

WHY AM I A RELIGIOUS?

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1.	The Goals of Religious Life	1
Chapter 2.	Happiness in Religious Life	4
Chapter 3.	Prayer Life	13
Chapter 4.	The Vow of Chastity	24
Chapter 5.	The Vow of Poverty	33
Chapter 6.	The Vow of Obedience	41
Chapter 7.	Apostolate and Mission	47
Chapter 8.	Fraternal Life	51

Chapter 1

THE GOALS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Religious have accepted Jesus' invitation, "If you want to be my disciple, renounce yourself, take up your daily cross, and follow me" (Lk 9:23). Firstly renunciation of self is an absolute necessity. This counsel contains certain definite directions, among the most important of which is the renunciation of riches, of carnal pleasure, and of all ambition and self-seeking, in order to acquire a spirit of voluntary submission and generous devotion to the service of God and our neighbour. Selfishness is a great obstacle to spiritual growth. Some religious have selfish motives and some work for the welfare of their dear ones at home. Secondly one has to carry his cross daily. The cross can be sickness, misunderstanding, failure, labour involved in fulfilling his duties. Thirdly, one has to be keen on doing God's will, fulfilling his duties. Here laziness can come in. Laziness is the greatest enemy of growth in religious life. Mr. M. Scott Peck in his book, "The road less travelled" has mentioned that our original sin is our laziness. "In the struggle to help my patients grow, I found that my chief enemy was invariably their laziness. And I became aware in myself of a similar reluctance to extend myself to new areas of thought, responsibility and maturation. One thing I clearly had in common with all mankind was my laziness. It was at this point that the serpent-and-the apple story suddenly made sense" (Road Less Traveled, p. 291). Further religious have accepted Jesus' call to religious life. They made the religious profession a few years ago. There is a tendency to water down the demands of religious life. Some start this process during the first year after profession.

Sometimes young Brothers complain that they are not appreciated. Let them ask themselves, “Are we appreciable?” As a young Brother I was appreciated by my superiors, Brothers, teachers and students. I did nothing special. I was faithful to my prayers and to all my duties. Even now my students remember me. Old students of both these schools appreciate me. As a religious, daily I ask myself, “What more can I do for my community, for my students.” Those days, every day, I did some practical or other in the class. Even now I follow the same principle.

What are the goals of religious life? “Religious are dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God’s Kingdom, for the honour of God, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world” (Can. 573). “All those who are called by God to the practice of the evangelical counsels, and who make faithful profession of them, bind themselves to the Lord in a special way. They follow Christ who, virginal and poor (cf. Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58), redeemed and sanctified men by obedience unto death on the cross (cf. Phil 2:8). Under the impulse of love, which the Holy Spirit pours into their hearts (cf. Rom 5:5), they live more and more for Christ and for his Body, the Church (cf. Col 1:24)” (PC 1).

“He makes profession in the Church of the evangelical counsels. He does so for two reasons: first, in order to be set free from hindrances that could hold him back from loving God ardently and worshipping him perfectly, and secondly, in order to consecrate himself in a more thoroughgoing way to the service of God... Being means to and instruments of love, the evangelical counsels unite those who practice them to the Church and her mystery in a special way. It follows that the spiritual life of such Christians should be dedicated also to the welfare of the entire Church” (LG 44).

“In every age consecrated men and women must continue to be images of Christ the Lord, fostering through prayer a profound communion of mind with him (cf. Phil 2:5-11), so that their whole lives may be penetrated by an apostolic spirit and their apostolic

work with contemplation” (VC 9). “By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives but strive to reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, ‘that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world’ (LG 44). By embracing chastity, they make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that he is the Only-Begotten Son who is one with the Father (cf. Jn 10:30, 14:11). By imitating Christ’s poverty, they profess that he is the Son who receives everything from the Father, and gives everything back to the Father in love (cf. Jn 17:7, 10). By accepting, through the sacrifice of their own freedom, the mystery of Christ’s filial obedience, they profess that he is infinitely beloved and loving, as the One who delights only in the will of the Father (cf. Jn 4:34), to whom he is perfectly united and on whom he depends for everything” (VC 16).

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Chapter 2

HAPPINESS IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

All religions want to be happy and contented. Happiness is not something readymade. It cannot be bought from market nor can anybody give it to others. “There is only one person who could ever make you happy, and that person is you” (David Burns). Happiness comes from my own actions. I am the first one responsible for it. “Happiness depends upon ourselves” (Aristotle). “Happiness does not consist in games and amusements but in virtuous activities” (Aristotle). “Happiness resides not in possessions and not in gold; the feeling of happiness dwells in the soul” (Aldous Huxley).

Happiness is also defined as contentment. The Bible tells us that contentment is achieved by a reverence and respect for God’s Law. “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart” (Ps 119:1-2). The word “blessed” means happy. How is this accomplished? By walking in His law, keeping His testimonies, and seeking Him with one’s whole heart. The 19th Psalm gives a marvelous description of how to achieve happiness and contentment: The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward (Ref. Ps 19:7-11).

Means to Attain Happiness

A. Renunciation of Self

Jesus wants his disciples to renounce themselves, take up their daily cross and follow him (Ref. Lk 9:23). He wants them to know an important truth about life and happiness. According to him, denying self, and walking in the ways of God is the path to happiness. The humble, selfless, teachable person who allows him/herself to be disciplined by God's word is the really the happy person. An enduringly happy, useful, and contented life is possible only to those who "lose" their selfish life in the selfless service of God and their fellow beings. Denying self, coming unto Christ, learning of him, resting in Him, taking up His cross, copying His service to God and to others – these are the steps to a life of enduring happiness and peace. Jesus told his disciples, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). Jesus has not promised that His disciples will have 'a bed of roses' in their waiting for His Kingdom, but he has promised his guidance, and help, producing peace of mind and true happiness in his service. There is an inner peace and happiness in the knowledge that God loves us, cares for us, forgives and helps us. Jesus intercedes to God on our behalf. We show God our love for Him in practical ways – in the reading, believing, and obeying His Word; in worshipping with others; and in "doing good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (2 Pt 1:1, Gal 6:10). Happiness comes from seeing the good in others and doing the good for others. It encompasses fullness of goodness, beauty, truth and love. Our ultimate happiness is found in relationship with God through Jesus (prayer, obedience to his teachings, etc.).

"I have learned to seek happiness by limiting my desires, rather than attempting to satisfy them" (John Stuart Mills). "You're happiest while you're making the greatest contribution" (Robert

F. Kennedy). “There is only one way to happiness, and that is to cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of your will” (Epicletus). “Happy are those who are poor, mourn, humble, hunger for justice, pure, kind, merciful, work for peace and persecuted for the cause of justice” (Ref. Mt 5:3-10). One of the great rewards for obedience and reverence for the Law of God is contentment and peace of mind. The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (Ref. 1 Tim 6:8-10). Happiness is not obtainable without admitting guilt and repenting of it. “He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but whosoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy” (Prov 28:13). Man must repent of breaking that law. He must establish a relationship with God in order to achieve happiness and contentment.

B. Obeying the Commandments of God

“Those who keep God’s law will be happy here and in the next life” (Ps 1:1). “If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (Jn 15: 10, 11). Keep the Lord’s Day holy. Be faithful to your spiritual duties. Obey your parents. Obey your superiors and the Rule of the congregation. Do not kill, do not harm anyone. Love others. Do not commit adultery. Avoid all hetero and homo sexual activity. Abusing a child is a crime. Do not steal. Do not manipulate accounts. Lead a simple life. It is easy for us to lose the sense of sin; but sin is a reality. “We must take sin seriously, and heed what Scripture says: Man is a liar. We must strive to ask ourselves repeatedly, whether our conscience too has not already become untruthful, whether God’s standards have already become so dim to us, that we no longer notice what sinners we are” (Karl Rahner, *Mary Mother of the Lord*, p. 80).

C. Getting united to Jesus Christ

“All perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus” (Montfort, TD 120). “Contemplate him lovingly, stay with him, let yourself be captivated by him and your life then will attain its plenitude” (R.L. 27). Holy Eucharist, Meditation and Holy Rosary can lead us to our union with Jesus and Mary. Do I have love for Holy Eucharist? Am I keen on making my daily meditation? Do I at least pray five decades of the Rosary? “Christ invites you to pray to the Father in the solitude of your heart. Do not let the frenzy of the world invade your soul, take time to listen to His word uttered for you alone, open your heart to it and let it dwell there. It will remain with you throughout the day” (RL 75). “You are a man of action, be true to yourself in your contact with God” (RL 76). “Pray to Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church that Christ may ever grow in you, that through your apostolate His Kingdom may come” (RL 68). “The Holy Eucharist is at the heart of your prayer. In union with your Brothers of your community and the Christians of your parish, you offer yourself as a holocaust in the unique sacrifice that is agreeable to God” (RL 70). “Acknowledge your sin; confess it before God and the Church” (RL 72). “Prayer accompanies the Brother in all his activities from his rising, when he places himself in God’s presence, until the evening, when he lays the happenings of his day in His hands during an examination of conscience and prayer of Compline or a prayer inspired by it” (C. 115).

