

## **Consecrated Celibacy**

Bro. Lawrence Joseph, s.g.

### **1. What is Consecrated Celibacy?**

1. Consecrated Celibacy is a state of greater love for God. Affectivity yearns for possession, whereas a celibacy whose primary declared purpose is to love as many people as possible, is for that reason opposed to possessing any of those people. Consecrated celibacy is first of all love for God and possession of him, rather than just a means to love other persons. Celibacy means possessing God. The celibate has to fall in love with God. Falling in love rivets the lover's attention on the beloved in an utterly unique way. This is achieved through contemplative prayer, being in the company of God. No one can fulfil successfully the project of becoming a celibate lover without a deep, enduring life of contemplative prayer. Celibacy means prayer, friendship and ministry. These three are the sources of the joy that makes celibate life worth living.

2. Consecrated Celibacy is a state of greater freedom. A celibate is free from economic worries, family worries, etc. A celibate should cultivate a universal and altruistic love. Vowed chastity signifies liberation of the human soul in a unique way, enabling it better to reach its supreme goal of total dedication to God in undivided love.

3. Consecrated Celibacy is existential inability to marry. The fundamental motivation of celibacy is a drive towards God. He seeks to be one with God. Celibacy is for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The celibate life is not the product of reason. Men and women choose celibacy for personal reasons rather than for any theoretical ideas about the value of celibacy. The motives for their choice are deeply embedded in the history of each individual than in any rational justification. At the centre of true consecrated celibacy is an experience. They come under the loving care of a provident God. That life is ultimately a gift from God. Christ stands at the heart of consecrated celibacy. The real basis for Christian celibacy is the example of Christ himself. Christ had to be celibate because he was divine-human. He had to be celibate because of his utter dedication to and love of God. He had to be celibate because of his single-minded commitment to his ministry. He lived his celibacy joyfully. Jesus' unique situation did not preclude a bond with women. He counted women among his acquaintances, intimate friends and fellow workers. In the final analysis, celibacy means being captivated by Christ. Celibacy is rooted in an openness to God's mysterious action in one's own life. At one precious time in your life, you felt being called.

4. Consecrated Celibacy is a witness of intimacy. Groups who live this vow well, sharing together the depth of a non-genitally expressed intimacy, give witness to one of the deepest yearnings of this culture.

5. Consecrated Celibacy is the state of special bridehood of God. Religious commits himself to God in that personal, total and exclusive way which is associated with the commitment of husband and wife in marriage. Man is loved by God and he can love God in return. In celibacy there is a greater possibility of subjectively experiencing the spousal of love for God.

6. Consecrated Celibacy is a prophetic witness. It is a sign of the orientation of Christianity toward the invisible mystery and presence of God. It can also be seen as a protest against a society that is dedicated to pleasure and luxury.

**a. Support from Bible:** In Matthew celibacy is "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt, 19:12). In 1 Corinthians a celibate is to be "anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord" (I Cor 7:32). In both the cases the centre of celibate life revolves around the love of God. John the Baptist was himself a virgin. But it is with Jesus who is our supreme model in this regard, as in all other aspects of the Christian life, that virginity is properly promulgated.

**b. Support from Magisterium:** Pius XII wrote in his encyclical *Sacra Virginitas*, "Virginity is a very efficacious means for devoting oneself wholly to the service of God, while the heart of married persons will remain more or less divided." According to *Perfectae Caritatis*, every celibate is called upon to love God and his neighbour with an intense love. Pope Paul VI wrote in his encyclical on celibacy, "The choice of celibacy has always been regarded by the Church as a sign of and an invitation to charity - a rare but extraordinarily significant example of a life whose driving force is love, a love through which man expresses his unique greatness."

**c. Support from the Virgin Mary:** St. Ephrem depicts Mary as the perfect model of virginity. Mary is single-minded and fully Christ-oriented. She conceived Christ physically and mentally. "The Holy one dwelt bodily in the womb and he dwelt spiritually in the mind."

**7. Consecrated Celibacy:** a. It is a state of greater love for human beings. The primary value of Jesus' celibacy consisted in directing him wholly to the heavenly Father, for it was by adhering to the Father that Jesus shared in the universality of divine love.

b. Jesus' celibacy signified a universal availability of himself to mankind. If he chose not to marry and if he refused to found a family, the reason was that he wanted his life and his love to be more universally available to men. Thanks to celibacy, Christ was able to enjoy a maximum of presence to every man, woman and child. He was able to say, "Here are my mother and my brethren! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and my sister and my mother" (Mk 3:31-35). "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49). The renunciation of marriage by Jesus was linked to his solidarity with the poor and deprived. When Jesus called upon his disciples to leave their family, he simultaneously asked them for a more complete surrender of all things. "Lo, we have left everything and followed you," Peter said to him (Mt 19:27; Mk 10:28).

