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EDITORIAL

The Church of God is convoked in Synod. The dream entitled, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission” was solemnly inaugurated in Rome on 9-10 October, 2021 and on the following 17 October in each particular Church. Then, there will be the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023. Then, there will be the implementation phase where each particular Church would concretise the general principles and suggestions suitable to their own local realities (cf. *EC* 19-21). With this convocation, Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is so important for its life and mission. Pope exhorts, “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium”.

It is basically *journeying together* through the Church in every level is expected to experience and live communion, achieve participation and open herself to mission. And this “journeying together” is what most effectively enacts and manifests the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary people of God.

Episcopalis communio invites consultation with the people of God, and a synodal Church in which the exercise of the Petrine primacy could receive greater light. After recalling how the Synod was established by Paul VI, and describing the Synod as one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis emphasizes the efficacious collaboration of the Synod of Bishops with the Roman Pontiff on questions of major importance; that is, questions which require a special knowledge and prudence for the good of the whole Church. Pope Francis says, one in which the Church is led to a new evangelizing stage towards a permanent state of mission, the Synod of Bishops is called to become an even greater channel for the evangelization of today’s world.

Pope Paul VI had already foreseen that, with the passage of time, such an institution could be perfected. In 2006, the most recent revision of the *Ordo Synodi* was promulgated by Pope Benedict XVI. In a particular way, the duties of the General Secretariat of the Synod were established and gradually strengthened. It is to the questions that require the timely intervention and agreement of the pastors of the Church that synodal action has been particularly effective. For this reason, the Pope says, there has been a growing desire in recent years that the Synod should increasingly become a particular manifestation of the efficacious realization of the solicitude of the episcopate for the whole church. This is based on the firm conviction that all the pastors have been constituted for service to the holy People of God, to which they themselves pertain in virtue of the sacrament of Baptism.

Bishops, the Pope says, are at the same time teachers and disciples, in their duty, which involves their mission, but also their commitment to listening to the voice of Christ, who speaks through the People of God. And so, the Synod should also become ever more a privileged instrument of listening to the People of God. It does so by consulting with faithful of the particular churches; because while the Synod is an essentially episcopal institution, it is nonetheless true that it cannot exist separated from the rest of the faithful. It is an instrument suited to giving voice to the whole People of God, precisely by means of the bishops. From Assembly to Assembly, the Synod reveals itself as an eloquent expression of the “synodality” of the Church herself, in which the communion of diverse cultures is reflected. The Synod shows clearly the profound communion between the pastors and the faithful, and between the bishops and the Pope. Pope Francis expresses his hope that the Synod might, “in its own way contribute to the restoration, of unity among all Christians, in accordance with the will of the Lord.”

The invitation of Pope Francis for a synodal Church also has a lot implications for the consecrated persons of today. The insights presented to the universal Church by Pope should challenge the consecrated persons the way we live our community life and the way we carry out our mission. It should also give us new impetus and methodology in the way we conduct our community meetings, provincial chapters and general chapters. The synodal Church also in a very special way invites us that we engage more and more the partakers/recipients of our mission in planning, implementation and evaluation process. They have to be respected and considered not as mere spectators but as equal partners with us, consecrated persons. It needs real change of attitude and openness from our part. This is what exactly the synodal Church expect from us the consecrated persons of today.

The present issue of *Sanyasa – A Journal of Consecrated Life* carries six scholarly articles. The first one is by Rev. Fr. Mathew Vattamattam, CMF, the superior general of the Congregation of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Claretians) titled, “Walking Forth in the Spirit. Practising Discernment in Personal Life and in Communities”. Here the general with his vast experience in guiding the congregation and the individual members reflects on the process of our personal and community discernment in order to make it a normal part of the life and mission of the consecrated persons.

The second and third articles are by renowned canonist and official (retired) and consultant of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples Dr. Jose Koonampampil, CMF. They were actually part of Consecrated Life Lecture Series offered by ICL: Institute of Consecrated Life – Sanyasa. They are reproduced here to reach wider audience. In the second article titled, “Religious’ Obligation for Community Life and Pope Francis’ *Communis Vita*, the author explains in detail

the need for the religious to live in their own community, the exceptions from community life and the process to be followed to apply the *motu proprio* of Pope Francis in dismissing the religious from religious life.

In the third article titled, “*Authenticum Chrismatis* on Establishing Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life”, the authors goes on explaining *Perfetae Caritatis*, no. 19 and *Vita Consecrata*, no. 12 which also have significances for this theme. Then, he speaks of revised *Code of Canon Law* (1983) and the nature of the consultation before the revision, the need for the revision of canon 579, the rescript of Pope Francis in 2016 and the significance and the content of *Authenticum chrismatis*. He concludes describing beautifully different stages of the growth of an institute or society.

The fourth article titled, “Insights for Consecrated Life from Joseph Cycle (Gen 37–50) is by Dr. Arul Jesu Robin, CMF. He begins analysing the long text at the literary level highlighting the internal structure of the chapters and the composition of the same. Then, he proceeds to analysing the text at the historical level highlighting the Yahwist use of the narrative, the Pharaonic administrative system and the priestly use of the narrative. It is followed with the theological level analysis where the situations of ambiguity and death, situations of life, the story of Judah and Tamar and Jesus’ typology are given prominence. He concludes his reflections bringing out the insights from Joseph cycle for consecrated life today.

The fifth article titled, “The Eco-consciousness of *Thirukkural*, the Template for the Consecrated” by Dr. S. Devadoss, a popular eco-theologian. In the background of *Laudato si’* of Pope Francis, he draws out many eco-conscious insights from *Thirukkural*, the most famous, reviewed, widely recognised and acknowledged classical work of Tamil literature. He brings out the foundational physical elements of cosmic creation like sky, stars, sun, moon found in the *Thirukkural*. He also points out the goodness of the mother earth beautifully portrayed in this classical Tamil literature. Then, he goes on analysing the importance given to water and its preservation. He also highlights the mentioning and the significance given to air, an absolute component for existence in *Thirukkural*. It is followed by the exhortation of the *Kural* to extend compassion to all the living beings and importance given to flowers. He points out the surprising and rich descriptions of tress, plants, birds, animals, etc. As he describes the concern of Thiruvalluvar for nature and its rich biodiversity, drawing lessons from *Laudato si’*, the author invites the consecrated persons to commit themselves for preserving the nature and not to damage it with selfishness.

The sixth article is by Bro. Carlos Verga with the title, “The Community School of Disciples in Mission”. Taking a few texts from the gospel of Mark, the author highlights the importance of being formed by Jesus to be his radical followers in

carrying out his mission. He also highlights the importance of the community in the formation of missionaries and for the credibility and efficacy of the mission of the proclaiming the Gospel.

We take this opportunity to wish all our readers a happy and prosperous new year 2022. We had a terrible and forgettable last year mainly due to Covid-19. Let us hope and strive for the best in the new year.

M. Arul Jesu Robin, CMF
Chief Editor

Endnotes

¹ *Episcopalis Communio (EC)*, Apostolic Constitution of Pope Francis on the Structure of the Synod (15 September 2018).

² FRANCIS, “Address for the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops” (17 October 2015).

³ Thanks to CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF INDIA, For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation and Mission, Bangalore 2021.

⁴ GIADA AQUILINO, Pope: The Synod of Bishops at the service of the People of God [access: 10.01.22], <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-09/pope-francis-apostolic-constitution-episcopalis-communio.html>

⁵ GIADA AQUILINO, Pope: The Synod of Bishops at the service of the People of God [access: 10.01.22], <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-09/pope-francis-apostolic-constitution-episcopalis-communio.html>

⁶ GIADA AQUILINO, Pope: The Synod of Bishops at the service of the People of God [access: 10.01.22], <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-09/pope-francis-apostolic-constitution-episcopalis-communio.html>

WALKING FORTH IN THE SPIRIT

PRACTICING DISCERNMENT IN PERSONAL LIFE AND IN COMMUNITIES

Mathew Vattamattam, CMF

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you will be able to discern the will of God—what is good, acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

Introduction

Through the public profession of evangelical counsels, we have offered to God “the free ability to arrange the course of our lives.”¹ Commitment to do the will of God is at the core of our consecrated life. When we take decisions, how do we know that it is the will of God? In the words of Pope Francis, “The only way is through discernment, which calls for something more than intelligence or common sense. It is a gift we must implore”.² In this article, we shall reflect on the process of our personal and community discernment in order to make it a normal part of the life mission of the consecrated persons.

1. What are your criteria for making choices?

As individuals and as communities, we make small and big choices every day. Some decisions have far-reaching consequences. Let us take some examples from everyday life:

- Accepting a mandate from the superiors for a mission for which there is no interest.
- Handling a situation of crisis when love for missionary life competes with a growing special affection for a loving complementary companion.
- Experience of emptiness in life and ministry while thoughts of joining a diocese have become constant. Personal freedom and financial liberty of diocesan friends becomes more alluring.

Rev. Fr. Mathew Vattamattam, CMF is the superior General of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary popularly known as Claretian Missionaries. After serving the province of Bangalore as formator and novice master for many years, he was elected and served as the general consultor in-charge of formation for twelve years and then he was elected as the Superior General. He holds licentiate in Formative Psychology and Systematic Theology from Gregorian Pontifical University, Rome.

- Purchasing a wide screen LED TV for the community though there is a TV which is still functional.
- Starting a new ministry to respond to a need in the mission, but there is risk of failure and being ridiculed by others.
- A young person shows interest to join the congregation. You feel that he/she is not transparent, and his/her motivations are not clear. As Vocation animator you want to give a try.

In your everyday decision making, do you include the movement of the Spirit in you so that you can honestly say, “the Holy Spirit and you” (cf. Acts 15:28) decided the matter? The Lord says, “Surely I know the plans I have for you, plans for your welfare, and not for your harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jer 29:11).

Discernment is the art of aligning our lives both personally and in community with God’s vision for us by taking decisions towards realizing it. I invite you to recall one of the recent important decision that you made in your personal life and another in your community. How did you make these decisions? What processes did you and your community engage in taking the decisions?

2. Discernment – Christian Way of Navigating the Course of Journey in the World

2.1 Learning from Jesus

Through his life and words, Jesus taught his disciples how to do the Father’s will rather than follow one’s own immediate inclinations. Even as a young boy, Jesus’ life was oriented to the Father, “Didn’t you know that I should be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:49). Jesus kept the purpose of his life clearly before him in all circumstances. He was candid to his disciples, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to carry out his work” (Jn 4:34). Jesus’ intimate way of doing the will of the Father became vivid in the passion narrative. In the agony of the garden, we see the following three steps he followed:

- *Awareness of what is going on in him:* “Now my soul is deeply troubled” (Jn 12:27). Jesus is able to name his inner experience, “My soul is full of sorrow, even to death” (Mk 14:34).
- *Recognition of the human tendencies to flee from the ordeal:* “Shall I say, Father save me from this hour?” (Jn 12:27). “Father, all things are possible for you; take this cup away from me” (Mk 14:36).
- *Affirmation of his mission and surrender to the will of the Father:* “But to face this I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name” (Jn 12:27). “Not my will, but yours be done” (Mk 14:36).

After the resurrection, Jesus walked with the disheartened disciples on the way to Emmaus and engaged them in a process of discernment (cf. Lk 24:13-35). They returned to their missions with joy. The disciples learnt the art of walking in the Spirit and keep their gaze fixed on the Risen Lord when they had to take decisions.

2.2 Discernment in the Early Church (Acts 15)

The Acts of the Apostles gives one of the best examples of communal discernment. There were life issues that caused serious tensions that rocked the growing early Christian community. They experienced serious differences among them about accepting the gentiles into their fold with the requirement to follow the “Law of Moses” especially the rite of circumcision. The issue touched upon cherished cultural and social practices and theological meaning which were not easy to reconcile. The meeting of Jerusalem was called to discern the will of God on such a sensitive issue. The circumcision party even travelled about 250 miles to Antioch to impose circumcision on non-Jewish Christians and had open conflict with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:1-2). The matter was taken for discernment in the presence of apostles and elders. The following are the important components of the process of discernment:

- *Addressing the core issue:* The question of how we are saved. The circumcision party linked salvation to obedience to the law of Moses (v.1). For Paul and Barnabas salvation is by the grace of the Lord Jesus (v.11) through faith (Acts v.9).
- *Participation of the entire community* in the discernment process. No one was excluded. Awareness of the unity and togetherness of the Church despite bitter debate as expressed in the wholehearted ownership of the decision by all with the clear consciousness of the lead of the Holy Spirit in the process, “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (v. 26).
- *Presentation of perspectives,* and even heated discussions (v. 7).
- *Looking into the data.* Different interventions in the meeting focussed on what God did in the life of the pagans through the preaching of the Gospel. God has offered the gift of the Holy Spirit equally to those who did not observe the law of Moses (v.8). The grace and action of God is above customs and practices of ancestors (v.10). Miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the non-Jews through the apostles that testify salvation of God reaching to all through the faith in Jesus (v.12).

- *Silence and attentive Listening by the whole assembly* (v. 12).
- *The role of the Jerusalem Church* and “the apostles and elders” (vv. 4,6,22) especially Peter and James.
- *Confirmation of the experiential reality* in the light of the promises of God to the prophets (vv. 15-16).
- *Final decision* and practical tips to integrate the wisdom of the differences.
- *Communication of the outcome* of the meeting by the “apostles and elders with the whole Church” who sent representatives to the churches in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia with a letter (cf. Acts 15:22, 41).
- *Joy and peace experienced* in the community after the decision. “All were delighted by the encouragement it gave them” (v. 31) and the messengers were sent off in peace by the believers (v. 33).

The meeting of Jerusalem was an honest search of the will of God for a community facing crucial questions for which there were no established norms. They shared their concerns and discerned what the Lord was asking them in a new situation. Faith in the Lord and experience of the action of the Holy Spirit in them were crucial to transcend limiting perceptions and uncritical attachment to traditions.

The Church has cherished the practice of discernment in the treasury of her spiritual heritage to which the fathers of the Church and saints added from their experiences. St. Ignatius of Loyola has popularized the practice of discernment of spirits through his spiritual exercises. Unfortunately, Church also suffered divisions, heresies and got manipulated by political forces when she ignored the time-proved principles of spiritual discernment and sought to please the world than her Lord. Today, there is a growing awareness of the need for spiritual discernment in the Church to learn to walk in the Spirit of the Risen Lord in our times.

2.3 Creating a Culture of Community Discernment in our Congregation

In a complex and fast challenging scenario of our world, we need the grace of discernment and develop it as our typical way of finding God’s will for our lives and communities. We become relevant and credible in the Church and the world only by being truly missionaries in the style of our founders and foundresses without domesticating our charism to fit the standards of the world. The grace of discernment and its practice at individual and community levels will “help us recognize God’s timetable, lest we fail to heed the promptings of his grace and disregard his invitation to grow” (GE 169). Through the grace of discernment, we learn to perceive God’s language in prolonged silence of prayer, to interpret the real

meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, calm our anxieties and to tune ourselves to the purpose of our lives and of our congregation, which nobody knows better than God himself (cf. *GE* 171, 172). We should learn to discern and act according to God's heart.

Pope Francis has given us four specific principles which can guide our discernment process. They are the following:

- *Time is greater than space*: This principle helps us to work slowly but surely without obsessed with immediate results and patiently enduring adverse situations or inevitable changes in our plans.
- *Unity prevails over conflict*: This principle helps us not to lose perspective and sense of reality by being trapped in conflict but urge us to build communion amid disagreement. On the ground of solidarity, conflicts, tensions and oppositions can achieve a diversified, and life-giving unity brought out by the Holy Spirit (cf. *EG* 226-230).
- *Realities are more important than ideas*: This principle keeps us from the danger of dwelling only in the world of good ideas and rhetoric and challenge us to face reality. It connects us to the mystery of incarnation, the word becoming flesh. The salvific action of the Spirit in the history of the Church impels us to put the word into practice and make it fruitful through works of justice and charity in continuity to the millennial tradition of the Church (cf. *EG* 231-233).
- *The whole is greater than the part*: This principle helps us to strike the balance between the global and the local dimensions of life so as to avoid all kinds of narrowness and banality and keep our feet on the ground where we are. It urges us to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which benefits all. This principle evokes the integrity of gospel for all people as the Good News in their concrete life situations (cf. *EG* 234-237).

These four principles bring harmony and direction in our search for what is true and good for the life and mission of individuals, the community and the people of God.

3. The Spiritual Warfare in the Human Heart

Discernment cannot be reduced to a technique or a method of making right decisions, though it includes them. It is rather a way of living and acting everyday with God at the center, assuming one's own role and responsibility to fulfil the unique mission in the web of all the relationships that constitute God's creation.

We can understand discernment only in the context of grace and sin. St. Augustine expresses our deepest truth, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord,

and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”³ The tensions of the sinful world are felt in the heart, the indivisible center of our being. St. Paul beautifully explains the conflicting invitations we feel in the heart, “My inmost self agrees and rejoices with the law of God, but I notice in my body another law challenging the law of the spirit, and delivering me as a slave to the law of sin written in my members” (Rom 7:22-23). The solution to these existential dialectics in walking in the way of the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:4-17). Paul reminds us, “Your existence is not in the flesh, but in the spirit, because the Spirit of God is within you” (v.9). “All those who walk in the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God” (v.14). Grace and sin work also in the body of the Church, in religious communities, in families and in any social group. Sin which dwells in the members (Rom 7:17) can be overcome by uniting ourselves to Christ, the head of the body by sharing in the death and resurrection of the Lord (cf. Rom 8:1-2, 17, 35-39).

Making choices according to the Spirit is the way to grow in Christ. The gift of discernment is all the more necessary today, since contemporary life offers immense possibilities for action and distraction with promises to improve life. When we are bombarded with many new trends, with great opportunities and enticing novelties knocking at our door, we have to decide whether it is “new wine brought by God or an illusion created by the spirit of this world or the spirit of the devil” (*EG* 167).⁴ We need the gift of discernment to make Gospel-based decisions, a gift to be developed through cultivating spiritual practices as well as human competencies of mindfulness, emotional integrity and sound judgement.

4. Stages of Discernment – Growing in Christ Consciousness⁵

Our spiritual taste goes through a process transformation through the encounter with the Lord and the gifts of the Spirit. Spiritual masters identify at least two stages of discernment.

The first stage, a purgative stage, takes us from the cares of the world to know God as love, and to discover who we are in God including God’s presence in our own unique history. Awareness of our own sins and God’s forgiveness enable us to have a healthy self-acceptance as sons in the Son, being purified and strengthened by God’s compassionate love. Experience of forgiveness makes us humble, and prevents us from being arrogant, argumentative or accusing. Conversion to God is the core aspect of this stage. A purified mind and heart begin to see and love oneself and others as God Does.

The major struggle in this stage is the recognition of the dynamics of sin and the opening of hearts and minds to the action of God’s grace in our lives. Sin

creates a vision of life outside the logic of God's love and places oneself at the center disconnected from the rest. Other persons and creation are perceived in terms of their usefulness to oneself. The delusion of self-sufficiency and self-assurance prevents authentic freedom and joy of life. It is a delusion to think that we can know and love God and do His will by our own efforts. In a technological and rationalistic culture, discernment may be mistaken for a technique to master the mind of God and control the course of things if humility and openness are not cultivated. The Paschal mystery of Christ reveals the relation between love and suffering.

In the second stage, the period of discipleship, discernment becomes a habit. The Copernican revolution in spirituality is a shift in the perception about the center, from self to God. When the inner eyes are opened, we see God as the source of love and goodness. We know that each person is created in the image of God and we grow in the likeness of Christ by responding to situations with the mind of Christ. Holy Spirit conforms us to Christ by moving our hearts and senses, feelings and reason, to savour God's love and do his will. The Christ consciousness has the spiritual taste to distinguish between what is connatural to living in Christ and what is not.

Those who live in Christ are granted spiritual consolation by the Holy Spirit who works on sentiments and desires. The Spirit enlightens their intellect with reasons for their orientation to God and surrender to his will. Humility and temperance safeguard the pervading joy and peace of the soul. However, at this stage the tempter disguises as angel of light and presents apparent good as real good, falsehood as truth. The enemy seduces with thoughts and feelings as coming from the Holy Spirit but orients the person away from doing God's will. The fall of some spiritual persons into heresy, apostasy or moral lapses often was masterminded by the lure of worldly impulses dressed as the angel of light. Pope Francis often warns the religious and priests of the seduction of spiritual worldliness and clericalism which damages the lives of missionaries.

5. Discernment of the Spirits: Consolation and Desolation

Ignatius Loyola observed his interior movements while he was savouring thoughts of heroic feats of knights and the life of saints. He noticed his inner state of consolation and desolation that signalled his closeness or distance to God's presence. His insights on consolation and desolation are helpful tips for discernment at each stage of discernment.

Consolation is experienced when we draw closer to God and the heart opens to the gifts of deep and abiding joy and greater love. There is more compassion and Christ-like attitudes. Consolation can hold many emotions and experiences

while anchored in the presence of God. For example, in the midst of calumnies and persecution outside, one experiences the consoling presence of God deep in the heart. “The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know” (Blaise Pascal).

Desolation is experienced when we are moving away from God and the heart remains closed to the gifts of the Spirit. In desolation we sense the growth of resentment, ingratitude, selfishness, doubt, fear, dullness, and so on. We become increasingly gloomy and self-obsessed. Either I am resisting God or I am being led away from God by other influences. In desolation, we may tend to alleviate the discomfort and gloom by having recourse to “false consolations” in eating, drinking, sexual encounters or seek distraction in work or social events.

Consolation and desolation are also employed by the enemy spirits. Hence, we should not mistake euphoria of “bubble joy” offered by sensual pleasures for the enduring deep peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Similarly, desolation experienced when the soul is away from God is different from the doubts and fears experienced by a soul in times of trial. This is why we need to discern the spirits at work in us and separate the wheat from the chaff.

We discern by looking at the root of both consolation and desolation and verify where these feelings and thoughts come from and where they take us to: from and towards God or one’s own ego?

6. Some Means for Illumining the Process Discernment

6.1 Prayer and Spiritual Practices

As we have seen that our spiritual journey is beset with many obstacles and false allurements. We need to separate the wheat from the Chaff. Both in the initial as well as the advanced stage of our spiritual journey we need to be alert to the allurements of the worldly spirits and discern the call of God in each circumstance. The most important thing to be in a discerning attitude is our dialogue with God in prayer. We keep Christ at the center and fix our hearts on the Paschal mystery of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection to illumine us during the process.

6.2 Holy Indifference (Spiritual Freedom)

We need to cultivate a holy indifference which prepares us to be open to any alternative which gets clearer as the will of God in the course of the discernment process. We can cultivate this quality by observing the affections and disaffections that arise in us and check if they come from God or not. Do they push us to react emotionally rather than act out of love? When impulses impose themselves under the guise of spiritual, religious, ethical or moral pretensions, and push for actions

bereft of love, they are not arising from the free zone of the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

6.3 Humility, Patience and Temperance

What is of God is humble and never showy; patient and never hasty; calm and never pushy. If we disregard the impulses from the Spirit of God, they wait at the door and knock, but never force open. God does not push for our response but attracts our free surrender. Spiritual goods do not have marketing strategies. Falsehood and superficial realities impose, excite and make theatrical show to attract attention. Hasty decisions taken in an emotionally disturbed situation are not moved by the Spirit of Christ.

6.4 Peace and Joy vs Euphoria

In discernment, we need to distinguish the spiritual impulses that lead to peace and fill us with joy from those external impulses that generate instantaneous excitement and superficial wellbeing. We may feel a passing good feeling of a “bubble joy” when we go to a new place, meet new people, have new experiences or find new opportunities. When the “kick of novelty” vanishes after a short while, we may fall back into loneliness and emptiness. How often people make mistakes by choosing lifestyles, partners, jobs or other important decisions in moments of such “bubble joy”. Experience teaches that missionary vocations resulting from dramatic conversions are unlikely to persevere.

The Joy of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is silent and humble, welling up from the interior without being mediated by external events. It is the pure joy in the Spirit which Jesus himself lived (cf. Lk 10:21) and his apostles were gifted (cf. Gal 5:22; Rom 14:17; Acts 13:52). It is a joy that illumines the night of the soul and gives inner assurance in times of doubts. It is a joy that evokes the memory of God’s goodness and gratitude. The joy of the Spirit eradicates fear and anxiety and gives courage to give witness in times of trial. Serene joy knows when to speak and when to be silent. It stays longer than excitement. Even when it disappears in certain life situations, it will shine like the sun behind the clouds. This silent joy is the terrain from which we can listen to the whispering of the Holy Spirit.

6.5 Good Counsel

Listening to the advice of a wise other is important for good discernment. It will help to see ourselves and the issues from a distance. Again, the enemy spirit can deceive a person by prompting him to avoid wise persons who would invite objective view of things in the light of Gospel values and look for friendly guides who would ratify pleasing choices. Involving superiors in the process of discernment

also assures the openness of the person to God's will. When superiors are the last ones to know a decision in the case of a religious, the discernment is unlikely to be an open search for God's will.

7. Personal Discernment as the Building Block of Community Discernment

The foundation for a good community discernment is that the members habitually practice the art of spiritual discernment in their own personal lives. Here is a schema which can help you to improve your habit of discernment and decision making.

- Bring before the Lord what it is that you want to decide. Pray to the Holy Spirit to enlighten and move you to seek only what is most conducive to God's service and praise.
- Clearly state what you are deciding about. Why did this question arise? State the question briefly and clearly. For example: How should I address this particular issue as a disciple of Christ? What are the options before me, and which one should I choose?
- Consider all the information that you have about the issue and the options before you. If any significant information is missing, try to gather it to enrich your discernment. It is helpful to recognize that you will never have all the information about a matter at any time.
- Prepare your heart to be indifferent towards any option "like a balance at equilibrium without leaning to either side" (St. Ignatius). Pray for the grace to do what God wants of you and keep the ultimate end and goal of our existence clearly before us (to give glory to God and the integral good of humans).
- As you move to choose from the options before you, objectify the options in two ways. First, imagine a previously unknown person who seeks your counsel to respond to God's call in the same situation you are considering. What advice would you give this person? Second, imagine yourself at the end of your life giving an account of your life to Christ. Which of the options would you consider as pleasing to the Lord? You should choose the course of action that would make you feel proud of yourself for having made as a disciple of the Lord.
- When there is no inner clarity about the correct decision to be made, you need to weigh the matter carefully listing the advantages and disadvantages of the choices at hand in relation to living out God's will in your life. You are then to consider which alternatives seem more reasonable and decide according to the weightier motives and not from your selfish inclinations.

- Having come to a decision, turn again to God and ask for signs of God's confirmation that the decision is leading you toward God's service and praise. The usual sign of this confirmation from God is an experience of peacefulness about the decision. The confirmed decision has a feeling of "rightness" about it, and we feel a sense of God's presence, blessing, and love. Feelings of anxiety, heaviness, sadness, and darkness often indicate the opposite.

The method of see, judge and act is incorporated in this approach. When the final decision on the matter pertains to your superior, present your discerned option and the reasons for it and leave the superior to take the decision. Your discernment is only part of the data he would need for the decision he has to discern before the Lord.

8. Practice of Community Discernment

As a Congregation we can walk forth with the joy of the heart when we consciously practice discernment in the Council sessions of governing bodies, local community meetings, assemblies and Chapters. According to our norms, the entire community has the mission of seeking and doing the will of God which the superiors and the other brothers and sisters carry out in unity within their different but complementary functions. The gifts and resources that God has given to each of us is valuable in this process.

How does your community seek the will of God on important issues? Do you share with one another what is going on in your hearts and minds in the light of your personal prayer and reflection? How do you contribute to the collective understanding of the matter being considered?

