt 15:3). They had distorted the commandment to honour one's parents by circumventing it and substituting one's duties to the parents with an offering (*corban* in Mk 7:11) to the temple (Mt 15:4-5). Thus they went against the will of God (6). Such distortions are indeed a cause of defilement, since it comes from the heart.

In both Matthew and Mark, the focus is on the true nature of defilement: it is an internal matter relating to attitudes, thoughts and desires (cf. Mt 15:18-20).

¹³ That the washing referred to here is a ritual washing, not washing the hands before meal for hygienic reasons, is clear from the long description in the Markan parallel (Mk 7:2-5). Matthew takes it for granted because his Jewish Christian readers would understand it even without specifying that the issue was ritual purity, whereas Mark's gentile readers would have needed the explanation he gives in his Gospel.

¹⁴ D.A. HAGNER, "Holiness and Ecclesiology. The Church in Matthew", in DANIEL M. GURTNER – JOHN NOLLAND, ed., *Built upon the Rock. Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids 2008, 179. The fact that some of the disciples were eating without the ritual washing of hands demonstrates how little the common people actually cared for the tradition about ritual purity.

“It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person” (Mt 15:11);¹⁵ on the contrary, the true reason for defilement is stated in a list of vices (Mt 15:19) that point to the absence of inner purity. Thus, it is not ritual purity that is essential for a true believer, but inner purity and the resultant ethical behaviour (20). The passage brings into sharp focus the contrast between the heart and lips service (8), divine doctrines and human precepts (9b), ethical behaviour and ritual purity (11, 19). Jesus calls those who promoted such substitutes ‘hypocrites’ (7) because “This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines” (Mt 15:8-9; cf. Isa 29:13). Finding ritual substitutes like the *corban* (Mk 7:11) to escape from one’s moral duties actually defeats God’s intention and the true purpose of religions. So, Jesus denounces them.

4. Priority of Reconciliation over Offering (Mt 5:23-24)

This saying from the Sermon on the Mount also prioritises an ethical value over a ritual. When Jesus says, “first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift,” he is reminding his listeners that a gift at the altar is meaningless, unless one is in peace with his/her brothers and sisters. This hyperbole¹⁶ invites them to make sincere efforts to be reconciled to others before thinking of an offering in the temple: it is not enough that your heart is clear of any grudge against others; you must take an extra step to make sure that others are at peace with you.¹⁷ The former is taken for granted; Jesus is demanding the latter. While teaching the prayer ‘Our Father’, Jesus would explain how worship becomes meaningless when one fails to forgive his/her brothers and sisters (Mt 6:12, 14-16). Sir 28:3 mentions the futility of expecting healing from God, when one is angry with another. Only the offering of the righteous is pleasing to God; he will accept neither a bribe nor a dishonest sacrifice (Sir 35:9-15). And the parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:23-35)

¹⁵ Jesus’ statement in v. 11 must have been indeed revolutionary in the given context. In a society that was firmly convinced that certain ‘unclean’ food could indeed defile a person, this was shocking and unacceptable not only to the Pharisees but also to any ‘law-abiding’ Jew. Mark would even add, “Thus he declared all foods clean” (Mk 7:19). Matthew has deliberately omitted this sweeping statement probably because his Jewish Christian community still observed some food taboos.

¹⁶ That it is a hyperbole is clear from the many practical improbabilities associated with the saying. Can a Galilean, for example, leave his gift in the temple and walk back some 180 kilometres to Galilee in search of the person to be reconciled to, and then return to Jerusalem to complete the offering? Or what if that person refuses to be reconciled? So, practically, one should not go for offering a gift without getting reconciled first.

¹⁷ If someone has a grudge against you, usually it is presumed that you have offended him/her, causing that ill-feeling. Then you are guilty of the offence, and you have a duty to be reconciled to him/her. On the contrary, if the ill-feeling is due to some misunderstanding, though you are not guilty, Christian charity demands that you humble yourself and clear the misunderstanding.

reminds us that failure to forgive is a failure to imitate the boundless mercy of God (Mt 5:48; Lk 6:36). Therefore, just as the *corban* (Mk 7:11) cannot substitute one's duties to parents, no offering in the temple can substitute the obligation to love one's neighbour, which includes forgiveness and reconciliation.

5. Woes against the Pharisees and Scribes (Mt 23:13-33)

The seven woes against the Pharisees and scribes narrated in Mt 23 demonstrate how the misinterpretation of religion and the Scriptures can do great harm to people. These religious leaders are held responsible for misguiding the people, and thus hindering their entry into the kingdom of God (23:13); hence a series of woes are pronounced on them, warning them of severe punishment (23:33). Their misplaced priorities are most evident in the fourth woe (23:23-24) that speaks of the neglect of the 'weightier matters' such as justice, mercy and faith. In their eagerness to observe the Law in its minute details, they had lost sight of these more important aspects of religion — while meticulously ensuring scrupulous adherence to the tithing of even negligible herbs such as mint, dill, and cummin, the leaders were neglecting the practice of these weightier matters. Tithes were initiated in Israel to take care of the underprivileged and the Levites (Deut 14:28-29); however, later additions to the tithing regulations had probably become an unjust burden for the poor farmers.¹⁸ Thus, insisting on unjust rules, the Pharisees were breaking the principles of justice and mercy, values strongly upheld in the Torah. They believed that any lapse in tithing would endanger their ritual purity, so they were scrupulous about observing them. Such practices had become ritual substitutes for them to ensure holiness; but for Jesus, it was like straining out a gnat to avoid defilement and at the same time swallowing a camel, which was an 'unclean' animal (23:24).

The third woe (16-22) denounces the meaningless casuistry of the Pharisees. The leaders had made numerous casuistic laws, validating or invalidating oaths, depending on the wording of the oath formula. These were futile attempts at tricking God and escaping the practice of ethical values like truth and sincerity. Such substitutes for truth are not acceptable to Jesus. In the fifth woe (25-26), the leaders are accused of disregarding inner purity while ensuring external/ritual purity. They are also charged with greed and self-indulgence, revealing their selfishness and lack

¹⁸ The Pharisaic leaders had sharpened and extended the tithing laws far beyond the biblical tithes, so much so in the first century, tithing laws accounted for 10 treatises in the *Mishnah*. These extensions were done mostly to the advantage of the priests and the ruling elite in Jerusalem. Along with the common adverse climatic conditions in the area, resulting in poor agricultural productivity, the Roman taxation and the Jewish tithes would have aggravated the burden of the poor farmers in the countryside: cf. U. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, Hermeneia 3, Minneapolis 2005, 123.

of social commitment; so, they are urged to clean the inside first because in Jesus' teachings, a selfish person cannot inherit the kingdom. The sixth woe (27-28) also proves that external appearances are not a sign of true righteousness. The leaders' attempt to conceal their lawlessness and hypocrisy under the pretty façade of pious religiosity¹⁹ is denounced here in a strong language, portraying them as 'whitewashed tombs.' In the seventh and final woe (29-33), the leaders are charged with the crime of killing the prophets and righteous men who had probably questioned their wrong interpretations and misplaced priorities. Building their tombs had become a substitute for walking in their path. Thus, through these woes, Jesus denounces several substitutes that put in danger the practice of ethical principles in religion.

6. Insistence on the Fruits of the Kingdom

Matthew's Gospel insists on producing good fruits worthy of the kingdom as a prerequisite to enter the kingdom. Salvation comes neither by mere faith in Jesus nor by membership in the Church, but by producing good fruits.²⁰ In the beginning of his Gospel (after the infancy narrative), John the Baptist's advice is to "bear fruit worthy of repentance" (Mt 3:8); and "every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt 3:10). The same warning is repeated by Jesus in Mt 7:19, while cautioning his disciples against false prophets. True disciples and prophets should be identified by their fruits (Mt 7:16), not by appearances and pretensions (15). For the same reason, when 'pretending' disciples (21 – saying, 'Lord, Lord,')²¹ will make big claims about prophesy, exorcism and deeds of power (22), shockingly, they will be identified as evildoers and mercilessly cast out (23). Again, when the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons with the help of Beelzebul (12:24), Jesus repeats the imagery of the good tree producing good fruit (12:33). The Pharisees have failed to produce good fruit because of the evil in their heart (34). Similarly, the prophetic symbol of cursing the fig tree in Jerusalem (Mt 21:18-19) exposes the guilt of the religious leaders there in the 'holy' city.

¹⁹ J.P. MEIER, *Matthew*, NTM 3, Wilmington Delaware 1981, 271.

²⁰ Matthew's insistence on the necessity of 'producing good fruits' would also mean that salvation does not come automatically as a gift because of the death of Jesus as a 'ransom for many' (Mt 20:28). Matthew preserves the Markan saying (Mk 10:45) *verbatim*, but does not develop it further. Nor does forgiveness come automatically because Jesus has poured out his blood 'for the forgiveness of sins' (Mt 26:28). According to Eugene Eung-Chun Park, "there is no evidence that it refers to the idea that whoever believes in Jesus will be forgiven their sins just by virtue of the belief itself": cf. E. EUNG-CHUN PARK, "Covenantal Nomism and the Gospel of Matthew", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77/4 (2015) 684.

²¹ The saying 'Lord, Lord' seems to echo the deception mentioned in Jer 7:4. Here in Mt 7:21-23, Jesus is denying the salvific efficacy of calling him 'Lord,' in contrast to the teaching of Paul in Rom 10:9, 13. Because of this, some have even suspected an anti-Pauline ethos in Matthew.

The judgement on them is further clarified in the parable of the wicked tenants:²² “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom” (Mt 21:43). The same fate awaits those who were originally invited for the wedding banquet: they are murderers (Mt 22:7) and not worthy (8). Even one of the new invitees is thrown out from the banquet hall for lack of a proper wedding garment. So, membership in the community is no guarantee of salvation; one has to prove his/her eligibility through worthy fruits.

Three parables in Mt 25 reinforce this Matthean theme that faith in Jesus must be proved through corresponding good works of charity: the symbols of the oil of the bridesmaids in Mt 25:3-4 and the talents of the slaves in Mt 25:16-17 correspond to the works of charity undertaken by the righteous in Mt 25:35-36. In the judgement of the nations (Mt 25:31-46), the elevation of charity as the sole criterion for entry into the kingdom is unparalleled in the whole of New Testament. However, there are several New Testament texts that reflect the same principle, wherein fruits of the kingdom are often identified as works of charity, which also involves the sharing of goods. Here are a few examples:

- **Works of Charity:** Jesus instructs the lawyer to imitate the charity of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:37 – “Go and do likewise”) in order to inherit eternal life.
- **Concern for the Poor:** Jesus instructs the rich man searching for eternal life to share his wealth with the poor (Mk 10:21; Mt 19:21; Lk 18:22). Jesus declares the arrival of salvation to the house of Zacchaeus after he announces his plan to share his wealth with the poor and those exploited by him (Lk 19:8-9). In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man is punished for his failure to share his goods with those in need, like Lazarus (Lk 16:25).
- **Sharing of Wealth:** Before Jesus, John the Baptist advocated it (Lk 3:10). The measure you give will be the measure you get (Mk 4:24; Lk 6:38). Give to everyone who begs, without expecting it back (Lk 6:30, 34, 38; Mt 5:42). Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind to the banquet (Lk 14:13). Make treasures in heaven by selling one’s possessions and giving alms (Lk 12:33). It is impossible for the rich (who do not share their wealth) to enter the kingdom of God (Mk 10:25; Lk 18:25; Mt 19:24). The ideal first Christian community necessarily involved sharing of goods (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37). Collection was

²² The parable of the wicked tenants has strong echoes of the vineyard parable in Isa 5 – in both stories, YHWH waits for fruit from Israel, but finds none; similarly in both cases, the failure of the leaders has catastrophic and dramatic implications for the people because the judgement falls on the people also: cf. J. NOLLAND, *The Gospel of Matthew. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC, Grand Rapids 2005, 868.

done for the famine affected Christians in Judea (Acts 11:29). Paul also exhorts the Christians of different Churches to share their goods (Rom 12:13; Gal 2:10; Eph 5:28). Paul cites the good example of Macedonia and Achaia, who “have been pleased to share their resources” (Rom 15:26). Contributing to the needy is the true expression of love (Heb 6:9-10). Meeting the needs of the needy is the way to practise love (1Jn 3:17-18).

- **Judgement Based on Deeds:** Those who have done good will have the resurrection of life (Jn 5:29). “He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit” (Jn 15:2). “He will repay according to each one’s deeds” (Rom 2:5-6).
- **Teachings on ‘love of neighbour’** in the Gospels and letters (see below).
- **Teachings on good works,** generosity and sharing (e.g. 2Tim 6:18; Titus 2:7; 3:1; Heb 10:24; 13:3, 16; 1Pet 2:12, 15; 3:8-13; Jas 3:13, 17, etc.).
- **Faith and Works:** “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? [...] a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (Jas 2:15-16, 24). Be doers of faith, not just hearers (cf. Jas 1:22-25; Rom 2:13).

As clearly mentioned in Jas 2:15-16, none of the above mentioned works of charity can be substituted with words or rituals. Charity should be done through concrete acts of love.

7. No Substitutes for the ‘Love of Neighbour’ (Mk 12:28-34; Mt 22:34-40; Lk 10:25-28)

All the New Testament writers summarily present Jesus’ ethical vision as a ‘love-based’ ethics. Therefore, they are united in projecting love as the essence of Christian message. Since much has been said and written on the centrality of love in Christian teaching, we are not discussing any of it here. Instead, our focus is on the need to present ‘love of neighbour’ as the essence of Christian religious praxis. Each evangelist presents this theme in different ways. As we know, all the Synoptic gospels present Jesus summarising the Mosaic Law into love of God and love of neighbour (Mk 12:28-34; Mt 22:34-40; Lk 10:25-28). Now, there are two practical questions rising from this summary and two misunderstandings associated with them. 1) *Is love of God more important than love of neighbour?* The misunderstanding associated with the answer to this question is this: because Mk 12:28-31 grades the two as first and second, many think and argue that love of God is indeed more important; love of neighbour, in fact, derives from it; 2) *How do we love God?* Loving neighbour

is clear, but loving God is tricky. The misunderstanding is that we express our love of God through prayers, praise and worship, rituals, pilgrimages, other pious practices, etc. A close analysis of the Gospels reveals that each evangelist answers both the questions together without arguments and discussions and reach the same conclusion.

In Mark's Gospel, the scribe agrees with Jesus' summary and states, "this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk 12:33). So then, it is not through 'burnt offerings and sacrifices' that one needs to love God. In the Matthean version, love of neighbour is presented as equal in importance to love of God ("And a second is like it": Mt 22:39). Therefore, there is no gradation between the two. Moreover, Matthew has proved his closeness to the 'love of neighbour' in many subtle ways. In answer to the rich young man's question, Matthew has an addition to the list of commandments: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 19:19).²³ As it is not part of the Ten Commandments, it is missing in the Markan and Lukan parallels (Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20). Again, in the judgement of the nations (Mt 25:31-46), the sole criterion for the reward of heaven is love of neighbour (charity done to the needy); shockingly, the judge asks no question about love of God or any cultic practices. In Luke's Gospel, the lawyer gives the summary of the commandments (Lk 10:27), which is supplemented with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37), apparently to clarify the term 'neighbour'. There, of course, it is the 'love of neighbour' that is highlighted as a requirement to inherit eternal life. At the end of the parable, the lawyer is asked to imitate the mercy of the Samaritan (Lk 10:37), not the cultic practices and ritual purity of the priest and the Levite. So, the emphasis is on the love of the neighbour.

And in many other New Testament books, the law is summed up into the commandment to love one's neighbour; it is not coupled with the love of God. In John's Gospel, there is no summary of the commandments, but the disciples are given a new commandment to love one another (Jn 13:34; 15:12, 17); there is no mention of loving God. Paul's summary of the commandments is also limited to love of neighbour: "The commandments [...] are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Rom 13:8-10); "the whole law is summed up in a single commandment: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'" (Gal 5:14).