c. Celibacy is a higher marriage. For Jesus, to be celibate is to be married to all mankind and to lay the foundations of a higher love that is to nourish and sustain the love of all marriages. By following the vocation and by participating in the celibacy of Christ, the celibate penetrates deeply into the mystery of the nuptials of God and mankind.

d. Celibacy is a call to be open to relationship. Celibacy is a call to be constantly open to relationship, to be ready to befriend any person met, with an non-demanding love. Celibate lifestyle is a structure which aids the development of an enlarged and non-destructive approach to the world of intimacy.

e. Celibacy can lead to generativity. Sex has certainly a reproductive dimension. Celibates, by using their own creative gifts, often highly developed, can contribute very substantially to the enrichment and survival of the human species. Jesus, giving up his family, came to form another family, much larger, that of the children of the Father. He initiated a new spiritual generation. Whatever the expression of generativity, its sources should be the generosity of caring for others rather than self-absorption. Generativity is the power to create and nurture life. Erik Erikson defines generativity as "concern for the establishing and guiding the next generation." There is a deep need within the human psyche to give life, to create something that will live on after we are gone. At some deep level the celibates need to feel that they are fostering life, whatever form that may take. Thousands of religious sisters and brothers, who spend long hours of teaching in the classroom or those who work in hospitals, parishes, or community development projects, can be generative. They invest their energies in building the reign of God, in giving life to other people and that, in turn, makes them feel alive. The work is hard, but they do not experience it as drudgery.

Fr. Bernard Häring says, "Through human sexuality everyone is called, in one way or another, to a fatherhood or motherhood of the children of God. The usual response to God's call is in the vocation of marriage and natural parenthood; but loving concern for neighbour in secular life is also a parental role, and the total giving of self to a spiritual fatherhood or motherhood in consecrated celibacy is an especially blessed form of parental vocation" (Shalom: Peace, p. 222). In a mysterious way Christ is wedded to his Church and he brings forth from her the supernatural life of children of God. A consecrated celibate is wedded to his/her mission.

f. Consecrated celibacy and married state are complementary. According to Vatican II, both the celibate and the married are to work with God for the salvation of the world. The celibate's response to the divine call to celibacy points to the reality of the supernatural order. Celibacy testifies to the eschatological life of a new and eternal relationship with God; marriage, on the other hand, testifies to the redemptive love of Christ here below. Marriage draws our attention to the incarnate nature of God's love. Celibacy, on its part, draws attention to the transcendent goal of human affectivity. The dedication to celibacy is an emphatic statement of belief in the resurrection.

g. Celibacy is a charism. A charism is a gift that is meant to be given away. Acknowledged in gratitude, it is exercised in generosity.

h. Celibacy is living the Paschal Mystery. Dying to self in celibacy does not depict gloomy prospects, it is not a desperate self-annihilation, rather it is a dying to be resurrected, a dying to live gloriously. The project of consecrated celibacy refers to becoming a celibate lover, for that is what we are called to be: not just lovers, and not just celibate, but both.

i. Celibacy facilitates Apostolic Activity and Pastoral Care. Consecrated celibacy allows a celibate to become totally committed to the service of all people in Christ. It is this point that St. Paul stresses as he praised the life of celibacy ( 1 Cor 7:32-34).

## **2. Living the vow of chastity**

**1. Living our greater love for God:** All consecrated persons must be professional God-seekers. And there is no professional God-seeking without contemplative prayer. Meditation is not a mental practice, but an awareness that takes place in the heart. It is essentially an experience in and of love. Believe that God is present in the centre of yourself. At the very root and centre of you, there is only God. Silent prayer is and must be a continuing adventure - and proficiency and progress in depth can only come through practice. Our faith teaches us that the Blessed Trinity is present in our souls by grace. Love gives rise to the desire for recollection and the desire to love more leads us on to further recollection, since it is in the silence of our souls that we can find God.

**2. Living our greater love for human beings:** a. Consecrated persons have a greater obligation to love their enemies than lay people. Love of enemies does not mean giving way to injustice. Forgiveness does not downplay evil nor does it give another person free rein to keep on hurting us.

b. Consecrated persons are expected to excel lay people in identifying themselves with the poorest of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. Preference for the poor is a norm that is biblically rooted because of God's preference for the poor.

c. Consecrated persons must be hospitable to strangers.

d. Show love toward acquaintances. Take a little effort to reach out to others.

e. Show love toward one's family members. Consecrated celibates are to be shining examples of genuine love and concern for relatives.

f. Show great love toward celibate friends. Fraternal love must flourish in communities. Some celibate friends may be belonging to the diocese or another congregation.

g. Celibate heterosexual friendship can be cultivated provided this friendship seeks the good of others by becoming more free and freedom-giving.