Do I live in an atmosphere of silence and recollection? St. Paul says, “The kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink; it is justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). “Happy the people who’s God is the Lord!” (Ps 144:15) “Happy the man who finds wisdom and gains insight” (Prov 3:13). “He who listens to the word finds happiness; blessed is he who trusts in Yahweh” (Prov 16:20). It is high time that each religious sets up your own religious goals and seek the same without bothering about others. Stand on your own feet. Have the back bone. Truth will make you free.

D. Keeping the Three Vows

i. Chastity: Sexuality has two goals: intimacy and generativity. In spite of the vow these goals will have to be met. Intimacy with Jesus has to be built up. Cultivate intimacy with Jesus and Mary. Devotion to the Holy Eucharist, contemplation of Jesus and perfect devotion to Mary will pave way to intimacy with Christ. Contemplate him lovingly. Help children and students to grow in the right way. Religious need to be guides and models. We need to have spiritual children as a result of their full commitment to their mission. This is spiritual fecundity. “Your love embraces the whole world and achieves its fecundity in the Spirit” (RL 28).

ii. Poverty: “Do not keep unto yourself the things that come your way; whatever you earn, whatever is given to you, you have promised not to claim as your own, but to share, in full dependence on your Superior and your Brothers” (RL 33). Here religious must be detached from family and from worldly standards. Simplicity is a source of joy.

iii. Obedience: “You accept in faith to seek God’s will with your community. You want to serve and not to be served” (RL 39). “Be attentive to all signs and manifestations of the Father’s designs on you and others, in fraternal love, sincere dialogue and united prayer. Working with them towards a common goal, you bear, with each of your Brothers, the responsibility for the building up of your community in Christ” (RL 31). Be absolutely faithful to all your duties. Do more and not less. “What more can I do?” must be one’s attitude. Service to others is a source of happiness.

iv. Being a good teacher: Brothers’ main mission is teaching. The teaching mission must be a success story. Work hard to become a good teacher. Improve your knowledge, dream about and invent new methods of teaching and become a very successful teacher. Happiness will be yours. Work hard and become a man of quality, character and achievement. Be a good organizer: scout master, literary association in charge, Legion of Mary in charge,

in charge of sports, games, elocution, drama, music, etc. Pope Francis has published an Apostolic Exhortation entitled *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel. “An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that delightful and comforting joy on evangelizing” (EG 10). Accept failures that come on the way. Do not waste time in useless talks. Dream about the possibilities and execute them one by one. Each person must work at least 8 hours a day. Sometimes, religious do not work enough, as food, medical care, shelter, etc are available.

vi. Loving and serving the Brothers: Religious need to be attached to their community and work for its welfare. “In your community, grounded on faith, moved by the love of Christ, fed at the Eucharistic meal, sustained by the word of God, united in worship with Mary, you will be, for one another, witnesses to the New Covenant” (RL 46). “Because of the ties that bind you, your community assumes the work of each one” (RL 49). Religious need to learn to serve their Brothers. “How happy you will be if you put washing one another’s feet into practice” (Jn 13:17). Serve others, serve the community and be of service to students, teachers and workers. Happiness is built on uprightness and good relationship with God, with Brothers and with those whom they serve.

vii. Wrong ways of seeking happiness: The quest for happiness seems to be endless. Many have made it their primary goal in life. In the search for happiness men have indulged in every whim, desire, aim, passion, and pleasure. Yet, few appear to have achieved the happiness they desire. Sometimes Brothers like to have jolly time with Brothers who are their friends. They like to meet, chat and have a party. To have many friends need not be an aim of life. There is no need to waste one’s time in chatting over the phone. We should not abuse the mobile phone. Internet can be used as a source of knowledge. Once again this too can be abused. Love all; but all need not be your friends. “Only the upright shall be my friend” (Ps 100:6). Follow principle given in the Book of Sirach

Chapter 6: “Let your friends be many; but your counselors, one in a thousand... If you would gain a friend, begin by testing him and do not put your confidence in him too quickly... Distance yourself from your enemies and be careful about your friends... A faithful friend is a secure refuge... Whoever fears the Lord will make true friends for, as a man is, such will his friend be” (Sir 6: 6,7,13, 14, 17). “Do not rely on a friend or trust an intimate companion” (Mic 7:5). Friends are not the models, but Jesus and Mary. Enjoyment is not the aim of religious life, but holiness. “In Christ, God chose you before the world was founded, to be dedicated, to be without blemish in His sight, to be full of love” (RL 1). “Be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). “Be holy because I am holy” (1 Pt 1:16). Holiness is sinlessness and service to others. In holiness and service there is happiness.

viii. Different ways to be adopted: 1. Cultivate positive thoughts. 2. Cultivate a compassionate heart. 3. Cultivate desire to help others. 4. Do an act of love every day. 5. Fill your mind with good projects. 6. Give up criticism and complaining. 7. Get better and better and not bitter and bitter. 8. Have a grateful heart. 9. Listen to God’s inspirations. 10. “Resolve to make at least one person happy every day” (Sydney Smith).

To be happy, one must follow the following: 1. forgive others 2. Accept yourself 3. Carry on in spite of difficulties 4. Thank God for everything and 5. Smile always. “If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal, not to people or objects” (Albert Einstein). Happiness depends upon capacity for selflessness. Happiness is the result of your choices and actions. Gratefulness makes you happy. Be happy with what you can do. Surround yourself with supporting people of value. Have a forward looking thought; look at future with hope and enthusiasm.

Five important things: 1. Free your heart of hatred. 2. Free your mind from worries. 3. Live simply 4. Give more. 5. Demand less and don’t expect miracles in your life. Worry is a silent killer; but you can easily break it with simple scripture meditation. “Blessed

are they who see beautiful things in humble places, where other people see nothing.” (Camille Pissarra) Stop keeping track of the mistakes committed. It is time to forgive yourself. Get rid of hurt feelings; forgive and forget and move forward. Hurt feelings will only hurt you.

ix. Six Elements of happiness

Simplicity: Happiness is not dependent on fame or wealth or social status. Be satisfied with your present situation. Appreciate the value of simplicity, then happiness becomes easier to cultivate.

Tolerant heart: If you constantly criticize others, you cannot find peace and happiness. If you have a tolerant heart with the qualities of acceptance of others and self, then happiness will be the result.

Positive thoughts: You need to cultivate positive thoughts.

Gratitude: You need to appreciate others and thank them for the little helps they render.

Be active in finding a sense of purpose in life and it will lead to satisfaction and happiness.

Physical exercise: If you develop your physical fitness that will increase your self esteem and happiness.

x. Twelve useful things: 1. Express gratitude 2. Cultivate optimism 3. Avoid over-thinking about oneself and social comparison 4. Practice acts of kindness 5. Nurture social relationships 6. Develop strategies for coping 7. Learn to forgive 8. Increase flow experience 9. Savour life’s joys 10. Commit yourself to your goals 11. Practice spirituality 12. Take care of your body.

xi. The Formula for happiness is found in the living out the beatitudes. “Happy are the poor in spirit... Happy are those who mourn ... Happy are the humble... Happy are those who thirst for justice... Happy are the pure in heart... Happy are those who work for peace... Happy are those who are persecuted for the

Kingdom... Happy are those who are insulted because of being Christ's followers" (Mt 5:3-12). "How happy you will be, if you wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:17). Serve others, serve the community and be of service to students, teachers and workers. Be Happy; happiness is built on uprightness and good relationship with God, with Brothers and with those whom the religious serve. Happiness is your birth right and you can have it if you are good and do good to others.

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Chapter 3

PRAYER LIFE

A. The Need for Prayer

“Religious are to find their supreme rule of life in the following of Christ as proposed in the Gospel and as expressed in the constitutions of their own institute” (Can. 662). “1. The first and principal duty of all religious is to be the contemplation of things divine and constant union with God in prayer. 2. Each day the members are to make every effort to participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice, receive the most holy Body of Christ and adore the Lord himself present in the Sacrament. 3. They are to devote themselves to reading the sacred Scriptures and to mental prayer. In accordance with the provisions of their own law, they are to celebrate the liturgy of the hours worthily, without prejudice to the obligation of clerics mentioned in can. 276. They are also to perform other exercises of piety. 4. They are to have a special devotion to the Virgin Mother of God, the example and protectress of all consecrated life, including by way of the rosary. 5. They are faithfully to observe the period of annual retreat” (Can. 663). “Religious are earnestly to strive for the conversion of soul to God. They are to examine their consciences daily and to approach the sacrament of penance frequently” (Can. 664). “Members of institutes should assiduously cultivate the spirit of prayer, drawing on the authentic sources of Christian spirituality. In the first place, let them have the sacred scripture at hand daily, so that they might learn ‘the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus’ (Phil 3:8) by reading and meditating on the divine scriptures. They should perform the sacred liturgy, especially the holy mystery

of the Eucharist, with their hearts and their lips, according to the mind of the Church, and they should nourish their spiritual lives from this richest of sources” (PC 6).