²³ As 'love of neighbour' was not part of the Ten Commandments, the rich young man was not bothered about it. That is precisely the commandment which he had failed to practise; he claims to have practised all the Ten Commandments from his younger days. Since he was unwilling to share his wealth with others, it is clear that he did not consider it essential to love one's neighbour. But for the Matthean Jesus, love of neighbour is essential to attain perfection: cf. K. SNODGRASS, "Matthew and the Law" in D.R. BAUER – M.A. POWELL, ed., *Treasures New and Old. Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies*, Atlanta 1996, 108.

Paul's numerous praises of *agapē*²⁴ are all evidently referring to this love of the other/neighbour. Similarly, Jas 2:8 ("one fulfils the law by loving one's neighbour"), 1Pet 1:22 ("love one another deeply from the heart"), 1Jn 3:11 ("this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another") and 1Jn 4:8 ("whoever does not love does not know God") echo the same message. In fact, among the numerous lists of virtues in the New Testament epistles, at least 9 lists mention love (of neighbour) as the climax of those virtues.²⁵ So, in simple terms, the New Testament's answer to both the questions raised above is that *there is no other way to love God than by loving one's neighbour* (cf. 1Jn 4:20-21).

Evidently, the primacy of the love commandment played an important role in shaping Christianity right from the early centuries; charity soon became the attractive hallmark of Christians in the Roman Empire. While analysing the major causes of Christianity's success story in the early centuries, Henry Chadwick writes: "The practical application of charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success."²⁶ According to the sociological analysis of Rodney Stark, it was the love-based life of the early Christians in the Roman Empire that revitalised the Greco-Roman societies:

Christianity revitalised life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing

²⁴ All Pauline letters contain the term 'love' and exhortations to love figure prominently in all of them. For Paul, *agapē* is the highest of Christian virtues, and the most important ethical characteristic of Christian life. It is more valuable than the charismatic gifts (1Cor 12:31-13:8), in fact, the greatest of charisms (1Cor 13:13); it is the first fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). Christians are advised to live in love (Eph 5:2; 1Thess 4:9). Col 3:14 reads, "Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

²⁵ These texts present the supreme importance of the virtue of love: 1Cor 13:1-13; 2Cor 6:1-10; Gal 5:13-26; Eph 4:1-3; 5:1-14; Col 3:1-17; 1Tim 6:11; 2Tim 3:1-13 and 2Pet 1:1-11. James' insistence on works actually supplements the command to love one's neighbour (2:17-18, 20, 26), because love of neighbour has to be demonstrated in works.

²⁶ H. CHADWICK, *The Early Church*, Revised ed., London 1993, 56. So then, "the pagan comment 'see how these Christians love one another' (reported by Tertullian) was not irony. Christian charity expressed itself in care for the poor, for widows and orphans, in visits to brethren in prison or condemned to the living death of labour in the mines, and social action in time of calamity like famine, earthquake, pestilence, or war." When the New Testament was *new*, these were the norms of the Christian communities. Tertullian had claimed: "It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another!' (*Apology* 39)."

services.²⁷

Even in the present world, what is most admired about Christians are their works of charity provided regardless of the religious, cultural, or political affiliations of the recipients.

When we focus thus on the love of neighbour, one might ask: *are we not sidelining the love of God, which is the basis for the Christian love of the neighbour?* In fact, we are not at all discrediting the command to love God. When Jesus listed the commandments to the rich man (Mk 10:19; Mt 19:18; Lk 18:20) as requirements to obtain eternal life, why did he mention only five ethical commandments from the second part of the Decalogue? Why did he not mention the first three commandments? Does he mean that the first three are not necessarily required for salvation? That need not be the case. In our view, it was not necessary for Jesus to mention them because he would naturally expect any pious Jew to observe them as a basic duty. Similarly, among the so-called ‘practising Christians’, observance of cultic laws is assured; there could be laxity only about the ethical principles. For example, they feel bad when they miss a Sunday mass, but they may not feel as much guilt when they fail to love others. So, people need to be reminded only of their ethical duties. And if loving the neighbour is the way to love God, there is no need to repeat the *mantra* that loving God is more important and fundamental; it will only confuse simple people and promote ritual substitutes as valid means to please God.

Conclusion

As we have seen above, if the New Testament teaching is clear on the matter, why do many Christian leaders and ministers still promote ritual substitutes? In many cases, it can be explained by the principle of demand and supply. As stated in the introduction, short-cuts are in high demand; they sell easily. So, an easy way to make money or to gain popularity is to sell short-cuts. We sometimes find in the street corners people selling rings, medals, threads, statues, etc., that allegedly bring good luck, health and money. For this reason, those who profit from this business will keep promoting ritual substitutes; only the buyers need to understand the ploy and prevent the deceit. Many others, probably a majority, are under the spell of a

²⁷ R. STARK, “Antioch as the Social Situation for Matthew’s Gospel,” in DAVID L. BALCH, ed., *Social History of the Matthean Community*, Minneapolis 1991, 205. When societies are burdened with natural and social disasters resulting in social chaos and chronic misery, as was the case in many Greco-Roman cities, they need new initiatives for revitalisation; or else such societies will perish. Christianity effectively played this role of revitalising many Greco-Roman cities, mitigating their chronic misery, disorder and periodic disasters.

misunderstanding about these substitutes, like the Pharisees of Jesus' time. They take these substitutes to be real means to follow Jesus, attain holiness and reach heaven.

For example, people take up different means to 'propagate' the word of God: from old methods like writing biblical verses on the compound walls, making bible cards, memorizing them, manually copying biblical books, etc. to new social media methods of doing it on the mobile phone, computer and other electronic gadgets. Are they useful? Of course, we cannot deny their usefulness. But can they substitute living biblical principles in one's real life situations? No, unfortunately they can't; these may remind you, help you, guide you to live an ethical life, but can never substitute it. Or, let us take the case of a woman who undertakes a hazardous pilgrimage to a 'sacred' hill, fasting and reciting the way of the cross; she is praying for a 'miraculous cure' of her ailing and bedridden husband. Can her fasting, prayer and the painful pilgrimage substitute the care her husband needs from his wife? Perhaps, only as much as a *corban* can substitute one's duties to parents! But the attraction of the substitute still persists: *what if a pilgrimage could do the trick!* Or if cancer can be miraculously cured by attending a charismatic convention, who wouldn't jump into it, instead of spending lots of money and undergoing painful treatment processes? But, as someone said, "it is like buying a lottery ticket daily instead of going to work."

Now, this realization is very shocking and painful for those who are under the spell of the said misunderstanding. The religious leaders of Jesus' time had faced a similar shock: they could not bear it when Jesus tried to correct them, so they got him killed. In our days, many sincere Christians have got habituated with ritual substitutes and feel secure and comfortable with them. During the Covid-19 related lock-down, when many of these substitutes were temporarily suspended, we could see many finding alternative substitutes (such as on-line services) for these common substitutes. To avoid misunderstanding, I would repeat here what I said in the introduction: the problem is not with rituals, but when they are misunderstood as substitutes for one's ethical duties. Because this misunderstanding is so deep-rooted in many cases and due to the strength of habit, many depend on these substitutes, while their promoters will flourish in their business. And as a result, true religious praxis will face moral degradation and ruin, because whether out of ignorance or sheer love for short-cuts or other motives, the craze for substitutes is coupled with people shying away from their ethical duties. Therefore, religious leaders must desist from promoting this trend and enlighten the faithful on the true spirit of Christianity. For instance, may the Eucharist remind us of the sacrifice of Jesus on

the cross and inspire us to sacrifice our comforts and conveniences for the good of others! May the sacrament of confession help us to be aware of our own sinfulness and remind us how much we have been forgiven, so that we may also try to forgive the offences and mistakes of others! May the Sunday rest remind us that everyone needs rest, so that we may willingly permit some rest to our staff members and employees! May our prayers for the poor and suffering instil in us a willingness to help them in whatever way possible! When these and similar attitudinal changes begin to occur, our rituals and pious practices will no more be substitutes, but supplements strengthening our religious praxis.

THE CRITICAL ISSUES FACED BY THE CHURCH TODAY AND THEIR EFFECTS ON CONSECRATED LIFE

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

“Accept your shadow.”

Church, consecrated life accept your shadow!

What does it mean today to be religious, consecrated or lay people within the Church? We are characterized *by what we believe, what we do*.

- People who believe in God, who follow Jesus Christ, anointed by the Holy Spirit.
- We are people who go to the churches, who frequent temples, who perform rites, rituals, who obey moral precepts (the 10 commandments) and evangelical Counsels (obedience, celibacy and poverty).
- We are people supportive and compassionate with the needy and the poor.
- We feel blessed with this a great treasure: of faith and vocation!
- We are graced with the mission of evangelizing and sharing with others our treasure

But what happens when we discover “our shadows”? When do we realize that there is also among us, misery, evil, crimes? We are in the society of communication. What before was hidden, now is easily public. Jesus already said:

“Nothing is hidden that will not be revealed, and nothing is secret that will not be made known” (Lk 12:1)

We are not to wait until the final judgment. The media of our time provides this manifestation of what before was hidden: abuses of power, sexual abuses —

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especially with children and violence against women —, economic corruption of believers. In the past, we try to maintain in secret all these scandals, but now no more. Today many of them are manifested and denounced. That is our shadow! We must accept our shadow! This shadow belongs not only to our society, but also **to our body**. We all are members of the body of Jesus. Therefore, we are also responsible. What to do? How to act?

Pope Francis in his Christmas speech to the Roman Curia spoke about this subject. We can also re-read it as directed to all of us, to consecrated life. In this article, let me offer a reading of the speech of Pope Francis to the Roman Curia (December 21, 2018)¹ as it were addressed to us, the contemporary consecrated persons.

The outline of this paper is divided into three parts: 1) The Message of the Pope to the Roman Curia; 2) Strong Winds and Tempests: Critical Issues and Their Effects on Consecrated Life and 3) The Processes of Transformation: New Wine, New Wineskins.

I. THE MESSAGE OF THE POPE TO THE ROMAN CURIA

In that Christmas Greetings, Pope Francis presented critical issues —lights and shadows — that the contemporary Church has to face in our time but preceded by fundamental theological premises or convictions.

1. Theological Premises and Convictions

First of all, Pope Francis confesses:

- 1) “No sin will ever be more significant than God’s mercy;
- 2) “No act of ours can ever prevent the dawn of His divine light from rising ever anew in human hearts;
- 3) “The light always proves stronger than the darkness. Christ is the unique Saviour of the world and the light of the universe; this links Christmas to the Parousia and confirms us in the hope that does not disappoint and
- 4) The Church always follows the path of penance and renewal. The Church receives strength to overcome, with patience and love, her sorrows and difficulties by the power of the risen Lord.

However, Pope Francis does not discharge with these theological premises the responsibility of the Church. What God does for us is not everything. We are also responsible for our activities. We are in a bilateral covenant with Him,

and, therefore, we are accountable for our actions and our responses to his grace.² Instead of following God, we can put ourselves in front of him, like Peter, who remonstrated with the Master and thus merited the most severe of Christ's rebukes: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind, not on the things of God but the things of men" (Mk 8:33).

Starting from these theological convictions, let's see what the strong winds and storms that, in this historical moment, harass the Church, without excluding the Roman Curia.

2. The Central Moments of Difficulty – Strong Winds and Storms

"This year, the bark of the Church has experienced and continues to experience, moments of difficulty. Strong winds and tempests have buffeted her".

The Pope evokes the evangelical scene in which Jesus slept in the boat, while an enraged storm raged against her (Mk 4: 38).

a) Storm from Outside

The Pope denounces four types of adverse reactions:

- 1) Loss of trust and abandonment of the Church;
- 2) Attacks that aggravate the wounds of the Church;
- 3) Not concealed glee in the face of these attacks and
- 4) the intra-ecclesiastical attacks are always most hurtful and destructive than those from outside.

The Church feels —like her own — the winds and storms that scourge:

- 1) The immigrants, forced to leave their homelands and to risk their lives;
- 2) those children who die each day for lack of water, food, and medicine!
- 3) the vulnerable and women, victims of violence;
- 4) the innocent blood spilled daily by declared and undeclared wars;
- 5) persons systematically tortured in police custody, in prisons and refugee camps;
- 6) the new martyrs of the new Neros of today who oppress believers in Christ.

b) Storm from inside

- *New Davids, into the web of corruption and abuse:* There is inside of the Church a network of corruption and violence that gives continuity to the corruption of the Old Testament's David: abuse of power and conscience and sexual abuses. These abusers (sex, power and conscience) are clergymen and consecrated people. They perform abominable acts yet continue to exercise their ministry as if nothing had happened. They only worry about not being discovered or unmasked; they betray God, his commandments, their vocation, the Church, the people of God, and the trust of little ones and their families; they disfigure the countenance of the Church and undermine her credibility.
- *The infidelity of the new Judas:* some people betray their vocation, vows, mission, and consecration to God and the Church. They hide behind good intentions their betrayal to stab their brothers and sisters in the back: they sow weeds, division, and bewilderment; they always find excuses including intellectual and even spiritual justifications, to progress unperturbed on the path to destruction.³ Behind these sowers of weeds, we still see the thirty pieces of silver. They like Judas are chosen by the Lord, who sell out his Master and hands him over to death.

3. The Call to Conversion: Justice, Vigilance, and Protection

David king and Judas Iscariot are always present in the Church since they represent the weakness that is part of our human condition. They are icons of the sins and crimes committed by those who are chosen and consecrated.

David, in his encounter with prophet Nathan, became aware of the seriousness of his sin. David repented, trusting in God's mercy. Today we need new Nathans to help so many Davids rouse themselves from a hypocritical and perverse life. Please, let us help Holy Mother Church in her difficult task of recognizing real from false cases, accusations from slander, grievances from insinuations, gossip from defamation. And the same Pope says:

“To those who abuse minors, I would say this: convert and hand yourself over to human justice and prepare for divine justice.”

Judas, instead, hanged himself. All of us, then, to make Christ's light shine forth, have the duty to combat all spiritual corruption.

That must never happen again. David and Judas remind us of the need for a growing duty of vigilance and protection on the part of those entrusted with

governance in the structures of ecclesial and consecrated life. The strength of our institutions does not depend on its composition of men and women who are perfect (something impossible!), but on our willingness to be continuously purified and to acknowledge humbly our errors and correct them and our ability to get up after falling.

4. The Joys

Finally, Pope Francis refers to certain people and events that have brought joy to the Church.

- 1) Many good Samaritans: young people, families, charitable and volunteer movements, and so many individual believers and consecrated persons;
- 2) The new beatified and canonized people are “precious stones,” who adorn the Church; they are models of holiness (“the saints next door”);
- 3) The significant number of the faithful who each year receive baptism and thus renew the youth of the Church as a fruitful mother, and the many of her children who come home and re-embrace the Christian faith and life;
- 4) all those families and parents who take their faith seriously and daily pass it on to their children by the joy of their love;
- 5) the given witness by so many young people who courageously choose the consecrated life and the priesthood and the significant number of consecrated men and women, bishops and priests, who daily live their calling in fidelity, silence, holiness, and self-denial;⁴
- 6) the successful outcome of the Synod devoted to young people and the progress made in the reform of the Curia: for example, the efforts made to achieve clarity and transparency in financial affairs.

II. STRONG WINDS AND TEMPESTS: CRITICAL ISSUES AND THEIR EFFECTS ON CONSECRATED LIFE

If, after the previous synthesis of Pope Francis’ speech to the Roman Curia, we look to consecrated life, we discover that the words of the Pope move us towards a paradigm shift in our theory and praxis (ways of understanding and performing) of consecrated life. The paradigm shift affects our way of understanding and performing the covenant, mission, evangelical counsels, and our discernment and accompaniment of vocations.

1. Interior Atheism That Endangers Our Covenant with God

Is Jesus sleeping of the boat of consecrated while the enraged storm of atheism is raging against her (Mk 4: 38)? In our time, in our turbulent world, the boat of consecrated life has experienced and continues to suffer, moments of great difficulty. Strong winds and tempests have buffeted it.