**3. Living our great love for self:** Jesus said, "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt 22:29). I should love myself, my own body and sexuality. I should also be at home with my affectivity. The genuine need of the celibate for human love must be met by mature friendship. No body denies that there are dangers in cultivating friendships in celibate life. Virginitly basically consists in personalizing one's sexuality in the service of Christian love. For man, virginitly can only mean the renouncement of fatherhood and all the conscious sexual acts which are directed towards achieving it.

## **3. Facing Problems of Consecrated Celibacy**

1. **Proper attitude towards Sexual Temptation:** Sexual desire is as natural and normal as is desire for food and drink. Sexual thoughts and fantasies are normal. I need to concentrate on my own life pursuits. A celibate must cultivate a chaste attitude exemplified by prayer and compassion. Harmful books and TV shows should be avoided.

2. **Appropriate understanding of masturbation:** Two kinds of masturbation should be distinguished, namely, invited masturbation and non-invited masturbation. Invited masturbation is indulged in with the sole aim of obtaining voluptuous sensations. This kind of masturbation constitutes an element of an unchaste pattern of life. Non-invited masturbation, on the other

hand, is resorted to as a result of spontaneous genital excitation and is not sought after for itself. One, who makes every effort not to masturbate, however gives into the sexual tension and seeks relief by masturbation. Contemporary moralists are inclined to consider acts in relation to the totality of the person. What is of primary importance is the continuing fundamental option whereby a person unconditionally commits or refuses himself to God. Invited masturbation is culpable and must be avoided. As regards non-invited masturbation, it is an imperfection which we should strive to overcome.

**3. Vow of Chastity in my life:** Much of human life issues from sexual instinct and the need for affection. I continue to be a celibate because God has called me to be a consecrated celibate and I want to respond to that call as fully as I can with his grace sustaining me always. Mixed motives could have led me to my early decision. As I grew up I purified some of the motives. As a celibate I have grown and deepened and learned to love God and others evermore. This is the path of my own journey to and with God. My purpose in life still is to know God, to love God and be happy with him in his kingdom for ever. Jesus denied self-seeking and decided to live for God and others. I gladly choose to follow Christ in his example of self-surrender. No celibate can genuinely be happy unless he/she contemplates and loves. A celibate must strive to achieve loving personal relationship with God and human beings. I need to spend a prolonged period everyday for contemplation. It is good to have a small circle of close friends. Celibates, who try to love God as God loves them, will encounter problems. They need to become highly prayerful. In my ministry I need to ask myself, "What difference do I make in the lives of people?"

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## **The Religious Vows**

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## **Consecrated Poverty**

### **I. What is Consecrated Poverty?**

1. Consecrated Poverty
  1. is not hatred of things and money,
  2. is not destitution
  3. is not a matter of asking permissions
  4. is not literally following the Founder
  5. is not mere collective sharing of goods.
  
2. Consecrated Poverty is the true and the full imitation of the poverty of Christ. Evangelical poverty in its final profundity is a radical renunciation, a total humility and consequently a limitless trust in God. God identifies himself with the poor to such an extent that their rights become the rights of God himself. (Prov 17:5) The poverty which Jesus beatified is not precisely destitution, but the poverty of those who, knowing the inability of their resources to meet life's demands, seek their strength and sustenance from the Lord.
  
3. Poverty in the life of Jesus cannot be defined as a definite style of life. He wanted poverty rather than wealth to be a sign of his kingdom. He saw danger in wealth. He condemned service of wealth and devotion to money. Pleasures of being rich choke off the plants in the Parable of the Sower. Jesus warned us against addiction to comfort. The poverty of Christ was mainly a matter of an interior spirit. Jesus' poverty meant reaching out and sharing, living for the neighbour, not for himself. Jesus chose to be poor.

4. **Definition of the Vow of Poverty:** The poor consecrated person is one who possesses and is possessed by God. He/she is poor because they know that everything they are and have and possess have been given them by God as gifts, and they freely wish to use them and to give them back to others in a spirit of loving service.

The position of man in relation to God is at the root of poverty. When he realizes his condition of creature and submits himself wholly to God, he acquires the virtue of poverty. Pope Paul VI, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio* issued in June 1971, has provided us with another element to the understanding of consecrated poverty. Essentially, poverty is simplicity of life - with all that it implies in terms of lifestyle, activities, dress, use of terrestrial goods, affirmation of human values, and fraternal sharing - which is stressed as the basic evangelical value. Evangelical poverty includes simplicity of life and sharing of goods generously with one's needy brethren who are children of the Heavenly Father.