Collective discernment bears results based on the quality of the information available to the discerners, the commitment to the integrity of the dialogue, the time available for the discernment, and the spiritual freedom of the discerners with respect to the outcome.

8.1. Preparing for Community Discernment

A community which is engaging in collective discernment needs to cultivate some shared values. Here are a few important ones:

- Desire to know and do God's will.
- Trust that God will lead the group.
- Willingness to share and to listen with openness to differing opinions.
- Courage to lay aside personal fears, desires, prejudices, hearsay or group pressure.
- Readiness to let go of the desire to control the outcome.

Collective discernment needs a climate of dialogue and mutual respect and recognition of the image of God in each person irrespective of their limitations. It is not possible to enter into a process of discernment in a climate of rivalry and group fighting.

8.2 *Community Discernment Process in Four Steps (an outline)*⁶

Step 1: Preparing the Group

The quality of community discernment depends on the quality of individual discernment of the members who are willing to place their gifts and insights in common and seek the will of God together. Decision making in community is neither democratic nor autocratic, but “pneumatocratic” (led by the Spirit) which harmoniously combines the hierarchical (role of superiors), collegial (role of consultors) and synodal (responsibility of all) dimensions of a faith community. Active and prayerful participation of all members is important for a fruitful community discernment. There could be different rounds of spiritual conversations to arrive at a discerned decision.

Begin with a Moment of Prayer

Take a few moments of silence. Notice what you carry with you into this time of discernment: your assumptions, agendas, tensions, feelings and thoughts. Is there anything “unfree” in you that prevents surrendering to God’s will whatever it be. The superior/facilitator reads a suitable passage from Bible and the group contemplates it for a while.

- Articulate an accurate question for discernment and clarify the details
- Clarify the question: The superior/facilitator articulates a question that accurately describes what you are seeking through the discernment process. What are we deciding about? Why did this question arise? Describe the issue that you are bringing for discernment. Agree on one-sentence question. Ask if this question most accurately describe what the group is really seeking to discern?
- Identify key stakeholders: Include all significant persons or groups who need to be part of the discernment process. Clarify the process of discernment and the method of spiritual conversation which is different from a political debate. Take the matter together in prayer.
- Establish group objectives: What is our most important goal based on mission, vision, values. Prioritize the objectives.
- Clarify final decision maker: Who finally ratifies the decision? Does it require deliberative or consultative voting in council as conclusion of the discernment? Does the decision pertain to the whole community, the local council, major

superior and his council, or general superior and his council etc?²⁷ Clarify the role of the discerning group in seeking the will of God on the issue being addressed.

Step 2: Gathering of Relevant Data

Gather data relevant to your discernment topic through research, prayer, and dialogue. Consider all the details and implications associated with the discernment issue. Pay attention to all the ways the Spirit is seeking to be revealed through the discernment process. Consult relevant people and sources of information. Understand the data, visualize it and place it into context.

Present Information to the Group

Make sure everyone is included. Visualize and explain data. Allow time for questions and clarifications.

Some Questions for Gathering Relevant Data

- What do we gain and what do we lose by taking or not taking a particular decision? Is the proposed decision an urgent, timely and opportune response to the challenge faced?
- Who are the people and systems who will be affected by the outcome of this decision?
- What are the practical implications of what may be discerned?
- What factors need to be considered for whatever is discerned to become a reality? (Finances, administration, physical location, relationships, systems, etc.)
- When you imagine living out possible outcomes and doing the work associated with those outcomes, where do you sense most strongly energy and life in the Spirit?
- Chew the data in prayer and reflection

The group members take time to hold everything they have discovered so far in prayer. Spend time walking in nature or in silent reflection, contemplating the question for discernment without rushing to resolution. Notice what naturally arises that feels significant. As we sift through all the available information, we pay attention to what is happening in our bodies, minds, and souls. This is where we continually return to our awareness of movements of consolation (drawing nearer to God) and desolation (drawing away from God) as we interact with all the material of discernment. Something may cause you to feel an “ache in your gut” or a tightening in your chest. Another data may lead to a sense of ease, opening, and relaxing. Perhaps a way forward seems to be emerging as a good idea, yet you feel an uncomfortable. Weight within you as you consider an option.

Body: How am I feeling in my body in response to this discernment issue?

Mind: What am I currently thinking about this discernment issue? (Notice where your thoughts seem to wander, get stuck, or form patterns.)

Heart: What is moving deep within as I hold this discernment issue? (Where do I notice movements of consolation or desolation?)

Step 3: Discussion and Provisional Decision

- *Come together to share.* They Listen to everyone's response and look for the deeper layer. They listen actively to one another and share their inner movements. Observe how the information impact you in your deepest self.
- *Look for pros and cons.* The whole group looks at the disadvantages of each option compared to the objective. They then look at the advantages for each option. The holy indifference is the key in this process.
- *Seek emerging consensus.* After holding the relevant data intentionally and prayerfully, notice if a way forward is beginning to emerge in you. Sometimes the best choice becomes gradually apparent. Other times clarity is still obscured, and more time is needed to prayerfully sift through the realities that encompass the discernment issue. Look if there is consensus emerging in the group?

In discerning as a community, it is especially important to note how the community is feeling in response to this tentative choice. Is there a growing consensus or a deepening division? Is the community beginning to feel settled or does the decision feel forced? When the superior (facilitator) gets a feel that the process is pointing towards the direction of a decision enriched by different contributions, he proceeds to articulate the emergent option for final decision.

If there is no consensus emerging in the group, there may be need for further prayerful reflection, gathering of important and missing information and collective discernment. It is always helpful to take a break before continuing with the process in the group.

Give time for Confirmation. Pray for confirmation of the tentative decision. When the community has chosen a tentative decision, a helpful practice is to imagine the possible outcome. Consider that you have already decided and are now living in the reality of that decision. Notice how it feels: Is there energy or dread? Is there a sense of relief or something unresolved?

The goal in discernment is faithfulness to where the Spirit is leading. Seeking confirmation invites us to bring the emerging option into another time of prayer

and discernment. It is the moment we may consult trusted persons, mentors, or experts to get a third-party perspective.

One way of seeking confirmation is to look for the fruits of the Spirit in yourself and in the community. The fruits of the Spirit are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). Now it is time to finalize the option.

Step 4: Decision and Action

- *Make Final Decision.* When process leads to confirmation of the tentative option, the person authorized to make the final decision confirms and communicates to all stakeholders. If it is a consultative decision, the decision of the group is communicated to the authorized person or body with the report of the process of reaching the conclusion. For e.g., local community communicating its discernment on promotion of a member for final profession to the Provincial government.
- *What if no consensus?* If common discernment does not bear fruits after reasonable efforts in communities or councils, congregational norms oblige the respective superior to adopt clear positions, set down proper guidelines and make the decision they prudently consider most fitting. The community is bound to accept by virtue of our religious profession without prejudice to the provisions of particular law to disagree for a greater cause.
- *Now the community moves to the implementation phase.* A decision legitimately made is owned by all irrespective of differences during the process. The whole community commits to implement the decision taken and set deadlines for action steps. It is important to keep communication flowing so that all are informed of the program of implementation as well as each one’s role in it and the deadline for action. It is vital to keep referring to the fundamental reason for the decision.
- Set a date for evaluation to see if we are effectively addressing the issue through the decision being implemented. Know that the process of discernment is ongoing.

Conclusion

As discernment is a style of life seeking to walk in the Spirit of the Lord, the processes explained here makes sense only when our heart seeks the Lord and wants to follow him unconditionally. Our missionary vocation is precisely that of conforming ourselves to the Jesus of the Gospels. In our contemporary world where Church is often scorned for the scandals of her children, we should be firm in faith, love and hope by opting to walk in the Spirit of the Risen Lord as the Christians of the early Church.

For Personal and Community Reflection

(1) Lectio Divina

Choose any of the following passages: Jesus' facing the temptations in the desert (Mt 4:1-11), Jesus resisting Peter's persuasion (Mt 16:21-28), Jerusalem council (Acts 15).

(2) Some Personal Questions for Dialogue

How would you describe the decision-making process in your community? What improvements can the community make in its discerning and decision-making process?

(3) Personal Prayer and Reflexion

Personal prayer and reflection: Make a list of three or four important crossroads in your life and how the decision you made with the grace of God makes you feel grateful and happy about them. What helped you to make those decisions? List two or three decisions you repent having made. What is that you consider went wrong in those decisions? What do you learn from it for your future? Think of a recent event of decision making when you felt consolation and look at its source. Is it from God or from the spirit of the world? Recall another instance when you felt desolation and look at its source. Is it from the spirit of God soliciting compunction or from the bad spirit discouraging you from doing good? Apply this to decisions in community.

Endnotes

¹ *Constitutions of the Claretians*, 28.

² *Gaudete et Exsultate (GE)*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the Call to Holiness in Today's World (March 19, 2018)

³ ST. AUGUSTIN, *Confessions* Bk I § 1.

⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium (EG)*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (November 24, 2013).

⁵ For a detailed description of these stages cf. MARKO IVAN RUPNIK, *Discernment Acquiring the Heart of God* (2006).

⁶ This outline is adapted mainly from two sources: leaflet titled "Discernment in Common" from Jesuit Curia in Rome and a practical guide titled "Personal and Communal Discernment Guide" published by Community of Christ, Missouri, USA, (2018).

⁷ The respective superiors should follow the norms of their own proper law regarding matters that require deliberative votes and consultative votes in council.

RELIGIOUS' OBLIGATION FOR COMMUNITY LIFE AND POPE FRANCIS' *COMMUNIS VITA*¹

Jose Koonampampil, CMF

Introduction

Holy Father Francis has promulgated different *motu proprio*. *Motu proprio* is an apostolic letter given *motu proprio*. *Motu proprio* means given by one's own initiative. The Latin expression *motu proprio* means one's own initiative. So, it is the decision or initiative of the Holy Father. All the documents from Vatican that comes out with the Latin title *motu proprio* are legal in nature. They are either new norms or modification of existing ones. Here, we are going to discuss one of the *motu proprio*, *Communis Vita* promulgated on 19th March, 2019. *Communis Vita* means life in common or community life in a particular religious institute. As the title itself indicates, Pope wants to underline the importance of community life. Community life is not an option but an obligation for every religious. If a religious does not respect the obligation of residing in community, what will be the consequences? This article answers this important question. I shall highlight in this article the following aspects: a) The obligation to live community life; b) the implications with regard to this obligation; c) reasons for which exceptions are granted to live outside one's religious community and finally d) reasons for the dismissal of religious from religious institute related to community life.

Definition of a Religious Institute

The very first canon regarding religious institute (canon 607 #2) defines religious institute as, "A religious institute is a society in which members, according to proper law, pronounce public vows, either perpetual or temporary which are to be renewed,

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however, when the period of time has elapsed, and lead a life of brothers or sisters in common.” Three points are mentioned here as essential constitutive elements of religious institutes and religious life. They are: a) Society; b) Public vows and c) Community life.

A society is the actual gathering of individuals but this is not a spontaneous and casual gathering of individuals on different occasions as it happens in cinema theatre or in railway station or even in the church for some functions, meetings and so on. These gatherings cannot be called as society in legal sense. A society means a group of people voluntarily coming together motivated by a particular purpose and strive to attain some goals and destinations. So, it is not a casual gathering but it is voluntary and deliberate gathering of individuals who are united with certain basic elements. With regard to religious, we say that we are living together because of common charism, common spirituality and common purpose for which we are all gathered into different religious societies, communities or institutes. It is a society that has a lasting bond among the members. This is the first constitutive element of a religious institute.

The second constitutive element of a religious institute is *public vow*. Those who live in a religious institute have to profess public vow. The term “public” is a juridical distinction with regard to the vows or promises made. Those who belong to religious institute have to profess public vow. It is defined that the profession of vows has to be received by the Church representative officially. Hence it is public. Of course, it is a definition or qualification given by the Canon Law of the profession made by the members of religious institute.

The third constitutive element is *community life* or *life in common*. It is not an option but obligation. A religious has to live in a community. It has its own significance as a society. The public vows are also somehow linked to the obligation of the members of religious institute to live in community. The vows are based on the evangelical counsels chastity, poverty and obedience. We shall also see later how these evangelical counsels have a specific relevance with community life.

The Role and Importance of Superiors in Community Life

The first and foremost implication on the obligation to live life in common is that “a religious must live in a legitimately established house under the authority of a superior designated according to the norm of law. Each house is to have at least

an oratory in which the Eucharist is to be celebrated and reserved so that it is truly the center of the community (can. 608). So, the obligation to live community life, to lead a community life and to live in a community, etc. imply to live in a religious house; a religious house that is legally and legitimately constituted. There are various norms regarding the legitimate constitution of a religious house. It means that with the prior written permission of the local diocesan bishop, the competent major superior of the institute constitutes a religious house. Every religious house should have its own superior or leader and the obligation to lead the community life also implies to live in a house constituted legally under the religious superior legitimately appointed and designated by the competent authority.

Another element of religious house is the necessity to have at least an oratory i.e., what we call as chapel in which the Holy Eucharist is celebrated and it is preserved for adoration and prayer. These are also constitutive elements of a religious house. There are attempts to do away with the role of the religious superior in some quarters. They say that all are equal and want to change the terminology from superior to community leader or something else like that. But the Canon Law speaks about the power of the superior as the one who guides the community. Whatever terms that we use, he/she is the superior. And those who live in the community have the obligation to live under the superior. When we say under the superior, it does not eliminate the individual freedom or the individuality of the members. But, the role of the superior is to promote and favour the common good of the community together with every member. There are beautiful canons that speak about the role of religious superior, mainly of spiritual animation. It also implies sometimes corrections even taking very serious and hard decision for the good of the community. The only motive for exercising the authority of the superior is to foster and promote the good of the community as well as the good of the individual based on the common charism and the constitutions.

When we say that the community is under the superior, we have to understand that the superior does not have an absolute and uncontrolled authority. The superior has to exercise his/her authority according to the law and with the conviction that the authority comes from God through the Church for the favour of his/her own community and the community members. Otherwise, the role of the superior is meaningless. It is coming from God through the Church for the benefits of the community and the community members. Therefore, a religious house is not a simple residence, a lodge or a dormitory. We know people who work or do some activities outside come back to a lodge or to a dormitory or to any institutions of this

type and take rest, sleep and the next day again go back to work. A religious house is not like that. It has another structure and another essential nature. A religious house is completely different from a lodge or a dormitory that provides accommodation for the individuals who are occupied with some sort of activities.

A religious house and the superior with his animating role should facilitate the ongoing transformation of the community members and the community. It is not only the responsibility of the superior but every member has to cooperate with the superior in putting into effect this ongoing transformation. Thus, a religious house is not a simple residence for people but it has its own canonical identity and personality. The members assigned to a particular religious community live community life on the basis of a legal and affective bond arising from the religious profession and the common charism and the spirituality shared in common. It is not casual coming together but based on a substantial element of common charism and common vocation.

Relationship between the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity and Community

What is the relation of the vow of chastity with community? We renounce to have natural family through the vow of chastity. Vow of chastity is not negative in nature but it has a specific purpose for the religious. Positively, it is to follow Jesus Christ more closely imitating the same life that the Lord had lived in this world. Closer imitation of Jesus Christ is the basic reason for the religious in professing the vow of chastity. Thereby, we also renounce all the positive elements of a natural family. Natural family is substituted by our religious community. What does it mean? It means that the community should help each one live the vow of chastity properly. We are not renouncing our natural affection towards persons. We are not renouncing the desire to live together with somebody in a right way. Instead of natural family, we have our religious family and that religious family of each member is to help that member to live the vow of chastity. Often, when do not find satisfaction in our religious life and in our community life, there is a danger that somebody goes out in search of love and affection.

We all need love. Each religious is a person. Even when we have defects, even when we make mistakes, we need corrections; we need understanding; we need support of one another. In a normal family, the members usually accept one another and support one another in spite of their weaknesses. Similarly, in religious communities the members should support and help one who is in difficulty and going through a crisis. Thus, even the vow chastity has important relevance to our

community life. The community has a role to play in living faithfully the vow of chastity.

Relationship between the Evangelical Counsel of Poverty and Community

The vow of poverty is also linked to community living. What is the vow of poverty? It is not to live in misery. Canon very clearly specifies that we live with whatever is necessary and not whatever that we want. It is a way of empowering the community. Whatever we have and whatever we are, we place at the disposal of the community and the community members. Even if somebody is lazy in the community, she/he can contribute whatever she/he can. Even this is the expression of poverty. One benefits from the work and contribution of others even if he/she is not ready to contribute to the good of the community and the community members.

Relationship between the Evangelical Counsel of Obedience and Community

Obedience is free surrendering of our own individual will to the will of the superior. When we speak in this way, some people may feel very uncomfortable. We can speak for hours regarding the real meaning of obedience. In a brief way, we can say that obedience is an attempt to find out the will of God through a common discernment. Whenever there are points or things which are not clear, we try to reach a conclusion regarding what to do, how to do and so on through a common process of discernment. Here the superior has a leading role to play. It is not imposing his/her own views, ideas or decisions because the superior exercises her/his authority that comes from God. It is not a human authority. It is not a personal authority. It is a role entrusted to his/her through the Church because the Church prescribes how a superior is to be designated and appointed. The Church also prescribes the role and the way of doing of a superior. Therefore, the obedience that is required is a common discernment. A common discernment does not mean that we discuss and discuss on a particular issue and finally we reach nowhere and each one goes his/her own way at the end. This is not the common discernment.

I can share with you one of my experiences. When one of my superiors told me the real meaning of obedience that is when a superior demands from you something and that you are not convinced, both you and the superior should be ready to have a dialogue. Even after the dialogue if you do not agree the point, then you have the freedom to go to the higher superior and to the supreme moderator. If all of them are of the same opinion as the local superior, then you have to obey. There is no choice after going through all these processes. And this is religious obedience. This is the

price of the vow of obedience that we have professed. Even after all these processes you are still not convinced yet you have to obey. Here you obey not because the superior says but the superior has a role in the Church and in the institute and he/she exercises it and you because of your vow of obedience make that decision your own positively and implement the same even if you are not convinced. And this is the virtue of obedience. I always say that the vow of obedience is not for the weak. If somebody is weak and just because of it, he/she does whatever the superior says, then it has no merit at all. But after the process of discernment even if you are not convinced, you make it your own decision and implement it, that needs courage, strength and that brings you the merit and the fruits of the virtue of obedience.

Dispensation from Community Living

In the Church, there are many laws and sometimes it is difficult to observe the laws. If a law is just a practical law and not based on the divine law but purely an ecclesiastical law, the Church has also introduced a merciful system of dispensation. Dispensation can be defined as permission for not obeying the law or for not implementing the law. There are classical elements defined as dispensations. We can speak of dispensations from religious vows when a religious wants to leave consecrated life, he/she has to ask for dispensation. It means that one who has made the profession is obliged to live according to the profession. That is the law. Humanly speaking, we can say it is a legal obligation. But there can be some cases or some individuals for whom it becomes very difficult to live a life according to the profession made. Sometimes obeying the law may be more harmful than not obeying the law. In such situation, the Church mercifully gives the dispensation for not obeying the law.

Though not living in a community is described as dispensation, it is actually permission. But generally, it can be placed in the category of dispensation. Community life is a constitutive element of religious life as we have seen above. It is not an option for the religious but legal obligation. However, there could emerge some situations in which the religious needs to be absent from his/her community. Though there is an obligation to live in the community, there could be some circumstances in which a religious may ask for a permission to be absent from the community or one is simply absent from the community without following the process. Canon Law speaks generally of two kinds of absences: legal or legitimate and illegal. Legitimate means with the permission of the superior. Illegal means somebody goes on his/her own without asking for permission as if religious

community is a lodge. In a religious context, it is a legitimate absence or it could be illegal. It is legitimate when we have the permission of the superior and it is illegal when somebody goes away from the community without the due permission of the superior.

Canon 665 # 1 prescribes specifically about the obligation of the religious to live in the religious house. It further speaks about the legitimate absence from the religious house.

Observing common life, religious are to live in their own religious house and are not to be absent from it except with the permission of their superior. If it concerns a lengthy absence from the house, however, the major superior, with the consent of the council and for a just cause, can permit a member to live outside a house of the institute, but not for more than a year, except for the purpose of caring for ill health, of studies, or of exercising an apostolate in the name of the institute (can. 665 # 1).

Religious has to live in their own religious house. What does it mean? By this, he/she has to live in his/her own religious house to which he/she is duly assigned by the competent superior. As we know, each religious has his/her own religious community. He/she is assigned and belongs to a particular community. A religious may have a religious house of their own institute nearby. But it is not his/her community in the strict sense. Of course, as a member of the same institute, he/she may have some rights and obligation in the nearby community of the same institute when he/she visits. But the neighbouring community is not his/her own religious community though it belongs to the same institute. Any house of the same religious institute is not one's own religious community. He/she is a mere guest there. One cannot choose to live in a religious community of his/her own choice in the same religious institute without accepting the transfers given by the legitimate superior. If the transfer is decided definitively and the religious concerned refuses to move to the new community, then he/she is illegitimately absent from his/her community even though he/she remains in his/her present community. His/her own community is the community to which he/she has already been assigned by the legitimate superior.

Reasons for Living Outside One's Community Legitimately

The major superior, with the consent of the council and for a just cause, can permit a member to live even outside a house of the institute for one year. But there are some exceptions. The exceptions are caring for ill health, of studies, or of exercising an apostolate in the name of the institute (cf. Can. 665 # 1). There are three exceptions. With regard to the apostolate, it is not an individual's apostolate but an apostolate carried out by an individual in the name of the institute. It is the

institute which entrusts this responsibility to the individual member. On the other hand, if the individual carries out his/her own ministry with his/her own initiative without proper approval from the institute, in this case, his/her absence from the community is illegal.

Leave of Absence

Major superior with the consent of his/her counsellors can grant permission for the absence from the community up to one year which we call “leave of absence”. Beyond that, the major superior cannot grant except for the three exceptional cases mentioned above. Leave of absence and even longer duration for the three exceptional cases mentioned above do not affect the rights and obligation of the religious. They remain fully hundred percent as religious in their institutes. All their rights and obligations are intact. The only exception is with regard to their community life in their own institute. They continue to enjoy their active and passive voice in the congregation. They can participate in the voting by voting (active voice) as well as they can receive votes implying that they can also be elected (passive voice).

What could be the reasons for the leave of absence? The reasons could be some sort of doubt regarding their vocation, a small crisis that a person wants to reflect about his/her own life in a spirituality centre away from a religious context of one’s own institute’s community in a free atmosphere. Leave of absence need not be very negative but it is a personal, psychological and spiritual need of the person. In some countries, some religious make use of this provision of leave of absence to go home in order to take care of their ailing and aging parents or siblings when there is a real need.

Exclaustration

Another type of absence that is more serious and negative is the exclaustration. It comes from the Latin root *ex-clausura* which implies the permission to go out of the cloister. It has also legal and canonical meaning. It is also a permission given to a religious to be away from one’s own religious community or institute. Exclaustration can be of two types: voluntarily *requested* by a religious and *imposed* by the major superior. Canons 686 and 687 have the basic norms of exclaustration.

Voluntary Exclaustration

Exclaustration by voluntary request is granted by the competent internal authority of the institute at the request of the interested religious. But the internal

authority cannot grant it for more than three years. So, requested exlaustration can be granted up to three years by the internal authority of the institute. This could also be motivated by serious crisis about one's vocation but without actually thinking of leaving the institute. But it is a temporary leaving from the institute in order to think about one's own vocation and one's own life. In the same way attending to some other personal or family exigencies, one may request exlaustration. The internal authority of the institute is the supreme moderator or the superior general.

With the consent of the council, the supreme moderator for a grave cause can grant an indult of exlaustration to a member professed by perpetual vows, but not for more than three years, and if it concerns a cleric, with the prior consent of the ordinary of the place in which he must reside. To extend an indult or to grant it for more than three years is reserved to the Holy See, or to the diocesan bishop if it concerns institutes of diocesan right (can. 686 #1).

What is the procedure if someone wants exlaustration for more than three years? Three years is the maximum that can be granted by the supreme moderator either together at a stretch or with intervals. The supreme moderator can grant exlaustration for three years in the life of a religious. Beyond that, it has to go to the ecclesiastical authority. The ecclesiastical authority is the Holy See for those institutes, which are of pontifical right and the diocesan bishop of the principal house of the institute namely the generalate is the ecclesiastical authority for the institutes of diocesan right. For a cleric, there is a clause which says "with the prior consent of the ordinary of the place in which he must reside". This is connected with the exercise of the ministry. Without the prior consent of the bishop, a religious priest or deacon cannot be sent to a particular place.

At the petition of the supreme moderator with the consent of the council, exlaustration can be imposed by the Holy See on a member of an institute of pontifical right, or by a diocesan bishop on a member of an institute of diocesan right, for grave causes, with equity and charity observed (can 686 #3).

Imposed Exlaustration

The imposed exlaustration is granted only by the ecclesiastical authority i.e., the Holy See for the institutes of pontifical right and diocesan bishop of the principal house of the institute namely the generalate for the institutes of the diocesan right. The superior general with the consent of his/her council makes the request to the competent ecclesiastical authority to impose exlaustration on one of their members. It is not an automatic concession by the ecclesiastical authority. The Holy See or the diocesan bishop has to make a discernment of its necessity and the presence of valid reasons for imposing exlaustration.

What could be the reasons for imposing excommunication? The reason is incorrigible character of a religious. In religious life, we find some members who don't care at all for anyone including the superior general and the provincial superior. They go always in their own way with utter contempt for community commitment and living. They normally have no affective link with the community. They are not ready to participate in the activities of the community. They may have their own personal activities and commitments and so on. Incorrigible character here implies unwillingness to obey the legitimate superiors. They deliberately and continuously disobey the legitimate superiors. They will have exaggerated individualistic attitudes. They may take up private initiatives, activities, etc. without any communication with the legitimate religious superior. The title religious is kept just for the convenience and to enjoy the privileges. When there is this incorrigible attitude in a member and the refusal to abide by the community norms, rules and the style of life, as the last resort the superior general may ask the ecclesiastical superior to impose excommunication. There was a case of a religious who was imposed excommunication recently as the first step as he had taken so much loans without anybody's knowledge for reasons only he knew. So, he became free and he could answer to those liabilities that he had incurred by his own personal initiatives. These are two types of excommunication that the Canon Law speaks of.

Qualified Excommunication

There is another kind of excommunication that is for clerics though we don't find in the *Code of Canon Law* but practised in the Holy See. Some institutes ask for it. It is called qualified excommunication. It implies that the excommunicated cleric is asked not to exercise priestly ministry. This is done only for a very serious reason when someone is in a very serious crisis. He is given total freedom to live practically as a layman and to decide about his future. Imposed excommunication is granted when there is at least some hope of coming back. When there is no hope, one may go for dismissal.

Dismissal from Religious Life

This is the most serious punishment that can be inflicted upon a religious. Generally, we can speak about three types of dismissal. They are:

a) Ipso facto Dismissal

It is automatic. It is a Latin expression meaning 'by the fact itself'. We also use other terms like *ipso iure* or *latae sententiae* regarding other punishments. In

this case, the dismissal is automatic in nature by the fact itself. When a religious commits some violations or some delicts, the law decides that by that fact itself, he/she is dismissed. There is no need of the intervention from the superior. The intervention from the superior is subsequent to that just to declare that so and so is *ipso facto* or automatically dismissed from the institute for particular reason. *Ipsa iure* also has more or less the same meaning. It means by the law itself. It is the law that itself dismisses not the ecclesiastical authority or the religious authority.

b) Mandatory or Obligatory Dismissal

If certain delicts are committed by the religious, he/she must be dismissed. This is not automatic. Here, the superior has to act and follow the procedure. And the procedure is necessary in order to make sure that the delict has been committed and the person is fully guilty and he/she deserves to be dismissed. If the delict is confirmed and the guilt of the person is also confirmed, then the superior does not have the freedom to dismiss or not to dismiss but has to dismiss. That is mandatory.

c) Discretionary Dismissal

The religious superior may proceed for dismissal for serious violation of religious obligations after evaluating the violations and the responsibility or guilt of the person. The superior together with the council discusses and decides whether to dismiss or not to dismiss. It can be serious enough to dismiss or sometimes they may decide to give him/her another chance according to the gravity or seriousness of the case.

