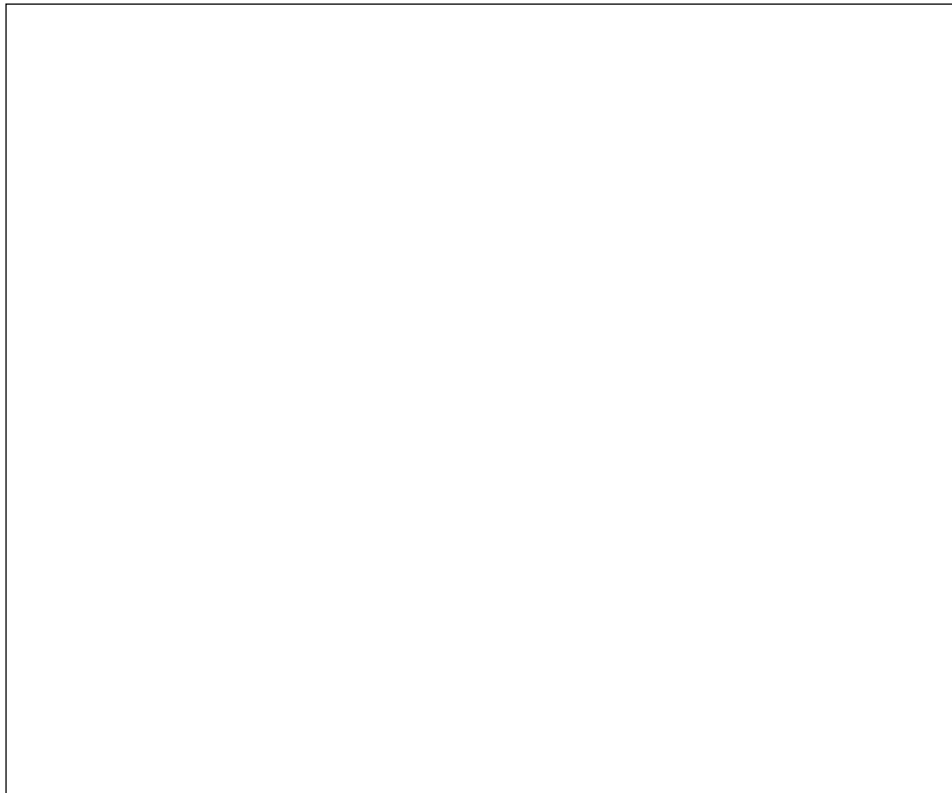


**Religious as a  
Sign of  
Sisterhood/Brotherhood**

*The Consecrated Life in  
View of the Celebration  
of the Jubilee Year 2000*

**by Camilo Maccise, OCD**

**translated from the Spanish  
by Philip Gage, SM**



*CMSM members hold out a blessing for one another at the close of the Assembly last year.*

# Religious as a Sign of Sisterhood/Brotherhood

## The Consecrated Life in View of the Celebration of the Jubilee Year 2000

### Preface

**For CMSM, making this document available in English is one way that the Conference can ... offer further reflections on the teaching of *Vita Consecrata*.**

In Spring of 1998, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men was able to make available to the English-speaking world the first of the Latin American bishops' documents on the Jubilee Year.

We are now pleased to provide the second part of this excellent resource, *Religious as a Sign of Fraternity*. Published in Spanish by CELAM (the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America), *Los Religiosos como Signo de Fraternidad* is the second of the series of three documents published by the Latin American bishops to help integrate the message of *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* into the celebration of the Church of Latin America. The pamphlet was written by Camilo Maccise, OCD, Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites and president of the Union of Superiors General in Rome.

The purpose of the document is to make available to religious for reflection and discussion an

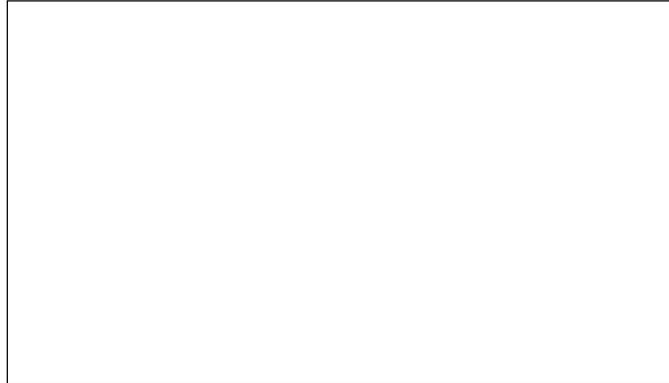
integration of key themes of *Vita Consecrata* with themes of *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* as the millennium proceeds.

For CMSM, making this document available in English is one way that the Conference can help facilitate that process for U.S. religious and offer further reflections on the teaching of *Vita Consecrata* itself. In the fall, we plan to make the third pamphlet available.

