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Sanyasa, Carmelaram Post

Bangalore – 560 035, Karnataka, India

Tel: 080 – 28439259; 28439944; Mobile: 099 6416 1332

E-mail: sjbancmf@gmail.com; sanyasac@gmail.com

Web: www.sanyasa.com

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EDITORIAL

Fratelli Tutti is the third encyclical by Pope Francis signed in Assisi at the tomb of Saint Francis on 3rd October, 2020. This encyclical is a summa of Pope Francis' social teaching. It presents the views presented by Pope in his speeches, discourses and interventions throughout the first seven years of his pontificate. One of its sources and inspirations is the "Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together", signed on 4th February 2019 in Abu Dhabi together with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyib.

In this encyclical, Pope reiterates that dialogue be the way, common collaboration be the *modus operandi* and reciprocal understanding be the method and criterion. His recommendations in this encyclical are needed for us to survive not only the coronavirus pandemic but also for the contemporary world to survive. He boldly offers "a new vision of fraternity and social friendship".

He dedicates this encyclical to his namesake, Francis of Assisi, who treated the entire cosmos as his brothers and sisters. It is an invitation for all of us to broaden our perspective to view a "world without borders". It is an invitation to witness to counter cultural values before the world. In fact, he pleads on behalf of the world's poor, the handicapped, the infirm and the elderly who often live on the margins and he wants them to be at the center.

Pope has applied in this encyclical "see, judge and act" or experience-social analysis-theological reflection-action method. *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* are both addressed to men and women of all faiths and places. They serve as lenses through which we can look at everything; planet and people on the planet. It is about "we," "our," and "us". Fraternity and social friendship are the two ways to build a better, more just and peaceful world, with the contribution of all. Global health emergency (Corona) demonstrates that "no one can face life in isolation" and that the time has truly come to "dream as a single human family" in which we are all "brothers and sisters all".

The heart of this encyclical is Pope Francis' reflection on the good Samaritan. Jesus's provocative story of the foreigner who acts as a true neighbour to the man robbed and beaten by the side of the road offers the "criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project". This moves us to respond to our sister or brother in need. We are challenged to turn outwards, to act as neighbours, and to reach out to all those who are in need. Rather than looking for "abstract

moralizing” or a “social and ethical message,” he invites us to enter into this Gospel parable. Jesus’ words to the scholar of the law are readdressed to us: “Which of the persons do you identify with? Which of these characters do you resemble?” We are invited to bend down to touch and heal the wounds of others.

Laudato Si’ taught us that everything is connected; *Fratelli Tutti* teaches us that everyone is connected. Pope is not talking about something else; he’s talking about the same subject but at a deeper level. It is about how to build a more just, humane and fraternal world.

Fratelli Tutti is a radical challenge, offering a blueprint for a world after coronavirus. It turns the world upside down, placing human dignity at the centre. As Pope Francis said at the Angelus, just before *Fratelli Tutti* was released, “The signs of the times clearly show that human fraternity and care of creation form the sole way towards integral development and peace.”

This encyclical calls for the creation of a new kind of solidarity to tackle the crises of the world. Pope Francis calls on us all to play our part in building peace, and to focus on becoming a neighbour to others – in particular to welcome migrants, and to resist racism, prejudice and discrimination.

Pope Francis also speaks of some specific threats to social friendship, peace, and dialogue. They are political nationalism, racism, trickle-down economics, relativism and consumerist individualism, a lost sense of history and memory, the death penalty, and the development of weapons of war.

The present issue of Sanyasa carries seven articles; all of them bringing out salient features of consecrated life from different angles. It also has an article which explains in detail the changes introduced by pope Francis recently with regard to erection of new religious institutes. Finally, it also has a book review.

The first article is on “Conflict Transformation” by Paulson Veliyannoor, CMF. Conflict is a natural phenomenon that disrupts the homeostasis between what one is at a given moment and the demands of the internal and external environment, and thereby challenges an organism towards further growth and development. Religious communities are no exception to this fact of life. In the present article the author explores the dynamics of various levels of conflicts within religious communities and offers insights into understanding conflicts in their context and personal styles of dealing with conflicts. After presenting some foundational skills in conflict transformation, the author suggests some models, drawn from biblical resources as well as traditional Christian practices, to transform conflicts into moments of growth as individuals and communities. The article provides you with a rich repository of practical resources to transform our community lives for the better.

The second article is on “Walking on the Water without Sinking: From Loss of Hope and Boredom to Creativity” by José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF. He explains how to make the transition from a growing attitude of boredom and hopelessness among religious towards creativity. The creative capacity is the opposite of the “consumerist” attitude. Consumerism generates boredom and despair. Creativity opens up new horizons. Consecrated life needs, more than ever, the theological virtue of hope. Boredom is detected in consecrated life when it becomes repetitive and monotonous. The author reflects on the creative capacity, in the consecrated life, as a source of meaning. And he presents areas in which creativity is more necessary today: spirituality and liturgy, institutional improvement and the realization of the mission. Creativity is a leap into the void: it is the possibility of the apparently impossible. In the creative moment, time becomes fertile. The “sense” visits us. Enthusiasm is growing. Then it deserves the pain of living and dying. Consecrated life is living a unique moment in its history: like Peter is called to walk on the waters. She can no longer sit, senseless, affected because of the boredom in the boat. Jesus calls her out, into the water and to walk on the waves.

The third article is by José Rovira Arumí, CMF with the title, “Joy and Happiness in Consecrated Life: Some Reflections”. Being inspired by the Apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the author reflects further and asserts that joy, happiness and love are the human and Christian goals. He also discusses on the question of unhappy consecrated persons living consecrated life for various reasons. He categorically points out that God wants all religious to live a happy life in joyful religious communities. Finally, he concludes that the definitive root of one’s deep and unshakeable joy and happiness can be found only in the person of Jesus Christ.

Then, we have an article by George Panthalanickal, CMF on the theme, “Discipleship: A Call ‘to Be with Jesus’ or ‘to Remain in Jesus’”. He argues that the gospels clearly articulate the primary purpose of discipleship as ‘to be with Jesus’ or ‘to remain in Jesus.’ The account of the ‘Institution of the Twelve’ in the synoptic gospels (Mk 3:13-16; Mt 10:1-4; Lk 6:12-16), explicitly expresses the purpose of call as ‘to be with him’ and ‘to be sent out.’ Similarly, John also portrays the nature of discipleship as ‘remaining with Jesus’ or ‘remaining in his love’ (cf. Jn 1:35-42; 10:7-18; 13:31-35; 15:1-17). The article focuses on this significant aspect of the discipleship of Jesus, analysing representative passages from the length and breadth of the gospels. The Johannine expression “to remain in Jesus” seems to have a more profound significance than the synoptic phrase “to be with Jesus.” “Remain in Jesus” is closely linked with the Johannine concept of faith and his view of the covenantal union between Jesus and his disciples. In John, the expression gives the trajectory for the path of holiness, serving as the new holiness code.

The next article is by James Kannanthanam, CMF, an expert in *Appreciative Inquiry (AI)* on “Building a Dream Community”. He begins elucidating theoretical foundations for building up a dream community from biblical, theological and psycho-social models. Then, he explains in short, the process of *AI* highlighting its five basic assumptions. He also points out the stages to be followed namely Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny in the application of *AI*. Following the principles and processes of *AI*, the author proposes with a lot of examples how a religious can build his/her dream community.

Then, the issue has the article with the title, “The Ministry of the Religious as Guru” by Swami Vikrant, SDB. In ancient India, Vedic study was considered as the sacrifice offered to the Supreme Being, Brahman. The teacher who imparts sacred knowledge is called a *guru*, literally meaning the one who removes spiritual darkness. In ancient India, the teacher (*guru*) was held in the highest honour. The teacher had to impart to the student, in addition to the Vedic lore, the entire body of moral law (Dharma Sastra). Vedic priesthood was a ministry totally different from that of the teacher. His task was offering sacrifice. Mostly only Brahmins were teachers at first. But later warrior caste teachers became very famous *gurus*. The *guru* must be detached from mundane cravings. He should be kind and gentle in his behaviour. *Gurus* had great privileges. They were worshipped like gods. Teachers were not paid any salary, but they were given a handsome gift at the end of a student’s academic career. The author concludes saying that in the context of the current devastating pandemic of corona-virus, the Church in India must plunge herself in liberative and humanitarian mission of saving lives, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, sheltering the home-less, burying the dead and comforting the bereaved.

Finally, the issue has an article by Rahul Reddy, SG who explains the situation of vocation to religious brotherhood from the survey that he carried out. After analyzing the vocational situation of major congregations of religious brothers in India, he concludes that the vocational situation is not that alarming though there is not much growth. He also proposes some concrete suggestions to augmenting quality vocations to religious brotherhood.

We have just entered into new year 2021 with a lot of optimism and enthusiasm despite the gloomy picture triggered by pandemic covid-19. May the new year bring in all of us, God’s abundant blessing. May I wish you all a happy new year 2021 and a pleasant reading of this issue.

M. Arul Jesu Robin, CMF
Chief Editor

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES¹

Paulson Veliyannoor, CMF

All of you, be of one mind, sympathetic, loving toward one another, compassionate, humble. Do not return evil for evil, or insult for insult; but, on the contrary, a blessing, because to this you were called, that you might inherit a blessing.

(1Peter 3:8-9)

1. Conflict: A Natural Growth Phenomenon

Generally, conflict is viewed as a negative phenomenon, and we talk about *avoiding* conflict. The first thing we require in dealing with conflict is to approach conflict as *necessary dynamics in human growth process*. This is true of one's physical dimension as well as emotional and spiritual dimensions. Biological life is possible precisely because the organism maintains a healthy tension between various biological processes. When the given resources of an organism are in conflict with the demands of the internal or external environment, the organism draws upon its potentials and responds adaptively, resulting in a spurt of growth of the organism. A body without any conflict or tension is a dead body. Thus, conflict is natural and necessary for individuals and communities to grow, mature, and be productive. Consecrated life is no exception to conflicts. A fruitful and productive consecrated living includes the grace and ability to transform conflicts into moments of growth.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines conflict at different levels: At intra-personal level, it is a "mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demands." At intra-personal and interpersonal levels, it is "competitive or opposing action or incompatibles; antagonistic state or action (as of divergent ideas, interests, or persons)."² The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* defines conflict thus:

Paulson Veliyannoor is a Claretian missionary who currently serves as a member of the team for the Claretian Renewal Encounters at the Forge Center in Madrid, Spain. He holds a doctorate in clinical psychology and is currently specializing in mysticism and spiritual theology. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to him at: frpaulson@gmail.com

The occurrence of mutually antagonistic or opposing forces, including events, behaviors, desires, attitudes, and emotions. This general term has more specific meanings within different areas of psychology. For example, in psychoanalytic theory, “it refers to the opposition between incompatible instinctual impulses or between incompatible aspects of the mental structure (i.e., the id, ego, and superego) that may be a source of neurosis if it results in the use of defense mechanisms other than sublimation. In interpersonal relations, conflict denotes the disagreement, discord, and friction that occur when the actions or beliefs of one or more individuals are unacceptable to and resisted by others.”³

Conflict arises not only within an individual, but between individuals as well as between groups and nations, leading to armed reactions and war. At all these levels, conflict can also be seen as a challenge which is an invitation to grow beyond our current state of affairs to a more wholesome state of well-being and peaceful living. The way we respond to such challenge-invitation will define whether conflicts help us grow or remain stunted. The goal is to transform the destructive ways we deal with conflict in order to lead to constructive outcomes.

The purpose of this paper is to facilitate reflection, and more importantly to provide some tools for assessment, understanding, resolution, and transformation of conflicts within a religious community. A religious community consists of human beings drawn from the larger population of human race and hence, carry within them human struggles, assets, liabilities, and potentials. Being an ‘unnatural’ community called to live as a sign of eschatological community, it is only natural to expect conflicts along the way. Dealing with them constructively should help them become better specimens of what and how a human community called to live in orientation towards God and the other in charity should look like.

2. Levels & Dynamics of Conflict

We can identify conflicts at four different levels. We have already alluded to them above in the various definitions discussed. We will see them in a bit more detailed way here.

a. Intra-personal conflict refers to conflicts occurring within a person. Unless we have certain maturity in handling intra-personal conflict, we will struggle to deal with interpersonal, intra-group, and inter-group conflicts. Thus, dealing with intra-personal conflict is fundamental to resolving or transforming other types of conflicts. Intra-personal conflict can happen when one’s unconscious motivations are at mismatch with conscious pursuits and values. It can also happen as a mismatch between “should” and “want.” “Should” is driven by values, religious beliefs, expectations, etc., whereas “want” is driven by one’s inner desires and the

enticing environment. An example for intra-personal conflict, in the setting of religious life, would be the demands of vow of obedience conflicting with one's desire for personal autonomy; or, affective demands impinging on one's vow of celibacy. Such intra-personal conflict can play out with subtle to gross dimensions, and when not dealt with maturely, it can cause havoc to the individual and to the community. When such conflict is driven by unresolved unconscious dynamics and becomes extremely disruptive, one might require therapeutic intervention.

- b. Interpersonal conflict** occurs when there are differences of opinions, values, and goals of members who live in proximity to one another. When two or three people come together from different family, social, or cultural backgrounds and with different personality dynamics, such conflicts are a given. This happens in marriage, religious life, work place, or in any setting where people are required to interact. The conflicts that happen within our religious communities are mostly of interpersonal type, made complicated by intra-personal conflicts.
- c. Intra-group conflict** happens within a particular group, be it religious, ethnic, political, or any other identity group. Here, the group is much larger than the kind of community setting referred to in the interpersonal conflict; here, the conflict has more to do with ideologies, life styles, and principles that affect the entire group. Such conflicts can happen within a Province or even within an identity-group within a Province, such as a language group, nationality group (as in a multi-cultural or multi-linguistic community setting), caste group, or rite group, etc. Such conflict can also occur at a provincial chapter, when the ideological or ministerial direction the province wants to take becomes an issue of differing and conflicting opinions.
- d. Inter-group conflict** refers to conflicts occurring between large organized social or identity groups. Conflicts between nations, races, religious groups, etc. come under this category. Such inter-group conflicts can occur within the Church over issues of liturgy, rites, liberal vs conservative ideologies, language, region, caste, color, etc.

We must keep in mind that the conflict that is foundational to all these four levels is the first level of conflict: *intra-personal*. We need to keep this insight alive as we engage with conflicts at other levels in our community living. If we have certain maturity to constructively deal with our own internal conflicts, we will bring that maturity to the interpersonal, intra-group, and inter-group challenges as well. Remember: everything is created twice: first, in our minds; later, out in our relationships. When faced with some interpersonal or intra-group issues,

some religious ask for a “transfer” or are transferred as a solution to the problem. Sometimes it is the last resort, and sometimes it does help; but more often than not, it does not help or, worse, it even causes the problem to spread, because the person has not recognized that he or she needs to work on oneself — one’s own way of dealing with conflict — in order to be able to deal with issues related to others. As the saying goes, “wherever you go, there you are” and the problem continues. We have seen the tragic consequences of such transfer of the problematic in the child abuse crises that we have lived through and still are living through.

3. Understanding Style, Conflict, and Context

In the context of community living, we will focus more on inter-personal and intra-group conflicts in the following sections. When we are faced with conflicts, it is necessary to analyse and understand the context and the dynamics involved. However, prior to it should be an understanding of one’s own styles of dealing with conflicts, as intra-personal style is fundamental to understanding inter-personal and intra-group dynamics.

a) Recognize Your Personal Style(s) of Dealing with Conflicts







We all have our own preferred style of creating and dealing with conflict. Sometimes we use different styles at different situations. Understanding our style of creating and dealing with conflict is important in modifying our response and choosing a healthier option. Given below are two tools to diagnose your preferred style of dealing with conflicts, one of which is fun-filled exercise, and the other, a more professional tool.





i. Your Conflict Totem

Let’s have some fun in learning here! Here is a humorous and culture-fair tool using animal types (no offence to animals!) to recognize the various styles we and others use.⁴ Recognizing as to who plays which animal can help us towards identifying our little contributions to the problem and finding a solution. Each style has predominantly a negative feature; however, there might be occasions to use a style momentarily to release the tension (for example, one may have to don a monkey hat to release the tension and help everyone relax when discussion gets too hot and dangerous). Such styles can hinder or sometimes help conflict transformation. This exercise is also helpful when we live with people whom we know well. But we must be careful to avoid the danger of labelling them with these animal names!

Now, imagine a conflict situation that you have lived through in your community. Keeping that specific conflict in that specific context, read through the following

animal model descriptions and find out which one describes best the way you responded to the conflict. Now, think of another conflict you had experienced in community and redo the exercise. Thus, repeat the exercise for 3-4 conflict situations. You will have an idea which animal or two represent your predominant styles of dealing with conflicts – they are your totem animals for dealing with conflicts. Now, analyse if such responses to conflict were helpful or harmful in facilitating conflict transformation and growth for yourself and your community. If helpful, build on the style. If harmful, change your response style.

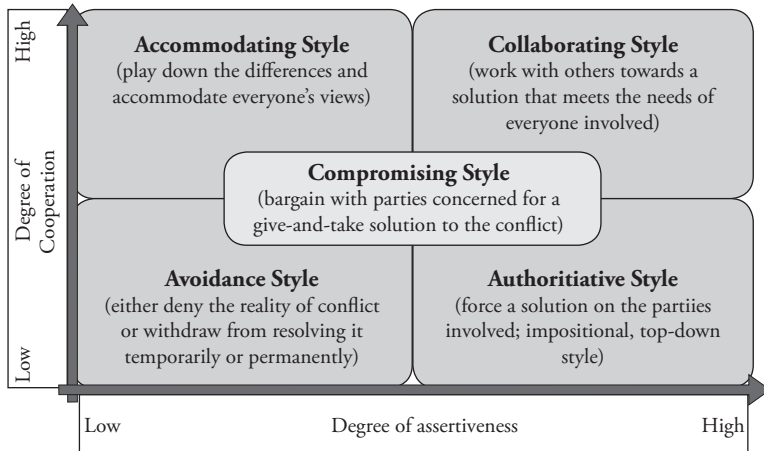
 <p>Donkey Style: Stubborn, refusal to change one's point of view.</p>	 <p>Elephant Style: Blocks the way and prevents the group from any forward movement in resolution of conflict.</p>
 <p>Lion Style: Intervenes and fights when others disagree with one's ideas and suggestions or interferes with one's program of action.</p>	 <p>Rabbit Style: Timid, flees situations of tension and conflict. Tries to change topic to avoid stress and conflict.</p>
 <p>Ostrich Style: Refuses to face reality or admit any conflict at all. Denial of reality.</p>	 <p>Turtle Style: Total withdrawal from any group effort to resolve conflict. Refuses to share ideas or opinions. Shut in one's own world.</p>

 <p>Chameleon Style: Changes colour according to the people and the situation one is in. Will take sides as it suits him or her.</p>	 <p>Owl Style: Pretends to be wise and know-it-all. Talks in long words and complicated sentences. More talk than action.</p>
 <p>Mouse Style: Poor self-image, too timid to speak up, share opinions. Quiet presence.</p>	 <p>Monkey Style. The clown in the group. Fools around, chatters, brings up silly observations, and prevents the group from concentrating on serious business</p>

ii. Personal Conflict Style Inventory (PCSI)

Well, that was fun, isn't it? Revealing of our dynamics too! We now turn to a more formal, standardized tool to assess the way we manage conflict in our lives. Everyone has a predominant style of dealing with conflict. We may also adopt different styles when the intensity of the conflict differs or when conflict becomes ongoing. The *Personal Conflict Style Inventory* (hereinafter referred to as PCSI), which is a variation of the Thomas-Kilmann instrument and examines how we react to conflicts when they first arise and how we respond when the conflict becomes intense or full-blown. You can download the PCSI from: https://workingwithconflict.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/hlc_06_personal_style_inventory_.pdf The PCSI is easy to administer, score, and interpret. You might want to do this as a personal exercise for everyone in the community, and then discuss together each one's profile and how a given style has helped or harmed conflict transformations in your community living. Such an exercise can be very helpful in bonding together within a community as well as understanding the dynamics unfolding within the community as well.

The five major styles analyzed by the PCSI are: *accommodating* (*smoothing*), *competing* (*forcing, authoritative command*), *avoiding* (*withdrawing*), *collaborating* (*problem solving*), and *compromising*. Please note: *none of these styles is bad or wrong!* It all depends on the conflict situation. Some style may be better than others in a given context. What we need to keep in mind is that each style suits a particular conflict situation and hence, we must reflect as to which style is most helpful in a given conflict situation. Also, if your test result indicates a couple of styles to be dominant, it is a good sign — that you are flexible enough to use different styles. (On the contrary, if one of the styles in your test result has a very high score and the rest have very low scores, it indicates a rigidity of style, that might hinder conflict transformation process.) Knowing our styles helps us be flexible and adopt another style that might be more functional in a given context. Here is a little diagram that briefly explains the five styles and their dynamics.



b) Analyzing Group Conflicts

Once we have insights into our own personal styles of dealing with conflicts, we can deal more effectively with group conflicts. Here are two models, among the many that are available around in conflict transformation resources, that may be of help. You can discover more models and methods in the reading list supplied at the end of this article.

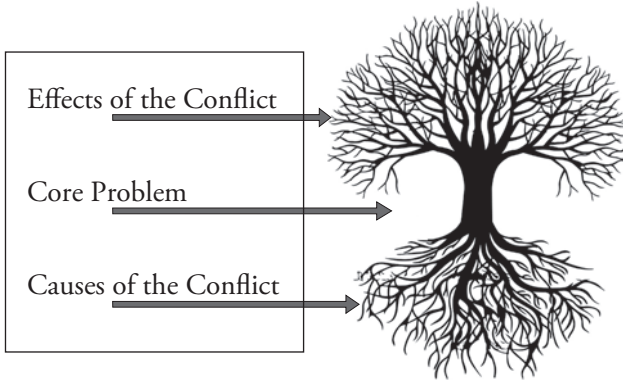
i. Identify the 3 Ps: People-Process-Problem Method

John Paul Lederach, a world-renowned peacebuilding interventionist, has proposed this model.⁵ In this model, we ask questions about three components: *people, process, and problem*, in order to understand them and their interactions.

People refers not exactly to the individuals involved in conflict, but more to their relational and psychological dynamics. In other words, people-related variables. Here we look into the affected parties' feelings, emotions, and individual and group perceptions of the problem and the conflict involved. We will have to ask the following questions: Who are involved in the conflict? Are their primary parties and secondary parties; those affected directly and those affected indirectly? How do they perceive the conflict and how do perceptions differ between individuals and groups involved in the conflict? For example, in a conflict related to intercultural community living, we ask the above questions to identify the various perceptions, feelings, cultural components implied in such perceptions and feelings.

Process applies to the manner in which decisions are made and how people feel about them in each group's habitual ways of resolving conflicts and in the given context of the conflict. The process of decision making we use can alienate or satisfy parties concerned. When a decision is forced on people, they tend to get rebellious. Some may not overtly reject a decision, but would be passive aggressive about cooperating with it. For example, in a conflictual situation in a religious community, the superior can command and enforce certain decisions, or can call a meeting where everyone can voice their opinions and come to a consensual decision. Or, even when there is no consensus available, the process of having consulted makes people feel "counted in." So, in this step, we ask questions about how decisions are made and how well or ill they are received and acted upon. It is important to obtain feedback as to how the parties affected perceive the decisions arrived and the mode of arriving at them.

Problem: It refers to the specific issues involved and how the parties involved perceive and respond to them. Here we identify the values, needs, interests, threats, fears, opposing views, and concrete differences in the use of resources in the community. The questions we ask are: What are the major issues in the conflict? Are there hidden issues and needs? Are any common interests and needs identified? What are the different ways the problem is manifested? What triggers fears and apprehensions in the parties concerned? It helps to use the metaphor of a tree to identify the *root causes, core problem, and effects* of a conflict.⁶ The roots of the tree symbolize the causes; the trunk signifies the core problem; and the branches and leaves are the effects.



4. Conflict Transformation: Some Foundational Skills

The term “conflict transformation” is of recent currency. The term more prevalent previously was “conflict resolution.” The concept of resolution gave a false idea of completely eliminating conflict, focused more on the end-product than the very process itself. It has sometimes resonances of outright victory, defeat, and even revenge,⁷ in the sense of resolution being elimination of the enemy. A war or an atom bomb can resolve a conflict for good, but has it transformed the people for the better? “Transformation” implies a greater positivity, focus on the process and dynamics, and an end-result that is constructive and wholesome. It may also refer to transformations at various levels: of the actors involved, the issues, the rules, and the structures.⁸

Before we discuss some of the models for conflict transformation, we shall see some foundational skills we need for dealing with our conflicts and transforming them into growth-moments.

a) Change the Frame

You must be familiar with this celebrated quote from Albert Einstein: “No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.” Very true! We have already discussed in the above pages how each party’s perception of a situation or problem is important in escalating or transforming a conflict. Hence, one of the fundamental skills we should have is the willingness and flexibility to “change the frame” of our perception and look at the situation from different vantage points. This will help us in many ways: (i) understand the perspectives of others, (ii) recognize that a problem has many sides and hues, (iii) become tolerant and receptive to the views and opinions of others, and (iv) facilitate and identify

new ways of solving the problems as change of frame can trigger new insights as to how to transform a conflict in creative ways.

Multiplicity of Frames

One of the classic exercises in recognizing that there are different ways of looking at a situation or problem is the “Old Lady-Young Lady” phenomenon discussed in standard books on the psychology of perception. Look at the picture given below. Who do you see – *an old woman or a young lady?* Whichever person you see initially, slightly change the mental frame and look at the picture from that different frame, and you will see the other woman. This exercise helps us realize that there are different ways people look at a situation and it is important to recognize those multiple perspectives.



From Inter to Trans, and from Ego-Frame to Eco-Frame

A major frame change we need to embrace in our community living is the willingness to move from “inter” to “trans.” If we try to solve the problems caught up in the “inter” – between and among ourselves, we may be stuck with the problem for ever. We need a paradigm or perspective shift to “trans” – transcending ourselves and transcending to a higher perspective or frame. A “seeing beyond.” This seeing beyond can mean looking at the problem from the vantage point of our mission or our vocation or the first love of God and humanity that brought us together as a religious community. That will help us relativize the problem and see it on a wider canvas and respond accordingly. One of the lighter comments I used to hear during my seminary days from some companions when they were faced with some disappointments or challenges was “compared to eternity, what is it after all?” That is a very good “transing!”

We must also move from ego-frame to eco-frame of reference. Many of the problems that confront the world today such as climate change, hyper-nationalism, and religious fundamentalism are due to our unwillingness to look beyond our ego needs and connect to the ecosystem. This applies to community living as well. If we can look beyond our egos and connect to the ecosystem we are in, with its many layers (community, region/province, mission, Congregation, Church, society, earth, universe, God), we can relativize our problems and have a different perspective. Indeed, many problems fizzle out when we compare it with the larger frame and purpose of life. And the greatest “transing” is to sit on God’s porch and look at the world and ourselves with His eyes.

Here is again a standard classic “*Nine Dot Problem*” from the psychology of perception that shows us how a change of perspective from inter to trans can help us solve the problem. See the picture of nine dots given below. Your task is to connect all nine dots with only four straight lines, under the following conditions: (i) Do not lift your pencil off the paper once you begin; (ii) Do not pass over a line that you have already drawn; (iii) Use only straight lines, and (iv) You cannot use more than four lines. *Clue: This problem can only be solved if you succeed to “change your frame.”* You can see the explanation and solution at the end of the article.



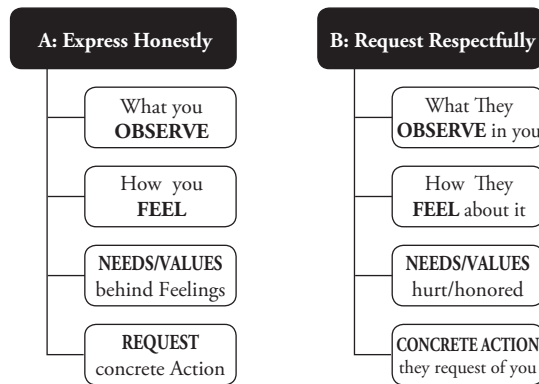
b) Role of Compassionate Communication

Another key element in conflict transformation is compassionate communication. If our communication is healthy and appropriate, we can even avoid many unnecessary conflicts. As Rollo May observed, “Communication leads to community — that is, to understanding, intimacy, and the mutual valuing that was previously lacking.”⁹ However, if our communication is not proper, it can kill souls! How judgemental and violent some of our communications can be! Here are a few samples: “You are always late in the chapel for prayers”; “You are a good-for-nothing student. I am sure you are not going to survive long”; “You are a liar!”; “Ah, after all the retreats, she will be the same. You wait and see.” How condemnatory, judgemental, absolutist, and violent these statements are!

Nonviolent communication, or better put as *Compassionate Communication* is an art and science. Our communication can get very violent and hurting. Sometimes lives are made or shattered by the words spoken by some significant other at a very

vulnerable time, which linger on and constantly undermine one’s self-esteem and self-confidence. Hence, it is very important to learn how to practice compassionate communication. Since this is a full-length topic on itself, I will only refer you to an excellent resource, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* by Marshall B. Rosenberg¹⁰ and briefly summarize its simple idea in most economical words here.

When we communicate, we must simply state what we observe without judging, explain how we feel about what we observe (how it affects us emotionally), specify the need or value that is honoured or hurt in what we observed and that causes the joy or pain, and finally, simply state what exactly you want the other to do in specific action request. A simple example would be this: “I see that over the last two weeks you have come late for prayers four times (*specific observation*). It makes me sad and worried (*your feelings about it*), because I believe punctuality is important in our lives, especially in community activities (*value specification*). So, I would like you to be punctual at community prayers, unless there is a genuine reason for you to be late” (*specific request*). This may be more words, but it is not violent, judgemental, or attacking; just statement of facts and reasoning behind the request. Similarly, when other members communicate to us violently and without clarity, we must request them to state what they observe, how they feel about it, what needs or value of theirs is met or not met, and what specific action they want from you. This entire process can be summarized as below (Section A is about you communicating compassionately. In other words, how to communicate actively and compassionately. Section B is about you requesting clear communication from others, when they make generalized or unclear statements. In other words, how to ask for and receive clear and compassionate communication).



Rosenberg has used this simple methodology to broker peace between nations. I strongly recommend that you obtain a copy of the book and put its wisdom to daily practice. Communicating in this manner might sound a bit laborious and artificial

initially. However, soon you will reap its rewards and the style become more natural and habitual with you.

5. Conflict Transformation: Suggested Models

Having identified our personal styles of dealing with conflicts and learned a few foundational skills, let us now look at some models to transform conflicts in the most practical manner. We can borrow these models from three sources: The Holy Scriptures, your own congregational documents, and some traditional spiritual practices.

i) Following Biblical Models

The Holy Bible is a rich repository of conflicts and conflict transformation along the journey of the people of God! A few of the famed conflicts from the Bible are listed below. For want of space, I will not do an analysis of each of these cases. These are well-known instances from the Bible and hence, I recommend that you take each of them or locate other conflicts and use them separately for reflection and insights on conflict transformation, as a series of community exercises:

- Conflict and conflict transformation between Jacob and Esau (cf. Genesis 27:32-33)
- Joseph's conflict and its transformation with his brothers (cf. Genesis 37:42-45)
- Jesus' teachings on conflict transformation (cf. Matthew 18:15-19)
- Conflicts in the First Christian Community over receiving the Gentiles to the Church (cf. Acts 11:1-18)
- Conflicts in the First Christian Community over the question of circumcision (cf. Acts 15)

Given below is a brief summary of "practical tips" gleaned from the above events as well as some scriptural injunctions collectively.

- a) *Time Out*: When emotions flare up, take a break and do something else (e.g., go for a walk, do some gardening, go to chapel and pray). This 'time out' helps you calm down emotionally and return to reason. Jacob took a time out when conflict arose with Esau.
- b) *Engage in self-reflection*: "for all have sinned..." (Rom 3:23); "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye?" (Mat 7:3-5).
- c) *Reframe the negative experiences*: Joseph reframed the negative experience of being sold into slavery as an act of God's Providence.

- d) *Seek out your brother in private*: “So far as it depends on you, be at peace with all” (Rom 12:18); “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone” (Mat 18:15); “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember...” (Mat 5:23-24); “You who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness...” (Gal 6:1).
- e) *Dialogue*: Respectfully speak your mind. Explain your perspective with a view to helping the other understand. Speak from the vantage point of values, and not personal biases.
- f) *Offer forgiveness as an act of love / ask forgiveness as an act of humility*: “Come to terms quickly with your accuser...” (Mat 5:25-26).
- g) *Consult elders*: Respect their wisdom.
- h) *Use mediation*: “Take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church” (Mat 18:17); “When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?... Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers?” (1Cor 6:1-8).
- i) *See God’s face in your brother*. As Jacob did.
- j) *Repay evil with good*. As Joseph did.
- k) *Keep charity and the common good* as the highest norms.
- l) *Cultivate peace*: “So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another” (Rom 14:19); “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mat 5:9).

ii) Aspirational Model of the Congregation

The Constitutions and the Directory as well as the various Chapter documents of a religious congregation form another excellent source for insights and practical suggestions on how to go about resolving conflicts. The charismatic heritage as well as the generational wisdom that has been handed down through the decades and even centuries of community living within each congregation is a rich mine of resources for healthy living.