Cases of *ipso facto* Dismissal

For *ipso facto* dismissal, the *Code of Canon Law* Promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1983, has foreseen only two cases. They are: a) when the religious has notoriously defected from the catholic faith. It means that a religious has abandoned catholic faith and catholic Church as the religious life is the part of the catholic Church. It is lived in the context of the catholic Church. If a religious leaves the catholic Church and joins another Christian sect or a non-Christian group, it is a notorious defection from the catholic Church. Notorious defection means something that can be proved.

The second case is contracted or attempted marriage. There is a difference between contracted marriage and attempted marriage. They are juridical terms. Contracted marriage is a valid marriage. How can a religious contract a valid marriage? Temporarily professed religious can contract a valid marriage even without dispensation. It is illicit but if someone has left religious community life and goes somewhere and celebrates marriage in the Church without the knowledge

of the priest of his/her status, that marriage is valid. In this case, *ipso facto*, this religious who contracts valid marriage is dismissed. An attempted marriage is a religious who has celebrated invalid marriage. It means that a perpetually professed religious away from the community in an unknown place celebrates a canonical marriage. The parish priest as well as other faithful do not know the fact that this particular person is a finally professed religious. Final profession is an impediment that nullifies the marriage. That is the reason the marriage of this type is known as attempted marriage because from the Church view point there is no marriage at all. It is only an attempted marriage. For these two cases, *ipso facto* dismissal is prescribed in the *Code of Canon Law*.

Pope Francis' Communis Vita and the Dismissal of Religious

With the *moto proprio Communis Vita*, Pope Francis has added a third case by adding a third number to canon 694 #1. It reads:

has been illegitimately absent from the religious house, pursuant to can. 665 §2, for 12 consecutive months, taking into account that the location of the religious himself or herself may be unknown.

Here there were a lot of confusion when the document came out. It is not to be understood that one-year illegal absence causes *ipso facto* dismissal. What it means is one's illegal absence from the community and nobody knows where the religious is. His/her location is not known to the superiors. And as the part of the procedure, the religious superior should try to trace the person by all means possible and convince the person to come back to the community and resume his/her religious life by advice, invitation, admonition so on. If a problematic person goes away and the superior says, it is ok and waits for one year and applies this new provision, it will not be effective. One cannot apply this provision like this. The superior has the responsibility to seek the person who has abandoned the community and bring him back.

Then, there is another clause regarding discretionary dismissal that says if a religious is illegally absent from the community for six months and everybody knows where he/she is, in that case the automatic dismissal will not apply. Here after, six months after advice, invitation, admonition, etc., if the person does not come back, he/she can be dismissed by the superior through the normal process. Only six months' absence is required to begin the process of dismissal.

On the other hand, *Communis Vita* is applicable only when the location of the person is unknown. It is very important because in order to proceed normally to dismiss

a religious, we have to follow the procedure. Procedure implies communication with the person concerned, inviting him to come back, admonishing him/her, giving canonical warning and so on. These are the normal procedure. If we do not know the location, we cannot apply the normal procedure. There are some cases where the location of the religious is not known. That is why Pope Francis gave this *moto proprio* by which if the illegal stay is more than twelve months and the normal procedure cannot be followed, *ipso facto* provision can be applied. The time begins once the superior makes the declaration that the person cannot be located after making all the efforts to trace his/her. We have to count from that day to another twelve months.

It is based on the obligation of the religious to live in the community under the superior. If somebody does not care at all and does not take effort to get in touch with the superior, does not want even to get the dispensation, if he/she wants to go away and the superior is helpless in communicating with the person, at that stage the superior makes the declaration that the particular religious cannot be located and after twelve months, the superior together with the council can evaluate the situation and make the declaration. It is not a declaration to dismiss but it is a declaration to make aware of the situation of a particular religious and by the provision of *Communis Vita*, that person is *ipso facto* dismissed.

The Pope has also introduced another condition to apply this provision. The whole documentation of the matter together with the declaration of the superior with the council has to be sent to the Holy See or to the diocesan bishop if it is of diocesan right for verification. This is done to avoid arbitrary application of this provision by some superiors. Only after getting the confirmation from the Holy See, it can be made public and a religious concerned can be *ipso facto* dismissed.

It seems that religious who were absconding, came out informing the superior about their whereabouts after the publication of this document. There were some who asked for dispensation since dismissal is seen as a punishment whereas dispensation is a grace or a privilege granted by the ecclesial authority.

Endnote

¹ This article is a rough replica of the online lecture given by Dr. Jose Koonampampil, CMF on 4th August, 2021 as part of *Consecrated Life Lecture Series – 3* organised by ICL: Institute of Consecrated Life – Sanyasa, Bangalore. The original lecture can be accessed in YT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9HpZhRC40k>

AUTHENTICUM CHIRSMATIS ON ESTABLISHING INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE¹

Jose Koonamparambil, CMF

Introduction

Today we shall see the novelty or the revision regarding the erection of new institutes of the consecrated life and societies of the apostolic life that has been enacted by Pope Francis and that has come out on 1st of November 2020 through the apostolic letter issued *motu proprio* with the name *Authenticum chrismatis*. *Motu proprio* is the category of the documents by the Holy Fathers through which they introduce new laws. The recent *motu proprio Authenticum chrismatis* is the document through which this particular ecclesiastical law has been completely revised. It is just one canon but it has been completely revised. There is a parallel document, *motu proprio Ab initio* for the oriental churches. I shall explain only about the Latin Code and the revision of the Latin Canon. There is not much difference but only slight difference for the competence of the patriarchs and the major Archbishops. Otherwise, this is same for the both the *Code of Canon Law*.

***Perfectae Caritatis* (19)**

In the same *motu proprio*, the Pope himself mentions two previous ecclesiastical documents. Let us see what they are. One is from the Second Vatican Council, the document *Perfectae caritatis* that is on “Religious life and Religious Institutes”, number 19. And there also one particular aspect has been underlined that is the unnecessary and useless proliferation of new institute should be controlled in substance. Of course, it speaks generally about the positive aspects but also this concern is expressed in this document. The no. 19 begins with this sentence: “When the question of founding new religious communities arises, the necessities or at least the many useful services that they promise must be seriously weighed”. So, this

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is an invitation to the ecclesiastical authorities mainly the diocesan bishop that when a new foundation is erected or founded, their necessity and its usefulness in the Church, of course at the beginning in the local Church should be properly evaluated. otherwise, communities may be needlessly brought into being which are useless or which lacks sufficient resources. The words are rather strong. These are elements that should be avoided while evaluating the opportunity or the necessity for erecting or founding a new community.

Vita Consecrata (12)

Another later document that's mentioned in the *motu proprio* is *Vita consecrata*. That is the first synodal exhortation by Pope St. John Paul II. In no. 12 of this document, more or less the same idea is expressed or repeated. The perennial youth of the Church or ever remaining youthfulness of the Church continues to be evident even today. It starts with a positive note. In recent years, following the Vatican Council II, new or renewed forms of the consecrated life have arisen. After the Vatican Council II, in the light of the Council's reflection and the documents that came out, there was an attempt and there is an attempt even to find new forms of consecrated life. There are different groups that have come up; some have disappeared and others are continuing and other new communities may also come up in the future. But at the same time, the document mentions that in many cases there are institutes similar to those already existing but inspired by new spiritual and apostolic impulses.

Their vitality 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 their proliferation of the institute similar to one another with the consequent risk of harmful fragmentation into excessively small groups. This tendency we see in many places. Even if there are institutes of consecrated life of diocesan right or pontifical right existing in the local Church, there are sometimes attempts by some presumed founders to start something very similar. All they do is just making some changes in the name, making some changes in the official dress or religious dress and more or less the same work is done and more or less same spirit is continued. That is what the Church calls "proliferation of useless or unnecessary new religious communities". And this has sometimes created problems in the local Church; unnecessary rivalry between the groups and confusions among the faithful.

Revised Code of Canon Law (1983)

The above two documents are already mentioned in the latest revision of the

Canon Law regarding this particular aspect that is canon no. 579. We shall now just concentrate on this particular canon and the main topic of this article is the revision of this canon. Who can erect a new institute of consecrated life? Even when I was teaching classes or speaking with the religious or some other group, they often make the question who can erect validly or licitly a new institute or a new society of apostolic life of diocesan right and what the procedure is. We shall answer these questions in this paper.

According to the present *Code of Canon Law* promulgated in 1983 to which belongs the particular canon (579) which says, “Diocesan bishops each in his own territory can erect institutes of consecrated life by formal decree provided that the Apostolic See has been consulted”. Basically, this is the ecclesiastical norm regarding the erection of a new institute of consecrated life. So this canon is rather short but each phrase has got its own very specific canonical meaning. So, it is important to understand this specific canonical meaning.

It speaks about the *diocesan bishop*. So, diocesan bishop each in his own territory can erect institutes of consecrated life. Who is a diocesan bishop? A diocesan bishop is the one who is entrusted with the pastoral care of a particular diocese, a local Church and a diocese or a local Church is defined in the *Code of Canon Law* as a portion of faithful, people of God entrusted to the care of the bishop. Of course, it has its own territory but the main aspect is the persons, the faithful. The bishop who is entrusted with this care can erect a new institute of consecrated life or a new society of apostolic life of diocesan right. So, it is only the diocesan bishop who can erect validly or licitly a new institute or a society. What does it mean? No other person can erect validly a new institute. No auxiliary bishop, no emeritus bishop, no apostolic/diocesan administrator can validly erect. *Auxiliary bishop* is a bishop who is given to a particular diocese in order to assist the diocesan bishop. He does not have any independent responsibility of a diocese. He is to help or to assist the main bishop, the diocesan bishop. He may have specific rather autonomous responsibility like vicar general or episcopal vicar and so on. But he is not the diocesan bishop. The same way an *emeritus bishop* is a retired bishop. Usually at the age of 75 years, every diocesan bishop has to present his resignation to the Holy Father. When it is accepted and published, then he is no more the diocesan bishop and he is just the emeritus bishop and such a bishop cannot erect a new institute or a new society.

I would like to distinguish between these two words: to *found an institute* and *erect an institute*. *Founding* an institute means, that is by the founder or the foundress who receives the charism, who receives the vocation, who receives the inspiration to start a new group. He starts in the beginning, may be with a very small group,

just a couple of persons. But it has to be later accepted and acknowledged and approved by the ecclesiastical authority. And the *erection* is the canonical act by the ecclesiastical authority through which the Church officially approves a new group as an institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life. This distinction has to be kept in mind.

An *apostolic* or *diocesan administrator* could be a bishop of nearby diocese when the diocese is vacant or the college of consultors elects a priest among them to administer the diocese when the diocese is vacant. such an administrator, apostolic or diocesan administrator cannot erect validly a new institute of consecrated life. So, the concept of diocesan bishop has to be clearly understood and nobody else can erect except him.

The second concept in this particular canon is *in his own territory*. That also is very important because the competence or the authority of the diocesan bishop is restricted to the territory of his own diocese. No bishop can exercise any authority/ jurisdiction usually outside the territory because there will be another bishop there. That is his responsibility. So, a bishop can do that only in his own territory. In this particular point, we have come across some cases where neither the founder nor the foundress nor the bishops were very conscious about it these things. We have come across some foundations; for example, started in India and the diocesan bishop was not ready to approve it and the founder goes in search of some bishop and he finds somebody either in Sri Lanka or in Tanzania. So, the whole group is in primarily in India and the formal decree of recognition is given by a bishop in Tanzania or in Sri Lanka. We have come across another similar situation in Africa. In a particular country, the Bishop's Conference has taken a stand that new foundations are not to be encouraged unless the authenticity of the charism and so on are very clear. So, the founder is going in search of bishops elsewhere in Africa. Sometimes they find a bishop who is ready to approve but that bishop does not know where this group is, what the charism is, whether they have a charism and so on. So, these are all normally we have come across, and this also in a context why the Pope has revised this particular canon. So, "in his own territory" means when a group emerges in a local Church, it is the responsibility of that particular bishop of that particular place who has to evaluate it and make a discernment whether this has to be, should be or could be approved as a new religious community of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life.

We sometimes come across expressions like patron bishop or a benevolent bishop and these expressions are not canonical in this particular context because it speaks only about the diocesan bishop who is the ecclesiastical authority. The

patron bishop or benevolent bishop, we hear often being used but that is not the correct or the canonical expression. In the same way, usually we usually speak about the benevolent bishop when some priests are looking for somebody who will accommodate them for ministry and so on but not for the erection of a new religious or a community or a society.

Then the other word is *erect and institute by a formal decree* that more or less say how or what the procedure is. So how to erect an institution by a formal decree? The bishop has to make a formal decree with the date, place, his own signature and official seal, signed also by the chancellor. That is the formality. What is the content of the official decree? The bishop has to explain when it was founded; where it was founded, who the founder is; the brief history of it, the present situation and then brief mentioning of the charism and their spirituality. Then, as a result of his discernment, he officially through this decree erects this institute or the society. So, this is a formal act of jurisdiction by a diocesan bishop. This is the formality and definitely the copy of this official original copy goes to the group as such, the new foundation, the new community; its authenticated copy should be preserved in the diocesan archive and a copy should be sent to the Holy See. From mission territories, it goes to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples or what is usually called the *Propaganda Fide*. Certainly, the Holy See has a certain documentation regarding this new foundation and this document is a basic document of the history of this particular group.

The Nature of the Consultation before the Revision

And the fourth point and that is very important because that is the point that they Holy Father has modified. The canon says, provided that the *apostolic see has been consulted*. So, this is a condition for erecting a new institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life that bishop before issuing the decree of erection has to consult the apostolic see. The interpretation of this particular clause has created some confusions. I mean not as a concept but the practical point of view. In the canonical sense, what does it mean to consult? Those of you who are council members, major superiors or who know how the council has to function and so on, may know it better because I refer back canon no. 127 of the *Code of Canon Law*. The first paragraph says, “When it is established by law that in order to place acts a superior needs the consent or counsel of some college or group of persons, the college or group must be convoked according to the norm of can. 166 unless, when it concerns seeking counsel only, particular or proper law provides otherwise. For such acts to be valid, however, it is required that the consent of an absolute

majority of those present is obtained or that the counsel of all is sought". That means whenever a group has to be consulted or whenever the consent of the group has to be obtained, there should be convocation of the group to discuss with it and to get their advice or to get the consent.

The second paragraph of the same canon (127) says, "When it is established by law that in order to place acts a superior needs the consent or counsel of certain persons as individuals". This is more important for us. Number one of the second paragraph (127 § 2) says, "if a consent is required, the act of a superior who does not seek consent of those persons or who acts contrary to the opinion of all or any of them is invalid". In the revised text as we have in the *motu proprio*, this particular number is very important because if an authority has to get the consent of a person or a number of persons or has to get the advice or a council of a persons or a number of persons if consent is required and if the authority does not seek the consent or goes against the consent, that act is invalid. At this particular moment for us, the more important is the second number. It says, "if counsel is required, the act of a superior who does not hear those persons is invalid; although not obliged to accept their opinion even if unanimous, a superior is nonetheless not to act contrary to that opinion, especially if unanimous, without a reason which is overriding in the superior's judgment" (127 § 2, 2). If council is required that is advice the act of a superior who does not hear those persons is invalid. Here, we have come across cases where superiors have not understood the real meaning of this clause sometimes I myself have come across some instances where the superior says after all its not consent, only the advice of the council is required and even if they give council that's contrary to my discernment I can go ahead as the law permits. So, I can go ahead without getting the advice because I am determined. That attitude and that procedure makes the decision invalid. That is paragraph 2 of canon 127. If council is required the act of a superior who does not hear those persons is invalid. That means if a superior does not listen to those persons who are supposed to be heard, then that act is invalid although not obliged to accept their opinion even if unanimous. So, the religious superior knows very well that when the major superior convokes the council and gets the advice, he or she can go against even the unanimous counsel or the opinion of the council members if the law requires only their advice or consultation. But if he or she does not listen to them, and then his or her right could be invalid. That is what the canon says. So, this is the canon and as such it is very clear but as far as the application of the canon no 579 that provided that the Apostolic See has been consulted. That was a condition established in the canon 579. Diocesan bishop can erect a new institute of consecrated life and also a

society of apostolic life in his own territory through a formal decree provided he has already consulted the Apostolic See.

If we explain the canon 579 in the light of 127, the consultation is obligatory otherwise it is invalid. But if the Holy See says “no”, then it is better not to proceed. Even then the bishop could go because when the council is required, the superior is not obliged to accept it or go along with it. That is the general interpretation. But in the Holy See, especially in the Congregation for the Institutes for Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the long tradition was to interpret it in a different way because theologically we say the bishops are successor of the apostles, they have their own God given responsibility, God-given rights so we should not put an obstruction to their discernment. So the traditional interpretation given by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life was that even if the diocesan bishop does not consult the Holy See before issuing the decree of erection of a new institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life, his action was licit and valid. So that goes against the general principle of the canon law but that was the practice. Initially when I started to deal with similar cases, I was a bit confused. Then I got some advice from the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. They told me that that was the decade long tradition in the congregation to consider as valid even if the bishop has not consulted the Apostolic See before erecting a new institute. So, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples too followed the same principle. From mission countries, new institutes of consecrated life are erected and when the concerned bishop consults the Holy See, he consults the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

The Need for the Revision of Canon 579

Now what is the need for the revision the Canon 579? This was the situation. The canon was clear provided the bishop has consulted the Holy See and even when he does not consult or even after consulting, he goes against the opinion of the Holy See, everything is ok and valid, but there was another clause and legal practice in the Holy See that if the Holy See sees that there are no basic elements that approves the new foundation or many basic elements are lacking, then the Holy See could eventually invalidate the decree. It implies that the decree is valid but it can cancel the decree.

I remember one case where the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples has exercised this competence. It was a group started by a sister who was dismissed

from her Congregation and then the diocesan bishop accepted her and asked her to start a new group. When we examined the whole documentation, there were a lot of irregularities and the bishop had already approved it with the formal decree but the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples has declared that the decree is invalid through its decision. So that possibility was there. but usually, it was accepted as valid. This was discussed especially by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic life because all over the world, not only mission countries even in the Western Countries, there were some foundations that have come up and some bishops have approved them or erected them without a minimum of necessary elements. It created a lot of problems for the local church and later for the universal Church. An institute of diocesan right or the congregation of diocesan right or the society of diocesan right, canonically we say that it is a new group or institute approved by the Church through the diocesan bishop and it is specially entrusted to the pastoral care of the diocesan bishop. It does not mean that this is a diocesan reality. By the very fact that the diocesan bishop issues a valid formal decree of erection, it becomes an institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life of diocesan right. But it belongs to the universal Church. Some consecrated persons used to say that they are from diocesan institute or diocesan congregation as if it is a diocesan reality. It is not proper to say that it is a diocesan institute because canonically there is nothing like diocesan institute in this context. It is the institute of diocesan right that has a wider meaning. Of course, the *Code* says that they are entrusted to the diocesan bishop in the name of the universal Church.

We have come across some cases where the bishop who erects a group says that you cannot go outside my diocese. You are a diocesan right or a diocesan institute and he says it is for the service of this church, this diocese and you should not go out. This is not a correct attitude and sometimes we have to correct those who insisted on this because any institute of diocesan right also belongs to the universal Church. So much so that the diocesan bishop cannot suppress an institute validly erected. Even the diocesan right institute can be suppressed only by the Holy See. So, when a bishop erects a new institute, it is the part of the universal Church. And the vision they should have is always for the universal Church. There were institutes erected by bishops, sometimes without consulting the Holy See. This was brought to the attention of the Holy Father. Of course, according to the practice of the Holy See, there was nothing wrong but it has created confusion as it is difficult to suppress it as there are so many innocent persons involved in it.

Rescript of Pope Francis in 2016

This situation was brought to the attention of the Holy Father and then the Holy Father has made an intervention in 2016. This is a rescript from an audience moved by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. This congregation presented the matter and it was briefly explained to the Holy Father by the Cardinal Secretary cardinal Pietro Baroline. It was presented on 4th of April, 2016. And then the Pope said that here after the prior consultation of the Holy See by the bishop to erect a new institute is obligatory. In Latin, we say *ad validitatem*, for the validity of the decision. It became a law on 1 June 2016. From that day onwards, if any bishop has issued a decree erecting a new group without consulting the Holy See, that decree is automatically invalid. That was the first modification introduced by the Holy Father Pope Francis namely the consultation is necessary for the validity of the decree. Even then, the bishop was not obliged or bound to obey or follow the opinion of the Holy See.

After four years of this rescript, it was evaluated and found that it has not made much difference in the way new institutes were erected. Of course, the bishop consults and then he goes in his own way but not all the bishops. Therefore, the situation was again presented to the Holy Father. Finally, the Holy Father decided to make this stricter. In this background, the new *motu proprio Authenticum chrisimatis* for the Latin Church and *ab initio* a little later for the Oriental Churches have come out. This was formulated on 1 November, 2020 and became binding on 10th November 2020.

The Content of *Authenticum Chirismatis*

This document has just a page. *Motu proprio* is normally a partial revision of a law. He mentions about the previous two documents *Perfectae Charitatis* (19) and *Vita Consecrata* (12) as mentioned above. After explaining all these things, finally he says, “With this in mind, I have decided to modify canon 579”. Then he replaces it with the following text: “Diocesan bishop in his own territory through a formal decree can institute or erect an institute of consecrated life *with the prior written approval of the Holy See*” (rough translation from Latin). So, bishop must have a written document from the Holy See authorizing the bishop to erect a new institute of consecrated life. From 10 November, 2020, this is obligatory. If any bishop erects any institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life without getting a prior written consent or permission from the Holy See, his decision or act is invalid. This is the revision of canon 579. We have to keep in mind the meaning of each word: *prior, written consent*. We may remember that a superior general can erect a religious

house in a diocese with a prior written consent of the diocesan bishop. This is the present situation. In that way, we have briefly seen the development of canon 579.

Different Stages of the Growth of an Institute/Society

I would like to mention here that at the beginning we have seen the four different stages of an institute/ society — Pious Union or Private Association of the Faithful; Public Association of the Faithful, Institutes/Society of diocesan right and finally Institutes/Societies of Pontifical right — how does an institute come to existence? There could be a founder or foundress who has this divine inspiration as a gift from the Holy Spirit a new charism; after prayer and reflection and valid discernment, he/she begins to work in this line and get others who also may have the same spirit come together and start as a group. Initially, they may be called as a pious union of the faithful or private association of the lay faithful. The founder or foundress may be a priest or a religious or even a lay person. This pious union or private association can take two orientations: it can be made as a group of ordinary lay people or during the course of its history can take a new orientation and become an institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life. It can also happen that from the very beginning, the founder intends to have this second orientation.

In the beginning it remains as a pious union or an association and works for sometimes and the bishop may notice its presence may be in a parish and its members are actively living the Christian spirit and exemplary Christian life participating in the activities of the parish and the bishop may give a recognition by formally recognizing it as a pious union or an association. When it grows further, it can be approved as a Public Association of the faithful. A public association which has a certain standing in the local church. A public association of the faithful means, it can assume missions and responsibilities in the name of the Church. And when it grows further, it comes to a point where the bishop discerns that it can be a new institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life and at that stage the bishop consults the Holy See. Of course, the Apostolic Nuncio may help the bishop or the bishop may contact the Holy See through the Apostolic Nuncio. The Holy See will send a list of documents required. And with that, the Holy See will study and give its opinion and now give its consent or refuses the consent. If the Holy See refuses the consent, the bishop cannot go ahead. He has to wait. The Holy See may say what he has to do; either to stop and to wait for some more times and so on.

And when it is erected formally, it is of diocesan right entrusted to the care of the diocesan bishop but it already belongs to the universal Church. For the Holy See to give this first approval and consent, according to the practice, there

should be at least forty professed members; forty members with commitments to the society. It is the minimum. Not only the number, the quality of the members is also required. They should be well-trained and well-formed members; solidly formed in the spirituality according to the charism of the group so that from its side, they have persons mature enough and well-formed to assume the responsibility of leadership namely to be the superiors and to be the formators. Not only that. It is not enough just to have one person capable of being a superior and one or two as formators. There should be possibility for the periodic change of the superior and the formators. If a group remains under the same superior for a long time, it is not good for the superior and the group as well.

When the Holy See evaluates, the situation of a group, these aspects are taken into consideration. And then naturally it has to develop beyond the boundaries of the initial diocese or even beyond the boundaries of the country itself so that it has become a universal reality. At that stage, it can apply for the pontifical approval; an institute or society of pontifical right. There the minimum requirement is hundred professed members with greater maturity and many well-trained and qualified members and with greater choice of people to assume the responsibility of leadership and formation. These are different stages of a particular group that intends to become an institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life.

Endnote

¹ This article is a rough replica of the online lecture given by Dr. Jose Koonampampil, CMF on 24th September, 2021 as part of *Consecrated Life Lecture Series – 4* organised by ICL: Institute of Consecrated Life – Sanyasa, Bangalore. The original lecture can be accessed in YT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpL6spKZRNA>

INSIGHTS FOR CONSECRATED LIFE FROM JOSEPH CYCLE (GEN 37–50)

Arul Jesu Robin, CMF

The story of Joseph begins in ch. 37 and goes on until the end of the book of Genesis (ch. 50). These chapters which we call, Joseph cycle is a kind of transition from the Patriarchs to the events of the Exodus which follow immediately.

Joseph, next to the last of Jacob's sons, is presented as the most important of the twelve brothers. He was the son loved most by his father Jacob and also most delicate since he was a child of his old age (37:3). The Hebrew *yoceph* means "He will add" (Gen 30:24). Joseph was born in Haran, the firstborn of the beloved Rachel, who died at the birth of her second son Benjamin. A motherless lad among the sons of other mothers felt the jealousy of the situation, and the experience became a temptation. The "evil report" of his brethren was thus naturally carried to his father, and quite as naturally stirred up those family jealousies which set his feet in the path of his great career (Gen 37:2-4).¹

The dreams of the young Joseph testify that what will happen to him is not pure coincidence, but rather will serve God's plans: through him God will save the whole family from death. He will become the instrument of life amidst a structure of oppression and death for two nations: Israel and Egypt (47:25).² The life of Joseph is so rich and inspiring that consecrated persons of today can learn a lot from him.

1. Literary Level

The whole cycle of Joseph is the work of competent writers at the time of king Solomon. But it draws its support from the more ancient traditions. We can also notice in many parts of this cycle the inspiration that it got from Egyptian books.