“One of the concerns frequently expressed at the Synod was that the consecrated life should be nourished from the wellspring of a sound and deep spirituality... The word of God is the first source of all Christian spirituality... As the Church’s spiritual tradition teaches, meditation on God’s word and on the mysteries of Christ in particular, gives rise to fervour in contemplation and the ardour of apostolic activity. Both in contemplative and active religious life it has always been men and women of prayer, those who truly interpret and put into practice the will of God, who do great works. From familiarity with God’s word they draw the light needed for that individual and communal discernment which helps them to seek the ways of the Lord in the signs of the times. In this way they acquire a kind of supernatural intuition, which allows them to avoid being conformed to the mentality of this world, but rather to be renewed in their own mind, in order to discern God’s will about what is good, perfect and pleasing to him (cf. Rom 12:2)” (VC 93,94).

For a fruitful and successful religious life daily prayer is extremely important and the Church has understood this. But some religious try to down play it and sadly face the consequences. Watering down was attempted by Peter, when he said, “That must never happen to you!” (Mt 16:22) And sharp was the reply, “Get away from me, Satan!” (Mt 16:23) Are religious sharp in their reactions to those who dilute the demands of religious life or do they also squeeze in that group?

“In Christ, God chose you before the world was founded to be dedicated, to be without blemish in His sight, to be full of love” (RL 1). “Contemplate Christ lovingly, stay with him, let yourself be captivated by him and your life then attain its plenitude (RL 27). Holy Eucharist, meditation, and rosary can lead the religious

to union with Jesus and Mary. Religious should ask himself. "What is the goal that is upper most in my mind and heart? Do holiness, perfection in virtue, etc., rank high in my pursuit? Are Holy Eucharist, Meditation, Rosary, and prayer life, etc., important things in my life?" Prayer is a great support to religious life. Religious should learn time management and allot time for prayer, for mission, for study, spiritual reading, etc. During the Superior General's visit, one Brother, in a community dialogue, said, "I am not able to come for Morning Prayer." The General answered, "You are not bound to be a Brother of St. Gabriel."

B. Prayer in General

Prayer is an invitation for religious to become aware of God's loving, creative presence within them and to consciously open themselves to be transformed by his presence. Religious come into conscious communion with God. In prayer, one has to silence himself. "Be still and know that I am God" (Ex 14:14). In prayer religious has to be like the stream in conscious communion with the fountain, God. There is an in-built orientation to be filled with God. Religious can say "yes" to this in-built orientation. This can and should become conscious. This permanent attitude may be called prayerfulness. 1. Prayer is the time, a religious live fully, with awareness of who he is, a child of God. God sees him as his child, precious and loved, not because of anything he has or has achieved, but just because he is a sharer in God's life. 2. If he wants to be with God, then he 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 he has to say "yes" to life and to the different happenings. 4. He has to say "no" to sin, injustice and to all forms of dehumanization.

C. Gospel Contemplation

“Religious are to devote themselves to reading the sacred Scripture and to mental prayer” (Can. 663 § 3). A very important item of prayer-life in the life of a religious is the contemplation of the Gospels. Let them recall what they learned in the novitiate and daily practice it. The daily meditation can start with a short prayer expressing one’s desire to know Jesus more intimately in order to love him more deeply and following him more closely.

Preludes: Then read the Gospel passage and arrive at the historical background and history and this is first prelude. In the second prelude imagine the whole scene as vividly as possible and in the prelude pray for a deep interior knowledge of the Lord so that you may love and follow him more closely.

The body of contemplation: Take time to see the persons Jesus, Mary and others are historical persons in flesh blood. They are not strangers. See, watch, hear and converse with them. Ask Jesus what he wants you to learn and what does he want to communicate to you. Pray for the grace to imitate him. If corrections are needed, pray for strengthen and resolve to take steps. Being in his presence is often enough. “Contemplate Him lovingly, stay with Him, let yourself be captivated by Him and your life then will attain its plenitude” (RL 27). You can end with a short prayer to Jesus and to Mary.

Fr. William A. Barry, S.J. in his book, ‘A friendship like other’ has said, “In contemplating the Gospels, take this advice to heart. Be sure to take Jesus’ humanity seriously even as you reflect on his divine attributes. God took humanity seriously enough to become one of us, and we do God no service if we downplay what God has done in becoming human... In contemplating the Gospels, we are asking Jesus to reveal himself to us... You can tell God anything in your heart and then see how God responds.” On Feb. 2, 2015, Pope Francis said during the homily, “Jesus comes to us in the Church through the foundational charism of an Institute: it

is nice to think of our vocation in this way! Our encounter with Christ took its shape in the Church through the charism of one of the witnesses. This always amazes us and makes us give thanks.”

D. Daily Participation in the Holy Eucharist

“Each day religious are to make every effort to participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice, receive the most holy Body of Christ and adore the Lord himself present in the sacrament” (Can. 663 § 2). “Let religious see well to it that the Church truly show forth Christ through them with ever-increasing clarity to believers and unbelievers alike – Christ in contemplation on the mountain” (LG 46). “An indispensable means of effectively sustaining communion with Christ is assuredly the Sacred Liturgy, and especially the celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours. In the first place, the Eucharist “contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ himself, our Passover and living bread, who, through his very flesh, made vital and vitalizing by the Holy Spirit, offers life” to the human family. This is the heart of the Church’s life, and also of the consecrated life. How can those who are called, through the profession of the evangelical counsels, to choose Christ as the only meaning in their lives, not desire to establish an ever more profound communion with him by sharing daily in the Sacrament which makes him present, in the sacrifice which actualizes the gift of his love on Golgotha, the banquet which nourishes and sustains God’s pilgrim people? By its very nature the Eucharist is at the centre of the consecrated life, both for individuals and for communities” (VC 95).

Jesus used to get up early in the morning, go up to mountain to pray. In Hindu families in the morning the master of house does the morning puja. Do religious give importance to the daily participation in the Holy Eucharist? Some may question, “Why Mass every day?” Do they question, “Why breakfast every day?” Daily idli puja cannot be given up; but can the Holy Eucharist be? “The Holy Eucharist is at the heart of your prayer” (RL 70).

E. Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer

“Religious, in accordance with the provisions of their own law, are to celebrate the liturgy of the hours worthily” (Can 663 § 3). Vat II in its decree on Sacred Liturgy has mentioned, “Since the purpose of the office is sanctify the day, the traditional sequence of the hours is to be restored... By the venerable tradition of the universal Church, Lauds as morning prayer, and Vespers as evening prayer, are the two hinges on which the daily office turns. They must be considered as the chief hours and are to be celebrated as such” (SC 88, 89). “Brothers meet together morning and evening to express their love in a corporate prayer. This prayer is usually the Divine Office” (C. 109).

The word ‘Lauds’ (i.e. praises) explains the particular character of this office, the end of which is to praise God. All the Canonical Hours have, of course, the same object, but ‘Lauds’ may be said to have this characteristic par excellence. For a Christian the first thought which should present itself to the mind in the morning is the thought of God. The first thought of the day should be a prayer, recalling Christ, the true Light. Christ rose from the tomb, conqueror of death. It is thought of His Resurrection which gives to this office its whole significance.

“Vespers, or evening prayer, evokes the evening sacrifice of incense offered in the Temple of Jerusalem, and the hour when Christ lay in the tomb, having offered himself to the Father for the salvation of the world. The moving sequence of Psalms, scriptural canticles, readings, and intercessions concludes with the Lord’s prayer, the perfect expression of the Church’s praise of God, and a final prayer which invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Pope John Paul II, at the end of audience on Oct. 15, 2003).

F. Daily praying the Rosary

“Religious are to have a special devotion to the Virgin Mother of God, the example and protectress of all consecrated life, including by the way of the rosary” (Can. 663 § 4). St. Montfort had a great

devotion to the Rosary and he was known as the Father with a long Rosary. He preached Rosary everywhere, got parishes and groups to recite it daily and wrote the books *The True Devotion to Mary*, *The Secret of Mary* and *The Secret of the Most Holy Rosary*. “The Rosary is a priceless treasure which is inspired by God... It is a blessed blending of mental and vocal prayer by which we honour and learn to imitate the mysteries and the virtues of the life, death, passion and glory of Jesus and Mary... The Rosary said without the meditation on the sacred mysteries of our salvation would almost be a body without a soul” (SR 1, 9, 61).

“As a Gospel prayer, centred on the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation, the Rosary is therefore a prayer with a clearly Christological orientation. Its most characteristic element, in fact, the litany-like succession of Hail Marys, becomes in itself an unceasing praise of Christ, who is the ultimate object both of the Angel’s announcement and of the greeting of the mother of John the Baptist... Without contemplation the Rosary is a body without a soul” (Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus* 46, 47). “To vocal prayer we must add mental prayer which enlightens the mind, inflames the heart and enables the soul to hear the voice of Wisdom, to relish His delights and to possess His treasures. I know no better means to establish in ourselves the kingdom of God and to draw Divine Wisdom to our soul than to pray vocally and mentally by saying the Holy Rosary, while meditating on its fifteen mysteries” (Montfort, LEW, 193).