In Latin America, the documents were published in succeeding years, 1997-99. You will note in the Introduction that this second document was published in 1998; we have not changed these references.

We have also not attempted to change the language of the document from its appeal to Latin American religious. There is hardly a point made in the document that is not equally applicable in this country.

As in the first document, its



*Jack Russi, SM, with Fidelis Knight, OH.*

integration of Trinitarian theology into reflection upon the religious life requires an extensive use of masculine images for God from Scripture and classical Trinitarian theology.

We once again refer to Catherine Mowry LaCugna in her classic book on the Trinity in contemporary theology,<sup>1</sup> which recognizes this masculine imagery can be misused, but also points out that substituting other images, such as mother, does not seem to solve the difficulties. She argues that what is needed is a better development of the theology than the use of substitutional language that does not address the ideological difficulties.

The Conference hopes that this resource will help local communities, regional communities, and institutes engage in serious and timely reflection on

*Vita Consecrata* and the implication of *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* for religious life and its continuing renewal as it encounters the culture of a new millennium.

We are very interested in your reaction to this document. Is it meaningful for U.S. religious? Will it help your institute further study fraternity and *Vita Consecrata*? How will you plan to use it within your institute?

We hope your experience with this second document is as positive and thoughtful as the first, *Witnesses of Christ in the World*.

As was the first, this English version was translated by Philip Gage, SM.

*Stephen Glodek, SM  
President  
Conference of Major  
Superiors of Men*

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), p. 18, note 7.

# Religious as a Sign of Sisterhood/Brotherhood

Camilo Maccise, OCD

## Introduction

The second year of the immediate preparation phase for the celebration of the Jubilee Year 2000 centered on the Holy Spirit.

The Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* brings this out and indicates at the same time the dimensions it includes:

*“1998, the second year of the preparatory phase, will be dedicated in a particular way to the **Holy Spirit** and to his sanctifying presence within the community of Christ’s disciples. ... The Spirit, in fact, makes present in the church of every time and place the unique revelation brought by Christ to humanity, making it alive and active in the soul of each individual.... The primary tasks of the preparation for the jubilee thus include a **renewed appreciation of the presence and activity of the Spirit**, who acts within the church both in the sacraments, especially in **Confirmation**, and in the variety of charisms, roles and ministries which he inspires for the good of the church.”<sup>1</sup>*

The Apostolic Letter recalls that “in our own day too, the Spirit is the principal agent of the new evangelization”<sup>2</sup> which has an eschatological dimension calling us to rediscover the theological

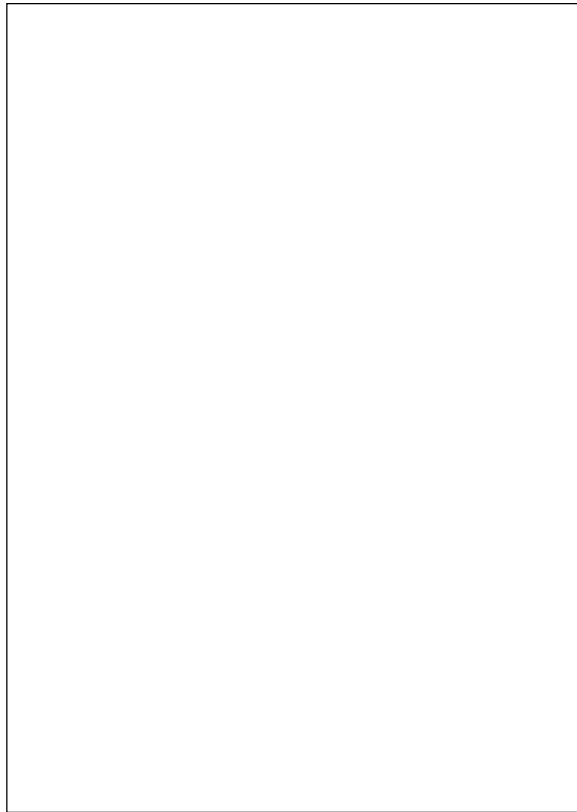
virtue of *hope*. This virtue opens us up to appreciate and understand the *signs of hope present at the end of this century*, both in *society in general* and in the *church*.<sup>3</sup> Becoming aware of the Spirit’s presence and activity invites us to focus “*particularly on the values of unity* within the church, to which the various gifts and charisms bestowed upon her by the Spirit are directed”<sup>4</sup> and to contemplate Mary and imitate her especially as the woman who, like Abraham, knew how to embrace God’s will, “hoping against hope.” (Rom 4:18)<sup>5</sup>