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1.1 *The Internal Structure of the Chapters*

The solemn statement of Gen 37:2: “This is the family history of Jacob”, connects with Gen 25:19 and 36:1, 9 which present the descendants of Isaac and Esau respectively. Chapters 37–50 present the history of Joseph, the offspring of Jacob. These 14 chapters that present the life, work and death of Joseph, the favourite son of Jacob (37:3) can be divided into fifteen sequences as follows based on the theme:

1. Joseph and his brothers and the selling by his brothers (37:2-36)
2. The story of Judah and Tamar (38:1-30)
3. Joseph and his master’s wife (39:1-20a)
4. Joseph interprets dreams while in prison (39:20b–40:23)
5. Joseph interprets Pharaoh’s dream (41:1-57)
6. First journey of Joseph’s brothers (42:1-38)
7. Second journey of Joseph’s brothers (43:1-34)
8. Joseph’s goblet in Benjamin’s baggage (44:1-34)
9. Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers (45:1-28)
10. Joseph’s meeting with his father Jacob (46:1-30)
11. Joseph tends to the needs of his family (46:31–47:28)
12. Blessing for the two sons of Joseph (47:29–48:22)
13. Blessings of Jacob for his sons (49:1-28a)
14. Joseph buries his father (49:28b–50:14)
15. Promises and death of Joseph (50:15-26)

It is to be noted that in the fifteen sequences that we have noted above, all the sons of Jacob are not presented in detail. There is the list of descendants (46:5-27) but it is incidental to Joseph’s meeting with his father. In the sections 2 and 13, we have persons other than Joseph as protagonist. But in all other 13 sections, the protagonist is always Joseph. All other episodes presented in the Joseph cycle are logically woven together around him.

The story of Joseph begins with a family conflict in Canaan that ends tragically with the selling of Joseph and his presence in Egypt as slave (1). Then we have the excursus on Judah and Tamar (2). This is followed with a false accusation against Joseph by his master’s wife who is attracted to him. This false accusation sends Joseph to prison (3). In the prison, he earns the good name of all and gets an opportunity to interpret the dreams of two court officials (4). As his interpretation comes true, one of those officials gets back his job with Pharaoh. He recommends

Joseph to Pharaoh to interpret his dreams. Thus, Joseph gets an eminent political position after having won the good will of the king by his honesty and wisdom (5). As Joseph himself foretold, there comes a great famine. And this great famine, leads his brethren to have recourse to Joseph whom they sold (6). Joseph recognised them as his brethren but the narrator keeps it as secret to his brethren. Thus, takes place the second journey (7) and the subsequent finding of Joseph’s goblet in Benjamin’s baggage, the younger son of Joseph’s mother Rachel (8). Then comes the climax. Joseph can no longer hide his identity from his brothers. He is so emotional that he weeps and finally reveals who he is (9). He wants to see his father who always had very special love for Joseph. And thus, takes place the family reunion (10). God had his own plan and the selling becomes the blessing in disguise. Now Joseph using his position saves his family from famine and enables Pharaoh to allot a fertile land for them (11). Now Jacob has seen his beloved son whom he considered as dead in his old age. Now he can die in peace. Before his death, he blesses Manasseh and Ephraim, the sons of Joseph (12) and his own sons (13). Finally, Jacob dies (14) and Joseph buries him with his ancestors. Now it is the turn to Joseph to die. Before his death, he makes sure that his brothers would be well taken care in Egypt (15).

1.2 The Composition

When we look at these fifteen sequences in isolation, its composition is not evident. As noted above, the story of Judah and Tamar (2) and the blessings of Jacob seem to be disturbing the well-developed story about Joseph since in these two sections Joseph is not the protagonist. Certainly, the climax of the whole episode of Joseph is the revelation of his identity to his brothers. The following table clearly shows its composition and enables us to appreciate the richness of it.

<i>Jacob’s love for Joseph and his sons’ plot to kill Joseph (a)</i>	37:1-36
The evil deeds of Judah & the wife of Joseph’s master (b)	38:1–39:20a
Joseph becomes the blessing for Egypt (c)	39:20b–41:57
<i>Journeys of Joseph’s brothers (d)</i>	41:1–44:34
JOSEPH REVEALS HIS IDENTITY	45:1-28
<i>Journey of Joseph’s father (d’)</i>	46:1-30
Joseph becomes the blessing for his family (c’)	46:31–47:28
Blessings of Jacob (b’)	47:29–49:28a
<i>The death of Jacob and Joseph (a’)</i>	49:28b–50:26

The fifteen sequences noted above are seen as nine sections composed concentrically: a, b, c, d, |X| d', c', b', a'. At the extreme sections, we have the infancy of Joseph, Jacob's special love of him and his brothers' jealousy which eventually leads his brothers to kill him. Thanks to the intervention of Ruben and Judah, he was finally sold for twenty silver coins (a) and the symmetrical section (a') presents the death of Jacob as well as Joseph. The sequence 2 that speaks of Judah and Tamar seems to be out of place. But it goes with the next sequence (3) and forms a section (b). In sequence 2, we have Judah who falls into the trap and has sexual intercourse with her daughter-in-law Tamar. In the third sequence, we see Joseph refusing to fall into the trap of his master's wife to have sexual intercourse with her. In the symmetrical section (b'), we have the blessing of Jacob. This too seems to be out of place. But its richness comes out when we compare its symmetrical section (b). In section b, Joseph felt cheated by his master's wife as she accused him falsely. In the section b' too, he feels cheated but this time by his father Jacob since he blessed his elder son with left hand and younger son with right hand (48:17). Section b points out the sin of Judah and in its symmetrical section (b'), Jacob blesses Judah but without mentioning anything about his immoral act. In section c, Egypt is blessed and saved because of Joseph and in its symmetrical section (c'), Jacob and his sons are blessed and saved because of Joseph. In other words, two nations, Egypt (c) and Israel (c') are blessed and saved by God through the righteous and wise man Joseph. Section d points out the two journeys of Joseph's brother to Egypt without his father Jacob while its symmetrical section (d') presents of the third journey with Jacob.

Right at the centre, we have the climax: the revelation of the identity of Joseph. For those accustomed with western thought and logic, it is strange. We are used to presenting the climax right at the end. But in the biblical rhetoric, the climax is often seen at the centre around which other events are interwoven. Biblical composition is often concentric in nature though parallelism is also used by biblical authors.

1.3 "Living" and "Dying"

Joseph cycle ends with "living" and "dying" (50:22,24,26). This is the culmination of the process that began in the opening chapter where Joseph's brother wanted to kill him but they failed in their conspiracy (37:18,28) and as a result he continues to live in Egypt as a slave (refer sections a, a' in the composition).

Joseph cycle presents death as well as life. Death seems to be valued differently, both positively as well as negatively. The determining factor of evaluation of death seems to be age. Joseph cycle contains the death of Jacob, Joseph, Judah's wife and Rachel. They all seemed to have died in their old age. Hence their death is not judged negatively.

In the case of Rachel and Judah's wife, it is simply stated that they died (38:12; 48:7). No judgement has been made on their death. With regard to Jacob, it is stated that he could now die in peace after having reunited with his beloved son Joseph (45:28; 46:30) and after receiving an oath that he would be buried in the tomb of his ancestors (47:29; 50:5). Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten, a time of fullness for the Egyptian (50:26). He too died peacefully like his father Jacob after being convinced that God would take good care of his brothers (48:21; 50:24).

In contrast, if someone dies at young age, then it is considered as the most grievous evil. Joseph cycle presents the death of Er and Onan, the sons of Judah (46:12). Their death was considered as the result of their wicked conduct, for which YHWH "took their life" (38:7,10). It could also be a punishment for a punishable action (42:20; 44:9). Both Judah and Reuben consider the eventual death of their sons to be a great evil (38:11; 42:37). We also know the great sorrow of Jacob at the supposed death of Joseph (37:33-35) and it is said that he would have died if Benjamin had remained absent (44:22,31).

Another terminology that appears often in the Joseph cycle is "living": when Jacob heard that Joseph is not "dead" but still "living", his spirit is revived and it comes to "life" (45:27). There is a concern for food so that they may live. This concern is seen among both the Egyptians (47:13,15,25) and the Israelites (42:2,18; 43:8). Interestingly, the entire story of Joseph is presented in such a way that he saves both the Egyptians and the Israelites from "death" and imparts "life" to them.

Here the notion life includes "peace" or "well-being" (*shalom*). This term which is very essential for proper living is also highlighted in the Joseph cycle as the story unfolds. The interest for the well-being of others involves a concern for their peace (37:14; 43:27-28; 44:17). Even a greeting includes a communication expressing a wish for their welfare (37:14; 41:16; 43:23,27).

1.4 Literary Genre

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly the literary genre of Joseph's cycle. It is possible to assign the literary genre to this block of materials halfway between the "sagas" referring to Abraham and Jacob and the "novellas" relating to Judith, Esther, Ruth, etc. It is to be noted immediately that it differs in many aspects from the sagas referring to Abraham and Jacob. The differences are:

- a) The originally independent smaller units (etiologies) of Gen 12–36, now give way to an account that unfolds in a unitary way from beginning to end.
- b) Instead of an evolution growing out of an oral tradition, here we already have

from the outset a written account to which chapters 39–45, parts of 47 as well as fragments of 46 and of 50 belong.

- c) The familiar horizon is broadened and there is a notable interest in elements of an international order, especially the usages and customs of the Egyptian court.

The purpose of writing this cycle is didactic in nature. At the same time the accounts reported are deeply rooted in the memory of the people, on its great personages and on its familiar situations. Hence this section could be aptly called “edifying novelised history”.

2. Historical Level

2.1 Human Trafficking

Human trafficking was very common at the time of Joseph cycle. A popular narrative records the trafficking of Israelite slaves whom the Ishmaelites carried on along the way to Egypt. This historical piece of information helps us to understand better the sojourn of the Ishmaelites in the land of the Israelites.

2.2 Ishmaelites

The Ishmaelites are the supposed descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar, whom Abraham sent away from him after the birth of Isaac (Gen 21:14-21). The sons of Ishmael were twelve in number (Gen 25:13,14) and gave rise to as many tribes, but the term Ishmaelite has a broader signification, as it appears in Gen 37:28,36, where it is identified with Midianite. Midianite was applied to the Bedouin of the desert region East of the Jordan generally (cf. Gen 16:12), for the character assigned to Ishmael, “His hand shall be against every man, and every man’s hand against him,” fits the habits of Bedouin in all ages. Such was the character of the Midianites as described in Judg 7, who are again identified with the Ishmaelites (8:24). These references show that the Ishmaelites were not confined to the descendants of the son of Abraham and Hagar, but refer to the desert tribes in general, like “the children of the east” (Judg 7:12).

2.3 The Yahwist Use of This Narrative

The Yahwist had special reason to use this narrative. Possibly, he wrote these accounts in order to pursue his account of the patriarchal history. With this in mind, after presenting some data concerning the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi (34), Reuben (35:21-22), Joseph (37:3-4, 25b-27, 28b), he recounts the descent of Jacob himself to Egypt (46:1-5a) and uses some ancient tribal traditions as a conclusion (49:1-28a). In the conclusion, he highlights the blessings given to Judah and Joseph. It is to be noted that the blessings given to Judah and Joseph are

lengthier than the blessings given to the other sons owing to the importance that the first two held in the South and in the North.³

It is to be noted that in the Yahwist's account, Joseph has no special relevance since he is subordinated to Judah. At any rate, he is less important than Judah for the Yahwist.

It is possible that not too long afterwards someone from the Northern kingdom, using this Yahwist narrative and other materials from tradition might have composed the "story of Joseph".

In the story of Joseph as well as in the unit of 47:18-26, the familiar horizon is broadened and we are offered so much of information on the usages and customs of Egypt, on its government and administration.

2.4 The Pharaonic Administrative System

The text of 47:18-26 describes vividly the Pharaonic administrative system. It also provides an important economic datum: the introduction of the exaction of a "fifth" of the communal product in the land of the Nile. Verse 26 assures that the statute establishing this assessment still exists in the narrator's day. However this datum presents some historical difficulties regarding three points: the time when the assignment of land to the Pharaoh's power began, how far it extended and the amount exacted. In all these three aspects, it seems that the information given in the text is correct in substance but incorrect in details.

Let us begin with the first. Certainly there is no economic history of Egypt. But the Pharaoh's rights over a great part of the territory is a recurrent theme throughout the history of Egypt and it is a novelty in the time of Joseph. Secondly the exemption that the text mentions of the temples probably did not exist, at least as a universal privilege. Finally the amount of the tax seems to have varied, depending on the epochs and the lands that were taxed.

Another historical exactness should also be mentioned. In the cycle of Joseph, it is mentioned that people went to Joseph at the time of famines. But historically there were many other measures differing from those attributed to the prudence of Joseph taken at the time of famines. They are: free distribution of wheat, loans of grain from one city to another and exemptions from taxes.

The responsibilities that are attributed to Joseph seem close to those of an inspector of the royal granaries but his attributes are rather overblown. Among the other pieces of information, the notion that he held a position lower than that of Pharaoh alone seems to contradict the data provided by history. From 1500 B.C.E

to 850 in Egypt two persons follow the monarch in hierarchical order: one in charge of the Northern part of the country, the other in charge of the Southern part.

Possibly the Egyptian administrative system is known to Israel since the Israelite monarchy had established close relationships with Egypt. So we need to seek the origin of the accounts in Joseph cycle in courtly circles. In this block, right from the beginning resounds the question: “Are you going to rule over us? Shall I and your mother and your brothers come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?” (37:10). This seems to hint at a kingdom and at discussions as to the legitimacy of its sovereign. In the father, who feels that he is included in the dream and thus reproves the dreamer, we may glimpse the quarrels of those tribes who felt that they had been left in the margin of the exercise of power.

It should also be remembered that at those time, there was no clear laws on the monarchical succession. The triumph of one pretender often meant the elimination of the rest, including his own brothers. Thus it is not a surprise that Joseph who dreamt of ruling over his brothers is “eliminated” at the bud.

2.5 Famines in Egypt

Great famines have not been common in Egypt, but are not unknown. The only one which corresponds well to the Bible account is the one recorded in the inscription of Baba at el Kab. The monument still remains and is easily visited, but the inscription is so mutilated that it presents many difficulties. The severity of the famine, the length of its duration, the preparation by the government, the distribution to the people, the success of the efforts for relief and even the time of the famine, as far as it can be determined, correspond well to the Bible account.⁴

2.6 The Priestly Use of the Narrative

The priestly authors unlike the Yahwist present through their materials altogether a different figure of Joseph. He is seen from a new point of view, from a situation of exile.

P is responsible for the texts that deal with the passage from the status of a family to the status of a people and to the juridical legitimization of that people. Hence he connects the story of Jacob (37:2) with that of Isaac (25:19). In the family, not only Jacob’s daughters, but also the daughters of his sons appear (46:7) and the list of 46:8-27 includes the descendants of three generations. Thus the birth of a people or nation is announced.⁵

Moreover, the sons of Joseph born of a non-Israelite mother need to be legitimated. The account of 48:3-6 was composed with this in mind.

The interest in the land is also explained from the viewpoint of the exile. The text considers this theme in keeping with the three following stages: provisional stay in Canaan, sojourn in Egypt, definitive settlement in Canaan.

The first point is explained in 37:1. Unlike that of Esau (36:8), Jacob's dwelling is not stable. With regard to sojourn to Egypt, we are told that the Israelites settled down in farms and had children there (47:11) but it is to be noted immediately that they had to go out from the presence of the Pharaoh (47:10). Finally, the accounts of the death and burial of Jacob (49:28-32 and 50:12-13) point out that while his body remains in a foreign land, the possession of a burial plot in Canaan already foretells the possession of the land, which was promised to his offspring.

2.7 The Purpose of 50:22-26

The author of 50:22-26 aims at linking the preceding history with the history that is to follow. God's visit to his people connects it with the Exodus, God's oath regarding the land connects it with the patriarchal history, the duty to transfer Joseph's bones refers us to the time when the conquest is finished and the mentioning of some of the sons of Joseph summons up the image of some who would take part in the conquest.

3. Theological Level

3.1 Situations of Ambiguity and Death

Joseph finds himself in situation of ambiguity and death. His brothers wanted to do away with him but finally settled for selling him. First, he is incarcerated by the Egyptian tributary system where he might have experienced many situations of death receiving inhuman treatment.⁶

Most of these situations are the result of human selfishness. This selfishness tends to become structured as an imperial system, which throughout human history takes on new names: the Pharaonic system, the new international order or some other title. This system gives rise "to some genuinely grave concerns: the culture of death, the poverty and marginalization in which two thirds of humanity are living, situations of injustice, oppression and the systematic violation of human rights which a great part of this same humanity is also suffering. The ever-widening gap between the Northern and Southern hemispheres, the exploitation of many peoples by more industrialised nations, together with corruption and wastefulness of the governments of these same exploited peoples, etc" (SW 1.2).⁷

The imperial system of Egypt was built with the bricks of human slavery. It made use of the quarrels among some Israelite brothers and the selfish greed of some Midianites in order to achieve its aims in a traffic of persons that led to the estrangement of a great part of humankind. External and internal migrations, as well as countless similar situations like war, famine, flood, leave a growing number of the world's population "outside their own land".

Even the brothers of Joseph who wanted to kill him in order to enjoy "life" do find themselves in the situation of death. The famine threatens life even in Canaan. When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt tells his sons: "Why do you keep looking at one another? I have heard", he said, "that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may *live and not die*" (42:1-2). Again, when Joseph asks his brothers to bring Benjamin with them and Jacob refuses to send him, Judah said to his father: "Send the boy with me, and let us be on our way, so that we may *live and not die*" (43:8).

The great famine that struck Egypt in fact threatened life of two nations: Israel and Egypt. The Egyptians come to Joseph when they have no more money to buy grains saying: "Give us food! Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone" (47:15). A year later, they come again to Joseph pleading: "Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may *live and not die*, and that the land may not become desolate" (47:19).

3.2 *Situations of Life*

In the cycle of Joseph, there are many situations of death. Yet an attentive reader can also find the situations of life hidden behind the culture of death. Joseph was "sold" but this attempt to do away in fact becomes a blessing in disguise. Joseph, the victim of selfishness and jealousy of his own brothers becomes the imparter of life, not only to thousands and thousands of the Egyptians but also to his own brothers who wanted to take away his life. Thus "being sold" becomes an occasion for saving lives (45:5), so that his brothers can survive on the land and save their life through a happy liberation (45:7).

The interpretation that Joseph gives to the selfishness of his brother that ultimately went to the extent of selling their brothers to the Ishmaelites needs to be noted. Joseph does not think of taking revenge and interpret the event negatively. Rather he sees the whole aspect with a different perspective, as a plan to save many more lives. This should be a lesson for us to interpret events, discovering the history of life in the very midst of a history.⁸

In fact, Joseph is seen as giving life to two nations: Israel and Egypt. The sons of Jacob are facing death in Canaan due to famine. They come to Egypt hearing that there are grains. Joseph feeds them and thus save the nation Israel from annihilation. The Egyptians too face severe famine. Joseph who feared God (42:18) saves the nation Egypt too by his prudence and administrative skill. For the Egyptians said: “You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh” (47:25).

3.3 Saying “No” to Mere Apparent Life

Joseph enjoying everything that he wanted in the Pharaonic system of Egypt might have been a real temptation for him to be satisfied with that and to forget the imperial system that enslaved many and brought the culture of death to many people. The apparent “life” that Joseph had in Egypt might have urged him to forget his father’s house (41:51), to let himself be seduced by the splendour of Pharaoh’s court and to become involved in the Egyptian tributary system that promoted the culture of death to the majority people and divided the society rich and poor.

It is here that Joseph felt the need to break away from the comforts of imperial system and from compromises with imperial power. In order to be convinced that the imperial world is not “the be-all and end-all of history”, he has to “go out from the presence of Pharaoh” (47:10).

Joseph should constantly recall that the promises are tied to that land where his fathers rest, so that he will remember the burial place where “they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife (49:32), Isaac and Rebecca his wife... and Leah”. So he has to be vigilant so as to recognise ‘the visit of God’, the moment when God will undoubtedly take care of his brothers (50:24). His ability to share in the blessing depends on the solidarity that makes him able to look to the promised land with certainty, to refuse to be buried in Egypt with its apparent life, and to march on even after death “to the land that God promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (50:24).⁹

3.4 The Story of Judah and Tamar (Ch. 38)

In ch. 38, the protagonist is not Joseph though it is placed within Joseph cycle but Judah. This chapter is placed here quite artificially. It is an episode relating to Judah which naturally interrupts the story of Joseph. It is to be noted here that in history only two of the twelve tribes stand out: Judah and Joseph. And these two tribes would dominate others. That is why ancient traditions hardly ever mention other than these two tribes.¹⁰

It is to be noted that this episode of Tamar having sexual relation with his father-in-law Judah was written at a primitive time and during the age of primitive customs

and morality, the Bible does not at first sight insist on certain aspects of sexual morality. Certainly, primitive sexual morality was not what it is today. The point here is not sexual morality but the transmission of the promises God made to Jacob which were to benefit the descendants of Judah (49:10).

Onan's sin consists in having refused to father a son who, later would not belong to him (see Ru 3:7 about the obligation to give a child to the widow of one's brother. See also Dt 25:5). Tamar's nobility lies in her determination, using all possible means, to have a son who would bear the name of her first husband, Er, and who would therefore be Judah's heir. It is rare for women to figure prominently in the Bible, but when they do appear, they teach men a lesson in being human. Here, after the event by which Tamar enters into his life, Judah begins to reflect, which is something he never thought before (38:26). Interestingly, Tamar finds a place in the list of the ancestors of Jesus (Mt 1:3).¹¹

3.5 Jesus' Typology

Joseph stands out among the patriarchs in some respects with preeminence. He is presented as someone with nobility of character, purity of heart and life, magnanimity as a ruler and brother. These characters of Joseph make him, more than any other of the Old Testament characters, an illustration of that type of man which Christ was to give to the world in perfection. Surprisingly, Joseph is not in the list of persons distinctly referred to in Scripture as types of Christ but none more fully illustrates the life and work of the Saviour as that of Joseph. Joseph wrought salvation for those who betrayed and rejected him, he went down into humiliation as the way to his exaltation, he forgave those who, at least in spirit, put him to death, and to him as to the Saviour, all must come for relief, or perish.

Jesus was betrayed by his own "friend" Judas Iscariot for thirty silver coins (Mt 26:15); Joseph was sold by his own brothers for twenty silver coins (37:28). As an infant, Jesus escaped death from his home land and fled to Egypt; Joseph being saved from the imminent death by the interventions of Reuben and Judah, was taken to Egypt as a slave. Jesus was a man filled with the Spirit of God (Lk 4:18) and it was recognized by those who heard him and witnessed his wonders. Joseph was a man possessed with the spirit of God and it was recognized even by the Pharaoh of Egypt (41:38-40). Though we do not have any explicit scriptural backing, traditionally it is believed that Jesus began his public ministry when he was thirty years old; Joseph was thirty years old when he began his mission under Pharaoh as "Prime Minister" (41:46).

In the New Testament, there is an interesting event. Jesus is at Cana for a wedding with his mother and the Apostles. Suddenly, the wine for the party gets over. Sensing the embarrassment of the hosts, Mary informs Jesus of the same, implicitly requesting him to do something to change the situation. Though Jesus hesitates, Mary tells the servants: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). Though Joseph was not expected to perform any miracles, when the people suffering from famine approaches Pharaoh for bread, he says: “Go to Joseph and do as he tells you” (Gen 42:55). Though the comparison is not perfect, one can find similarities. Jesus was dead and rose again on the third day. Those who heard about it did not believe (Lk 24:11). Joseph was almost dead and for his father Jacob, he was actually dead. When came to know that “Joseph is alive and he is the ruler of all Egypt!”, he could not believe it (Gen 45:26).

When the two prisoners in the prison request Joseph to interpret the dreams that they had, Joseph says: “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me” (40:8). After saying this, he in fact interprets the dreams. Again when he was brought before the Pharaoh, the Pharaoh says to Joseph: “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it” (41:15). Hearing this, Joseph replied: “It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer” (41:16). This clearly shows that he participates in God’s work of giving life to others. Similarly, we have ample examples in the Gospel of Jesus participating actively in the works of God and thus giving life to numerous people.

Joseph is presented in the narrative as the giver of life. His own family members as well as the Egyptians are at the brink of death because of famine. So they approach Joseph who supply them food grain and thus save their lives (45: 5; 47:25). In other words, Joseph is presented as the giver of life to two nations. In the Gospel, Jesus is presented as the giver of eternal life (Jn 3:15-16,36; 5:21,40; 6:33,50-51,58; 10:10; 10:28) though he too gives bread to the hungry and thus giving physical life (Mk 6:30-44; 8:1-9).

4. Insights for Consecrated Life Today

1) *Selfishness* leads humanity to so many evils. It takes one to *jealousy* and in the extreme cases, jealousy is not afraid even to commit sins against the fifth commandment of the Lord (“You shall not murder”: Ex 20:13). Unfortunately, selfishness and jealousy have creped in even into religious life and among the members of religious communities. So many religious communities are experiencing the evil of the impact of selfishness and jealousy. And jealousy has killed the family

atmosphere of many religious communities. The selfishness and jealousy of the brothers of Joseph destroyed their family unity and went to the extent of taking away the life of Joseph though they settled in selling him at the end. In short, selfishness and jealousy bring the culture of death. A religious has to bury selfishness and jealousy if he/she wants to be promoters of life in a world threatened by the culture of death and be genuine radical follower of Jesus.

2) Our God is a God of history. He is the God who brought the people of Israel from Egypt and liberated them from slavery. Our God is not someone who is far away from the world and watching the fun. Rather, He is involved in every activity of the world. He is concerned about the problems of the world and every individual. He has a definite plan for the world and for the individual. Often, we fail to understand His plan for us specially when we face difficulties and sufferings. When we encounter frustrations, disappointments and depressions, we tend to forget God and question sometimes even His very existence. We fail to realize that God can speak to us in different situations even in situations of “death” like sufferings, frustrations, depressions, disappointments. It is here that Joseph stands tall and still teaches us, the consecrated persons. Because of his brothers’ jealousy, Joseph was sold and he had to live in an alien country. Joseph accepts this reality positively and he sees God’s plan even in this situation of death. Joseph says to his brothers: “do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life” (45:5; 50:20). What a beautiful example that the consecrated persons have in Joseph to discern God’s will even in unfortunate miserable situations!

3) The magnanimity of Joseph is to be appreciated and imitated specially by the consecrated persons. Here is a man who comes across his brothers who wanted to kill him and finally settled for selling him for mere twenty silver coins. Now they are at the mercy of Joseph pleading him to give food so that they might live. A normal person would have taken it as an opportune occasion to take revenge. Joseph using the authority that he enjoyed in Egypt could have jailed if he wanted and tortured them as much as he wanted. But he did not do that. Rather he manifested his magnanimity and forgave his “enemies”. He gave them all that they wanted and ensured that they are well taken care (50:17-21). In the New Testament, Jesus would say: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven ... For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” (Mt 5:43-46). We have the perfect example of this already in Joseph.

True, that Joseph did not forgive his enemies but his own brothers. But his own brothers became his enemies by their plot to kill Joseph. Forgiveness is a virtue many consecrated persons find it very difficult to possess and practice. Forgiving one's own community members becomes all the more difficult. Often the greatest enemies are within one's own religious communities. Religious must learn from Joseph how to forget and forgive one another and lead a magnanimous religious life.

4) Today, we are living in a world that challenges consecrated life. It is a real challenge to be faithful to the evangelical counsels professed by the consecrated persons. The consumeristic world and the explosive mass media propose pleasure, power and possession as ultimate values in life totally contrary to the evangelical counsels. As a consequence, many consecrated persons fall into the temptations of pleasure, possession and power. In the Joseph cycle, we have two examples of marital fidelity, one negative and another positive. Judah, the father-in-law of Tamar falls into the trap; considered her own daughter-in-law as prostitute and had sex with her. On the other hand, we have the positive example of Joseph. The wife of his master Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh was very much attracted to Joseph. She wanted to have sex with Joseph and asked him the same. But Joseph refused strongly saying: "How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (39:9). These examples must continue to inspire the consecrated persons to be faithful to their evangelical counsels, specially the evangelical counsel of chastity.