The interior atheism threatens the Covenant with God that we profess. To be in covenant with our Trinitarian God requires a permanent connection of mind and heart with Him. But, unfortunately, intense waves of contemporary atheism and misbelief are biting against the boat of consecrated life. New idolatries are taking over the place of devotion, mission, and communion: loss of Christian prayer, extreme importance given to our works, jobs, “agenda anxiety”; as a result of that, the experience of God becomes weaker and even disappears.

Pope Francis has reminded us of our vocation to holiness in his beautiful exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate*. Pope detects three main enemies of holiness in our time: gnosticism, pelagianism, and the seduction of ideologies.

That inner atheism leads us to be disconnected from our covenant with God and to renounce to become sons and daughters of the covenant (cf. Acts 3:25).

2. The Extended Shadow of David over the Contemporary Consecrated Life: Abuse of Power, and Sex

We, religious, are affected by strong winds and tempests against the covenant with God. New idolatries threaten our covenant with God, our religious profession. The shadow of David’s sins hovers over our contemporary consecrated life

a) The Idolatry of Power.

Power-domination is an impulse that inhabits us. We tend to dominate instinctively. We use all of our best resources in it. The personal charisma or natural gifts that we have received are sources of power. Dominating others can become intoxicating, addictive power. There are ambitious, megalomaniac people who accumulate power and extend it even into sacred spaces. Then the power is out of focus; it becomes arrogant, tyrannical, and idolatrous. George W. Coasts called it “The God of Death.”⁵ Out of focus, power leads to anger, aggressiveness, and killer instinct. The book of Revelation warns us when it describes it as that power with beastly, monstrous, and diabolical pictures. *Evangelii Gaudium* 93-96 presents the another perspective of this idolatry of power: the spiritual worldlines:

Spiritual worldliness hides behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church. It consists of seeking not the Lord's glory but human glory and personal well-being. It is a subtle way of trying one's "own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:21). It leads to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism.

b) The Idolatry of Sex

They are close and tangible realities that dominate our affection and our feelings; sometimes, with an impressive and even idolatrous intensity. In our sinful condition, sexuality becomes compulsive, tumultuous, passionate. Eros in our sinful condition of covetousness can become tyrannical. When the language of sex excludes other styles of relationship, of tenderness, it creates a state of tyranny. An addictive contact with society and its media produces in us, consecrated people, some sexual addictions. The sexual revolution of the sixties of the past century is still alive in our societies, and it influences us. We have not been able to face it with wisdom and strength. We have not discerned what in this revolution is right from what is wrong. That revolution has affected many religious men and women. We have to lament sexual abuses and addictions of different kinds. Powerful waves are beating against the consecrated chastity.

3. The Extended Shadow of Judas over the Contemporary Consecrated Life: Infidelity

The shadow of Judas' sin hovers, also, over our modern consecrated life: it is the shadow of greed, of the idolatry of money and as a consequence, infidelity.

a) The Idolatry of Money or Greed

This kind of idolatry is seductive and addictive and finds accomplices among us, religious. The prophets announced that the riches are the great rival of God and greed an idolatry. Greed is an "idolatry" (Col 3:5). The god-money has temples, priests, a well-structured religion, rituals that seem admirable. But it generates "corrupt people."

Consumerism is the other face of secular idolatry.⁶ It is a new capital vice, typical of our time. Consumerism creates addiction. There are compulsive buyers. Consumerism offers only substitutes for happiness. How can one look at millions of human beings who have not solved their primary or biological needs? In some cases, we know some financial and economic scandals in which religious people or even congregations are protagonists. Greed and consumerism are tempting us in very different ways as it happened with Judas. Money becomes an end and not

an instrument. Money allows us to install us in our comfort zone and our selfish interests.

b) The Difficult Perseverance or Infidelity

We state today a high number of abandonments of consecrated life⁷. What are the leading causes?⁸: emotional crises, a crisis of faith, disconnection of spirituality due to stress and activism, isolation of the youngest in aging communities and without renewal perspectives on spirituality and mission or incapable of authentic inculturation;⁹ or some formative styles that leave people in a state of fragility.¹⁰

Lack of people capable of guiding and accompanying initial formation “experts on the paths that lead to God,”¹¹ and able to transmit “the beauty of the following of Jesus and the value of the charism in which this following becomes concrete.” The formators need the expertise to accompany the mystagogical processes.¹² Fidelity is a creative process that requires a culture of ongoing formation, able to favour creative fidelity in mission, in community¹³, and personal life in all stages of life.¹⁴

c) The Call to Conversion: the New Nathans

As we see the waves that beat against the consecrated life in our time, what are our best defences? The covenant and the evangelical counsels, or better, the Holy Spirit, present in us as our Counsellor and Energizer.

There are questions that the consecrated life of our time in all its forms should answer:

- What style of living and mission defines us?
- What story do we transmit?
- What signals do we emit?
- What meaning do we communicate?
- Are we a parable of divine wisdom, apocalyptic-sting, a symbol of a different world?

III. PROCESSES OF TRANSFORMATION: NEW WINE, NEW WINESKINS

We are aware that in a new era, the usual answers are no longer useful. A transformation at a personal, community, and structural level is necessary. We will speak, therefore, of the processes of transformation, in response to the imperative of Jesus: “A new wine, new wineskins.”

The question that consecrated life is asking today is:

- What are the interpellations that consecrated life receives from God in this historical moment in which we find ourselves?
- What is today the wineskin fit to guard the new wines that the Spirit continues to offer and consecrated life?

1. The New Challenges and the New Wineskins

A severe and complex discernment is necessary today to find those structures, styles, languages that new wine needs to breathe, ferment in consecrated life.

We have not to apply this parable only to the social structures, norms, styles, but also the following of Jesus in a prophetic and charismatic way in our contemporary context.

From the Second Vatican Council — under the guidance of the Holy Spirit — the Church, vineyard of the Lord, has been graced with an extraordinary spiritual vintage, with “new and good wine.” The attempt to place it in “new wineskins”: new mystagogical and formative itineraries, new models of holiness and fraternal life, new structures of government, unimpeded forms of solidarity, and *Diakonia*.

But not all wineskins are new. The old wineskins persist sacred and sclerotized, rigid, and resistant traditions, that does not give life or respond to life.¹⁵ We are in times of new challenges that need new structures and processes of formation:

- The need for *a path to interiority*. This path favours the taste for the deep, never feels satisfied, always is thirsty.
- The challenge of *a world of complexity*. That means that our capacity for contemplation should not be partial, nor reduced to simplistic elements, which are not worthy of the greatness of the Mystery of God in the world. To understand the complexity, we need to get out of our ego-system and enter the ecosystem, which displaces us and makes us see reality from very different points of view. In this way, our thinking becomes holistic.¹⁶

2. Openness to a New formation Paradigm

The service of formation aims to accompany the person to adopt a wise and comprehensive attitude towards life. The path of formation is a path of encounter with each unique and unrepeatable human being, with his face. It is a path of communication and communion and proximity. In that way, the mysticism of the “open eyes” emerges.

The leading role of the Holy Spirit in the processes of formation leads us to make Him the main formator (cf. Wis 9:10). Formation requires times of prayer, silence, solitude, contact with the Spirit. But, at the same time, formation requires a wise, attentive, and loving look at life and people.

In the field of formation, a significant change is taking place in methods, languages, dynamics, values, goals, and processes. Although we still wonder if our *Ratio Formationis* is enough to guarantee what the Spirit asks of us at this time of change.

Ongoing formation requires today:

- To rediscover and redesign the ecclesial identity of consecrated life amid a Church called to a pastoral-missionary and ecological conversion.¹⁷
- To understand that formation takes place day by day and consists of being touched, educated, provoked, enlightened by life and history, by what is announced and celebrated, by the poor and excluded and by those who are close and far.
- To be aware that we need new institutions able to generate processes of transformation, capable of responding to the inspirations and movements of the Spirit in our time.¹⁸
- To choose formators and community leaders ready to know-how and accompany along the way — both personal and communitarian — to make a community eco-system of evangelical values. We need formators with new skills and abilities who know how to act wisely in multicultural contexts.¹⁹

3. To Generate New Relational Models

a) First, Female-Male Reciprocity

Let us attend to the complexity of “the feminine” in our time and its cultural diversity. From there, let us discover new systems of relationships among men, women, or gender differences.²⁰

The lack of awareness or even denial of the feminine or gender issues has a very negative influence on the new generations of women and men. Many of them expect from their Institute to be introduced and trained in the following of Jesus, but they are obliged to assume already outdated and currently inhuman role models. Thus the vitality of the members belonging to the consecrated life is extinguished, weakens or hurts. Mutual hospitality and an interrelation that allows personal growth and the contribution of new values are necessary.²¹

b) Second, the Relational Models in the Service of Authority

We are passing from the central role of authority to that from the dynamics of fraternity and sorority. Authority is at the service of the communion of sisters and brothers. Only in listening and accompaniment is the authority authentically evangelical in consecrated life.²² The service of authority calls for collaboration and a shared vision in the style of fraternity and sorority.²³ And for this it is necessary to remember some fundamental principles of Canon Law:

- It is not good to hold government positions for a long time and without interruption.²⁴ Delaying change is sometimes due more to ensuring the continuity of the management of the works than in paying attention to the demands of community and missionary animation. And, on the other hand, we must have confidence in the capacity of the new generations that the Spirit sends us.²⁵
- In our General and Provincial Chapters, we must listen to the Spirit and discern his motions regarding the Institute. Openness to the Spirit also requires acceptance of differences and unexpected proposals. A Chapter is the place of personal and choral obedience to the Holy Spirit. This humility in listening bends intelligence, heart, and knees in prayer.
- It is necessary to rediscover or rethink orientations that have matured throughout the tradition of the government of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life. The near future cannot narrow the horizon: the new professionalisms (knowledge and competences) can contribute to broadening our horizons, but above all, not to give ourselves to the margin of the future, prisoners of short visions that, in the long run, immobilize the whole common path.²⁶

c) The Service of Authority and Obedience

Another sign of the Spirit in our time is to understand power as a co-responsible, synodal, and collegial service, which implies that:

- Today have no-meaning denominations as “superior and subject”.²⁷ Our obedience is, above all, obedience to God and has its prototype in Jesus’ obedience, who came to serve and not to be served.²⁸
- We must be opposed to any form of authoritarianism, of vertical centralization since it distorts the genuine evangelical authority, communion and undermines the vitality and fidelity of consecrated persons.

- The service of authority must be bold and creative, rethinking objectives, structures, style and methods and not leaving things as they are.
- The evangelical authority tries to convince and persuade — offering correct and honest information —, responds to the whys, promotes and ensures the active participation of all, and avoids any form of infantilism and avoids behaviors deprived of responsibility.
- Recognizes that — according to the ancient wisdom of the monastic tradition — “God often inspires the youngest what the best is.”²⁹
- Defends that no authority — founders or foundresses included —, should arrogate the unique interpretation of the charism, subtracting from the norms of the universal law of the Church;³⁰ and the same goes for the new foundations.³¹
- It is worrying to discover that after more than fifty years of the closing of the Council, styles and praxis of government remain that depart from the spirit of service or even contradict it.³² Authoritarianism is far from the evangelical spirit that has to dominate in community and missionary life.³³

d) The Challenge of oikonomia: Evangelical Communion of Goods

“The financial crisis we are going through makes us forget that there is a deep anthropological crisis at its origin: the denial of the primacy of the human being!”³⁴

Inside our communities, we feel called to perform the prophecy of sharing goods. Outside our communities, we feel invited to fulfil the prophecy of generous solidarity, especially towards the poor and more fragile.

The transition from a domestic economy to administrative and management processes that are almost beyond our control shows our precariousness and lack of preparation. And they require:

- Economic and financial transparency.³⁵
- Respect for justice, co-responsibility, and especially respect for the human dignity of each consecrated person in the distribution of goods.
- Serious and attentive discernment on our poverty: evaluation and significant testimony among the people of God.
- Avoiding the exclusive management of resources in the hands of a few.

- The awareness that the possessions of our institutes are goods of the Church. These goods promote mission and solidarity within the people of God and, above all, with the poorest.³⁶

CONCLUSION

Consecrated life has received new wine. It is arriving at the time of the harvest and of pouring the new wine into new wineskins so that the wine can ripen, settle and ferment. The time for creativity and innovation has arrived so that the new wine could maintain its flavour. It is necessary to go beyond the inherited models to appreciate the novelties that the Spirit provokes, to welcome them with gratitude, and to guard them until they ferment entirely.

Endnotes

¹ Pope Francis addressed a Christmas Greeting to the Roman Curia: to his co-workers, all those who serve in the Curia, to the Papal Representatives and the staff of the various Nunciatures.

² God's salvation, freely bestowed on all humanity does not act independently of our will, our cooperation, our freedom and our daily efforts. Being Christian or consecrated people does not mean acting like an élite group who think they have God in their pocket. We are unworthy sinners! We are nothing but servants in the vineyard of the Lord, who must hand over in due time the harvest and its gain to the owner of the vineyard (cf. Mt 20:1-16). We are not owners of salvation. We are recipients, humble ministers of the mysteries of God. The Church, clasping sinners to her bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal. Many Christian People, however, continue to cling to the Church, in the certainty that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against her" (Mt 16:18).

³ This is nothing new in the Church's history. Saint Augustine, in speaking of the good seed and the weeds, says: "Do you perhaps believe, brethren, that weeds cannot spring up even on the thrones of bishops? Do you perhaps think that this is found only lower down and not higher up? Heaven forbid that we be weeds! ... Even on the thrones of bishops good grain and weeds can be found; even in the different communities of the faithful good grain and weeds can be found" (Serm. 73, 4: PL 38, 472).

⁴ People who light up the shadows of humanity by their witness of faith, love and charity; persons who work patiently, out of love for Christ and his Gospel, on behalf of the poor, the oppressed and the least of our brothers and sisters.

⁵ Cf. GEORGE W. COATS, "The God of Death: Power and Obedience in the Primeval History", *Interpretation* 29 (1975) 227-239.

⁶ Cf. UMBERTO GALIMBERTI, *I vizi capitali e i nuovi vizi*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2010, 67-74.

⁷ Abandonments that occur, both after the main steps of the formative year (profession, ordination), as in old age. This phenomenon is observed in all cultural and geographical contexts.

⁸ CIVCSVA, *For New Wine in New Wineskins. Since Vatican Council II Consecrated Life and the Challenges Still Open*, 12. (=New wine).

⁹ CIVCSVA, *For New Wine in New Wineskins. Since Vatican Council II Consecrated Life and the Challenges Still Open*, 12. (=New wine).

¹⁰ *New Wine*, 12.

¹¹ VC, 41.

¹² Generic proposals are not enough for everyone (values, spirituality, times, styles and forms).

¹³ VC 41. It is in the fraternity that one learns to accept others as a gift from God, accepting their positive characteristics along with their diversity and limits. It is in the fraternity where they learn to share the gifts received for the edification of all. It is in the fraternity where the missionary dimension of consecration is learned.

¹⁴ VC 70-71.

¹⁵ VC 70-71.

¹⁶ “Contemplad”, 55.

¹⁷ *New wine*, 35.

¹⁸ *New wine*, 36.

¹⁹ *New wine*, 37.

²⁰ *New wine*, 38.

²¹ *New wine*, 39-40.

²² *New Wine*, 42: “In this vision it is possible to consider the institution that this Dicastery often receives on the occasion of the approval of Constitutions (reworking and / or amendments) to proceed with a re-formulation of the current legal terminology, in order to the terms superior and subject. The conciliar decree *Perfectae caritatis* had already invited him to say: «The way of living, praying and acting should be conveniently adapted to the current physical and psychic conditions of the members of the institute and also to accommodate given in all parts, but, mainly, in mission lands and according to what the peculiar nature of each institute and the needs of the apostolate require, the demands of culture and social and economic circumstances» *Perfectae caritatis*, 3.