When it comes to such congregational documents, a general tendency I have observed, at least among some Indian religious, is the general lack of interest in such documents and a biased preference for action on the ground. Whereas it is true that reflection without action on the ground is empty, action without ongoing reflection can be dangerous as well. We need a healthy balancing of reflection and action,

with each component being fodder to the other in an unending cycle. Yet another tendency I have observed is that once a new chapter document appears, the old ones are forgotten. An exercise worth doing is to study through the chapter documents of the last five to seven to ten chapters and identify the core and common principles as well as corrective reflections that have emerged on community living across them. (This can be applied to other themes as well: such as the ministry on the margins, preferential option for the poor, Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation, etc.) They can serve as distilled wisdom that can enrich us very much in our life ahead.

iii) Traditional Spiritual Practices

Some of the traditional practices of the Church as well as the Congregation, if recovered and practiced, can be helpful in preventing unhealthy conflicts and effecting conflict transformation. A few of them are listed below:

a) Regular Examen of Conscience

An age-old practice that has fallen out of favor in some religious communities is the daily examination of conscience. Let's honestly ask ourselves: Do I do the examen of conscience on a daily basis? If the answer is yes, you would already have the grace and skills to deal with conflicts. If no, well, let us get back to making it a daily habit. Saint Anthony Mary Claret, the Father Founder of my own order, Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, used to make examen of conscience every day at noon and evening, and a constant fixture in his retreat resolutions. He used to make general and particular examen on specifically chosen virtues.¹¹ The very essence of the discernment of spirits that St. Ignatius of Loyola propounded is in the daily examen of conscience.¹² The same can be said of any founder of any religious order. The famous locution from Christ received by the orthodox saint Silouan the Athonite – “Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not” – was in essence to live in perpetual examen of conscience which would lead him to the practice of humility without despair.¹³

b) Sacrament of Reconciliation

Of equal and even greater importance is the regular reception of the sacrament of reconciliation. Here also it is worth asking if this practice has gone out of favor with many priests and religious. Counseling and therapy cannot substitute the sacrament of reconciliation. The comment by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, that psychoanalysis had to come in when the confessionals were thrown out, is revelatory indeed.

c) *Eucharistic Celebration in Community*

There are religious communities where eucharistic celebration with all members is either merely perfunctory or a rarity. In a community of priests who had the responsibility to offer Mass at a nearby school community used to refer to that Mass as “Mass for the Dead”, meaning the lack of life at the Mass wherein the members were more worried about getting the Mass done in 25 minutes so as to rush out to the school. Whereas daily Mass is not obligatory even for priests, I have met some religious priests who do not celebrate Mass if they did not have an assigned Mass in a parish, even when their Constitution demanded daily Mass. If the Eucharist contains the entire spiritual wealth of the Church, the wealth being Christ himself and is the heart of the Church as well as of the consecrated life, we can only wonder as the document *Vita Consecrata* wonders rhetorically thus: “How can those who are called, through the profession of the evangelical counsels, to choose Christ as the only meaning of their lives, not desire to establish an ever more profound communion with him by sharing daily in the Sacrament which makes him present, in the sacrifice which actualizes the gift of his love on Golgotha, the banquet which nourishes and sustains God’s pilgrim people?”¹⁴

d) *Daily Reading – Spiritual and Literary Classics*

With the arrival of electronic gadgets and social media, there is a tendency to limit ourselves to Twitter-long information and superficial news, and neglect spending time reading literature of greater depth and reach. Daily spiritual reading is a must. It is also important to make it a habit to read literary classics as well as *authentic* self-help books (the word *authentic* is important, as there are plenty of fake ones in market) which can help us learn better about ourselves and human nature in general, giving us insights into how to deal with conflicts, intra- or inter-personal.

e) *Spiritual Direction and Vocational Growth Sessions/Psychotherapy*

Having regular spiritual direction is a great help in recognizing and healing our tendencies towards conflict. Having a mature, insightful spiritual director should be a must for every religious. Such a director can accompany us in greater discernment of God’s will and as a sounding board when faced with conflicts. There are two forms of apostolic succession within the Church: the visible succession of the hierarchy in the line of the apostles and the apostolic succession of the spiritual fathers and mothers in every generation of the Church, a line which Saint Symeon the New Theologian called the “golden chain.”¹⁵

It is also advisable to avail of vocational growth sessions (VGS) or counselling or psychotherapeutic services. Often there is an erroneous thinking that they are meant only for those who have ‘problems.’ In fact, they are very useful adjuncts in our project of human flourishing.

f) The Emmaus Walk: Personal Dialogue with the Other

A practice that would go a long way in helping us avoid unhealthy conflicts and transform conflicts when they invariably arise is to spend time with the other members of the community. This can be done in many ways: by having our meals together; by having regular recreation time together; by watching television together. But besides all these good practices, the best would be to have regularly what I would call *Emmaus walks*: spend time on one-on-one with each member of the community, sharing your life story and listening to the life story of the other, with the awareness that Christ walks with you both as an invisible third person, listening to you both and opening up your minds and hearts to understand the mysteries of God and human life. Knowing a person in close quarters and listening to him or her is the best practice to grow in empathy and compassion. Such intimate moments of learning about the other as well as offering the gift of self-disclosure will help us grow closer as brothers and sisters in faith.

Conclusion: Transformed Communities

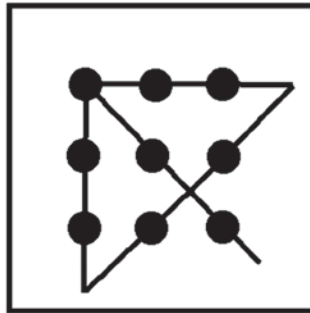
We began with the assertion that conflicts are natural and are growth-moments. No human community is free from conflicts. Let us be realistic that in our religious living and ministering, conflicts are bound to occur. However, if we approach the conflict with a mature perspective and a transcendental vision hinging on God, the result of such conflicts would be a community that is transformed in Spirit for the better. We grow as mature and authentic human beings and grow closer to our brothers and sisters in our communities. This is evident in the history of the early Christian community. Though they were of “one mind and heart” initially (cf. Acts 4:32), sooner than later there emerged conflicts regarding neglecting widows, admitting gentiles, circumcision, etc. However, when the community approached them in prayer, discernment, and honest discussion, the Church was transformed for the better. The same can happen to us too when we approach conflicts with the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

A beautiful artistic expression of such conflict transformation is evident in the movie *Of Gods and Men*. It is a 2010 award-winning French motion picture directed by Xavier Beauvois. It tells the story of the martyrdom of seven Algerian

Trappist monks in 1996 (who now are beatified). It is also a beautiful exposition of a “crisis” or “conflict” in a religious community: In the context of the threat of Islamic terrorists, the civil authorities asked the monks, who were all foreigners and hence potential victims of violence, to leave the country and save themselves. The superior, convinced that it was wrong to leave, decided that they would stay; but he did so without consulting the community. Was it right for him to decide for others? Did they all really want to stay? It was a conflict rooted in one’s freedom to choose. How did the community face the conflict? What methods did it adopt? How did they arrive at an appropriate and just decision? How was the community transformed thereafter? Watch this movie as a community, specifically focusing on the “community dynamics” and the conflict transformation implied. What learning outcomes can possibly be for your community living? You might then want to apply the insights to your community living and discuss with your community members.

Religious communities are called to be exemplars of eschatological communities. Well, that is the goal, the ideal. The actual may fall short. However, contemplating the ideal and analyzing the actual will help us bridge the gap, one day at a time, piece by piece, assisted by Grace.

Appendix A: Solution to the Nine-Dot Problem



Due to the perceptual principle of closure, we see the nine dots as a square. That is, due to the proximity of the dots in the form of rows and columns, we tend to close the spaces and see it as a square. This “mental set” or “perceptual habit” blocks finding a solution to the problem. You can never solve the nine-dot problem by approaching it as a square. You can only solve it if you “break” your habitual frame and see it in a different perspective—approach it as a triangle. You need to start at any dot and go beyond the dots to a higher or deeper plane, and then come down and enter another dot, with the new frame of a triangle, to have the solution.

Appendix B: A Community Exercise

Here is a follow-up exercise that can be done in your community. This exercise has two parts. The first part is to be done individually; and the second, together with everyone in your community as a community act.

Part A: Individual Act

- Time required: Ideally 60-90 minutes.
- Get ready with a couple of sheets of paper and pencil.
- Find for yourself a peaceful place, free of distractions.
- Sit down, do some *alpha breathing*, after which breathe as you normally do. (*alpha breathing* refers to cycles of slow, deep breathing with four parts for each breath: breathe in deep, hold the fullness of lungs for a few seconds, breathe out long, hold the emptiness of the lungs for a few seconds. Repeat it six more times, at least.) Resume your normal mode of breathing (you might find it now to be much calmer and longer though, and that is good!)
- Take a reflective, mental tour through the years of community life you have led so far in your religious living. You may begin ideally at your initial formation days or at least from the time of your perpetual profession. Do so with the following review questions in your mind to guide you:
 - a) What major conflicts have I lived through during these years?
 - b) Were some of those conflicts *intra-personal* and some, *inter-personal*?
 - c) Were there conflicts wherein *divisive groups* were formed within the community? Were there conflicts wherein the entire community became an *alliance* against another community or the government of the Province?
 - d) What “*pattern*” do I find in the personal conflicts I have experienced?
 - e) Do I find a “*pattern*” for the *inter-personal/inter-group* conflicts I have witnessed or been part of? Describe it.
 - f) Did I/ my communities successfully resolve these conflicts, and if yes, how? If no, why?
 - g) What were the “*consequences*” (both positive and negative) of such conflicts and their resolutions or the lack of resolution?
 - h) What insights has this exercise given me into my own conflict dynamics and that of my community living?

Part B: Community Act

- Time required: Ideally 90-120 minutes, for a community of 3-7 members.
- Come together at a designated day, time, and place (preferably on the same day of the personal reflection by every member, or not later than one day – so as not to cause the insights to fade away due to lapse of time). Ensure that all potential distractions are neutralized (for example, by switching off the cell phones and not attending phone calls. This is sacred time.)
- Assign a moderator to ensure optimal participation of everyone, and a ‘scribe’ to capture the points of sharing.
- Each member shares only the following (Avoid sharing the “stories” of conflicts you recalled in the personal act part of this exercise, for two reasons: (i) it can cause much harm to the name and dignity of individuals involved, and (ii) you might end up wasting so much of time, ending up with little time for the analysis/learning part, which is the primary intent of this exercise):
 - a. *The “patterns” you have identified in the conflicts you reviewed.*
 - b. *When the conflicts were resolved, what elements helped the resolution most?*
 - c. *When the conflicts remained unresolved, what elements hindered the resolution most?*
 - d. *The insights you gained from the personal act part of the exercise.*
- Now, with the help of the notes gathered by the scribe, the group identifies the common elements in the sharing and prepares a chart.
- Apply the findings to your current community living to understand the dynamics of any existing conflicts and to resolve them.
- If required, prepare an Action Plan to prevent unhealthy conflicts in future as well as to transform conflicts as growth-moments when conflicts arise in future.
- End the session with a 20-minute community adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, in the spiritual company of Mother Mary and the saints/blessed of your Congregation.

Appendix C: Select Resources for Further Reading

- AYINDO, BABU, DOE, SAM GBAYDEE, & JENNER, JANICE., *When You are the Peace Builder: Stories and Reflections on Peacebuilding from Africa*. Harrisonburge, VA: Eastern Mennonite University, 2001.
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- JONES, L. B., *Power of Positive Prophecy: Finding the Hidden Potential in Everyday Life*. Santa Clara, CA: Hyperion, 1999.
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- LEDERACH, J. P., *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Peacemaking*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
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- ROSENBERG, M. B., *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. Encinitas, California: Puddledancer Press, 2003.
- SENEHI, J., (2002). Constructive storytelling: A peace process. *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 9, no.2 (2002), 41-63.
- VAYRYNEN, RAIMO, ed., *New Directions in Conflict Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1991.
- Plenty of resources and links to other sites can be accessed at the website of the Mindanao Peace-building Institute, Davao City, Philippines. www.mpiasia.net/newsresources/resources.html

Endnotes

¹ This article is a revised and adapted version of a module originally published in 2020 by Claretian Missionaries as part of a series of 12 modules on community dynamics, within the ongoing formation project of its members.

² "Conflict", *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conflict.

³ "Conflict", *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, American Psychological Association, <https://dictionary.apa.org/conflict>

⁴ This exercise is adapted from Hope & Timmel II, as given in *Peacebuilding: A Caritas Training Manual*, Vatican 2002, 142-143.

⁵ *Mediation and Facilitation Training Manual: Foundations and skills for Constructive Conflict Transformation*, Mennonite Conciliation Services. As discussed in *Peacebuilding: A Caritas Training Manual*, 65-66.

⁶ BABU AYINDO – SAM GBAYDEE DOE – JANICE JENNER, *When You are the Peace Builder: Stories and Reflections on Peacebuilding from Africa*, Harrisonburge, VA 2001, 76.

⁷ CHRISTOPHER MITCHELL, “Beyond Resolution: What Does Conflict Transformation Actually Transform?,” *Peace and Conflict Studies* 9/1 (2002) 1-23.

⁸ RAIMO VAYRYNEN, “To Settle or to Transform? Perspectives on the Resolution of National and International Conflict”, in R.VAYRYNEN, ed., *New Directions in Conflict Theory*, Thousand Oaks, CA 1991, 4-7.

⁹ ROLLY MAY, *Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Violence*, New York 1998, 247.

¹⁰ MARSHALL B. ROSENBERG, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, Encinitas, CA 2003.

¹¹ ANTHONY MARY CLARET, *Autobiography and Complementary Writings*, Bangalore 2011, nn. 637, 646, 765, 782, 801.

¹² MARK E. THIBODEAUX, *God's Voice Within: The Ignatian Way to Discover God's Will*, Chicago 2010.

¹³ ARCHIMANDRITE ZACHARIAS, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, Dalton, PA 2012, 62-92.

¹⁴ *Vita Consecrata*, Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World (March 25, 1996), 95.

¹⁵ Cited in Kallistos [Ware] of Diokleia, “Foreword: The Spiritual Father in Saint John Climacus and Saint Symeon the New Theologian” in IRÉNÉE HAUSHERR, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Kalamazoo, MI 1990, vii.

WALKING ON THE WATER WITHOUT SINKING: FROM LOSS OF HOPE AND BOREDOM TO CREATIVITY

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

When the mission becomes monotonous, repetitive, routine, everything languishes: spirituality, formation, community life, apostolic work. This is what is happening in many areas of the Church today. After a time of enthusiasm comes tiredness, boredom, the loss of creative energy. Mission becomes repetitive. The missionary is no longer a mystic, a poet, a creative person. He becomes an official, a worker.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE CRISIS OF HOPE

The many entertainments that the society of leisure offers so easily today do not give meaning to our lives. Neither do the amazing technological gadgets, which attract our curiosity and allow us to do what was impossible in the past. Nor do our lives have meaning simply because we can eat, sleep or enjoy sex. Our lives are meaningful if we are able to overcome boredom. Our lives have meaning when they are thought through on a long term basis and everything in them has meaning and sense.

The question confronting us then is: how to rediscover hope? Where do we find meaning in life today? Only hope will enable the mission entrusted to us by the risen Lord to be authentically reborn.

1. Vita brevis

The span of life given to each one of us is limited. After infancy, we spend many years in formation; then comes the stage of production and reproduction.

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF is a Claretian Missionary, a re-nowned theologian, a Mariologist and an expert in Consecrated Life. He is Professor of Theology of Consecrated Life at the Instituto Teológico de Vida Religiosa in Madrid, Spain (Pontifical University of Salamanca), and at the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia (ICLA, Manila) and ICL: Institute of Consecrated Life – Sanyasa . He is also Professor of Pastoral Theology of the Sacraments at the Instituto Superior de Teología Pastoral, Madrid (Pontifical University of Salamanca). Among his books are Religious Life as a Parable of the Kingdom: Theology of Religious Life (9 booklets); Teología de las formas de vida cristiana (3 volumes); Teología fundamental de los Sacramentos; Iniciación Cristiana y Eucaristía; Mariología; and “Lo que Dios ha unido”: Teología del Matrimonio. The present article was originally written in Spanish.

In fact, they are just a few years! And, as the psalmist says, they fly so quickly. Then comes the “third age”, which, if there are no problems, could last another twenty to twenty-five years.

The loss of Utopian depth is obvious in our times. The post-modern mentality adjusts much better to the finite, the concrete and the possible. Gone is the time of the building of great cathedrals that took several generations before they could be used. Now we do not make very long-range plans. Gone also is the time of great rhetoric and heroism, of grandeur and super responsibilities. Today we try to adjust more to our limitations and speak with more modesty about our achievements.

Although there are some people who proclaim that “another better world is possible”, that “another democracy” is possible, we can however see an intelligent resignation in the face of the slow rhythm of the progress that could perhaps bring us many surprises.

2. The Gift of Hope

We Christians confess that hope is a gift. It does not come from us or from our hidden energies. It is given to us when we believe that the reign of God has come and is at hand among us; when we realize that our plea “Maranatha!” is heard; when we notice in our living space the footprints of the Son of Man.

Hope is the divine sensibility acting in our soul. The one who has been given hope is able to overcome the limits imposed by death, even by the most personal and individual interests motivating him; even without knowing how, this person feels affected by the “whole”: he becomes interested in everything — his family, community, nation, even all humanity, nature and the cosmos.

The one who has hope knows that there is a “way, a truth and a life.” He feels himself wrapped in the light of the resurrection of the flesh. He looks at everything around him from the perspective of this impressive horizon.

Our hope becomes alive only when we are penetrated by the light of God. We have no power to make it shine, as it does not belong to the sphere of our own light. Communion with Jesus, participation in his Spirit and the intense living of the Covenant with our Abba make it possible. In our Christian tradition, hope has been understood as a “theological virtue”, which is an energy that comes only from God.

3. When Lacking in Hope

When we human beings think of ourselves as self-sufficient and give up living in a permanent covenant of love and vision with our God, then our charity, faith and

hope enter into crisis. These are three divine energies which are kept alive within us insofar as we are in living connection with our God.

When we lack hope, curiosity and snobbery take its place. In this situation, we are no longer interested:

- not in wide horizons, but in grandiose spectacles;
- not in formation, but in addictive information;
- not in wisdom, but in restless curiosity;
- not in transformation, but in make-up and fitness.

We enjoy dreaming shallow dreams more than transforming them into reality.

Consecrated life is not without curiosity, information, heavy schedules full of projects and many attempts at make-up. I wonder how much space is taken up by “the theological virtue of hope” that only communion with God can keep burning and whose effects are obvious in an admirable “newness of life” and creative innovation. Is it not said that hope is active and creative?

The eyes of despair begin to operate when we look at ourselves. Instead of life, we see death. We bring forward the reality of death instead of the reality of life. We live attached to death, when we think that to commit ourselves to many things “is not worth the effort,” when we give up bringing out the best of ourselves in new activity, when we reject the enthusiasm that at other times led us to do crazy things. There are those who become disenchanted in the face of the difficulties they encounter and give up beautiful projects; they no longer believe in the future!

When despair increases, our community meetings are characterised by silence, by obstacles to new initiatives, by scepticism in the face of projects put forward by younger members or those more sensitive to prophecy. Scepticism and even cynicism are powerful obstacles to our union with God and make the virtue of hope impossible. We are like the one who hid the talent in the ground because he was afraid to invest it (Mt 25:24-30). We make it difficult for others to hope when we say, in the face of an initiative, “Impossible!” or “It isn’t worth it”.

We lift the blockade on hope, on the other hand, when we remember that our God often chooses poor and weak instruments to confound the strong, that “all things are possible to the one who believes” (Mk 9:23) and that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from the stones (Mt 3:9). What would happen if we really made a space in our present for the future that God offers us, the apocalyptic future of the Reign of God?

4. A Precarious Present? Not Yet!

If we look at the generations which form consecrated life today, we can see that there are no reasons for scepticism. It is true that some people, outside religious life, are selling the idea that religious life is practically dead and that we are more a burden than a help. But we can look at consecrated life from a positive perspective.

In the movie “The Great Silence”, Philip Groaning has filmed the life of a Carthusian monastery, which could properly serve as parable of consecrated life. In the monastery there were more old monks, seasoned by many years of cloister. However, there were also monks in midlife, young ones and new candidates. In this monastery the camera captured only beauty, charm, harmony and serenity. At times, the camera focused on the faces, especially the face of a seasoned old monk whose countenance invited us to penetrate the mystery of God.

We frequently speak about numbers, statistics and about the increasing age of those in consecrated life. However, the question we should ask is: what is old age? Is it a space of hope? Yes or no? Is the younger generation arriving from different countries a sign of hope?

“Old age is so long that we shouldn’t start it too early” (Mark Twain). Religious life today in many countries has just received a great gift: “an additional life”:¹ from fifteen to twenty extra years! They have been offered to adult men and women religious. And what is even better, we can live this added existence in good health and in good shape. A revolution is taking place which brings about lasting changes in our body, our behaviour and our way of thinking; this event also transforms the balance of our society and the future of our young people and those who come after them. It is a major change in our history which affects all of us. Not only is our life extended, our vitality is also extended. Until recently, human life was divided into three stages: infancy (stage of development), adult age (stage of activity) and old age (stage of decline). Recently, adolescence has been added; as well as another stage of transition which has now been discovered, a new age between maturity and old age, from the sixties to seventy-five years of age — a second adolescence, perhaps as agitated and restless as the first one.

Religious life today, in a good number of countries, is receiving a wonderful gift: new generations from other cultures who are trying to live this way of life with passion. The seeds of charism are germinating in an amazing way in Africa, Asia and Oceania. There are already thousands of new men and women religious reaching their majority and bringing with them the riches of other nations, cultures, religious traditions and the creative capacity of a new way of seeing evangelical charity.

The interaction among these fabulous gifts will be the challenge (our problem and our opportunity) for the coming years. Challenges are calls to our imagination to find creative answers.

Is it a precarious present? My answer is: not yet! We still have time for a new “inclusive” project of mission in which everyone has a place, in which the old and the young will generate a creative process never seen before, with the characteristics of post-modernity and globalization which make us relevant and catholic.

II. PAYING ATTENTION TO THE CRISIS OF MEANING: BOREDOM

Lack of hope is manifested in the phenomenon of boredom.²

“Boredom has not been given the necessary attention as a factor of human behaviour. I am convinced that it has been a powerful agent throughout the ages, and in our times more so than ever” (Bertrand Russell).

1. What is boredom?

When we are affected by boredom, we see the future as a repetitive reality, without any appeal and not as a vital space full of opportunities. The only thing we want is for time to pass.

Boredom emerges when we are not able to do what we want or, worse, when we do not know what we want to do. Boredom is a sign of being disoriented in life; boredom produces in us a sort of psychic coolness which threatens our spirit. “Boredom is like a sickness which causes all vitality to be extinguished and to vanish rapidly” (Alberto Moravia). To prevent boredom taking hold of us, we either fill up our working schedules or search for entertainment or leisure. We say: “I have no time to get bored!” But the truth is, neither the many activities nor the entertainments are able to give meaning to life. The inner emptiness remains. Only experiences and the knowledge gained from experience take away boredom. And it is when we “experience” that we meet the originality and the newness of life. However, it is also true that our life experiences are transient, so that what was very interesting at one moment soon afterwards becomes indifferent or tiring.

2. Is there boredom in religious life?

We are affected by boredom much more than we think. Primitive monastic life was very much aware of this reality. It was called “acedia”. A community cannot function properly if it is not able to find meaning in what it is and does. The desert Fathers, like Evagrius, considered acedia a grave sin, a demoniac reality: the demons

induced the monks to hate the place in which they were living and even their way of life; they introduced a deep sadness into the monks' souls. Acedia was described as a state of vital boredom and exhaustion. During the Middle Ages the name of acedia was changed to melancholy or apathetic indifference. The great ascetics used to see acedia as the source of all the other sins. According to Cassian, acedia is opposed to joy we should feel in the face of God and creation. Since the fourteenth century, acedia has been considered more as a sickness than a sin.

Acedia continues to be present in consecrated life today. It is a sickness that destroys hope and brings sadness, death and lack of passion to the mission.

We try to hide our boredom with our many tasks and busy schedules. We religious know very well how to give space in our schedules for entertainment in order to hide our boredom. We have, besides our normal daily work, time for listening to the radio, for reading the newspapers, for watching television, for working on the computer, and for relating with people. It is even possible that, with this schedule, we might have not enough time for prayer, for study, for dialogue with ourselves. If, one day, circumstances force us to have long periods of silence or inactivity, we discover our inner emptiness and the "horror vacui", the fear of emptiness produced by our being alone with our self. We are not able to bear silence or solitude because in this situation, our boredom emerges.

The most serious thing about all this, in relation to religious life, is that boredom shows the absence of God in our life. Pascal affirmed that the human person without God is condemned to boredom: "even persons without a privileged mind realize that nothing exists in this world that is able to give us real and lasting fulfilment" (Pascal). Leisure and boredom diminish our human life. How can we transform what is boring into something interesting? Only by filling it with meaning, being and life! Boredom is like being dead when we are still alive.

3. Boredom as a Passage Towards Creativity

Those who do not flee from boredom, but hold on to it and face it, could be preparing themselves for a creative moment. Nietzsche affirmed that the "unpleasant sluggishness of the spirit" which is boredom could be the preparation for a creative work. Those with a creative spirit are able to hold on to boredom. The simple ones avoid it. According to Heidegger, boredom could serve as an initiation into metaphysics and the encounter with God. Spirituality can be born in the nothingness of boredom. Boredom deprives the world of its hospitality: in this situation, people feel the need for a hospitable world. Boredom makes us long for the time we call *kairos*, the presence of grace.

There is superficial boredom and deep boredom. In superficial boredom, people feel the emptiness of things around them. In deep boredom, people feel the emptiness of everything, even of themselves. We feel powerless in the face of this kind of boredom. The only thing we can do is to understand it.

Boredom leads us to ask ourselves questions about our own identity: Who am I? It makes me ask whether what I have within me is a foundation or an abyss. When we perceive ourselves as pure presence, we see ourselves as an abyss. References to the past and to the future give us stability.

Many remedies have been sought against boredom: relationship with God (Pascal), love (Friedrich Schlegel), renunciation of the individual ego through aesthetic experience (Schopenhauer), finding meaning in boredom itself and facing up to it (Bertrand Russell). The problem is that all these answers are not definitive ones: in the long term, boredom returns, because it is tiresome and recurring.

Joseph Brodsky, perhaps, offers the most convincing remedy:

“When boredom takes hold of you, immerse yourself in it. Allow it to press upon you and to drag you to the bottom. In the emptiness generated by boredom there are possibilities. Because of its negativity, boredom can produce a positive change.”³

Boredom is a major problem in the modern age. Boredom increases when traditional structures of meaning break down. Liberation from tradition compels us to find meaning by ourselves. Boredom leads us to a profound hidden meaning. If it is deep, it will bring about a change in our existence.

In life, we have to bear a significant amount of boredom here and there. Boredom must be accepted as unavoidable, as the force of gravity in our own life. There is, perhaps, a solution: against boredom, the creative capacity! Human beings can transcend themselves, can see reality in another way, can overcome the limits of space and time by imagination, can create and can hope.

Perhaps the “grace” of the mission that Jesus has entrusted to us consists in this: to live already in the here and now the Utopia of the Reign of God and to live from the perspective of the unconcern given us by the finding of the “treasure”; to proclaim it and to be witnesses to this marvellous invention.

III. THE CREATIVE CAPACITY

We have used this word so often recently that any initiative has been called “creative”. We have called the “lazy and restless imagination” creative. Anything improvised at the last minute, without roots, without previous meditation and spirituality, has been considered “creative”. Creativity in religious life, often times, has been deprived of a foundation. And this has seriously affected the mission.

Because of this, it is no wonder that many sensible persons are turned off when they hear the word “creativity”. They show in that way their tiredness and a certain scorn for those who consider themselves creative.

Creativity is something different. It is a meaningful word only when it means what it should mean.⁴

1. Space for the Encounter

Where creativity occurs, there is an encounter between the human and the divine. In creative action, we co-create with the Spirit of God. When we say “we”, we refer to a mysterious reality which is part of our constitution. The atoms of hydrogen, the food and drink which nourish our body, the ideas penetrating our mind, the language we have learned, the beauty we have absorbed during many days on earth — we find out that they have affected us.

Creativity is the space of encounter, the meeting of the divine powers of creation and the human powers of imagination. There is creativity where a profound intimacy with the divine takes place. “God is delighted to watch your soul enlarge”, affirmed Master Eckhart. The creative capacity truly enlarges our soul.

Creativity is not reserved for superior beings. It has not been given only to geniuses. It is a capacity we have received from our Creator. The Creator has created “creators”. We are creators! But the problem is how to develop this interior capacity, how to educate it, how to be led and motivated to creative thought and praxis.

2. The Source of Meaning

Creation is seldom the result of a sudden intuition; rather it occurs after years of intensive work.

The creative capacity is a source of meaning in our lives. When we are committed to a creative activity, we feel ourselves to be living more fully than in the rest of our lives. The result of a creative action is always interesting and gives meaning.

Creativity always takes place in liminal spaces: in the intersection of different cultures; where religious traditions, where beliefs, lifestyles and knowledge interact and allow for new combinations of ideas more easily. Creativity is more likely to occur where the perception of new ideas requires less effort.

Creativity is a systemic rather than an individual phenomenon. We are creative as a whole, when we allow ourselves to be affected by the totality. The reactionary, those closed in on themselves and in their own interests, barely participate in the

re-creation of the world. Their creativity is a negative one. In the final analysis, their initiatives are more destructive than constructive.

However, the creative genius gives the impression of being isolated from society, locked away in his artistic monastery. In reality, he does not isolate himself, rather he penetrates the soul of humanity more deeply. He is like the psychoanalyst investigating the human psyche, or like the surgeon penetrating the mysterious geography of the human body. When the creative person comes out of his isolation, he is a bearer of good news.

Without a good measure of curiosity, admiration and interest in how things are and how they work, it is very difficult to recognise an interesting problem. Openness to experience, attentively processing everything happening around us, is a great help in discovering possible newness.

The search for creativity places us in the very heart of spirituality.

3. Fear of Creativity

If we ask someone: why do you not develop your creative capacity? The answer could be: because I am afraid! I am too shallow and lacking depth! Sadness has taken hold of me! I am sick and might die soon! People will not accept me I would have to pay a high price! I am a perfectionist and have no time to be creative! God did not give me that gift!

Within each of us there is a person with a creative capacity. Why do we not develop it, leaving it as a talent which is not traded or as a seed which does not develop? Is someone faithful to his or her vocation if s/he does not develop a creative capacity? Everything in creation is in a constant creative process. Because of that, there is life. The human being is aware of that. I can realize it in an intentional and cordial way. S/he can become a “gift” out of this creative capacity: It is a unique gift!

The evil one is the greatest anti-creator. He tries only to destroy and bring life to an end. This is the reality of sin! To renounce the creative capacity in ourselves and to block it in others! Sin is anti-creation. When Jesus, the Liberator arrives, a new “genesis” takes place (Mt 1:1:18).

4. Launch out into the Deep!

Creativity leads us to the desert, to solitude, to the place where the liberation of our potentialities takes place. Consecrated life will be creative only if its members are able to bear silence, to cloister themselves in the monastery of their inner solitude, to resist acedia and to wait for the coming of the Spirit.

We do not seek solitude or silence for their own sake. We seek them because they are necessary for creative activity. The one who feels challenged by what is going on in our world, in the Church, in our community, even within oneself, searches for solitude as the proper sphere to allow answers to mature, to reorganize intuitions and to plan the mission.

The forty days of Jesus in the desert are perhaps an expression of his inner anxiety about finding the most creative orientations for his mission. From his days in the desert, we can explain his teachings, his transformative and healing actions and his deep spirituality.

Religious life, scattered in so many activities, often forced to improvise, using answers already given by others and giving up cultivating its own well of inner wisdom and drawing out the best from it, will have very little creative capacity.

When the creative capacity comes, as a gift of the Spirit, joy is reborn and boredom disappears. “Rejoice, full of grace!” Boredom, the tedium of life, has come to an end. The inner quest has found the answer. And this answer is pure grace and inspiration! When inspiration comes, a new intense life comes to us. Our body vibrates and is full of emotion. Everything is born again to contribute, in shared mission, to the creative result.

Our union with the Creator Spirit is the most genuine source of joy. Only those possessed by this inner joy can evangelize and proclaim the Good News. How could someone be a messenger of joy (*Mebasser* or Evangelizer) if s/he is always weighed down, sad and possessed by boredom? The creative inspiration is a source of evangelization, first for our own selves and, then for others.

The one moved by the Creator Spirit might think at times that s/he is crazy. A sort of wild craziness is present in those who have received the grace of creative passion. Perhaps this is the “fear of God”: a sort of shudder in the face of something within us, bigger than ourselves, which is energizing even the smallest members of our body and the most insignificant feelings of our spirit. Creative inspiration leads to ecstasy. We should not tame it? What is the worth of consecrated life deprived of ecstasy?

5. The Most Urgent Fields of Creativity

I believe that our creative capacity, as missionaries of the Reign of God and as humble mediators of the Great Covenant of our Abba with humankind, leads us to four areas which are today, more than ever in need of this creative capacity:

a) The Sphere of Religion and Liturgy

In the face of the insensibility of so many of our contemporaries to God, our religion and our faith, should we not commit ourselves to new forms of liturgical, religious and cultural expression? Those given to us by the Spirit, because we have not yet discovered them! Our liturgical art is still mediaeval or Renaissance. It obviously keeps the characteristics of our tradition — which is good and necessary. We have introduced new elements, which are quite poor from a creative perspective. Great contemporary music is found outside our churches and religions. New artistic tendencies in images, sculpture and architecture, in dance and movement, hardly interact with the celebrations of our faith and beliefs. Creative beauty is escaping from us and we are satisfied with being owners of the “uncreated Beauty”. We do not know how to speak about this divine beauty. We do not have language, forms and sounds to express it.

There are no quality controls when we have to create new imaginative expressions of our faith. It is also true that some pastors have shown very little sensitivity to creativity and have closed themselves off from sacred art (*arte sacra*), keeping us always tied to the expression of antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

The same thing is happening to theological expression. Creative theological expressions are obstructed. There is a radical mistrust of imagination and creation. Because of this, there are also boring theologies which kill any hope.

The Creator Spirit, however, is free and is acting everywhere. When it is unable to penetrate through one door, it finds another. There is religious and theological creativity in our world. It will be a pity if this creativity comes to our doors and those in the house are unable to recognize it.

b) The Sphere of Institutional Improvement of the Church

The Church needs to move forward in the revision of its structures. It is a time for organizational and innovative imagination. The post-Conciliar Church has redefined itself as a Church of communion and mission. Communion and mission must shape it.

There is no theoretical difficulty in accepting that the laity are responsible subjects in the life of the Church; but, in reality, we accept them as mere volunteers, without status or remuneration. They are asked for voluntary work and financial contributions. It is about time that they were given official, juridical and liturgical recognition for the many services they have given. Is it not time for them to be called to participate in the most serious decisions of Church life, like the election of

parish priests, bishops, and even the Pope? The synodal journey of several individual Churches is a first step, which should be continued and taken seriously.