5) God's ways are sometimes so amazing and difficult to understand. He refused to accept the offerings of elder Cain but was very pleased with the offerings of younger Abel. Samuel went to the house of Jesse to name the king after Saul. YHWH was not impressed by the tall, handsome elder sons of Jesse but he chose the youngest David to be the king of Israel. Joseph cycle presents an interesting event. Joseph takes his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim to his father Jacob. Now Jacob wanted to bless these two sons of his favorite son Joseph. Now Jacob stretched out his right hand and laid on the head of the younger son Ephraim and his left hand on the head of the first-born Manasseh (48:14). And we know from history that it is the younger Ephraim who became powerful in Israel and not the first-born Manasseh. It is to be noted that Jacob himself brought the first-born right from his elder brother Esau (Gen 25:29-34). What does God want to teach us by these events? Possibly they imply that God has preferential love for the younger ones, the weaker ones, the little ones, the poor ones. Sometimes, as consecrated persons, we may wonder, what we can do as we are the weakest, less talented, etc. God has special love for us. He also invites each one of us to commit ourselves fully for the weaker and poor people, the marginalized and exploited section of the society.

6) In the Joseph cycle, we come across persons who promote the culture of death as well as persons who promote life. Joseph's brothers by their act of selling their own brother (37:12-36), the wife of Potiphar by her seductive behavior and her lie that sent Joseph to jail (39:7-20) and Er and Onan, the sons of Judah by their wicked behavior (38:7-10) are presented as promoters of death culture. On the other hand, the just Joseph is seen as promoter of life. In fact, he gives life to two nations: Israel and Egypt. Joseph is the promoter of life not only for the Israelites but also to the gentiles. He is promoting life to all without any distinction. This should be lesson for all consecrated persons to promote life in the situations of death that we find ourselves in. Our mission of giving life to people should not be restricted to any group of people. Rather, like Joseph, we should be the promoters of life breaking all barriers and boundaries and giving life to each and every one.

7) Interestingly, we find people moving from one place to another for survival in the Joseph cycle. Right from the beginning, Joseph escapes from the situations of death in Canaan and is taken to Egypt for his survival. Then at the end, Joseph's own father and brothers migrated to Egypt for their survival. Leaving one's own place and country and settling in other country for survival is not an easy thing to do. A person has to undergo a lot of difficulties personally, psychologically, socially, politically and economically to get rooted in the new country and in the new situation. The phenomenon of migrating from one place to another, one country to another is on the increase today. People migrate from villages and towns to big cities and from poor countries to rich countries in order to escape from the situations of death seeking for life somewhere else. On the process, they have to undergo so many problems as Joseph and his family underwent. In this growing phenomenon of immigration and its sufferings, what role do we play as consecrated persons? Are we able to be promoters of life to them? What is the Spirit asking of us today to respond to these situations of human trafficking, migration, exploitation of the migrants and the migrant workers?

Endnotes

¹ Cf. GORDON WENHAM, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, Waco 1994, 344-345; LEANDER E. KECK – al, ed., *General and Old Testament Articles. Genesis, I*, The New Interpreter's Bible, Nashville 1994, 592-601.

² Cf. E.A. SPEISER, *Genesis. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, I, The Anchor Bible, London 1962, 292-294.

³ Cf. GERHARD VON RAD, *Genesis. A Commentary*, London 1972, 349-341.

⁴ Cf. WILLIAM H. SHEA, "Famine", *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, II, London 1992, 769-775.

⁵ Cf. GERHARD VON RAD, *Genesis. A Commentary*, London 1972, 341.

⁶ Cf. CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES, *Servants of the Word. Pentateuch*, Quezon City 1994, 181-182.

⁷ *Servants of the Word*, XXI General Chapter Document of the Congregation of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Claretians), Rome 1991.

⁸ Cf. CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES, *Servants of the Word. Pentateuch*, Quezon City 1994, 182.

⁹ Cf. CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES, *Servants of the Word. Pentateuch*, Quezon City 1994, 183-184.

¹⁰ Cf. E.A. SPEISER, *Genesis. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, I, The Anchor Bible, London 1962, 297-300.

¹¹ Cf. GORDON WENHAM, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, Waco 1994, 363-370.

THE ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS OF *THIRUKKURAL*, THE TEMPLATE FOR THE CONSECRATED

S. Devadoss, CMF

Pope Francis, who wrote *Laudato Si'* insisting on our obligation to take care of our common home, came forward to inaugurate a new cycle of studies at the Pontifical Lateran University on 7th October, 2021, in Rome. In his speech, the Pope spoke of the damage or destruction which we do to the planet earth. It is certainly not restricted merely to the climate change, water and soil but it is extended to the life itself. He warned that it is not sufficient that we repeat statements of principle, on the contrary, we need to become aware that the complexity that is involved with regard to today's ecological crisis, all the more, demands from our part 'responsibility, concreteness, and competence.' He also added: "The effort to form ecological consciousness and develop research to protect the common home passes through the Universities." As part of our effort to bring the eco-consciousness in view of addressing the contemporary ecological crisis, I make a study on eco-consciousness of *Thirukkural* and relate its relevance to consecrated persons of today.

Let me begin with a brief description concerning *Thirukkural* itself. As far as Tamil language (one of the ancient and longest spoken languages of the world) is concerned, *Thirukkural*¹, also called as *Kural* (couplet of short lines), is the most famous, reviewed, widely recognized and acknowledged classical work. It is regarded as "a masterpiece of Tamil literature, one of the highest and purest expressions of human thought." Literally *Thirukkural* means 'sacred couplets' and is weighed as equalling to the great works of the major religions and ancient classics of the world. It is also perceived as the Bible of South India (A. Schweitzer) or the fifth Veda of Tamils, (P. Machwe). It deals with useful morality and virtues of any human person irrespective of his or her socio-political, economic, cultural and

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religious background. Many names are attributed to it and among them, the vital names are the following: *Muppāl* (Three Chaptered), *Poyyāmoli* (Statements devoid of untruth), *DeivaNūl* (Divine Book), *Pothumarai* (Book for all), *VāyuraiVālttu* (Truthful utterances), *Uttharavedham* (The final, ultimate Veda), etc.

The significance or uniqueness of *Thirukkural* is indicated in the following way: “*Thirukkural* is the life, *Thiruvagasam* is the heart and *Thirumandiram* is the soul of Tamil culture.” (Swami Shivananda).

“What God said to man is in *Geeta*; what man said to God is in *Thiruvagasam*; and what man said to man is in *Thirukkural*.”² It is one of the five ancient classics which were translated into many languages of the world. And this classic deals with diversified themes under one umbrella. The fundamental reason for the appreciation of this unique work is about the moral pronouncements which it contains. It is known for its brevity and the capacity of its author to communicate his message in concise verses. It transcends any religion or religious tradition, class or caste, race or ethnicity, and gender and thus endowed with the universal characteristic. Its insights are so relevant and appreciated by people of all ages.

Thirukkural is hailed as a memorable work which deals with ethics and morality. Each chapter is constructed on a particular concept or theme. It is based on the fundamentals of *Ahimsa* and insists upon the virtues like non-violence and moral vegetarianism; underlines that the human beings must be kind towards others, truthful, self-restraint, grateful, hospitable, not desiring other’s wife, dutiable, generous in giving; deals with certain socio-political elements namely rulers, minister, payment of taxes, exercise of justice, having forts, waging war, magnitude of army, the honour attached to a soldier, death sentence to the wicked, the importance of agriculture and education, abstinence from alcohol, and intoxicants; emphasises on friendship, love, sexual union, and domestic life; redefining the cultural values pertaining to the Tamil land.³ In short, it is more focused on the earthly life of an individual and concentrates on several elements of life like ethics, morality, politics, romance, etc.

Though *Thirukkural* deals with several themes, the focus of this paper is mainly on the eco-consciousness of *Thirukkural*. Ecology is a field of study which underlines the interrelatedness and interconnected that exists among different organisms and to their surroundings. The ancient society was predominantly nature-centered. In general, any classical work necessarily deals with matters connected with the society. As a result, the ancient classics were ultimately nature-centered in their content. Hence, it is not strange to find the nature centeredness in *Thirukkural* as one of the ancient classics.

On the one hand, it contains the insights and wisdom which are regarded as the outcome of its author's keen observation of the natural world who activated his senses such as hearing and visioning. On the other hand, it is also filled with aphorisms based on the observation of human nature. Therefore, it touches upon the code of conduct of an individual person. The lessons learned from the deep observation of the natural world are regarded as valuable for the well-being of human beings and the world. It makes comparison between the elements which are found in the world of nature and day-today happenings in the life of the humanity and society. *Thirukkural* makes valiant attempt to show the similarity and dissimilarity between them.

Today, we speak so much of environmental degradation which takes us back to the root cause of it that it is selfishness of humanity in both individual and collective forms. Thiruvalluvar might have understood this inner dynamism which led him to focus on these both elements namely nature and the conduct of an individual. While alluding to the personal virtues, he emphasises that non-killing is the greatest or foremost of all virtues and talks also about meat-eating.

1. Foundational Physical Elements of Cosmic Creation

According to Hinduism, there exists five elements: sky (*Aakash/Dyaus*), earth (*Prithvi/Bhudevi*), water (*Apas/Varuna/Jal*), air (*Vayu*) and fire (*Agni*), which are vital for the cosmic creation and are addressed as '*PanchaBhoota*.' Sadguru believes that our physical self is perceived as a combination of these five elements.⁴ *Thirukkural* also mentions of these five vital components. It treats some of them briefly and some others more elaborately. These five elements which are attached to one's body will laugh at him or herself when such person is filled with deceitful mind because he or she, by deceiving others enjoys the pleasures of the senses (271). Now, let us proceed to examine, how he treats them.

1.1 Sky, the Upper Atmosphere

The sky refers to everything which we come across above the surface of the earth inclusive of the atmosphere and outer space. In relation to astronomy, it is addressed as the celestial sphere.⁵ The terms like *vaanam*, *vin* refers in *Thirukkural* to the sky. Sometimes, the word sky is also substituted by another word namely 'heaven' referring to that part of created cosmos which we come across beyond the earth (sphere of sun, moon and stars). Sky is thought out to be a space where the clouds are said to remain or abide and they come down to the earth as rain. When Psalmist invites the waters above the heavens to praise God (Ps 148:4), he is inviting the clouds situated in the sky to praise Him (*LS 72*).

Out of love and compassion, the heaven gives rain for the living beings to exist which is expressed through a symbolic expression as the lovers express their love to each other at the appropriate occasion (1192). Through this metaphor, it is underlined that as the earth completely depends upon the clouds, the sky out of love for the earth pours down the rain according to the need. Otherwise, both the excess of rain as well as lack of it will lead to the situation of either flood or drought. *Thirukkural* uses the expression ‘the heaven dry up’ or ‘the heaven grow dry’ to imply the cessation of rain (18). It also uses the term sky to indicate the higher state of a person’s life. It stresses that a person’s appearance of sanctity may be as high as heaven but it is of no use at all, in case, if his or her mind indulges in wrongful activities consciously and intentionally (272). What is to be upheld or highly esteemed in one’s life is not the higher state of a person rather his or her interior thinking. Pretending to be good may be easy for sometimes but we must become aware when we pretend, we can easily escape from others but not from our own mind.

1.2 *Heavenly Bodies: Stars, Sun and Moon*

In general, the heavenly bodies are regarded as things which make up the universe namely the stars (consisting of red dwarfs smaller neutron stars and larger ones than the earth’s sun), planets (like Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune) and smaller objects (such as moon, comets and asteroids).⁶ Francis of Assisi calls them as brothers and sisters who are found in heaven and praising God, their Creator (cf. *LS* 87). While speaking about the present state of Mother Mary, the Book of Revelation narrates that she is “clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (Rev 12:1; cf. *LS* 241). And *Thirukkural* also deals with the heavenly bodies like star, sun and moon. It makes mention of the stars and sun only once, but in terms of the moon, *Kural* deals with it in several couplets.

In the context of talking about the beauty of the countenance of the lover, it is pointed out that the stars, which are situated in the sky, are in great perplexity because they are indeed in utter confusion to distinguish between the moon and the lover’s countenance (1116). Here in this couplet, the face of the lady is poetically presented as the moon. The human face is valued much more than any other physical attribute of a person. Face has got social importance because we have the tendency to evaluate a person basing on a person’s facial expressions. Our life experiences make us understand that sometimes there exists a contradiction between the reality and facial expression. For an example, a person is indeed sad internally but shows externally a smiling face.

In this regard, we are reminded of the expression, *Kaanalneer*. *Kaanal* means heat and *neer* signifies water. The literal meaning is an “optical illusion” or something which appears real or possible but in reality, it is not so. For an example, when we happen to look up the roads during the summer time, we will find the water in certain distance away, but when we actually reach the spot, we find nothing there. Likewise, *Thirukkural* speaks of an optical illusion that the face of a lover looks just like the moon but in reality, it is entirely different. This difference is manifested clearly through another couplet which says, we come across the spots in the moon which are waxing, waning and shining, but we find no such spots at the face of a lover (1117). Therefore, the stars need not get disturbed or confused. Actually, while asserting the beauty of both the moon and lover, the concept of stars is used in an imaginative way.

The reference to sun (the distance between sun and earth is more or less 92,955,887.6 miles) is made in relation to the person in whom love is absent. In terms of the danger involved on the part of the person who does not have love, it mentions about the heat of the sun that is to say, virtue will burn up those people who are not endowed with love but filled with arrogance and rudeness just as the sun burns up the boneless creatures like worms (77). The sun consists of the light with heat which is necessary for the life to exist on earth. Likewise in the life of a person soul must exist with love otherwise his or her life will become so miserable.

Another component of heavenly bodies is the moon and according to scientific data, it is located around 384,400 kilometers that is 238,855 miles away from the earth. The 8 Lunar phases are new moon, waxing crescent moon, first quarter moon, waxing gibbous moon, full moon, waning gibbous moon, last quarter half-moon and waning crescent moon. When *Thirukkural* deals with the notion of moon, it beautifully brings out the different dimensions of the moon like new moon and full moon. While addressing the friendship of wise persons, it expresses that their friendship starts with crescent moon and grows as full moon whereas in the case of the friendship of fools, it starts with the full moon, becomes waxing moon and finally disappears (782). On another occasion, the concept of moon is used. Even the small mistakes, limitations or the deficiencies of the noble people cannot be hidden because they are very much visible and transparent and thus observed clearly by many persons as the dark spots in the moon that are visible very much (957). “Every error of the mind is the more conspicuous and culpable in proportion to the rank of the person who commits it.”⁷

When the moon is fully shining, we are able to find spots which we don't observe in the face of the lover. In this background *Thirukkural*, on behalf of the husband, goes to the extent of praising the moon: O blessed moon, if you are able to shine

just like the face of my lover in such a way that I get my joy, then you too will have the right to receive my love and thus you can also become my lover (1118). The moon is not in a position to shine like the face of his lover mainly because of the spots which are found in the moon. And so, it is presumed that his love goes to his lover than the moon. He further tells to the moon, if you happen to resemble the face of my lover whose eyes look like the flowers (1142), it is better that you do not appear in order to be seen by everyone in the world because you are meant only for me and thus you need to appear only to me (1119). In these couplets the husband lays down two conditions to the moon to become the recipient of his love and in case, if the moon succeeds in fulfilling those conditions, he makes a request to it not to appear in the public since it is reserved to him alone.

In the context of painful recollection of the joy of love due to the departure of the lover, a request is made to the moon on behalf of the wife: I request you my dear moon to continue to shine till I am able to succeed in finding my beloved who deserted me without quitting my soul (1210). Further, the lover tells: I just had the chance to meet my beloved only one day, but the rumours about our encounter started to spread everywhere as a sensational news like the seizure of the moon by the serpent (1146). The expression, the seizer of the moon by the serpent, refers to “the mythological eclipse of the moon, which is accounted for scientifically by the earth coming between the sun and the moon.”⁸

2. The Goodness of the Mother Earth

Now, we are going to deal with the next component of the physical elements of cosmic creation is the earth. *Thkirukkural* makes use of two words like *Nilam* and *Kalari* to denote the earth, ground or the land. According to the Hebrew Scriptures, “The earth is the Lord’s” (Ps 24:1); to him belongs “the earth with all that is within it” (Dt 10:14; LS 67). Therefore, God is the owner and author of the earth but He entrusted it to humanity (Gen 1:28) not only for cultivating, ploughing or working but also for caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving it (Gen 2:15; LS 67). We are aware that today our land is used for different purposes such as agriculture and horticulture, housing, roads and railway lines, industries, mining, storing water, fodder, forest wealth, etc. Here, we mainly focus our attention concerning the use of the land for the purpose of agriculture.

2.1 The Greatness of Agriculture, Farmers and Guidelines for Cultivation

It is interesting to note that an entire chapter, consisting of ten couplets, is dedicated to deal with the importance of agriculture and the directions given for

the cultivation of the land. Day-today life of those who are involved in tilling the land manifests to us that agriculture is a very much labourious task which involves a lot of difficulties and sufferings. However, it is regarded by *Thirukkural* as the best of all the occupations or professions which we come across in this world and the people of other occupations ultimately have to depend upon it (1031). Those persons who are working in the field of manufacturing the computers cannot live by consuming those parts. Instead, they need to rely on the food items produced in the land. Hence, agriculture is to be seen as the foundation upon which all other edifices are built and it is the bedrock of the earth.

Kural is of the opinion that agriculture stands at the pride of place of all the economic activities. Since agriculture alone has the capacity to produce different raw materials for food which are absolutely necessary for the existence of all the people who are engaged in different professions as their sources of earning and living their life. Hence, agriculture is valued as the axle of all the people of the world (1032). As far as a car is concerned, an axle plays a vital role because it is the part which rotates the wheels of the car, holds the weight of it and maintains the position of the wheels. Basically, it is important for the movement of any vehicle. Likewise, to keep on moving the life of a person, food is necessary and the food items are produced through agriculture and as a result, agriculture is regarded as the axle. There is another interpretation to consider that agricultural is not merely a profession but as an ethical way of living without which the earth will collapse.

While emphasising the importance of agriculture, it did not fail to underline the greatness of the farmers because they are the backbone of the society, who cultivate the land not only for themselves but also for others and to live with the help of the food produced by them from the cultivation, are the true living persons. All others rely on the farmers who give them the food and living from their produce through agriculture (1033). Thus, the life of a farmer is considered to be worth living in this world. The farmers, who are endowed with the wealth of their produce from their farms, have the potentiality to bring all other states under the jurisdiction of their own ruler (1034). There is no doubt that agricultural wealth plays a prominent role in terms of the economic wealth of a country.

Another aspect of the uniqueness of the farmers is that they are the ones who produce and eat from what they have produced and thus they do not seek alms from others. And above all, they are all the more generous enough to give something to those who beg them (1035). Both the land and farmers are very much aware of the high value of giving. If the hands of the farmers happen to stop working in the field, even the ascetics who say that they have renounced everything cannot live in this

world (1036). Agriculture wealth plays a vital role regarding the economy of the country, if they stop doing the agricultural activities, the economy of the country will collapse.

Therefore, *Valluvar* valued the farmers highly and greatly for the following reasons namely they serve as the axle of the world, produce food not only for themselves but also provide food for others, are capable of bringing all other rulers under the power of their own and they do not seek food from others but generous enough to share with others who beg them. They are like the clouds who are concerned about the good of others without expecting anything in return. But it is something unfortunate today, the farmers in India had to stage a protest for 383 days to obtain their own rights. It is all the more shocking to note, according to the National Crime Records Bureau report in 2004 there were 18,241 farmers who committed suicide and in 2015, 12,602 farmers met with the same fate.

Thirukkural comes out in proposing certain technics to be followed by the farmers to have a better cultivation. It tells us that if we are able to reduce one ounce of earth to a quarter by ploughing it multiple times, we are in a position to produce plenty even without the help of handful of manure (1037). When we do so, soil will be naturally aerated and increase the growth of nitrogen fixing bacteria and as a result, we will be able to get more healthy crops.⁹ This may a technique that we can follow as the present Pope is inviting us to develop techniques for the sustainable agriculture (*LS* 180). This direction of *Valluvar* will also be of great help to today's farmers who are accustomed to use excessively pesticides and artificial fertilizers with the intention of obtaining more profit by ignoring the damages done to the earth itself and above all to the consumers.

In contradiction to the proposal found in the above-mentioned couplet that we can have good produce without the use of manure, *Thirukkural* in the following couplet tells that manuring is more essential than ploughing and protecting the crops is more significant than irrigation after the weeding (1038). According to Mohamed Jayalani, it is not to be perceived as a contradiction if we are more attentive to the expressions of these two couplets, we may grasp that as far as the dry land is concerned manure is not required whereas in the case of wetlands it is needed. For wetlands, we need to undertake certain activities such as ploughing, manuring, weeding, irrigation and crop production in order to have best output. Dry lands are considered to be significant source for crops which assure income to the farmers with minimum resources and food security.¹⁰ Although ploughing the land, manuring it, removing the weeds, watering, protecting the crops are important for the cultivation, two aspects are to be given priority namely manuring and guarding the crops especially from sicknesses and destruction.

It is absolutely necessary, on the part of the land owner to take care of the land. If he or she fails to do so, it is sure and certain that the land on its part will not yield anything as the reaction like a sulking wife who has not experienced the care and protection of her husband (1039). In this couplet, two elements are to be observed that the land will help only those people who are regarded toilers and thus let us not expect any miracle to happen without involving hard work. Secondly, in human beings, there exist two types basic instincts like hunger for food (self-preservation) and hunger for sex (self-propagation). The wife who has not experienced sufficient love, care and concern of her husband may not show interest in collaborating with her husband to fulfil the husband's hunger for sex. In this way *Thirukkural* makes a comparison between farming and chaste way of life. It also makes us understand that not only a human being needs our care and concern but also non-human beings, the land and its crops.

2.2. Concern for the Quality of the Soil and the Necessity to Work

There exists connectivity between the soil and water since the quality of the soil is that which determines the nature of water. In order to understand its inner implication, we are given another reality of life, the quality of the wisdom of a person varies depending upon his or her association with the category of people (452). When we constantly relate with intellectuals, our knowledge gets broadened likewise the good soil adds better quality to the water. Another couplet also shows the intimate connection between the sprouts or seedlings and the soil because the growth of the seedlings is that which manifests the quality of the soil just as we are able to perceive the nobility of the people depending upon the words they utter (959). Those who are involved in farming will tell us that if seeds are sown in the fertile soil, the seedlings will be healthy. From our look at the sprouts of a plant, we can naturally grasp the quality of the soil or the earth. Hence, one of the things through which the worth of a country is measured based on its fertility of the land and crops (732).

The people have the natural inclination to give value to a country which is endowed with fertile land and natural resources because it has the possibility to increase its wealth day by day and the people are blessed with prosperity. And at the same time, it is considered to be free from any natural calamities like flood, and drought, or any other problems like prevalence of wild animals or birds or misrule from the part of the ruler and so on. Fertile land from which we are able to have bountiful crops is regarded as one of the ornaments of a country adding to its other ornaments like the absence of sickness, immense wealth, happiness and strong defence (738). These five ornaments imply the health, security, prosperity, the pleasure of the public or people and security.

Soil is in general classified into four categories namely clay soil, sand soil, slit soil, and loamy soil. In India, we come across such as alluvial soil, red soil, mountain soil, desert soil, lateritic soil and black soil. The Evangelist Mathew, in the parable of the sower, mentions about four types of land like the path, rocky ground, thorny place and good soil (cf. Mt 13:4-8). Therefore, by way of preserving and increasing the quality of the soil, we need to be extra-ordinarily careful not to lead the soil to its degradation through physical factors like water or wind erosion, chemical factors such as acidity or salinization (alkalinity) or water logging, and biological factors namely loss of soil micro-organisms, removal of dead organic matter and reduction in stabilizing plant communities.

On the other hand, the infertile soil or barren land is neither useful for itself nor for others. Therefore, the illiterates who just exist but they are in no way beneficial to anybody and thus they are compared to the barren land (406). It is not only enough to have the land with good soil to produce the food items for which everybody depends upon the agriculture. We also need to work in order to cultivate the land without remaining indolent or lethargic. The mother earth laughs at those who possess the land but do not have the food to eat and to live an idle life without involving themselves in the cultivation of the land (1040). The humanity is called not only to preserve the earth ('keep') but also to make it fruitful ('till'). Labourers and craftsmen thus "maintain the fabric of the world" (Sir 38:34; *LS* 124). In this regard, the book of Proverbs rightly pointed out: "Those who till their land will have plenty of food, but those who follow worthless pursuits have no sense" (Prov 12:11). Hence, there should be no place for laziness, the desire to do nothing and remain an idle, in the life of a person since it also paves the way for the reduction of the ability and productivity of a person. In this regard, *Laudato Si* of Pope Francis expresses that we were created and were endowed with a vocation to work. "The goal should not be that technological progress increasingly replace human work, for this would be detrimental to humanity. Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment" (*LS* 128).

3. Water, the Rudimentary Fluid of Living Organisms

Another factor connected with the physical elements of cosmic creation is water. Next to air, water is an essential element for the preservation of life. As a whole, we cannot basically think of any living being to exist without water (20). But it is interesting to become aware that our world is surrounded by the terror-producing ocean (149) and a never-drying ocean (701). And it is indeed surprising to see that 71% of our earth's surface is filled with water and our oceans contain 97% of our

earth's water. Though we cannot use the ocean water for drinking and domestic purposes, we are able to get rain through the clouds which absorb water from the oceans and give it back. If we do not get rain, then we are sure that the oceans will get dried up (17).

We are aware that water is basically used for different purposes like domestic, agricultural and industrial causes. "Fresh drinking water is an issue of primary importance, since it is indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems" (LS 28). Rain is that which provides water mainly for certain purposes namely for drinking and cultivation that is to say for the cultivation of the land and when we eat those items produced, we get thirsty and so, we drink water (12). In terms of underlining both the quality and quantity of water, the couplets say that the nature or quality of the water differs depending upon the quality of the soil in which it flows or to say that water gives up its own nature and adopts the nature of the soil in which it flows (452). The change of the nature of water is demonstrated through the happening in the life of humanity. The knowledge or the character of a person depends upon the persons with whom they relate.

There is another element connected with water that is we are able to get more water when we take the effort to dig as deeply as possible into the well which is situated in the sand. It is something which is based on the reality of life that teaches us that the greater interest we show in learning more, the better, deeper and broader will be our knowledge (396). The more we learn, the more we acquire in terms of knowledge. Our initiative and effort that we take in terms of learning will not disappoint us. It gives us the understanding that there is no question of achieving success without the involvement of our hard work which means to say without hard work, there is no success. This is the life experience we have inherited from the lives of successful persons in the world.

As a matter of fact, water is a finite commodity, if it is not managed properly, a situation in the near future will arise during which we will experience water scarcity. Pope Francis also warns us about the occurrence of an acute water shortage within a few decades if we do not take immediate precaution. If water scarcity occurs, such situation will lead us to face the increase of the prize of food and other products (LS 31). Hence there is the urgent need for us to preserve or conserve it. In this regard, *Thirukkural* expresses that surface namely water of the sea water of the river which flowing from the mountain (water from below) and rain water (water from above) are regarded as some of the limbs a country (737). Basing on this couplet, it is communicated that the four elements which serve as instruments of prosperity and the security of any country are the waters, mountains, rivers and forts.

The village-tank (lake or pond) is seen as the storage place where water is kept with the intention of preserving it, so that whenever the people are in need of it, there is the possibility to supply water to them. This insight is compared to the wealth of a person who is known for his or her stand for the common good or aware of the developing trend of the world is made available according to the requirement of the entire world (215). This invitation to use the right means to preserve water or water harvesting becomes more appropriate for today's context in which we observe that disputes emerge in many places due to the issue of water within states and between states and nations. It is believed that the next world war will occur due to water disputes among nations. Let us not ignore of another dimension connected with water scarcity that is today we come across the situation of the encroachment of some of the water bodies which leads to water scarcity.