²³ Cf. Instruction, *The Service of Authority and Obedience. Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram* (Mai, 11, 2008), n.3, «This topic requires a special effort of reflection, mainly due to the changes that these last years have taken place within the institutes and communities; and also in the light of what was proposed by the most recent magisterial documents on the theme of the renewal of the consecrated vineyard».

²⁴ CIC, c. 624 §2.78.

²⁵ “In the consecrated life the encounter between the young and the elderly is lived, between observance and prophecy. Let’s not see it as two opposite realities. [...] It is good for the elderly to communicate wisdom to the young; and it is good for young people to collect this heritage of experience and wisdom, and carry it forward, not to guard it in a museum, but to take it forward facing the challenges that life presents us, carry it forward for the sake of respective religious families and the whole Church”: *New Wine*, 47.

²⁶ *New wine*, 54.

²⁷ *New wine*, 24.

²⁸ Cf. CIVCSVA, Instruction, *The Service of Authority and Obedience. Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram* (Mai, 11, 2008), 13f.49, 14b.

²⁹ *Regula Benedicti*, III, 3

³⁰ Cf. CIVCSVA, Instruction, *The Service of Authority and Obedience. Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram* (Mai, 11, 2008), 13f.49. The CIVCSVA letter denounces: “In these years — and especially in the newly founded institutions — there have been no lack of facts and situations of manipulation of the freedom and dignity of people, not only reducing them to a total dependence that mortified dignity and even fundamental human rights, but inducing them, with tricks and with the claim of fidelity to God’s projects through charisma, to a submission that also reached the sphere of morality and even sexual intimacy. With great scandal for all when done so come to light”: *New Wine*, 20.

³¹ *New wine*, 24-25. The CIVSVA letter pays particular attention to the new foundations and founders with the objective of overcoming certain difficulties and authoritarianisms, which can easily arise and that would not correspond to the previously made reflection.

³² *New wine*, 43.

³³ “This will be possible when the responsibility of the brothers is trusted, “provoking their voluntary obedience in the respect of the human person”, and through dialogue, bearing in mind that the adhesion must be carried out “in the spirit of faith and love, to follow obedient Christ”, and not for other motivations”, CIVCSVA, Instruction, *The Service of Authority and Obedience. Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram* (Mai, 11, 2008), 14b.

³⁴ *EG* 55,57.

³⁵ *New wine*, 26.

³⁶ *New wine*, 28.

THE HEALING MINISTRY OF JESUS AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

M. Arul Jesu Robin, CMF

INTRODUCTION

The mission of Jesus is establishing God's kingdom here on earth. He carried out his mission apart from his very life through his preaching, teaching and healing. Indeed, healing plays an important role in the life and mission of Jesus. Consecrated persons who are called to radically follow Jesus, live like Jesus with poverty, chastity and obedience and continue his mission here on earth with all commitment and enthusiasm cannot but fully involve in the ministry of healing as Jesus did.

1. General Background Notion of Sickness and Healing

"Healing" and "Sickness" cannot be easily defined as these concepts and their meanings depend on culture and subjectivity. It is said that sickness is in the eye of the beholder.¹ For science, the human experience of non-well-being is called sickness. A modern, science-based view of sickness is disease, that is, a biological or psychological disorder caused by a germ, virus, or any other culprit. The science-based view of the remedy is known as "cure," that includes the process of identifying the cause and removing, destroying, or controlling it. For ordinary man, sickness is illness. It is the experience of some biological or psychological disorder along with its many complex social consequences for the individual, the family, and the community.²

It is difficult to understand the biblical notion of sickness and healing with our modern scientific understanding as biblical culture and time is totally different from modern culture. Modern science believes in controlling and manipulating nature and its processes but the ancient world believed that only God could control and

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manipulate nature.³ Since ancient peoples had no knowledge about the existence of germs and viruses, they could not know diseases and their causes and therefore they were not interested in the cures as well.⁴

During biblical time, sickness and healing were not limited to physical body alone. They can be understood from different levels: 1) it can be abnormalities located within the body, in the structure and functions of bodily organs or systems. In this case, healing requires just the physical intervention; 2) it can be on the body but together with one's networks of relationships. Here, healing requires physical intervention together with setting right one's relationships with fellow human beings. Modern science calls it psychosomatic illness and healing; 3) Disorders caused because of larger social environment and its cosmic imbalances without neglecting either the body or one's faulty networks of relationships. The recovery needs putting the world back together or redressing a cosmic imbalance, possibly social injustice or social sins as well as religious and spiritual understanding affecting human beings adversely. As medical anthropologists point out, often all these aspects namely biological, psychological, mental, social and religious overlap. They are not clearly segregated or compartmentalised. In the biblical accounts of sickness and healing, often this is the case, combination of all the aspects which causes sickness and disorder.⁵ Biblical leprosy and exorcism and their healing are good examples to understand different layers of sickness and healing during biblical time.

2. Ancient Physicians, Ancient Medicine

a) Healing in the Ancient Israel

The Israelites believed that God had sent sickness for a divine purpose (cf. Ex 15:26 and Lev 26) as punishment for sins and that God was the one and only healer. The Bible presents Yahweh as the only God and He is the one who rules everything and there is no one above him. He is all in all. There is nothing beyond His knowledge and power. He is omni-potent and omniscient. Possibly, it also has something to do with the state of medical knowledge in antiquity, and thus with the mysteriousness of the human body and its processes. People were not aware of the causes of sickness and illness as they had very little knowledge about the functions of the body. When people became sick, they thought that some unknown power or spirit had possessed them and caused them all types of pain and illness. This ignorance led people in believing in magic, sorcery, witchcraft and miracle. Yet, it is to be noted here that OT forbids very strongly all types of magic or sorcery which is the manipulation of the evil spirits as a remedy, in preference to divine intervention, God's providence and care (cf. Lev 19:26-28; Dt 18:10-14; Eze 13:17-18).

Though God was the only healer as he alone had control over nature, any human being who healed a sick person was empowered by God to do so. When Elisha, cleansed Naaman of his skin condition (called leprosy in the Bible), the Syrian exclaimed “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel” (2Kgs 5:15). In fact, Naaman recognized the God of Israel as the real agent of healing. Elisha was God’s broker. This common cultural belief is reflected in Ex 15:26: “If you really listen to the voice of the LORD, your God,’ [God] told them, ‘and do right in his eyes: if you heed his commandments and keep all his precepts, I will not afflict you with any of the diseases with which I afflicted the Egyptians; for I, the Lord, am your healer.” The Israelites truly believed that God causes illnesses and removes them as well. Prophets like Elijah (1Kgs 17:17-24) and Elisha (2Kgs 5:1-19) too acted on God’s behalf in healing sick people. The story of Naaman shows that other gods were also viewed as healers. Though he takes dirt from Israel with him back to Syria to construct an altar to worship Yahweh, Naaman admits of continuing to attend the Temple of Rimmon to please his master (2Kgs 5:16-18).⁶ Priests too as God’s representatives bore medical responsibilities (cf. Lev 13:2-45).

Healing practices in Israel centered in the home, where the sick people were kept. Like present time, they were not taken care in hospitals or medical care centres. The sick people were taken care by the relatives maintaining vigil as well as soliciting the help of Yahweh through prayer and fasting (cf. 2Sam 12:15-23). Persons with “leprosy,” on the other hand, were segregated. They were not kept at home (cf. Lev 13-14). They had to live outside the city. Women in childbirth received the aid of midwives (cf. Gen 35:17; 38:28) who helped them for smooth delivery. Only rarely do physicians appear in the OT. When they do appear, they are typically seen as negative alternatives to Yahweh who is the real healer (cf. 2Chr 16:12; Jer 8:22-9:6) or as persons offering worthless advice to the sick persons or to their care-takers (cf. Job 13:4).⁷

There were different ways by which healings were done. Balm (Gn 37:25) is said to have been an aromatic resin with healing properties; oil was the universal emollient (Is 1:6) and was sometimes used for wounds with cleansing wine (Lk 10:34). Isaiah recommended a fig poultice for a boil (38:21); healing springs and saliva were thought effectual (Mk 8:23; Jn 5; 9:6-7). Medicine is mentioned (Pro 17:22) and defended as “sensible” (Sir 38:4). Other herbs too are recommended for particular disorders. Most food rules had both ritual and dietary purposes, while raisins, pomegranates, milk and honey were believed to assist restoration.⁸

b) Greco-Roman Background

Healing in Greco-Roman antiquity was related with the ubiquitous gods, especially but not exclusively (cf. Acts 14:8-13). Greek god, Hercules was a god of compassion who manifested his compassion by healing diseases of all sorts, even raising the dead. The goddess Isis was recognized as dispenser of life, healer and bringer of salvation. Asclepius, the god of healing, was credited with guiding the hands of the physicians. Hygeia, health personified, was recognized as Asclepius' daughter. Healing was also claimed to be available by means of magical paraphernalia. Acts records the burning of magical books at Ephesus by former magicians who had become believers (19:18-19).⁹

After secular Greek medicine had been spread throughout the ancient world by the armies of Alexander the Great, worshipers of Yahweh had the dilemma. Should sick people turn to human beings (physicians) or to God for healing? The reflections found in Sirach 38 reflect that challenge. The passage seems to be ambivalent toward physicians. It advises consulting this healer but reminds the sick person of God's healing power and God is responsible for the success or failure of the venture (38:1-8). Sirach points out that both the patient (v. 9) and the physician (v. 13) rely on God through prayer. Although a sick person consults a physician, traditional remedies of repentance, purification, and offerings (vv. 10-11) should be followed.¹⁰

In rural areas of Roman empire, there were snake-charmers and healers with magical powers. They were often asked to heal the sick specially at the time of pandemic. However, they always sought the help of the gods for defense and salvation at the time of difficulties.¹¹

c) Physicians at the Time of New Testament

Possibly, at the time of NT, physicians were very common that Jesus could allude to their activity metaphorically in his teaching (cf. Mk 2:17). But recourse to qualified physicians must have been a costly affair. Only the wealthy and rich could afford the care of a trained physician. The villagers and the poor people were often exploited by the charlatans who took away even the little money that they had but giving little in return by way of a cure (cf. Mk 5:26).¹² In the NT times, Jewish exorcists practiced and evidently with some success (Lk 11:19; Ac 19:13), and Luke became Paul's "beloved physician" (Col 4:14).¹³

Generally, village and rural folk did not depend on so-called qualified physicians, possibly because of poverty and to some extent ignorance. They depended more on divine healing (cf. Acts 5:16). Their trust and hope were in the power

of God. Even hospitality could be seen as a form of health care in the NT time (cf. Lk 10:30-35; Acts 10:33-34). Interestingly, St. Paul while recognizing the potential of intoxication, advises “a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1Tim 3:8; 5:3) reflecting medical tradition of that time.¹⁴

Healing by unqualified persons (non-professionals) falls into the social scientists’ category called “folk.” These ordinary people in every culture who heal sick people are folk healers who know the folk wisdom and utilize folk remedies. Even Jesus could be seen as a folk healer in his culture. Some folk techniques that Jesus used were laying on hands or touching the sick person (Mk 1:41), using spittle (Mk 8:23) or mud (Jn 9:6), pronouncing powerful words — like *talitha cum* (Mk 5:41) or *ephphatha* (Mk 7:34) — and the like.

Prior to Antony van Leeuwenhoek’s microscope in 1674, it would have been impossible to know about germs and viruses (the major causes of physical sickness), so folk healers essentially reflected upon presenting symptoms. Thus, Scripture describes the Gerasene man as “night and day...howling and bruising himself with stones” (Mk 5:5), or the moon-struck young man as “often [falling] into the fire and often into the water” (Mt 17:15), and so on.

3. Yahweh, the Healer

In all the three sections of the Jewish Scripture, Yahweh is presented as the healer.¹⁵ OT acknowledges ill health and sickness in God’s world though originally it had no place in God’s plan.¹⁶ God who created us is also our healer (cf. Ps 103:1-5). Though human and traditional means are used to heal sickness, God was seen as the sole healer in the Biblical world.

OT presents Yahweh as a healer par excellence: “I am the Lord who heals you” (Ex 15:26; see also 2Kg 5:7; Is 57:19). This self-attribution comes immediately after the narrator’s account of Yahweh’s liberation of Israel from Egypt. This demonstrates how the notion of “healing” is associated with liberation and formation of a people. Yahweh also asserts, “I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal” (Dt 32:39). It is in the prophets that Yahweh as healer is fully developed. Prophet Isaiah repeatedly appeals to Israel to turn back to God and be healed (Is 6:10; 19:22; 30:26).¹⁷ In the Prophetic writings, we find people appealing to God that he might come and heal persons and the nation. King Hezekiah prays that God might restore his health (Isa 38:16), and Ezekiel portrays Yahweh as healer of the weak, the sick, and the lost (34:16). In the Suffering Servant Song of Yahweh, Isaiah writes that Yahweh will effect the healing of God’s people (53:5). In the Writings, too, God is portrayed

as healer. A recurring motif in the Psalms is God's restoration of the faithful (Ps 30:2; 41:4; 103:3; 107:19-20). Yahweh binds up and heals the wounded (Job 5:17-18).¹⁸

In the NT too, the role of God as healer is continued, but with a significant modification. Healing is a sign of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God, a reminder that behind the healing ministry of Jesus and others stands Yahweh, the sole healer. In the Gospels and Acts, well-being is seen as a divine gift mediated through Jesus, then through his followers. According to Acts, God worked deeds of power, wonders, and signs through Jesus so as to accredit him as God's authorized agent of salvation (2:22); likewise, the Lord "testified to the word of his grace by granting signs and wonders to be done" through Paul and Barnabas (14:3). Others also participate in God's healing activity, but the real source of healing is only Yahweh. This is emphasised in Acts by describing miracles as "signs and wonders," language borrowed from the OT to proclaim God's saving purpose and bear witness to God's commanding influence in history (cf. Ex 7:3; Dt 4:34; 7:19; 26:8; Jer 32:20-21; Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 8:6, 13; 14:3; 15:12).

Summing up, to appreciate better the biblical healings, we need to set aside the contemporary medical knowledge. Ignorance of the theory of secondary causality (germs, medicines), the ancient Israelites viewed Yahweh as the cause and remedy of all human health problems. Humans (prophets, priests and others) who brokered healing to sick people always acted in the name of God.¹⁹

4. Jesus as the Healer

a) Healing and the Historical Jesus

One of the first titles given to Jesus of Nazareth in the gospel tradition is "Holy Man." The demon in the synagogue at Capernaum shouted out: "I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (Mk 1:24). In all cultures, the holy person (man or woman) is characterized by two qualities. This person has ready and facile access to the realm of the deity or the spirit world. Furthermore, the holy person brokers favors from that world to this one, and these favors often include healing. The holy person is primarily a spirit-filled ecstatic healer.