The creative capacity must look for new spaces in the Church for the feminine genius. Women today must find in our community of faith a space for hope, new horizons which give meaning to the vocation they feel in the deepest layers of their person.

c) The Sphere of Mission

Mission is a source of newness. The energies of the cosmos, the riches of the nations, cultures and religions come to the Church through mission. The Church, in permanent dialogue with life, offers society the best nourishment, the Bread from heaven. It is much more important for the Church to offer the riches of the Word and sacraments, of the processes of healing and overcoming evil, its spiritual journeys, than to offer the magnificence of its temples and the majesty of its authorities. To participate in the unique mission of the Church is the way to find the meaning of life, to overcome boredom, to find reasons for living, for being active agents of hope.

In mission, the proclamation of the Gospel challenges our creativity. It needs to be translated twice: firstly, into the languages of the peoples; secondly, as Word of God for the globalised and post-modern human person.

The Gospel must be translated into new languages. Deficient translations should be urgently corrected. Translations should witness to the truth of our Christian tradition and to the cultures receiving it. We badly need today new generations of indigenous biblical scholars, interpreters who, in the diversity of cultures, are able to express the Word of God through the beauty of new languages and symbolic worlds. Both the female and male genius could offer a new shining light, beauty and appeal today to the translation of the Bible.

A second kind of translation is also needed: the proclamation of the Gospel to the human person living in the age of globalization and postmodernity, suffering from the loss of religious and transcendent meaning, and who feels alienated by work and by the amazing web of entertainments.

The proclamation of the Gospel must be insistent, unceasing. It must be creative and innovative, a bearer of beauty that is always old and always new.

Within the mission — the *servitium caritatis* — ministries of charity demand a new creative imagination. In our world today, there are many persons, of all ages, suffering the wounds of death due to injustice, war, corruption, violence.

The community of Jesus feels called to go out to all the roads to care, welcome and exercise Samaritan hospitality. The mission of charity must find new expressions within the great net of globalization. It is in this field that our evangelizing mission and our liturgy acquire credibility in our society today.

Conclusion

Consecrated life is living a unique opportunity in its history: like Peter, it is called to walk on the waters. It cannot continue sitting in the boat, bored and without meaning. Jesus is calling consecrated life to come out and to walk on the waves. Consecrated life obeys and places its feet on the water. The impossible becomes reality. But, after the first steps, the wind blows. Consecrated life feels that it is going to sink. It cries out to the Lord. The Lord demands faith, absolute trust and hope. Here are the hands able to save it.

Creativity is a leap into the unknown: it is the possibility of the apparently impossible. To jump into the sphere of creativity is our salvation and the salvation of our brothers and sisters. In the creative moment, times become fruitful, the “meaning of life” returns; enthusiasm increases; living and dying are worthwhile.

Endnotes

¹ ROSMAY, JOEL DE – SERVANT-SCHREIBER, JEAN-LOUISE – CLOSETS, FRANCOIS, *Una vida extra. La longevidad: un privilegio individual, una bomba colectiva*, (Anagrama, Barcelona, 2006).

² Cf. LARS FR. H. SVENDSEN, *Filosofía del tedio, Ensayo Tusquets*, Barcelona 2006; cf. PETER HANDKE, *Versuch ubre di Müdigkeit, Suhrkamp*, Frankfurt am Main, 1989; FERNANDO PESSOA, *Libro del desasosiego*, Acantilado, Barcelona 2002; POUND, EZRA, *The Cantos*, Faber and Haber, Londres 1975.

³ JOSEPH BRODSKY, *Til kjedsomhetens pris (The Price of Boredom)*, in *Hvordan lese en bok (How to Read a Book)*, Aventura, Oslo 1997.

⁴ Cf. MATTEW FOX, *Creativity. Where the Divine and the Human Meet*, New York 2004; MIHALY CSIKSZTMIHALYI, *Creativatividad. El fluir y la psicología del descubrimiento y la invención*, Paidós 1998.

JOY AND HAPPINESS IN CONSECRATED LIFE: SOME REFLECTIONS

José Rovira Arumí, CMF

INTRODUCTION

On November 24, 2013, Pope Francis offered to the Church his Apostolic Exhortation, *On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World: Evangelii Gaudium*. On February 2, 2014, the CICLSAL (Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life) came out with the *Circular Letter to Religious, Towards the Special Year for the Consecrated Life: Rejoice*, taking some words from the teaching of Pope Francis: "I want to share a message, and the message of joy. Wherever consecrated persons are, there must always be joy."

I would like to present in this article some reflections on "Joy and Happiness in Consecrated Life." It is definitely not a new subject as you can see in the bibliography at the end of these pages, but a subject that is nonetheless newly highlighted in a special way by Pope Francis.

1) The Human and Christian Goal: Joy, Happiness and Love

a) First of all, there is a need to distinguish between joy and happiness, although in this reflection we shall consider them together due to their complementarity. As we progress in our discussion, it is important to keep in mind that their meaning is not identical. As John-Varkey says:

Happiness involves our deepest strivings and concerns. Though happiness can be seen as a pleasant feeling like joy, it also entails evaluation of our situation and things around us as basically right and good. Happiness is not the same as joy, although the two are closely linked. Evans¹ distinguished between joy and happiness; joy is a basic emotion, and, like other basic emotions, a single episode of joy lasts only a few seconds or minutes,

Josep Rovira Arumí C.M.F., is a Claretian Missionary. He held a Doctorate by the "Alphonsianum" (Pont. Univ. Lateranense, Roma) in 1973, on Moral Theology. From 1973 to 2012, he taught Theology of Consecrated Life at "Claretianum" (Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata, Rome) and in other Faculties of Rome and abroad. From 2013 to 2015, he has taught Theology of Consecrated Life at ICLA (Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia, Manila. Along the years at the "Claretianum" he has also performed the role of Secretary, Vice-Director, Director and Librarian. He has published some books and above all numerous articles on Consecrated Life. He can be contacted at jracmf42@gmail.com

whereas, happiness is a mood that lasts from several minutes to several hours. Moods are background states that raise or lower our susceptibility to emotional stimuli. In a happy mood, for example, we will be more likely to react joyfully to good news, while in not so happy mood we might react not so intensely.

Happiness is not measured by the outward expression of joyous behaviours. For example, a person who is in a grieving period over the death of a parent may appear sad, but this person may be very grateful for having this parent live lovingly so long or for granting a peaceful death. The inner experience of this person is happiness and gratitude which is fulfilling. In this sense, it is important to see through the spectrum of behaviors of the candidate to assess deeper happiness.”²

In other words, joy tends to be rather a passing and often times superficial emotion, while happiness is that which is deeper and lasting. In our life, the decisive goal is to be happy despite un-joyful moments, or even moments of sadness and grief, anger, fear, anxiety, guilt and shame, as long as they remain transitory and do not destroy our inner most happiness and peace.³

b) Secondly, let us remember that the final goal of our lives is to be happy, a kind of happiness that we achieve when we love and feel loved. All the rest are means: celibacy or married life, to be here or to be there, to do this or to do that. Thus, what we cannot renounce as creatures of God Who is love (1Jn 4:8, 16), in order to be happy, is to love and to be loved, concretely, that is, loving and being loved by concrete people, for love looks for faces.⁴ Humankind cannot understand itself and attain its goal without love. As John Paul II said:

God created man in his own image and likeness (cf. Gen 1: 26-27); calling him to existence *through love*, he called him at the same time *for love*.

God is love (1Jn 4: 8) and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion (cf. GS 12). Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.

As an incarnate spirit, that is a soul which expresses itself in a body and a body informed by an immortal spirit, man is called to love in his unified totality. Love includes the human body, and the body is made a sharer in spiritual love.

Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person, in its entirety, to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy. Either one is, in its own proper form, an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being ‘created in the image of God’...” (FC 11; cf. PH 10, PDV 44, CCC 2331, 2392).

And, as all other human being are, Consecrated people cannot just live giving love; they too need to receive love (cf. DCE 7b).

At this point, we can ask the question: What is love, if it is so important for our joy and happiness? Why are we continually speaking of love, either in profane or in religious sphere? The response is that love is not only something emotional and psychological; it is also something much deeper. It responds to the necessity we have as humans in order to be justified in our own existence. We consciously or unconsciously pose to ourselves this question continuously: Is my life and my existence worthwhile or not? Is it good that I am? The response cannot come from us but from outside; if the answer comes from us it would seem to be a suspicious tautology. Somebody or something has to give us the answer, and we look for that answer in our relationships and in our work — in our family, our friends, the Christian community, the society, success in our job, etc. We look for somebody or something that will directly or indirectly tell us: “Yes, it is good, and still more, it is wonderful that You are! Life — my life, our life — is better, happier, because You are! Thank You for being!” To feel loved and to have somebody to love transforms life, things, places and gestures, even those that apparently seem to be insignificant, as those who fall in love know very well.⁵

The deepest cause of this necessity for love is man’s and woman’s fundamental and natural need for community. As God’s Word says: “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). Since the beginning, humankind was created as community. Made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-28), Who is love (1Jn 4:8, 16), humankind finds its meaning in a unity of distinct persons, related in self-giving. On the most basic level of our existence, each one of us can live only by learning to live with other creatures. We can become persons only in relation to other persons.⁶ For that purpose we receive a body. Thanks to our body we are inserted into the reality of this world. It is my body that opens me to the world around me, its colors, sounds, light, and so I feel. And already here at the level of the senses, we stand in need of other beings. In fact, the stimulus from outside makes possible our encounter with the world; and so, without sound we cannot hear, without light we cannot see. Still more, we need community with the world in order for us to be revealed to ourselves. We can only experience our body in so far as we relate to other bodies; in other words, we can only know ourselves if another one reveals us to ourselves. We can only come to a real love of self (we can only understand our own meaning and value, that is, love for ourselves) when we realize that we are welcome, loved by another one. That will be the meaning, the goal, and the absolute need of love in our existence, that is, when we experience that our life has meaning for others, when somebody tells us: “You mean a lot to me,” “I love You.” We can value ourselves only if another one values us. Much the same as our need

for food to survive physically, we need to be recognized, welcome, loved by others. And, of course, this need is reciprocal, for the others are as poor as we are. We all need valuing, welcoming, accepting, and loving, even to understand that I am not confused with others — that I am unique, that I need this relationship with others. This encounter with the others allows me to be conscious of my self, that only I is I, that I am not the others. We can only be ourselves when others say: “You are You, only *You* are You,” “I am not You, You are not me; there is no other like You,” “You are unique, irrepeteable, unmistakable and valuable; therefore You are lovable, for You are You” (cf. *ChL* 28). We can know ourselves and others only in being with them.

Therefore, selfishness and total solitude are incompatible with our human existence and maturity. And so, love is welcome and self-giving; only as much as we love one another do we find joy and happiness: “Happiness lies more in giving than in receiving” (Acts 20:35).

The consequence is clear, anyone who does not feel loved risks self-destruction; he/she is a candidate to commit suicide: “Because my life is not worthwhile, I move away.” Remember that both Peter and Judas sinned — the former denied the Lord and the latter betrayed Him — and both of them repented. But Peter, believing that he could still be accepted and loved by the community, went back to the community, and the community welcomed him, loved him, and even recognized him as their head again. The community saved him! (cf. Mt 26:69-75; Jn 20:1-19; 21:15-17). Judas, on the other hand, kept alone and hanged himself; he could not endure total solitude. And being refused by those of the Temple and probably thinking that the community of the disciples would also reject him, he hanged himself (cf. Mt 27:3-5). Only Jesus could save Judas, could tell him that he was forgiven, could show him that despite everything He still loved him; but it was too late, they did not meet any more.

The French Philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) proposed as a starting point of his philosophy the principle *Cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am). Recently, our consumerist society coined the *Emo ergo sum* (I buy therefore I am). Still, in these last years, thanks to our mass-mediatic reality the “I am accessible ergo sum” (I am accessible by internet, cell-phone, radio, TV, therefore I am) was created. Much deeper, another young thinker of the last century, Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950), said *Amo ergo sum* (I love therefore I am). Finally, the famous German Theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) wrote: *Diligor ergo sum* (I am loved — by God — therefore I am). Some authors have said: “Love is the only energy that as much as You use so much it increases”⁷; or, as Thomas Mann (1875-1955) affirmed:

“Happiness is a perfume that You cannot pour out on the others without some drops falling on You”⁸.

Now, it is understandable how the unique commandment could be about love for God, for ourselves, for our neighbor, for one another (cf. Mt 22:36-49; Jn 13:34-35; 15:12-17, 1Jn 3:11.23); and: “The one who does not love remains in death. The one who hates his brother is a murderer” (1Jn 3:14-15). Rightly, it is said that love is “the greatest” (1Cor 13). Without love it is impossible to be saved (cf. Mt 25:31-46), for “God is love. The one who lives in love, lives in God and God in him” (1Jn 4:16).

2) Unhappy Consecrated?

Let us go back to our subject. The problem in Consecrated Life today is that a certain number of religious are not happy or they do not look happy. We must bear witness to the truth that Consecrated Life makes us not only spiritually but even humanly happy and joyful. Of course, there are childish forms of joy and happiness that need to be overcome, and mature joy and happiness will never be total and perfect in this world. It is a pity that some candidates to Consecrated Life have sometimes left because — as they say — they could not accept to enter or to continue in a way of life that appeared to them as sad, unhappy or humanly immature. God, on the contrary, wants

the integral promotion of each human being. It is no longer possible to claim that religious should be restricted to the private sphere and that it exists only to prepare souls for heaven. We know that God wants his children to be happy in this world too, even though they are called to fulfillment in eternity, for he has created all things ‘for our enjoyment’ (1Tim 6:17), the enjoyment of *everyone* (EG 182).

In fact, as Paul VI had said, God wants the

true development (of mankind): it must be directed to ‘all men and the whole man’ (PP 14). We know that ‘evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man’s concrete life, both personal and social’ (EN 29), every aspect of human life (...), ‘all dimensions of existence, all individuals, all areas of community life, and all peoples. Nothing human can be alien of it’ (*Aparecida Document* 380). True Christian hope, which seeks the eschatological Kingdom, always generates history” (EG 181).

As a consequence:

An authentic faith (...) always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it. We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with

all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses. The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters (*EG* 183).

We are keeping in mind here not just the individual but also the human community, not only the spiritual and eschatological goal but also the whole mankind as spiritual and bodily, not merely the transcendent goal but also the earthly one. God's ideal for us embraces — in His love — all these aspects, because He has created all of them; and we are not dualistic! (cf. Gen 1-2; Ps 8; 104; 136; Dan 3:52-90; Wis 11:23-26; Eph 1; Col 1; 1Cor 15; 1Jn 4:8, 16).

3) God wants us to be joyful and happy

a) The document, “Rejoice,” of the CICLESAL, recalls some main texts of the Old and the New Testament in which joy is promised to the people of Israel or to the Christian community.

In a special way in Psalms and in prophet Isaiah, we find meaningful expressions about it. It is enough to recall here the joy in going to the Temple to meet the Lord: “I rejoiced with those who said to me/ ‘Let us go to the home of the Lord!’” (Ps 122:11ff); the joy for the salvation after the exile: “They went forth weeping,/ bearing the seeds for sowing,/ they will come home with joyful shouts,/ bringing their harvested sheaves” (Ps 126:6). His divine love fills us with joy, because He never abandons definitively His people: “You (God) have increased their joy./ They rejoice before you,/ as people rejoice at harvest time” (Is 9:2ff; cf. 35:1ff); “Sing gladly, O heavens,/ for Yahweh has done this./ Shout aloud, O earth below!/ Burst into song, you mountains,/ you forests with all your trees/ for Yahweh has redeemed Jacob/ and shown his glory to Israel” (Is 44:23ff); “Sing, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth;/ break forth into song, O mountains:/ for Yahweh has comforted his people/ and taken pity on those who are afflicted./ But Zion said: ‘Yahweh has forsaken me,/ my Lord has forgotten me.’/ Can a woman forget the baby at her breast/ and have no compassion on the child of her womb?/ Yet though she forgets, I will never forget you” (Is 49:13-15; cf. 51:11).

In the New Testament, joy is the messianic gift par excellence, just as Jesus Himself prays during the last supper: “My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11; cf. 16:24; 17:13). Luke underlines — “Rejoice” — the spreading of exultant joy from the events preceding the birth of Jesus (cf. Lk 1:14, 44, 47; 2:10; cf. Mt 2:10); joy will be the apostles' reaction experiencing the resurrection of Christ (cf. Lk 24:31-35, 41; Mt 28:8), and it accompanies the spread of the Good News (cf. Lk 10:17; 24:41, 52). Joy will then be the typical sign of the presence and spread of the Kingdom (cf. Lk 15: 7, 10, 32; Acts 8:39; 11:23;

15:3; 16:34; cf. Rom 15:10, 13; etc.). Paul will insist that the Kingdom is not a matter of food or drink, but justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 14:17; cf. 15:10-13). That will be the fruit of the Spirit: charity, joy and peace (cf. Gal 5:22). Therefore the conclusion is: “My brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord!” (Phil 3:1), “Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: rejoice (...). The Lord is near” (Phil 4:4-5; cf. Col 1:11, 24); and not be “as do those who have no hope!” (1Thes 4:13).

b) That means — as we have said before — that joy and happiness are absolutely necessary, not only spiritually, but for a healthy and balanced human life for Religious men and women. However, we cannot deny that in our society, and even in the Church and in Consecrated Life, there is in some people a lack of joy and happiness, of satisfaction for the embraced faith and vocation. Why? Is it due to a general climate of tension in many individuals? Is it due to the secularism in society and a sense of unsuitability between the official Church and the real problems of the people, including Christians? Is it due to a sense of dissatisfaction before the results of our own way of living Consecrated Life or of others or in the apostolate: many beautiful words, but so many limits in putting them into practice?⁹

As Mannath says:

Do people look happy? This is easy to notice. As Father Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) would say, ‘Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God’. Joy is one of the clearest signs that our heart has found what it was looking for. Both individually and as groups, one of the clearest signs of a good, healthy community (or family) is that the members look happy. Happiness is not a sense of personal satisfaction when things are easy or going well. It is both the effect and the cause of a life lived well. How? In the Bible, the secret of happiness is to live according to God’s laws. If our relationship with God is well cared of and in order, and our relationships in the community are sincere and loving, the result will be happiness. As for our mission, happy people will work more, be more available, can handle stress much better, and have more energy and dynamism than unhappy people.¹⁰

And going down into practice, speaking of formation and everyday community life, Mannath adds:

People grow up best when they are loved and trusted, not when they are suspected or shouted at; hence the importance of providing a happy and loving atmosphere for young members to grow up in. Only in such a setting will a person feel free to be himself/herself, to express oneself, ask questions, take initiative, make mistakes, and grow up. In a fear-filled setting, a person may do the expected external act, but one’s heart will not be in it, and, as soon as the threatening external presence is removed, the same person will tend to do the opposite¹¹.

Hence, sometimes we are surprised when we realize that, as soon as some people have professed the perpetual vows or have been ordained priests, they look like changed personalities, they look like different persons. This might mean that before there was no right formation, and the individual felt oppressed and actually behaved as hypocrite, just to be approved for the Perpetual Profession or for Priesthood.

Happiness is something deeper and simpler at the same time. Let us quote, due to its decisive importance, the words of Mannath:

There are communities that have wonderful memories of living together in great poverty, with simple meals, poor accommodation, plenty of hardships and deep and heart-felt joy. It is not buildings, meals, costly gadgets and positions that fill the heart, but the warmth and support of genuine, caring relationships.

Cooking a meal together, cleaning the house together, preparing a parish program together with the people, working late into the night, with no proper sleep or food — all these can be wonderfully happy experiences and material for years of happy memories, if done in the company of loving people.

It would be a great mistake to try to make people happy by providing luxurious housing or expensive meals or comfortable living. This will attract the wrong type of candidates to religious life, cause non-stop rivalry and bickering, and empty religious ideals of their inner strength and attraction (...).¹²

A happier religious community will be built more surely any day on, ‘we have very little, but we are rich, because we have one another, and God’s loving protection’, than on ‘we have money, we want more, we do not need each other, and we do not feel the need of God’.

In other words, a happy community is built:

- On *individuals* who have given their heart to God, and hence hold nothing back in humble, cheerful service to each other and to the people they serve;
- On a *community atmosphere and network of relationships* where one feels supported and appreciated, where the community really shares my joys and sorrows, and has time for me when I am down, and correct me to my face without spoiling my name behind my back;
- And on *shared celebrations, shared work, shared fun, shared space and time*.¹³

c) Something must be clear: By choosing Consecrated Life, the candidate is looking for what he/she believes will be not only his/her spiritual but also his/her human happiness. It would be completely wrong to understand Consecrated Life’s radicalism as a sort of masochism or a refusal of any sort of satisfaction and just waiting for the blessed eternity. If anyone had entered Consecrated Life just “to

suffer” (do not worry, there will be occasions for sufferings!), he/she would have knocked on the wrong door: he/she had to go to the psychiatric hospital, because he/she was sick! On the other hand, to look for joy and happiness and escape from sadness is a sign of good physical and mental health, said a famous Doctor of the Church.¹⁴ It does not mean at all that we do not accept the sacrifices that any kind of life — including Consecrated Life — carries with it. Each medal has its back: we look for the right side, and accept the back in order to reach the right. People do not get married to suffer, but to be happy; although they are aware that not everything will be easy. The same happens in Consecrated Life too. Beware, then, of some ascetic principles that foster suffering and renunciation as if they were a value in themselves: from the Christian point of view, this is not true at all. The definitive proof to this is that not even Christ wanted to suffer, and repeatedly asked the Father to set Him free, if that agreed with His Fatherly will (cf. Mt 26:36-46; Heb 5:7-10). Remember the words of St. Bernard: “it is not the death (the suffering and death) which was pleasing (to the Father), but the will of the One who died of his own accord.”¹⁵ Christ freely obeyed because of his love for the Father; but His passion and death was the result not of the Father’s will as such (as if the Father were a “cruel” God — He was always a loving Father and could never be other than who He is, being love Himself: 1Jn 4:8-16-), but of the human sin of those who caused this outcome. Neither the Father nor Christ could want and accept this kind of sinful circumstances as such!¹⁶

Therefore, *Vita Consecrata* will rightly say, speaking of the Evangelical counsels: “The counsels, more than a simple renunciation, are *a specific acceptance* of the mystery of Christ, lived within the Church” (VC 16a; about renunciation in Consecrated Life, cf. 6c, 9a, 30b, 35b, 38b, 59a, 93c). Certainly, there will necessarily be renunciation or asceticism in Consecrated Life (there is so much renunciation and asceticism in matrimonial life too: do not forget it). VC speaks directly of this issue:

There is also a need to rediscover the *ascetic practices* typical of the spiritual tradition of the Church and of the individual’s own Institute. These have been and continue to be a powerful aid to authentic progress in holiness. Asceticism, by helping to master and correct the inclinations of human nature wounded by sin, is truly indispensable if consecrated persons are to remain faithful to their own vocation and follow Jesus on the way of the Cross” (38b).¹⁷

Asceticism is a help, a means, but never a goal; it can only be a useful means to another aim, the positive one: fidelity to a commitment of love.

d) We, Consecrated men and women, like all Christians and even any other human being, have to accept courageously the joys and renunciations of our life.

Still more, we Religious have to proclaim with our whole person that a full devotion to God and to the brethren is something that makes us spiritually and humanly happy. We are not called to follow the Risen Lord by way of an earthly purgatory, but with the human joy that comes from our belonging to Him. We Religious do not do a vote of perpetual dejection, in the same way that we do not consecrate ourselves to God to avoid family annoyances. Our life must be simple, serene and joyful, more available to God and to the brethren, which is the reason of our deepest joy and happiness.¹⁸

It is not a matter of worldliness, or of noise or confusion, but of a sense of joy stirring from the faith that enlightens our life and helps us to embrace with love both the joy of living and the difficulties of every human life, and the specific risks of an existence focused on faith. Remember the words of Paul: “God loves a cheerful giver!” (2Cor 9:7), “be cheerful in your works of charity” (Rom 12:8). In God’s heart, it is not enough to give, to do works of charity; it is necessary to do these with joy and cheerfulness. And the deepest motivation of our joy and happiness is that “Christ Jesus [is] our hope” (1Tim 1:1): “I know in whom I have believed” (2Tim 1:12), and “our hope will not deceive us because the Holy Spirit has been given to us, pouring into our hearts the love of God” (Rom 5:5). Hence, let us not be “as those who have no hope” (1Thes 4:13); on the contrary, let us “have hope and be cheerful” (Rom 12:12).

This is the goal of God’s revelation, as John states: “We write this that you may have perfect joy” (1Jn 1:4; cf. Jn 15:11; 16:24; 17:13), and as Paul affirms: “I wish to contribute to your happiness” (2Cor 1:24). To sum up: “Brothers and sisters, be happy!” (2Cor 13:11), because “The Kingdom of God is not a matter of food or drink; it is justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17); “Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord” (Phil 3:1), and the Apostle will stress again:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: rejoice and may everyone experience your gentle and understanding heart. The Lord is near; do not be anxious about anything. In everything resort to pray and supplication together with thanksgiving and bring your requests before God. Then the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:4-7).

4) Joyful and Happy Communities

a) Now, let us reflect on the wisdom of the Magisterium and what it has said to us, Religious, about joy and happiness in our community life:

We must not forget, that peace and pleasure in being together are among the signs of the Kingdom of God. The *joy* of living even in the midst of difficulties along the

human and spiritual path and in the midst of daily annoyances is already part of the Kingdom. This joy is a fruit of the Spirit and embraces the simplicity of existence and the monotonous texture of daily life. A joyless fraternity is one that is dying out; before long, members will be tempted to seek elsewhere what they can no longer find within their own home. A fraternity rich in joy is a genuine gift from above to brothers and sisters who know how to ask for it and to accept one another, committing themselves to fraternal life, trusting in the action of the Spirit. Thus the words of the Psalm are made true: 'Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity... For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life for evermore' (Ps 133: 1-3), "because when they live together as brothers, they are united in the assembly of the Church, they are of one heart in charity and of one will' (St. Hilary, *Tract. In Ps. 132*, PL Suppl. 1, 244).

Such a testimony of joy is a powerful attraction to religious life, a source of new vocations and an encouragement to perseverance. It is very important to cultivate such joy within a religious community: overwork can destroy it, excessive zeal for certain causes can lead some to forget it, constant self-analysis of one's identity and one's own future can cloud it.

Being able to enjoy one another; allowing time for personal and communal relaxation; taking time off from work now and then; rejoicing in the joys of one's brothers and sisters, in solicitous concern for the needs of brothers and sisters; trusting commitment to works of the apostolate; compassion in dealing with situations; looking forward to the next day with the hope of meeting the Lord always and everywhere: these are things that nourish serenity, peace and joy. They become strength in apostolic action.

Joy is a splendid testimony to the evangelical quality of a religious community; it is the end point of a journey which is not lacking in difficulties, but which is possible because it is sustained by prayer: 'rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer' (Rom 12: 12)" (FLC 28; cf. 57)¹⁹.

Or, as *VC* says:

The whole Church greatly depends on the witness of communities filled 'with joy and with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 13: 52). She wishes to hold up before the world the example of communities in which solitude is overcome through concern for one another, in which communication inspires in everyone a sense of shared responsibility, and in which wounds are healed through forgiveness, and each person's commitment to communion is strengthened. The nature of the charism in communities of this kind directs their energies, sustains their fidelity and directs the apostolic work of all towards the one mission. If the Church is to reveal her true face to today's world, she urgently needs such fraternal communities, which, by their very existence, contribute to the new evangelization, inasmuch as they disclose in a concrete way the fruitfulness of the 'new commandment' (*VC* 45b).²⁰

This joy in community life should be proclaimed not simply by words, but first and above all by deeds. A gesture is more convincing than a thousand words, because a gesture is a real commitment, while a word is not yet.²¹ To some extent, we can apply what Augustine said about his being with friends to communitarian relationship:

There were other things which occupied my mind in the company of my friends: to make conversation, to share a joke, to perform mutual acts of kindness, to read together well-written books, to share in trifling and in serious matters, to disagree though without animosity—just as a person debates with himself—and in the very rarity of disagreement to find the salt of normal harmony, to teach each other something or to learn from one another, to long with impatience for those absent, to welcome them with gladness on their arrival. These and other signs come from the heart of those who love and are loved and are expressed through the mouth, through the tongue, through the eyes, and a thousand gestures of delight, acting as fuel to set our minds on fire and out of many to forge unity (Cicero, *On Friendship*, 98).²²

A Founder, Mons. Geraldo Fernandes, said: “The smile is the light shining through the windows of the face that are the eyes, showing that the heart is at home.”²³ And the famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), once said: “Heaven (God) has given to mankind, as counterbalance to face the many worries, three things: hope, sleep and laugh.”²⁴ And as another author has said, love, truth and joy are things of God. Truth is the goal, love is the way, and joy is the atmosphere; and, wrapping everything up, happiness and peace.²⁵

Of course, joy and happiness do not mean that it is necessary that we laugh or smile continuously (there are discouraging optimisms...!), or engage in an easy guffaw; rather it means maintaining an atmosphere of peace, prayer, labor, serenity, welcome, co-responsibility, mutual help and understanding (cf. *FLC* 28, *VC* 45). The mature Religious who, for example, crosses the main door of the house, tired from working the whole day, most certainly prefers the calm and understanding welcome of his/her confrères/co-sisters than the artificial and superficial row of forty, fifty, sixty... years old”...

b) At this point, it will be useful to call to mind what Mannath²⁶ points out as the twelve signs of a good celibate life:

- 1) *Joyful spirit*, joyful persons. The normal facial expression will be a warm smile, not a scowl.
- 2) *Universal love*; big heart and big dreams, becoming a loving (and often much-loved) father/mother, brother/sister, friend.

- 3) *Warm and caring dealings.* Universal love does not make the religious celibate impersonal or distant; on the contrary, he/she becomes attentive to community members, listening to them, looking after the elder and the sick with love, remembering their birthdays, and welcoming the visitors.
- 4) *Intimacy with God.* A rich prayer life, not as an obligation or simply a part of timetable but as a need of the heart, and an inner space where one finds refreshment and peace, and the strength to love and to forgive.
- 5) *Happy communities.* If the life of the individual is like what we have just described above, we shall build up communities in which there is simple but true mutual love and interest, mutual affection and spontaneity, readiness to share time and things, absence of divisions and power games. They will be communities not of naïve or childish groups but of humanly and spiritually mature fraternities.
- 6) *Positive energy.* In negative communities, much of the energy is dissipated in jealousy, hatred, anger, negative talk, gossip, individualism and selfishness. In happy communities it is not work that really tires people, but tension, worry and other negative emotions. On the other hand, love for one another, attachment to God and to the mission rather than to one's own comforts, exhibit exceptional energy.
- 7) *Simple life.* Celibacy outside a simple life does not make sense. Persons with growing closeness to God spontaneously tend to a simple life, not because things are bad, but because one's heart is full, and they do not need many things to find happiness.
- 8) *Enthusiasm for the mission.* If this is the real center of our preoccupations, we shall not have time or interest in gossip or petty politics, or in wasting our precious time in unnecessary use of the mass media (Internet, cell-phone, etc.)
- 9) *Creativity.* A loving, happy person is always creative, just as love is creative.
- 10) *Continued growth.* Our Consecrated Life is a process, not a point of arrival or a static state. That implies a continuous interest in one's ongoing formation, preparing as best as possible our homilies (cf. *EG* 135-159), conferences, catechesis, talks, jobs in favor of the others, etc., and never falling into the dangerous way of improvising everything—something that, in the long run, fatally brings us to a cliff of human, cultural and spiritual impoverishment. We should read serious books and articles from time to time, in order to force us to overcome, superficiality, banalities and laziness.

- 11) *Close ties of affection to our family and friends.* We should avoid two things: a) to forget or give up our human roots (family, country, culture, language...: they are part of our selves), and b) to become enslaved by them, thereby losing our freedom for fraternal life in community and for the mission. Certainly, we have to give up being involved in the running of the family, making their needs and problems our main concern, trying to poke our nose into everything. We can apply here the words of Jesus to Joseph and Mary: “Do you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2: 49). Our main commitment must always be our community and mission. For that commitment the Lord called us, and we entered and professed in our Congregation. In other words, we do not give up our family, relatives and friends, but like our married siblings who have to put their spouse and children in the first place, we too have to put our religious community and the mission effectively in the first place²⁷.
- 12) *Respect for boundaries, and avoiding all abuse.* While we show warmth and love and are at ease with people, in order to be joyful and happy, serene and peaceful, humanly and spiritually mature Consecrated people, we should respect certain boundaries, avoid expressions of affection or closeness that might be inappropriate to the fidelity to our religious commitment, and avoid attachments and partialities that might contradict our adult fraternal communion and mission. In this way, people—at whose service we have devoted our life—will recognize that our love for them is true and sincere, and we shall be sincere and true to ourselves.

In summary, the signs of our right Consecrated Life must be: a) a simple way of life, b) a heart expanded in love for everybody, starting from the “last ones”, and c) a deep trust in God, that is, living a rich life of prayer. Let us remember that we are not necessarily better apostles simply because we move a lot. Sometimes, our too much “apostolic zeal” can be a way of hiding some of our conscious or unconscious problems, or of escaping from them. The apostolic gauge is always the richness in depth and maturity of our human and spiritual life and our righteousness in dealing with and in devoting ourselves to the service of the people. It is not in vain that the doctrine of the Church says that prayer life (cf. CCC 2687, FLC 12d, 19, 20, *RMi* 42) and community/ fraternal life (*SAC* 33b, *FLC* 54, 55b) are already an apostolate as such, a kind of an implemented mission.

We are not just unmarried people, or bachelors, but celibates like Christ and for Christ in favor of the Kingdom of God: like Jesus’ community of the Twelve, appointed to be with Him and to be sent out to preach (cf. Mk 3:14). Our life is

called to be a way of love, of forgiveness, of trust in God (despite our struggles, longings and difficulties), of simplicity and inner freedom, of right human and spiritual joy and happiness.

5) The Definitive Root of Our Deep and Unshakeable Joy and Happiness: Christ

a) Reading the Bible, we see that it often speaks about the invisibility of God. Already in the Old Testament Yahweh said to Moses: “You cannot see my face because man cannot see me and live” (Ex 33:20). And repeatedly in the New Testament it is affirmed: “No one has ever seen God (the Father), but God-the-Only-Son made him known; the one who is in and with the Father” (Jn 1:18; cf. 1Tim 6:16); “No one has seen the Father except the One who comes from God; he has seen the Father” (Jn 6:46). Thus, Jesus can say: “I know him for I come from him and he sent me” (Jn 7:49), “Philip, whoever sees me sees the Father” (Jn 14:9). However, because God is love (1Jn 4:8,16), we know that He—although invisible—is in us (cf. 1Jn 4:12). Even in the Synoptics, Jesus says: “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Mt 11:27; cf. Lk 10:22). Hence, Paul says that Christ “is the image of the unseen God” (Col 1:15), for he “is the radiance of God’s Glory and bears the stamp of God’s hidden being” (Heb 1:3). Thus, we see the decisive role of Christ if we wish to know and see He Who is infinite and invisible.