## **II. Living Consecrated Poverty**

1. **Living Consecrated Poverty as Total Dependence on God:** A person dedicated to a life of poverty witnesses to the truth that man's happiness consists not in the abundance of things he possesses, but in the measure in which he is able to use his possessions in order to give himself to God and brethren. Consecrated persons are called to live in such a manner that others can see and say how happy they are without a lot of things.

**a. Detachment from wealth:** New Testament talks about the dark side of money - the way in which money can be a threat to our relationship with God and the radical criticism of wealth that we find so much of in Jesus' words. The warnings and exhortations are repetitious (Lk 6:24; 16:13; Mt 6:19; 19:24; Lk 6:30; 12:33). There is another stream of teaching that stresses the light side of money. Money can be used to enhance our relationship with God and humankind. The good Samaritan used money generously and drew close to the kingdom of God. (Mt 26:6-12; Lk 7:36-50; Jn 12:1-8)

**Money:** We need to understand that money is not just a neutral medium of exchange but a "power" with a life of its own. The New Testament teaching on money makes sense only when we see it in the context of the "principalities and powers" (Col 1:16; 2:15; Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 15:24-26). Jesus uses the term "mammon" and declares, "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt 6:24). Jesus calls people to turn away from the mammon god in order to worship the one true God.

**Consumerism:** We live and move in consumerism. The culture of wealth is psychologically harmful. Religious too are becoming victims of consumerism by the indiscriminate use of the alluring gadgets offered by modern world. While all the vows are a theological resource for social renewal, the vow of poverty can be cited more particularly as a resource for consecrated persons who seek to renew society. Consecrated poverty must establish a lifestyle based on a limited use of goods. World needs leadership in cutting down on the consumption of goods.

**Capitalism:** It has been exposed for several reasons. We are so dominated by the material outlook that we find it impossible to envisage a satisfactory life that is not materially abundant. Human beings need to experience the simple joy of living.

**b. Humility:** Evangelical Poverty, in the ultimate analysis, boils down to humility. The "poor in spirit" are all those who willingly accept God as the master of their lives and are joyfully led by the Holy Spirit. They give priority to God and everything and everybody else comes afterwards. The poor in spirit are those who are truly humble in a Christian way.

Material poverty continues to be an evil. But, despite this, it can be the source of unexpected spiritual riches, since it gives people the chance to give themselves confidently to God who secures justice for them. It is necessary to provide material conditions that make the experience of humility possible. This is where asceticism comes in. A sparing and moderate use of material goods and freeing ourselves from all wretchedness and all acquisitiveness are needed. The warnings of Jesus about the amassing of riches must be understood in this context. Desire for riches becomes an excessive preoccupation, encourages neglect of God and makes it easy to succumb to the temptation of idolatry (Lk 12:15, 22; 18:25).

Jesus committed himself to the poor of his times and always came to their defense, avoiding no arguments or conflicts, defending the man blind, the lepers, the prostitutes, the women who perfumed his feet, and all those considered public sinners by the accepted standards of his times.

To be poor, for the Church and religious of today, on personal level, is to commit themselves to justice for the vast numbers of the economically impoverished, whose dignity as human beings and as brothers and sisters has been outraged and to place their consciousness, words, social influence, goods, and historical presence at the service of these people who constitute the masses.

## **2. Living of Consecrated Poverty as gratuitous Sharing of Goods with Needy Brethren:**

Evangelical poverty rediscovers part of its authentic meaning in the Gospel words, "Sell what you have, give it to the poor." The impoverishment of the individual and of the community becomes one realistic way in which love of neighbour becomes a living reality in communion with Christ. Paul said as much to the Corinthians (1 Cor 8:9-11). Christian poverty is an ideal and it is measured by the active willingness of a person to share whatever he has with others, to labour selflessly to obliterate social injustices and immoral economic imbalances and to spend his personal and human resources in order to see to it that each man shares equitably in the good things of this world. The consecrated person dedicates his property and labour to the service of the ecclesial community, most especially to the members who are in greatest need. This sharing can take many forms: being involved in a social development plan, free education programme, helping with an aid project for the underprivileged, etc. We, who profess poverty, should try to give as much as we prudently can. The superiors are challenged to play a positive leadership role in this regard.

The religious communities possess goods; but they should see themselves as keepers of goods more than owners and the vow commits the religious to share them with their needy

brethren. We should realize that the proper use of money and goods includes their use for the benefit of others, whenever their need outweighs our own need.