Gospel presents predominantly Jesus as the healer. He was a healer totally different from Jewish holy men as well as Gentile miracle worker like Apollonius of Tyana. We can highlight at least three differences: 1) for Jesus, healing was typical of his ministry; 2) his special emphasis on the component of faith (cf. Mt 9:22; Mk 10:52; Lk 17:19) and 3) his unmediated exercise of the saving power

of God. Jesus did not ask God to heal rather he healed directly with authority. The healing work of Jesus is also different from his followers as well; they pronounced healing in the name of Jesus (cf. Acts 3:6, 16), since he is the source of divine power (cf. Acts 14:14-15).²⁰

We have also references to Jesus as tremendous healer outside NT. Josephus, the historian mentions of Jesus as doing “astounding deeds”. Rabbinic traditions describe Jesus as a magician who deceived and led Israel astray: “He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray.” According to Origen, Celsus thought that Jesus journeyed to Egypt, learned the secrets of magicians, then returned to Palestine as a deceptive quack (Cels. 1.38), and Justin, the Martyr observed that, though Jesus’ healing should have elicited recognition of him as Messiah, some drew the opposite conclusion: “they said it was a display of magic art, for they even dared to say that he was a magician and a deceiver of the people” (Dia. 69:7). In other words, the portrait of Jesus as magician and healer help to explain the hostility that he faced and the subsequent execution.²¹

For some, Jesus did healing as a witch, magician, or quack. According to the Synoptic Gospels, some who saw Jesus’ status as a healer and wonder-worker, attributed his ministry of exorcism and healing to his association with Satan. In response, Jesus interprets his exorcisms as a sign of the work of the Spirit in his mission, and as a demonstration of the dawning of God’s kingdom here on earth (Mt 12:24-33; Mk 3:22-30; Lk 11:14-26). In these exchanges, it is clear that Jesus healing ministry signifies the inbreaking of the kingdom of God. His healing ministry marked the coming of the long-awaited era of salvation (cf. Lk 4:18-19 (citing Isa 58:6; 61:1-2); Mt 8:14-17 (citing Isa 53:4)).²²

b) Jesus as Healer in the Gospels

The Gospel of Matthew records nineteen healing and four summary statements naming healing as typical of Jesus’ mission of establishing God’s kingdom here on earth. Mark has eighteen miracle stories and four summaries and Luke twenty stories and three summaries. Even if we consider the fact that the Synoptic Gospels sometimes report the same episode, the index is still very impressive: six episodes of exorcism and seventeen accounts of healing (including three reports of resuscitation), as well as allusions to unspecified episodes of healing. The Gospel of John refers to miracles as “signs”. There are five episodes of healing (including one resuscitation) in John. Each of the Gospels presents Jesus as healer with its own theology and focus.²³

We find in the Gospels two types of healing: healings which demonstrate Jesus' power over sickness and exorcisms that manifest Jesus' power over Satanic forces. We should include also here resuscitation which unveil Jesus' command over death.

i) Jesus, the Healer in the Gospel of Matthew

Healing stories in Matthew are found mainly in ch. 8–9. They depict Jesus as the one who makes divine blessing of healing available to those on the peripheries — a leper, the slave of a Gentile army officer, an old woman, the demon-possessed, a paralytic, a collector of tolls, a young girl, and the blind. These healings also explain “healing” as return to physical health, restoration of persons to status within their families and communities, reordering of life around God, and the driving back of demonic forces. Thus, cleansing a leper allowed him to have new access to God and to the community of God's people (Mt 8:1- 4), healing a paralytic was tantamount to forgiving his sins (Mt 9:2-8), extending the grace of God to toll collectors and sinners illustrated the work of a physician (Mt 9:9-13), and recovery of sight signified the insight of faith (Mt 9:27-31). Healing includes both instruction and restoration to a proper state of being. For Matthew, accounts of healing also serve to highlight who Jesus is, his Christological predicates. He is the Messiah, Lord and the Son of David (cf. 8:2; 9:27-31; 20:29-34). They also present Jesus' mission into Isaianic anticipation of the new age (8:17; 11:4-5; Isa 35:6; 53:4; 61:1).²⁴

Matthew presents Jesus as the one who has power and mastery over nature. Uniquely in the NT, Matthew uses a Greek word literally translated as “moon-struck” to describe one category of sick people whom Jesus healed (4:24; 17:14-18). Jesus' ability to heal the “moon-struck” demonstrates that he is immune to the alleged power of the moon and much more powerful than magicians and others who worship the moon as servants of that deity.²⁵

ii) Jesus, the Healer in the Gospel of Mark

According to the Gospel of Mark, the healing ministry of Jesus is strategically correlated with the message of the cross. Jesus goes to the cross precisely as the miracle-worker. Mark portrays Jesus as the powerful, self-giving Son of God. Episodes of healing in Mark sometimes have also parabolic function. For example, the comparison of 8:22-25 with 10:46-52 explains well the metaphorical use of sight and blindness for the presence or absence of the insight of faith of his apostles.²⁶

Jesus' healings in the Gospel of Mark include a fever (1:29-31); a repulsive, scaly skin condition (1:40-45); paralysis (2:1-12); withered hands (3:1-6); death (5:21-24, 35-43); menstrual irregularity (haemorrhage, 5:25-34); hearing loss and

speech impediment (7:31-37); and blindness (8:22-26; 10:46-52). The illnesses described by Mark clearly affect the entire person as perceived and understood by first-century Mediterranean culture. Jesus by healing these sick people enabled them to discover and have new meaning for their life. By healing the woman who suffered of menstrual irregularity, Jesus removed her from the category of “unclean” and restored her to full membership in the community and gave sense to her life. Jesus’ success in casting out demons (1:21-28; 3:20-30; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29; 9:38-40) demonstrates his superior power over the demons and the evidence that the kingdom of God has arrived and is present in the life and ministry of Jesus. Mark’s Jesus can be called as a teacher-healer (cf. 1:21, 22; 2:13; 4:1; 5:2, 6, 30) and who gave meaning to those who have lost it.²⁷

iii) Jesus, the Healer in the Gospel of Luke

Healing plays important role for Jesus’ identity and mission in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus in his inaugural address makes it clear that healing and teaching are together complementary means of proclaiming the Good News (4:16-30). Jesus’ role as a healer is a consequence of his anointing by the Spirit (cf. 4:18-19; 5:17; Acts 10:38), and healing is an important means by which Jesus offers salvation (cf. 11:17-19). For Luke, the healing ministry of Jesus is an assault on the forces of evil (cf. 13:10-17).²⁸

Luke has his own distinctive portrait of Jesus as healer. For Luke, blindness and its healing play an important role in the ministry of Jesus. Luke mentions of Jesus giving sight to “many who were blind” (7:21-22), yet surprisingly there is only one specific report of the healing of the blind in the Gospel (18:35-43)! And the focus there is not mere physical blindness but spiritual blindness. Jesus wants the believers to improve their own sight and understanding before trying to improve that of the believers (6:39-42). The parable of the sower and seed (8:1-15) is “illuminated” by the image of a lamp whose light should be seen. Jesus says: “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see” (10:21-24) and criticizes the evil generation for refusing to see the sign it seeks (11:29-32), and urges people to get an “eye check-up” (11:33-36)! Those who want to see the revelation of the Son of Man may actually miss it (17:22-37). Herod misses his opportunity (23:8). In contrast, the crowds that witnessed Jesus’ death returned home beating their breasts (23:48). They saw and understood. Within this context, the blind man who addresses Jesus as “Son of David” and gets back his sight (Lk 18:35-43) highlights the evangelist’s purpose: it is often easier for physically blind people to regain sight than for sighted people to truly understand who Jesus is and the miracle-signs that he works. Many in the

Gospel refuse to listen to and understand Jesus, while the healed man immediately follows Jesus and glorifies God.²⁹

iv) Jesus, the Healer in the Gospel of John

In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, which report many “mighty deeds” of Jesus, John reports just seven “signs.” Jesus refers to his mighty deeds as “works” (John 5:36) and makes this daring promise: “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these” (Jn 14:12). The Greek word *erga*, translated as “works,” was used in the Septuagint to point to Yahweh’s works, the greatest of which are the creation of the world and the redemption of Israel from the Egyptian bondage. In creation, God gives life to all creatures, including human beings. In redeeming the Israelites from the slavery in Egypt, God restores meaning to life. For John, Jesus’ and his disciples’ healing works flow from God’s primal creative and redeeming actions.

We can cluster the seven signs of Jesus into two groups: life-giving works and meaning-restoring works. Life-giving works include restoring to life the son of a royal official in Capernaum (4:46-54), feeding the huge crowd (6:1-14), and raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44). Meaning-restoring works include providing choicest wine for the wedding (2:1-11), restoring a lame man to mobility (5:1-18), calming a stormy sea (6:16-21), and restoring sight to the man born blind (9:1-41). Interestingly, in each sign, even in non-sickness events, Jesus, the healer restored meaning to people’s lives.

According to Jn 20:30-31, Jesus’ “signs”, including healing episodes has the purpose of cultivating faith in Jesus, the Messiah and the Son of God. The healing episodes are not mere healings. They go beyond themselves to the genuine identity of Jesus, pointing out his filial relationship with God and demonstrating that it was the Father who sent Jesus, his only Son (5:36-38).

In summary, Jesus was an influential intercessor with God, the one and only healer. Jesus’ role was that of a folk healer who acted perfectly according to the folk traditions of his Middle Eastern culture. By his healings, Jesus not only healed the physical infirmities of the sick people but in fact restored meaning to people’s lives.

5. Healing and the Dawn of the Kingdom of God

“Kingdom of God” is the central metaphor in the preaching and mission of Jesus. The imminent kingdom of God is the central message of Jesus from the beginning of his public ministry to the Last Supper (Mt 4:17; 26:29). In many respects the expression “kingdom of God” is original to Jesus.³⁰

The people of Israel were looking with hope for a better future, when sorrow and sighing would flee away (Is 29:17-19; 35:10). There is rabbinic evidence that people were looking for a Messiah who would heal the sickness of the world. The Talmud preserves among “signs of the Messiah” the portrait of “one in the midst of the suffering poor tending their wounds.” This recalls Isaiah’s Suffering Servant Song where the servant of the Lord would bear our griefs and carry our sorrows (cf. 53:3-8). Matthew too reflects the same while explaining the healing mission of Jesus (8:17). For Matthew understands “he took up our infirmities and carried our diseases” to mean, not that Jesus was sick, but that he was concerned about the sick.³¹

Luke presents Jesus announcing in similar terms the arrival of God’s kingdom — “freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed” (Lk 4:18). When John the Baptist, hearing in the prison of the ministry of Jesus, sent his disciples to enquire Jesus if he was indeed the Messiah, Jesus sent back with this message: “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised” (cf. Mt 11:4-6). Christ’s healing ministry proclaimed that the expected king had at last come and that the kingdom of God was gracious, loving and kind together with healing and total liberation.³²

The nature of God’s kingdom is health-giving, down to earth and relevant to the daily problems of the whole person. Healing miracles also shows that new power was at work in the world through Jesus Christ (Lk 4:36; 5:17; 6:19). Those who witnessed the miracles declared that “God was with him” (Lk 7:16; Ac 2:22; 10:38). Jesus’ presence proclaimed and achieved victory already over all demonic forces that degraded and tormented humankind.³³

He did not allow miracle-ministry to distract him from the preaching of the kingdom. God’s kingdom cannot be built on signs and wonders alone (Lk 4:3-4, 9-12); a generation that demanded “signs” was “evil” — incapable of discerning God. To discourage the wonder-seeking excitement in Galilee, he often warned the cured to be silent. Yet, in spite of all Jesus’ avoidance of display, “the healing Messiah” left everywhere a deep and lasting impression, kindling new hope for the afflicted and the poor.³⁴

Jesus validates the dawn of the kingdom through the display of power in healing sickness.³⁵ Jesus power over all types of sickness (healings), Satanic forces (exorcisms) and death (resuscitation) manifest the dawn of the kingdom of God in the life and mission of Jesus. So, Jesus’ healing is nothing but coming of God’s kingdom and restoring fulness of life for those who lost all hope and meaning of

life by the oppressive structures of those days. Jesus' success in casting out demons (Mk 1:21-28; 3:20-30; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29; 9:38-40) demonstrates his superior power to that of demons and the evidence that the reign of God has arrived and is present in the ministry of Jesus.³⁶ As a healer of lepers, Jesus is the creator of a new world order called "the kingdom of God" where no one is despised, excluded and discriminated (cf. Mt 4:17; 10:7).³⁷

The healings are manifestations of God's compassion and the messianic kindness of Jesus, the shepherd (cf. Mk 6:35; 8:2). Jesus understood that the healings are the signs of the kingdom of God, signs of human liberation. The healings are indications of the dawn of the eschatological age, foretold by the prophets. Jesus alludes to Is 22:18; 35:5-6; 61 and 65 to assure that he is the eschatological prophet. The healings are in fact the proclamation of the kingdom of God in deeds. They are concrete manifestations of the kingdom of God; a new age of love, mercy, compassion, justice, social equality and forgiveness.³⁸

Healings are also saving events which anticipate the final salvation in the glorious kingdom of God. They are the provisional signs of the final salvation. Indeed, the inner saving meaning of the healing can be perceived only by the eyes of faith.³⁹

6. Sickness as Punishment for Sins

Healing and sickness are indicators of Yahweh's favour and displeasure. Ancient Israelites thought that there is a causal link from sin to sickness. Sickness was considered as God's punishment for one's sins. The chapter 28 of the book of Deuteronomy speaks of blessings for obedience and severe punishments including various sickness for committing sins of disobedience (cf. Dt 28). The book of Proverbs asserts the good deeds done by people will be rewarded with God's blessings while the sins and wickedness will not be tolerated by God but the wicked people will be severely punished including sickness and death (cf. Pro 3:28-35; 11:19; 13:13-23). The three friends of Job, namely Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar argue with Job precisely on this point. All the sufferings and sickness of Job were attributed as God's punishment and curse for the supposedly committed sins of Job by these three friends (cf. Job 8:1-22; 11:6; 22:1-30). The same idea is also reflected by Paul in the context of the Corinthians taking part in the Eucharist unworthily and sinfully (cf. 1Co 11:29-30). In Jn 9, the disciples assume the causal relation of sin to physical disorder but interestingly Jesus makes no general pronouncement on the subject.⁴⁰

Illness situates a person outside the boundaries of God's holy community. The sick violates God's command and desire: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:2; cf. 11:45; 20:7). These words were spoken to the entire congregation of Israel. When sicknesses like blindness, lameness, and so on afflict a priest, that priest is disqualified from offering sacrifice (Lev 21:16-24). By extension, the ordinary Israelite afflicted with such problems would similarly be excluded from approaching God. So, sickness problems in the Bible are essentially purity problems. They remove a person from God's holy community: "He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp" (Lev 13:46). They rupture a person's relationship with God. Such a person is not permitted to approach God until the problem is remedied. Only sin can rupture one's relationship with God. If sickness can rupture relationship with God, there must be some relationship with sin and sickness. So, the Israelites believed that sickness is the punishment for the sins committed.