Certain values like the necessity of having mental strength, accumulating wealth through only just means, keeping ourselves away from addiction or the impossibility of transforming a drunkard and not to hide, which are vital for the human existence are communicated through the water related matters. As a matter of fact, one is able observe that the water-flowers' stems are proportionate to the depth of water. There is no possibility for them to grow more than the water level. Therefore, the length of the stem depends upon the height of the water. It is compared with another reality of life like the people's greatness is based on the strength of their mind or will power (595). It is said that mental strength enables us to have satisfaction in our life, enhanced performance and increased resilience. Hence, we are exhorted to have mental strength or will power which will lead our life towards a better living in a holistic perspective.

In today's world, we notice that people are eager to become rich within short time but not bothered about the means and ways through which they want to achieve it. To such kind of people, *Thirukkural* comes out with a beautiful saying that the desire to protect the wealth which obtained through unjust means like unrighteous ways and actions such as robbery, exploitation, manipulation, cheating, etc., is equivalent to the intention of preserving a vessel of wet clay by filling it with water (660). We are made to understand there is the danger that we cannot preserve water and the pot will also get collapsed in the course of time. Here we are reminded of the saying of the book of Proverbs: "Wealth hastily gained will dwindle" (Prov 13:11). It means to say that wealth is to be earned with hard labour and exertion and if it is gained through illegitimate and dishonest means, it will soon get dissipated.

It is highly difficult to reform a drunkard by giving him or her certain advices or instructions. It is as impossible as the searching for a person who was drowned

in water with a lighted lamp (929). “Under normal circumstances, the neocortex is responsible for evaluating circumstances and making sound decisions. In the presence of alcohol, however, this feature no longer functions properly. The resulting intoxication causes serious and often disturbing behavioural changes.”¹¹ Therefore, to give certain advices to addicted, it is of no use since neocortex in him is not functioning properly. Hence, he is not in a position to make sound decisions. Thus, we will not succeed in bringing about the transformation in the life of a drunkard.

Today we speak about different types of behavioural addictions namely co-dependency, food and eating, gambling, sex, love, work, shopping, debit, internet and games. And our advancement in the globalized world enables us to succeed, to some extent, in treating these types of addicts. But the fundamental required on the part of the ones who are addicted is that they should come forward to acknowledge the reality of their addiction and the wiliness to come out of it. Instead of accepting the reality, if they happen to hide the reality, it is difficult to treat them. In this context, the insight of *Thirukkural* is vital which tells us that the more we try to hide from others the difficulties which are associated with our sickness of love, the more they keep on swelling like the more we draw from the spring the more water we will be able to get (1161). The expression, the more we draw water, the more water will gush from the well is compared to the lover, the more she hides her passion of love, the more tears will emerge from her eyes.

The concept of water is also made use of as a symbol to explain about the love (*eros*) which exists between wife and husband. The just glance of a wife at her husband and stooping her head when he does not notice it (by revealing the existence of her desire of love) is visualised as the water which she pours on the love she is nurturing that is making the love to grow further (1093).

In general, the usages of water can be brought under three categories namely, domestic, agricultural and industrial purposes. Domestic purpose consists of drinking, bathing, cooking food, and washing dishes, clothes, fruits, vegetables and brushing teeth which consumes 15% of water. With regard to the usefulness of water, as far as the human persons are concerned, *Kural* speaks of it in terms of its usefulness for human beings’ exteriority. Water is equipped with the capacity of purifying their exteriority while their truthfulness is capable of purifying their interiority (298). Consequently, water becomes a vital element in order to keep our external body pure, clean and hygienic.

Besides, it is all the more valuable to water a bed of plants which are able to grow by themselves. This action is compared to the action of the wise persons who

have the understanding of people and matters when they address the gathering of the learned persons (718). The idea which is conveyed here is that “making available right amount of water in the proper manner, through the appropriate channel.”¹² Another characteristic of water is that when water which is essential for the existence, is exposed to the hot sun loses its characteristic of pleasantness. On the contrary, if it remains in the shade, it becomes cool and sweet. Similarly, the act of love-making becomes satisfying and pleasant only when it is made between persons who are endowed with love for each other (1309).

3.1 *Rain, Provider of Water*

Thirukkural, in its first chapter, starts first in dealing with invocation of God, and then proceeds in narrating the importance of rain which is considered to be the energizer or important principal actor in the affairs of all the life forms of the world. By giving priority to rain after God, he wants to pinpoint that rain is a dominant factor in terms of the existence of all living organisms and agriculture which serves as the foundation for the stable economic life. Generally, it is understood, that rain is the cause for recharging ground water which is mostly used for drinking purpose. It plays a vital role in overcoming tragic situation like forest fire and maintains water cycle. Realising its inevitability, a complete chapter is dedicated to deal with the theme of rain in *Thirukkural*. It comes out in indicating rightly the impacts of both the timely, regular and seasonal occurrence and that of the absence or ceasing of rain.

First of all, let us deal with the outcome of the seasonal rain fall which we observe in *Thirukkural*. i) The rationale behind the continual existence of world is the unfailing fall of rain. Consequently, rain is valued as the nectar (which serves as a food for immortal life) or ambrosial food for all living beings since it sustains the life on earth without being destroyed (11). ii) We are aware that rain is a significant factor for both growth and production of food that we consume. Besides, it serves us as food by the very fact of providing drinking water for all those who eat food produced by the rain (12). iii) Timely fall of rain enables the people to live happily without starvation especially those who suffered terribly due to its continuous and constant absence or non-occurrence (15). It is also sharp enough to demonstrate that when we have rain, we are blessed with water which is essential for our living and cultivation that leads us to have food for our life which removes hunger. If we have good cultivation, certain acts such as charity, penance are taking place. Hence, *Kural* is indicating to us the chain of actions taking place due to good rain.

Kural is also prompt in expressing the consequences of the absence of rain. Today's world realities tell us that it is estimated about 1.1 billion people worldwide

do not have access to water, and a total of 2.7 billion suffer from water scarcity for at least one month in a year. Insufficient sanitation is also faced by 2.4 billion people.¹³ As a matter of fact, we are surrounded by water of the oceans but it is unfortunate that that we are unable to consume it. Therefore, if the rains from the sky fail to come down to the earth, we will be facing the destructive consequences.

i) We depend upon the rain water for the cultivation of vegetables and food grains. Hence, if we face the situation of absence of rain, then we have no option but to experience the extinction of plants and crops and ultimately leading us to suffer from starvation (13). ii) One of the reasons for cultivating the lands, on the part of the farmers, is to get income and economically to come up in life. Thus, the lack of rain, which is the source of income, forces the farmers to be incapable of cultivating their lands which will obstruct them to produce food substances to live and to grow economically (14). iii) The same rain which causes the people to live by helping them to overcome the hunger and the other attached difficulties, can also become a factor for them to face the state of destruction by its absence and make them to suffer in their daily existence (15). So, rain can become a matter of life and death depending upon of its occurrence and non-occurrence.

iv) From our life experiences, we know that it will be highly impossible even for a blade of grass to grow on the earth if it does not rain (16). Sometimes, we may think that grass is not so much important for us but it is said that there are several benefits involved in terms of the use of the natural grass like maintaining the air quality through its production of oxygen, reducing pollution and runoff, filtering excessive storm water and reducing sediment and pollutants from entering water bodies like ponds, lakes, rivers, oceans, seas, glaciers and so on, conditioning the air, improving wellness and reducing stress, having a positive and therapeutic effect, increasing community value and improving property values, and using it for recreation and sport activities.¹⁴ Besides, we are given the understanding that a number of animals consume it as the food for their existence. The destructive impact of the absence of rain is also felt on the biodiversity.

v) It is the nature of the cloud to come down to the earth as rain. If it fails in exercising its natural functioning, even the water of the oceans will get depleted on account of the fact that the oceans will get back the evaporated water from the oceans through the means of rain (17). In this way, it is revealed to us that the rain is endowed with the capacity of keeping the oceans to continue to exist.

vi) The discontinuation or cancellation of the annual celebration of festivals and above all every day worship of God will take place if the people failed to have seasonal rains (18). It is natural to perceive, if the timely rain does not occur, there

is the possibility that people suffer from poverty, famine, and starvation and thus they remain in the situation of sorrow, unhappiness. But in general, the annual celebration of festivals is undertaken in the atmosphere of prosperity and joyfulness. The lack of rain also incapacitates them to offer the things which are the fruits of the earth and the work of the human hands in their daily worship.

vii) Without rain we cannot think of the possibility of cultivation and production which will ultimately lead us to become non-havers or non-possessors. This condition will disable us to undertake the exercise of charity or alms-giving in our duty towards others. And when we are already in the state of material nothingness, how can we involve ourselves in the acts of charity? Absence of rain also undermines us to undertake the devotional practices like fasting, penance, etc., in our duty towards ourselves (19).

viii) When rain fails, we have nothing to eat in order to keep ourselves to continue to exist. Therefore, we are forced to involve ourselves in unethical activities like robbery, looting and fights to survive and so the disciplined life vanishes from us (20). In this couplet the interrelatedness exists between things namely clouds, water and living beings. Hence, *Thirukkural* with all sincerity directs all the citizens without exception to live our life with the realisation that rain is essential for the existence which signifies that the living beings fully depend upon the water which is part of nature.

Further, the author of couplets is also intelligent enough to pinpoint the intimate connection that we observe between seasonal rain and the just rule of a king. We are aware of the reality that all the living beings of the world look to rain in their existence. Likewise, the people in their earthly life look to the just rule from their king because their life depends upon the king's just rule (542). The element of love and compassion plays an import role in both the cases. It is compassion which motivates both the clouds and kings to give good rain and rule. If a king happens to rule his country in a just way or in a country where the rule of law prevails, then it will be blessed with rain and plentiful crops (545). On the contrary, if he fails to rule it with justice, then the country will not be in a position to have its regular rains (559). Thus, just like all the living beings of the world suffer on account of the absence of rain, the people of a country also undergo sufferings on account of their king who does not show kindness to them (557).

In this regard, I am reminded of a Tamil proverb which reflects the English proverb: "As is the king, so are the subjects." It brings to our notice similar sayings like "As is the thread so is the cloth" and "As is the mother so are the children." The inner implication, we can draw and interpret from these sayings, goes in the

following manner. When the king who is considered to be the supreme leader, shows his love and concern to his people without giving any room for exploitation, misuse and manipulation in his relationship to them, his own people too will imitate their king and put into practice those values in their relationship with the world of nature without bringing any destruction and degradation. As a result, there is no irregularity in getting seasonal rains and thus experiencing prosperity. It can also happen in the opposite way. But the end result will be lack of timely rain which will lead the people to experience famine and destruction.

In *Thirukkural*, we notice, a comparison is made between the element of rain and certain realities of life. The short-lived poverty of a benevolent rich person who got reputation on account of his or her charitable activities is compared to the symbolism of clouds going dry after rain (1010). In both the cases either the poverty of the noble rich man or the clouds going dry are only temporary which should not be seen as misfortune instead both of them will certainly get replenished. It also comes out with another comparison that the grace showered by the beloved on his lover is just like the clouds showering rain on the living beings by sensing how much they require (1192). Again, we are reminded about the existence of love, compassion and tenderness from the part of the clouds as well as the beloved for the earth and the lover.

3.2 Usage of a Tree as a symbol

As we are aware, there exists an intimate connection between rain and trees. Tree plays a greater role in the raining process. More specifically growing trees perform two different functions namely sucking the water from the soil and releasing it into the atmosphere. We might have heard about a process which is called evapotranspiration that is to say, trees serve as interceptors because they catch up the falling rain from the sky, which evaporates later and thus producing rain precipitation in some other place.

Although the word 'tree' appears several times but only the name of two trees — palm (104, 433, 1282) and bamboo (1113, 1272) — is mentioned in *Thirukkural*. It makes use of the symbol of a tree to communicate profound insights like the greatness involved in the littleness of a help, both the magnificence of charity minded and insignificance of uncharitable person, the necessity to do away with the fear for guilt instead better to have love in the heart, having eyes with kindness and the need to possess an aspiring mind, etc., which are essential for our earthly co-existence. Though the help, we extend to others, may look small or little in size just like a grain or a millet seed, the recipients of it will regard it as big or large as a palm tree (104). The wealth, which gets accumulated in a person who is known for

his or her benevolence or charitable mindedness, is equated to a fruit bearing tree which is found in the midst of a village that is useful (216). And such wealth is also valued like a medicinal tree and all the branches of it are seen as medicinal and so they will be useful to many (217).

The nature of a tree is to bear fruits or to serve as a medicine so that others get benefited. The book of Sirach makes it clear that “The Lord created medicines out of the earth, and a sensible man will not despise them” (Sir 38:4; *LS* 124). On the other hand, the wealth of a person who is not at all generous and charitable and thus disliked by everyone in the society resembles a poisonous tree which is full of fruits situated in the midst of a village (1008) and become dangerous to the people instead of being useful to them. The problem with those persons who have the fear for guilt is that even if they happened to commit a slightest mistake as a millet seed, they will perceive it to be as large as a palmyra tree (433).

If people happen to live their lives without love in their hearts, they will be considered as withered tree sprouting in the parched desert. Such tree is seen as living but not so healthy. So, the persons who are without love are seen merely as living persons but not joyful persons (78). We may come across certain persons, who, though have eyes but never look kindly on others. Such persons are considered to be just like the trees of the earth which are infixed that is to say unable to move (576). In the society, we also meet few persons who lack the aspiring mind which is considered to be the quality of manhood and though they physically look like human beings but mentally they are not different from the trees. Hence, the aspiring mind in the human person is very much expected and appreciated (600). It is also generally expected that people must be having certain human qualities like love, compassion, concern, courtesy, if not they will be regarded as trees even if they happened to possess intelligence as sharp as a file. Those qualities will enable others to come to them and establish with them the contact (997).

It is expected from the part of humanity that any thorny tree is to be removed at the initial stage of its growth itself, otherwise, later when it is grown fully it will harm or hurt the hand of the one who removes it (879). As a whole, it reminds us with an important exhortation that anything harmful to the humanity, above all to the society, it has to be uprooted at the initial state and if it is not done so, it will become a virus which will destroy everyone in the society. The reality of life teaches the lesson: when a person after reaching the top of a tree, still tries to go up further, he or she will surely fall from it and ultimately face death. In the same way, in everyone’s life there is a limit for everything if someone tries to move further beyond the boundary, his or her life will become miserable (476).

3.3 Water Bodies, Vital for the Preservation of Water

As it was made clear that water is an essential thing without which no living being will be able to survive and grow. It is indicated that 3/4 of the surface of the earth planet is covered with water. It is interesting to note that water is found throughout planet in various locations which we call as water bodies such as oceans, seas, rivers of two kinds namely snow-fed and rain-fed, lakes and ponds which we find only in our beautiful earth planet. References are made about many of the water bodies in *Thirukkural*.

Although many are accustomed to use them interchangeably both the ocean and sea consisting of salt water, there are some major differences which are indicated today. The ocean is bigger in size than the sea, covering 71% of the earth's entire surface. It is not necessarily situated near to the land and has reduced the aquatic life since its location is far away from the land and its depth is greater than the sea. The existence of marine life is very much limited due to the lack of penetration of sunlight deep into it. On the other hand, the sea is smaller in size, usually located near to the land, aquatic life is more due to its proximity to the land and the marine life exists in a larger quantity due to the penetration of sunlight. We are not certain whether *Valluvar* was really aware of such differences between the ocean and sea. He used only once the direct term *Perungadal* which implies the ocean. He used other times some other terms like *Virineer*, *Kadal*, *Aazhi* to refer the sea. Here, it is very important to note the fact that the words ocean and sea are used in two different contexts. They sometimes imply the significance of a body of saline water which consists of a larger part of our earth's hydrosphere. But most of the times, they are made use of as symbolic terms in reference to their size or magnitude like sea of immortality, sea of vice, sea of virtue, sea of births, sea of rats, sea of perfection, sea of love, sea of joy, sea of sorrow etc.

Thirukkural mentions it obviously, the water of the sea which we see around the earth will be of no use to overcome the grip of famine (13). Another impact is that there is the possibility for the water in the ocean to get depleted if the clouds which give us seasonal rain do not absorb the water and give it back as rain (17). *Valluvar* was very much particular in instructing us that before starting to make an instrument, we must be aware of the realities that neither the wide chariot, though it is well fitted with strong wheels, can travel on the ocean nor the boat can move on the land (496). We know that the living beings of the water bodies cannot survive on the land and vice versa.

In General, there exists the understanding that there is no possibility for anyone to swim the sea of immortality. But this impossibility can be overcome by the one

who enjoys intimacy with the Supreme Being who is perceived as a sea of virtue (8). And it is also all the more possible for him or her to cross over the sea of births (10). This understanding makes us to become aware of the famous saying that nothing is impossible with God which is indicated number of times in the Bible (cf. Lk 1:37; Mt 19:29). The act of helping others not with the expectation of anything in return but purely with love is valued great because such action is regarded as larger than the sea (103). Such a wonderful act will lead us to have lasting happiness and meaningful success and to build long standing relationships. What is vital to have victory over the enemy is not the number but braveness, and good training. It is like the mere breath of a cobra makes the sea of rats to run away, but an army of determination is capable of bringing down the foes who are more in number (763).

The history of humanity makes us to realise the fact that the ages are subject to changes. But those, who possess the deep strength of a noble character or are committed in exercising their obligations, are known as the shore of sea of perfection who will never subject to change even though seas get changed (989). Thus, in any society a person who is known for his or her perfection is very much valued and appreciated than others. We are informed about the different types of love according to the ancient Greeks like *Eros* – erotic love (lust), *philia* – affectionate love, *storge* – familiar love, *ludus* – playful love, *mania* – obsessive love, *pragma* – enduring love, *philautia* – self-love, and *agape* – selfless love.

From the perspective of psychology, love or lust is perceived as a psychological force which is capable of creating an intense desire for something. Lust has got different forms such as lust for sexuality, money, power, food, indolence, etc. In the context of lust for sexuality, *Thirukkural* expresses that though women have the pangs of lust as large and deep as the ocean they will not enter into bodily relationship with men as some men easily do (1137). Here, we observe that *Valluvar* has high regard for the morality of women because he had observed in them this noble thing. He also acknowledges that there exists lust which is as deep as the sea (1137) but one finds that there is no protective boat which stands as the symbol for the lover to cross the sea of passionate love safely (1164). In both couplets (1137 and 1167), the passion of love is compared to the sea.

Thirukkural makes use of the words like *oorini*, *kulam* to indicate the lake or village tank or pond. As the village tank is made use of for the purpose of preserving water, which we get through rain, is stored sufficiently, it will be able to fulfil water related needs of the people during the non-rainy season. In the same way, the wealth which is accumulated by the learned persons will be useful to the society (215) and on the other hand, the wealth of a person who is not interested in mingling with

his or her own relatives will remain like the filling water in a lake which does not have banks (523). The tanks which do not have the banks will be of no use since they cannot contain water rather water goes out and not being stored in the tanks. Our willingness to help others without expectation will enable us to help those who cannot give anything to us in return. It will certainly make the life of the people better. This kind of mentality and action will definitely manifest our others-centeredness and thus regarded as larger than the sea (103).

3.4 Indications of Hills/Mountains

In general, two reasons are mentioned with regard to the creation of mountains such as the movement of tectonic plates together and volcanic activity. 24% of earth's land mass is covered by mountains. In *Thirukkural*, the word mountain is sometimes used symbolically to imply the highness or exaltedness or elatedness or greatness of a person (29, 124, 898, 965). We also find the reference to a mountain which is indicated in the context of a person who is equipped with sufficient wealth in his or her own hands, starting an undertaking is compared to the symbolism of a person who is standing on the top of a mountain which gives him or her the security and viewing the elephants fight in the plain (758). Starting a business with the money one has in his or her hands is regard as one of the reasons for achieving success in a business rather than depending upon somebody's help or borrowing the finance from others.

4. Air – an Absolute Component for Existence

Much more than food and water, air is absolutely essential for the existence of any living organism. We can live in this planet without food for some days. But life is unthinkable without air to breath. Air cannot be seen with naked eyes but can be experienced by the sense of feeling. A healthy person inhales and exhales 12 to 16 times in a minute which shows the vitality of air. *Thirukkural* does not speak much about the concept of air or wind. Still, we find the mention of it in a few times. It talks about the prevalence of the wind over the planet earth. The people of the rich earth over which the wild wind blows are bearing witness to the reality that the grace-filled persons without minding their own difficulties or sufferings on account of the strength of the grace, can exercise their responsibilities (245). In other words, sorrow never comes to those persons who are grace-filled. The teeming earth's vast realm around which the wind blows is a witness to it. Again, it makes mention of the wind in relation to the embrace that takes place between the lovers. The lovers are able to have their intimacy by embracing each other as closely or tightly as possible that even the wind is unable to pass through them (1108).

5. Fire and Its Positive and Negative Impacts

Fire consists of both constructive and destructive effects. With regard to the positive effects, it serves as the source of clean energy and warmth; essential for cooking; supporting life; paving the way for the science to develop; essential for the creation of weapons and for building infrastructure; useful for attacking and defending; serving as the symbol of reverence; preserving the earth's ecosystem; means of communication, etc.¹⁵

Thirukkural also rightly pinpoints the advantages of fire. Basing on the life of the those who are involved in the profession of making the gold ornament (goldsmith), we know that fire plays a vital role in getting gold to be purified and making it all the more shining and glittering. By presenting this example to us it wants to communicate a higher thought that an ascetic becomes all the more shining person by experiencing sufferings on account of the frequent austerities which are undertaken willingly and voluntarily in order to achieve a particular goal (267). So, the pain that one undergoes due to the embrace of penance is nothing comparing to its outcome that is he or she becomes a wise or purer or shining person.

On the other hand, it can destroy people and property and is detrimental to the environment. *Thirukkural* expresses that there are some undesirable elements like uttering harsh words, being envious, possessing the tendency to do evil, telling lies, being filled with anger, disrespecting the noble, being in poverty, etc., which can cause more danger than the fire. There is the possibility for the fire to cause the wound, though, the scar remains, its internal wound gets healed but the wound brought by the tongue (harsh words) will remain without being healed (129). We ourselves might have experienced the situation of being hurt by the harsh words of others. When we say that envy is much more dangerous than the fire, we mean, envy, in those persons in whom it is found, has the potentiality not only to destroy their wealth but also drives them into the pit of fire (168) because it is seen as kind of negative emotion which is instrumental in bringing about miseries in one's life and pampers any type of relationship.

It is the nature of fire to burn the things on which it is lit and finally to destroy them completely. But it does not harm the person who sets the fire on the things. But in the case of evil, it is not so, on the contrary, evil is capable of producing evil which means to say, the very act of our doing of evil to others will do evil to us. Hence, it is sincerely exhorting us to have fear for evil more than fire (202).

Whenever our conscience tells us that something is not true but it is merely a lie, then we are expected not to tell it out since when the world comes to know that what we have told was a lie, our conscience will burn us due to our guilt feeling (293).

If a person happens to be burnt by fire, there is the opportunity for him or her at least to escape from the death and to continue to live but the person who shows disrespect to the noble person will never be able to live and there is no possibility for such person to escape (896). When we are in the midst of fire still, it is presumed that some may be in position to sleep with the help of some magical positions and medicines but it is not at all possible when we are got up with the grip of poverty (1049). When we are hungry our body lacks “the nutrients to fuel brain power, replenish cells and provide boost. Aside from irritability and mood swings, hunger often cause fatigue — the most common complaint. It can also lead to an inability to concentrate, feelings of confusion and lack of focus.”¹⁶

The danger which is involved in the case of the fire of anger¹⁷ is that it consists of ammunition which is capable of destroying not only the persons who are in possession of it but also their kith and kin who give them the protection at the moments of danger (306). In this regard, the book of Proverbs reminds us, “Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly” (Prov 14:29). It further affirms the greatness of not yielding to anger, “One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city” (Prov 16:32).

It is strongly recommended that we need to be generous enough to avoid in getting angry even with a person who has inflicted upon us painful things as if a bundle of fire but after having regretted for the painful things he has done against us, now wants to establish his relation with us (308). Let us also not to forget the fact when we get angry, it also affects us. On the other hand, we will be able to succeed in obtaining whatever we desire if we do not give room for the anger to take shelter in our heart (309). The wise persons will not show their anger against their rivals instead they keep it under control until they succeed in achieving their aim at the appropriate time (487). The Book of Proverbs supports this saying: “A fool gives full vent to anger, but the wise quietly holds it back” (Prov 29:11).

The couplets make use of the concept of fire in relation to the necessity to guard oneself against committing wicked acts, to keep a balanced approach in one’s association with the rulers. We know that the straw which is found near the fire will get burnt. Thus, a person’s life will also perish just like a straw before fire, if he or she does not succeed, beforehand, in guarding himself or herself against committing

wrong things (435). The ministers who are at the service of the fickle-minded of the rulers should keep a balance in their association with the kings that is the ministers must not go so close to them nor to keep themselves far away from them just as the people who warm themselves in front of fire (691). When the ministers go near to the king, there is the possibility that the king can turn his wrath on them with real or imagined grievances and if they happen to keep themselves far away from the king, such distance will not help them to extent their service to him and it will not benefit him personally in any way.¹⁸

Thirukkural speaks of a special kind of fire which is passion found in a woman. The uniqueness of it consists on the reality, when we come close to her, we feel cool at the same time when we go away from her, we feel warm. We do not know from where she got such a new kind of fire (1104). In view of escaping from the slander of the people, we may think that we can very well quench the passion. But it is highly impossible to do so because to extinguish one's passion is like extinguishing fire with ghee (1148). Passion is a kind of energy or a powerful force which is to be channelized towards the right directions. The nature of fire is that it burns us only when we touch it. But when we go way from it, it does not burn us at all (1159). Can all those who are endowed with hearts which melt like fat in the fire, create a strong dislike and remain so after having enjoyed their intimate union with their partners? (1260). It means to say all those who got tender hearted find it extremely difficult to stay away from their beloved ones after having experienced union with them.

6. Extending Compassion to all the Living Beings

The call to take care of the living beings comes from different corners. Both Stockholm Declaration (1972) and Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992) insisted on the need of the international cooperation to take care of the ecosystems of the entire earth (LS 167). *Thirukkural* fundamentally upholds the principle that all the living beings must be protected and preserved. It is completely prohibiting the acts of killing them and eating their meat. That is to say, it is encouraging people to opt for vegetarianism. Hence it reminds the human beings that all those who live their life by showing compassion or kindness towards all the living organisms are considered to be *Anthanas* (30).

And all those who consider that it is their duty and obligation to come forward to extent their compassionate love, kindness and protect all the living beings, do not need to bother about their own life (244). In this regard, we are given the clear-cut understanding concerning the significance of both kindness and unkindness. Kindness signifies the preservation of any form of life and unkindness implies the

destruction of the life of any living being. And it is also clearly pinpointed that it is not right from our part to consume the meat of the living beings (254). *Kural* challenges us that we have already experienced manifold sufferings because others had inflicted upon us different kinds of sufferings. So, we are very much aware of the impacts of sufferings. Therefore, it is all the more expected from our part not to inflict sufferings upon the living beings (318).

A complete chapter is allotted regarding its commitment to the virtue of non-killing. It is categorically expressed that killing any living being is not only regarded as unrighteous but also leads us to all kinds of evil, on the contrary, the non-killing is seen as virtuous (321). Both the act of sharing with others by way of maintaining equality as well as the protection of all the creatures are viewed as the best of all virtues (322). Abstaining from killing is valued as the foremost among all virtues and freedom from falsehood is regarded as next to non-killing, *Thirukkural* reiterates its firmness and commitment to uphold its priority to non-killing (323).