Concern for the exploited and marginalized is an integral part of consecrated poverty. If we believe in Christ we must at the same time accept his living presence in the Bread, the Book, the Church and the poor. The psalmist has expressed the nearness of God to those who are the most needy, the most helpless and the most suffering. Prophets announced the word of God and defended the rights of the poor in the face of unjust aggressors. Christ associated himself with the poor. He said, "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it me." (Mt 25:40) The same mystery is expressed in the parable of Dives and Lazarus as recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke. It is a simple story of a have-not and a have-all and as such has profound meaning for our own day and age. The crime of the rich man is basically a crime of omission. It is his very passivity, indifference and reluctance to get involved with Lazarus which merited eternal damnation. God created all the goods of the world for the use of all men, not for just a few. Justice requires that we feed the poor. As individuals, communities, provinces, congregations, etc, this responsibility remains.

Consecrated poverty is embraced out of love for Christ and for the poor. Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelico Testificatio" issued in June 1971, called upon consecrated persons to reexamine their witness to poverty in the light of their awareness and attention to the cry of the poor and needy. The CBCI Evaluation Report of 1995 speaks of the urgency "to take an unambiguous stand on social justice and the preferential option for the poor." Works of love undertaken by a consecrated person should be a small scale, well-contained and as direct and personal as possible.

**Frugality:** Frugality means moderate use of things. It supposes flight from luxury and elimination of superfluous things. Keeping in mind that consecrated life, by reason of its very existence, involves a renunciation of certain goods and also that a degree of personal material poverty is an essential element in that consecrated life. First Timothy 6:17-19 summarizes three fundamentals of gospel simplicity of life and Jesus' teaching on material wealth in an admonition. These three teachings - trust in God's providence for you, do not selfishly amass wealth and use whatever goods you have to advance God's kingdom - set the standard for every Christian. A consecrated person must ask himself or herself, "How much of this world's goods do I use? How much do I require? Do I share with the needy?" They should have enough of this world's goods to do their job and do it well. They should consider themselves bound by the common law of labour. Negligence in the use of one's talents is against poverty.

### **Pastoral Considerations**

**a. Interior Poverty as the essential thing:** 1. Christian poverty is primarily an internal attitude.  
2. There must be the psychological and spiritual milieu in which gospel poverty is meaningful.  
3. Those, who vow poverty, do so because they have found God as an inalienable possession, as true wealth, cannot seek any other riches and cannot serve another god. Love of Christ must reach such a level that it can overwhelm all other drives in man. It is hypocrisy to speak of poverty of spirit while one is living in the lap of luxury and is surrounded by material comfort and ease.

4. Exterior poverty is theologically imperative.
5. Exterior poverty announces the beginning of a new kingdom.
6. Exterior poverty is demanded because of human weakness.
7. Material poverty and spiritual poverty, both, are required.
8. The lives of saints were characterized by a movement away from wealth, comfort and possession toward poverty, simplicity, and renunciation.

**b. Practice of exterior individual poverty:** If the poverty of the community were not presupposed, it would be impossible to speak of the poverty of the individual. Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation to Religious on July 2, 1971 furnishes us some guidelines. 1. Poverty must bar us from any compromise with any form of social injustice. 2. It obliges us to awaken consciences to the drama of human misery. 3. It leads some of us to live in union with the poor in their situation. 4. It calls many institutes to rededicate some of their members to the poor 5. It enjoins on us the use of goods limited to the requirements of our work. 6. It is necessary that in our daily lives we give external proof of poverty. 7. It is not normal to allow ourselves everything offered to us.

Fr. Aloysius Schwarz has the following suggestions for Religious:

1. Concentrate on the 21st century poor-man poverty.
2. Do not look upon every financial windfall as the direct result of divine intervention in the course of human events. Have the courage to examine it and even refuse it.
3. Don't blame God for your wealthy and expensive taste. Humbly take the blame on yourself.
4. Don't try to defend the luxurious food on your table in the name of economy by stating that what is spent on nutrition is saved on doctors' bill.
5. Ask yourself in all sincerity, is the magazine which you publish really necessary? Or is it simply an expression of a collective desire for prestige? Also ask yourself, are your fund-raising appeals really honest?
6. When the next time comes for you to travel, ask yourself the question, "Is this trip really necessary?"
7. Don't spend too much time and effort in cultivating the financial, political and intellectual elite. Concentrate rather on serving the poor.
8. Resolve to give a fair percentage of your collective wealth to the poor.

The current understanding of poverty clearly calls for changes in the way we live our poverty. A consecrated person has no right to hold back sums of money from the fruit of his labour and spend them on himself. The Christian ideal is a constant reduction of one's artificial needs until they equal one's real physical needs.

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## **Consecrated Obedience**

### **I. Superior's Role**

1. Authority is a function of love.
2. Authority is service. "You know that among the pagans, the rulers lord it over them and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. No; anyone who wants to

be great among you must be your servant and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:25-28).