Pope John Paul II has explained in his Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, the excellence of most holy Rosary. Further he added the Luminous mysteries. “The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christo-centric prayer. In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety, of which it can be said to be a compendium... With the Rosary, the Christian people sit at the school of Mary and are led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love... The Rosary, precisely because it starts with

Mary's own experience, is an exquisitely contemplative prayer. Without this contemplative dimension, it would lose its meaning. "Mary's contemplation is above all a remembering. We need to understand this word in the Biblical sense of remembrance as a making present of the works brought about by God in the history of salvation. The Bible is an account of saving events culminating in Christ himself. These events not only belong to 'yesterday'; they are also part of the 'today' of salvation.... The Rosary too, as a 'meditation' with Mary on Christ, is a salutary contemplation. By immersing us in the mysteries of the Redeemer's life, it ensures that what he has done and what the liturgy makes present is profoundly assimilated and shapes our existence" (Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 1, 13).

"But among creatures no one knows Christ better than Mary; no one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery better than his Mother... Contemplating the scenes of the Rosary in union with Mary is a means of learning from her to 'read' Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message... The Rosary is both meditation and supplication. Insistent prayer to the Mother of God is based on the confidence that her maternal intercession can obtain all things from the heart of her Son. She is 'all-powerful by grace'" (Ibid., 14, 16).

"The Rosary offers the 'secret' which leads easily to a profound and inward knowledge of Christ. We might call it Mary's way. It is the way of the example of the Virgin of Nazareth, a woman of faith, of silence, of attentive listening. It is also the way of a Marian devotion inspired by knowledge of the inseparable bond between Christ and his Blessed Mother: the mysteries of Christ are also in some sense the mysteries of his Mother, even when they do not involve her directly, for she lives from him and through him. By making our own the words of the Angel Gabriel and Saint Elizabeth contained in the Hail Mary, we find ourselves constantly drawn to seek out afresh in Mary, in her arms and in her heart, the 'blessed fruit of her womb'" (Ibid., 24).

G. Daily Examination of Conscience

“Religious are earnestly to strive for the conversion of the soul to God. They are to examine their conscience daily” (Can. 664). “Prayer accompanies the Brother in all his activities from his rising, when he places himself in God’s presence, until the evening, when he lays the happenings of his day in His hands during an examination of conscience and prayer of Compline or a prayer inspired by it” (C. 115). A religious should find a short time after dinner or just before going to bed for night prayer and examination of conscience. Let him sit quietly and feel the presence of God. He should thank God for all the blessings received during the day. Then let him examine himself:

“If anyone wants to be my disciple, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” (Mt. 16:24).

- i. Did I give way to selfishness?
- ii. Did I accept crosses patiently?
- iii. Was I faithful to my duties?
- iv. “Worries of this life, riches and pleasures of this life crowd in and choke the plants” (Lk 8:14).
- v. Did I give way to personal ambition forgetting the goals of religious life?
- vi. Was I faithful to the vow of poverty?
- vii. I faithful to my vow of poverty?
- viii. Did I make any compromise regarding the vow of chastity?
- ix. “My brothers, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise; things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable” (Phil 4:8).
- x. Was I keen doing God’s will?
- xi. Was I keen on the mission entrusted to me?

“I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind that endures... This, then. Is what I command you: love

one another” (Jn 15:16, 17). “The Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control” (Gal 5:22, 23).

xii. Was I keen on leading a virtuous life?

xiii. Was I charitable and loving this day?

The religious can end the prayer with an act of perfect contrition.

H. The Sacrament of Reconciliation

“Religious are to approach the sacrament of penance frequently” (Can. 664). Religious should participate in monthly recollection and annual retreat in all seriousness to derive profit from them. The same way they should approach the sacrament of reconciliation. These days the frequency is understood as once a month. “Then Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people’s sins, they will be forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven’” (Jn 20:22, 23). Thus the disciples were given the authority to forgive sins and thus the sacrament of reconciliation takes its origin from Jesus himself.

The history of individual confession has passed through different stages. In the early Church, publicly known sins were often confessed openly or publicly. However, private confession was still used for private sins. Confession, acceptance of penance and the rite of reconciliation, all these go back to 6th century. More or less in the present form, the sacrament goes back to the 11th century. In 1215, the Fourth Council of the Lateran made it a canon law stating that every Catholic should go for confession once a year. During the Counter-Reformation, i.e., in the 16th century sacrament of penance got transformed from a social experience to a personal experience. In the 20th century, during Vatican II, new approaches were taken.

“The Eucharist is also closely connected with the commitment to continual conversion and necessary purification which consecrated

persons bring to maturity in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. By their frequent encounter with God's mercy, they purify and renew their hearts and through the humble recognition of their sins achieve openness in their relationship with him. The joyful experience of sacramental forgiveness, on the journey shared with one's brothers and sisters, makes the heart eager to learn and encourages growth in faithfulness" (VC 95).

While strict obligation is to confess serious sins, the Church strongly recommends confession of even venial sins and encourages frequent confession. This was recommended by Pope Pius XII and Pope John XXIII as a pious practice which the Church introduced under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as a means of daily progress in virtue. Pope Paul VI said that frequent confession was of "great value". Pope John Paul II began a programme of fostering and newing the focus on this sacrament. In 1984, he issued *Reconciliatio et penitentia* which quoted Mark 1:15, where Jesus said: "Repent and believe in the Gospel." In 2002, he issued *Misericordia Dei* which quoted Matthew 6:73-75 where it was said that Jesus was born to 'save his people from their sins'. Unfortunately today, many people have lost the sense of sin. The moral conscience of many people has become seriously clouded. Religious are also caught up in this trend. Yet sin is a big evil which each one should try to avoid. People need the sacrament of penance because from time to time they fall into sin. Venial sins, especially willful ones, offend God much. People need to know that their sins are forgiven. Pope John Paul II has enumerated to advantages of frequent confession: renewal in fervour, strength in resolutions, and divine support and encouragement. Let each religious plan out the frequency following the teachings of the Church.

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Chapter 4

THE VOW OF CELIBACY AND THE VIRTUE OF CHASTITY

“The evangelical counsel of chastity embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, is a sign of the world to come, and a source of greater fruitfulness in an undivided heart. It involves the obligation of perfect continence observed in celibacy” (Can. 599). “You have been called by Christ to share the intimacy of His heart and He invites you to give yourself totally to the service of His Father and of your Brothers. In His love for you, He has given you the grace to understand that it is better for some not to marry so that the tenor of their lives may be more like His” (RL 25).

“Consecrated Celibacy is a state of greater love for God. Affectivity yearns for possession, whereas a celibate 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 fulfill 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... 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... 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" (Ref. Fr. Felix Podimattam, *Consecrated Chastity Revisited*, pp. 26-48).

"You have been called by Christ to share the intimacy of His heart and He invites you to give yourself totally to the service of His Father and of your Brothers" (RL 25). Consecrated Celibacy is the state of special love for Christ, of union with Brothers and of total commitment for the Kingdom. "Perfect continence in celibacy makes free for the service of your Brothers and the work of salvation" (RL 28). "You manifest to people the reality of heavenly goods already possessed here below and give them a glimpse of the condition of the Blessed of which your life of celibacy is a sign"

(RL 30). Your celibate life can also be seen as a protest against a society that is dedicated to pleasure and luxury.

“The first challenge of consecrated chastity is that of a hedonistic culture which separates sexuality from all objective moral norms, often treating it as a mere diversion and a consumer good and, with the complicity of the means of social communication, justifying a kind of idolatry of the sexual instinct. The consequences of this are before everyone’s eyes: transgressions of every kind, with resulting psychic and moral suffering on the part of individuals and families. The reply of the consecrated life is above all in the joyful living of perfect chastity, as a witness to the power of God’s love manifested in the weakness of the human condition. The consecrated person attests that what many have believed impossible becomes, with the Lord’s grace, possible and truly liberating... The consecrated life must present to today’s world examples of chastity lived by men and women who show balance, self-mastery, an enterprising spirit, and psychological and affective maturity” (VC 88).

From Bible: “In Matthew celibacy is ‘for the sake of the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt 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” (Ref. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-69).

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.”

Support from the Virgin Mary: “If all Christians are at one with Mary, their Mother of the faith, this union is for you a favoured way of delving more deeply into the mystery of Christ. Longing to pierce her secrets with a heart longing to know her, you will be in communion with her in all that makes up your life” (RL 8).