In this context, looking at Jesus we can glimpse something of the bottomless Trinitarian mystery and our life as believers. In fact, we glimpse the eternal Silence (the Father’s mystery), the eternal Word (the Son’s mystery), the eternal Encounter among them (the Spirit’s mystery). The Father remains in Silence, after telling us to listen to His beloved Son (cf. Mt 3:17; 17:5; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22; see Jn 2:5), the Son is the Word (the Father speaks through Him: cf. Jn 1:11ff; 3:16ff), and the Spirit is Encounter. And so, there is the eternal Encounter in the bosom of the Trinity, the Encounter along the human history when God reveals Himself to us and us to ourselves according to Him²⁸; the history of this Encounter is our theological and redeemed life, our partaking in the divine Encounter; and the celebration of this Encounter takes place when we listen to His Word and celebrate the Sacraments—in particular the Eucharist—in dialogue of faith and life with our brethren, the world and the whole creation.²⁹

b) As a consequence, the joy and happiness that all of us are longing for is something deep that stirs up from the intimacy of the person, from his/her profound satisfaction in the vocation in which he/she tries to be freely faithful

(2Tim 1:12: “I know whom I have believed”), from his/her availability to welcome others, from his/her tireless effort to reconcile and be open towards God’s mystery and the brethren.

Notwithstanding, sometimes, the best preparation for a moment of seriousness is precisely a space of joy, of relief, of relaxation, or a friendly and good-will joke. Hence, the significance of the sense of humor. There is a sentence attributed to a deeply serene and joyful saint, John XXIII: “Be humble enough not to take yourself too seriously!” We should know how to joke about our limits, our weaknesses, our manias and obsessions, and those of the others, and to let the others laugh at ours. To go on loving one another: this is a sign of human and Christian maturity. If we even joke about God and His Saints, why not about us? Remember a famous “beatitude”: “Blessed are those who can laugh at themselves: for they will never cease to be amused.” It is not a sort of scorn of anybody, but a balance and realistic love, that loves the beloved (ourselves and the others) beyond our limits and incongruities and theirs. Only children and adolescents (and adults who are immature, unstable, and proud) do not bear a joke: they are still too weak to endure and to face reality.

The right sense of humor, then, presupposes maturity, inner freedom, sufficient balance, the awareness that we are limited and sometimes even ridiculous, and the knowledge that God—in His goodness, in His infinite sense of humor—loves us beyond everything, for He knows He has formed us from “dust drawn from the clay” (Gen 2:7; cf. 1:26-28; Wis 11:23-26; 2Cor 4:7). Therefore, Jesus, image of the Father (Col 1:15) and made like us (Heb 4:15; 5:1-2), was so merciful (cf. Lk 15), and for sure He smiled at our human fragilities and contradictions (cf. Mt 18:16-19).³⁰ He Himself said that people recognized that He was not like the Baptist, not an austere person, which means that people saw Him as more joyful than John. Besides, He told us to be merciful like the Father (cf. Lk 6:36)³¹. And we should not forget—as we said above—that the Greek word *eu-aggellion* (Gospel) means: good news, joyful and happy events (cf. Mk 1:1; Is 61:1; still: Mt 24:14; Mk 1:15; 14: 9; Rom 10:16; 1Cor 9:12; 2Cor 4:3; 1Thes 1:5; 2:4; Acts 15:7; Eph 6:15; Phil 1:12.16, 27; Col 1:5, 23).³²

The result of our life should be, as somebody said: “Be so happy that when others look at you they become happy too” (Anonymous). This would not be a sign of superficiality, but of the presence of God’s Kingdom, a true apostolate (cf. *FLC* 28). Or, as another writer wrote: “When you were born, you cried and the others were joyful; live in such a way that, when you will die, you will be joyful and the others cry” (Anonymous).

Conclusion

We can conclude our reflection with the words from the Collect of the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time: “O Lord our God, give us grace to serve you always with joy, because our full and lasting happiness is to make of our lives a constant service to the Author of all that is good. Through Our Lord Jesus Christ....” And with the Psalmist, we can proclaim: “Cry out with joy to God, all the earth: serve the Lord with gladness!” (Ps 95:1ff). For: “You, O God, will show me the path of life, in your presence the fullness of joy, at your right hand happiness forever” (Ps 16:11).

Abbreviations of Magisterium’s Documents

- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, John Paul II, 1992.
ChL *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul II, 1988.
DCE *Deus Caritas est*, Benedict XVI, 2005.
EG *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis, 2013.
EN *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI, 1975.
FC *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II, 1981.
FLC *Fraternal Life in Community*, CICLSAL, 1994.
FT *Faciem Tuam*, CICLSAL, 2008.
GS *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II, 1965.
PC *Perfectae Caritatis*, Vatican II, 1965.
PDV *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, John Paul II, 1992.
PH *Persona Humana*, SCDF, 1975.
PP *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI, 1967.
Rejoice *Rejoice*, CICLSAL, 2014.
RMi *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II, 1990.
SAC *Starting Afresh from Christ*, CICLSAL, 2002.
VC *Vita Consecrata*, John Paul II, 1996.

Endnotes

¹ Cf. D. EVANS, *Emotion: The Science of Sentiment*, New York 2001.

² R. JOHN – T. VARKEY, *Healthy Emotional Life*, in: VV. AA., “Psychosexual Integration and Celibate Maturity”, I, Bangalore 2012, 60-61.

³ R. JOHN – T. VARKEY, *Healthy Emotional Life*, 61-67.

⁴ Cf. J. ROVIRA, *Amicizia e comunità nella vita consacrata*, Roma 2008, 235-288, with bibliography on pp. 1-18 and along the text; S. PALUMBIERI, *Amo dunque sono*, Milano 1999; P. LAIN ENTRALGO, *Teoría y realidad del otro*, 2 vv., Madrid 1968²; *id.*, *Sobre la Amistad*, Madrid 1972; A. CENCINI, *Per amore*, Bologna 1994; *id.*, *Con amore, ib.* 1994; *id.*, *Nell'amore, ib.*, 1995; B. LOTZ, *Die drei Stufen der Liebe: Eros, Philia, Agape*, Frankfurt a. M. 1971; J. PIEPER, *Sull'amore*, Brescia 1974; S. M. SCHNEIDERS, *New Wineskins. Re-imagining Religious Life Today*, New York 1986; *id.*, *Selling All*, New York 2001; etc.

⁵ Cf. F. PODIMATTAM, *Consecrated Life Revisited*, 170-175. This author affirms (*o.c.*, 190): “we (Consecrated people) may live without the pleasure of physical sexual intimacy”, but not without some intimacy with other human beings (therefore he will speak along on friendship: *o.c.*, 142-171); but “we need intimacy; we need a very small number of people with whom we can share our inmost joys and sorrows, achievements and struggles”. Loneliness is humanly unbearable, and therefore inhuman. It is deeply significant that”. “when dying from TB, St. Teresa of Lisieux (1873-1897) asked a visiting relative to ‘Give me a kiss, a kiss that makes a noise, the kind of kiss you can hear’”. And she is a Saint, Doctor of the Church...! “Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength; loving someone deeply gives you courage” (LAO TZU , Chinese Philosopher, sec. VI-V b.C.).

⁶ Cf. F. PODIMATTAM, *Consecrated Community Revisited*, 26-29.

⁷ F. MOLINARI, *Mille e una ragioni per credere*, Cinisello Balsamo (M) 1988, 166.

⁸ F. MOLINARI, *Mille e una ragioni per credere*, 150.

⁹ About the joy in the Evangelization, cf. esp. *EG* 1-18, 21, 24.

¹⁰ J. MANNATH, *Happy and Inspiring Religious Communities*, *Sanyasa* 5/2 (2010) 130.

¹¹ *Id.*, a.c., 128.

¹² Sometimes we have committed these mistakes due to lack of vocations or because they were (for to us) too few. We have accepted individuals with hesitant vocation or without vocation at all, or individuals actually looking for a social promotion, or with deep psychological problems, coming from very problematic family situations, or individuals with past serious physical or moral experiences, or individuals looking for a refuge because of social difficulties (economics, wars, etc.) or sometimes individuals coming from other experiences in other Congregations or Seminaries (although in some cases, it is prodded by a right search for one’s own vocation, of God’s will for them, etc: how many religious and Founders have lived this kind of experience!). Yet, a good and deep discernment has to be done, especially when the individual comes from several different and even charismatically contradictory experiences (what were they actually searching for?).

¹³ J. MANNATH, a.c., 128-129.

¹⁴ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Eth. Nic.*, VII, lect. 14; STh I-II q. 4 a. 2, q. 18 a. 21, q. 34 a. 1 and a. 4.

¹⁵ ST. BERNARD, *De errore Abelardi*, 8, 21; PL 182, 1070/A; cf. FT 5c.

¹⁶ Cf. J. ROVIRA, *Evangelical Counsels and Consecrated Life*, Quezon City 2015, chapter IV, when speaking about Christ’s obedience.

¹⁷ Do not forget that to be faithful is required from all kinds of vocations.

¹⁸ “The joy of the Gospel” (EG 1, 21, 84, 288f) drives us to “the joy of Evangelisation!” (EG 83), the “delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing...” (EN 80, EG 10, 13). Therefore, “an evangelizer must never look like someone who just come back from a funeral” (EG 10). We need “a spirit of joy” (EG 12), to be “joyful messengers” (EG 168) if we have to proclaim the *eu-aggélion* (good news, happy news): “The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me, because Yahweh has anointed me to bring good news...” (Is 61: 1), “This is the beginning of the Good-News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk 1:1). The original meaning of *eu-aggélion* was the decree of the Roman Emperor — because the Emperor was supposed to be always after the good of the people, his decrees and laws were always a motive and source of joy. Hence, *Evangelium* (Gospel) is not just the title of a book; it is like a synthesis of its content: good news.

¹⁹ About community recreation-relaxation and the use of the mass media, etc., cf. F. PODIMATTAM, *Consecrated Community Revisited*, 201: “... Recreation is a time of giving ourselves to others and hence an obligation in charity (...). When one is able to recreate well, one is able to pray and work well. A well-balanced mature personality will be the consequence. The pejorative significance of the inability to be leisurely and to relax is also expressed on the person’s inability to rest, even in sleep (...). When a person’s work is permitted to dominate his life at the expense of recreation and relaxation, even his prayer can be dominated by his work.”

²⁰ Also SAC speaks very often about joy (SAC 13df, 15b, 16d, 23b, 32c, 44a, 46abc), and EG speaks of joy since the in the title and all along the text, from EG 1 until 288, joy directly or indirectly pervades the whole Exhortation.

²¹ Likewise, words can be false while gestures tend to be more committal according to what I am, and therefore more sincere and true.

²² S. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, IV, 8b.

²³ Cf. J. AMATOS, *The charism of the Missionary Sisters of Saint Anthony Mary Claret*, Melbourne 1999, 199.

²⁴ “Der Himmel hat den Menschen als Gegengewicht gegen die vielen Mühlesigkeiten des Lebens drei Dinge gegeben: die Hoffnung, den Schlaf und das Lachen”.

²⁵ “Amor, verdad y alegría son cosas de Dios. La verdad es el fin, el amor es el camino y la alegría el ambiente. Y, envolviéndolo todo, la paz” (J. VILLALABEITIA, fb 10/02/2014).

²⁶ Cf. J. MANNATH, *Celibate Chastity – A Different Way of Loving*, in: VV. AA., “Psychosexual Integration and Celibate Maturity”, v. 2, Bangalore 2012, 404-437.

²⁷ Therefore, to belong a religious community deeply changes our relationships with our original physical family. Hence, we should be aware: “Simply because we are not married, our relatives tend to think that we still belong to them as much as we did before we became priests and religious and joined the priestly or religious fraternity. Choosing the priestly or religious fraternity as our way of life demands emotional independence so that we may first give ourselves wholeheartedly to our brother priests or religious and our other friends and then be able to re-adjust our relationship with our family” (F. PODIMATTAM, *Consecrated Community Revisited*, 18; cf. 23-25). Regarding the

fundamental difference between family and religious community, cf. J. ROVIRA, *Communion and Community*, 108 n. 11; J. MANNATH, *A Radical Love*, 50-55; M. FERNANDO, *Family Background and Community Life of the Religious in Asia*, RLA 5 (2003) n. 3, 33; S.M. SCHNEIDERS, *Buying the Field. Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World*, Quezon City 2014, 379-392, 403, 405, 410, 459.

²⁸ If the Scriptures speak about God, it is to tell us how God looks at us, and if they speak about us it is to say to us how we are looked upon by Him (cf. B. MAGGIONI, *Al pozzo della Parola*, Anno A, Milano 2010, 5).

²⁹ Cf. B. FORTE, *Teologia della Storia*, Cinisello Balsamo (M) 1991. Using a computer's vocabulary, perhaps we could say: the Gospel is the "key-word"; faith and hope in Jesus as the Christ is the "pass-word" to enter and share into the Trinitarian mystery; and the core, goal and contents—the "hard-disc"—is communion, love, joy and happiness (cf. 1Jn 1:1-4; 2Cor 1:24; 13:11; Rom 14:17; Phil 3:1).

³⁰ "Now, to what can I compare the people of this day? They are like children sitting in the marketplace, about whom their companions complain: 'We played the flute for you but you would not dance. We sang a funeral-song but you would not cry!' For John came fasting and people said: 'He is possessed.' The Son of Man came, he ate and drank, and people said: 'Look at this man! A glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet the outcome will prove Wisdom to be right" (Mt 18: 16-19).

³¹ Cf. A. CENCINI, *Il respiro della vita*, Cinisello Balsamo (M) 2002, 141-145.

³² Cf. What J. PARAPPULLY says on midlife crisis and human and spiritual maturity: *Psychosexual and Celibate Integration at Midlife and Beyond*, in: VV. AA., "Psychosexual Integration and Celibate Maturity", v.2, Bangalore 2012, 438-499, especially 444-492. We are called to reach a progressive maturity, which means: 1) more wisdom, 2) integrity-interiority and 3) deep spirituality. The result would be the "wise" Religious man/woman. "Wisdom" is an amalgam of refined discernment, mature judgment and accumulated knowledge. Such wisdom accruing from experience and working through life's joys and disappointments helps us to cope with successes and frustrations. It is a wisdom which is not simply an accumulation of intellectual or experiential knowledge but rather a way living, a kind of wisdom which manifests itself in serene and harmonious relating. We can quote the words of an ancient figure, the Jewish Philo of Alexandria (15 bC-c.50 aC): "The face of the wise man is not somber or austere, contracted by anxiety and sorrow, but precisely the opposite: radiant and serene, and filled with a vast delight, which often makes him the most playful of men, acting with a sense of humor that blends with his essential seriousness and dignity, just as in the well-tuned lyre all the notes blend into one harmonious sound. According to our holy teacher Moses, the goal of wisdom is laughter and play—not the kind that one sees in little children who do not yet have the faculty of reason, but the kind that is developed in those who have grown mature through both time and understanding. If someone has experienced the wisdom that can only be heard from oneself, learned from oneself, and created from oneself, he does not merely participate in laughter: he becomes laughter itself" (quoted on p. 486; cf. also, J. MANNATH, *Psychosexual Integration and Happy Celibate Life*, in the same volume, 500-531).

DISCIPLESHIP: A CALL 'TO BE WITH JESUS' OR 'TO REMAIN IN JESUS'

George Panthalanickal, CMF

Gospels clearly articulate the primary purpose of discipleship as 'to be with Jesus' or 'to remain in Jesus.' The account of the 'Institution of the Twelve' in the synoptic gospels (Mk 3:13-16; Mt 10:1-4; Lk 6:12-16), explicitly expresses the purpose of call as 'to be with him' and 'to be sent out.' Similarly, John also portrays the identity, nature and purpose of discipleship as 'remaining with Jesus' or 'remaining in his love' (cf. Jn 1:35-42; 10:7-18; 13:31-35; 15:1-17). In the gospel of John, after John the Baptist introduced Jesus to them, the first disciples of Jesus, Andrew and an anonymous disciple (possibly, John the evangelist), 'remained with him' that day (Jn 1:39). Thus, in all the gospels, discipleship is primarily meant for fellowship with Jesus, or 'remaining with him' or 'remaining in his love'. The other purposes or elements of discipleship derive from this primary purpose contained in this metaphorical action of 'remaining with him.' This article focuses on this significant aspect of the discipleship of Jesus, analysing representative passages from the length and breadth of the gospels.

1. 'TO BE WITH JESUS': THE SYNOPTIC EXPRESSION THAT DEFINES DISCIPLESHIP

"To be with Jesus," is the synoptic metaphorical expression that defines the identity, nature and purpose of the discipleship of Jesus. In the accounts of institution of the twelve (Mk 3:13-16; Mt 10:1-4; Lk 6:12-16), the elements of call and response are condensed, while the identity, nature and purpose of discipleship are articulated.¹ The call is described as "he summoned those whom he wished" and their response is summarized in the expression, "they came to him". Then it clearly articulates the nature of discipleship as "to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons" (Mk 3:14).

The author has a doctorate in Biblical Theology from St. Peter's Pontifical Institute, Bangalore and a licentiate in the Theology of Consecrated Life from Claretianum, Rome affiliated to Lateran University, Rome. He also holds diploma in Formative Psychology from the School of Formators, Bangalore. He is the author of many articles on biblical themes and theology of consecrated life. He teaches in theological and religious institutes and a sought-after retreat preacher. Presently he is serving as professor and librarian of ICL: Institute of Consecrated Life – Sanyasa, Bangalore. He may be contacted at: gpanthalanany@gmail.com

In the narrative, there are two symbolic elements derived from the Old Testament typology that allude to the particular significance of the scene. The first element is the ‘location on the mountain’ (3:13) and the second, the ‘withdrawal of Jesus from the crowds’.² Jesus’ ascent to the hills here does not allude to Moses’ ascent to the Mount in Exodus and throughout the Pentateuch (Ex 19:24, 34; Num 27; Deut 9:1-10:32), but to Yahweh’s descent to Mount Sinai and His call of Moses to him (Ex 19:3; cf. Mt 5:1). The absolute sovereignty of Jesus is hinted at in the expression used in Mk 3:13: “And he called to him those whom he desired.” This expression points to the divine initiative and freedom of Jesus, as well as the ‘gift character’ of the call.³ Ex 19:3 is particularly an interesting example to compare with the call of the disciples: two verses later (19:5), it is prophesied that Israel will be God’s treasured possession; and this is similar to the way the Markan Jesus chooses the ‘Twelve’ for intimacy with himself, and by implication, for intimacy with God.⁴

In Mk 3:14, the aim of the appointment of apostles is to have fellowship with Jesus and to participate in his salvific mission. NRSV translates Mk 3:14-15 as follows: “and he appointed twelve, whom he also names apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message and to have authority to cast out demons.” This formulation of the sentence may give the impression that all the three purposes of the discipleship of Jesus are of equal significance. *The Good News Bible* translation adds a significant nuance, referring to the priority of ‘being with Jesus’, among the three expressed purposes of discipleship: “I have called you to be with me” he told them. I will also send you out to preach...” (Mk 3:14-15). What is highlighted in this translation is that the primary purpose of discipleship is ‘to be with Jesus’ and all other purposes derive from this primary purpose. To understand this feature, let us take a worldly metaphor of married couples: after their intimate union in marriage, all their shared dreams and plans emanate from their intimacy.

1.1 Discipleship: Markan Stress on the Need ‘to be with Jesus’

“To be with him” seems to be Mark’s summary expression of Christian discipleship.⁵ On fourteen occasions Mark explicitly refers to the presence of disciples with Jesus, while Matthew and Luke omit the reference⁶ or simply take their presence for granted. Jesus went through the villages and towns of Galilee as a wandering preacher, proclaiming to all the urgent message of the imminent coming of the kingdom. Totally bound to him, the disciples had to follow him on his continual journeys, literally fulfilling one important condition to become disciples, i.e., ‘to be with him’.⁷

The rich young man (Mk 10:17-22)⁸ had observed all the commandments, yet Jesus observed that he was still lacking something: “Sell what you have and come, follow me!” He needs to be with Jesus.⁹ This idea is already found in the calling of the first disciples. Mark emphasizes this theme so much that when the disciples temporarily leave Jesus for their mission in Galilee (6:7ff), the evangelist has nothing to narrate about Jesus; he fills up the interval with the story of the martyrdom of John the Baptist. Only after the return of the disciples, he resumes the narrative about Jesus (6:30). And being with Jesus, the disciples bear much fruit: the success of their missionary journey reveals that with Jesus, they can do everything (Lk 10:17-19). John has a similar absolute formula in the negative, reminding the disciples that without him they can do nothing (Jn 15:5).

The passion narrative speaks about Jesus' association with the Twelve (14:14, 17, 18, 20, 33), in contrast to Judas' conspiracy with the “chief priests” (14:10), his joining “a great crowd” sent by them (14:43), and Peter's mingling “with the attendants” (14:54).¹⁰ The arrest scene concludes with the mention of the flight of the disciples (14:50), ‘who abandoned Jesus and fled.’ Reversing their initial act of discipleship, when they ‘left everything to be with Jesus’, after the arrest of Jesus, they left everything to flee from Jesus. In Mk 14:51-52, a young man tries to follow Jesus at a distance, and when caught by a soldier, he runs away naked even leaving the inner dress; this story presents the dramatic reverse story of call narratives. At call they left everything and followed Jesus, but in a dramatic reversal here, one symbolic representative of theirs abandons everything in order to flee from Jesus. Peter denies his identity as disciple by denying before the enemies his association with Jesus (Mk 14:66-72), which he himself had solemnly confessed earlier (Mk 8:29). In the final moments of Peter near Jesus, he declares before a maidservant and other attendants of the high priest that he does not even know Jesus. The statement of the woman to Peter “You also were with Jesus...” (Mk 14:67) is not accidental, but it defines the identity of the disciple and then the focus falls on its denial; what Peter denies is not just his association with the master, but his very identity as a disciple of Jesus.

The ‘institution of the Twelve’ starts (Mk 3:14) with the definition of the identity and purpose of discipleship, i.e., ‘to be with Jesus’. But it ends hinting at the betrayal of that intimacy. In the names of the twelve, Judas Iscariot comes last, with a Markan note: “who betrayed him” (3:19). The reader of Mark's gospel knows the story, and 3:19 reflects not only the historical fact of the betrayal, but also the theological tragedy of a disciple who “gave Jesus away”. The account of the vocation to share in the mission of Jesus begins with the sign of belonging to Jesus, and closes

with the note on the failure of one of those whom Jesus himself had chosen. By handing Jesus over to his enemies, he wilfully separated himself from the source of all that he could be, and all that he could do. Thus, through the negative example of Judas, Mark rounds off his vocation stories. It is his first explicit indication of the possibility of failure in the life of a disciple.

By this presentation of the failure of disciples with all its intensity, Mark reminds the reader that discipleship involves not only a physical companionship, nor merely a learning relationship, but an unconditional and total binding to the person and destiny of Jesus.¹¹ Judas betrayed it and utterly rejected it; others failed to live up to the radical challenge of Jesus' way of the passion. Though the disciples failed to 'be with him' at the crucial moment of Jesus' passion, the need for "being with him" does not end with the physical death of Jesus.

1.2 Eucharist: A New Form and Depth in the Intimacy with Jesus

The Last Supper concluded all the earthly meal fellowships, which certainly had been a privileged form of the disciples' 'being with' Jesus. But in the *sacramental way*, a new type and new level of "being with him" emerged with the institution of the Eucharist, and it will remain as an essential condition of discipleship.¹² Hereafter, it is in the celebration of the Eucharist, that the disciples experience the privileged covenantal gift of the presence of Jesus with them. Eucharist is the presence of Jesus, and it is the attachment and love to this presence that will define the identity, nature and purpose of discipleship.

In sealing the Old Covenant, Moses sacrificed an animal and poured half of the blood of the sacrificial lamb on the altar that represented God, and the other half, he sprinkled on the people (Ex 24:6). Through this act of sealing the covenant, Israel and Yahweh became blood relatives through the medium of the blood of the animal sacrificed to God. But this covenant failed, and prophet Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant (Jer 31:31) in the place of the failed covenant. In the new covenant, the blood of the Passover lamb is poured inside (taken inside). Jesus asked his disciples to drink his blood, an unconventional command (Mk 14:23). A new blood-relationship and union with God is established through the medium of the blood of Jesus. In the new covenant, blood is not poured outside; it is taken inside. In every Eucharist the same blood of God is flowing through Jesus to his disciples.

We are taught in the catechism classes that Jesus willingly died for us. But if we enter into the emotional aspect of the passion, we can see that Jesus was unwilling to die. On the one hand, Jesus had to die in accordance with the will of his Father

to save mankind; on the other hand, Jesus did not want to die, he wanted to live with his disciples. For this dilemma, the answer of Jesus was the institution of the Eucharist. It is Jesus' desire or passion to give his life for his disciples and 'to be with' them forever.

1.3 Jesus' Appeal for Consistent Prayer: to Stay United with God

Jesus' appeal to his disciples to pray was intended to stay united with God. Prayer in the gospels (Lk 6:12; 9:28; 11:1-13; 18:1-14; 22:40), as Jesus taught, is not just the repetition of some verses or formulations, either from memory or from any book. Prayer in the gospels is giving expression to our relation with God. It can be giving voice to our relationship; it can be giving emotions to our relationship; it can be giving actions to our relationship. Whatever may be modes of expression, it should be always the expression of relationship with God.

Jesus taught his disciples: 'where your treasure, there your heart also' (Mt 6:21). His Father was the treasure to which his heart was united. The disciples understood that Jesus' source of power was his union with his father. So, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray.¹³ Jesus taught them the great prayer, 'Our Father' (Luke 11:1-4), asking them to pray in those terms. We often repeat it, and say we have prayed the Lord's Prayer. But we cannot just repeat the words of the prayer of Jesus and make it our prayer. Each word in that prayer is the summary expression of his relationship with his father. To make it our prayer, we need to share the depth of relationship and intimacy that is summarized in each word, starting with the very address of God as 'Father'.

In Luke, Jesus transfigures while praying (Lk 9:29), and thus prayer in Luke is also an occasion for his disciples to transfigure, experiencing intimacy with Jesus.¹⁴ The disciples were asked to pray and transfigure from their disfigurations like Jesus did after rejections, sufferings and death. Prayer, he taught them, was for transfiguration as they faced disfiguration in their lives. In prayer, Jesus was assured and strengthened on the mountain of transfiguration, ahead of his disfiguration on mount Calvary. In fact, transfiguration and disfiguration were daily experiences in the life of Jesus and his disciples. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus starts his public ministry with a disfiguration experience: at Nazareth, his own people rejected him and tried to kill him by pushing him down the cliff. Later, Jesus will also end his ministry on another mountain of disfiguration, Calvary. When our dear ones reject us, fail to recognize us, hurt us, attempt to destroy us, do we not get disfigured? All the synoptic gospels place the transfiguration of Jesus immediately after the first passion prediction; and this path of suffering is not acceptable to his

disciples. The mountain traditionally attributed to the transfiguration experience of Jesus is the highest mountain in Galilee. On this mountain, he is being called out lovingly by his father, acknowledged, recognized and assured of love; and there he is transfigured. From this mountain of transfiguration, Jesus could look down to all other mountains, on which he was disfigured and going to be disfigured. Similarly, the intimacy and assurance experienced in prayer is intended to lead the disciples to a transfiguration that can surpass all their mountains of disfigurations.

The accounts of the mountain experiences of Jesus in the gospels are considered narrative rituals. They are replicable experiences to readers, believers or the disciples of Jesus. In fact, Matthew frames his gospel with this idea that ‘God is with us.’ In the first chapter, the name of the saviour is Emmanuel, which means God is with us (Mt 1:23); and finally the gospel concludes with the message that he will be with us till the end of days (28:20). Again, at the heart of the community sermon, Jesus promises that where two or three are gathered in his name he is in the midst of them (Mt 18:19). Thus, our prayer could be a replication of transfiguration and experience of intimacy with God.

In the first section of this article, we have analysed representative passages from the length and breadth of the synoptic gospels to understand the primary condition of discipleship: ‘to be with Jesus.’ Once seeing president Abraham Lincoln totally disturbed during the American civil war (1861-65), one of his aides tried to console him saying: “do not worry, God is with us.” Lincoln responded telling: “I know that God is always with us but my worry whether we are with God.” Similarly, our experience of ‘God with us’ combined with our check in ‘to be with Jesus’ fulfils the primary synoptic condition for discipleship of Jesus.

2. ‘TO REMAIN IN JESUS’: THE JOHANNINE EXPRESSION THAT DEFINES DISCIPLESHIP

The Johannine expression “to remain in Jesus” (Jn 1:35-42; 10:7-18; 13:31-35; 15:1-17) seems to signify a more profound meaning than the synoptic expression “to be with Jesus.” “Remain in Jesus” is closely linked with the Johannine concept of faith and his view of discipleship.¹⁵ The verb “to remain” occurs about 118 times in the New Testament, of which the Johannine corpus contains 67 occurrences (12 in the synoptic gospels and 17 in Pauline corpus). In 43 out of the 67 Johannine instances, the expression is used with the preposition “in” or “with”. The expression “remain in/with,” when used with persons, denotes relationship and intimacy. The relationship between Jesus and the disciples is often expressed by the verb “remain in” (cf. Jn 14:25; 15:4, 5, 6-7, 9-10). In John, the relationship between Jesus and the disciples is a covenantal relationship. That is why, before inviting the disciples to

'remain in him', the incarnation of Jesus is presented as 'Word becoming flesh and dwelling with us' (Jn 1:14). As a term of relationship and communion, 'remaining in Jesus' expresses the ultimate goal or the culmination of discipleship with its Christological orientation in John's gospel.¹⁶

2.1 "They Remained with Him that Day": Unforgettable First Experience (Jn 1:35-41)

In the gospel of John, the first disciples of Jesus come from the disciples of John the Baptist. In response to the witnessing of their revered master, two disciples of John began following Jesus. It may well be that they were too shy to approach him directly, and followed respectfully some distance behind. Then Jesus did something entirely characteristic of him: he turned and spoke to them. That is to say, he met them half way. He made things easier for them. He opened the door that they might come in. Here we have the symbol of the divine initiative. It is always God who takes the first step. In this respect, it resembles the beginnings of discipleship in the synoptic gospels.

Jesus began by asking these two men the most fundamental question in life: "What are you looking for?" And they responded, asking, "Where do you stay?" Since the first question of God to man in Genesis ("Where are you?" Gen 3:9), never was there a question in Bible which has fuller revealing touches than these. These two questions together define the identity, nature and purpose of discipleship in John's gospel. Jesus' question clarifies the goal of discipleship at the very beginning of their journey with him. "What are you looking for?" was a very relevant question in Palestine at the time of Jesus. There were legalists like the scribes and Pharisees, looking only for subtle and recondite conversations about the little details of the Law; there were ambitious time-servers like the Sadducees, looking for position and power; there were nationalists like the Zealots, looking for a political demagogue and a military commander who would smash the occupying power of Rome; there were humble men of prayer like the simple people in the land, looking for God and for his will; there were also simply puzzled, bewildered sinful men, looking for light on the road of life and forgiveness from God. These last groups were searching for peace, for something that would enable them to live at peace with themselves, with God, and with men.

The answer of John's disciples was that they wished to know where Jesus was staying. It was not mere curiosity which made these two ask that question. What they meant was that they did not wish to speak to Jesus on the road, in passing, as chance acquaintance, just exchanging a few words. They wished to linger long with

him and talk out their problems and their troubles. The man who would be Jesus' disciple can never be satisfied with a passing word. Jesus' answer was "Come and see!" (39). He was inviting them, not only to come and talk, but to come and find the things that he alone could open out to them. "Come and see" is an invitation to relate to Jesus in faith, which means establishing a personal relationship with him and seeing who he really is. In response to this invitation to come and see, the first two disciples 'remained with' him that day.

It was after that encounter, and their remaining with Jesus, that the two disciples became convinced of who Jesus is. Their meeting with Jesus had the impact of strengthening, renewing and transforming them internally. It also enabled them to bear witness to what they experienced: Andrew brings Peter to Jesus. In the Johannine perspective, remaining with Jesus is the final stage of the process of discipleship; their response in faith to Jesus' invitation has resulted in their fellowship and communion with him.¹⁷ The evangelist gives also an additional reference to the time of the day: "it was about the tenth hour" (Jn 1:39), perhaps because he himself may be one among the two. He could tell you the very hour of the day, and no doubt, the very stone of the road he was standing on when he met Jesus. It was an impressive and unforgettable meeting with Jesus, and his life changed forever.¹⁸

2.2 Accounts of 'Remaining with Jesus' – Long Personal Encounters in John

Unlike the synoptic accounts of brief individual episodes, narrated in a few verses, John's gospel portrays long personal encounters of individuals with Jesus (Nicodemus, Samaritan Woman, Blind Man, etc.). They resemble the 'come and see' experience of the first two disciples of Jesus (Jn 1:35-41). We shall consider a few Johannine passages that narrate similar instances of 'remaining with Jesus.' These are stories about people who became believers of Jesus after their 'remaining with Jesus'. In John's gospel, the dynamic character of believing not only means that one accepts the words of Jesus as true, but also indicates an attachment to the person, a true allegiance to the person of Jesus. For a thorough understanding of the concept of faith and the Christological orientation of discipleship in the John's gospel, it is not sufficient to study the nuances of John's usage of the verb "to believe; it is necessary to consider also other expressions that convey some aspect of faith or that can stand for the Johannine understanding of faith. The following expressions, among others, are connected with faith, revealing at the same time the Christological orientation of discipleship: "to accept, receive, know, or welcome Jesus," "to receive his words or testimony," "to follow Jesus," "to remain in Jesus, in his love or in his words". It is in this sense that we need to read the story of Nicodemus and the Samaritan

woman encountering Jesus and becoming his witnesses. Both the stories reveal the surpassing of man-made boundaries for persons to enter into intimacy with Jesus. Sectarian boundaries are overcome in the story of Nicodemus: though Pharisees are portrayed in the Gospels as opponents of Jesus, Nicodemus the Pharisee enters into communion with him. Ethnic boundaries are broken in the story of the Samaritan woman, when she and other Samaritans from her village surprisingly begin relishing Jesus' company and believe in him (Jn 4:40-42).