3. Obedience is obedience to the will of God. God sends out personal summons to each of his children every moment of his life. The role of the superior consists in helping the member to respond to these summonses as fittingly as possible. The superior's mission is to create a favourable ambient in which the seed of grace, implanted by the Holy Spirit, can germinate and flourish. Superiors should endeavour to conform their decisions to the will of God.

4. Authority is leadership. Leadership is dynamic and it is relational. Community is a group and the superior must attend to the development and health of the group. Leadership is the force within a congregation that ignites the spiritual and psychic energies of the members to follow their dreams for the reign of God. Leadership involves capacity to influence the behaviour of others. Superiors need to develop leadership qualities.

4. Evangelical authority is charismatic and not juridical. For every kind of leadership a special talent is required. That talent is love. Leaders are able to motivate and inspire others into action. True leadership differs from power.

5. Authority is an instrument of attaining true happiness. People in authority should focus on happiness in formulating social and economic policy as much as other goals. Pragmatic policy-makers claim to be doing what works. Society desperately needs a concept of the common good around which to unite the efforts of its members.

6. Authority has a tendency towards mad quest for power. One may have the desire to be in control, the craving to be king, the exhilaration of being able to command. Power, Lord Acton wrote, tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Ecclesiastical superiors too can easily be seduced by the power and security attached to the post. Power is foreign to the Gospel. Dictatorial methods were never evangelical. Finally, arbitrary methods that deny dialogue can create crisis of confidence and lead to inefficiency.

**1. Superior's will and God's will:** If the superior merely reiterates a precept of the natural or divine law, he is indicating the divine will. As regards other matters the superior cannot be said to manifest the divine intention for the obvious reason that he does not know what the divine intention is. All that he can do is use his experience, reason and supernatural prudence in coming to a decision and then hope he is doing what God wants. Strictly speaking, a religious superior does not materially manifest God's will when he issues a command. A superior ought to weigh carefully the directives he gives. He should make every effort consonant with the gravity of the matter to be objectively right. Government by whim, directives issued by worldly prudence, commands based on favoritism, prejudice, or misinformation, are wholly unbecoming in men and women who rule.

**2. Superior's will need not necessarily be materially God's will:**

1. No superior can know for certain all that God wants for each member of the community.

2. It may happen that the matter is not willed by God at all.

3. A superior has the strict obligation in conscience to use his authority in accordance with ordinary personal morality. He is not beyond the Christian laws of justice, fraternal charity and tolerance. He has the strict obligation to respect the human dignity of all his subjects as persons.

4. Superiors must administer their authority in a way worthy of its source, namely, for the good of the subordinates. When authority is not thus exercised, the obligation of subjects to obey

ceases. Authority is at the service of the common good of subjects. Pope John XXIII says that authority does not receive obligatory force from the constitutions nor from common law, nor from the vow of obedience, nor from general chapters. Instead, authority draws its power from the moral order which is written by God into the nature of things and especially the nature of man.

5. Superiors have to use the normal human means to discern God's will. They take the decisions as representatives of the Church.

6. Superiors are secondary causes, not direct voices of God. Authority becomes part of God's way of ruling the world, but by secondary human means.

7. Grace of office does not make the superior something he is not, but like all graces, leads the superior to see what he must be and what he must do to be a good superior.

8. Authority alone will not suffice to discover God's will. Superiors will come to know God's will by listening to him, by encountering him in prayer. Holy Spirit works in the events and the happenings of the times. The superior has to humbly admit his own strong and weak qualities, intelligently search out information from those more qualified than himself, maturely refuse to treat his brethren as immature little children. Besides he has to be imbued with the spirit of prayer, charity, prudence, dialogue and consultation.

9. Superiors must listen to the Lord and be guided by him.

10. A subject can and should presume that the command of a superior does not violate the laws and norms of morality, but in every case he cannot be sure about it and therefore he has the right and the duty of judging in conscience.

11. What the superior orders ought not in normal circumstances be understood as divinely inspired; it is something conceived and determined humanly.

12. Christians are called to be mature and responsible adults. Authority can never spell out in detail how an individual Christian should live his or her life.

13. God speaks through signs. To read the signs and listen to God's will every day superiors should take the means such as prayer, charity, prudence, dialogue, consultation, knowledge of rules, knowledge of persons and of their needs. If a particular superior neglects these means, he will be answerable for such a failure. Superiors are to be humble in listening and consulting and charitable and prudent in making decisions. They should not have any personal preferences and personal confidants.

14. Discernment is needed for the practice of consecrated obedience.

**3. Theology of command:** Commands or precepts are similar to laws. Laws of Israel were seen as symbols of the intimacy between God and his people. Law was a manifestation of Israel's election by God. St. Thomas Aquinas defines law as "an ordinance of reason, for the common good, promulgated by one who has charge of the community."