Consecrated Celibacy: “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... 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). (Ref. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-86)

Celibacy, Intimacy and Generativity: Sexuality is meant to lead one to intimacy and generativity. A celibate should not grow up as a selfish person; but rather he should become intimate with Christ, with his Brothers, with friends, etc. Similarly he should not grow up as sterile people; but rather as a productive person. He should be a caring person, who will have spiritual children. Erik Erikson defines generativity as “concern for the establishing and guiding the next generation.” 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. 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).

Celibacy is living the Paschal Mystery: In celibacy there is dying, a dying to be resurrected, a dying to live gloriously. The project of consecrated celibacy refers to becoming a celibate lover. He should fall in love with Christ and get very much involved in apostolate. 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: “An unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord’s work, because he is trying to please the Lord. But a married man concerns himself with worldly matters, because he wants to please his wife; and he is pulled in two directions. An unmarried woman or a virgin concerns herself with the Lord’s work, because she wants to be dedicated both in body and spirit; but an married woman concerns herself with worldly matters, because she wants to please her husband” (1 Cor 7:32-34).

Living for a greater love for God: All consecrated persons must be God-seekers and as such they must spend time in contemplative prayer. Further their interest in apostolate must be strong. Prayer and contemplation must go hand in hand. “The Church is ever anxious that the Good News be proclaimed to the poor. With your Brothers you will seek out what is most urgent for the fulfillment of this task” (RL 64).

Living for a greater love for others: Consecrated persons must cultivate much love for others, especially for the poor. They

must strive to come to the aid of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. Fraternal love must flourish in communities. Celibate heterosexual friendship can be cultivated provided this friendship seeks the good of others by becoming more free and freedom-giving.

Living for a greater love for self: Jesus said, “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Mt 22:29). A celibate should love myself, his own body and sexuality. The genuine need of the celibate for human love must be met by mature friendship. Nobody denies that there are dangers in cultivating friendships in celibate life. For man, virginity can only mean the renouncement of fatherhood and all the conscious sexual acts which are directed towards achieving it.

A. Facing Problems of Consecrated Celibacy

i. 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. A religious needs to concentrate on his own life pursuits. A celibate must cultivate a chaste attitude exemplified by prayer and compassion. Harmful books, harmful internet items and TV shows should be avoided.

Wikipedia has given some tips on taking some steps to reduce sexual thoughts:

- a. Identify those things (persons, place, events, etc.) which trigger sexual thoughts. Avoid those triggers by anticipating them. Still some situations cannot be avoided.
- b. Get rid of pornography from your house, computer and avoid watching it.
- c. Replace your triggers with other things. Make a special effort to do something else during that particular period. Train yourself to think of unsexy things when your mind drifts into sexual territory.
- d. Make a minimum goal to curb your sexual thoughts so that they don't distract you from your other daily activities.

- e. Don't beat yourself up.
- f. Be creative. Translate your sex drive into creative energy. Devote it to a creative hobby.
- g. Fill free time in your schedule by planning things in advance.
- h. Talk to a parent you feel comfortable.
- i. Tell a trusted friend about your problem.
- j. Talk to a religious advisor or counsellor.

ii. **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.

Self-Control and the Power of Christ: Self-control is a virtue mentioned by Apostles Peter and Paul' "You must be self-controlled and alert, to be able to pray" (1 Pet 4:7). "To your knowledge add self-control; to self-control add endurance; to endurance add goodness" (2 Pet 1:6). "The Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). Proverbs 25:28 likens "a man without self-control" to "a city broken into and left without walls."

David Mathis in an article on Self-control and the power of Christ says, "Biblically, self-control, or lack thereof, goes to the

deepest part of us: the heart. It begins with control of our emotions, and then includes our minds as well. Self-control is often paired with “sober-mindedness” (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8; Tit 2:2; 1 Pt 4:7), and in several places the language of “self-control” applies especially to the mind. Mark 5:15 and Luke 8:35 characterize the healed demoniac as “clothed and *in his right mind*.” Paul uses similar language to speak of being in his right mind (2 Cor 5:13), as well as not being out of his mind (Acts 26:25). And Romans 12:3 exhorts every Christian “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think,” but to exercise a form of self-control: thinking “with sober judgment.” Self-control is bodily and external as well. The apostle disciplines his body to “keep it under control” (1 Cor 9:25–27). It can mean not being “slaves to much wine” (Tit 2:3–5).

“True self-control is a gift from above, produced in and through us by the Holy Spirit.... Receiving the grace of self-control means taking it all the way in and then out into the actual exercise of the grace.... In the person of Jesus, “the grace of God has appeared . . . training us” — not just “to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,” but “to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Tit 2:11–12). Christian self-control is not finally about bringing our bodily passions under our own control, but under the control of Christ by the power of his Spirit.” . . . In Jesus, we have a source for true self-control far beyond that of our feeble selves.

Certain remarks: If a junior religious does not show interest in prayer and he/she is interested to build up relationship with a person of the opposite sex, the Provincial Superior should correct him. If no improvement is shown, such a person should not be admitted for the renewal of vows. If the case of senior religious same principle must be followed. If correction is not effected, canonical warning must be given. If still no change dismissal proceeding should be resorted to. No celibate can genuinely be happy unless he/she contemplates and loves Jesus. A celibate must strive to achieve loving personal relationship with God and human beings. He

needs to spend a prolonged period everyday for contemplation. It is good to have a small circle of close friends, who live religious life seriously. Celibates need to become highly prayerful. In the ministry ask yourself, “What difference do I make in the lives of people?” Members of the community should try their best to create a happy, lively and contented community. They should be kind enough to point out errors to the concerned religious.

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Chapter 5

THE VOW AND VIRTUE OF POVERTY

“The evangelical counsel of poverty in imitation of Christ, who for our sake was made poor when he has rich, entails a life which is poor in reality and in spirit, sober and industrious, and a stranger to earthly riches. It also involves dependence and limitation in the use and the disposition of goods, in accordance with each institute’s own law” (Can 600). “Contemplate Jesus Christ, your Master: He was rich, yet for our sake, He became poor so that, through His poverty, we might become rich. He receives all things from His Father with thanksgiving: He also knows when to abstain, always in fidelity to His Father who sent Him to redeem mankind. In His footsteps, the Saints, more particularly Saint Louis Marie, our model, have known how to use the gifts of God, with the same gratitude and freedom, always ready and available in the service of Christ, seeking first the Kingdom of God and His justice” (RL 31).

“Even before being a service on behalf of the poor, evangelical poverty in itself, since it recalls the first of the Beatitudes in the imitation of the poor Christ. Its primary meaning, in fact, is to attest that God is the true wealth of the human heart... Consecrated persons are asked to bear a renewed and vigorous evangelical witness to self-denial and restraint, in a form of fraternal life inspired by principles of simplicity and hospitality, also as an example to those who are indifferent to the needs of their neighbour. This witness will of course be accompanied by a preferential love for the poor and will be shown especially by sharing the conditions of life of the most neglected” (VC 90).

A. What is Consecrated Poverty?

Consecrated Poverty is not hatred of things and money nor is it destitution. Further it is not a mere matter of asking permissions nor is it collective sharing of goods. It is not literally following the Founder. “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...

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 people 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... 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” (Fr. Felix Podimattam, *Consecrated Poverty Revisited*, pp. 45-61).

B. Living Consecrated Poverty

Living Consecrated Poverty as Total Dependence on God: “Contemplate Jesus Christ, your Master: He was rich, yet

for our sake, He became poor so that, through His poverty, we might become rich. He receives all things from His Father with thanksgiving: He uses, in full freedom, whatever is laid before Him. He also knows when to abstain, always in fidelity to His Father who sent Him to redeem mankind” (RL 31). A religious 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 to people. He is a happy person, who does not possess many things as he lives for the Kingdom of God.

Detachment from wealth: “Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me. When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he was very rich” (Mt 19:21, 22). Then Jesus spoke about the dangers of being rich. “How terrible for you who are rich now; you have had your easy life!” (Lk 6:24) “You cannot serve both God and Money” (Lk 16:13). Money can be an obstacle to man in his relationship with God. Yet it can be wisely used. The Good Samaritan used money generously and drew close to the kingdom of God (Lk 10: 30-37).

Money: Religious need to understand the real nature of money as it gives to its owner “power”. Jesus uses the term “mammon” and says, “You cannot serve both God and mammon” (Mt 6:24). Jesus asks people to turn away from the mammon god in order to worship the one true God.

Consumerism: Religious live and move in a world of consumerism. The culture of wealth is psychologically harmful. Religious too are becoming victims of consumerism by the indiscriminate use of the attractive gadgets offered by modern world. While all the vows can be a source for social renewal, the vow of poverty has a greater role. Religious must aim at living a simple life style with limited use of material goods. World needs to cut down on the consumption of goods.

Capitalism: Capitalism has been exposed for several reasons. Religious live in a world dominated by the material outlook that they find it difficult to envisage a satisfactory life that is not materially abundant. People need to experience the simple joy of living.