2.2.1 Encounter with Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21)

Usually, we see Jesus surrounded by the ordinary people, but here we see him in contact with one of the aristocrats of Jerusalem. Like the other Johannine narratives on encountering Jesus, Nicodemus' encounter with him also has two parts — first to know and the second to witness Jesus. In the case of Nicodemus, we have one at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus and another after his death. In the first part, Nicodemus came at night 'to remain with him.' It was a big surprise that Nicodemus could overcome the prejudices of his Pharisaic upbringing and visit Jesus. There were probably two reasons for him to choose night time to meet the Rabbi (2). First, it may have been out of caution: he did not want to make a public show of his visit. The second is a positive reason. The rabbis declared that the best time to study the law was an undisturbed night. It may well have been that Nicodemus wanted an absolutely private and completely undisturbed time with Jesus at night. Over and above both these logical motives, the evangelist may have had a theological reason for portraying the backdrop of a dark night: the impact of 'remaining with Jesus' was the light lit in his heart in the dark night. We have no information from the present text about the impact of this encounter; but we can reasonably surmise that it leads him to light, and makes him a witness, as we later understand. When the Pharisees blindly condemn Jesus, Nicodemus tries to defend him (Jn 7:50). Now he moves in the light ignited during his first encounter with Jesus. That is why Nicodemus returns boldly to bury Jesus' body (Jn 19:39-42), when everything appears dark and even the apostles are nowhere to be seen.

As already noted, Nicodemus appears again in the burial scene of Jesus, manifesting the impact of the first encounter. The account of the deposition of the body of Jesus in the tomb (Jn 19:38-42) substantially corresponds to that of the Synoptics. However, John recalls some precious details that the other evangelists ignore: 1) Nicodemus "who had come to Jesus by night" joins Joseph of Arimathea; 2) He comes with a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds and 3) The two take the body of Jesus and wrap it in linen cloths with aromatic oils.

These details are amazing. First of all, the profusion of scents amazes. It speaks of 32.7 litres of precious, very expensive essences. It is definitely an excessive quantity: to anoint a dead body, a thousandth part of it would be more than enough. In addition, the spices used are not suitable for embalming. They are those used in the wedding party to perfume the clothes (Ps 45:9) and the bedroom: “I have sprinkled my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon”, says the woman in the book of Proverbs (Pro 7:17).¹⁹ John is not narrating the burial of a corpse (note that he does not mention even the closing of the tomb stone), but the preparation of the royal thalamus in which the groom rests.²⁰

The most beautiful image used by the prophets to speak of the love of God is that of the wedding: The Lord — they said — is the faithful husband and Israel is the bride who was often unfaithful. In the Gospels, the bridegroom is Jesus. He is the Son of God who came from heaven to take back the wife who abandoned him. From the beginning of his Gospel, John has referred to him as the bridegroom (Jn 3:29-30). On the cross, Jesus gave the greatest proof of his love. It is an immense love because “there is no greater love than this, to give one’s life” (Jn 15:13). It is a passionate love like the one mentioned in the Song of Songs: “for love is strong as death, no flood can extinguish love, nor river submerge it” (Song 8:6-7). Now the groom who loved so much awaits the embrace of the bride, the new community, represented by the disciples Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. They serve as friends of the bridegroom, as John the Baptist introduced himself at the beginning of the gospel.

2.2.2 Samaritan Woman’s Encounter with Jesus (Jn 4:1-42)

In the Samaritan Woman story, the call to intimacy with Jesus is firmly placed. The setting of this narrative created by the evangelist is very much deliberate and significant to understand the message.²¹ The backdrop of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman is the ‘well of Jacob’, the background of the most beautiful romantic story ever told in the Old Testament. It is the well where Jacob met Rachel which is followed by events that reveal Jacob as the greatest romantic lover of the Old Testament (cf. Gen 29:1ff).²² The backdrop fits well with the image of Jesus as bridegroom presented from the beginning to the end of the gospel of John and the intimate union between Jesus and discipleship as spousal relationship.

Few stories in the gospel record show us so much about the ability of Jesus in breaking barriers and establishing communion. First, it presents the love that conquers. The setting of the story passionately brings up poetic images of the romantic lover of the Song of Songs, a lover that conquers the world with apparent

unconquerable boundaries. Second, it shows us the warmth of his sympathy that conquers. From an ordinary religious leader, the Samaritan woman would have fled in embarrassment. It is as if she had at last met someone who was not a critic but a friend, one who did not condemn but who understood. Third, it demonstrates how Jesus breaks down some concrete social barriers. The Jewish-Samaritan quarrel was more than 400 years old. Even in Jesus' time, it smouldered as resentfully and bitterly as ever. It was no wonder that the Samaritan woman was astonished that Jesus, a Jew, should speak to her, a Samaritan. Fourth, by dialoguing with a Samaritan woman, Jesus was taking down the gender barriers existing in his society. Strict Rabbis forbade a Rabbi to greet a woman in public: a Rabbi might not even speak to his own wife, daughter or sister in public. Here was Jesus breaking down the barriers of nationality and orthodox Jewish custom. Here is a clear expression of the universality of the gospel; here is God so loving the world, not in theory, but in action.

In response to the offer of Jesus, the woman asks him to give her the living water so that she may not thirst again and might be spared the tiring journey to the well. Suddenly, Jesus brings her to her senses with his demand to "Go, call your husband, and come back" (Jn 4:16)." As many authors point out, this discussion on the husbands could be a reference to the Old Testament allegory of the spousal relationship between man and God. When the original people of Samaria were exiled and transported to Media, peoples from five other places were also brought in there. These five different peoples carried with them their own gods too (2Kings 17:29); and it has been held that the woman here stands for Samaria and the five husbands for the five false gods to whom the Samaritans, as it were, married themselves. The sixth husband stands for the true God, but they worship him, not truly, but in ignorance; therefore they are not married to him at all. It may be that there is a reminder of this Samaritan infidelity to God in the story.²³ Now Jesus invites her, the representative of the Samaritan community with their history of spousal infidelity, to return to a spousal relationship with God in Jesus.

At the end of the personal encounter, the woman is hurrying back to the village without taking her water jar. That she leaves behind her water jar shows two things: that she is in a hurry to share this extraordinary experience, and that she dreams of doing nothing else but come back. Her action has much to tell us of real Christian experience. The one who is touched by Jesus longs to come back to him again and again. It is similar to the response of Andrew, who after his first encounter with Jesus, goes and brings his brother Simon to Jesus. The same thing might have happened to Nicodemus, which made him return to Jesus boldly in a particularly dark hour of the death and burial of Jesus.

Thus, the experience of the Samaritan woman and its implications for Christians may be summed up as follows. First, the Samaritan woman was staggered by Christ's ability to see into her inmost being. She was amazed at his intimate knowledge of the human heart, and of her heart in particular. Second, the first response of the Samaritan woman was to share her discovery. Having found this amazing person, she was compelled to share her findings with others. Christian life is based on the twin pillars of discovery and communication. No discovery is complete until the desire to share it fills our hearts; and we cannot communicate Christ to others until we have discovered him for ourselves. First to find, and then to tell, are the two great steps of the Christian life. Third, this very desire to tell others of her discovery removed in this woman the feeling of shame. She was no doubt an outcast; the very fact that she was drawing water from this distant well shows how she avoided her neighbours and how they avoided her. But now she ran to tell them of her discovery. Here we have one of the greatest truths of Christian life. The only real argument for Christianity is a Christian experience.

2.3 John's Metaphors and Parabolic Figures on 'Remaining with Jesus'

In the gospel of John, we have two powerful metaphors that speak about the intimacy between Jesus and his disciples: 'Good Shepherd and sheep' and 'Vine and branches'. In this section, we also discuss a series of events associated with one of the parabolic characters in the gospel of John, namely, the 'beloved disciple', the figure of love.

2.3.1 *Shepherd and Sheep (John 10:11-19, 27)*

Jesus identifies himself as the good Shepherd (Jn 10:11) one of his most revealing profile pictures in John. Regarding sheep, it is said that unlike other domesticated animals like dog or cat, it is one of the most foolish animals which cannot find the way back home on its own once it strayed away from the flock. Therefore, there is a constant need for shepherd to accompany them and keep them before his eyes. Thus, the fact of spending a lot of time in isolated places with the flock meant that, between the shepherd and his sheep, a loving relationship is built. The shepherd called each sheep by name, and they recognized his voice.

But going beyond the other gospel images of shepherd tenderly caressing the wounded sheep, in John 10:11-18, the "good shepherd" is the fighter who, at the cost of his own life, confronts anyone who endangers the herd. The qualification of "good" does not refer to feelings; it does not mean being sweet and lovable, but "real", "authentic" and "brave". Jesus is the true shepherd because he is tied so

passionately to his sheep and ready to sacrifice his life for them.²⁴ To give the image even more emphasis, Jesus contrasts it with the figure of the mercenary (12-13). Whoever has a heart like Jesus does not count the cost. He does not ask where his rights reach and where his duties end. A unique law follows: the “foolish” love for the beloved. Love knows no boundaries; it does not stop in the face of any obstacle, risk and sacrifice. Who does not love as Christ has loved will never understand his choices and his proposals; he shall judge him a dreamer, a person under illusion, an imprudent dreamer, a reckless one.

In the second part of the passage (14-16) Jesus repeats the affirmation, “I am the good shepherd” to add a second feature. The true shepherd is one who knows, one by one, his sheep and is known to them. In the Bible, the verb to know does not only have the meaning of learning. In John, it is intimately related with the concept of faith. When referring to the relationship between people, it implies a profound intimate experience, indicating the total involvement in love. It is a matter of the heart than of the mind.²⁵

2.3.2 Vine and Branches (Jn 15:1-17)

In Jn 15:1-11 Employing the metaphor of the vine and the branches, Jesus speaks to his disciples and emphasizes the importance of their remaining in him: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides (remains) in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing... If you abide (remain) in me, and my words abide (remain) in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples” (Jn 15:5-8). Remaining in Jesus and in his love take disciples of Jesus to the level of communion and to the indwelling of the Father and the Son in him (Jn 14:20, 23). Biblical tradition normally speaks of an imitative relationship with God for holiness (Lev 19:1-2). But the stunning new image of god-man relationship in this metaphor of ‘vine and branches’ is that of an organic relationship.²⁶ We become part of God in this sense we are called to become expressions of God. The disciples are those who remain in Jesus or in his words or in his love (Jn 8:31-32; 15:1-11). After introducing the allegory of the vine and the branches, in 15:9-17 Jesus explains what happens in those who remain united to him. There are fleeting infatuations for Christ, dictated by temporary emotion and enthusiasm. On the other hand, there is a lasting attachment that no opposing force is able to break. This strong and decisive union is expressed by John with the verb “to remain.”²⁷

2.3.3 Jesus and the Beloved Disciple

In the gospel of John, there are at least five references in four different scenes to 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (Jn 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). There are also two other episodes (Jn 1:35; 18:15) where a disciple appears to share some common features with the 'beloved disciple'. Like the 'beloved disciple', he is anonymous and placed side by side with Peter often as a 'competitor and colleague'.²⁸ These and other common features evoke the impression that the author may be referring to the same character in all the texts mentioned above.²⁹ The passionate expression 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', with which the evangelist almost always introduces this character in John's Gospel, identifies Jesus with the supreme theological value of love and reveals his primary nature of entering into intimacy or friendship with people. The six episodes with this character give the impression that the 'beloved disciple' experiences the intimate friendship of God in Jesus and also responds to it passionately; this is summarized in a highly mystical or iconic expression of his 'reclining on Jesus' breast' (Jn 13:25).³⁰ Here there is no break in the pattern of the divine offer of intimate friendship and the human response to it. Thus, John's gospel replaces the holiness code for the followers of Jesus with this program of intimately belonging to God in Jesus or responding to the offer of intimate friendship with God in Jesus. The characterization of the beloved disciple in the six serial episodes in John shows how he continually lives this program of life of discipleship in this gospel; in other words, he strives to intimately belong to God or remain with/in Jesus in all circumstances of life.

Everyone recognizes a bit of tension between Peter, the figure of authority and the beloved disciple, the figure of love, in the shaping of the six unique episodes associated with the beloved disciple in John. It appears that these two followers of Jesus in this gospel just love to play-off each other. The evangelist, combining his literary and theological strategies in the shaping of these six episodes, consistently places the beloved disciple, the figure of love, in an enviable position. In general, the literary strategies of all the evangelists are at the service of their theological message. The enviable characterization of the beloved disciple in John too is clearly intended to powerfully reveal the theological message of this gospel. A quick analysis of the six episodes associated with the beloved disciple will exhibit the literary and theological strategies of the evangelist in shaping these episodes.

The 'other disciple' (Jn 1:35-42), moves ahead of Peter creating metaphors and defining the program of life for the disciples as intimately belonging to God in Jesus. But in spite of this and of his chronological primacy, the authority is clearly and definitely reserved for Peter. It is Simon, the brother of Andrew, who is given the

title 'Peter' at his very first encounter with Jesus, evoking the idea of his authority and his primacy in leading the Church.³¹ This scene is the first among the many episodes which we are going to see, creating a pattern for the portrayal of play-offs between the beloved disciple and Peter. The scene appears parallel to the event, where the beloved disciple reaches the tomb first but it is Peter who first enters the tomb (Jn 20:2ff).

i) The Beloved Disciple at the Last Supper (Jn 13:21-25)

John makes his first explicit mention of the 'beloved disciple', in the last supper scene. Here definitely he is portrayed in an enviable position in comparison with Peter, the figure of authority. In the narrative, he is introduced by Peter to ask Jesus a question; and most of the subsequent appearances of this disciple are in association with Peter, generally to his advantage. Evidently the shaping of the episode follows the definite pattern inaugurated in the previous episode: while the beloved disciple comes out best in his identity as disciple, Peter's role as the leader is explicitly acknowledged or hinted at.³²

In a ceremonial ritual meal like that of the Passover meal of Jesus, seating arrangements are significant. There must have been three tables for the Last Supper, one in the middle and two on each side. Jesus and two other disciples must have sat at the middle table. The other ten disciples must have been divided into two side couches, with a food table usually set-in front of each couch. Peter may not have sat at the middle table or at the immediate left or right of Jesus, the host. Instead, Peter sat at another table at a distance; otherwise, there is no reason for Peter to make signs to the beloved disciple to ask Jesus about the identity of the betrayer (Jn 13:24). For special occasions like the Passover meal, it was mandatory for Jews to follow the Hellenistic custom of reclining on couches, where one propped oneself up on the left elbow and then ate with the right hand from food that had been cut up into small pieces in advance. Also, since persons were usually seated according to rank or honour, Jesus no doubt reclined at the head couch, with his beloved disciple probably to his right (Jn 13:25).³³

When Jesus made the prophecy about the betrayer (13:24), Peter takes the initiative to know who's going to betray Jesus. It is at Peter's behest that the beloved disciple makes the enquiry. Here, the beloved disciple is close to Jesus and to Peter.³⁴ Taking an enviable and metaphoric posture of "reclining on Jesus' breast",³⁵ the beloved disciple makes this enquiry to Jesus. This curious expression could be easily explained if one meditates like this mystical evangelist the scene of sharing the meal in a reclining position. The participants reclined on their left sides, supporting

themselves with their left arm, leaving the right arm free; Jesus as the host would have been slightly ahead of the rest; if the beloved disciple on his right had to lean back to speak to Jesus, naturally he would literally have had his head at Jesus' breast.

The evangelist here introduces the beloved disciple as a metaphor of closeness to Jesus' heart, analogous to Jesus' intimacy with the Father. It was that intimacy which enabled Jesus to reveal the image of God to humanity (Jn 1:18); in the same way, later in his gospel the evangelist identifies himself with the beloved disciple to make it a claim on his superior access to the person of Jesus and the traditions associated with him. Behind this gospel is the testimony of the one who was "close to the heart" of Jesus. The metaphoric meaning of relationship portrayed here is comparable to Jesus' spiritual relationship or intimate belonging to the Father ("in his bosom," John 1:18). Father certainly has no physical body, but the evangelist makes use of the metaphor of the human body here to focus our attention on the intimate belonging of the beloved disciple to God in Jesus.

Jesus responded to the query of the beloved disciple saying, "the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish' will betray me." The statement in Jn 13:26 gives a definite clue to guess who sat at the left-hand side of Jesus, though the text is not explicit on this. Mt 26:25 also indicates that Jesus could speak to Judas probably without being overheard by others (cf. Jn 13:28-29). Judas should have been seated next to Jesus on his left side, if he had to receive the bread from Jesus without getting up. Jesus made Judas sit next to him, on the left side, which is the place of honour in the oriental world.³⁶ It means, the inspired artist and mystical evangelist of this gospel has left behind another touching scene for our meditation. When Judas betrayed Jesus, he was not betraying Jesus, but betraying his very identity as a disciple, the identity of intimately belonging to Jesus. And when Jesus spoke to Judas and gave the morsel, true to his identity in relation to his disciple, Jesus could have been literally 'reclining at Judas' breast'.

ii) The 'Other Disciple' at High Priest's Palace (Jn 18: 15-27)

The next appearance of an anonymous disciple happens at the High Priest's palace, to set the stage of the denial scene: though the evangelist simply calls him 'another disciple', he clearly intended to place him side by side with Peter, with the scope of comparison and contrast. Jn 18:15-16 notes how 'another disciple' was able to gain entrance for himself and Simon Peter into the high priest's courtyard while Jesus was being questioned inside, because this "other disciple... was known to the High Priest" (15). Here the unnamed disciple obtains access for Peter to the court of the high priest and he is very much present in the denial scene of Peter.

When a servant girl questions Peter regarding his identity as Jesus' disciple, Peter denies. In fact, all the three queries to Peter are formulated in such a way that they focus on the identity of Peter as a disciple and his belongingness to Jesus:³⁷ "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" (Jn 18:17; 25, 26). The figure of authority denies Jesus, while in contrast, the other anonymous disciple does not deny his identity of belongingness to Jesus.

iii) The Beloved Disciple at the Foot of the Cross (Jn 19:17-37)

In the next episode, the beloved disciple is portrayed at the foot of the cross: he is the only male disciple present there along with some women disciples; he demonstrates an unshakable belongingness to Jesus and takes the risk of his own life by standing there. His presence here is contrasted with the absence of all other men disciples, especially Peter, the figure of authority. The beloved disciple becomes the only privileged male disciple to witness the most crucial events in the life of Jesus, namely, his passion and death. By portraying the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross, the evangelist creates another moving image of intimate bond of belonging to each other.³⁸ Completely belonging to Jesus, the beloved disciple stands at the foot of the cross, courageously participating also in his death vigil.

iv) The Beloved Disciple at the Tomb on Easter Sunday Morning (Jn 20:1-10)

John places Peter and the beloved disciple side by side again in an episode on Easter Sunday morning. On the first day of the week (Sunday), after visiting Jesus' tomb, Mary Magdalene "ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." Then the two men "ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first." The normal reasoning is that it was because the beloved disciple was younger and more agile, trim and fit. Narratively, this particular revelation makes no sense, if it was due to a natural physical reason. So, it is not because of old age, but it is metaphorical of the intimate belongingness the beloved disciple enjoyed with Jesus.³⁹ Here Peter is slow to run, as later he will be portrayed as slow to believe (Jn 20:7).⁴⁰

"He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in (Jn 20:5)." The beloved Disciple is the 'winner' in the race, but the precedence is given to Peter, allowing him to enter the tomb first. Peter arrived and entered the tomb, where he sees the empty shroud-wrapping and the folded face-cloth. These insignificant details, just as the detail about the beloved disciple reaching the tomb first, will add a particular nuance to the gospel. Here it is mentioned that the cloths

that tied and secured the dead body were lying there. This particular nuance of the account argues indirectly against the accusation that the body of Jesus was stolen by his disciples:⁴¹ if the dead body was stolen, they would not untie the clothes that secured the dead body. If the cloths that secured the dead body of Jesus are left there, it means that the body which is gone from the tomb, has gone not as a dead body, but alive.⁴² Peter apparently failed to have this insight into what he had seen. But the beloved disciple gets insight from what he has seen: “Then the other disciple... went in also; and he saw and believed.” There is an intimate relation between believing and loving in John. They are used as synonyms. Peter is hesitant to believe that Jesus has risen from the dead (as was the case with most of the male disciples, cf. Luke 24:36-43). The beloved disciple’s insight and the consequent faith at the tomb are the true climax of this narrative, which links love and faith in this gospel.

v) The Beloved Disciple in the Final Episode at the Seashore (Jn 21:1-25)

The literary and theological strategies of the five serial episodes climax in the final chapter of John, at the Sea of Tiberias (21:1-25), where Peter and the beloved disciple again play major roles together; as in the previous episodes, this narrative also focuses on the primary image of Jesus and the corresponding program of life for the disciples. On this occasion of the Galilee appearance of Jesus, seven disciples decided to go for fishing, including “Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two others of His disciples.” It is as though Peter and the other disciples decided to go back to their old identity and profession. Certainly, the characters in the story do not appear to know what has happened in the 20th chapter of the gospel due to narrative gaps between the events.

Peter was an expert fisherman, but that night fishes in the lake of Galilee played a hide and seek game with these fishermen to teach them an all-important lesson: without ‘remaining in Jesus’ or ‘apart from him they can do nothing’ (Jn 15:50); intimately belonging to Jesus is their identity as disciples. As morning dawned, a stranger appeared on the shore and called out, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” to which they replied, “No” (Jn 21:5). Then this stranger told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat, after which the nets were so filled with fish that the men could not haul them in. The beloved disciple was quick to perceive the insight from the apparent theophany.⁴³ “Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’” (Jn 21:7), after which Peter jumped into the water and began swimming to shore. Here again the beloved disciple is quicker to perceive

the spiritual realities as at the tomb, while Peter is more compulsive actor. The story gives the impression that while the disciples are attempting to forget their identity of belonging to Jesus, Peter, the figure of authority, is leading them back to their old identity. But Jesus remains faithful and reveals once again his identity of intimately belonging to his disciples.

When all the disciples had joined Jesus on shore, he served them a breakfast of fish and bread, metaphorically communicating his concern and belongingness to them. After breakfast, Jesus questioned Peter three times about his love for him. The first question (Jn 21:15) was, “Do you love me more than all these?” Two different verbs for ‘love’ are used in Jesus’ three questions to Peter, *agapaō* in the first two questions (Jn 21:15, 16) and *phileō* in the final question (Jn 21:17). The Greeks had three basic terms (nouns) for love. *Erōs* was primarily associated with erotic love. *Agapē* was applied to divine love and chaste human love; and it became the favored word in Jewish and Christian writings to describe God’s love and selfless human love (cf. Eph 2:4, 1Cor 13). *Philia*, the term with which Jesus formulated the final question, was the general word for ‘friendship’.

Once again, the questions are formulated to focus on the identity of Peter as a disciple.⁴⁴ The first question of Jesus is not “do you love me?” but “do you love me more than all these?” If he loves Jesus more than the other disciples, then his identity becomes identical with that of the beloved disciple, the figure of love. The final question to Peter using the Greek term *phileō* enquires whether Peter will be a faithful friend to him, focusing on the aspect of his fidelity and belongingness. In fact, it was this third question that ‘hurt’ Peter, recalling his history of infidelity. The ultimate message is that Peter has to recall his past unfaithfulness, by which he lost Jesus’ image. He has to once again configure with the image of Jesus, the love embodied, and renew the covenantal faithfulness of intimately belonging to Jesus.

One last time in John, Peter once again initiates a dialogue with a scope for comparison and contrast with the beloved disciple. After being informed of his own fate, Peter wants to know the fate of the beloved disciple. “Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His breast at the supper, and said, ... ‘But Lord, what about this man?’”⁴⁵ But Jesus answered, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow me.” (Jn 21:20-22). The gospel of John contrasts the fates of Peter and the beloved disciple. For Peter, the full extent of friendship with Jesus meant the laying down of his life in imitation of Jesus, the highest form of love in a friendship in the words of Jesus himself (Jn 15:13). The task for the beloved disciple is to continue remaining in Jesus. Peter is given a renewed appeal to ‘follow’ him. Here the use of

the term 'follow' gets the full metaphoric meaning of discipleship in John, namely, intimately belonging to God in Jesus at any cost.⁴⁶

Conclusion

To affirm the gospel portrayal of the primary purpose of discipleship as 'to be with Jesus' or 'to remain in Jesus', this article has analysed passages from the length and breadth of synoptic as well as Johannine gospel. In the synoptic gospels, especially in Mark, the phrase "to be with Him" defines the identity, nature and purpose of discipleship. The Johannine expression "to remain in Jesus" seems to have a more profound significance than the synoptic phrase. "Remain in Jesus" is closely linked with the Johannine concept of faith and his concept of discipleship. In John, the expression gives the trajectory for the path of holiness, serving as the new holiness code. In the synoptic gospels, as we have seen, "to be with Jesus" is a synonym for discipleship; in the gospel of John the expression "to remain in Jesus" almost becomes a condition that identifies the disciples of Jesus. John makes use of many metaphors and parabolic characters to present his idea of discipleship as 'remaining with Jesus.'

Endnotes

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⁷ G. MANGATT, "Aspects of Discipleship", *Bible Bhashyam* 7 (1981-82) 240.

⁸ There are many scholars who consider the stories of the Rich Man (Mk 10:17-22), Gerasene Demoniac (5:18-20), and Blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52) as vocation stories in different ways.

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- ³⁹ R.E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 372.
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BUILDING A DREAM COMMUNITY

James Kanantham, CMF

“Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common” (Acts 4:32)

INTRODUCTION

We who are in Consecrated Life are called to community life. A good community itself is a proclamation of the gospel. A religious community of zealous commitment to the mission, with mutual support, empathy and concern validates the values it proclaims as did the early Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-34). Hence we need to underscore the importance of creating an inspiring vision of our missionary community. We need to have an exciting dream of our community! Pope Francis has been constantly encouraging about having dreams:

Don't lose the ability to dream the future. Each of us needs to dream about our family, our children, and our parents: to imagine how I would like their lives to go. Priests, too, need to dream about what we want for the faithful. Dream as the young dream, who are 'unabashed' in their dreams and find their path there. Do not lose the ability to dream, because to dream is to open the door to the future. Be fruitful in the future.¹

It is dream that sustains our efforts. Dream gives us the direction. When we have a dream of an ideal community clearly imprinted in our mind and heart, it will have 'the power of attraction' which can draw us towards its achievement.

He is a Claretian missionary presently doing ministry in the Institute of Consecrated Life for Asia (ICLA), Manila, Philippines. After his licentiate in Psychology from the Institute of Psychology, Gregorian University, Rome, he took his doctorate in Organization Development (OD) from SAIDI, Philippines and had a post-doctoral diploma in Protection of Minors from Centre for Child Protection (CCP), Gregorian University, Rome. He also served as the Provincial of Bangalore Province of the Claretians for six years besides long years of service as novice master. He can be contacted at james.kannan@gmail.com

The Scriptures and our Constitutions give us the picture of an ideal community. Other sciences can give us insights and information to build on such foundation. In this article on “Building a Dream Community” we draw on the lines of *Appreciative Inquiry* approach with its 4-D methodology of *Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny*. We will dwell on discovering the positive strengths already in place in our communities and create provocative propositions of ideal community living and suggest ways to design its fulfilment. We look briefly into biblical, spiritual, and psychological aspects of community building and make use of them in building up our ideal community.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

We approach from an interdisciplinary perspective for building up our dream of community.

1. Biblical Models

We first turn to the Scriptures. To make it participative and co-creative, the members of the community may discover the qualities of the ideal communities from Old and New Testaments. It would be particularly useful to look into the scriptural narratives of the experiences of the apostolic community with Jesus as its center and leader.

Some of the qualities that we come across in the Scriptures can be seen in the following models.

(a) Exodus Model of Community

The features of the Exodus Community can serve us in our pursuit of a fully functioning community after the heart of God. Some of its features are:

- Large company of every kind (Ex 12:38)
- They share a common heritage, history, and memory
- The commandments given at Sinai unite them as a community with certain discipline
- They sought collective forgiveness at the moments of collective failure
- Centrality of God and Liturgy as the unifying factor: The “Tent of the Tabernacle” (Ex: 25) and the observance of Sabbath

(b) New Testament Community Model

Some of the characteristics of apostolic community and early Christian communities indicated in the NT are:

- *Inclusiveness and Diversity:* Apostles are called from different walks of life (fisherman, tax-collector, zealots), of different nature and character. People of all cultures are welcome in the church (Acts 1:8; Jn 3:16; Col 3:11).
- *Authenticity:* Speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15); Don't lie to each other (Col 3:9).
- *Mutuality, Being for "one another":* (Rom 12:10; 1Cor 12:25; Gal 5:13; 1Thess 4:18; 5:11; Phil 4:2; 1Thess 5:11).
- *Courtesy and Empathy:* (Gal 6:2; 1Thess 5:14; Eph 4:32; 1Thess 5:15; Col 3:13).
- *Mercy:* Col 3:13; Rom 15:7.
- *Humility:* James 5:16; Eph 5:21.
- *Confidentiality:* Guard against the tendency to "gossip" (James 4:11); Don't grumble against each other (James 5:9).
- *Frequently meeting together:* Don't give up meeting with each other (Heb 10:25).
- *Provoking to love and to do good:* Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24).

2. A Theological Model

Theology and spirituality provide abundant resources for understanding and building up communities. We summarize here a few insights from *The Gospel-Centered Community: Leader's Guide* by Robert H. Thune and Will Walker.²

(a) Model of Trinity

The Nicene Creed (c. 325 CE) summarizes the Trinity as a community of persons: one God, three persons. Before any human community existed, even before the universe came into being, God existed, dwelling in perfect harmony, in his threefold being.

In the creation account, this Triune God says: "Let us make man in our image" (Gen 1:26). We are made to image God, to reflect his likeness. Our longing for community is deep and primal precisely because we are made to be God's image bearers. God wired us for community and communion.

What Jesus redeems us for is to a life that images God and reflects his goodness to the world. Jesus restored our capacity for community; a community made up of people from every tribe and tongue and nation on earth (Rev 7:9). God has created us for community, and Jesus has redeemed us for community.

(b) Eschatological Model

We are called to be a community that reflects “the new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2Peter 3:13). God wants us to be a renewed creation, where we live in harmony with one another and God. God “sanctifies” us into being a redeemed community, with the Holy Spirit as the agent and gospel as the tool of sanctification. And this sanctification takes place in the context of community.

In the context of living in community, we are forced to confront our weaknesses, flaws, and sins... and that is good! That opens us to reach out and embrace one another as weak human beings who need the transforming and sanctifying power of God’s Grace.

(c) Spiritual Model

Community is the place where we recognize and honor the image of God in every human being. In community we blend faith and action to generate commitment for the gospel and to defeat injustice. We rely on scripture reading, prayer, and community worship for inner strength. Some of the spiritual characteristics of the community are:

- *Centrality of Jesus:* As people belonging to Jesus and collaborators in his work of the Kingdom, centrality of the master is a must. What was common for the apostolic community was the call from Jesus. Disciples are those who listen to his word and obey it.
- *Fraternal communion:* fraternal communion includes witnessing to the life of Trinity, being a sign of ecclesial communion, sharing and enjoying the fruits of the gifts of one another, concern for the other, shared responsibility, forgiveness as a means for healing, directedness towards one mission in a sense of convocation.
- *Prayer:* Prayer is the basis of the Christian community and therefore of the community of consecrated persons.
- *Eucharist:* The Eucharist is the heart of religious community. Through the Eucharist we learn to break ourselves for the sake of the other in the community.

- *Silence:* Prayer requires an atmosphere of quiet and silence. If you refuse to be alone you are rejecting Christ's call to you and you can have no part in the community and those who are called.
- *Forgiveness:* Community is the place of forgiveness where we have to practice it in our daily life. Forgiveness is the cement that binds us together.
- *As sharers in one mission:* We all share in the one mission, and hence we engage in mission received from and entrusted to us by the community, with a spirit of serving the Church and the world.

3. A Psycho-social Model

Social sciences point out many qualities of a successful organization in modern times where intercultural compositions of the members necessitated much assimilation and accommodation. Their findings and suggestions should be considered seriously when we plan to build up our communities especially as we are also living in a multi-cultural context. They highlight the following things among many others.

- *Acceptance and Appreciation:* One of the deepest needs of the human heart is the need to be appreciated and accepted. Everyone wants to be valued, to be loved and accepted for what one is.
- *Mutual Trust and Understanding:* Mutual trust and understanding is at the heart of the community.
- *Sharing, Bearing, and Caring:* Caring for each other is an awareness of others and their realities beyond oneself.
- *Communication:* openness, dialogue among the members, transparency and constructive fraternal confrontations, compassionate and non-violent communication build the community (For one of the best resources for compassionate, nonviolent communication, see *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* by Marshall B. Rosenberg).
- *Cooperation:* In the community the members should work with the team spirit to fulfil the common goal.
- *Sense of Belongingness:* Each member of the community must feel that he belongs to it. There should be space for fun, humor, laughter and recreation among the members.

- *Appreciation of Cultural Diversity:* With our call to universality, we need to be open to all cultures and appreciate diversity as richness despite the challenges it brings.
- *Emotional Intelligence:* The members need to learn to manage their emotions constructively and the leaders should create positive emotions in the community. When positive emotions flourish better decisions, greater enthusiasm and greater effectiveness of the mission result.

Healthy community is created when the members take effort to:

- Offer hospitality to everyone and turn the community into an inclusive family rather than exclusive club;
- Exhibit personal authenticity, true respect, and validation of others;
- Believe in recognition and affirmation, not eradication, of differences;
- Permit emotions, listen with the heart, foster empathy and compassion for others;
- Tolerate ambiguity – realizes that sometimes a clear-cut answer is not readily available;
- Build increasing levels of trust and work to avoid fear of difference and others;
- Acknowledge limitations, lack of knowledge, or understanding and seek to learn;
- Acknowledge conflict or pain in order to work on difficult issues;
- Speak truth in love, always considering ways to be compassionate with one another;
- Avoid physical aggression and verbal abuse;
- Resolve conflicts peacefully, without violence, recognizing that peaceful doesn't always mean comfortable for everybody;
- Release resentment and bitterness through self-purification (i.e., avoidance of internal violence through spiritual, physical, and psychological care);
- Focus energy on removing evil forces (unjust systems), not destroying persons;
- Have unyielding persistence and unwavering commitment to justice;
- Achieve friendship and understanding through negotiation, compromise, or consensus – considering each circumstance to discern which will be most helpful;
- Gather together regularly for table fellowship, and meet the needs of everyone in the community;
- Share power and information;

- Acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of the members and
- Builds up relationship through story telling – experience sharing.