7. Exorcism and God's Kingdom

The summary statements frequently join the mentioning of healing sick people with driving demons out of possessed people (cf. Mt 8:16-17, Mk 1:32-34, Lk 6:17-19). Though the modern mind tends to distinguish these two activities, the Mediterranean world sees both as indicative of a loss of well-being and understands that both require a remedy.⁴¹

At the time of Jesus, people had strong fear for demons. Many illnesses were attributed to evil spirits especially mental illness and epilepsy. In the book of Tobit, sickness is seen as the result of the work of demons. When Tobit was blinded by sparrow drop-pings, physicians were unable to cure him (Tob 2:10). The entrails of a fish were the remedy to restore his sight (11:8) and at the same time were effective in expelling demons (cf. Tob 6:7; 8:1-3).⁴² Healing of such illness was conceived as victory over Satan. Jesus defeated all forces that enslaved and alienated human beings and liberated the humanity from all evil forces.⁴³

Violently insane behaviours (Mt 8:28; Mk 5:1-5), the inability to speak (Mt 9:32) or to hear (Mk 9:25), blindness (Mt 12:22), epilepsy (Lk 9:39) apparent tendencies of psychologically divided self (Mt 17:15), etc. were attributed to the work of the evil spirits in the ancient world. That is why, they are not "healed" but "exorcised" in the Gospels (cf. Mk 1:32). According to Mark, the first messianic deed of Jesus was an exorcism (1:21-27).⁴⁴

The exorcism stories have a fixed form, technically known as “Form”. They are:

- a) A description of the demoniac: a man possessed by an unclean spirit (Mk 1:23)
- b) Confrontation between Jesus and the unclean spirit (Mk 1:24-25)
- c) The exit of the evil spirit with a convulsion (Mk 1:26)
- d) The reaction of the witness (Mk 1:27)

Jesus did not use any secret technique to cast out demons. Interestingly, we do not find any magic, chanting of mantras or sophisticated practices. Simply by the power of his Word, Jesus cast the evil spirits out (cf. Mk 3:21-30).⁴⁵ In the context of Beelzebul controversy (cf. Mk 3:21-30), Jesus also teaches the meaning of exorcism. Jesus’ exorcism brings an end to the kingdom of Satan. Jesus has bound Satan and destroyed his rule and the head of the evil kingdom is crushed totally. The Spirit of God is the eschatological gift of the kingdom of God and he is active here and now. The eschaton has already come in the preaching of the kingdom of Jesus. So, exorcisms like healings are the sign of the coming of the kingdom where God will be their only King and all people will experience fullness of life and joy with love and peace.⁴⁶

Exorcisms are the proofs that the kingdom of God has broken into the present world. But in fact, this idea expresses the ancient world-view. According to ancient world-view, the world is a realm of evil forces that threaten human beings. They thought that sickness is caused by evil and sin. Satan and his demons are the cause of the miseries of human existence.⁴⁷ Jesus has totally conquered the Satan, enemies of God’s kingdom. God’s kingdom is a kingdom of love, mercy, compassion, justice and forgiven: a new world order where everyone is treated equally with social dignity and respect.⁴⁸

8. Leprosy and Isolation

The leprosy mentioned in Lev 13-14, is not actually leprosy in the modern understanding (Hansen’s disease). Possibly, it is a kind of skin problem. Victims of biblical leprosy were isolated from the holy community simply because they defiled it and not because they were spreading germs and it was a contagious sickness. The concern was purity rather than sickness, and the desired outcome was cleansing rather than cure. That is why Jesus instructs the one healed to go and show to the priest (cf. Lk 5:12-14). Here the priest is like a health care consultant, validating the cure and mediating the former leper’s return to community with God’s people in full communion.⁴⁹

For the people of Israel, there is a direct link between sickness and ritual impurity as is spelled in great detail with respect to leprosy (cf. Lev 13-14). When symptoms appeared, priests had to examine the patients for changes in skin and hair color. After a seven-day waiting period patients had to be re-examined (Lev 13:12-17). Confirmed lepers were treated with a protocol of ritual degradation. They had two choices: to die and to be reborn. They dressed like corpses, shrouded their faces, did not cut their hair and wailed like mourners and were asked to live outside the city or village in isolation (cf. Lev 13:45; Num 5:18; Mic 3:7; Is 52:11). And in no way, they can enter the temple. When the symptoms of leprosy subsided, priests readmitted lepers to their places in the village. And then, they can enter the temple too.

By the time of Jesus, “leprosy,” was treated similarly as in the OT as a social disorder. The Gospels portray Jesus (cf. Mt 8:1-4; 11:2-6; Mk 1:40-45; Lk 5:12-16; 7:18-35; 17:11-19) and his disciples (cf. Matt 10:5-15) treating lepers. The miracles emphasize both his mission as a Suffering Servant and the social consequences of his way of life. Jesus humbles himself by becoming human, and accepts death on the cross to restore Israel and everyone to the fullness of life. The protocol for the healing of lepers in the OT was a prototype for the paschal mystery of bringing life from death. Power is acquired by becoming powerless. The repatriation of lepers from the margins of society by Jesus was also a first step signalling that the kingdom of God was being established. In this new world, everything would be upside down. The powerless, like the lepers would be powerful. The reign of kings and prophets who oppressed the poor would come to an end. In this new world order of God’s kingdom, there will be preference for the lepers, the blind, the lame, the deaf and all those marginalised in the society.⁵⁰

9. Blindness and God’s Punishment

Blindness was very common in the ancient Middle East. Possibly, because of this reason, the blind and the deaf were guaranteed special protection in the Torah (cf. Lev 19:14). Often blindness occurred due to trachoma, a contagious infection of the inner mucous lining of the eyelids and of the cornea. The disease was transmitted by flies and by poor hygiene. Washing of hands was an important step in preventing the spread of this disease. In antiquity, scarcity of water encouraged many people to omit even required ritual ablutions (possibly the case in Mk 7). There were also other reasons for the loss of sight in antiquity. Some were congenitally blind (Jn 9). Sorrow was also blamed for some eye problems. Job lamented: “my eye has grown dim with sorrow” (17:7; cf. also Ps 88:9). Old age was blamed for others

(cf. 1Sam 4:15). Still other cases sound to modern ears like cataracts (Tob 6:8). A widely recognized cure for blindness was gall, a bitter greenish fluid secreted by the liver and stored in the gall bladder. The angel Raphael which means “God is my healer,” advised Tobias to use the gall of a fish to cure blindness (cf. Tob 6:8). With this remedy, Tobias restored his father’s sight (Tob 11:7-15).⁵¹

The real misery of blindness in ancient Israel was the awareness that God who bestows this gift has taken it away (Ex 4:11). In some, though not all instances, loss of sight was associated with displeasing God by committing sin. (cf. Gn 19:11; Dt 28:28; 2Kg 6:18; Acts 13:11).⁵² Quoting Prophet Isaiah, Jesus speaks of giving sight to the blind as one of the manifestations of the coming of Messiah and establishment of God’s kingdom here on earth (cf. Lk 4:18). In the Gospels, there are six episodes of Jesus giving sight to one or more blind people. Three of these episodes seems to be independent (cf. Mk 8:22-29; Mt 9:27-31; Jn 9:1-7) and the other three seems to be the same episode with parallel versions of the same synoptic tradition (cf. Mt 10:46b-52; Mt 20:29-34; Lk 18:35-43). As Jesus foretold in the beginning of his ministry, he did give sight to the blind reiterating once again his identity as Messiah and the blinds as one of the preferred recipients of his kingdom of God.

The reason attributed for a man born blind is sin, his own sin or the sin of his parents. Though Jesus does not ascribe to this view, this opinion was prevalent at the time of Jesus (cf. Jn 9:1-3).⁵³ The men of Sodom who wanted to commit great sins were struck with blindness (cf. Gn 19:1-11). The Israelites were warned of severe punishment including blindness for their sin of disobedience (cf. Dt 28:28). When Arameans, the enemies of Israel wanted to attack Elisha, the prophet prayed to God to punish them by striking with blindness. God listened to prayer and struck them with blindness (cf. 2Kg 6:18). The magician Elymas of Cyprus who opposed the Word of God preached by Paul was punished for his sin with temporary blindness (cf. Acts 13:4-12). Tobit and the man-born-blind in John 9 illustrate exceptions to this belief.⁵⁴

10. Longevity of Life

The psalmist observes: “seventy is the sum of our years, or eighty if we are strong” (90:10). Does it mean that the ancient people’s life-expectancy is 70? It may not be true. Study of skeletal remains suggests that life-expectancy in the ancient world averaged only between thirty and forty-five years depending on the specific location and the period. Certainly, modern human lives much longer than the ancient people for different reasons. In ancient cities, almost thirty per- cent of live-births

were dead by the age of six. Another sixty percent of live-births would have died by mid-teens. By the mid-twenties, seventy-five percent would be dead. Only ten percent might have lasted until the mid-forties, and perhaps as few as three percent made it to their sixties.⁵⁵

The death of the twelve-year-old girl restored to life by Jesus (cf. Mk 5:21-24, 35-43) is a very common experience in his day. The cause for her death is not indicated by the evangelist. But it is interesting to note that the girl could have been a victim of the “evil eye”. The word “evil eye” appears in Pro 28:22; 23:6, 8; Tob 4:7, 16; Mt 20:15; Mk 7:22; and elsewhere, but is often translated as envy.⁵⁶ There is a pervasive belief in Mediterranean cultures that some people can cause misfortune like sickness, deformity, death, crop-failure, business and financial loss and other tragedies by a mere “glance” described in the contemporary Middle East as “the fierce look”. Frequently these people have an eye ailment like the modern “lazy eye” or weak muscular control of one eye. The “glance” is associated with a strong desire to destroy whatever they behold with “envy” and “jealousy”. In the Mediterranean world, a person may envy a precise object like this lovely child. Since it cannot be possessed, it must be destroyed. The agents of destruction are invariably any of the capricious and malicious spirits. Often attractive and gifted children are common targets of the evil eye and malicious spirits. A common preventive measure against the evil eye and its consequences like sickness and death is to wear something blue or red in color (ribbons, tassels). Special amulets can also thwart the evil eye.⁵⁷

It is also a custom to spit, sometimes three times to overcome evil eye. Possibly, it is in this background, we need to understand the Pauline text of Gal 4:14. Others bite the knuckle of the index finger. Possessing the evil eye is not considered as sickness in the ancient world. Normally, people suspected of having it ordinarily go out of their way to be kind and generous to avoid the accusations.

11. Healing Ministry of Jesus and Its Implications for Consecrated Persons

The healing ministry of Jesus which is the manifestation of the dawn of God’s kingdom is an important aspect of the mission of today’s consecrated person. Practically all the religious congregations are involved in one way or other in sacramental or non-sacramental healing ministry. Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI) reports that there are more than 1,000 Christian hospitals with about 60,000 beds in India. More than 60,000 consecrated persons, mainly women religious are also actively involved in health ministry in India. As the country is plagued with Covid-19 pandemic, CHAI has written to the Prime Minister of India on 25th March, 2020 expressed its willingness to offer its healthcare facilities for

treatment of the virus infected people. The Catholic body has also offered their resources both personnel and material to collaborate with the government to fight the pandemic. This is the Christian spirit and dedication for the mission of Jesus. Yes, the work that the Church has done by way of health ministry throughout the world is phenomenal. We shall present here just a few theological and practical reflections of the healing ministry of today's consecrated persons.

The disciples shared the healing work of Jesus in the earlier years and the Church continued the same in the apostolic age.⁵⁸ The healing was carried out in the name of Jesus. Indirectly, we learn of signs and wonders during Paul's missions (Rom 15:18-19; cf. 2Cor 12:12; Gal 3:5). The gift of healing was not limited only to the apostles, but bestowed on others too "as the Spirit wills" (1Co 12:9, 11).⁵⁹ Luke's constant care of Paul enables us to understand that non-miraculous means of healing were also part of Apostolic Church.⁶⁰

The healing mission of the Church in the world flows from its mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God's love, inaugurated by the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, leads us to discover the fullness of salvation. Since the Christian community experiences the presence and the power of Jesus, the Church cannot but to continue the work of Jesus in making present God's kingdom and bringing wholeness to broken people of the world.⁶¹

Ministry to the sick has always a significant place in the life of the Church. The practice of praying for the sick and dying in the liturgy and of bringing the Eucharist to them began very early in the Church. Even Desert Fathers attest physical healing experienced through prayer and anointing of the sick. The charism of healing is listed by Paul as one of the gifts of the holy Spirit (1Cor 12:9). The phenomenon of pilgrimages to important shrines like Lourdes manifests the faith of the people in the power of God to grant physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. Believers have also discovered that the healing sought in prayer is much more than mere physical cure.⁶²

The Church understands the importance of Mt 25:31-46 and placed the visitation and care of the sick among the corporal works of mercy. It played a leading role in the West in the founding of hospitals and hospices. Much of this work has been carried out by religious communities that were founded for the specific purpose of ministry to the sick. This tradition lives on even today in the many health care facilities sponsored by the Church.⁶³

Today we are in urgent need of an exorcism from the exorcists, who have blocked the liberation wrought by Jesus' kingdom of love. An exorcism should address all

the enslaving forces like hatred, communalism, fanaticism, racism, discrimination, injustice, inequality, etc. Jesus authorised the disciples to continue to exercise the authority over unclean spirits of all times (Mt 10:8; Mk 3:1-19; 6:7-13; Lk 9:1-2).⁶⁴

Healings are to be seen as signs of God's liberation from any sort of evil that oppress the humanity. Healings are acts of God's love.⁶⁵ We should be agents of manifesting God's love and liberating people from all sorts of evil. We should liberate people from natural catastrophes like epidemics, pandemics, famine, flood, earth-quake, sickness, corruption, sinfulness, violent passion, inability to establish meaningful relationship, etc. Our fight should also be against unjust and tyrannical systems of oppression, exploitation, racial discrimination, caste discrimination, etc. We should heal and exorcise the sinful and corrupt social and political institutions, the distorted and harmful religious beliefs and institutions, materialism, exploitation, war, discrimination of all kinds.⁶⁶

The leprosy of today is not merely physical leprosy but guilt feelings, immoral life that leads to all kinds of unknown sickness, uncontrolled selfishness for amassing wealth. The mighty healings and exorcisms should be continued and completed in our life and ministry.⁶⁷

The beneficiaries of Jesus' healing ministry were exclusively the poor and those in the peripheries. The poor people have preferential option in the kingdom of God. We need to ask the question. Who do we serve? Who are mainly the beneficiaries of our hospitals and health centres? Are our hospitals and health centres accessible to the poor and needy? We do understand that we need money for paying for medical personnel and upgrading facilities and infrastructure to offer quality service. But this argument cannot be a justification for excluding the poor from our health ministry. We need to find ways and areas to care the poor and the peripheries. Poverty can never be the reason to exclude the poor from our medical facilities.

Jesus treated the poor with care and concern. He had great compassion for them. The poor felt at home in his presence. His language was one of understanding, respect and mercy. How do we treat those sick people who come to our hospitals and health centres? People come to us not for mere medicines and treatment. They expect more than that from us, consecrated persons. We religious, both men and women, work in hospitals and health centres not as mere doctors and nurses or administrators. We are there as radical followers of Jesus, the ambassadors of Jesus who is merciful, compassionate, caring, gentle, respectful.

The Sacraments of Healing

The grace of Christ received by the celebration of the sacraments is a source of healing for body as well as spirit.⁶⁸ The Eucharist is the principal sacrament of healing for the Christian community. Faith in the healing effects of the Eucharist is expressed by the community in the prayer before reception of communion recalling the words of the centurion (cf. Mt 8:8-9). Through the intercessory prayer of the liturgy and by reception of the Eucharist brought by the Church's ministers, the sick people are also included in the Eucharistic celebration of the community.

In the sacrament of reconciliation, believers receive the healing power of Christ's forgiveness. This sacramental experience of being forgiven and being called to forgive can be a source of profound spiritual and emotional healing. Vatican II renewed the sacrament of reconciliation declaring that the whole person's bodily and spiritual dimensions are helped by the grace of the holy Spirit

The practice of anointing the sick with oil, commended in Jam 5:14-15, was adopted by the early Church and eventually developed into an official sacrament. This anointing has both physical and spiritual effects. Anyone who are seriously ill are encouraged to receive it.

As consecrated persons, we are not interested in mere physical healing. Healing is integral which includes biological, emotional, relational and spiritual. Jesus' healing included all these aspects. Consecrated persons as dispensers of the sacraments, must aim at integral healings of people. Our mission of advancing the coming of the fullness of the kingdom certainly requires our commitment for integral healing, the gift of the sacraments.

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THE ART OF HAPPY LIVING OF CONSECRATED LIFE AS ORDAINED MINISTERS (WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON INTEGRAL FORMATION)

Justin Thomas Kuzhivelil, CMF

INTRODUCTION

We live in a globalized world; everything is possible at our fingertip by means of the incredible growth of modern technologies and mass media. We live in an 'online' world; online purchases, google meet, zoom classes, etc. A small electronic device named as 'mobile phone' took birth from the Motorola company in 1973, by Martin Cooper, an executive and researcher, is almost controlling the movement of the world today. I would say we are in a 'fingertip revolution'. Is it our only life? I think it is only a part of our life not the whole. Our life is much more than that, beyond all these noisy and fabricated or globalized world. Our life and vocation should create newness and differences than being washed away by the media and technologies. A small Virus, which the naked eyes cannot see has petrified the entire world. We are stunned and terrified by the pandemic Covid-19 to such an extent that the Church is having online Holy Mass. Can the technologies save the world from Covid-19? The technology may help us to a certain extent to meet some necessities of our life but not everything of this world. Is the world offering a happy and joyful life to the consecrated persons?

St. Paul writes to the Corinthian community, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new" (2Cor 5:17). Religious life is an invitation by the Church to learn the art of living with Christ. The art of living religious life by radically following Christ in every sphere of life will definitely bring change and newness. Once Mahatma Gandhi said, "be the change that you wish to see in the world". What does the Church expect of consecrated persons in this globalized world today? Do we have a heart which kindles God's love to promote the art of living consecrated life happily? Or are we carried away by the so-called 'fingertip revolution' and materialism?