Poor in spirit: “Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!” (Mt 5:3). 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. The poor in spirit are those who are truly humble. Religious need certain material things to lead a normal life. They should try to follow a simple life style. Amassing money or things is against evangelical poverty. A sparing and moderate use of material goods must be the aim. The warnings of Jesus must be understood. “Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because a person’s true life is not made up of things he owns, no matter how rich he may be” (Lk 12:15). Jesus committed himself to the poor, the blind, the lepers, the prostitutes, and all those considered public sinners. The religious of today should commit themselves to such people who need their help badly.

Consecrated Poverty and Sharing with the Needy: “The community of which you are a member is not an end unto itself. With it, you are in solidarity with all your Brothers, the Church and all men in need: the man with two shirts must share with him who has none, and anyone who has food must do the same. Open your heart to all those in need, and the world will know that the divine love dwells in you” (RL 34). “Sell what you have, give it to the poor.” Christian poverty is an ideal and it is measured by the active willingness of a person to share whatever he has with others. A consecrated person dedicates his property and labour to the service of others, especially of those who are in greatest need. Those, who profess poverty, should try to give as much as they prudently can. Superiors are challenged to play a positive leadership role in this

regard. 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. The proper use of money and goods includes their use for the benefit of others, whenever their need outweighs one's own need.

Concern for the poor is an integral part of consecrated poverty. Christ associated himself with the poor and 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 parable of Dives and Lazarus has a profound meaning. The crime of the rich man is a sin of omission, his indifference and reluctance to help Lazarus. God created all the things 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 taken 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.

Frugality: Frugality means moderate use of things. It supposes keeping away from luxury and elimination of superfluous things. Consecrated life involves a renunciation of certain goods and accepting a degree of personal material poverty. Religious should follow what is given in First Timothy 6:17-19, we read, "Command those who are rich in the things of this life not to be proud, but to place their hope, not in such an uncertain thing as riches, but in God, who generously gives us everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share with others. In this way they will store up for themselves a treasure which will be a solid foundation for the future. And then they will be able to win the life which is true life." 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.

Interior Poverty:

- i. Christian poverty is primarily an internal attitude.
- ii. There must be the psychological and spiritual milieu in which gospel poverty is meaningful.
- iii. 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.
- iv. Exterior poverty is theologically imperative.
- v. Exterior poverty announces the beginning of a new kingdom.
- vi. Exterior poverty is demanded because of human weakness.
- vii. Material poverty and spiritual poverty, both, are required.
- viii. The lives of saints were characterized by a movement away from wealth, comfort and possession toward poverty, simplicity, and renunciation.

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:

- i. Concentrate on the 21st century poor-man poverty.
- ii. 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.
- iii. Don't blame God for your wealthy and expensive taste. Humbly take the blame on yourself.
- iv. 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.
- v. 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?
- vi. When the next time comes for you to travel, ask yourself the question; "Is this trip really necessary?"
- vii. Don't spend too much time and effort in cultivating the financial, political and intellectual elite. Concentrate rather on serving the poor.
- viii. Resolve to give a fair percentage of your collective wealth to the poor.

Some remarks: There is a tendency among certain religious to water down the demands of the vow and virtue of poverty. Some try to have a happy and comfortable life with good food and facilities, costly gadgets, modern mobiles, from time to time an extra good meal outside, etc. Some manipulate accounts and to have black money for personal use. A few think that he should look after his family which they left, put up a house, etc. The Provincial Administration should try to create the correct atmosphere of poverty in the Province. Junior religious who violate

the vow should be corrected and warned and if not corrected, not admitted for the renewal vows. If senior Brothers do the same, they too must be corrected, if need be canonical warnings given and dismissal procedure initiated. Among the religious there should a constant reduction of one's artificial needs until they equal one's real physical needs. Keeping the pension and gratuity for oneself, cases of religious diverting huge amounts to their dear ones at home. There have been cases of religious bidding good bye to religious life on reaching retirement age and leaving for home with gratuity and pension.

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Chapter 6

VOW AND VIRTUE OF OBEDIENCE

“The evangelical counsel of obedience, undertaken in the spirit of faith and love in the following of Christ, who was obedient even unto death, obliges submission of one’s will to lawful Superiors, who act in the place of God when they give commands that are in accordance with each institute’s own constitutions” (Can 601). “Your reason to live obedience is to be found in Christ. One with His Father in love He always did His Father’s will: He ministered to the brethren, and gave His life as a ransom for many. Through her Fiat, Mary freely associated herself with the obedience of her Son. With Christ and His Mother, you welcome the designs of God on you and in the diverse ways He makes them known to you” (RL 38).

“Even before being a service on behalf of the poor, evangelical poverty in itself, since it recalls the first of the Beatitudes in the imitation of the poor Christ. Its primary meaning, in fact, is to attest that God is the true wealth of the human heart... Consecrated persons are asked to bear a renewed and vigorous evangelical witness to self-denial and restraint, in a form of fraternal life inspired by principles of simplicity and hospitality, also as an example to those who are indifferent to the needs of their neighbour. This witness will of course be accompanied by a preferential love for the poor and will be shown especially by sharing the conditions of life of the most neglected... In an especially vigorous way evangelical obedience re-proposes the obedience of Christ to the Father and, taking this mystery as its point of departure, testifies

that there is no contradiction between obedience and freedom. Indeed, the Son's attitude discloses the mystery of human freedom as the path of obedience to the Father's will and the mystery of obedience as the path to the gradual conquest of true freedom... Obedience, enlivened by charity, unites the members of an Institute in the same witness and the same mission, while respecting the diversity of gifts and individual personalities" (VC 90, 92).

A. Superior's Role

According to Jesus 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). "Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my Father in heaven wants them to do" (Mt 7:21). Obedience is obedience to the will of God. The Superior's role is to help the religious conform themselves to the will of God.

Superiors should cultivate and come to possess leadership qualities. They should be able to influence the behaviour of others. They should be able to motivate and inspire others into action. The goals of religious as a whole and the goals of that particular institute should be uppermost in their mind. They work for the common good and give up all ideas of controlling everyone and everything. Religious Superiors must be beware of power seeking. Dictatorial methods should never be employed nor arbitrary methods.

i. Seeking and doing God's will: God's will is normally made known to religious through their Rule of Life and Constitutions, and by the duties they have to perform in their professional capacity as teacher, nurse, etc. In certain the Superiors will communicate the duties and give certain orders. When the Superiors give orders according the Rules and Constitutions, they communicate God's

will. In other matters Superiors should reflect and pray before taking decisions. Strictly speaking, a religious superior does not materially manifest God's will when he issues a command. He should make every effort to be objectively right. Whims and fancies, worldly prudence, favoritism, prejudice, etc. are to be carefully avoided.

Superiors have to use the normal human means to discern God's will. They take the decisions as representatives of the Church. A superior has the strict obligation in conscience to use his authority in accordance with ordinary personal morality. He is bound by the Christian laws of justice, fraternal charity and tolerance. He has the strict obligation to respect the human dignity of all those under him.

ii. Superior's will need not necessarily be God's will: No superior can know for certain all that God wants for each member of the community. It may even happen that the matter is not willed by God at all. Authority is at the service of the common good of the community. Authority alone will not help the superior know God's will. Superior has to listen to the member. Further he has to pray and reflect. He should try to become a man of prayer, charity, prudence, dialogue and consultation. Superiors should not have any personal preferences and personal confidants. Discernment is needed for the practice of consecrated obedience. St. Thomas Aquinas has defined law as "an ordinance of reason, for the common good, promulgated by one who has charge of the community." Law 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 and positive laws.

iii. Portrait of a good superior: A good superior is the father of the community and represents Christ. He should be spiritual-minded. He should be relatively mature in love. He has to be humble, unpretentious, and ready to listen and learn. He should be sympathetic, approachable, trustworthy and loyal. The office of the superior is a place of unity, an expression of unity for the

community. Good superiors are more than just clever administrators. They are above all, good guides, faithful instruments of the Holy Spirit. They remain as brothers in a community of adult brothers. They should be ready to consult and listen. They should have the gift of humour (Ref. Fr. Felix Podimattam, *Consecrated Obedience Revisited*, pp. 66-76).

iv. Exercise of authority: A Superior keeps the members informed about the future plans. He avoids domination and respects the feelings of members. He must have recourse to dialogue. There should be maximum participation of the community. A superior should be prudent and well informed.

B. Consecrated obedience from subject's side

i. 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 (Ref. *Ibid*, pp. 97- 104).

ii. Nature of consecrated obedience: Obedience means obedience to the inner inspiration a religious receives, 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. “Be attentive to all signs and manifestations of the Father’s designs on you and others in fraternal love, sincere dialogue and united prayer. Working with them towards a common goal, you bear, with each of your Brothers, the responsibility for the building up of your community in Christ. In all your initiatives, remain one with the community” (RL 41). In perfect obedience there are three elements: 1. executing the superior’s directive, 2. wanting to execute it because of the superior’s authority and thinking in its regard as the superior thinks insofar as such is possible, and 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. The subject looks frankly on the evidence favouring the superior’s viewpoint.