Having seen the theoretical foundations of building up our dream communities, we turn to the practical way of building up a vision of our community — how it looks like in actual living. For this we depend on an approach found highly effective in the organizations, namely, Appreciative Inquiry (AI). To make it easy to follow, a short description of the process is given first and then it is applied to the context.

THE PROCESS OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY (AI)

Before getting into our efforts of building community, let us have some understanding of what is AI and how it is practically applied. AI is found to be a very effective strength-based approach in corporate world for building up vibrant organization. It is used for generating a better future for the organization by engaging people in positive thought.

AI seeks to build a constructive union amongst people about their past and present capacities: achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, high point moments, lived values, stories, expressions of wisdom, possible futures and so positively on.....

AI is grounded on five basic assumptions:

Constructionist Principle: It basically tells that we create the world we live in. It is the members who make a community as heaven or hell. We create our communities through our conversations. Words create the world!

The Poetic Principle: It tells that as a poem can be interpreted in hundreds of ways we have multiple possibilities in any situation. We can focus on positive or negative. What we focus on will grow.

The Positive Principle: It says that there is a positive core in every person and situation, and that positive emotion is essential for growth and change. When we focus on the positive strengths, positive energy is created and the persons and communities thrive.

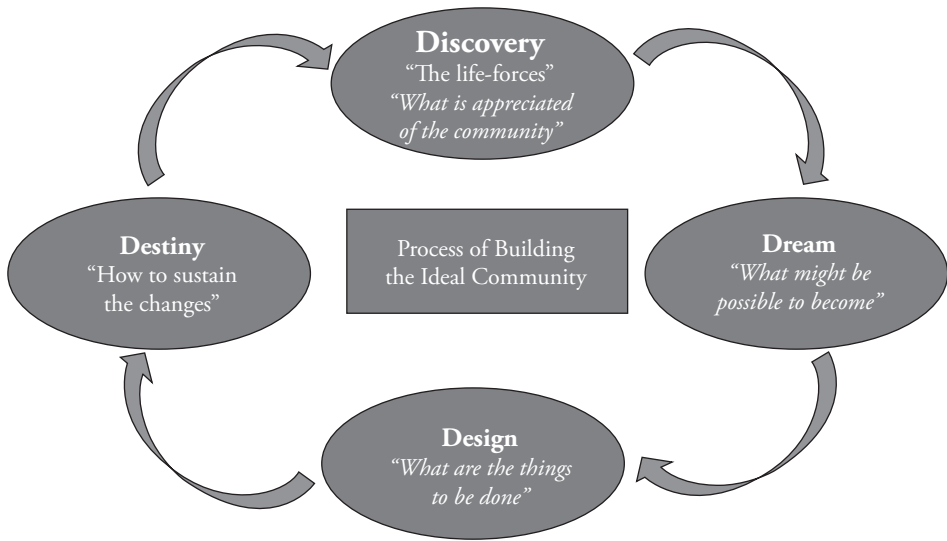
The Simultaneity Principle: It asserts that the changes begin to happen with the first question one asks. So, we need to learn to ask the right positive questions while engaging in conversations.

The Anticipatory Principle: Future has an impact on the present. It reminds of the importance of forming positive visions of future. The picture of the future has the power of attraction for its realization. As deep changes start with change in the active images of the future, we need to create ideal images of the community we want to build.

More than a philosophy, AI is an approach/method of building up a group and bringing about transformational change through conversations involving all stakeholders. It means, in our case, all the members of the community are actively participating in it if the aim is planning how to live as a missionary community. If it is to build a group for a missionary action, the participants are those who are directly involved in it, and at least the representatives of the recipients and collaborators. In the model presented below, we assume that we are in the effort to create the vision of living an ideal religious community. Keep in mind the following criteria as you involve:³

1. *Keep it open:* let the issues unfold as the inquiry proceeds.
2. *Be open minded:* the team need to retain an open mind about the actions which can follow.
3. *Outcome focused:* the process needs to focus on an outcome.
4. *Positive phrasing:* the outcome needs to be positively orientated.
5. *Involvement from the start:* involve all stakeholders from across the system
6. *Exciting:* Make the outcome provocative and encourage members for passionate action.

The actual process starts by identifying or defining together the topic, theme of the change process. In our case, if it is done at the beginning of a year in view of team work, it could be defined as *Building up an ideal community for the present year* (It could be similarly used for creating a vision for an institute, e.g. school or for our General or Provincial Chapter). Then follow the stages of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny.



Discovery

The discovery phase is about discovering the community’s key strengths and appreciating the ‘best of what is’. This phase is about understanding what gives life to your community and what has brought it this far or to this point in its history. We explore its leadership, history, reasons for existing, its values, which have contributed to its life and success. They are discovered through sharing of experiences of what the members appreciate most, bringing to conversations the positive stories of your community that you heard others speak about you, etc., and then map the main themes emerging from the stories. Thus, you have a list of “life-forces” or the positive strengths of your community. They are the strengths in place already and you want to carry them forward. When you create an ideal for the future, in addition to the existing strengths, you can also discuss and identify what are the qualities that you want to see more of. For this you may look into most appreciated qualities of your communities found in other places and benchmark what could be taken from them for creating your ideal community. To complete the list, you might add also the ideals proposed in your Constitutions, Chapters, etc. In the *Discovery* you focus on:

Collecting: Here the members engage in story telling — your own best experiences or the best stories others speak of your community. Collect key qualities (‘life-forces’ of the community) discovered from the stories of your community when it was at its best (If the group is large this could be done in different groups and pool together the themes in the plenary, for example in the context of a General or Provincial Chapter or when it is done in big institutions like a School).

Mapping: It is the large group process to map the findings around themes which may include resources, capabilities, relationships, partnerships and positive hopes.

Identifying enduring factors: It is the process, done in the large group, to identify factors that have sustained the community over time from the larger map above.

Dream

The dream phase is about bringing out the dreams the members have for their future as a community/institute.

After having discovered the assets and strengths of your community from the lived experience of the members and the qualities of that you benchmarked from other communities or the ideals of the congregation, the members now can create a *vision of the community* for the coming year or for a specific period of time. The ideal you want to live is put into a few concrete statements called **Provocative Proposition** (PP). They are *Provocative* because it contains the challenging proposals stated, not as future possibilities, but as if already living in the present.

When you make a PP, evaluate whether it has the following qualities:

- Is it provocative enough? Has it got a stretch? Does it challenge you to go beyond what is already there?
- Is it grounded? Is it realistic and based on the strengths of the members and within the reasonable possibilities?
- Is it desired? Do the members really mean what they say and are they committed to the achievement of the goals enshrined?
- Is it stated in affirmative, bold terms? (Statements are positive to create positive energy. What you want to see changed or improved also should be put in positive terms. It means you should abstain from using negative words).
- Does it widen the circle of dialogue, interaction, and relationships?

Here is a model of PP of a corporate organization. See how it expresses a challenging vision stated as if it is happening right now. Instead stating XYZ organization *will be* a model, it says *It is*. It brings out the quality of relationship within the organization and with other organizations and in the process coins a new word 'cooperation' in order to express both cooperation and competition at the same time!

Our XYZ organization is a model of cooperation. It balances cooperation and competition among teams within the organization and externally with alliance partners who are also our competitors. Everyone at XYZ has the information needed to do their job. Our knowledge

creation and management system allow each of us to create a personalized portfolio of information needed to do our job in a professional and caring manner.

Here is another sample of PP, from one of the Claretian schools in India:

St. Claret School stands out for its academic excellence, discipline, and promotes holistic growth of the students. It is known for its dedicated staff, understanding and encouraging management and for its cordial relationship among students and staff and with people. The spiritual, moral, and social values inculcated in the students make them socially proactive and honorable citizens of our country.”

So, in the *Dream* phase you ask yourselves how your ideal community looks like and describe it in three or four sentences.

Design

The design stage is to invite the members to talk about the dreams paying attention to specific details. These details might be around how the bold statements of PP can be realized concretely. It may describe the values to be followed, attitudes towards one another, with superiors and subordinates, collaborators, the way the mission is carried out, how your community is perceived by outsiders, etc. In order to make it more concrete and specific make use of the SMART planning (SMART is an acronym for being **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime-bound). The best way to do it is using a grid with “5 Wh” (What, Who, When, Where, Which) and How as shown below. First state the specific goals from the PP and then give the details how it could be realized by identifying what actions to follow, who are the people involved, when is it going to happen, where is it done, how it is done and which action to follow what, etc. In every goal all these may not be applicable.

Goals	What	Who	When	Where	Which	How
1.						
2.						
3.						

It is good to identify all the values contained implicitly or explicitly in the PP and make an acronym using an easily memorable word or phrase.

For example the following values of a PP may be expressed with the acronym,

CLARET:

Caring for one-another

Living joyfully

Availability

Responsible to the mission

Empathy

Thoughtful of the poor and needy

Pick up only the most salient qualities and keep the acronym short so that the qualities may be easily recalled. Next thing to do is to express the ideal vision of the PP in a symbolic way. Capture it in a drawing or in an art using whatever suitable materials. What is important in *Appreciative Inquiry* is to do it together rather than leaving it to one or two gifted persons! By creating together, the bonding is built among the members of the community.

Destiny

The next stage in the 4-D virtuous cycle of AI is Destiny. Destiny is the strategy of sustaining the process of action-plans outlined in the Design. It is to guarantee that the members start implementing the new images of the shared future. It also includes the periodic evaluation plan. Some of the strategies outlined could be:

- Prioritizing the designed goals according to importance
- Identifying the long-term plans, short-term plans
- Prioritizing the potential change projects according easiest to achieve to hardest to implement
- Spelling out commitments by the members
- Drawing out an evaluation plan: decide the frequency (how often evaluation is done about the progress)
- Generating specific first steps for implementation
- Identifying the measures of realization: what will indicate the realization of the goals
- Identifying some “Quick Wins”: some markers of success

There should be an evaluation plan to keep track of the progress of the

implementation. The frequency of such evaluation meetings is fixed. These meetings help to discover the emerging stories and modifying or adding new visions and designs. Thus the 4-D cycle continues to create enthusiasm and fulfilment.

Having seen the steps in some details now let us turn to its application in building up a vibrant religious community.

BUILDING THE VISION OF THE IDEAL COMMUNITY

Now let us apply the *AI 4-D Method* in building a model for your community. All the members are to be actively participating in it. What we participate in creating, will have a natural accountability — pressure from outside is not required for the realization of what is created by the group.

DISCOVERY

It is through ‘story telling’ we discover the fine qualities already existing in our community which become the basis for creating our ideal community. We discover the qualities of the ideal community from our own experiences of community living. Our experiences contain the beautiful examples of our own or of others’ ways of making community life joyful and fruitful. So, to facilitate story telling use the following AI questions (or formulate appropriate questions by a small group).

Think of the peak moment of your community life when you were most joyful, encouraged, and content. What was that moment? What made it the most vivid and memorable of your community experiences? Share your experience in the group.

After each sharing, the group identifies the salient characteristics of the ideals of community life contained in the narratives. When everyone finishes the sharing, you have a list of the qualities that would make an ideal community. They are the “life-forces” of your community. The life-forces are those qualities most repeated in the stories. They are the strengths and assets already in place for building your ideal community for the specified time e.g., for the current year.

As we want our community to be more than what we are presently, we can add to the list the congregational ideals and those qualities the members desire most for the community. For this the group could continue with discovering the qualities of an ideal Christian community from the Scriptures as well as the ideals lived in the communities elsewhere. The materials that we discussed in the theoretical foundations could be utilized for embellishing the ideals we desire to follow.

Thus at the end of the first phase, you have a list of ‘life-forces’ which are your

resources as a community on which you can build your Dream.

DREAM

After having discovered the assets and strengths of the community from the lived experience of the members and the qualities you want see happening more, you can now create a **vision of the community** for the specified period (e.g., for one year or three years). To help your imagination of the future community you want to live in, use the following visualization:

Visualizing the ideal community

Imagine that you were transported into the future when your community is considered the model for community life to be emulated by all others in the province. You see your community in an ideal situation — every member is happy, living fully his vocation and mission in the symphony of collaboration and communion of the members. What are the things you see there? — the way members interact, work, and live together? What do the outsiders see and admire of this community? What do the members say about it to the new members coming to the community?

What you find happening in the visualization, now you put into a few statements. They are written as if happening right now and so in the present tense. This ideal picture of the community to be realistic should be related to the list of assets (life-forces) you identified in the *Discovery* stage. What you now put in a few statements is your **Provocative Proposition (PP)** about your community. A Provocative Proposition is a statement describing your ideal community — it “lives” the qualities you most desire. Give a title or banner for the PP.

Let us look into the following PP as a model:

Adorers and Servers

Rooted in adoration and seeking the will of God, we are a community filled by the fire of love ‘going-forth’ in communion to realize our mission. Our community as ‘a statement of our mission’ expresses joy of consecrated life, love for one another, care for the earth, appreciation of diversities, and we empower, accompany and support each other in realizing the mission. Our collaborators (sisters & lay associates in the mission), and recipients of our service are delighted about us and joyfully participate in the shared mission as we actively join forces with local Church. Our community is a model in the province for listening to guidance from authorities and following Congregational vision.

Here we have a PP which states how the members as a community live in relation to God, to one another, and others and the quality of the commitment to mission. It tells how the community appears to the collaborators, recipients of the mission, to the province, and the diocese where the community exists. It is provocative in the sense that it claims to be a model admired in the province and can be emulated by others. The title “Adorers and Servers” captures the essential qualities of the community of missionaries anchored in prayer going forth in service.

Now the PP being a brief, general statement, we need to design the details for actual implementation. That we do in the next stage.

DESIGN

In the Provocative Proposition, you have a desired reality of the community stated in bold and provocative terms. Now to realize the dream you have to create together (co-create) the desired reality by identifying further the values to be pursued, specifying the small and big steps, the structures to be in place, etc.

Concretely it would mean:

1. Identify different goals contained in the Provocative Proposition
2. Specify the values to be pursued in order to achieve the goals.
3. Spell out the action steps to realize the above.

In short, we design the Goals, the Values, and the Action Plan (In doing this, you make use of the resources from theoretical discussion about the different models given above. Pay special attention to the best practices in other communities which can be benchmarks for building your community. The ideal would be to have a day of input, reflections, and study of the different models of community conducted before having the AI workshop.)

Following the model Provocative Proposition (PP) above, we may do the designing as follows:

1. **The Goals:** We identify the *goals* enshrined in the PP.

	<i>Goals</i>
1.	Rooted in adoration and seeking the will of God
2.	Accompaniment of the members: building communion
3.	Collaboration and support in mission
4.	Being recognized as a model community

2. **Values:** Now, identify the values contained explicitly or implicitly in the Provocative Proposition which should be practiced and made visible so that PP is really lived. The values explicitly present in the above PP are joy, love, appreciation, empowerment, collaboration (The list of life-forces in the *Discovery* are the assets and strengths for realization of the *Dream* but the list of values here are the outcomes).

Create an Acronym: If possible, make an acronym with those values. You may have to look for synonyms of the terms or elaborating into phrases to suit to the alphabets of the acronym. Better to keep it small so that it may be easily remembered.

‘ADORERS’ can capture many salient features of the above PP

A Adoration (prayer) as the source of energy

D Dedication in mission

O Obedience to God and authorities

R Respect and reverence for all

E Empowering & Eco-friendly

R Renewal through learning & getting feedback

S Servants of the Word

3. **SMART Plan:** make a chart with the details of the Action Plan. Different formats could be used like the one described earlier using a 5 *Whs* and *How*. You may use some other format more appropriate to the types of activities you have in the community. What is to be brought out is the details to be attended in order to realize the *Dream*. So, it should contain the actions to follow, how they are carried out, who would be there to do, etc. A model is given below. Though it is given here in two separate chart for convenience, you can make it in one and display it in big letters on a chart paper.

Goals	What (Actions, behaviors)	How (strategies)
1. Rooted in spiritual life and seeking the will of God	Being Adorers (people of prayer) Interest in spiritual renewal Centered on Word of God Community discernment	Importance to Community prayers Monthly recollections Daily communitarian reading of the Word of God and Congregational Documents

Goals	What (Actions, behaviors)	How (strategies)
2. Accompaniment of the members and building communion	<p>Promote the beauty of the community and to reactivate our fraternal covenant</p> <p>Make our fraternal life a transparent and joyful proclamation of the Kingdom.</p> <p>Reinforce the sense of belonging and community co-responsibility.</p> <p>Pardon and reconciliation to heal our wounds</p>	<p>Attention to the needs of the members</p> <p>Celebration of the important days of the members</p> <p>Frequent community activities.</p> <p>Cultivate the art of listening (within and outside of the community), concern for the other, spiritual sharing, fraternal relationships, and transparency in the sharing of goods.</p> <p>Care for one another, warm relationships</p> <p>Story telling: sharing experiences at meals. Bearing one-another's burdens</p> <p>Attention to speech, Spirit of welcome</p> <p>Respect for elderly</p> <p>Care of the sick members</p>
3. Collaboration and support in mission	<p>Spirit of dialogue, acceptance and mutual appreciation, discerning together our ministries and services</p> <p>Appreciation and encouragement of good activities of the members.</p> <p>Fostering team-work</p> <p>Shared mission</p> <p>Active collaboration with local Church</p>	<p>Celebrating the victories</p> <p>Having time to share stories of the day/week and listening, giving and receiving feedback, learning etc.</p> <p>Using gifts and talents at the service of mission, Sharing in governance,</p> <p>Collaboration in the ministry,</p> <p>Collaboration with local church</p> <p>In discernment include others who share our mission and charism.</p>
4. Model for Religious community	<p>Listening to guidance from authorities,</p> <p>Following Congregational vision</p>	<p>Actively participate in the plans and programs of the province</p>

Fill in also the other columns if they are relevant. For example, when is the goal to be attained, what are the milestones to achieve for a specific project and when (e.g., when is the halfway through?), who are people in charge, the roles each one has

to play, where is the event going to happen, what is the resource and preparations for a particular event etc.

Goals	When (time-frame and milestones)	Who, Which (resources)	Where
1...	Everyday morning and evening prayers Reading from the Constitutions before dinner.	Availing books for spiritual life. Recollection reflections by members taking turn	Recollections together with neighboring communities/ associates at different places
2 ...			
3 ...			
4 ...			

4. **Symbol:** Fourthly, the members can present the characteristics of the community with an appropriate symbol capturing different aspects. Placing the symbol so created in a prominent place of visibility for the community members will remind them constantly of the ideal they are striving for.



(A symbolic exhibit of the Design Phase of a community)

DESTINY

Destiny is the delivery part. What is designed is to be now implemented. To facilitate the actions, we have to have some strategies. Following things are suggested:

1. The members spell out what each one is going to do for the realization of the dream. Spelling out a few immediate actions would motivate to put them into action right away.

2. Put up a chart in the notice board on the milestones to be achieved of the planned projects and their realization. Display also in a prominent place in the community the Provocative Proposition, SMART plan and the symbolic design as constant reminders for the members of what they are and what they should be doing.

3. Formulate a measurement plan to evaluate whether plans are being realized.

Goals	Criteria for evaluation	Frequency of evaluation
Being rooted in spiritual life	What is the percentage of participation by the members in morning and evening prayers	Every monthly recollection.
Collaboration	How many participated in the meeting, how many shared etc.	Every three months conduct an evaluation meeting.

4. The members evaluate their commitment to the projects in their sharing with their mentor, Spiritual Director.

As you put into action your designs, you have new stories and discoveries. It leads to bigger dreams and more effective designs. Thus, AI is a virtuous cycle of activities continuously in evolution and growth. AI is a method of co-creation and you will experience warm relationships in community, and enthusiasm in collaborative mission. Thus, you build up the Dream Community.



Conclusion

It is one thing to dream of an ideal community. It is another to wake up from the dream and work hard to translate that dream into reality! At every General Chapter, Provincial Chapter, and General Assembly, we discuss and dream of

living our community life in a manner more attuned to the Gospel mandate and style of the first Christians. We shall not give up dreaming. All the more we need to work hard for realizing it. Community is the first act of mission for religious. *Appreciative Inquiry* provides us with tools to envision and practical methods to design and put into action. Once our eyes are opened to new ways of living and acting, creating synergy and harmonizing strengths, building up relationships and promoting passion in mission, we will create new communities and things that we never thought possible will be realized.

“Man’s mind stretched to a new idea never goes back to its original dimension.”
-Oliver Wendell Holmes



Endnotes

¹ Pope Francis in his daily homily during mass at Casa Santa Marta on December 18, 2018. It can be accessed at <https://www.romereports.com/en/2018/12/18/pope-in-santa-marta-do-not-be-afraid-to-dream/>

² ROBERT H. THUNE – WILL WALKER, *The Gospel-Centered Community*, Greensboro, NC 2013.

³ SARAH LEWIS – JONATHAN PASSMORE – STEFAN CANTORE, *Appreciative Inquiry for Change Management*, London 2008, 48.

THE MINISTRY OF THE RELIGIOUS AS GURU

Swami Vikrant, SDB

1 . Introduction

In ancient India, instruction was never regarded as an end in itself, but only as a means to the attainment of a higher goal, a spiritual value. Vedic study was considered as the sacrifice offered to the Supreme Being, *Brahman*. Speech, mind, etc., were the ritual prerequisites required for this sacrifice. According to the *Satapatha Brahmana*, the Brahmins who have studied and recited the sacred lore, are the “human gods”.¹ The term used for a learned man was *Susruvan*, i.e., the one who has “learned.” The knowledge acquired from a teacher (*acaryat*) leads more successfully to the goal.² The teacher or guru is indispensable for the acquisition of knowledge.³ The *Mundakopnishad* says: Let him, for the sake of this knowledge, approach a teacher (guru) who is learned in the Scriptures and established in *Brahman*.⁴ Even the god *Indra* was obliged to live with his guru *Prajapati* in order to obtain perfect instruction.⁵ Without tuition, the members of the first order were Brahmins by birth only.⁶ The *Apasthamba Dharma Sastra* says: The student should wait upon the teacher (*acarya*) as if he were a god”.⁷

The divine character of the guru was a basic doctrine of ancient India. Even in ancient Greece we find traces of the divine character of the preceptor. Thus the philosopher Empedocles, crowned as a god, permitted himself to be worshipped by the people. Who was a guru? The term “guru” in the sense of teacher, does not appear before the time of the *Chandogya Upanishad*. But *acarya*, literally meaning the one who knows, adheres to and practices the traditional good behaviour, customs, practices, etc., is already found in the *Atharva Veda*.⁸ An *Atharva Veda* hymn invests the preceptor with divine powers and also identifies the teacher and the pupil; some

Swami Vikrant was professor of Indian philosophy and Indian spirituality at Sacred Heart Seminary, Poonamallee, Chennai from 1975 till retirement and visiting professor of Indian spirituality at Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore and several other formation institutes across India. He studied Yoga at Divine Light Society, Rishikesh in the Himalayas and learned spirituality from Bede Griffiths, Raimundo Panikkar and Vandana Mataji. At present he is staying at St. Francis Xavier church, 38, Broadway, Chennai – 600 108. In addition to Indian Spirituality and Classical Indian Philosophy, he has authored over 200 articles on various spiritual topics. He can be contacted at: swamivikrant16@gmail.com

mystical relation seems to be established between the teacher and the pupil. The tendency to deify the guru is seen from the attempt to equate devotion to God with devotion to the guru.⁹ In the *Taittiriya Upanishad* the guru is explicitly called god: *Acaryadevobhavah*.¹⁰

The term “guru” literally means “heavy” and it signifies that the teacher is characterized by an uncommon weight of authority. This concept of the “heaviness” of God is very clearly taught in the *Vishnu Purana* where we read that the earth cannot bear the weight of the person in whom the god of gods has taken the abode.¹¹ When Vasudeva, the father of the new-born Sri Krishna takes the child in his arms, he exclaims: “Lo! The heaviness of the child!” (*Aho-gurutvam-balasya*).

Guru, in the sense of inspired guide or teacher, is foreign to the earliest texts. Originally, the term seems to have meant any elderly person wielding authority, like father, etc.¹² Devala, an authority on *Dharma-sastra*, taught that among the gurus, five deserve special honour: father, mother, eldest brother and husband. Commentators are divided as to who among the gurus is to be considered par excellence. Gautama, while holding that the *acarya* is the chief among the gurus, adds that according to some, the mother is the highest, an opinion shared by Yajnavalkya¹⁴, but rejected by Bhishma.¹⁵ According to another text, there are three super-gurus.¹⁶ According to Manu, the guru is the Brahmin who performs the rites in accordance with the rules of the Vedas.¹⁷ And again, “the man who benefits the pupil by instruction in the Veda is called his guru”.¹⁸ According to Manu¹⁹ and Yajnavalkya²⁰, the guru is the one who performs the *Samskaras* (Sacraments), maintains the child and imparts the Veda to it. This shows that, originally the term guru meant the father. We have the texts of fathers teaching their sons.²¹ Though *acarya* and *Upadhyaya* are often used as synonyms, the latter is one who teaches a portion of the Veda for livelihood²², while the *acarya* is one “from whom the pupil gathers” (*acinoti*) the knowledge of his dharma²³, or rather, the one teaches him the *acara*, the traditionally right conduct and behaviour. The *Nirukta*²⁴ defines *acarya* thus: *acarya acaram grahayati* (the *acarya* makes the student understand the traditional precepts). But Manu²⁵ and Yajnavalkya make a distinction between the functions of the guru and that of the *acarya*: the former performs all the ceremonies till the initiation while the latter initiates the boy into Vedic studies after performing the Sacrament of initiation, *Upanayana*.²⁷

Vedic priesthood was a ministry distinct from that of the guru. The priests formed a separate class by themselves. It was a hereditary priesthood. They worked in the service of kings and nobles, from, whom they secured large wealth both by flattery and by threat. The *Rig-Veda Samhita* is full of encomiums on the generosity

of kings which was a hint for others to follow suit. The *Rig Vedic* priests seem to have adhered to their own occupations as strictly as possible. It seems the priestly function included also medicine for one priest says in a hymn of the ninth *Mandala* of the *Rig Veda* that his father is a physician. Spells and incantations formed an integral part of medicine in those ancient times. Spells were performed for procuring offspring, to destroy enemies and to oust a rival woman from a man's affections. But the major part of the sacerdotal function was limited to the great sacrifices and little to home rituals.

Three kinds of priests occur in the *Rig Veda*: the *Hotri*, the *Adhvaryu* and the *Udgatri*. The *Hotri* recited the hymns; the *Adhvaryu* was the chief officiating priest at the sacrifice. The *Saman*-singers recited songs in honour of the deities. The *Purohita* was the domestic priest of the king, who generally accompanied him to the battlefield. He seems to have acted as the chief of the priests.

2. Duties and Privileges of the Guru

If the goal of instruction was so sublime, it is but natural to expect that the best preceptor should be sought out. He should be a well-read man, of good family and character and given over to religious exercises.²⁸ The Brahmin alone could be a preceptor as is evident from the texts.²⁹ Only by way of exception could a *Kshatriya* or a *Vaisya* become a guru.³⁰

Teaching the *Veda* was an obligation for the Brahmins. Thus the *Sruti* on Medhathiti on Manu 2, 113 says: The man who having mastered the *Veda*, does not teach, deserts his own good and shuts the door to happiness. The man who keeps back something or speaks untruth, dries up completely³¹; or receives all the sins of his pupils.³² The potent word, of which the guru is the custodian, must be transmitted for the benefit of the world so that all may be aware of their obligations to society.

The guru was not paid for his tuition, but there was the convention of giving some gift, (*Veda-dakshina* or *Guru-dakshina*) when the pupil completed his studies.³³ Patanjali mentions the gift of a cow to the *Upadhyaya*.³⁴ Manu however gives a more elaborate list of gifts.³⁵

That the guru enjoyed great authority is seen from the fact that he was often called upon to ensure difficult questions, not merely in academics, but equally in *Vedics*, economics, politics or hygienics. Thus we see some prominent Brahmins approaching their guru Aruni for discussions.³⁶ The guru imparted instructions not only to adolescents but also to adults. Thus we see the sage Yajnavalkya imparting

esoteric knowledge to his wife Maitreyi.³⁷ When the guru is employed by a kingly person, he is called *Purohita*, literally meaning, “placed in front” (of the king), to shield the king against evil influences in virtue of his priestly power. The presence of the royal chaplains (*Purohitas*) ensured military success. The relationship between the king and the chaplain was considered matrimonial.³⁸ According to one text, the chaplain is, “the half of the self of the prince”.³⁹ The *Purohita* was the first to anoint the king during the coronation ceremonies.⁴⁰ The king who turns against the *Purohita* is destroyed.⁴¹ The king’s victories depend on the advice of the *Purohita*.⁴² Being sacrosanct, the *Purohita* may not be executed or killed.

The *Mahabharata* introduces the doctrine of the grace (*prasada*) of the guru. Thus the god Agni grants to the seer Gaya the power to know the *Veda* without study.⁴³ The image-worship of the guru during the Epic period is further step in the process of his deification. Much stress was laid on purity of descent and certain rites could be performed only by those who could trace their origin to ancient *rishis* of pure descent. On the other hand, we have texts which proclaim that, what absolutely mattered were not heredity but learning and virtue.⁴⁴ Visvamitra was originally a *Kshatriya* (warrior caste). The great *Upanishadic* sage Satyakama Jabala was born illegitimate.⁴⁵ Brahmin priests like Kavasha, Ailusha and Vatsi, who had married *Sudra* girls, though despised, were not excluded from priestly functions. The priest should be detached from mundane cravings. He should be kind and gentle in his behaviour towards others. He must be very devoted to his duty and he should have mastery of the sacred lore and the rituals. Celibacy was not practiced by the Vedic priest. The priest had to be a married man, since a son’s rituals alone will take him to Heaven. Celibacy was a cause of disqualification for performing Vedic rituals. Yet, there were great Brahmin priests who practiced life-long celibacy like Sanatkumara and his illustrious disciple Narada. They were called *Naishtika-brahmacaris* (life-long celibates). The doctrine of the three debts (*rinās*) militated against celibacy: begetting an offspring was a man’s debt to one’s ancestors, while the study of the *Veda* was the debt to the supreme God and offering sacrifices was the debt to the gods.

3. Priestly Privileges

The exalted position of the Hindu priesthood with a number of privileges: some legally given while others were usurped. Priests were exempted from military obligations. They could not be executed for any crime; they could only be banished abroad. They were also exempted from trade, commerce and agriculture. Yet, examples of worker-priests are to be found in juridical texts like the *Apasthamba*

Dharma Sutra and the *Gautama Dharma Sutra*. Medieval Buddhist monks of the Deccan and Magadha were the patrons of bankers and farmers. This was against the primitive simplicity of the Buddhist monks, whose only possessions were a begging bowl, a water pot, three plain clothes, an oil jug, a razor, a needle and thread, a walking staff and a pair of sandals. They were to eat only one meal a day, in keeping with the ascetic dictum: a **Yogi** eats once a day; a **Bhogi** (glutton) twice a day, a **Rogi** (sick man) thrice a day and a **Drohi** (enemy) four times a day! The monks may accept only food as gift. But now monks began to solicit cash gifts, barely hundred years after the famous Ecumenical Council of Vaisali, which had strictly forbidden it. Records show merchant guilds paying interests to money borrowed from Buddhist monasteries.⁴⁶ The monks had to pay a very high price for their laxity. The Muslim invaders looted all their wealth, destroyed their monasteries, and wiped out Buddhism from the land of its birth. Both Hindus and Buddhists used to hide gold and precious stones inside sacred idols. In medieval India, the Satavahana kings used to give huge amounts of money to the Brahmin priests as sacrificial fees (*Yajnas*), somewhat similar to the Catholic Mass stipends. The fine for insulting a Brahmin priest was hundred cows, while for assault it was thousand cows! Killing a Brahmin priest was the only real murder and it had to be expiated by the famous Horse Sacrifice (*Asvamedha-yaga*), which lasted for months and drained the royal treasury!

During the Vedic period priests were above the law. But in the Magadhan Empire, the priest was bound by the imperial laws, thanks to the sagacity of the shrewd Brahmin Prime Minister, Kautilya or Chanakya. In the Magadhan Empire, every village would set apart a plot of land and a part of the harvest for the benefit of the village priest. Chanakya outwitted the priest in raising funds: his spies would set up wayside shrines in the name of bogus apparitions of gods and the funds coming from gullible devotees would flow into the imperial treasury. Some Indian Catholic shrines seem to be replicating Chanakyan wisdom in fund-raising! The Brahmin priests also claimed to be above imperial jurisdiction. They claimed that **Soma**, the god of liquor, was their king! The king may not censure a Brahmin priest!

The sacrifice was generally offered for the benefit of the individual, called the *Yajamana* (patron) or patron. But during the *Sattra* sacrifice, which lasted for days and months, every participant was temporarily consecrated priest and all of them benefitted from the sacrifice. During the *Brahmana* period (circa 800-600 B.C.), the number of priestly orders increased and their functions became stereotyped. Thus, only the *adhvaryu* was required for the daily sacrifice of *Agnihotra*, offered to god *Agni* (god of fire). In the *Soma* sacrifice the number of priests increased to sixteen. It might have been a kind of concelebration. People had to accord the priest

respectful reception and hospitable entertainment wherever he went. No limit was put to the amount to be given to priests for sacrifices and other rites. One of the most excellent sacrifices was the one in which a man gives all his wealth to the priests for performing a particular rite. It was even enacted that the gifts rejected by one priest should not be accepted by another priest; only the sacrificing priests were considered holy enough to consume the sacrificial offerings. Even the king could not drink the *Soma* used in his coronation rite.

The Brahmins also propounded a queer theory of sacrifice. They held that giving to gods was not in expectation of benefits. Return was compelled by the gift. Thus, sacrifice became a most formidable weapon against which the gods themselves were helpless. This is sheer magic, the essence of which is the coercion of the deity to grant a boon in return for sacrifice. Such a preposterous theory naturally led to abuses and that brought about a strong reaction against sacerdotalism and ritualism, mostly from part of the warrior caste (*Ksatriyas*) and non-Aryan elements, who counter-balanced the Brahminical theory of sacrifice by a novel theory of internal sacrifice, viz., sacrifice in the form of prayer and asceticism (*tapasya*). But the cunning Brahmins were quick to take the initiative even in this new movement.