We are advised to dedicate ourselves in order to follow the code of conduct of the avoidance of killing any creatures because it is perceived as the good and perfect path (324). Those who carry out the principle of not killing any creatures are valued greater comparing to those who denounce the family life but embracing the ascetical life (325). We are informed that even the death will be hesitant to take away the life of someone who is determined not to kill any living being and uphold the policy of taking care of it (326). We are invited not to involve in the act of killing any living organism even to the extent when there arises the possibility that we are being killed by any living beings (327). We may consider that we can accumulate wealth by killing any living being but the wise ones will in no way consider such wealth as valuable (328). And they too, due to their realisation of the impacts of killing, will value those persons who are involved in killing as dishonourable persons (329). The wise will also consider the sufferings of the people, their life of poverty and their miserable life as the consequences of their involvement in the killing of different living beings (330).

Thirukkural highlights the negative impacts of those who eat the flesh of any other living creatures in order to nourish their body, namely they cannot be valued as persons endowed with compassion (251); are unable to have the benefits of compassion (252); are considered to be cruel-hearted or persons who have no regard for goodness (253); and the animals will not be in a position to live in this world and thus leading the offenders to hell and not allowing them to come out (255). It also brings out the optimistic effect of people who desist from consuming the flesh of different creatures, such as, all the living beings will worship them with the folded hands (260) and above all, no one in the world will come forward to undertake the occupation of a meat-seller (256).

It is all the more enriching to notice that it not only speaks about the disadvantages of embracing non-vegetarianism (killing and eating the flesh of different creatures) and the advantages of following vegetarianism, but also proposes the ways and means to abstain from eating meat that is, to come to the realization, when we eat the meat of any animal, we are but eating the flesh of the unclean ulcer of a body of a living being (257); the perception of the act of not consuming the meat of an animal is far better than the act of performing a thousand rich oblations (259); and the recognition that the wise people who have liberated themselves from the mental delusion will not eat the flesh which is separated from its life (258).

7. The Qualities of Flowers

Although the word 'flower' is used several times, *Thirukkural* mentions the name of only two flowers: *Anicham* (Scarlet Pimpernel) (90, 1111, 1115, 1120) and *Kuvalai* (Cup Flower) (1114). It associates flowers with God and Goddess. Persons who follow Him who passes swiftly over the flower of the mind are sure to live longer in fame (3). It is believed that *Mudevi* (the goddess of adversity) abides in a person who is known for his or her indolence, whereas the one who is distinguished for industriousness, *Laskmi* (the goddess of prosperity) who is connected to the lotus flower, abides (617). *Anicham* flower is considered to be sensitive and so as soon as we smell it, it will fade away. Likewise, if we happen to welcome our guests with unpleasant face, they will feel unhappy and sure to disappear (90). By indicating the nature of *Anicham* flower, it stresses the importance of being pleasant which is part of our hospitality.

Again, *Thirukkural* speaks of *Anicham* flower as the softest of all the flowers but there is somebody who is much tender than this flower that is one's own lover (1111). What is more esteemed in her is the sense of touch among the five senses. Sexual delight is more delicate than a flower but only a few are there in the world to understand its nature and obtain it (1289).

It is the natural expectation of the human beings that the flowers must have their two basic qualities namely blossoming and giving fragrance. If they fail in one of these qualities, they are not valued much. In this background, persons, who are incapable of explaining to others in a more understandable or graspable way whatever they have learned, are regarded as the bunches of blossomed flowers but without fragrance (650). According to Rajaji, "There are flowers, that blossom in plenteous clusters but bear no sweet fragrance. Like these are those who, though learned, have not the mastery of expression to convey their knowledge briefly to others."¹⁹

As we know the length of the stem of lotus flower is based on the height of the water. In the same way, the greatness of human person is based on his zeal, inner strength or the strength of the will (595). Reference to flowers is seen in relation to the perception of friendship. Having friendship with great persons of the world is wisdom. Thus, friendship should not be of one of having the feeling of happiness at the initial stage and later giving it up in the course of time like the flowers which undergo the process of opening and closing (425).

Thirukkural has got so much of aesthetic sense and thus flower is related to the eyes of a woman. The lotus will feel shy and inferior by seeing the eyes of this excellent jewelled one since her eyes are more beautiful than the lotus (1114). What gives beauty to the good and virtuous husbands is an increased shyness of the wives whose eyes are like flowers (1305). Our mind gets fascinated by the flowers. We get fascinated by the eyes of the lover whose eyes resemble the flowers (1112, cf. 1142) and whose eyes are directed only to him and thus he may take notice of the love which are behind her eyes and enjoy it all in a unique manner.²⁰ If the moon has the desire to become the face of the lover who is endowed with flowers like eyes, there is a condition laid down before the moon that is the moon should appear to him alone and not to be seen by many (1119).

It speaks of the relationship between love and flower. Love is compared to the nature of a flower which buds in the morning forth, gets expanded all day long and blossoms in the evening (1227). Due to the departure of him who has gone afar, her eyes weep for him and shun (the sight of) fresh and fragrant flowers in the field (1231). As fragrance is hidden in the bud before it begins to blossom into flower, the thought of her husband is hidden in the smile of the wife (1274). Even if the husband wears a garland which is made up of beautiful flowers, his wife tells him in an angry temper that he is wearing it with the intention of showing off to other women (1313).

8. Use of Natural Elements as the Standard of Measurement

Thirukkural stands as an expert in indicating the breadth and length and height and depth of natural elements which are symbolically made use of in order to communicate the greatness and the meaningfulness involved in exercising certain values of life. The value of any type of help increases greatly depending upon the time during which we help others. When we extend even a smallest help at the time of need, it will be considered as something greater than the world itself (102). The help that is rendered may be small like a grain, but it is valued as high as a palm tree by the recipient (104). Fully out of love and without expecting anything in return, when a help is extended to someone, such help will be regarded as larger than the

ocean (103). A person, who lives a humble life without going away from the right path, is ranked taller than a mountain (124).

The wealth which is found with the person of eminent knowledge will benefit the entire world, just as the village tank filled with water helps the people (215). The wealth that gets accumulated in a charitable person will be indeed helpful to many people like the fruit tree situated in the midst of a village (216). Just like a tortoise which is capable of controlling its limbs within, a person who can control his five senses will be in a position to preserve this quality throughout his or her life (126). The first virtue that we need to live with is to bear with those who revile us just as the mother earth bears up those who dig it (151). The above-mentioned values are spoken in relation to the natural elements like the world, grain, palm tree, ocean, mountain, pond, fruit bearing tree, tortoise and mountain.

9. Divisions of a Day

Thirukkural speaks of three main divisions of a day: morning, evening and night.

9.1 *The Concepts of Morning and Evening*

If a person happens to inflict suffering in the morning, it will come back to him or her without seeking in the evening of the same day (319). In spite of the awareness of this wisdom, people continue to cause sufferings to others. The sickness of love has got the same rhythm of a flower, involving the divisions of a day, which buds forth in the morning, enlarges throughout the day, and blossoms in the evening (1227). A complete and whole chapter is dedicated to speak of the uniqueness of evening in context of narrating the manifestation of intimacy which exists between husband and wife and the agony experienced because of the absence of the lover. Let us briefly examine its narration concerning the nature of evening. In general, the perception of evening is the sky becoming red, the sun beginning to sink and the moon starting to rise and thus the day turns into night. It is the moment during which we begin to sense the quietness after hearing the different types of noise throughout the day.

According to *Kural* evening is the mixture of both light and darkness and above all sightlessness (1222); the season when the flower blossoms (1227); the moment of being united with the lover and having enjoyment (1268); the time which kills the life of those separated married women from their husbands (1221); the period which just arrived with both trembling as well as dimness when the wife was with her husband, but now it comes as the carrier of aversion for life and more sorrow when the husband is separated from his wife (1223); the moment that comes in as the hangman on the execution platform at the departure of the lover (1224);

the duration during which the sickness of love becomes more disturbing (1225); time which brings out its painful nature with the departure of the lover (1226); the moment which has become a weapon which kills the wife (1228); the space of time when not only the wife but the whole town falls in sorrow by losing their sense (1229); and the time during which the wife faces slow death thinking about the husband who went away from her to earn wealth (1230). Hence, the nature of evening is expressed to us through the optimistic and pessimistic feelings of the lover who is separated from her beloved.

9.2 Perception of the Night in the Context of Dream

Again, one full chapter is allotted to deal with the theme of the visions of the night. The night is the occasion to experience between sunset and sunrise. It is associated with darkness that is reserved for certain events like the sleep. The intellectual investigations reveal to us that good sleep has been linked to both better cognitive function and emotional health, and they have also connected dreams which are the outcome of healthy sleep to effective thinking, memory and emotional processing. *Thirukkural* deals with the happenings in the life of a lover who is away from her partner. Dream is a period of time through which her partner sends his message to her (1211); the lover fully narrates her pains to him (1212); she sees him only in her dream but he does not show himself when she is awake. It is because of this encounter with him in the dream which keeps her life lasting (1213); she gets the pleasure of love since it is her dream which takes the effort to seek, obtain and above all it brings him before her (1214, 1215); the beloved does not depart from her in the dream (1216); he, who does not show his love when she is awake, tortures the lover by showing his love in the dream (1217); and he rests on her shoulders but he gets into her soul when she is in wakefulness (1218). Only those lovers who do not have the chance of seeing their partners in their dream blame them who do not visit them when they are awake (1219). The villagers accuse the partner of the lover for forsaking her when awake but they are not aware that he visits her in her dream (1220).

While dealing with the concepts of evening and night, *Kural* draws our attention with regard to the agony caused by the separation of husband and wife. This is of great importance for today's situation of one of the partners who remains away from the other for a longer duration on account of many realities but especially for the reason of earning wealth. Many young people are away from their partners and working in different parts of the world and thus, some of them enter into family crisis which affects not only the husband and wife but also the children. Hence, *Thirukkural*, while touching upon one of the divisions of a day especially night, is

inviting us to reflect seriously about the condition of the feeling of a wife who is separated from her husband for various reasons.

10. Biodiversity

The convention, which was held in 1992 at Rio De Jenerio in Brazil and attended by 154 countries, defines biodiversity. Biodiversity is “the variability among living organisms from all source including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic eco-systems and the ecological complexes of which the area part-this include diversity within species, between species and of ecosystem.” *Thirukkural* does not speak about all the living organisms but makes mention of only some of them like plants, birds, animals and so on.

10.1 Allusions to Plants

There is a reference with regard to plants while underlining the importance of the capacity to understand the things by oneself. Giving talks before those people who are gifted with the capacity of perceiving things by themselves will bear much fruit like watering a bed of plants which can grow of themselves (718). And by hearing the words spoken by someone, we can also perceive the nature of his or her family. Likewise, when we look at the plants or sprouting or seedlings, we can easily recognize about the nature of the soil from which they have grown (959). Thus, on the health of seedlings, we are able to perceive the worth of the soil. It is not necessary to go to a laboratory to test the soil in order to comprehend its quality.

10.2 References to Birds

In *Thirukkural*, we are able to find the names of five categories of birds such as *Mayil & Peeli* – Indian peacock, *Kakkai* – house crow which is different from large billed crow, *Kokku* – heron, *Koogai* – owl, and *Annam* – swan. It wants to give an important teaching with regard to the morality of the ascetics by drawing a lesson from the harm done to the birds in a hidden way. Just as the hunter hides himself in the thicket in order to catch the birds, the ascetics hide themselves under the mask of asceticism (274). Hiding and doing something bad is not at all accepted and appreciated by the society. When it becomes public, they have no other option but to face the situation of shame and pain. Therefore, the ascetics have to live their life according to their state of life. Otherwise, it brings discredit to this state of life as well as to them. It also speaks about the short-term relationship which exists between the body and life that is beautifully explained through the symbolism of the flying of a grown-up bird from the hatched egg (338). Hence, the body is impermanent which is manifested not only through the death which the body undergoes through different stages: infancy – teenage – adulthood and finally to age.

We may be familiar with the proverb, *Alavuku Minjinal Amirthamum Nanju* (If we happen to consume even elixir (*Amudham*) beyond the limit, it can become poison). It signifies that anything beyond the limit is detrimental to us. In this background, it is easy to understand the saying of *Thirukkural* that if we load the cart with feather of peacock excessively, it is capable of breaking the axle (475). By nature, the feather of a peacock is light but it does not mean that we can cross the limit. *Kural* also mentions about the birds like a crow and an owl in 481. A weak crow is able to have victory over the strong or powerful bird owl due to the fact that the crow is clever enough to attack it during the day time. By drawing a lesson from this incident, Valluvar tells an important technic to the king to have victory over his enemies that is to wait for the right time to attack his enemies. Again, he underlines the necessity to wait for the right opportunity to have success through the action of a heron which patiently waits with folded wings for the right moment to strike the fish (490). It also teaches us that we need to have self-control and patience like the heron in order to experience success in our actions. Let us be reminded of what Proverbs say, “Like a city breached, without walls, is one who lacks self-control” (25:28).

Today, we are living in a world where we are able to perceive not only the existence but also the widening of economic disparity between the rich and poor. *Thirukkural* reminds us about the prevalence of the value of sharing with others in the very life of crows. They do not have the habit of hiding or accumulating the food for themselves rather they invite others to share with them while they eat. If we have such an attitude, wealth will come naturally to us (527). Proverbs comes handy again, “Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; Others withhold what is due, and only suffer want. A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water” (11:24-25). In the Bible, we come across few references about sharing of goods (cf. Isa 58:7; Lk 3:11; Heb 13:15-16; Rom 12:3). To speak of the softness of the feet of the females both the *Anicham* flower and the feathers of sworn are used (1120).

10.3 Mentioning of Animals

Thirukkural mentions different kinds of animals like elephant, tiger, cow, bullock, crocodile, fox, bullock, rats, cobra, rabbit, fish, yark, deer. In dealing with different issues like controlling our mind, avoidance of begging and the necessity of guarding the people by the rulers, references are made to cow. It insists on the necessity of having control over one’s own mind. If we are able to control our mind, we will have control over our thoughts, actions, beliefs, words, emotions, attitude

and ultimately, we will achieve something or be anything that we want. On the other hand, if we do not succeed in controlling our mind, we will be like those persons who assume the saintly appearance or to be a cow in tiger skin which grazes the field (273). It conveys the idea that there are wicked persons who act to show to the world as if they are good persons. Therefore, we are cautioned not to be taken up by only the external appearance of a person. In this context, let us remember the saying of Jesus, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Mt 7:15).

Giving water to the thirsting cow is seen as an act of virtue. Even in this case, one is not expected to beg. The general perception of begging is asking for something. And this kind of act is very much discouraged and looked down in the society as it is a sign of one’s laziness or an act of squeezing the energy of somebody else. In this background, it is disgraceful to the tongue which asks for water for the sake of a thirsting cow (1066). While emphasising on the grave obligation of the rulers to guard the citizens, it underlines, if the ruler of the people fails to guard them, the impacts will be seen not only on the people but also on the animal like the cow which will not produce the milk (560) and that will in turn ultimately affect the people.

The characteristics of the elephant, bullock, crocodile, tiger, and fox are brought to our notice to underline the need to possess firmness, strength, power, determination, the right time and correct location. A strong-minded person is able to withstand even if he or she happens to come across problems, difficulties, obstacles, failures, or moments of disappointment and frustration. Such person is like the elephant which is known for its firmness and determination even if it happens to be wounded heavily by a shower of arrows (597). It is better to remember the famous saying that the failures are the stepping stones to success. The elephant is known for its attitude of not easily giving up rather continues to fight. *Kural* tells us that we will be able to overcome even the most complicated problems and difficulties of our life or they will disappear from us, if we have the fortitude, the will power and the courageous attitude like the bullock which draws a cart through deep mire (624). These couplets insist that there is no question of giving-up or to grow slack or to become weak, weary, infirm and so on.

To have victory over others or safety and security for one’s own life, it is not only the right time or opportunity is required but the correct location is also needed. The strength of something or somebody alone is not sufficient but also the right place is required to have victory over others. This insight is manifested to us through the sayings: the crocodile needs to be in deep water otherwise the other animals will have their victory over it (495) and a fox will be able to kill the mighty elephant only

when it is caught up in the clay in which its legs sink down (500). Elephant stands as the symbol of strength, power, size, long life, stamina, good luck, happiness, wisdom, experience, loyalty, companionship, unity, etc. Although, it has the large body and sharp tusk, it is afraid when the tigers attack it (599). It means to say when we compare the tiger with the elephant in terms of the strength of the spirit; the elephant lacks the venturing spirit. The concept of elephant is used to convey another insight. To make use of an action as the means of achieving another action or similar to it is just like making use of a rutting elephant the means of capturing another elephant (678). In our ordinary life we make use of the services of the experts who has got better knowledge in that area. In other words, it is like making use of the enemy of our enemy to win over our enemy.

It is considered to be a prudent action of a person who plunges into an undertaking when he is in possession of wealth with him. It is something similar to the prudent action of a person who is watching the elephant fight from a hill-top instead of being caught up in between the fight on the plain (758). Watching the fight of elephant from a hill-top signifies the safety and security of a person who enters into the venture of starting a business with sufficient wealth. It is to say the person who has wealth becomes the owner and as an owner he or she does not suffer on account of work but he or she can command others to work and just watches them to work.

It is all the more appreciated and esteemed for upholding the arrow which really misses to hit the elephant that is fearless, daring, and strong than that arrow which hits the rabbit that runs away in the forest out of fear (772). As it is expected in the case of a soldier, any person is not supposed to attack a person who is weaker than the attacker or against anyone who withdraws from the fight. In the fight with the elephants a person is regarded as the real hero only when he or she, after having casted the only left-over lance on an elephant, happily plucks the lance which struck his own chest while searching for another lance in order to aim at another elephant (774). It manifests to us the fearlessness of a soldier who is daring not to wink his or her eyes when the arrow of his or her enemies hit him or her. It is because he or she thinks that to wink the eyes is like being defeated in the war.

It is something interesting to note that the different parts of an elephant are compared to variety of things of nature. "Broad ears are compared to leaves of lotus and colocasia, columnar legs are compared to pillars and trunks of palmyra palm, the prehensile trunk is compared to the hand (thus the name *hāthi* in Hindi) and snake (and so the name *nāgam* in Tamil), tusks are said to resemble screw-pine flowers, nails over the foot are compared to the palmyra palm fruit and so on."²¹

Apart from talking about the elephant, *Kural* also makes reference to other animals. As far as the areas of strength of rats are concerned, it is said that they are very much hard working, honest individuals, adaptable, aiming at earning success and perfection. But it is something to observe that at the very mere breath of a cobra will make the ocean of rats flee for life (763) because they are by nature timid. Through this insight, *Thirukkural* makes it clear that if the soldiers happen to be fearful by nature, they will run away from the battle field by seeing the very presence of their foes. In explaining about the friendship, *Kural* makes mention of the timidity of the horses. There exists a brief definition which explains who is indeed a friend. A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world goes out. It is indicated that it is better not to have friendship with those persons who resemble the untrained horse which flee by throwing off its rider in the battle field (814). It is of no use to have friendship with somebody who abandons us during the moments of difficulties and problems when we indeed need their presence and support.

In short, it is better not to have friends than to have bad friends. We are cautioned to become aware of the existence of different types of traps around us and not to fall just like a fish. Even if there is the possibility of winning, it is very strongly advised and exhorted not to have the desire at all for gambling because even in the case of win, such win will be regarded as a fish which finally swallows the iron hook itself by thinking that it only eats the meat (931). Only after swallowing, it realises that it has made a terrible mistake. It reminds us to be attentive and not to fall into the trap.

In the couplets we come across that the mention is made about the yark and female deer. There are people in this world who give greater importance to their honour or dignity than their own life. Such people, when they happen to see that their honour is at stake, they go to the extent of giving up their life. *Thirukkural* compares such category of people to yark which kills itself when its hair is lost as some people believe (969). Some people have the tendency to give priority to honour than to life. Such persons will not be hesitant to die than to lose their honour. This insight is more thought provoking for those young people who easily opt for ending their life or committing suicide since they have undergone certain failures like fiascos in studies, in getting jobs, in running a business, in sports and competitions.

The lady is endowed with the natural beauty like the meek look and the modesty of a female deer. As a result, the question is raised: what is the need for her to beautify with the artificial and intricate ornaments? (1089). It gives a vital direction especially for those people who are mad after in beautifying themselves in going to different beauty parlours and spending lavishly for the artificial and complicated plastic surgeries which may lead to the loss of life.

Conclusion

So far, we have been demonstrating the richness of *Thirukkural* in transmitting eco-consciousness. In order to understand its richness, we should not ignore the fact that it was written nearly 2000 years back. In those days people's environmental or ecological awareness emerged not due to its degradation or catastrophes as we have it today. On the contrary, their consciousness about the natural world was due to their fascination for the beauty of the created world. Today, to some extent, we are able to perceive their environmental understanding from the primeval people or indigenous people who have an intimate connection with the natural world. We can say that *Thirukkural* reflects its eco-awareness based on the observations on people's interaction with the nature.

The content of the eco-consciousness of *Thirukkural* plays a vital role not only in the life of humanity in general but also for strengthening the life and mission of consecrated persons. Every component of consecrated life, like the following of Jesus, consecration by the Holy Spirit which involves the life of chastity, poverty and obedience, communion not only with God but also with oneself, with others and with the natural world and committed to continue the mission of Jesus who himself was an ecologist, is connected to ecological perspective. In this context, wisdom of *Thirukkural* will be of great help in enriching the life and mission of consecrated persons. *Thirukkural* has dedicated a complete chapter (after dealing with God and goodness of rain), in dealing with the greatness of renunciation. By the very fact, it deals with the consecrated life in the third chapter itself, we can understand how much importance it wants to give to it or to have high regard for it.

Though it expresses that it is as impossible to assess the greatness of consecrated persons as to count the dead ones in the world (22), it underlines that the consecrated persons are regarded really great on account of their renunciation of the world after having discerned duly the properties of both states of being (what is good and what is bad) (23). Hence, *Kural* rightly mentions that the scriptures highly speak about them who renounced the worldly life by embracing a disciplined life (21) and they also show to the world the greatness of the consecrated ones (28). It also pinpoints that only those persons who are able to control the five senses are able to enter into the world of heaven (24) and one who knows the properties of taste, sight, touch, hearing and smell has the capacity to have the world within his or her knowledge (27). Consequently, *Indra*, who is considered to be the Lord of heaven will be bearing witness to the strength of those who have subdued five senses (25). Above all, it acknowledges that the great people are capable of doing the things which are difficult to do. On the other hand, the ordinary ones cannot do them (26).

Besides, it proposes a number of values or code of conduct to the consecrated people to follow. In consecrated life, there is no place at all to hide themselves under the pretext of an ascetic and doing something bad (274). Faithfulness to the state of life in total truthfulness is very much expected from every consecrated person. In the context of talking about their dependency, it is said that though they have renounced many things in this world, still, they have to dependent upon the farmers for the food to exist. Through this teaching, they are reminded that there is no question of thinking that they are independent persons and they are made to accept that everybody in this world has to depend upon somebody or something (1036). Suffering becomes part and parcel in the life of every consecrated person (267). In this way, we can conclude that the eco-consciousness of *Thirukkural* will be of great enrichment for the life and mission of the consecrated persons.

Endnotes

¹ I am very much indebted to the following authors: Sivasuppramanian (Tamil Commentary) and J. KRISHNASWAMY (English Commentary), *Thirukkural: Texts, Tamil and Explanations*, Sivakasi 2014; G. U. POPE – W.H DREW – JOHN LAZARUS – F.W. ELLIS, “Thirukural English Translation and Commentary,” https://www.projectmadurai.org/pm_etexts/pdf/pm0153.pdf ; RICHIA PRAKASHAN, *Thirukkural (Tamil text, Paraphrase, Roman Rendering & English Translation)*, New Delhi 2005; S.M. DIAZ, ed., *Tirukkural: With English Translation and Explanation*, Coimbatore 2001; G. RAJESWARI, “Thiruvalluvar’s Concept of Cultural Ecology,” https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342749958_Thiruvalluvar

² ASHRAF, N.V.K., “*Comparative literature (இலக்கியஒப்பாய்வு)* A journey through the literatures of the world through the eyes of Valluvar, searching for meanings, significance and parallels,” <https://literature-comp.blogspot.com/2011/12/thirukkural.html>

³ *Wikipedia*, “Tirukkural,” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tirukkural>

⁴ SADHGURU, “The Importance of the Element of Earth” <https://isha.sadhguru.org/in/en/wisdom/article/earth-element-importance>

⁵ *Wikipedia*, “Sky,” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sky>

⁶ STAFF WRITER, “What are Heavenly Bodies?,” <https://www.reference.com/science/heavenly-bodies-6de35d684354b3>

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⁸ S.M. DIAZ, ed., *Tirukkural: With English Translation and Explanation*, Coimbatore 2001, 1145.

⁹ MOHAMED JAYALANI, “What Thirukkural, Classic Tamil Couplets says about Agriculture and Farmers?,” www.imotforum.com/...farming-agriculture-insights-couplets-thiruvalluvar; S.M. DIAZ, ed., *Tirukkural: With English Translation and Explanation*, Coimbatore 2001, 1039.

¹⁰ MOHAMED JAYALANI, “What Thirukkural, Classic Tamil Couplets says about Agriculture and Farmers?,” www.imotforum.com/...farming-agriculture-insights-couplets-thiruvalluvar

- ¹¹ NIKKI SEAY, “Drunk Talk isn’t just nonsense, According to Study,” <https://rehab.com/blog/drunken-talk-isnt-just-nonsense-says-study> For Rajaji, “The light of reason cannot pierce the darkness of a drunkard’s mind even as a naked light cannot be taken under water. The poison has left him bereft of the power of response to reason.” It is quoted by S.M. DIAZ, ed., *Tirukkural: With English Translation and Explanation*, Coimbatore 2001, 932.
- ¹² S.M. DIAZ, ed., *Tirukkural: With English Translation and Explanation*, Coimbatore 2001, 736.
- ¹³ WWF, “Water Scarcity,” <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/water-scarcity>
- ¹⁴ STMA, “Eight Benefits of natural Grass,” <https://www.stma.org/eight-benefits-of-natural-grass>
- ¹⁵ ANANDA, “Essay on Importance of Fire,” <https://importantindia.com/30869/essay-on-importance-of-fire>
- ¹⁶ URUJ KAMAL, “What Are Side Effects of Hunger?”, lipulse.com/2017/11/16/what-are-side-effects-of-hunger
- ¹⁷ In general anger is looked both positively and negatively. It is said that sometime a well-managed anger plays a positive role in bringing about certain constructive changes in life. On the other hand, if it is handled inappropriately, it can lead us to face several problems like headache, digestion complications, insomnia, increased anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, skin diseases, heart attack, stroke etc. Better Health Channel, “Anger – how It affects people,” www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/anger-how-it-affects-people. It is very much interesting to observe that so much is said about anger in the Bible because more than five hundred times it is being mentioned in it.
- ¹⁸ S.M. DIAZ, ed., *Tirukkural: With English Translation and Explanation*, Coimbatore 2001, 713.
- ¹⁹ It is quoted by S.M. DIAZ, ed., *Tirukkural: With English Translation and Explanation*, Coimbatore 2001, 679.
- ²⁰ S.M. DIAZ, ed., *Tirukkural: With English Translation and Explanation*, Coimbatore 2001, 1113.
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THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL OF DISCIPLES IN MISSION

Carlos Verga, CMF

INTRODUCTION¹

“And he went up on the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be send out to preach and have authority to cast out demons” (Mk 3:13-15).

Our following of Jesus is “in the style of the Apostles;” that is to say that it refers to “the special communion of life with Christ, now, risen, and the mission of preaching the Gospel, to the whole universe.”² As consecrated persons, we glimpse how to live our communion of missionary disciples of Jesus’ by confronting us with the experience of the Twelve.