- a. 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 Philippians (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.
- b. 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.
- c. In my practice of obedience, I need to listen seriously to the cries of the poor and the oppressed.

iii. Certain remarks: Sometimes superiors fail to manifest God’s will. If members have good reason for doubting the wisdom of the order, they should represent it to the major superior. 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. 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.

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Chapter 7

APOSTOLATE AND MISSION

“Superiors and members are faithfully hold fast to the mission and works which are proper to their institute. According to the needs of time and place, however, they are prudently to adapt them, making use of new and appropriate means” (Can. 677 § 1).

“Following the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the Synod expressed great esteem for the kind of consecrated life in which religious brothers provide valuable services of various kinds, inside or outside the community, participating in this way in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel and bearing witness to it with charity in everyday life.... These Religious are called to be brothers of Christ, deeply united with him, ‘the firstborn among many brothers’ (Rom 8:29); brothers to one another, in mutual love and working together in the Church in the same service of what is good; brothers to everyone, in their witness to Christ’s love for all, especially the lowliest, the neediest; brothers for a greater brotherhood in the Church... The apostolic dimension opens the hearts and minds of consecrated persons and prepares them for constant effort in the apostolate, as the sign that is the love of Christ which urges them on (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). In practice, this will involve updating the methods and objectives of apostolic works in fidelity to the spirit and aims of the founder or foundress and to subsequently emerging traditions, with continuous attention to changing historical and cultural conditions, as the general and local levels where the apostolate is carried out... Men and women religious will be all the more committed to the apostolate the more

personal their dedication to the Lord Jesus is, the more fraternal their community life, and the more ardent their involvement in the Institute's specific mission... Consecrated life will not be limited to reading the signs of the times but will also contribute to elaborating and putting into effect new initiatives of evangelization for present-day situations" (VC 60,71,72,73).

"The option for the poor is inherent in the very structure of love lived in Christ. All of Christ's disciples are therefore held to this option; but those who wish to follow the Lord more closely, imitating his attitudes, cannot but feel involved in a very special way. The sincerity of their response to Christ's love will lead them to live a life of poverty and embrace the cause of the poor. For each Institute, according to its charism, this involves adopting a simple and austere way of life, both as individuals and as a community... Serving the poor is an act of evangelization and, at the same time, a seal of Gospel authenticity and a catalyst for permanent conversion in the consecrated life..." (VC 82).

"Equipped with this charism, consecrated persons can give life to educational undertakings permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity, in which young people are helped to mature humanly under the action of the Spirit... The history of the Church, from antiquity down to our own day, is full of admirable examples of consecrated persons who have sought and continue to seek holiness through their involvement in education, while at the same time proposing holiness as the goal of education. Indeed, many of them achieved the perfection of charity through teaching. This is one of the most precious gifts which consecrated persons today can offer to young people, instructing them in a way that is full of love, according to the wise counsel of St. John Bosco: 'Young people should not only be loved, but should also know that they are loved'... With respectful sensitivity and missionary boldness, consecrated men and women should show that faith in Jesus Christ enlightens the whole enterprise of education, never disparaging human values but rather confirming and elevating them. Thus

do consecrated persons become witnesses and instruments of the power of the Incarnation and the vitality of the Spirit. This task of theirs is one of the most significant manifestation of that motherhood which the Church, in the image of Mary, exercises on behalf of all her children” (VC 96, 97).

“Your active share in the evangelizing mission of the Church as a Brother of Saint Gabriel, lies in the privileged field of education, particularly that of school-going youth. Teacher and educator, committed to a profession that you love and of which you respect the exigencies and the rules, you manifest that God’s designs on man encompass the whole human mystery. You proclaim the sacredness of and grandeur of all that is created: at the same time, your own life shows that the world is made for the Kingdom of God” (RL 63).

“The Church is ever anxious that the God News be proclaimed to the poor. With your Brothers, you will seek out what is most urgent for the fulfillment of this task. Near you, or in far-away countries, they await your fraternal love and your help, to make them conscious of their human dignity, to free them from oppression of every kind, to dispel their ignorance, to lighten their spiritual distress, to satisfy their longing for a hope of salvation. Their condition is also a light from Christ, which reveals to you your own situation before God” (RL 64).

Every religious community has a mission or missions and every religious is given a mission to fulfill. If his mission is education and if he is appointed a teacher, he should become a good teacher fulfilling his duties well. He should keep up reading and learning habits. He should adapt himself to his students. He should motivate them and teach them well. He should prepare his lessons well. He should always ask himself. “What more can I do for them? He should be enthusiastic and keep up the enthusiasm of the students. Experiments, practical demonstration, drawings, etc., should be done. He should try to acquire the qualities of good

teacher like caring, compassionate, creative, empathetic, generous, inspirational, kind, organized, patient, etc.

Religious congregations have schools in order to train students to grow up as upright, loving, socially conscious, morally good citizens of the country. The teacher's behaviour, actions, words, example, etc., will contribute this upbringing of students. This duty has to be kept in mind especially as a religious teacher. Senior religious should set up a good example. If junior religious do not come up to the mark they should be corrected. If constant negligence is noticed such persons should not be allowed to renew the vows. A religious community from time to time examine its faithfulness to apostolate. Local Superiors, Heads of Institutions and senior religious should see to it that the mission goal is always aimed at. The Province as a whole also must fulfill this goal.

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Chapter 8

FRATERNAL LIFE

“The fraternal life proper to each institute unites all the members into, as it were, a special family in Christ. It is to be so defined that for all it proves of mutual assistance to fulfill their vocation. The fraternal union of the members, rooted and based in charity, is to be an example of universal reconciliation in Christ” (Can 602). “Union in a community comes into being, lives, and flourishes, if the members know how to give and how to receive. The acceptance of each Brother with his strengths and weaknesses, the mutual esteem and trust, the balanced participation in the common task, the sharing and the fraternal help, build up the home where you love to meet to renew your strength, to relax, to rebuild your spiritual resources as sustain your apostolic dynamism” (RL 47).

A. Love for the Members and for the Community

As religious, we seek the perfection of charity. When we love God above all else and our neighbours as ourselves, we keep the commandments. “If you love me, keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15). “You must be perfect - just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Mt 5:48). “In your community, grounded on Faith, moved by the love of Christ, fed at the Eucharistic meal, sustained by the word of God, united in worship together with Mary, you will be, for one another, witness to the New Covenant” (RL 46). I need to become an active member in my community.

“The fraternal life plays a fundamental role in the spiritual journey of consecrated persons, both for their constant renewal and

for the full accomplishment of their mission in the world. This is evident from the theological motivations which sustain it, and is amply confirmed by experience. I, therefore, exhort consecrated men and women to commit themselves to strengthening their fraternal life, following the example of the first Christians in Jerusalem who were assiduous in accepting the teaching of the Apostles, in common prayer, in celebrating the Eucharist, and in sharing whatever goods of nature and grace they had (cf. Acts 2:42-47). Above all I call upon men and women religious and members of Societies of Apostolic Life to show generous mutual love, expressing it in ways which are in keeping with the nature of each Institute, so that every community will be revealed as a luminous sign of the new Jerusalem, ‘the dwelling of God with men’ (Rev 21:3). The whole Church greatly depends on the witness of communities filled ‘with joy and the Holy spirit’ (Acts 13:52)” (*Vita Consecrata*, 45).

“In community life, it should be in some way be evident that, more than an instrument for carrying out a specific mission, fraternal communion is God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the Risen Lord (cf. Mt 18:20). This comes about through the mutual love of all the members of the community, a love nourished by the word and by the Eucharist, purified in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and sustained by prayer for unity, the special gift of the Spirit to those who obediently listen to the Gospel” (VC 42).

“One of the reasons for community life is the satisfaction of certain basic needs that all persons have. Let us look at four of the basic needs: identity, intimacy, generativity and achievement. The generativity needs of religious should find their primary satisfaction in ministry as such and not within the community. The need for intimacy is primarily met through personal friendships within and outside of the congregation and immediate community; the need for generativity is primarily met through one’s ministry as ministry; the need for achievement and recognition is primarily

met in the sphere of ministry as work or profession” (Ref. Fr. Felix Podimattam, *Consecrated Community Revisited*, pp. 35-39). Another important thing in a community is to make sure that the individuals have sufficient time to nourish their personal life of faith through contemplative prayer, reading and reflection. Dialogue, communication, sharing of goals, and willingness to help and support are necessary in a community. The most successful communities are those where the members come together at least occasionally simply in order to straighten out matters with each other as best as they can, so that each feels comfortable with the others.

About fraternal life in community, in 1994, the Sacred Congregation for Religious issued a document entitled *Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor* which contains reflections and proposals. Congregation for institutes of Consecrated Life in 1994 issued a document entitled *Congregavit nos in unum Christ amore* in which a number of reflections and proposals are mentioned: “The coming of the Holy Spirit, first gift to believers, brought about the unity willed by Christ. Poured out on the disciples gathered in the Upper Room with Mary, the Spirit gave visibility to the Church, which, from the very first moment, is characterized as fraternity and communion in the unity of one heart and one soul (cf. Acts 4:32). This communion is the bond of charity which joins among themselves all the members of the same Body of Christ, and the Body with its Head. The same life giving presence of the Holy Spirit builds in Christ organic cohesion: he unifies the Church in communion and ministry, coordinates and directs it with various hierarchic and charismatic gifts which complement each other, and makes the Church beautiful by its fruits...