Sacrifice soon yielded to a new form of priestly ministry, viz., sacred teaching and spiritual direction. The *Hotri* became the *Guru*. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* has several hostile references to sacrifices. Men no longer believed that sacred knowledge could be obtained only from Brahmins. We have the curious example of kings like Janaka, Kaikeya and Ajatasatru imparting sacred instruction to Brahmins. Highly learned women like Maitreyi and Gargi are seen taking part in philosophical disputations with the redoubtable scholar Yajnavalkya.

During the Epic period the offices of the guru and the priest (*purohita*) were often combined in one person. Now it was held that the power of the king was derived from that of the priests who could destroy kings at will. The story of Parasurama exterminating the *Kshatriyas* served the purpose very well. The priests also put an end to the ancient *Rig Vedic* Assembly of the people and the Council of the warrior caste and they began to control politics. Brahmins like Dronacarya and his Asvathama were great warriors. At a later period we see the Brahmin Chanakya expounding the details of political intrigue and espionage in his classical work on political science called the *Arthashastra*.

4. The *Guru-sishya* Relationship

Ancient Hindu education was based on the theory of *Asrama-dharma*, according to which, a man had to pass through four successive stages in life. During the

Brahmacarya or studentship the pupil shared the board and lodging of the guru. *Brahmacarya* literally means walking in *Brahman* or God, implying God-realization. The period of studentship was characterized by a constant personal contact between the teacher and the pupil who were bound together by a spiritual relationship.⁴⁷ This entailed a matrimonial impediment; one may not marry the daughter of one's guru. The guru's son was moreover, for the pupils like the teacher himself: *Guruwad guruputrah itih*, says the commentator on Katyayana 1.1.56.1.

With the initiation rite of *Upanayana*, the pupil is said to experience a new birth. He is henceforth a twice-born (*dvija*). According to the *Atharva Veda*, the teacher is said to make his pupil his embryo. Manu says: "The birth which the teacher procures for his pupil through the *Savitri* is real and exempt from old age and death".⁴⁸ The qualities of the guru are described in the *Viramitrodayasamskaraprakasa*.⁴⁹ Vedic instruction was esoteric in character. The *Chandogya Upanishad* says: "A father may teach this doctrine of *Brahman* to his eldest son or to a worthy pupil and to no one else even if one should offer him the whole earth".⁵⁰ The secrets of the *Aranyakas* could be revealed to an esoteric group only in the forest away from the villages. But sage Yajnavalkya held public philosophical debates in the court of king Janaka of Videha. Mutual protection was another feature of the *Gurukula* system. The *Mahabharata* says that the guru should protect his pupils like a canopy and they in their turn should protect him like sun-shade.⁵¹

The subject matter of instruction varied from group to group. According to Patanjali, a Brahmin boy was expected to study the *Veda* with its six ancillary sciences and the *Dharma*.⁵² Dronacarya taught military science to the Pandava and Kaurava princes. Bhishmacarya expounded the *Rajadharma* or political science.⁵³ The earliest tradition does not consider the guru as omniscient or infallible. This is made abundantly clear from the bold manner of Gargi's disputation with the famous Vedic professor Yajnavalkya, as recorded in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.

5. From Vedism to Hinduism

At the beginning of the *Upanishadic* period (circa 500 B.C.), *Brahminism* began to undergo a sea change. There were several forces at work. Men of different races and cultures confronted the eastward expansion of the Aryans. Some of them had a superior culture. Hence, the Brahminic institutions had to make adjustments, compromises, and amalgamations. In the process, the old Vedic priesthood too assumed a new physiognomy. The oldest *Upanishads* hold aloof from the study of the *Veda* and from sacrifices. The great sage Narada complained that all his Vedic knowledge did not teach him the nature of God. Jainism introduced the ascetical

priesthood into Hinduism. Unlike Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism were able to introduce some kind of hierarchy in the priestly orders.

Absorption of aboriginal and Dravidian deities Kali, Murugan and Mariamman also brought in absorption from the elements non-Aryan priesthood, particularly, the female priesthood. This has special reference to the phenomenon of sorcery or black magic and devil worship and exorcism, totally unknown to Vedic priesthood. The emergence of the village priest (often a non-Brahmin), is a new phenomenon we now witness. His presence is essential for rites connected with birth, marriage and death. In return, he receives his share of grain or cash.

The village priest (*purohit*) is also the astrologer who predicts seasons for agricultural operations, draws up horoscopes, essential for fixing the auspicious time (*muhurtam*) for the marriage celebration. He controls the evil spirits and predicts fortunes. Temple rites are often delegated to priests of lower castes, such as the *Pandaram* and *Tambiran*.

In tribal India, the function of the routine priest is curtailed by another functionary, who may be described as the “seer”, the “prophet,” the “possessed one”, etc. He is generally the medium of divine powers. Unlike the Aryans, the tribals do not possess any systematized ritual. In this context, what the great anthropologist Verrier Elwin says about the *Muria* and the related communities, holds good for tribals as a whole. He says: “There is no definite pantheon, no sacred book, no canon, no deposit of faith committed to a centralized guardian and no regular liturgy. Religion is always on the move. Even the legends change from village to village. The living voice of the prophet is more important than the convention of priests”.⁵⁵

The aborigines of the East worshipped demons. *Tantrism* (Assam, Bengal, Kerala) practiced esoteric sex cult. They considered the guru as the manifestation of the supreme power of *Sakti*. In the North, the priests of the village deities are usually drawn from the menial classes. Any one may claim to be possessed by the spirit and offer propitiatory or coercive function vis-à-vis these deities.⁵⁶ But as people began to adopt Hinduism, Brahmins came to take the place of the local priests.⁵⁷ Thus the presence of gurus and *Sadhus* among the tribal *Bhils* is due to Hindu influence. With the *Sema Nagas*, a man is compelled to take up the unpopular priestly function. He is usually a poor man and his function is connected mainly with sowing and reaping of the harvest. The *Daflas*, another Naga tribe, whose ideas of religion are extremely crude, employ any man as priest, who is at the same time a diviner and an exorcist.⁵⁹

A striking feature of the South Indian village cult is the absence of a priestly caste. The village priests, called *pujaris*, are drawn from the lower castes indiscriminately. The office of the *pujari* is by no means an honourable one.⁶⁰

The opening lines of the *Bhakti-mala* list four elements of religion: *bhakti*, *bhakta*, *bhagavanta* and *guru*. The *Saiva Siddhanta* system of philosophy identifies Siva with human gurus. The *Siddhantin* believes that only God knows the disease of the soul. Tirumular says: "He who is above all worlds, the holy Siva, is in this world, the praise-worthy, holy guru. God himself is the Siva guru".⁶¹

Saiva Siddhanta divides souls into three categories: *Vijnanakalar*, *Pralayakalar*, and *Sakalar*. The first two groups do not require *Siva guru* in human form since they are no longer subject to sense deception. Siva talks to them in their inner consciousness. For *Sakalar*, the human form is the only contact. The *Saiva* priests are known as *Gurukkals*, while the *Vaishnava* priests are called *Archakas*, *Pancarattras* or *Vaikhanasas*. The priests of the *Nataraja* temple at Chidambaram are known as *Dikshitaras*.

The *Saivite* Tamil village priests are known as *Pandarams*. They bathe the idols. Some of them are non-vegetarians. A section of the *Pandarams* are known as *Tambirans*. They are the managers of the temples and heads of monasteries, called *Mutts*. They are celibates and scholars. The celibate *Pandarams* are strict vegetarians and staunch *Saivites*.

What was the influence of these non-Aryan sacerdotal institutions on the guru concept of the Hindus? For one thing, no tribal priest combined in himself the totality of functions we notice in the Aryan guru, who is, "the teacher of traditional and systematic knowledge and behaviour, the educator and the initiator, who belonging to a hereditary class, also performs priestly functions and helps his pupils to attain a higher spiritual level".⁶² According to a later theory, the guru is capable of guiding the adepts in the paths of liberation (*moksha*). In the *Vaishnava Pancaratra* system, the election of a guru is extremely important. He must be an adept in all philosophical systems and he must sympathize with his pupils in their sorrows and joys. He must teach them in accordance with their natural inclinations and act as their spiritual guide. Finally, he must initiate them (*diksha*) by means of esoteric instruction in the meaning of the prayers or *mantras*.⁶³

In *Tantrism*, "certain peculiarities of the highly important function of the guru have developed into extreme forms".⁶⁴ Tantric initiation (*diksha*) consists in the transference of the guru's vital energy to the adept and in the gift of a suitable *mantra*. The guru is God's earthly representative. He makes occasional visits to the families of his disciples in order to instruct or even to admonish them. His advice is held in great esteem for spiritual progress. Initiation was held so important that those Hindus who had no gurus, had initiated themselves in old age or even in their death-bed.⁶⁵

The guru removes obstacles like passion and cravings from the disciple and sharpens his mind. This is done in two ways: either the disciple himself attempts self-purification in a single moment. The followers of Ramanuja, especially the *Prapatti* school, consider the guru as a manifestation of God, who has to lift his weak disciple out of the earth and offer him as a worthy object of grace and mercy to God.

Indologist Gonda gives two possible reasons for the deification of the guru: firstly, the *avatara* concept facilitated this process; and secondly, it may have been a substitute for image worship.⁶⁶ Many Hindus drink with great reverence the water in which the guru's feet had been washed.

According to the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, the wise man feels the same devotion for his guru as for God (*Brahman*).⁶⁷ Jnanadeva, the great Maharashtra saint says: "God, his devotee and the guru are united together as three rivers merge in a confluence. The Vallabha gurus claimed absolute power over their devotees, including the right of defloration (first sexual intercourse).⁶⁸ The *Lingayats* (Karnataka devotees of Siva) feel greater respect for their gurus than for Siva himself, because the former leads the souls to God. The same is for the followers of *Chaitanya* (1485-1533). This continued reverence for the guru down the centuries must be attributed to the Hindu faith that God reveals Himself through the guru. Christ said: "He who listens to you, listens to Me; he who despises you, despises Me" (Lk 10:16).⁶⁹

6. Adaptation

The spectrum of the amalgamated Hindu priesthood has all the colours of the rainbow. *Velan*, the priest of the Tamil god Murugan, was more of a sorcerer and exorcist than a cultic priest. After a frenzied dance, he would go into a trance and foretell the future.⁷⁰ Now, *Velan* is a far cry from the Vedic *Hotri*. Now, the Indian Church can learn something from the various forms of the Hindu priesthood: the *Homa* offering Vedic Brahmin, the Tamil exorcist *Velan*, the prophetic *Velichappadu* of Kerala, the sex-worshipping Bengali *Saktas*, the corpse-eating *Kapalikas* of Varanasi, are all dim manifestations of the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Eremitism and coenobitism began to flourish all over India during the medieval period. In some of the *Saivite* sects, asceticism had assumed extreme and even revolting forms. Hermits were solitary monks while *coenobites* were community members in a Christian monastery. All this shows the restlessness of the Indian spirit to liberate itself from the ocean of phenomenal existence. In his search for the Spirit, the Hindu guru has penetrated deeper than any other race into the secret

recesses of the Absolute, where he could find eternal bliss — *ananda*, which had been his eternal quest.

In its evolution, Catholic priesthood had been considerably influenced by the priesthood of ancient Rome. Excessive centralization and the unwieldy bureaucratic system is a legacy of ancient Rome.⁷¹ The Hindu priesthood and Religious Orders are highly flexible, adaptive and decentralized. Unity rather than uniformity had been the peculiar feature of Indian religions. Organizationally, the Indian Church is an appendix of the Roman Church. There is the same feeling of extravaganza for the external form. But for the Hindu, the ideal priest and the ideal monk is the *Yogi*, not the Commissar. Simplicity in food, abode and travel, is the hallmark of Indian spirituality. The Ramakrishna monk has two sets of rough cotton clothes, a pair of sandals, a razor and a needle and thread, by way of earthly possessions and he eats only once day. He may not display any academic titles. The Hindu, Buddhist and Jain monks and nuns do not accept invitations for social parties or entertainments. The Hindu *Parivrajaka* (wandering monk), the Buddhist *Samana* (wanderer) and the Jain *Arhat* (ascetic) always lived a life of simplicity and detachment. Unless the Indian clergy and consecrated persons bear a living witness to Christ's simplicity, our Gospel message will lack credibility. In this context, Gandhiji has a beautiful thought: "Today I rebel against orthodox Christianity as I am convinced it has distorted the message of Jesus".⁷² Again Gandhi says: "My fear is that Mammon has been sent to serve in India and Jesus has remained behind".⁷³

Let us also not make a fetish out of celibacy and virginity. These are not, per se, Christian values, as justice is. And yet, the Indian Church has no qualm in soft-peddalling the practice of justice, as is clearly seen in the Report of the C.B.C.I. Labour Commission. The treatment meted out to our Church personnel and dependents are a crime that is crying to Heaven for vengeance. Today virginity is a less significant aspect of Christian life than radical discipleship, lived in the context of social and political action.⁷⁴

7. The Guru as Social Reformer

The activities of the Vedic guru were limited to the pedagogical and pastoral spheres of human life only. The economic, social and political spheres were the monopoly of the king. But when the rulers become oppressors of the people, especially of the marginalized and poor sections of society, it is the duty of every citizen to liberate the oppressed. Jesus himself took up this challenge as a part of his Messianic mission. Soon after his desert experience, at the very first sermon after his baptism in the Jordan river, Jesus proclaimed his life mission: "He (God) has sent me to heal the brokenhearted,

to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Lk 4:18). As is plain from the words of Jesus, his mission was not cultic, but liberative. Hence, it was bound to clash with the highly conservative, cultic religion of the ruling classes of his time.

Says Soares-Prabhu: “With supreme freedom Jesus challenges the most sacred institutions of his people when his concern for his fellowmen impels him to do so. He breaks the Sabbath (Mk 7:1-15), touches lepers (Mk 1:42), dines with the socially outcast and with sinners (Mk 2:15-17)”.⁷⁴ The only liberative force in the world is love and it is just this that Jesus offers when he proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God. Like Jesus, every genuine Indian Christian guru must challenge all unjust, oppressive social structures we find all around us especially the accursed casteism, regionalism, tribalism, linguistic fanaticism and Ritualism. All over India, fanatics torture and kill own daughters if they fall in love with a *Dalit* youth.

The core-message of Jesus contains an *indicative* which epitomizes all Christian theology and an imperative which sums up all Christian ethics. Its indicative is the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, that is the revelation of God’s unconditional love. Its imperative is a call to repentance, that is the demand that we open our hearts to this love and respond to it by loving God in neighbour. The freedom of the Kingdom finds its fulfillment only in our unconditional love for others. For man becomes truly man only by relating to his fellows in love, sacrificial love, like Jesus’ love.

What is the message of Pope Francis to bishops, priests and religious? “Be poor and be with the poor; reach out to the people; get the smell of the sheep.” He still takes pride in being called the “street priest.” Pope Francis compares the Church to a field hospital. Hence, the Indian Christian guru’s primary mission is the healing ministry. Yet many priests and Religious spend the whole day as CEOs (Chief Executive Officers). There is an interesting story in Dostoevsky’s famous novel, *Brothers Karamazov*. Jesus comes to the filthy slums of Rome incognito, dressed in rags, like a poor beggar. But the poor slum dwellers at once recognize him, because he speaks their language. There is much singing, laughing, dancing, even drinking! It is party time. But soon the news reaches the Grand Inquisitor, the Pope. The Vatican secret police come and arrest the intruder and he is placed on trial. The Grand Inquisitor tells him: “We know who you are, and why you came here. You came to give liberty to the proletariat, which we have taken away. If you persist in this mission so-called Messianic mission, you will suffer the same fate as you once suffered under the Roman governor Pilate.” With that the liberator was incarcerated. This had been the fate of liberators down the corridors of time, from

John the Baptist, Paul the bravest disciple of Jesus, Archbishop Oscar Romero, who won freedom for his poor countrymen with blood-shed. And the latest brave witness to Jesus' gospel of liberty for the oppressed poor is 84 years old, sickly Fr. Stan Swamy, S.J., now bravely bearing witness to Jesus' gospel of freedom.

Victor Hugo declared that one thing stronger than armies is an idea whose hour has come. In the 1950s the idea of liberation came to colonial Africa and it spread throughout the Third World like wild fire. In India, multinational corporate companies with mining industry have uprooted the poor, famished forest-dwelling primitive tribals. Today Jesus does not need cultic gurus in India; he needs liberator-gurus like late Rani Maria and Stan Swamy, S.J. Money-lenders are blood-suckers of the poor all over India. What Indian liberation theologians like late Samuel Ryan, S.J. and Stan Swamy, S.J., have achieved is the first step in the liberation of the tribals, viz., *conscientization*. The Christian Church is not a belief-system, a *theoria*, but a way of life, a *praxis*, to use a Marxist term. Brazilian Archbishop Helder Camara had famously said: "When I feed the poor, they call me saint. But when I ask why there is poverty, they call me a Communist! "Hence, the primary ministry of the Indian guru is the liturgy of conscientization. It is what Paul calls, "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). If faith is limited solely to chanting of Alleluias and Charismatic retreats, with no liberative praxis, then it is fake faith. For both Jesus and Paul, the sheet-anchor of faith is justice, not cult. Says Paul: "The kingdom of God is justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). And Jesus comes down heavily on the Pharisees for reducing worship to mere offering of condiments at the altar, neglecting, "the weightier aspects of the Law, justice, mercy and faith" (Mt 23: 23). For John, truth is not mere belief, but praxis: "Whoever lives the truth, comes to the light" (Jn 3:21). Christian gurus, authentically committed to Kingdom, will be involved in the struggle to demolish all unjust social structures, in order to eliminate all institutionalized injustice, and establish on earth a just society.

8. Basic Christian Communities

To make the liturgy contextualized and existentially vibrant, Mass should be celebrated in small *basic communities*, as is being done all over South and Central America, where about ten poor families come together, knowing one another intimately, even sharing food to the needy, thus avoiding the anonymity of big churches, where as Voltaire had said, "people come together without knowing one another, would live without loving one another, and would die without mourning for one another." A fundamental characteristic of such basic communities is the intimate link between worship and daily toil of the members. Worship is seen

as emerging from daily struggles of day-to-day existence and as impacting those struggles in turn. Reading the Word of God within a context of oppression, the poor come to see the Bible as a source of empowerment and liberation. The Bible stands in judgment over the dehumanizing conditions under which the poor live and empowers them to work for that justice, which is God's will. Here, the Eucharist is a symbol of mutual love, assistance and solidarity. The Eucharistic sharing must prompt the members to social sharing of food, pains and joyful celebrations. All contemporary Indian gurus must be poor and must be with the poor, as Pope Francis wants. The Second Vatican Council invites the Indian gurus to live a life of authentic sharing, with the following words, right at the preface to the document on, *The Church in the Modern World*: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties, of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties, of the followers of Christ." As in the Old Testament Yahweh God identified himself with the poor and the oppressed, especially in Egypt and Babylon, the Indian guru must be in the "field Church." Pope Francis compares the Church to a field hospital. Fr. Gutierrez speaks of, "God's special identification with and preferential option for the poor" (*On Job*, pp. xi-xix)

9. Christ's Real Presence

During the Bengal famine and plague at the start of the twentieth century, Swami Vivekananda noticed young Ramakrishna monks studying Vedanta and engaged in deep Yoga meditation at the Belur Mutt in Calcutta. He told them bluntly: "You can study Vedanta in Heaven; now rush to the sick, the starving and the dying with food and medicine and see God in the sick and in the dying." Several young monks made heroic sacrifices, some even sacrificing their life. Vivekananda is on record as saying: "It is a sin to preach religion to a starving person."

During the current bewildering and catastrophic pandemic of *coronavirus*, several heroic doctors, nurses and social workers have made heroic sacrifices, including Catholic priests and Sisters and lay leaders. To those who are only praying for the sick and the dying in the security of the chapel or church, Tagore has sharp, barbed expressions: "Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely, dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee! He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy sacred mantle and even like him, come down on the dusty soil" (*Gitanjali*, song 11).

The Jewish Law Book, the *Talmud*, narrates the story of the pious Jewish leader Ben Joshva who was eagerly waiting to see the Messiah. Hence he approached the prophet Elijah and inquired about the whereabouts of the Messiah. The prophet directed him to the Jerusalem temple. But after a frantic search within the temple, he could not encounter the Messiah, and returned to the prophet with the same quest. Now Elijah tells Joshua that the Messiah was among the beggars with wounds and sores, seated at the temple gate. “But how to identify the Messiah among the dozens of beggars,” at the temple gate, was the next question put Elijah by Ben Joshua. The prophet gave the correct clue: while all the beggars are busy cleaning and bandaging their own wounds, the Messiah, un-caring about his own wounds, was busy cleaning and bandaging others’ wounds: the Messiah is a wounded healer! In fact we read in the gospel: “And Jesus went about all Galilee, healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (Mt 4:23). Henri Nouwen, probably the greatest spiritual writer of this century, has written his masterpiece, entitled, *The Wounded Healer*.

End Notes

¹ *Satapatha Brahamana*, 2.2.2.6

² *Chandogya Uanishad*, 4.9.3

³ *Kathopanishad*, 2.8

⁴ *Mundakopanishad*, 1.2.12

⁵ *Chandogyopanishad*, 8.7.2

⁶ *Op. Cit.*, 6.1.1

⁷ *Apasthamba Dharma Sastra*, 1.2.6.13

⁸ *Atharva Veda*, 11.5

⁹ *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 6.23

¹⁰ *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 1.11

¹¹ *Vishnu Purana*, 1.12.8

¹² GONDA J., *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, The Hague 1965, 240.

¹³ *Gautama-Dharma-Sutra*, 2.50

¹⁴ *Yajnavalkya-Smriti*, 1.35

¹⁵ *Mahabharata*, 12.109.16

¹⁶ *Vishnu-Smriti*, 3.2.1

¹⁷ *Manu*, 2, 142

¹⁸ *Manu*, 2.149

¹⁹ *Manu*, 2.142

²⁰ *Yajnavalkya-Smriti*, 1.34

²¹ *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 6.2.1

²² *Manu*, 2.141

²³ *Apasthamba-Dharma-Sutra*, 1.1.1.14

²⁴ *Nirukta*, 1.4

²⁵ *Manu*, 2.141

²⁶ *Yajnavalkya-Smriti*, 1.15

- ²⁷ GONDA, *Op. cit.*, 241
²⁸ *Viramitrodayasamskaraprakasa*, I, p. 408
²⁹ *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.1.15
³⁰ *Satapatha Brahmana*, 8.1.4.10
³¹ *Prasnopanishad*, 6.1
³² *Mahabharata*, 7.50.21
³³ *Mahabharata*, 1.3.95
³⁴ Patanjali, *Mahabhashya*, 1.4.32
³⁵ *Manu*. 2.45 ff
³⁶ *J.B.*, 1.271
³⁷ *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.1
³⁸ *Aitareya Brahmana*, 8.27.4
³⁹ *Aitareya Brahmana*, 8.26.4
⁴⁰ *Satapatha Brahmana*, 5.4.2.1.
⁴¹ *Manu*, 9.321
⁴² *Ramayana*, 2.44.11
⁴³ *Mahabharata*, 7.a.66.C
⁴⁴ *Kathaka-Sambhita*, xxx.1
⁴⁵ *Chandogya Upanishad*, 4.4.4
⁴⁶ KOSAMBI, D.D., *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India*, London 1965, 184.
⁴⁷ *Panini*, 6.2.36
⁴⁸ *Manu*, 2.148
⁴⁹ *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.1.15
⁵⁰ *Chandogya Upanishad*, 1.1
⁵¹ *Mahabharata*, 4.2.62
⁵² *Patanjali*, 1.1.1
⁵³ *Mahabharata*, 12.a.56 ff
⁵⁴ *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.8.2
⁵⁵ ELWIN VERRIER, *The Muria and their Ghotul*, Oxford, 223.
⁵⁶ CROOKE W., *Religion and Folklore of North India*, Oxford, 223.
⁵⁷ BADEN-POWELL, *The Indian Village Community*, London, 180.
⁵⁸ HUTTON J.A., *The Sema Nagas*, London, 216.
⁵⁹ ELWIN VERRIER, *India's North-East Frontier Province in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford, 160.
⁶⁰ WHITEHEAD H., *The Village gods of South India*, Calcutta 1921, 43 ff.
⁶¹ Tirumular, *Tirumantiram*, stanzas: 1573, 1576
⁶² GONDA, *Op. cit.*, 22.
⁶³ *Ahimbudhnya-sambhita*, ch. 1
⁶⁴ AVALON A., *Mahanirvana Tantra*, Madras, LXXIX.
⁶⁵ O'MALLEY, S.S., *Popular Hinduism*, Cambridge 1935, 79 ff.
⁶⁶ GONDA, *Op. cit.*, 281.
⁶⁷ *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 6.23
⁶⁸ MEYER, J.J., *Sexual Life in Ancient India*, 174.
⁶⁹ Luke, 10.16
⁷⁰ NILAKANTA SASTRI, *The Sangam Age*, Madras, 1972, 69.
⁷¹ JONES STUART, *The Legacy of Rome*, Oxford, 45-91.
⁷² GANDHI K. *Harijan*, Dec., 30, 1936
⁷³ GOERGEN DONALD, O.P., *The Sexual Celibate*, London 1974, *passim*
⁷⁴ GEORGE SOARES-PRABHU, *The Kingdom of God*, Bangalore, 26.

THE SITUATION OF VOCATION TO BROTHERHOOD IN INDIA

Rahul Reddy, SG

Introduction

Today, the consecrated persons must rejoice and thankfully acknowledge the graciousness of God in choosing and consecrating them from their very conception. God's boundless love for humanity is clearly expressed in choosing the consecrated, without counting their merits and worthiness to mirror His love and compassion on earth. Therefore, we need to live in God to become the embodiment of His grace, love, and peace.

The "Vocation to Brotherhood" is a very pervasive moral notion in the twenty-first century. Many in the society ask this question, "Is religious Brotherhood relevant today?" As we live in this technologically advanced, multicultural and multi-religious country, people view and understand 'Brotherhood' as a happy, helpful group that enjoys good economic status and comfortable community living.¹ It is partially true. But that is not all. In reality, it is to live together to experience and share the love of Christ and witness him through our lives. We find happiness not because of the good economic status but because of the love and support that we get from each other in all the challenges we face in this materialistic world besides experiencing the unconditional love of God. It is the confraternity we enjoy. There is joy in living Brotherhood; there are also challenges in this life. Yet this way of life is still attractive to many. At the same time, the taste for this life is diminishing in the present generation. In my opinion, the life of a religious brother has a lot to offer to the world even today. As consecrated men, we stand as effective radicals in following Jesus our elder brother and share the values of the kingdom.

Rahul Reddy, SG belongs to the Congregation of Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel of Hyderabad Province. He holds bachelor degree in Science and Mathematics from Andhra Loyola College, Vijayawada. He also holds diploma in Theology and masters in the Theology of Consecrated Life from ICL: Institute of Consecrated Life – Sanyasa, affiliated to Christ University, Bangalore. Presently, he is serving the province as a formator.

Today, the number of vocations to the religious life is declining, all the more to the 'Brotherhood' life. The reason for this decline could be so many but one of the major reasons is due to the misconception of the concept itself. Many people in India and elsewhere find it difficult to understand and appreciate the gift of religious vocation to Brotherhood – a life of total dedication to God as lay religious. "The inability of most people to understand the lay religious in general is due to their inability to understand the consecrated life itself".² Those who do not understand the identity of the religious brother naturally will not encourage anyone to join the brotherhood either. It is sad to see this state of decline in the vocation to religious life and religious brotherhood in particular. Therefore, my focus in this article is only analyse the situation of vocation to brotherhood in the Indian Church having as the basis the survey that I did with 12 exclusive congregations of brothers in the last five years.

1. A Vocation to Be Cherished

Vocation is a free gift given to us by God. A Christian believes that vocation is more than an ordinary call from God. Vocation is a special call from God to be holy. God's call is a call to holiness that is rooted in our baptism. The vocation to Brotherhood is a special call to be a prophetic missionary as Jesus himself. The Church considers this vocation as new and special. Brothers or lay religious are now a fifth of all male religious in the Church. Some belong to clerical institutes; others to mixed institutes. Others are integrated in lay institutes, also called Institutes of Religious Brothers (cf. *IMRBC* 2).³ As St. Paul states, "Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love" (Eph 1:4). Any vocation is a call to know, love, and serve the Lord. It is a movement that draws us toward a deeper union with God. This deeper union with God enables us to love God and love our neighbor. Vocation is a unique call to follow Christ closely, radically and joyfully.

The religious vocation is a sharing in the charism of the congregation to which he belongs. It is the Holy Spirit who is at the origin of every vocation. By their vocation, the religious share in the special gift given by the Holy Spirit to the Church. In as much as this charism is meant for the building up of the people of God, the religious becomes a sharer in God's work of building up the community of his chosen people. Every religious is a servant of the Church in which a consecrated person actualizes his call in a specific consecration he has received from God. Every vocation demands that one becomes what one is called to be. So, every religious strives to please God by doing what one is called to do and to become. The vocation

of the brother is to answer God's call. At the root of the vocation of the brother is a profound experience of solidarity. It should bring a deep sensitivity to the least, the oppressed, and the abandoned.

God the Father has revealed Jesus as our brother and that this transforming experience coming from a personal revelation of the Son as our brother and the brother of humanity contains our call and the grace to become brothers of Jesus and brothers like Jesus. Now is the time when the Holy Spirit through the Church has pointed it out for us, religious brothers, to allow ourselves to be transformed by the brother-experience of Jesus and make it the center of our spirituality.

The enlightenment emanating from this inner revelation can give us a deeper meaning of our vocation. This alone can enable us to value it above all other forms of consecrated life. It creates a sense of the sacredness in us and makes us live it out joyfully at the service of humanity in the Church. While universal brotherhood is at the core of Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God, the Church is entrusted with the mission to proclaim it. We, as consecrated Brothers are chosen to personify it and become the living signs of it. In light of this revelation, brotherhood becomes the center of our spirituality and the Kingdom of God becomes the goal of our mission. As a result of this, the barriers of creed, colour, and caste will give way to extended brotherhood in Christ to humanity. Thus, our lives become a proclamation of the Lord's word, "you are all brothers and sisters". Therefore, we must embrace the whole of humanity in our fraternal arms. It is the prophetic call to witness of the Kingdom in the world in our way — a prophetic presence in the Church for the world.

2. The Challenges of a Religious Brother

The recent development in the Church and religious life should give new strength to our faith, and help us brothers, to take a closer look at ourselves, at our vocation as well as at our image of ourselves as we prepare for the future. We must not be bound by old representations. We must create new representations as the needs of the Church. We must be discovering ourselves and our communities to see what kind of faith we are reflecting under the touches of God's love. This must be understandable by us, that our living in a changing atmosphere with new philosophies, and new values, we brothers must be constantly challenged. To meet this challenge today, we must be men who see ourselves as happy, fruitful, and self-critical. Brothers need to be truly meaningful in the 21st century and be creative in response to the whole person, with the conformity to the love God.

The memory of the love of Christ: “The same thing you must do” (Jn 13:14-15). To deepen our understanding of the identity of the Brother, we will allow ourselves to be enlightened as we contemplate one of the most evocative icons of the four Gospels: Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. The story that the evangelist John offers us regarding the meal on Holy Thursday which begins with the solemn and intimate statement: “Jesus... having loved those who were his own in the world, loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1). The Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples takes place in a context of commissioning: Jesus urges his disciples and through them, the whole Church, to continue the ministry of salvation which reaches its culmination in the death of Jesus on the cross, although he had developed it during his life, as reflected in his answer to John’s disciples, “Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life and the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (Lk 7:22). Thus, the Church experiences itself as constituted ministerial people commissioned by Jesus. The evangelists represent the institution of the ecclesial ministry through two icons.

The three Synoptic choose the icon of Jesus breaking and sharing his Body and Blood with his disciples, while requiring of them: “Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19). Differently, the Gospel of John presents us with the icon of Jesus with the towel tied around his waist, washing the feet of his disciples, and making a request of them later: “For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:15). In the consciousness of the Church, it is in the light of this icon of the washing of the feet that the other icon, in which Jesus shares out his Body and his Blood, finds its full meaning. That is to say, the commandment of brotherly love gives us the key to understand the meaning of the Eucharist in the Church. This is reflected in the liturgy of Holy Thursday. This testimony which the Church receives from Jesus points to two aspects or dimensions of the ministry of salvation which unfold in the Church through diverse specific ministries. On the one hand, through the ministerial priesthood, instituted by a specific sacrament, the Church guarantees its fidelity to the memory of the surrender of Jesus, his death and resurrection, and makes it present in the Eucharist. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit stirs among the faithful the memory of Jesus showing the attitude of service, and the urgency of his mandate: “by this everyone will recognize you as my disciples” (Jn 13:35). Because of this, many charisms are raised-up among the faithful to develop communion through fraternal service. This is how salvation comes to the poorest: the blind sees, the lame walk, prisoners are released, youth are educated, the sick and the elderly are taken care of. Brotherly love is made real in numerous

services, many of which become institutionalized or recognized as Ecclesial Ministries (cf. VC 60).⁴

Consecrated life arises in the Church in response to this call of the Spirit to faithfully keep alive the memory of the love of Christ who loved His own to the end (cf. VC 75). This response is expressed in many forms, but at the deepest level, there is always the option of “a radical gift of self for love of the Lord Jesus and, in Him, of every member of the human family” (VC 3). The vocation and identity of the religious brother acquire meaning in this dynamic, which is both inclusive of and complementary to the various ministries, but which also needs and promotes prophetic signs.

2.1 Vocational Crisis

The religious brotherhood is under serious vocational crises like any other forms of consecrated life. The word ‘vocation’ comes from the Latin word *vocare* meaning ‘to call’. From the opening book of the Bible to the last book, we find God calling human beings constantly. Vocation is to discover the will of God for us here and now. A true vocation begins when the hopes, joys, trials, miseries, illnesses, oppressions, the hunger of others become mine. Many of us gradually forget the essence of our call and tend to go away from the realities. We take things for granted. We will reflect on some of the vocational crisis in brotherhood.

The difficulties and threats to the vocation of a religious brother in the Church today are also symptoms of the difficulties and threats which are faced by the Church in the modern world. What threatens the vocation of a religious brother today brings us also into the heart of the Church’s struggles to live authentically by the calling, especially in Asia. Religious brothers, however, are a relatively invisible group even within the Church.