The “vocational” reading of the Bible, received as the Word of God today, can help us to enhance in us the evangelical radicality to which we feel called, helping us to grow as missionary disciples in the joy of the Gospel. And since we, like the Twelve, “communicate to others the full mystery of Christ,”³ in this article, we propose to address some texts of the Gospel of Mark concerning the experience of apostolic discipleship of the Twelve to relate it to our following of Christ as consecrated persons.

1. Characteristics of Apostolic Following of Jesus in Mark

Two questions move through the text of Mark and give a narrative cohesion. One refers to the identity of Jesus, and the other has to do with our identity as disciples and how to follow Jesus. Christology and missionary discipleship of Jesus are two fundamental axes in the Second Gospel.

With the objective to frame this reflection, we want to highlight some common characteristics that we find between the preaching of John the Baptist, that of Jesus

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and that of his disciples, on the one hand, and the consequences of this proclamation, on the other. Let’s look at the following chart:

THE MISSION OF		
John the Baptist	Jesus	The Twelve
John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mk 1:4).	Preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:14-15).	They went out to preach that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick (Mk 6:12-13).
THE TRAGIC END OF		
John the Baptist	Jesus	The Twelve
But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.” (cf. Mk 6:16-29).	And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again (Mk 8:31; 9:30-31; 10:32-34).	Be attentive: for they will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before the governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them... And brother will deliver up brother to death, and father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. He who endures to the end will be saved (Mk 13:9, 12-13).

Coincidences are given with respect to the proclamation, announcement or claim of conversion that express and the violent consequences she brings to them. Located in the first part of the Gospel, references to John the Baptist anticipated what will happen to Jesus in the course of the historical events narrated and his disciples, at the time Mark writes his Gospel. Matthew makes this clear to his community when he warns that “from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force” (Mt 11:12).

The Gospel comes to the crossroads of resistances that the apostolic *kerygma* encountered in the early days of the Church. It was necessary to clarify why the proclamation of a crucified Christ was a “Good News” as listeners had other expectations for the Messiah. St. Paul clearly expresses this disjunction in the letter he wrote to the Corinthians around the middle of 56 AD.: “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1Cor 1:23). A few years later, between 60 and 70, the Gospel of Mark resumes and develops this same argument and explains the paradox of that “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” for those who believe (1Cor 1:24).

In the time of Jesus, the cross was the instrument of torture par excellence of the Romans and the Law of Moses considered that “he who hangs from the wood is cursed by God” (cf. Deut 21:33; Gal 3:13). For us, on the other hand, the cross represents the surrender of the most sublime love; because we have grown up in the Christian tradition and we didn’t have to make that leap.

However, throughout history, the experience of the Cross, both the Cross of Christ and that of the Cross voluntarily assumed because of its continuation is and will be somewhat difficult to explain to others or for us to understand; especially when we experience some of its consequences in our own flesh. Paradoxically there are thousands and thousands of Christians persecuted and killed today because of faith in Jesus Christ. For different reasons, we are not always fully aware of these situations. However, many martyrs in the Church have certified with their blood the testimony of their pursuit. With this framework of understanding in mind, we can better understand the message of the Second Gospel and adequately answer the two questions that make up the scheme of the narration.⁴

As in every written work, the author is the only one who has clear things from the beginning and the design of the story he intends to tell. For this reason, Mark puts this title to his Gospel: “Beginning of the Good News of Jesus Messiah, Son of God” (Mk 1:1).

The Evangelist reports that Jesus is the Christ Son of God to those who read or hear the text from the beginning. Thus, the recipients of his work — the community of Mark, first of all, but also, we who read it almost two thousand years later — depart with some advantages both with regard to the historical protagonists of the narrated events and to the characters involved in the text. All of them will discover it step by step, as the narrative progresses; it reflects, in this way what has happened historically. And this applies even to Jesus and the Twelve. To them, just at the end of the Gospel, Mark gives them a key so that they can fully understand who Jesus is. To meet the Risen Jesus and fully understand that Jesus is the Messiah Son of God, the Twelve should return to Galilee; “there you’ll see him” (cf. Mk 16:7).

1.1 Consider who are those who have been called (1Cor 1:26)

The context of this phrase reinforces the earlier idea that God's behavior is paradoxical to the wise and knowledgeable; which is evident in his explanation of the crucified Messiah. But it is also so concerning those called by God to discipleship with Jesus. The phrase is a call against the vain glory of his disciples and a Pauline invitation for us to live our vocation with healthy realism (cf. 1Cor 1:26-31).

The call to "pursuit" is a disruption in our lives. Those who discover themselves called by God are able to leave everything that constitutes their known world and venture into a new situation. Whoever has a vocation goes after Jesus with certainties that a promise is based on his word or the authority of the Master. Mark makes this clear in the scenes of their vocation by the sea of Galilee: The two pairs of brothers, Simon and Andrew, James and John, leave the nets and their father with their workers in the boat and leave following Jesus. Shortly thereafter, Levi also leaves his post, his tax office and follows Jesus (cf. Mk 1:16-20; 2:13-15).

Mark allows us to distinguish the various groups of followers and antagonists of Jesus in 3:7-30. From these groups we can infer different interests that move them to follow Him or oppose Jesus.

The group of disciples begins to conform as soon as Jesus begins his preaching in Galilee. The Twelve arise, on the pure initiative of Jesus, as his group of disciples. He establishes them as such and assigns a double commitment to his apostolic vocation: "And he appointed twelve, to be with him and to be sent out to preach, and have authority to cast out demons" (Mk 3:14f.).

Mark notes that both objectives are fulfilled throughout the public life of Jesus. On the one hand, he is dedicated in a special way to the formation of the Twelve; in intimacy, he tells them that "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God" (Mk 4:11; cf. 7:7; 8:31). On the other hand, the Twelve effectively follow Jesus everywhere where he goes and carry out a portentous preaching.

However, the apostolic group is wounded by the betrayal of one of its members (cf. Mk 3:19; 14:43-49), by the defection of all at the time of the trial (cf. Mk 14:50-52), and by the denial of its principal reference (cf. Mk 14:66-72). They are the ones who share life and mission with Jesus from the beginning.

Throughout his missionary action in Galilee, but particularly in the second part of the Gospel, in the section of the road (Mk 8:22-10:52), Jesus dedicates his greatest pedagogical commitment to them. Despite this, the Twelve have great difficulty in understanding Jesus (cf. Mk 4:13; 6:52; 8:17, 21; 10:38).

Not all of his disciples disappear at the time of passion: “There were some women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome, who, when he was in Galilee, followed Jesus, and ministered to him” (Mk 15:40f.).

It is significant, that Mark makes explicit the discipleship of these women as a service at the end of the Gospel.⁵ Mark uses this same expression only twice to allude to the service that was lavished on Jesus, and this of women is the second time. The first time that this expression was used when the assistance given by the angels during Jesus 40 days in the desert, before beginning his public ministry (cf. Mk 15:39). In this way, following as a service to Jesus constitutes an inclusion that encompasses all the Good News described by Mark.

In Mark, it seems that none of his friends were present near the cross. Only Mark tells us the scene and records the mockery of the Roman officer who constitutes a confession and does justice to the title of his work: “Truly this man was Son of God”.⁶ The disciples, who “contemplated the scene from afar,” become exclusive witnesses of the crucifixion of Jesus and privileged recipients, protagonists of the proclamation of his resurrection (cf. Mk 15:39).

Unexpectedly, the message of the Risen Jesus is truncated in Mark. The evangelist ends his narrative by saying that “And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid”.⁷ Why? Because Mark wants to mobilize his auditorium by letting them know that the most fundamental thing about the Good News of Jesus is something that is still pending. It is therefore a task for listening to the Good News.

To see the Risen Jesus, it is necessary for the Apostles to meet him again in Galilee (cf. Mk 16:7). This is equivalent to reviewing in one’s heart the most significant events of what they experienced with him in the light of the new situation. The proclamation of Jesus Alive, which precedes them on the way to Galilee, helps them to change the heaviness of following in moments of darkness and rediscover Jesus present in their destiny.

There are times we need to meet Jesus again and see Him once again on our way; because in the daily commitments in following Jesus, it may call us to suffer the onslaught of culture and the world in which we are immersed. Like the Twelve, we need to “return to Galilee” to recreate our vocation as followers of Jesus by reviewing the events that give meaning in who we are, what we do, and how we live. We rarely lose vigor in our vital adherence to Christ and his proposal as missionary discipleship in community.

God appeals to our identity as disciples and challenges us through the events of the world, the Church and our own apostolic community. How do we capitalize on our vocational experience of missionary disciples? What is God's grace in our daily lives? How do we define the double objective of our apostolic vocation of "to be with Jesus and sent to preach with the power to expel demons?"

1.2 Nothing is worth it when compared to knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord (Phil 3:8)

We indicate earlier that the protagonists of the Gospel will gradually discover the identity of Jesus.

Jesus discovers himself as the "Beloved Son," in whom God finds complacency at the moment of his baptism by John in Jordan. The voice of God reveals him in the theophany that Mark recounts when Jesus comes out of the water (cf. Mk 1:10f.). The desert experience marks a beginning and after in his life, as if it were the time for him to mature that revelation (cf. Mk 1:12f.).

The demons, on the other hand, like us, because the author has told us; they also know who Jesus is, as he appears on the scene. The unclean spirits recognize him because they experience the consequences of his powerful preaching (cf. Mk 1:24-27).

People afflicted by different kinds of affliction seek and follow Jesus because they are liberated from their sufferings (cf. Mk 1:32-34, 37); and seem to have understood everything from the beginning. They know they need it and, therefore, they are with to him. They listen, believe, and they don't need to ask any more questions or who the man is that they follow. Jesus, for his part, recognizes them as his family (cf. Mk 3:32, 34b-35).

For their part, the Twelve, and among them, a small subgroup made up of Peter, James, and John, are the object of special dedication almost exclusive with that of Jesus.⁸ The events they have experienced with him and the teachings with which he instructs them allow them to discern better than others who they are following.

The section of Mk 4:35–5:43 shows a crescendo of divine revelation in the actions of Jesus. To his portentous preaching in Galilee, Mark adds a series of events by which the Apostles are progressing in their understanding of Jesus. The beginning is a scary question: "Who is he?" (Mk 4:41). The point of arrival is the confession of Peter: "You are the Messiah," (Mk 8:29) and the confession of the Roman soldier: "This was Son of God" (Mk 15"39).

Gradually, the apostles begin to understand that when Jesus controls the power of the sea (cf. Mk 4:35f.) and frees those in the boat from the power of the devil (cf. Mk 5:1-20), sickness (cf. Mk 5:24-34) and death (cf. Mk 5:21-23, 35-43), it is God who acts. The scene of transfiguration is also fundamental in this regard; not only because of the scene itself, but because God openly reveals it to those present, even though the disciples do not yet understand (cf. Mk 9:2-13).

Yet, the confession of the Twelve is a point of arrival. They go beyond those who recognize him only as a prophet comparable to John the Baptist or Elijah (cf. Mk 8:27-29). But as much as they and others are found as the rejectors of the masters of the Law, whom Jesus calls blasphemers; because they attributed God's work to Satan. They said, "He's possessed by Beelzebul" and "he has an unclean spirit" (Mk 3:22, 30).

Overcoming the enormous differences, surely there are in our experience as disciples some moments or events that give certainty to our vocation and meaning to our lives; why we're here. We too can make our words like that of Peter: "We have left everything and followed you" (Mk 10:27f.). We too are disciples in a community of life and mission who walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

1.3 Having the sentiments that correspond to those who are united to Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5)

With Peter's confession in the proximity of Caesarea Philippi, this begins the second part of the Gospel of Mark. Jesus and his disciples go towards Jerusalem and, along the way, he points out to them, with clarity and in detail, everything related to his passion and resurrection (cf. Mk 8:31; 9:30; 10:33-34). For it is necessary, that they now understand what kind of Messiah Jesus is; certainly not the one they had in mind.

The Twelve are not prepared to process the proclamation of Jesus and react by denying what he crudely exposes to them, over and over again. The reactions allow us to see how affected they are because of fear, confusion and lack of understanding (cf. Mk 8:32; 9:33; 10:35-37). They are so moved, that they are unable to cast out demons as they had during their mission experience (cf. Mk 6:13; 9:18, 28).

In the three announcements of his passion, Mark uses the same narrative structure: The omen of passion and resurrection (1); it corresponds to inappropriate behavior on the part of the disciples (2); then, Jesus teaches them some issues that are fundamental to discipleship (3). Then, the evangelist complements this with other events and teachings in the way of a catechesis.

The healings of the blind man of Bethsaida, in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee, and of Bartimaeus, in Jericho (cf. Mk 8:22-26; 10:46-52), constitute the narrative of Mark's framework of the section. But the path reflects the inner journey that the disciples must travel more than a geographical journey. The Twelve will have to go through this journey to understand the messianic nature of Jesus and discover how to follow him.

Leaving aside the first aspect, we have referred in a certain way before in speaking of the suffering Messiah; in the next points, we focus on the second point, related to Jesus' teachings on discipleship.

First Lesson: The place of the disciple in following and the demands of discipleship (cf. Mk 8:33 – 9:1).

Dominated by contradiction, Peter strongly rebukes Jesus in private; but in the eyes of the others and because of his reaction, he is rebuked like a demon⁹ reminding him of the place that fits as a follower: "Get behind me, Satan" (Mk 8:33). These words refer to the beginning of his vocation as a disciple; after all, that's the call for which he and the others (and we too) have left everything: "Come with me. Follow me" (Mk 1:17; 2:14).

In the other Synoptics, Matthew and Luke, clearly indicate that the disciple is and will always be an apprentice. One will never take the place of his teacher, even if he is in the way or the disciple becomes like him (cf. Mt 10:24; Lk 6:40). And in Matthew, Jesus is blunt: "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren" (Mt 23:8).

Having placed Peter in his rightful place, Jesus expresses three conditions intrinsic to discipleship and to all who follow him; not just the Twelve:

The first is that "God's thoughts" have to gain more and more influence in their lives until they form the nucleus of all their actions; above all, other kinds of personal or human expectations and plans (cf. Mk 8:33b; 9:34b). Only in this way can the disciples of Jesus embrace their condition of assuming the destiny of Jesus the Master as a valued cross, consciously accepted. On this basis, the other two following conditions are possible.

The second is that the disciple acquires the capacity to project his life as an offering and solidarity dedication, because of Jesus and the Good News (cf. Mk 9:35-37).

The third, that the disciple witnessed his condition with determination.¹⁰

Second Lesson: Service as a bond of fraternal communion (cf. Mk 9:33-37; 10:42-45).

The second instruction presents to two conflicting situations. One is a discussion that the Twelve prefer not to speak of because it shames them; “they had discussed among themselves who was the most important” (cf. Mk 9:33-34). The other is about the request that the sons of Zebedee make to Jesus and upset the other apostles: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one to your left, in your glory” (cf. Mk 10:37-42).

Jesus’ teaching proposes to pluck from the net, the eagerness of dominion of those who exalts and those who detain him above others: “Whosoever wants to be the first, let him be the last of all and the servant of all.” His plan disrupts the logic that reproduces the established order of the powerful in the world and their structures of domination in the internal dynamics of the community by altering the chosen fraternity.

Jesus’ response is found within the realm as paradoxical. And the truthfulness of his teaching is demonstrated in the example of his own life. Jesus constructs the paradigm of what he teaches and demands from his disciples: “The Son of man also came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (cf. Mk 10:45).¹¹

Then, so that we can understand what Jesus refers to when he talks about service, he embraces a child and placed him in the midst of everyone. His example is eloquent. A child is someone who needs other people to live; he is a vulnerable and helpless being, who doesn’t depend on himself. But the care a child needs isn’t just about giving him roof and food. The necessary care is also made of affection, tenderness, caresses and kisses. The affective dimension is fundamental. None of us would have survived without the care or protection our parents lavished on us when we were children. The love with which we were protected made it possible for us to grow and develop positively in life.

From Jesus’ perspective, what enables his disciples to grow in front of others is the service they give to each other when they are unselfish in the attention of others. Such greatness can only grow and be built from non-power; providing us to serve those who are helpless, providing them with the care and attention they need to succeed in life.

Moreover, service to the little ones treasures a sacramental dimension that no disciple who knows well can ignore. St. Joseph Gabriel of the Rosary Brochero, the holy priest of Traslasierra, in Córdoba, Argentina, expressed it in a very particular

way to his parishioners: “God is like lice, he is everywhere, but he prefers the poor” (cf. Mk 9:37; Mt 25:31-46).

Third Lesson: The bond of the Twelve with those outside the community and with the little ones who make up it (cf. Mk 9:38-41. 42-48)

On the way to Jerusalem, there is another situation in which the Apostles intervene and a man is expelling demons in the name of Jesus. Seeing him proceed in this way, the disciples forbid him to continue to do so because he was not part of our community of followers; “he was not following us” (Mk 9:38).

Jesus’ response is an antidote to the sectarianism of the apostolic community: “For he that is not against us is for us” (Mk 9:40). And, if such a criterion of inclusion is not sufficient for one who is narrow minded, Jesus adds that God treasures the smallest details that any persons, without specifying his belonging to the community or not, offers his disciples “because they are of Christ.” None of these gestures “will go without reward” (Mk 9:41). In other words, the criterion of behavior that Jesus demands of his disciples with regard to people who do not belong to the community is traced to God’s way of proceeding.

It is in these times when the Church and the Congregation are asking us to meet those who live on the margins of society and peripheries of human existence. Jesus contrasts the argument of the Twelve with a criterion that disarms their (and ours) unreasonable pretensions, their (and our) group misgivings.

Jesus then draws their attention to the behavior that the Apostles should lavish on the little ones in the community and then gives them a harsh warning: “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” This warning of Jesus finds its correlation in the scandals of abuse that shakes the Church today (cf. Mk 9:42-48).

In Mark, the images of the hand, foot and eye are otherwise eloquent, but can even be translated by uncontrolled craving for dominance, the megalomania of desire and vile intentions or envy and jealousy or selfish projects.

Jesus’ hyperbolic language illustrates the harm and derivations of behaviors originating in undue impulses and tendencies. Today, many of our brothers and sisters, cease to believe in the Good News of Jesus and defect from our communities because of these kinds of scandals that undermine both the credibility of the Church and the good reputation of its pastors and evangelizers.

Faced with the drama suffered by children, victims of abuse by clergy and religious, the Holy Father convened the presidents of the episcopal conferences for an Encounter in Rome, in February 2019. The purpose of this meeting was, first of all, to arouse the sense of responsibility of bishops in every Episcopate and throughout the ecclesial community. Secondly, guide them so that they know how to proceed: implementing tasks at different levels, prioritizing attention to victims, the search for justice and the expected behavior of Jesus' disciples.

The portfolio and protocol of the congregations for cases of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults falls within this perspective, and also recognizes that there are other types of abuse to which it is urgent that we give due attention to it and it is essential that we act in order to prevent it, since the initial formation of our missionaries in our formation communities.

One parameter for measuring the quality of our fraternal relationships is the care we give (or don't) to each other in our communities. And sometimes, the way we treat each other in our homes or the indifference with which we live among us draws negatively. And sometimes, we see some of our brothers and sisters in the congregations having a hard time or erring in the direction of their lives, or tell us about inappropriate behaviors of theirs, and we do not do anything. Sometimes we only move in the realm of criticism, contempt or complicit silence.

What happens to us is that we can often accompany others, outside the community and in pastoral spaces, but we become incapable of engaging with our brothers and sisters with whom we share a roof, food and ideals in life.

2. Missionaries with Spirit in the Congregation

It is proper of the Holy Spirit to guide and accompany the apostolic community towards the fullest knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ. The Spirit enlightens and explains Jesus' teachings so that we know how to grow in our desire to follow. In our missionary community, this discernment is typical of the General Chapters that are the highest authority of the Congregation. In them, discernment is expressed as obedience to the Spirit and fidelity to the charism.

For us, in following Jesus and collaborating with Him in the work that the Father entrusted to Him is not possible without the anointing of the Spirit that enables us to contemplate, and imitate Christ until we are configured with him. The Forge of the Heart of Mary, configures us with Jesus and prays with us that the Spirit may come and the definitive victory against Evil that seeks to destroy God's creation.

The evangelical counsels that we profess and the virtues of our charism in the Church help us in this task and are an expression of our configuration with Christ:

- Apostolic charity for God to be known, loved and served by all.
- Humility to serve with the same sentiments that Jesus Christ had.
- Meekness to win over the most possible for Christ with our apostolic ministry.
- Care of the senses, frugality and temperance, to be apostolic men.
- The effacement by Christ to gain a life in solidarity with those who suffer.
- Acceptance of the disease and the consequences of poverty as a testament to one's own life.

To be credible, to be able to communicate the Gospel, to become mystics in mission, we must cultivate among us the audacity, creativity, cordiality, joy, closeness, and ability to glorify us on the Cross of Christ.

How can we help each other grow in the apostolic journey with Jesus and the practice of the apostolic virtues that shape us with Christ?

CONCLUSION

We come to the end of our reflection on how to follow and proclaim Jesus in an apostolic community in the light of the Word of God. Now is the time to open an area for personal reflection and communal dialogue.

Without cordial dialogue, community experience, fraternal encounter, we have only indifference and individualisms of various kinds. We are not called to live with our backs to others or separated from our brothers and sisters. We want to promote the beauty of the community and revive the fraternal Alliance. Let us give ourselves the opportunity to grow into a true missionary fraternity that is a testimony of what we preach to others.

FOR PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY REFLECTION

1. What points of encounter or divergence do I find between Jesus' mission with his disciples and their consequences with the experience of the Congregation and that of our community?
2. How have I discovered Jesus and his message in my life? What captivates me most about him? What are the current challenges of my community journey?
3. What events in my following of Jesus confirm my vocation and give meaning to my life?
4. If I look at my experience as a missionary disciple in the Congregation, what aspects of my life have changed in the perspective of the configuration with Christ? What virtues do I nourish and what is difficult for me to grow?
5. How do we live service in our community? How can we grow in this essential dimension of apostolic journey?
6. How do we live fraternal co-responsibility in the accompaniment and care of our community brothers?
7. What attitudes of mine help others in their missionary vocation? How can others help me with my own journey?

Endnote

¹ The author is greatly indebted to KLEMENS STOCK, Marco. *Commento contestuale al secondo vangelo*, Rome 2006; KLEMENS STOCK, *La missione nei vangeli sinottici*, Rome 2004.

² CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES, *Our Missionary Life Project. Comment to Constitutions II. Fundamental Constitution and the Missionary Life of the Congregation*. Rome 1991, 89.

³ *Constitutions of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Claretians), 46

⁴ Cf. Data from the worldwide list of persecution provided by the Christian organization "Open Doors" available in <https://www.puertasabiertas.org/Pursuit-de-Christians>; and the homily of Francis during the celebration of the Eucharist in the Catacombs of Priscilla, on Nov 2, 2019, available in https://www.religiondigital.org/Vatican/Pope-Christians-persecuted-first-centuries-catacumbaspriscilafrancisco_0_2173282666.html

⁵ According to Luke, they had been healed or liberated by Jesus (cf. Lk 8:1-3).

⁶ Cf. Mk 15:40-41, 47; 16:1-8. The relevance of Mary Magdalene in the apostolic group, her love and fortitude in following Jesus and her witness to the Resurrection made Pope Francis recently recognized her as apostle of the apostles. In this way he does justice to centuries of bad repute because of the confusion of having identified her with the woman who anoints Jesus in Bethany, in the house

of Simon the leper (cf. Mk 14:3-9), of whom Luke's parallel text says that she is a public sinner (cf. Lk 7:36ff) when he included Mary Magdalene as one of the disciples whom Jesus had healed: "From whom (Jesus) he had cast out seven demons" (Lk 8:2). Cf. Holy See Press Office, "Mary Magdalene, apostle of the Apostles, 10/06/2016." Available at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/es/bollettino/pubblico/2016/06/10/apostol.html>.

⁷ Mk 16:8. What follows, Mk 16:9-20, as is well known, is a canonical appendix that harmonizes Mark's bewildering ending with the other evangelical accounts.

⁸ Cf. Mk 5:37-42 (the resurrection of Jairus' daughter); 9, 2-13 (the transfiguration of Jesus); 14, 32-42 (Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane) where the only privileged witnesses of events are Peter, James, and John.

⁹ In the clash between Peter and Jesus, both use the same term with which Jesus expels demons (Mk 1:25); the same one with which he commands the sea and wind to calm down in the passage of the storm of the lake (4, 39), ("warn" or "severely rebuke").

¹⁰ Cf. Mk 9:38. It is good to bring up here the offering of the life of Claretian martyrs of Barbastro in the testimony of Blessed Faustino Pérez CMF: "Dear Congregation, we take you in our memories to these regions of pain and death. We all die happy without anyone fainting or in grief; we all die begging God that the blood that falls from our wounds is not avenging blood, but blood that enters red and lives through your veins, stimulate a growth in our development and expansion throughout the world. Goodbye, dear Congregation! Your sons, martyrs of Barbastro, salute you from prison and offer you our painful anxieties in atoning holocaust for our shortcomings and in testimony to our faithful, generous and perpetual love."

¹¹ The Gospel of John, for its part, complements and enriches this perspective with the foot washing scene in which Jesus presents himself as the "*Master and Lord*" who puts himself at the service of others. Following his example, the disciples will find in fraternal service the key to happiness (cf. Jn 13:13-17).

BOOK REVIEW

JAMES KANNANTHANAM, CMF

Christ Formation. Handbook for Initial Formation for Priests and Religious

Consecrated Life Series – 7

Claretian Publications, Bangalore 2021, Pages: 176

The goal of every Christian and, in particular, of every consecrated person is to be transformed into Christ. Concretely, this transformation takes place through internalization of the values of Christ. So formation process needs to focus on cultivating and internalizing values. To address this need of clearly presenting values, ICL: Institute of Consecrated Life – Sanyasa has come out with the publication of another book — *Christ Formation* — in the Consecrated Life Series. It is mostly about value formation starting with human formation which is the foundation for all other formation. This book is not only to help all those in Initial formation — candidates to priesthood and consecrated life — but also to young girls and boys to develop the right attitudes and values for life.

Fr. James Kannanthanam cmf, the author, who is an experienced formator, rightly desires it be used as a handbook by the formees, the young men and women, who show signs of priestly or religious vocation to discern the call they receive and respond to it appropriately.

The first chapter explains the purpose of the formation as to help the candidates to grow in identification with Christ; in other words, Christ Formation as the title of the book and the image on the cover page indicate. Christ-formation means “to develop a heart like his with love and compassion and to do the things he did to reach out to the least, the lost and the last.” The next two chapters are to help the candidates to discern the vocation examining the conscious and unconscious motivations prompting one to pursue the path of radical following of Christ.

The fourth to sixth chapters discuss the various values — human, Christian and religious and priestly — which are essential for the formees. For each of the values, basic practical things are suggested. The inspirational quotes, scriptural references and the anecdotes especially from the lives of saints for each value clarify the concepts and enable to study them from a Christian and religious perspective. Seventh chapter gives some basic prayers that the candidates should learn and eighth chapter gives various meditation techniques to help the candidates in their prayer while ninth chapter highlights the disciplines and etiquette that one must acquire. Appropriate pictures and colour printing make the book attractive and appealing for the readers.

This book is indeed a great help for the formees to give a sound foundation already at the beginning stage of their formation to priesthood or consecrated life. The formators will find it a great guide to instruct and accompany the formees. For the teachers in the school and catechism teachers too, this book is handy in value education and teaching good manners. I recommend that every formee, in priestly or religious formation, be given a copy of this book as a handbook for his or her personal formation.

Fr. Antony Bhyju, CMF

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