1. Law is a reasonable decision.

2. Law is for the common good.

3. Law is made by him who has charge of the community.

4. Law has to be promulgated. It is promulgated only after sufficient notice and with due respect to the individual's rights and dignity. There is an obligation in conscience to obey just positive laws.

## **II. Proper exercise of evangelical authority**

### **A. Portrait of a good superior:**

1. Good superiors are spiritual-minded. They should have an inner deep communion with God and a strong spirit of prayer.
2. The good superior is the father of the community and represents Christ.
3. He should be relatively mature in love.
4. He has to be humble, unpretentious, and ready to listen and learn.
5. He should have understanding and sympathy.
6. He should be available and approachable.
7. He must be trustworthy and loyal.
8. He should be honest, sincere and consistent, rather than shrewd and clever, in dealing with his fellow members.
9. He knows how to handle power.
10. The office of the superior is a place of unity, an expression of unity for the community.
11. Good superiors are more than just clever administrators. They are above all, good guides, faithful instruments of the Holy Spirit.
12. Good superiors are more than good disciplinarians and much more than simple functionaries charged with the granting of permissions. They are animated by the spirit of the law.
13. They are not guardians of minors. They remain as brothers in a community of adult brothers. They should be ready to consult and listen.
14. They should have the gift of humour.
15. Unfit for the office of superior is the person who just cannot afford to be unpopular in any circumstances and as a result gives in to the whims of fellow members without any discernment.

### **B. Exercise of authority in the contemporary world:**

1. Democratization. Superior never gives orders without explaining why they are necessary. He discusses problems with the group. He keeps the members informed about the future plans. He delegates authority. He provides an atmosphere of emotional security.
2. Avoid domination and authoritarianism.
3. Avoid sanction as far as possible.
4. Give reasons for commands and decisions.
5. Respect the knowledge of the members.
6. Respect the law of subsidiarity. Instead of giving detailed order, state simply what is to be done.
7. Respect the feelings of members.
8. Have recourse to dialogue. The rank-and-file members of the community should have maximum feasible participation in the organization.
9. A superior should be prudent and well informed.
10. Give some consideration to the role of public opinion within a community.

## **III. Consecrated obedience from subject's side**

### **A. A proper understanding of evangelical obedience:**

**1. Holiness is doing God's will:** In the Gospel, on several occasions and under varied forms, Jesus constantly reminds us that the supreme rule governing all others is the rule of love. (ref. Lk

10:27, Col 3:12-15). Love binds everything in perfect harmony because it is the highest of the virtues which unites our soul to God. "If I give away all I have and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor 13:1-3). St. John gives us the same doctrine, particularly in his first letter (4:16-21). Likewise St. Peter writes in his first letter (4:8): "Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins." Now the most excellent part of this love is absolute conformity to the divine will. If we love God we will do what he wishes. Jesus' own holiness centred on his surrendering to his Father's will. Alongside the process of discerning through prayer, we also have to engage in a more general moral discernment about what we ought to do, how we ought to respond to the various calls we experience.

**2. Nature of consecrated obedience:** Obedience means attentive and faithful listening to various levels of our lives. It means fidelity to one's own heart, to the directives of lawful superiors, to the needs of the community, to the cries of the poor, to the call of the Church and ultimately to the challenge of the gospel. It is the collective searching for the will of God in a particular situation.

**3. Intellectual obedience:** Intellectual obedience is the disposition to see and acknowledge the truth inasmuch as it is favourable to the superior's command insofar as it is possible for the subject. There are three elements necessarily included in an act of perfect obedience: execution of the superior's directive, wanting to execute it because of the superior's authority and thinking in its regard as the superior thinks insofar as such is possible. The third element consists in submitting his own judgment to the superior's judgment, so far as a devout will can incline the understanding. A consecrated person seeks to conform his thought to the superior's insofar as he can and that by trying to see the superior's reasons rather than his own. Intellectual obedience is honest and realistic for the simple reason that it requires only that a subject look frankly at evidence favouring the superior's viewpoint.

#### **IV. Proper practice of Consecrated obedience**

##### **1. Are religious always bound to obey our superiors?**

Assisted by the Holy Spirit, by wise rules and traditions and by their own fellow members, superiors will generally succeed in discerning the actual will of God for us. When this is the case, our obedience is certainly a sign of communion with the divine will and our obedience will certainly advance the reign of God in us and around us.