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1. Theological Perspective of Consecrated Life

Our Lord said: “For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt19:12). According to the *Code of Canon Law*, “A life consecrated through profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living, in which the faithful follow Christ more closely and radically under the action of the ‘Holy Spirit’, and are totally dedicated to God, who is supremely loved. By a new and special title, they are dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God’s Kingdom, for the honour of God, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world. They are a splendid sign in the Church, as they foretell the heavenly glory” (CIC 573, CCEO 410). The speciality of consecrated life is in the fulfilment of the charism of the Congregation, community life and the practice of vows. Consecrated persons try to seek God’s will and the signs of the times according to the vision of their founders and foundresses. Consecrated persons must be the image of Jesus and be in communion with him by their prayer life, personal asceticism, and be in communion with one another.

Consecrated life is to make oneself available happily to God and the Church. It is in the Second Vatican Council that the word ‘consecration’ was used, to denote this life as an act of self-giving and obligation to service. The Council reminds that Baptism is the fundamental consecration of every Christian and the religious, in order to derive more abundant fruits from this Baptismal grace, we make profession of the evangelical counsels; chastity, poverty and obedience in the Church in order to be more intimately consecrated to God (cf. LG 44). Second Vatican Council, repeatedly stressed the fundamental vocation of a Christian; religious/priest is the following of Christ (cf. LG 44). The common understanding of consecrated life is an imitation of the type of life chosen by the Lord for himself and for his disciples. This is reconfirmed by *Perfectae Caritatis* which says, “Since the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels, let this be held by all institutes as the highest rule” (PC 2).

1.2 Essential Components of Consecrated Life

A religious priest is called to a dedicated and consecrated life style. From Second Vatican Council onwards the term ‘consecrated life’ is used to designate about, all those who seek to follow Jesus Christ radically through the profession of evangelical counsels (cf. LG 44). There are four forms of consecrated life which have been recognized and defined by the *Code of Canon Law*.

The two institutional forms are: ‘Religious Institutes and Secular Institutes’. Those who follow these two forms belong to an Institute, in which all members share a common charism and common patrimony, and lead a life according to the Constitutions approved by the competent ecclesiastical authority. The other two forms are, namely the hermits or monks and consecrated virgins. Those who follow these two forms are not part of any Institute, but live their consecration with personal responsibility under the direction of the particular Bishop of the place (cf. *CIC* 603-604). The consecrated person is called to serve, to teach, to minister to the Church and give a public witness in a very specific way. His call essentially is not only to a way of religious life, but also to a way of service. Here we shall see some of the essential components.

1.2.1 Following Christ

Jesus said to Simon and his brother Andrew, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people” (Mk1:13). Consecrated life means to follow Christ closely with greater commitment. Consecrated life requires a special call from the Lord. The whole life of Jesus can be summarized as a continuous search for the will of the Father, because He was sent into the world to do the will of the Father. Therefore, consecrated persons, continue the same style of the life of Christ and carry out His mission in the world, which has been entrusted to the Church by his apostles. Responding positively to the call of the Lord, the person is committed to consecrated life by following Christ closely and to live radically the Christian vocation.¹

1.2.2 The Evangelical Counsels

“Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and pay your vows to the most high” (Ps 50:14). Life consecrated through the profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living, in which the persons follow Christ closely under the action of the Holy Spirit and are totally dedicated to God (cf. *CIC* 573). The evangelical counsels which are the main sustenance of the religious life based on the teachings and the examples of Jesus Christ himself, are divine gifts which Church received from the Lord and preserves always (cf. *CIC* 575). In effect, through the profession of the evangelical counsels made in the Church, the religious wishes to be set free from hindrances that could hold him back from loving God ardently and worship him perfectly and to consecrate himself in a more radical way to the service of God (cf. *LG* 44). The evangelical counsels have to be lived in an authentic manner, it has a great significance for the religious and priests; each vow gives a specific counter response to the great temptations of our time.² These three evangelical counsels are the real source to grow in holiness and they keep the

religious very special by their special dedication to the Kingdom of God. Chastity is living one's sexuality in the right way according to one's vocation and charism. It is a common Christian virtue.³ The vow of poverty is not so much about sacrificing or depriving oneself of wealth and property. Its archetypal, primary focus is trusting in the providence of God, caring and responsible stewardship of the earth and the goods of creation. The fundamental meaning of the vow of obedience is to listen attentively to seek God's will and to respond to one's inner voice.

1.2.3 *Community Life in the Consecrated Life*

Religious community is bound together by God. It is the faith in God that makes the religious community. The ecclesial community is a mystery of communion and mission. It announces "faith (*kerygma*), the expression of communion (*koinonia*), and the service (*diakonia*) of ecclesial reality" (cf. *FLC*13, 46). "A religious community is formed under the leadership of a superior based on the pattern of Jesus Christ" (*CIC* 608). The community life is one of the fundamental features of consecrated life. It implies that the consecrated people seek the sanctification and apostolate in the context of community life. Charism is embodied in the relationships of the community members, with God, and with the world around them. The particular charism enables community life and witness to others through mutual love, prayer, and work. In a consecrated community, we can find a balanced synthesis of asceticism and activity, vision and mission, commitment and companionship. Religious community is for mission and the mission is in favour of the communion. A missionary is sent by the community for the mission (cf. *VC* 72).⁴

A religious priest is bound to dedicate himself and live in a community keeping a common rule, specific structures and provisions established in the Constitutions of the particular Institute or Congregation. He is placed under the authority of his religious superior and lives in the religious community and takes part in the mission of the Congregation according to the charism of the founder and be directed by the other important norms of the Congregation. In most cases, a religious priest is not linked to any diocese; but canonically any religious priest may work in any mission and be under the administrative power of the respective diocesan Bishop.⁵

1.2.4 *The Mission of the Consecrated Life*

The Fundamental mission of a consecrated person is to be a witness to humanity the 'absolute value of the Kingdom of God' to sprout and grow with the fruits of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22-23) and a sense of vocational fulfilment with sheer perseverance. The mission of consecrated life is to honour God, build up the Church, be committed

to the salvation of the world, and strive for the perfection of charity at the service of the Kingdom of God. This formulation shows the dual purpose of the consecrated life: one is internal or personal and the other is external or ecclesiastical. The internal aim is the sanctification of the consecrated person, namely the achievement of the perfection of charity through consecrated life, and the external or ecclesial aim is to participate in the mission of the Church. Consecrated life is not only to achieve personal sanctification, but as an essential and inseparable participation in the mission of evangelization and the pastoral activities of the Church.⁶

1.2.5 The Uniqueness of the Ordained Ministry of Religious

Jesus Christ chose and sent the apostles; He continues his mission through the Holy Spirit to choose and call persons to be ordained ministers. The term ordained ministry refers to persons who have received a charism and whom the church appoints for ministerial service by ordination through the invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands. The uniqueness of a religious is to follow Christ and imitate him in a radical way by practicing the evangelical counsels according to the charism of the Institute and by living in the community. The uniqueness of the ordained ministry of religious is also consisting of the same elements as mentioned above, but the grace of priesthood and its sacramental value makes them different. The men who feel called to do religious priestly ministry may join the seminary of a religious Congregation, be part of the systematic formation process, especially the novitiate formation, learn the norms of the Church and various theological subjects, which helps one to be more strong in Christian faith, and later having known enough about the religious priesthood, may seek for ordination. In that case, his vocational style of life will be religious, his ministerial vocation will be priestly. The young men of a religious Congregation by the profession of vows begin the life as a religious in the Church, then after the long formation process and making perpetual profession, later he will be ordained as priest for the ministry of the Church.⁷ A religious priest is a man who is specially called by God same like a religious brother or a sister, called to live his baptismal call as a discipleship to Christ within a religious community through the profession of vows in the light of the charism of the congregation. He is called to preach the good news of Jesus and to promote catholic faith. They are ministers of the sacraments of the Church in order to spread God's love, mercy and compassion.

St. John Paul II delivering a message in the plenary session of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on 28th September, 2001 said:

Consecrated persons are called by the Spirit to a continual conversion to give new vigour to the prophetic dimension of their vocation. In fact, they are called to place their very existence at the service of the Kingdom of God, leaving everything behind and closely imitating the life of Jesus Christ, assume a most important teaching role for the whole people of God.⁸

Before a candidate joins the seminary or the novitiate, he should discern very clearly to what sort of vocation he is called for. They bear witness to a personal spiritual experience, which is inspired by the witness and teaching of their founder. They live in a community and lead a life in conformity with the rule of life which they have bound themselves to observe. They are itinerant and available for the service of the Universal Church.⁹

2. Consecrated Life for Making Differences among the Challenges

The Church offers a wide opportunity for religious to work for the Kingdom of God. But do religious show commitment in living the evangelical counsels authentically? Do we really enjoy our living in our religious communities? Most of us have become so dry in our thinking and remain lukewarm in our attitude, and somewhat we have lost the real joy of being a consecrated person. The real enthusiasm has to come from within. Our consecration should not be for merely enjoying material pleasures of this world. If a consecrated person feels that, the real joy of living the consecrated life rests in materialism, then what is our difference with the lay people? The lay people will really challenge us in this regard, their life will be exemplary than we the consecrated people. St. Paul advises, “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:2-3). If a person knows the art of living happy and simple consecrated life, that itself is a living homily for the people. Pope Francis during the mass at the Casa Santa Marta on 31st January, 2020 said, “Worldliness is a slow slide into sin.”¹⁰ Pope Francis will inspire us in this regard with his right attitude to face the secular and worldly influences. He inspires everyone with profound faith in God, exemplary life style, inspirational leadership, tireless call for a poor Church, respect for the environment and the practice of mercy. Today we need better leaders like Pope Francis to give a better identity to the Church. Therefore, if we can form our seminarians with those values of Pope Francis and give them the practical inputs to face secularism and negative influences of the society, we can form a better generation of priests. Teach the seminarians to be merciful as Pope says, “mercy is the face of God, make them to be God oriented, improve their spiritual atmospheres and form them to be better human beings”.

2.1 Forgetting the Religious Dimension of Religious Priesthood

Our men religious mostly receive a formation primarily oriented towards the ministerial priesthood, knowingly or unknowingly less focus is towards their growth of religious vocation. Mostly reflecting about religious vocation and learning about the religious life is limited to the novitiate formation. After the ordination so much of their time and energy will be spent for their pastoral and other ministries and mostly the religious dimension of their life is neglected. In fact, men religious should be formed by giving equal importance about the priestly and religious dimension of their vocation. Their priestly ministry should help them to keep up the authenticity of their radical discipleship to Jesus and religious vocation. They shouldn't forget that they are basically and primarily religious and missionaries. But we see a tendency among some of the young religious priests, forgetting their religious vocation and neglecting religious dimension of their life, especially community life and indulging in the worldly affairs of the society. Therefore, training in integrating religious life and insight with emotional needs, and with the concrete life situations is an important aspect of formation. Theology classes alone cannot offer them sufficient awareness about the real practical problems of daily living as consecrated persons. The formators should take initiative to introduce them gradually into the art of religious living in all spheres of their existence, allowing them to know the art of living religious life. Religious priestly formation should help the seminarians to develop their personality and mindset in tune with the religious life.¹¹

2.2 The Role of Formation in the Art of Living the Consecrated life

Formation of future priests has always been a matter of serious concern for the Church. Formation is primarily a learning process which involves change, growth and transformation of the candidates as a whole, and helping them to become better human beings after the model of Jesus Christ. Today, we live in a fast changing, post-modern world, dominated by new forces. Though a spiritual quest is visible in today's world, it is at the same time inactive and remains static because, it is coloured with materialism, natural inclinations, unenlightened faith, wrong influence of media, etc. The present Indian context of religious pluralism, religious fundamentalism, religious violence, clericalism, institutionalism, recent scandals, and various Church related issues have devastated the simple faith of the people.

In this context, are the seminarians being prepared to face the challenges of the contemporary society? We need to keep in mind that the mindset of our young religious men has drastically changed. At least some of them look at priesthood as a profession or an economic mobility. Hence, the Church should consider the

seriousness of these issues and concentrate on the formation of priests. Seminary is a place, where a man learns not only to do the things a priest does (his doing) but what it means to be a priest (his being). The religious priest is a living and transparent image of Christ the eternal priest (cf. *PDV* 12).

2.3 Scandals and Problems in the Church

Scandals and problems are great challenges to the Church. The scandalous image of a few priests and religious have spoiled the good image of the Church. Similarly, the perception of priesthood is negatively coloured and the people also started creating a negative attitude towards the priests. Scandals and problems have become very common in the Church. As a result, we can see the manipulation of some of the media and lot of criticisms and confusions among the people of God. When we analyse these issues, we know that everyone is not a culprit but only a few of them who have personal problems like loneliness, unhappiness and dissatisfaction in the community, lack of support, poor and faulty relationships, inferiority complex, emotional immaturity, etc. In order to face today's scandals and problems, Church promotes many ongoing formation programmes for the religious and ordained ministers and systematic and life oriented initial formation for the future priests. The formators should help the formees to improve their relationship skills. For this purpose, better skill development and personality development courses by experts can be added to the formation programme. Seminarians need to be corrected when they behave disgracefully and they need to be accompanied when they need genuine help (cf. *PDV* 70-74). According to St. John Paul II, for many young people, the question of religion and the need for spirituality and self-discipline are to be more relevant. The regular indispensable spiritual activities like personal prayer, personal and regular reading of the Word of God, Eucharist, spiritual guidance, etc. are more helpful in keeping oneself holy and properly oriented (cf. *PDV* 9).

3. Re-Discovering the Identity of Consecrated Life

We are aware of the trials and purifications, which the consecrated life is undergoing in these days. In turning our attention to the sufferings and challenges of consecrated life today, let us not condemn consecrated persons, but extend our solidarity and love to those victims and the suspect. The ongoing crisis in religious life, can be due to the scandals in the Church, involvement of media in the issues and bad examples of some of the religious and priests. This can be a reason for the youth to look at this life with aversion. Our life and presence in the world reveal the identity and future as religious priests. I strongly believe consecrated life is not yet outdated but it is a visible witness and the consecrated persons are capable

of attracting the youth even today. Consecrated persons are not alone in living the tension between secularism and an authentic life of faith, but Church always supports, this is the experience of all members of the Church. The difficulties and the challenges which religious life is experiencing today, can give rise to a new, *kairos*.

In these challenges, there is a hidden authentic call of the Holy Spirit to re-discover the wealth and potentialities of this form of life. The evangelical counsels of 'Chastity, Poverty and Obedience' lived by Christ in the fullness of his human nature, gives consecrated persons a clear identity in this contemporary world. Consecrated life does not seek praise and human appreciation; it is repaid by the joy of continuing to work untiringly for the Kingdom of God, to be a seed of life, which grows in secret, without expecting any reward other than that which the Lord will give at the end (cf. Mt 6:6).¹²

Conclusion

The model of religious life that we have been living, is not vanishing but evolving and, it will continue to evolve, as it already has been, since the days of the Desert Fathers and Desert Mothers. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). After discussing the challenges and the responses of the Church regarding the formation of men religious, it seems all religious priests need to have an introspection and deep conversion of heart. Sometimes, there comes a dilemma whether this religious life, to which I came with lot of enthusiasm, might be dead in the couple of decades. Let us strongly believe that religious life will not die, but it will continue to evolve and take new forms, through our religious priests and sisters. The Spirit of God will continue to inspire and call many to religious priesthood.