The same Christ who called the religious, daily calls together his brothers and sisters to speak with them and to unite them to himself and to each other in the Eucharist, to assimilate them increasingly into his living and visible Body, in whom the Spirit lives, on journey towards the Father. Prayer in common, which has always

been considered the foundation of all community life, starts from contemplation of God's great and sublime mystery, from wonder for his presence, which is at work in the most significant moments of the life of our religious families as well as in the humble and ordinary realities of our communities" (Nos. 9, 12).

"Communal celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, or at least of some part of it, has revitalized prayer in many communities, which have been brought into more lively contact with the word of God and the prayer of the Church. Thus, all must remain strongly convince that community is built up starting from the liturgy, especially from celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments. Among these other sacraments, renewed attention should be given to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, through which the Lord restores union with himself and with one's brothers and sisters... Communal prayer reaches its full effectiveness when it is intimately linked to personal prayer. Common prayer and personal prayer are closely related and are complementary to each other... Prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary, animated by a love for her which leads us to imitate her, has the effect that her exemplary and maternal presence becomes a great support in daily fidelity to prayer (cf. Acts 1:14), becoming a bond of communion for the religious community" (Nos. 14, 15, 18).

"Community becomes a School of Love, for young people and for adults – a school in which all learn to love God, to love the brothers and sisters with whom they live, and to love humanity, which is in great need of God's mercy and of fraternal solidarity... It may be useful to recall that in order to foster communion of minds and hearts among those called to live together in a community, it is necessary to cultivate those qualities which are required in all human relationships: respect, kindness, sincerity, self-control, tactfulness, a sense of humour and a spirit of sharing. Recent documents from the Magisterium are rich with suggestions and indications helpful for community living such as a joyful simplicity, clarity and mutual trust, capacity for dialogue, and a sincere

acceptance of a beneficial communitarian discipline... It is very important to cultivate joy within a religious community: overwork can destroy it, excessive zeal for certain causes can lead some to forget it, constant self-analysis of one's identity and one's own future can cloud it. Being able to enjoy one another; allowing time for personal and communal relaxation; taking time off from work now and then; rejoicing in the joys of one's brothers and sisters, in solicitous concern for the needs of brothers and sisters; trusting commitment to works of the apostolate; compassion in dealing with situations; looking forward to the next day with the hope of meeting the Lord always and everywhere; these are things that nourish serenity, peace and joy. They become strength in apostolic action. Joy is a splendid testimony to the evangelical quality of a religious community" (Nos. 25, 27, 28)

"Regular meetings at the community level, often on a weekly basis, have also proved very useful; they let members share problems concerning the community, the Institute, the Church, and in relation to the Church's major documents. They provide opportunities to listen to others, share one's own thoughts, review and evaluate past experiences, and think and plan together... There is a felt need for more intense communication among religious living together in the same community. .. Without dialogue and attentive listening, community members run the risk of living juxtaposed or parallel lives, a far cry from the ideal of fraternity" (Nos. 31, 32).

B. The Superior

Ideas and passages have been borrowed from Fr. C.P. Varkey, S.J.,'s book *Authority, its use and abuse*. Superiors have to realize that the goal of a religious community to bear witness to the Kingdom, i.e., to values of love, compassion, justice, fairness, honesty, forgiveness, patience and respect for the individual. A Superior has to take the community with him as members possess their strengths and weaknesses, fears and anxieties, likes and

dislikes, etc. Further each one has his own freedom. Further, he should be proactive trying to change himself to find peace within and hopefully influence at least indirectly the behaviour of others. Patience is a very proactive behaviour. Honest dialogue without trying to find fault and a sincere apology are very proactive behaviours. A sense of humour, especially the ability to laugh at oneself, is a very proactive behaviour. One can be proactive by being a better listener, a better student, a loving Superior. To be reactive is the surest path to failure. Good leaders know how to use their time wisely and how to delegate authority.

The Pareto Time Principle says that 80% of the value of a group of items generally concentrate in only 20% of the people. For example, 80% of all telephone calls come from 20% of the callers. Time is usually wasted by procrastination, too much talking or socializing, spending too much time reading newspapers or magazines, watching T.V., too much, going back and forth from one task to another, failing to delegate, etc. “Superiors who take time and trouble to foster good relationship between themselves and the members and among the members themselves, will get their cooperation. There will be less flare-ups, conflicts, and non-cooperation. There will be fewer fires to put out. Superiors who take time and trouble to discover and focus on the goal of the organization through reading, reflection, and dialogue will more surely achieve the goal of the organization. Individuals and the community as a whole will have a sense of mission and achievement. There will be both warmth in the community and apostolic effectiveness, this involves attending to the really important things which do not look urgent” (Fr. C.P. Varkey, S.J., *Authority, its use and abuse*, p. 86).

Delegation is a powerful means to get a lot of things done in a limited time. It means assigning responsibilities to members and giving them necessary authority to get the job done. Superiors specify what goals are to be achieved but leave subjects free as to the manner in which the goals are to be attained. Good leaders

tell their subjects what exactly they expect and then leave them free to go about achieving the goal as they think best. Superiors' demand for perfection is more a personal need than the need of the apostolate or the welfare of the people concerned. Trust is the highest form of human motivation. A Superior should always be loving, understanding, caring and respectful. He should be a genuine person, who cares for others. He should clarify his expectations from the members. He should always be honest and be a man of integrity. The Superior who appoints five of his nieces in schools under him does not deserve credibility. If he makes a mistake and cause harm, he should make a sincere apology. The primary law is love and that love has to be unconditional. Empathic listening is the key to all interpersonal relationships. Superiors who rely more on their logic and authority and less on their credibility and empathic listening will find the going hard. Credibility, integrity and empathic listening are absolute essentials in a superior. He should listen to suggestions and corrections. There is no need to be known as a strict superior.

If a correction is to be given, it has to be given in great love and gentleness. Correction that is forced upon or given in anger will not be accepted. A Superior should try to get feed-backs and he should encourage members to give them. He should accept teasing with humour. A Superior cannot help a subject whose confidence he has lost. Arrogance and duplicity should be faced with courage and much prayer and reflection is needed in such cases. A leader is a good person with right skills. A Superior should know the skills for conducting community meetings. The basic skill is empathic listening through which the Superior makes the members listen to one another. He should learn to pick out the underlying currents in the discussion. "It is important that the Superior makes strategic interventions to keep the group focused on the topic. H.K. Rice writes: 'Leadership involves sensitivity to the feelings and attitudes of others, ability to understand what is happening in a group at the conscious and unconscious level and skill in acting in ways that

contribute to, rather than hinder task performance. But increased sensitivity and understanding are means, not ends and the end is more effective leadership” (Ibid, p. 200).

During community meetings a Superior does not normally express his opinion on the topic except after all have given their views. He must summarize long or confused interventions. However, he never attacks the trouble makers. Attacking them can only provoke more such remarks. If there is a fair amount of agreement, and if the Superior has no serious objection to the emerging agreements, he can announce the decision on the spot, at the end of the discussion. If Superior has serious reservations about the conclusion, then he can do it after a day or two. A good Superior keeps confidential matters to himself. He speaks only well of all members. His basic attitude towards them is one of trust. When one member needs urgent help, he will attend to it. He will do all that he can to make the life of the old and sick as pleasant as possible. Genuineness or integrity of life goes a long way to form a good community. A sense of mission is essential to every community.

A good Superior will be ready to encourage and appreciate the members much more than to correct them. He will avoid as far possible all privileges and should easily be available for consultation and dialogue. He will never do a favour to any of the workers or take a decision in their regard without consulting the one in charge. Once he has entrusted a work to someone, he will not interfere in his work. Whenever there is a serious problem, he will call all the members for consultation. Without hiding any relevant facts and without any hidden agenda he will present the problem before them. He is much, much more ready to appreciate and encourage than to correct and criticize.

C. The Older Religious

The old members of the community should set good example. They should take care to avoid becoming over dependent,

withdrawn, silent and sad. They should try to be less and less self-centred and more interested in other people. They should learn to spend their time usefully. If possible, they should carry on with their normal work. If that is not possible, they should choose a useful work and devote themselves to it: gardening, writing articles, writing books, taking coaching classes for weak students, etc. They can do some courses and can become counselors. Old age is a time of integration and old people must give themselves seriously to reflection and prayer. Certain physical weakness and sickness may accompany old age. Religious should accept them with serenity and peace. Unnecessary travels should be avoided even if it is on pilgrimage. Unnecessary purchases too must be avoided. Handing over pension amounts and other incomes to the community is the right way to do.

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