However, sometimes our superiors are bound to fall in their efforts to manifest to us the divine will. If members have good reason for doubting the wisdom of the order given they should represent it in all humility. They should also make their own suggestions. Then they are bound in conscience to abide by the decision of their superior and to execute his orders to the best of their ability. The two most significant and perfect acts of obedience in history are the Fiat of the Virgin Mary and the Fiat of Jesus before his passion.

##### **2. Is religious disobedience always a sin?**

The Constitutions of most religious institutes state explicitly that they do not bind under pain of sin, even venial sin, except when the vow of obedience is explicitly invoked or where they

determine the matter of the other vows. Most Constitutions state explicitly or at least imply that the same holds for orders of superiors. Some spiritual writers imply that there could be a sin against the virtue of obedience as distinct from the vow of obedience. One can sin against obedience by formal contempt for authority. One can also sin against other virtues in disobeying the rules. If there is really a sinful motive in one's action then there will a sin. There is a further way in which one might sin by disobedience to rules and regulations: if one does it habitually, one might very well be getting into a proximate danger of losing one's vocation. One who has taken perpetual vows is bound for life. Therefore, to endanger the perpetuity of his vows knowingly and willfully could be a sin. If we truly want to follow our Lord more perfectly, we shall ordinarily do our best to observe all rules and regulations. In ordinary circumstances, the rule is for us the indication of the better way of serving God.

**3. Obedience in our life:**

1. Obedience to another demands a kenosis, an emptying of self, in order to be filled with the Other, in a way that the Lord Jesus is described in Philippines (2:6-8). We need to seek in a radical way God's dream for us and our lives. Leadership and the exercise of authority are important elements in my understanding of the practice of obedience.
2. God also leads me with gifts and holy desires. My most reliable desires are those that lead me to glorify God. Such desires lead me toward self-gift more than toward personal fulfillment. Holy desires will ultimately lead me out of myself into a greater connectedness with the human community.
3. In my practice of obedience, I need to listen seriously to the cries of the poor and the oppressed.

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## Prayer Life

Bro. Lawrence Joseph, s.g.

Prayer is not primarily to "inform God" ( Mt 6: 7-8, 32) of our needs, is not to think about God, is not a duty and is not to get things from God. Prayer cannot be God's need. Prayer is an invitation for us to become more aware of God's loving, creative presence within us and to consciously open ourselves to be transformed by his presence. We come into conscious communion with God.

In prayer, I have to quieten myself "Be still and know that I am God" (Ex 14:14). In prayer I have to be like the stream in conscious communion with the fountain, God. We are from God; there is an in-built orientation to be filled with him. We can say "yes" to this in-built orientation. This can and should become conscious. This permanent attitude may be called prayerfulness. This prayerfulness becomes formal prayer when this awareness, this prayerful attitude becomes an act, awareness made more intense within assigned time and space. It is to concentrate the whole of my being on being precisely what I am as a child of God.

1. Prayer is the time we live fully, with awareness of who we are, children of God. God sees me as his child, precious and loved, not because of anything I have or achieve, but just because I am sharer in God's life.
2. If I want to be with God, then I will have to learn to accept and love others, as God accepts and loves them. This is what Jesus says, "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gifts there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift"(Mt 5:23-24).
3. Thirdly we have to say "yes" to life. There are so many things that happen in our life with which we may not naturally be happy; but many things are beyond our control and unless we accept what cannot be changed, we shall not be open to Reality, for we reject part of Reality, in rejecting one or other aspect of life.
4. We have to say "no" to sin, injustice and to all forms of dehumanization.

**Prayer** is conscious openness to Reality and it means listening to God's word wherever it is heard and seeing God wherever he is found. It is to be attentive to God's word and Spirit. Reading the Scriptures, listening to music, the song of a bird, the cry of a child, looking at the sunrise or a sunset, a flower, a tree, a fountain, a stone, seeing the face of a person... It is to listen to, to touch and feel God. It is to wonder, to contemplate, to be lost in Reality. One has to be silent. Any method that can help us be silent should be used. Then read a scripture passage, contemplate the scene, read and become present to the Lord in the passage. You do not 'apply' the gospel: you just remain in silence, attentive to what comes up. Whatever memory comes up will have a message for you. In that silence your life speaks to you, challenges you. In the silence you may discover what the Lord wants of you that day. In silence we come into contact with the truth of ourselves, with our deeper self. Take time to soak in, to reflect on God's love for you, on Jesus' love for you. This can melt away the hurts and bitterness and give life a new beginning. Come to a quiet place (Mk 6:31).

Every memory, however old, has a message for us; it tells us where we are not behaving truly as God's children, where we need to change. We usually do not allow ourselves to be touched by God, seen by God, we do not see ourselves as God sees us, we do not want to see ourselves as we are. When we face these memories, respond to them creatively and then we will see our lives transformed, we will be recreated.

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