In this globalized world, every area of our society is well advanced in thinking, planning, and acting. We human beings have performed well in science and technology, but not so well in Godfearing, religious thinking and practices. We need to give away our materialistic thinking, especially being carried away by the so-called modern gadgets. This is the challenge before us, consecrated people to keep a profound longing for Jesus, to live the good news and proclaim it to the place where we live. The Church is deeply aware of the prophetic dimension of religious life (cf. VC 84). Consecrated life provides a golden opportunity for us to give Jesus to the people. We need to re-vision the charism by going to the roots of the Congregation. The Holy Spirit is at work in the Church, and in the specific Charisms of various Congregations (cf. PDV 45). In order to renew and regain our strength, return to the

origins and find out the new ways to respond to the challenges. Our founders and foundresses had a great vigour and enthusiasm, their spiritual energy will boost us up to revision our charism of the congregation in order to do a better proclamation of the Gospel and to learn the art of happy living.¹³

Endnotes

¹ Cf. MANUEL EZHAPARAMPIL, *Formation to Discipleship*, Bangalore 2004, 19-24.

² RAJU CHAKKANATTU, *Vocation Ministry and Religious Formation*, Bharananganm 2012, 92-93.

³ JOHNSON J. PUTHENPURACKAL, *Consecrated Life Challenges and Prospects*, Bangalore 2016, 64.

⁴ Cf. JOHN SHANKARATHIL, "A Call to Character Formation", *VJ* 72 (2011) 544-546.

⁵ RAJU CHAKKANATTU, *Vocation Ministry and Religious Formation*, 90.

⁶ JOHNSON J. PUTHENPURACKAL, *Consecrated Life Challenges and Prospects*, 65.

⁷ FELICISIMO DIEZ MARTINEZ, *Refounding Religious Life: Charismatic Life and Prophetic Mission*, Manila 2000, 85.

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, "Message to the Plenary Session of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life", *LOR* 28/9 (2001) 14.

⁹ RAJU CHAKKANATTU, *Vocation Ministry and Religious Formation*, 153-154.

¹⁰ FRANCIS, "St. John Paul II a Man of Prayer, Closeness, Justice". Homily on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Karol Wojtyla, the Future St. John Paul II," [access: 10.02.2020], <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope-francis/mass-casa-santa-marta.html>.

¹¹ JOSE KURIYEDATH, "The Religious and the Church hierarchy", in SAJU CHACKALACKAL, ed., *Consecrated Life for a Transformed World*, Bangalore 2016, 338.

¹² CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Starting Afresh from Christ. A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium* (May 19, 2002).

¹³ BASIL GEORGE, "Consecrated Life and Formation for Proclamation in the Modern World", in Saju Chackalackal, ed., *Consecrated Life for a Transformed World*, Bangalore 2016, 596.

DOCUMENTATION

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS ON THE CELEBRATION OF 24TH WORLD DAY FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

Pope Francis while celebrating Vigil Holy Mass on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on February 1st 2020 with the members of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life delivered a touching and thought-provoking homily on the occasion of 24th World Day for Consecrated Life. Here, we present a summary of the homily as done by Christopher Wells as well as the full text of the homily.

Summary of the Homily

At the Mass for the Presentation of the Lord, Pope Francis focused on the words of Simeon when he encountered Christ in the Temple: “My eyes have seen your salvation” (Lk 2:30).

Speaking directly to consecrated men and women, present for the World Day of Consecrated Life, the Pope said that they, like Simeon, “are simple men and women who caught sight of the treasure worth more than any worldly good”. The ability to recognize Jesus, to see “what really matters in life”, is at the heart of religious life, he said.

This vision, he explained, begins with “knowing how to see grace”, especially by seeing how God works in our lives, “not only in life’s grand moments, but also in our fragility and weakness. He warned that “seeing things in a worldly way” is a great temptation in religious life, which can lead to a loss of passion, sadness, distrust. Being able “to perceive God’s grace for us, like Simeon”, on the other hand, gives meaning to the gift of voluntary poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Continuing his reflection on the figure of Simeon, Pope Francis said that he “sees Jesus as small, humble, the one who has come to serve, not to be served, and defines Himself as servant”. Seeing Jesus in this way, and being able to see things as He does, will teach us how “to live in order to serve”. The Pope said “we need to have a gaze that seeks out our neighbour”; and religious are called to bring that gaze into our world.

Finally, Pope Francis said “the eyes of Simeon saw salvation because they were expecting it. They were eyes that were waiting, full of hope”. Like Simeon and Anna in the Temple, religious must have hope. The secret, he said, is “never to alienate oneself from the Lord, who is the source of hope”.

The Holy Father concluded his homily with the exhortation, “Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank God for the gift of the consecrated life and ask of him a new way of looking, that knows how to see grace, how to look for one’s neighbour, how to hope”. “Then”, he said, “our eyes too will see salvation”.¹

Full Text of the Homily of Holy Father Pope Francis²

“My eyes have seen your salvation” (Lk 2:30). These are the words of Simeon, whom the Gospel presents as a simple man: “righteous and devout”, says the text (v. 25). But among all at the temple that day, he alone saw Jesus as the Saviour. What did he see? A child: a small, vulnerable, simple child. But in him, he saw salvation, for the Holy Spirit allowed him to recognize in that tender new-born “the Lord’s Christ” (v. 26). Taking him in his arms, he sensed by faith that in him God was bringing his promises to fulfillment. And that he, Simeon, could now go in peace: he had seen the grace that was worth more than life (cf. Ps 63:4), and there was nothing further to wait for.

You too, dear consecrated brothers and sisters, you are simple men and women who caught sight of the treasure worth more than any worldly good. And so you left behind precious things, such as possessions, such as making a family for yourselves. Why did you do this? Because you fell in love with Jesus, you saw everything in him and enraptured by his gaze, you left the rest behind. Religious life is this *vision*. It means seeing what really matters in life. It means welcoming the Lord’s gift with open arms, as Simeon did. This is what the eyes of consecrated men and women behold: the grace of God poured into their hands. The consecrated person is one who every day looks at himself or herself and says: “Everything is gift, all is grace”. Dear brothers and sisters, we did not deserve religious life; it is a gift of love that we have received.

¹ Thanks to Christopher Wells for this short summary of the homily of Pope Francis. This summary can be retrieved from: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-02/pope-francis-vigil-mass-feast-of-presentation-of-the-lord-homily.html> (access: 05.06.20)

² Full text of the Homily can be retrieved from: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/consecrated_life/documents/papa-francesco_20200201_omelia-vitaconsacrata.html (access: 05.06.20)

My eyes have seen your salvation. These are the words we repeat each evening at Night Prayer. With them, we bring our day to an end, saying: “Lord, *my* salvation comes from *you*, my hands are not empty, but are full of your grace”. *Knowing how to see grace* is the starting point. Looking back, rereading one’s own history and seeing there God’s faithful gift: not only in life’s grand moments but also in our fragility and weakness, in our insignificance. The tempter, the devil focuses on our “poverty”, our empty hands: “In all these years you haven’t got any better, you haven’t achieved what you could have, they haven’t let you do what you were meant to do, you haven’t always been faithful, you are not capable...” and so on. Each of us knows this story and these words very well. We see this is true in part, and so we go back to thoughts and feelings that disorient us. Thus we risk losing our bearings, the gratuitous love of God. For God loves us always, and gives himself to us, even in our poverty. Saint Jerome offered much to the Lord and the Lord asked for more. He said to the Lord: “But Lord, I have given you everything, everything, what else is lacking?” “Your sins, your poverty, offer me your poverty”. When we keep our gaze fixed on him, we open ourselves to his forgiveness that renews us, and we are reassured by his faithfulness. We can ask ourselves today: “To whom do I turn my gaze: to the Lord, or to myself?” Whoever experiences God’s grace above all else can discover the antidote to distrust and to looking at things in a worldly way.

There is a temptation that looms over religious life: seeing things in a worldly way. This entails no longer seeing God’s grace as the driving force in life, then going off in search of something to substitute for it: a bit of fame, a consoling affection, finally getting to do what I want. But when a consecrated life no longer revolves around God’s grace, it turns in upon itself. It loses its passion, it grows slack, becomes stagnant. And we know what happens then: we start to demand our own space, our own rights, we let ourselves get dragged into gossip and slander, we take offense at every small thing that does not go our way, and we pour forth litanies of lamentation – lamentation, “Father Lamentation”, “Sister Lamentation” – about our brothers, our sisters, our communities, the Church, society. We no longer see the Lord in everything, but only the dynamics of the world and our hearts grow numb. Then we become creatures of habit, pragmatic, while inside us sadness and distrust grow, that turn into resignation. This is what a worldly gaze leads to. The Great Saint Teresa once said to the sisters: “woe to the sister who repeats these words, ‘they have treated me unjustly’, woe to her!”

To have the right kind of view on life, we ask to be able to perceive God’s grace for us, like Simeon. The Gospel says three times that he was intimately familiar with the Holy Spirit, who was upon him, inspired him, roused him (cf. v. 25-27). He

was intimately familiar with the Holy Spirit, with the love of God. If consecrated life remains steadfast in love for the Lord, it perceives beauty. It sees that poverty is not some colossal effort, but rather a higher freedom that God gives to us and others as real wealth. It sees that chastity is not austere sterility, but the way to love without possessing. It sees that obedience is not a discipline, but is victory over our own chaos, in the way of Jesus. In one of the regions affected by an earthquake in Italy – speaking of poverty and community life – there was a Benedictine monastery that was destroyed and another monastery that invited the Sisters to come and stay with them. But they were only there for a short while: they were not happy, they were thinking about their monastery, about the people there. In the end, they decided to go back to their monastery, which is now two caravans. Instead of staying in this big, comfortable monastery; they were like flies there, all of them together, but happy in their poverty. This happened just last year. It is a beautiful thing!

My eyes have seen your salvation. Simeon sees Jesus as small, humble, the one who has come to serve, not to be served, and defines himself as *servant*. Indeed, he says: “Lord, now let your *servant* depart in peace” (v. 29). Those who see things as Jesus does, learn how to live in order to serve. They do not wait for others to take the initiative, but themselves go out in search of their neighbor, as did Simeon who sought out Jesus in the temple. Where is one’s neighbor to be found in the consecrated life? This is the question: Where is one’s neighbor to be found? First of all in one’s own community. The grace must be sought *to know how to seek out Jesus in the brothers and sisters* we have been given. And that is precisely where we can begin to put charity into practice: in the place where you live, by welcoming brothers and sisters in their poverty, as Simeon welcomed Jesus meek and poor. Today, so many see in other people only hindrances and complications. We need to have a gaze that seeks out our neighbor, that brings those who are far-off closer. Men and women religious, who live to imitate Jesus, are called to bring their own gaze into the world, a gaze of compassion, a gaze that goes in search of those far-off; a gaze that does not condemn, but encourages, frees, consoles; a gaze of compassion. That repeated phrase in the Gospel, which, speaking about Jesus, says: “He had compassion”. This is the stooping down of Jesus towards each one of us.

My eyes have seen your salvation. The eyes of Simeon saw salvation because they were expecting it (cf. v. 25). They were eyes that were waiting, full of hope. They were looking for the light and then saw the light of the nations (cf. v. 32). They were aged eyes but burning with hope. The gaze of consecrated men and women can only be one of hope. *Knowing how to hope.* Looking around, it is easy to lose hope: things that don’t work, the decline in vocations... There is always the temptation to have a

worldly gaze, one devoid of hope. But let us look to the Gospel and see Simeon and Anna: they were elderly, alone, yet they had not lost hope, because they remained in communion with the Lord. Anna “did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day” (v. 37). Here is the secret: never to alienate oneself from the Lord, who is the source of hope. We become blind if we do not look to the Lord every day if we do not adore him. To adore the Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank God for the gift of the consecrated life and ask of him a new way of looking, that knows how to *see grace*, how to *look for one’s neighbor*, how to *hope*. Then our eyes too will see salvation.

BOOK REVIEWS

Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Religious Life in the 21st Century: The Prospect of Refounding*, Orbis Books Publication, (August 18, 2016) pages 272.

Diarmuid O'Murchu, a priest and social psychologist is currently based in London. He lectures internationally and writes extensively on new paradigms from a multidisciplinary point of view. He being a social psychologist most of whose working life has been in social ministry, predominantly in London, UK. In that capacity, he has worked as a couple's counselor, in bereavement work, AIDS-HIV counseling, and laterally with homeless people and refugees. As a workshop leader and group facilitator he has worked in Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, Philippines, Thailand, India, and Peru and in several African countries, facilitating programmes on Adult Faith Development.

An important book, *Religious Life in the 21st Century: the Prospect of Refounding*, O'Murchu clearly lays out the path consecrated life has traveled and describes new fields emerging through shifting paradigms. Following Christ in an unfinished universe can be challenging and daunting but O'Murchu sees hope and promise ahead for those who can surrender themselves into the chaos of God's uncontrollable love. What is clear is that the reality of religious life has and will continue to change. Dramatic declines in membership, changing cultural norms and shifting social realities ensure that religious life in the 21st century must evolve to survive. This evolution requires that religious are prepared for refounding when the time comes.

In this book, he synthesizes the past, present and future and provides insight and a challenge to all readers as he considers the necessity of a paradigm shift within religious life and the church and proposes a re-visioning of radical engagement, authenticity and accountability for religious in the 21st century. The roots of a new understanding of religious life lie in an understanding of the paradigm religious have historically followed and the often misunderstood and misrepresented history of religious life. So he spends the first half of the book tracing the roots of religious

life and its inherently prophetic nature. Religious life has evolved over the past two millennia, with a constant reliance on community and discernment. In that time, the image of the religious as one who flees the world for individual holiness has developed under the auspices of the archetypal hero.

According to him, there should be a need for paradigm shift as no hero will rescue religious life. The future lies in communities of courage and collaboration. For inspiration, O'Murchu turns to those "great founders and foundresses," exploring their stories and reclaiming a largely subverted history of religious life. By distilling their core motivations and character strengths, religious today can discover a path to the future. This path first requires recognition that today's religious life is dying. He points to the cyclical nature of religious life, a historic pattern of birth-death-rebirth on a 300-year cycle. By the mid-21st century, religious life globally will be in crisis, including those groups that seem to be flourishing in the global south today.

Second, the paradigm of religious life as a fleeing from the world, which began to change at Vatican II, needs to completely shift to a communal recognition of, and commitment to, seeking the reign of God. He renames this concept the "Companionship of Empowerment." Religious life in the 21st century will be dependent on this shift, as religious embrace the liminal nature of their vocations and recognize their societal role to embody the core values of Christian belief and to radiate those values in the world. This value radiation will take religious life far and wide. In most cases, he argues, this will mean a shift away from functional and practical ministry within the institutional church to a wider recognition of the need to serve the prophetic call of religious life in the world by reading and responding to the signs of the times as cultural catalysts. This shift also requires honest, adult conversation within religious orders and congregations, delving more deeply into the radical call of the Gospel and how that call will reform the current understanding of constitutive elements of religious life, such as the vows, community and discernment. The prospect of refounding and, indeed, the future of religious life depend on such communal soul-searching.

O'Murchu, in his view of religious as androgynies and his allusion to reform in celibate sexual intimacy, in this reviewer's opinion, take away from the larger discussion of sexuality within religious life, the harnessing of divine eroticism, and the consideration of sexuality beyond procreation. Much more poignant and challenging is his criticism of the hypocrisy of congregations that claim a commitment to a preferential option for the poor but also lead upper-middle-class lifestyles that do not meet the ideals of ecologic and economic sustainability.

Religious Life in the 21st century deals with tough topics in a candid and even-handed manner. Looking at the core doubts that break down and eliminate critical conversations within congregations, O'Murchu calls religious to something more. Citing the stark decline in religious life, he addresses the paschal dimension of refounding religious life, where, dying will be required. To prepare for that death and hopeful rising, religious needs to respond to the signs of the times with courage, risk and prophetic imagination, renewing their Christ-centeredness and re-appropriating their founding charisms.

"Refounding is not easy: it was never meant to be," O'Murchu writes in the penultimate chapter of *Religious Life in the 21st Century*, "and yet it is a possibility for all of us, no matter how stuck we may feel." The future of religious life is a holy mystery waiting to be discovered. Faith in the future, is where hope for life, even beyond death lies. Putting that faith into action and modeling such radical faithfulness will be the work and call of religious life in the 21st century.

Fr. Ferdinand Tigga, CMF

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