The brothers are technically referred to as “lay religious” men. Brothers are ‘lay’ in the sense that they are not from the state of clergy. However, as religious, and as consecrated persons, we are equal to the religious priests and sisters. We all vow the evangelical counsels [poverty, chastity, and obedience] and live in the community. It may surprise some to know that in early Christianity, the monks were mostly non-ordained brothers. Even today, the vast majority of religious in the Church are consecrated brothers and sisters but not ordained to the priesthood. Knowing well that the vocation of the Brotherhood is not always well understood and appreciated within the Church, the Vatican has recently brought out a document titled, “Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church”. This document addresses not

only to the brothers but to all religious, priests and lay faithful. The content of this document is good for all those who want to know about, appreciate and promote the vocation of the religious brother in the Church. The document presents the identity of the brother in the threefold perspective of mystery, communion, and mission. At the heart of the identity of the religious brother is “fraternity” or “brotherhood”, which is a gift that is received, a gift that is shared and a gift that is given away.

2.2 The Vocational Crisis and Identity Crisis

The vocational crisis begins with identity crisis. Everyone must find one’s identity. Who do people say that I am? If the Lord needed to ask this question during his lifetime, many of the brothers also should ask this question with greater urgency. What is the place of religious brothers in the structures of the Church? Various factors of the technological world have led to an identity crisis of not only brotherhood but also the priest and religious. In the case of a brother who is not ordained, he is often considered the second-class citizen. The image of the religious brother is still someone who is involved in domestic duties, blue-collar jobs, or technical skills. Religious brothers share the same predicament because their ministry in the Church is never seen as complete in itself. There is a tendency to put things in a hierarchy and to overemphasize the sacramental ministries to the detriment of the other ministries in the Church (cf. 1Cor 12:4-13). The temptation for the brother is to devalue the sacramental ministry or to aspire for some privileges in the Church given only to clerics. This is especially in the community where priests and brothers live together. Brothers often held minor role in the communities. He could never be a superior, never vote, in most cases his educational qualification was confined to limited levels. In the past the dining was separated between fathers and brothers in the communities.

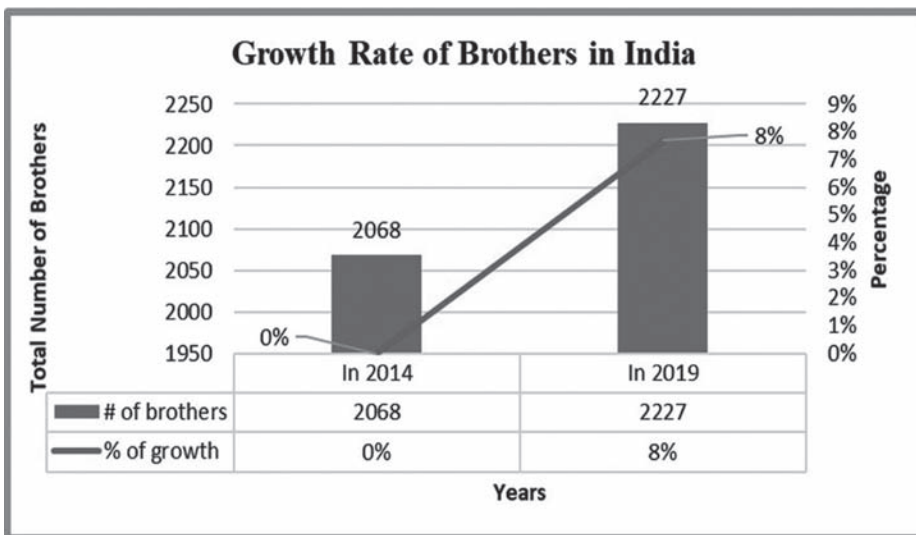
The value of common life is always a mockery. The main activity of the brothers could be confined to the kitchen or internal services of the institutions, in communities or the Church. Brothers are now almost taking steps at renewal and adaptation which has become contagious and has attracted the attention of youth and others. Vocations to religious brotherhood is increasing in bigger congregations. But still, brothers are usually neglected in general gatherings of the Church where they would address, “Dear Fathers and Sisters”. The word ‘brothers’ is mostly forgotten or neglected. This rich vocation to religious brotherhood is not sufficiently recognized and given the importance it righteously deserves.

The crisis of identity that outbreaks both the world and the Church affects the brothers also and, in their case, the crisis is more pronounced for various reasons.

Contemporary Church and society do not specifically recognize the brothers as a distinct group in the Church. Until recently the brothers remained a group taken for granted, belonging in some way as an appendix to the other forms of life in the Church. It was not found necessary to accord to them a specific identity that was distinct from other forms of life in the Church. The questions uppermost in the minds of the brothers today are: Why am I a brother? Who is a brother? What specificity do I have with other forms of life in the Church? They seek an answer to these and many other questions of similar nature and the answers to most of them leave him confused and anxious. The confusion arises because even as he tries to find his own identity, the brother is immediately confronted by the fact that the Church as a whole has not, either officially or otherwise, become consciously aware of such an identity.

The Church as a whole remains confused today, concerning the notion of religious brotherhood as a distinct form of life in her midst. The identity in the Church depends on the understanding, an average Christian has about the Church. Identity in the society depends on the level of the order to which an individual or a group belongs. In the Church, the main importance is given to clergy and the identity of consecrated life as brother is forgotten, because brothers do not belong to either to clergy which governs from top or to the laity. The one phenomenon that characterizes and dominates the existential life situation of a brother today is this crisis of identity.

3. The Situation of Vocation to Brotherhood in India in the Last Five Years



Today there is a fear spreading in the hearts of brothers due to the question that what will be the future of brotherhood in India if the level of the vocation continues to decline? In the midst of this present-day fear, the graph gives a positive outlook that the growth of vocations is not so bad. But then within span of six years the growth rate has increased by 8%. This increase in number of brothers clearly tells us that even in this modern era people are finding joy in the life of brotherhood. This positive outlook gives a hope that the brotherhood in India has relevance and will continue to exist.

4. New Findings to Vocation to Religious Brotherhood in India

A study was conducted among the brotherhood Congregations to collect the data on the vocation to brotherhood in the Indian Church. I have followed the personal approach to collect data from the brothers. 65 Brothers from 12 different congregations were studied. Out of these 65, only 47 responded to all the questions. The general purpose of this research was to gather the qualitative (happy/unhappy), quantitative (data, specific numbers) information and to propose certain ways to become effective and relevant.

Today so many miseries and vices are increasing in the world. At the same time, the vocations to lighten these miseries and vices are also declining. In this life-threatening condition, we religious can't close our eyes and hearts to the present reality of the religious life as well the world. We are urged to move to bring up our congregations by generating new life in it, by promoting new good vocations to give a response to the world's miseries and vices.

The brothers from different congregations have given few inspiring suggestions to foster vocation to the brotherhood. There are many brothers in our Society, but they are less well known than our priests. Therefore, we must first provide information about brothers:

- By giving the clergy a true picture of what the brother's vocation entails and doing the same at different church levels (parishes, sodalities, associations, families and schools, deaneries, dioceses, bishops' conferences, etc.). Hence, we can together create awareness and richness of religious life in the hearts and minds of the young.
- Through family apostolate and regular family visits; witnessing lifestyle by the committed ones.
- It is by involving the young ones in various activities of the Church mission; creating awareness about the brotherhood in the Church and at our workplaces.

- Via vocational camps with authentic and attractive activities.
- By systematic vocation promotion by choosing the right vocation promoters to give the right direction to the young ones.
- By means of adjusting our schools and institutions, including the formation houses, to foster vocations to the brotherhood.
- By spiritually guiding and encouraging young men in search of their vocation.
- Many social, historical and religious factors make the brother's vocation seem out of tune with the times. Here we have to promote the understanding that the brother's vocation rooted in the spirit of the Gospel and meets with many of the expectations of youth today.
- By reaching young men involved in the tensions of making important decisions of life and helping them understand that this form of life goes far in meeting the deep desires they may try to satisfy elsewhere as e.g. the option for solidarity with the poor, a genuinely international community, involvement with the Church, living spirituality, responsibility for the environment and for the future, increased neighborliness, protest against the excessive drive for satisfaction, etc.
- Finally, by actualizing a contemporary brother's image in our communities and our mission.

As I have noticed in the survey the number of brothers has decreased and is still declining; the brother is disappearing more and more from daily life and becoming a non-experienced vocation. But the decision to become a brother presupposes that the brotherhood still relevant. Young people will be attracted to this form of life by:

Opening up our communities to provide meeting places for young people and brothers. Getting brothers engaged in other fields of work involved in helping to set up and carry out recruitment programs. Striving for a style of community living that does not isolate us from those whom we serve and which makes our vocation and our prophetic witness visible.

5. The Major Challenges in Religious Vocation to Brotherhood Based on Survey

The following words of John Paul II are encouraging: "I wish to make a particular mention of religious brothers and to praise them and to encourage them, saying:

Your vocation, my dear brothers are not an easy one, especially because the spirit of the world does not appreciate evangelical poverty and humble service. You are called to follow Christ in a life of total self-giving which does not generally bring public acclaim.

Many people cannot understand your vocation because they cannot grasp how Christ's

invitation, when accepted, can truly bring joy and deep fulfillment: Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me' (Mt 16:24). The Christ who emptied himself is your model and your strength. You yourselves, then, must never begin to doubt your own identity. Your understanding of your vocation, your transparent happiness and infectious peace, your zealous commitment to your apostolate and to the good of the people whom you serve are an eloquent witness to the power of Christ's grace and the primacy of his love.⁵

The conducted survey also manifests similar challenges to brothers in India as discussed in the initial pages of this article. Many times, the vocation to the brotherhood is treated as something lower than all other forms of consecrated life. Even the well-informed religious priests and nuns try to put down the vocation to the brotherhood. Many of our religious friends keep telling us to become priests that their life resembles the life of Jesus Christ. Opting to become a religious brother is to choose the less traveled road and we need to be ready to face challenges and carry daily crosses. The life of religious brotherhood is to toil all day and the fulfillment of joy is experienced only at the end of the day when we look back to examine the day. Such a rich prophetic vocation needs to be promoted by one and all in the church.

The mission keeps on changing as per the context. Our ministries keep on changing to cater to the needy better. But all these are external. We lack time to ponder on ourselves. We neglect our personal growth in the Lord. We need a contemplative attitude. We look different from other people in the world that they look at us that we are pure in our minds and hearts. We are trying to catch up on our lives with the fast-moving world. We need time to renew ourselves to look deep into ourselves and listen to what God is calling us to do. We are to see and comprehend where the spirit is inviting us to do.

Another challenge could be individualism. The entire world is suffering from this syndrome called individualism. The younger generation is reluctant to take up responsibilities. Young religious tend to spend more time with mobile than books. We need to give space and time for relationships. We are called to live a shared life. Our vows remind us that we are at the service of others. We are invited to see around the world to be challenged by the people longing for us to be touched, healed and cared.

Life of brotherhood is to encounter God in the depth of our heart in our daily prayers. The prayer life of an individual is at stake. Even if you have your daily prayers you are not serious but to fulfill the timetabled activity. Daily prayers and the eucharist have to be part of our lives. These are our energy hotspots to gain our strength to do the mission effectively.

Today we are in critical condition of the brotherhood due to the lack of vocations. The reasons for the decline of vocation to brotherhood are: lack of awareness on brotherhood; neglecting the nature of vocation due to the worldly influences; over power; nuclear families; high regard for the priestly life; lack of respect in Church towards brotherhood; the inability to discern among the more choices of life; discouragement from the various parties; clericalization and lack of good witnessing life from the committed ones; modern technological development and losing the sense of humanity by owning the ego which closes one's hearts and minds to the cry of the needy ones in the world.

Conclusion

The vocation of the religious brother is a gift of God to the Church (cf. *VC* 1). Religious brothers, by embracing the evangelical counsels, totally dedicate to God by an act of supreme love and are committed to the honor and service of God under a new and a special title (cf. *LG* 44). The rich spirituality of the term 'brother' has its kingdom value of love to promote equality and justice on earth. The religious are called to be brothers of Christ, deeply united with him. Being in deep union with Jesus, every religious brother is further called to be a "brother" to all in their witness to Christ's love for all, especially the lowliest, the neediest.

It is very tough to understand, the unique image and specific identity of a religious brother. It cannot be acquired and projected apart from the unique image of Jesus Christ, who, being God, gave up his identity and became one among many. The brothers are called to lose themselves in the world to acquire the proper image in Jesus the brother. This effort will help the brothers and the whole Church to rediscover the rich and unique image of the brother in the Church and the world.

Pope Francis thus petitions the entire Church: "I especially ask Christians in communities throughout the world to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let everyone admire how you care for one another, and how you encourage and accompany one another: *It is by your love of one another that everyone will recognize that you are my disciples* (Jn 13:35). This petition of Pope Francis to the entire Christian people highlights the special place that brotherhood has within the whole of the shared Christian heritage. It is the pearl that Religious Brothers cultivate with special care. In this way, they are, for the Church community, a prophetic memory of its origin and an encouragement to return to it" (*IMRBC* 11).

As I conclude, I would like to recall the very words of Christ: *Abide in my love* (Jn 15:9). Every brother must passionately abide in the love of Christ as he

surrenders himself to Christ. Love of Christ binds us all in brotherhood. I would like to compare this to an allegory of thread that binds everything. This thread that weaves through the brother's life is the experience of being sent as a sign of the maternal tenderness of God and the fraternal love of Christ. Jesus called the disciples with an exhortation "Come, follow me". Those who followed him had to give up everything and put on Christ. They had to face many challenges, but the joy prevailed overall because of the love of Christ present among them.

Many aspects of the modern world have thrown a lot of challenges to the brotherhood. As a consequence, there are fewer vocations and more dropouts. Yet the joy of living brotherhood has not changed for those who said "yes" to God's call. In order to promote this joy of living brotherhood, a new effort must be made to foster and promote vocations, with a new commitment to prayer.

Reflecting on our personal and collective experience as brothers, we can say that at the core of our vocation there is a personal revelation of the love of Jesus as our brother and the brother of all in a special way so that we can extend this revelation of brotherly love to others. Within His infinite possibilities God, the Father has called us to follow Jesus, His Son, on the path of consecrated brotherhood, to live as brothers of Christ and perpetuate this beautiful way of brotherly living that silently announces: "I am all yours and all I have is yours" O Lord; may I be always at your service in loving my brethren with the love that you have loved me.

Endnotes

¹ PAUL RAJ, *Brotherhood. God's Foundational Gift to the World*, Bangalore 1997, 29.

² ABRAHAM M. ANTHONY, *The Vocation of the Religious Brother in the Church*, Shillong 2016, 92-93.

³ *Identity and Mission of Religious Brother in the Church* of Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (October 4, 2015).

⁴ *Vita Consecrata*, Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World (March 25, 1996).

⁵ ABRAHAM M. ANTHONY, *The Vocation of Religious Brother in the Church*, 121.

DOCUMENTATION

THE ERECTION OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE AND SOCIETY OF APOSTOLIC LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF *MOTU PROPRIO AUTHENTICUM CHARISMATIS* AND *AB INITIO* OF POPE FRANCIS

Jose Ammaikunnel, CMF

Introduction

The consecrated state does not pertain to the hierarchical structure of the Church but pertain to the life and holiness of the Church (cf. *CIC* 207, 574).¹ But that does not mean that consecrated life has nothing to do with the hierarchy of the Church. The consecrated life has essentially an ecclesial dimension in relation to the hierarchy that through the ministry of the pastors the Church not only establishes this state, but also through her action she presents it as consecrated to God.

1. Establishment of Consecrated Life in the Church

The consecrated life is a life that is totally dedicated and consecrated to God and that it originates from a divine call to which man responds under the impulse of the Holy Spirit in complete freedom. This vocation takes concrete form through the profession of evangelical counsels by which the person is totally consecrated to God. Into this consecration, the mediation of the Church is inserted. The Church receives and ratifies the consecration of the person and gives it public importance (cf. *LG* 43; *PC* 1; *CIC* 573-575).² In other words, the Church makes herself a mediator of the consecration through her ministry. She formally accepts the evangelical profession of the members.

Further, the Church establishes the life of evangelical counsels as a stable form of living. The institute of consecrated life must be canonically established by the competent ecclesiastical authority (*CIC* 573 § 2). By this establishment, the Church approves the authenticity of an institute in the Church. Nevertheless, the profession

The author has a licentiate in Canon Law from St. Peter's Pontifical Institute, Bangalore and a doctorate in Canon Law from Lateran University, Rome. He is the author of a book and some articles based on Canon Law. He teaches in different theological and religious institutes and served as Defender of Bond Archdiocesan Tribunal, Archdiocese of Bangalore and Judge, Eparchial Tribunal, Eparchy of Mandya. Presently he is serving as Vice Rector, Claretian Ashram: College of Philosophy, Wardha, Maharashtra. He may be contacted at: jammaikunnel@gmail.com

of evangelical counsels has to be made in an institute that is approved by the Church and they are to be practiced also according to the charism and proper law of the institute. Thus, the consecrated life becomes a concrete reality in and by the Church. It is born in the Church and approved by the Church.

The mediation of the Church occurs not only in the consecration of the persons, but in that, the Church intervenes in matters such as, in the interpretation of the evangelical counsels, in the regulation of their practice with laws, in the discernment of the charism of the founders or foundresses, and in the erection of the new foundation, along with its rule of life or Constitutions. It is the duty of the hierarchy of the Church to govern with wise legislation the practice of the evangelical counsels, to endorse rules formulated by eminent men and women, and to approve later modifications, to keep close to institutes so that they may grow and flourish in accordance with the spirit of their founders and their sound traditions (cf. *LG* 45; *CIC* 576, 587).

However, it must be understood that neither the Church nor her hierarchical authority is the source of the charism of foundation, but it is the Holy Spirit who raises up new institutes. The particular collective charism was living in the Church before hierarchical authority intervened. It became a canonical institute at a later time, when the Church authority recognized it as conforming to and useful for her mission and salvation and approved its Constitution. The approval of the hierarchical authority is necessary in order that everything will co-operate for the common good and the gift that the Spirit made to the Church itself may be established as genuine.

It is also to be kept in mind that the gift of the Spirit is for the entire Church and even if the first approval was made on diocesan level, as happens in most cases, it necessarily has universal importance. It is because of two reasons: it has been proved in the history of the institutes of consecrated life that a charism gradually spreads beyond the diocese in which it was born and the bishop who approves an institute does so not only as pastor of a given Church but as a member of the Episcopal college. The charism of an institute is born in a particular Church, but for the universal Church in as much as universal Church exists in and from the particular Churches (cf. *LG* 23; *CIC* 368).

Another thing to be understood is that the hierarchy of the Church by recognizing or by approving the Constitution of the institutes does not become the decisive superior in all the matters, especially with regard to the internal governance and the safe guarding of the patrimony of the institute.

2. Autonomy of Religious Institute

A true autonomy of life is recognized for each institute (cf. *CIC* 586). It is the duty of the hierarchy to respect the true autonomy and safeguard the patrimony of every institute. The foundation of this autonomy of governance is the safeguarding of the patrimony of each institute, while submission to the Apostolic See or to the bishop — which depends on whether the institute in question is pontifical or diocesan — marks the limits imposed on this autonomy. This means that the autonomy of an institute of consecrated life is not absolute, but one that is restricted by the Apostolic See in the case of an institute of Pontifical right and by the diocesan bishop in the case of an institute of diocesan right. However, this external power, that is, the Apostolic See or diocesan bishop, is not absolute either, since it is limited by the lawful autonomy of each institute.

In matters concerning the care of souls, the public exercise of divine worship and other works of apostolate, the consecrated persons are subject to the authority of the diocesan bishop (cf. *CIC* 678). However, in all matters it is expected that there should be a healthy relationship between the hierarchy and the institute of consecrated life. This is possible only when there is a mutual collaboration and understanding between them.

3. The Ecclesial Status

The state of those who profess the evangelical counsels belongs to the life and holiness of the Church, says *CIC* 574, §1. It must therefore be said that consecrated life, which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, belongs to the Church and takes place in the context within the same Church. We cannot, therefore, think of consecrated life outside of the Church. Consecrated life is a reality that belongs to the Church, which has an active role to play within it. This role is carried out at different times and at different levels.

4. The Formal Recognition of Each Institute

The Church recognizes and erects every institute of consecrated life with a special decree. An institute of consecrated life cannot exist in the Church without the explicit recognition of the competent ecclesiastical authority. In the life of an institute there are different levels of recognition. An institute begins her journey in general as a pious union or association, and then, after sufficient development, could be erected as a public or private organization, and ultimately as an institute of consecrated life of diocesan right.

This process ends ordinarily with papal recognition, when the Holy See recognizes and erects as an institute of Pontifical Right. This recognition, however, requires a development and maturity in all fields, and the institute normally extends beyond the borders of a diocese or of some dioceses. One must remember here that even if an institute is of diocesan right, this belongs to the universal Church and must have a global vision regarding its future and its apostolic activities.

5. Erection of a Religious Institute or a Society of Apostolic Life

The Foundation happens when the founder or the foundress decides and plans to form a group to achieve the special charism he/she has received to serve the Church. Faithful who share the same vision congregate around the founder. We need to make a distinction between ‘establishment’ and ‘erection’ of an institute of consecrated life. Establishment is the first formal canonical act by the Church that recognizes the authenticity of the new charism and the need of the new foundation. An erection requires that the group has already lived for a sufficient time according to the charism and vision of the founder, giving proof of the authenticity, the utility and desirability of the foundation.

5.1 Charismatic and Canonical Foundations of Religious Institute

The *charismatic* and *canonical* foundations are the two constitutive and complementary moments in the erection of a religious institute. The charismatic foundation refers to the moment when the future founder or foundress, having received the inspiration from the Holy Spirit, inaugurates a new way of witnessing the Gospel — usually with an initial group of companions to respond to a particular need of the Church — with the creation of a new religious family.

The *canonical foundation* refers to the second moment when the hierarchical authority intervenes by giving its approval, confirming that indeed the new institute is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. This said approval is a positive approval that consists in the positive judgment of the foundation of the institute. The ecclesiastical authority, however, not only confirms the legitimacy of the charism of the Spirit but also approbates (approves) the institute as a juridical body governed by laws and subject to the supervision and vigilance of the Church’s competent authority.

Hence, each institute is rightly initiated by the charismatic founder and at the same time is formally erected with the decree of approval by the competent ecclesiastical authority (cf. *CIC* 114 §1 and 589 and *CCEO* 921 §§1 and 3, 434, 505 §§1 and 2, *LG* 45).³

It is then proper to say that there are, in fact, two founders of every religious congregation: the charismatic founder or foundress who starts the congregation “from below” and the hierarchical founder who gives the canonical approval “from above”.

5.2 New Law Regarding the Erection of an Institute of Consecrated Life or a Society of Apostolic Life

The erection of a new institute of consecrated life, according to the current *Code of Canon Law*, is a simple procedure. Can. 579 states that “the diocesan Bishop, each in his own territory, with a formal decree erect the institutes of consecrated life, provided that the *Apostolic See has been consulted* [Italicized by the author for emphasis]”.

This canon is modified by Holy Father Pope Francis on 1 November 2020 with *Motu Proprio Authenticum Charismaticis* and came into force on 10 November 2020. The modified *CIC 579* states, “Diocesan bishop in his own territory, can erect institutes of consecrated with formal decree *with the prior written permission of the Apostolic See* [Italicized by the author for emphasis]”.

Same way *CCEO 435 §1*, and *506 §1* are also modified by Holy Father Pope Francis on 21 November 2020 with *Motu Proprio, Ab Initio* and came into force on 08 December 2020. Now *CCEO 435 §1* states, “The eparchial bishop to establish an autonomous monastery with the prior written permission within the territorial boundaries of the patriarchal or in other cases, the Apostolic See”.

And *CCEO 506 §1* states, “The eparchial bishop can erect only congregations; except with the prior written permission of the Apostolic See, but that they were not to establish, within the territorial boundaries of the patriarchal Church, without his knowledge and, moreover, of a patriarch”.

Pope Francis has changed the Canon Law to require a bishop to have permission from the Holy See prior to establishing a new religious institute in his diocese, further strengthening Vatican oversight over the process.

The Vatican clarified in 2016 that by law the diocesan bishop was required to consult with the Apostolic See before giving canonical recognition to a new institute. But, there were cases of canonical recognition given to new institutes without proper consultation with the Apostolic See. The new canon provides further Vatican oversight by requiring the bishop to have the prior written permission of the Apostolic See.

According to Pope Francis' apostolic letter, *Motu Proprio, Authenticum Charismaticis*, the change ensures that the Vatican will accompany bishops more closely in their discernment about the erection of a new religious order or congregation, and gives "final judgment" over the decision to the Holy See.

The modification to canon 579 makes "the preventive control of the Holy See more evident," Fr. Fernando Puig, vice dean of canon law at the Pontifical University of Santa Croce, told CNA. "In my opinion, the base [of the law] has not changed," he said, adding that "certainly the autonomy of the bishops decreases and there is a centralization of this competence in favor of Rome." The motivations for the change, Fernando Puig explained, go back to a clarification of the interpretation of the law, requested by the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in 2016.

Pope Francis clarified in May 2016 that, for validity, canon 579 required bishops to consult closely with the Vatican on their decision, even if it did not require them to obtain permission *per se*.

Writing in *L'Osservatore Romano* in June 2016, Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, the Congregation's secretary, explained that the congregation asked for the clarification out of a desire to prevent the "careless" establishment of religious institutes and societies. According to Rodríguez, crises in religious institutes had included internal division and power struggles, abusive disciplinary measures, or problems with authoritarian founders who feel they are the "true fathers and masters of the charism." Inadequate discernment on the part of bishops, Rodríguez said, had led to the Vatican needing to intervene in problems which could have been prevented if they had been detected before giving canonical recognition to the institute or society.

In his apostolic letter, *Motu Proprio*, Pope Francis said that "the faithful have the right to be informed by their Shepherds about the authenticity of the charisms and about the integrity of those who present themselves as founders" of a new congregation or order. "The Apostolic See," he continued, "is responsible for accompanying Shepherds in the discernment process that leads to the ecclesial recognition of a new Institute or a new Society of diocesan right."

He quoted Pope John Paul II's 1996 post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, which said that the vitality of new institutes and societies "must be judged by the authority of the Church, which has the responsibility of examining them in order to discern the authenticity of the purpose for their foundation and to prevent the proliferation of institutions similar to one another, with the consequent risk of a harmful fragmentation into excessively small groups" (VC 12).⁴

Pope Francis said: “The new institutes of consecrated life and the new societies of apostolic life, therefore, must be officially recognized by the Apostolic See, which alone has the last judgment.”

From the above, it is clear that only the diocesan bishops may erect a new institute of consecrated life with the prior written permission of the Apostolic See. The expression ‘diocesan bishops’ is to be understood in accordance with *CIC* 376 and 381 § 2, namely the bishops and other prelates who govern the particular Churches, described in can. 368. A clergyman who has temporary responsibility of a local church, as the Apostolic Administrator or diocesan Administrator cannot, therefore, establish a new institute of consecrated life.

It should be remembered that the power and competence of a diocesan bishop are territorial, and that is limited to the diocese presiding. Can. 579 (*CCEO* 435, 506 §1), therefore, rightly states that an institute can be erected by the diocesan bishop only in the territory of his diocese. A diocesan bishop who erects the institute, as an immediate ecclesiastical authority has also certain rights and obligations to the institute.

The *Code of Canon Law* prescribes various rights enjoyed by the diocesan bishop, for example, the right to approve the Constitutions (cf. Can. 596, § 1), to chair the election session of the institute (cf. Can. 625, § 1), and so on. The Bishop also has the obligation to ensure that the new institute will develop and grow according to the charism and in communion with the local and the universal Church. It is the responsibility of the bishop to ensure that members of the institute observe the norms of universal law and proper law. In the early years of its existence, the institute will have a greater need for an effective pastoral accompaniment by the diocesan bishop.

The Department responsible for granting the prior written permission of the Apostolic See is the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, for the institutes with major operations in the territories of the *ius commune*, namely not the mission countries and if it is in mission territories then it is granted by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

Conclusion

To conclude, we state that the institute of consecrated life is part and parcel of the Church. The new law for the institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life in the *Code* could be considered as the consolidation of various experiences of consecrated life lived in the Church in her existence. Such experiences, which have

proved to be beneficial to the community, are now codified in the Canons. It is one of the parts of the legislation that has been completely renewed. The new amendment in the *Code* sufficiently provides for the continued renewal of consecrated life in the line of particular teachings of our Holy Father Pope Francis. The new amendments in the *Code of Canon Law* can be seen as the role of Holy Father, “The Apostolic See is responsible for accompanying Shepherds in the discernment process that leads to the ecclesial recognition of a new Institute or a new Society of diocesan right”. The vitality of new institutes and societies must be judged by the authority of the Church, which has the responsibility of examining them in order to discern the authenticity of the purpose for their foundation and to prevent the spread of institutions similar to one another.

Endnotes

¹ *Codex Iuris Canonici (CIC)*

² *Lumen Gentium (LG)*, Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican Council II on the Church (November 21, 1964); *Perfectae Caritatis (PC)*, Decree of Vatican Council II on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (October 28, 1965).

³ *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium (CCEO)*

⁴ *Vita Consecrata (VC)*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World (March 25, 1996).

BOOK REVIEWS

JOSEPH VELLACHAL JOHN (JOSEPH AMMAIKUNNEL, CMF),
Canonical Norms on Consecrated Life, Consecrated Life Series – 3,
Claretian Publications, Bangalore 2020, Pages: x+152, Price ₹ 120.00

The book titled *Canonical Norms on Consecrated Life* written by Canon Law professor Joseph Vellachal John (Joseph Ammaikunnel, CMF) published by Claretian Publications in collaboration ICL: Institute of Consecrated Life – Sanyasa as part of Consecrated Life Series is a precious treasure for every institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life. Though book is written as manual for the students who study theology of consecrated life, it is so rich in content and so clear in presentation that everyone who exercises authority in the institutes of consecrated life must possess a personal copy besides enriching the community library.

The author has two chapters. In the first chapter titled “Theological and Historical Development of Consecrated Life”, he deals elaborated the title ‘Institutes of Consecrated Life’, ecclesial vision of consecrated life, consecrated life and its relation to the hierarchy of the church, biblical sources of consecrated life, historical development of the institutes of consecrated life tracing from the time of the apostles to the reforms undertaken after Vatican Council II, consecrated life in the Code of Canon Law, different forms of consecrated life namely the hermits, the order of virgins, religious institutes, secular institutes and the societies of apostolic life. He concludes the chapter with elaborate reflections on the state of consecrated life explaining it as neither clerical nor lay as consecrated persons are called for evangelical consecration from both the states.

The second chapter is titled “Canonical Norms on Consecrated Life”. In this chapter which is specific to consecrated life, the author deals precisely the 174 (573-746) canons of the *Code of Canon Law (CIC)* and 162 (410-571) canons of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO)* which deal with “The Institutes of

Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life”. He begins the chapter explaining the concept of law, source of law — common law and proper law —, definition of consecrate life, observation of norms and the patrimony of an institute.

In the backdrop of the preliminary issues discussed as mentioned above, the author then writes about the erection and suppression of a religious institute, rightful autonomy of the institutes and societies, constitutions, legal status of an institute of consecrated life, the evangelical counsels, fraternal life in common, religious institutions — establishment and suppression of a religious house and the province —, the government of religious institutes — superiors, the council members, canonical visit and the general chapter —, temporal goods and administration, admission and formation of candidates, separation of the members from the institute and finally dismissal from the institute.

Though *Code of Canon Law* is very legalistic in its language and sometimes so difficult to understand the nuances of the canons, the author has simplified the whole canons of consecrated life in a simple language so that even an ordinary religious who does not possess high qualification and legalistic background can understand. The author indeed deserves our appreciation and words of encouragement for this wonderful and immensely useful work.

M. Arul Jesu Robin, CMF

JAMES KANNANTHANAM, CMF,
Protection of Minors. Educating Priests, Religious and Laity,
Consecrated Life Series – 4, Claretian Publications, Bangalore 2020,
Pages: 375, Price ₹ 250.00

I was fortunate to attend an eye-opening and thought-provoking two weeks intensive course on “Protection of Minors” at ICL: Institute of Consecrated Life – Sanyasa, Bangalore. The two-weeks intensive course instilled a deep and burning desire in me to bring about a change in the society. With the inspiration and great support of our management, principal and correspondent, we were able to commence a 6 months course on “Safeguarding Minors” in collaboration with Gregorian University, Rome, Italy at St. Pious X Degree & PG College for Women, Hyderabad in the month of October, 2020. A lack of good resources for the purpose of creating awareness among the staff and teachers, and students of the problem of child sexual abuse and possible response left a deep void. I was immensely delighted to see that ICL – Sanyasa has published a very useful book in its advocacy for creating safe environment for children and vulnerable adults.

The book is written by the resource person of the workshop, Fr. James Kannanthanam, cmf who in collaboration with Centre for Child Protection, Gregorian University Rome, has been conducting workshops in the Philippines and India. Each chapter brings about his expertise in dealing with the sensitive yet important issue at ease intriguing the readers towards advocacy. The book deals with the global issue of child sexual abuse and in particular the issue of clerical child sexual abuse which rocked and shamed the Catholic Church in recent times. It points out that the problem is aggravated due to the ignorance of the people on its tragic, lasting impacts on the victims, and the societal indifference to its prevalence.

The book enlightens about the risk and protective factors, care of the victims, the ways of understanding and managing the perpetrators to assure prevention of abuse, preparing code of conduct for our institutions in the light of church directives and civil laws and preparing the future generation of priests, religious and lay people for creating safe environment for children in the Church and society. The book not only deals vehemently with advocacy and prevention but also emphasizes on understanding and encouraging the victim to take on a healing journey where they can not only survive but thrive and lead a life free of false guilt and shame.

With the alarming incidents of pornography due to COVID-19 and sexual assault in India on a day-to-day basis, this book is a must read for everyone to raise one’s voice to bring about a change in this deeply ingrained evil. The book will be

very useful not only for the priests and religious but all those who participate in the mission of the Church and have a passion to help those children whose innocence is lost.

The author with his post-doctoral diploma from the Centre for Child Protection, Gregorian University, Rome provides vast information — global and local — of this dark side of the world calling forth for immediate attention of the Church and society for a concerted effort to eradicate this evil of enormous magnitude. With each one reaching one together, we can make a good difference in not only breaking the walls of silence but in paving a path for greater responsible awareness and strong advocacy. I highly recommend this book to everyone

Ms. V. Beulah Vennela

Asst. Professor of Psychology/ Licensed Rehabilitation Psychologist,
St. Pious X Degree & PG College for Women,
Hyderabad.

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