For its part, the postsynodal document *Vita Consecrata* speaks from beginning to end of the *Holy Spirit* and his activity at the origins, in the development and in the renewal of consecrated life. All throughout the document the Spirit is presented as giving the church the charism of consecrated life.<sup>6</sup> Consecrated men and women have the mission to highlight the *eschatological dimension of hope*,<sup>7</sup> and they are called by the Spirit, who is the primary agent of the *new evangelization*, to commit themselves to living, witnessing and announcing the Good News of salvation<sup>8</sup> and to work for *communion and unity*

in the church, which is a mystery of communion.<sup>9</sup> Consecrated life is invited to ponder *Mary* as “the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son and openness to the Spirit”<sup>10</sup> and, like her, to preserve a firm hope.<sup>11</sup>

The aim of this booklet is to encourage consecrated individuals to commit themselves to preparing for and celebrating the Jubilee of 2000 by following what Pope John Paul II has suggested in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* and in *Vita Consecrata*. In an earlier publication,<sup>12</sup> we examined the vocation and mission of consecrated persons from a *christological* point of view, and in this one we offer the challenge of deepening consecrated life’s *pneumatological* dimension.

We will look at (1) the dimensions and charisms of the Spirit, (2) how the Spirit challenges us to face the new evangelization, and (3) consecrated life as a witness of hope and a sign and instrument in the church of communion and unity amid diversity. We will conclude by looking at *Mary* as “the woman who was docile to the voice of the Spirit, a woman of silence and attentiveness, a woman of hope.”<sup>13</sup>



*Reconciliation, the theme of the CMSM Leadership Workshop in January, was expressed through ritual.*

# Chapter One

## Consecrated Life: Charism at the Service of the Dimensions of the Spirit

Already in its introduction, *Vita Consecrata* points out the action of the Holy Spirit as the source of the charism of consecrated life ...

*“In every age there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father’s call and to the prompting of the Spirit have chosen this special way of following Christ.”*<sup>14</sup>

It also mentions the Spirit’s work in the many different forms of consecrated life he has raised up throughout history and which constitute an extraordinary richness for the church: monastic life, the order of virgins, hermits and widows, institutes completely dedicated to contemplation, apostolic religious life, secular institutes, societies of apostolic life and new expressions of consecrated life.<sup>15</sup>

*Tertio Millennio Adveniente* called for a pneumatological focus to take place in 1998 for Christian reflection and experience. From this viewpoint we should consider our vocation and mission as a charism of the Spirit oriented, like every charism, to fostering the dimensions or fruits that the Spirit produces in the church, a mystery of communion for the salvation of the world. We do this by starting with biblical revelation.

Scripture emphasizes that the Spirit is always near, with, and in

the Christian community to guide it toward the fullness of truth (cf. Jn 14:16-17, 16:13), and that he is the one who moves the church in every age to give witness to Christ and to bring about God’s plan for humanity. (Acts 1:4-8) As in the early church, so in every age there are signs that allow Christ’s followers to discover the Spirit and to listen to his call from within the heart of life. The activity of the Holy Spirit *reaches even those who do not know Jesus Christ. For the Lord “wants all to be saved and to come to know the truth.”* (1 Tm 2:4)<sup>16</sup>

The experience of the Spirit is one which proceeds slowly and is conditioned by many factors. It comes in a wide range of different situations and is frequently expressed in a tentative way before taking shape with more precise features, which are always only approximate. In the Bible, the revelation of the Spirit occurs gradually and is conveyed through different traditions and approaches. The starting point for all of these is a life illumined by faith. The Old Testament reveals glimpses of the Spirit of Yahweh at work. In the New Testament,

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however, Jesus reveals his face. But here, too, we run across different emphases and nuances in each of the books. The synoptic, Pauline, and Johannine communities transmit their experience of the Spirit with the stamp of their own particular circumstances. They thus clothe the experience in their own characteristic style.

From the *Synoptic* viewpoint, it is the Spirit who guides and directs Christ and believers (Mt 4:1, Lk 2:26, 4:14) and comes to the aid of disciples at times of persecution. (Mt 10:20) In the book of *Acts*, the Spirit is continually guiding the church. By his action he creates the community (Acts 2:42-47) and propels it to evangelize with boldness. (Acts 2:29, 4:13, 29, 31) At the same time the Spirit defends the Christian's freedom by helping to resist attachment to any kind of legalism that threatens or oppresses. (Acts 15:1-5, 28) For *Paul*, the Spirit is the New Law (cf. Rom 8:1-17) and the Spirit of communion in the midst of a diversity of charisms which he communicates. (1 Cor 12:1-13) He dwells in us (1 Cor 3:16), transforms us into children of God (Rom 8:14-15), and brings forth fruit. (Gal 5:22) In the Gospel of *John*, the emphasis above all is on the nearness of the Spirit in the Christian community (Jn 14:16-17), as the Teacher who helps us to know and grasp Jesus' teachings, and as the Advocate who defends Christ and convicts the world – in regard to sin, for not having believed in Jesus; in regard to righteousness, because he proves that Jesus has triumphed; and in regard to condemnation, because evil has been conquered by Christ. (Jn 16:5-10)

Having made these prelimi-

nary observations, we can now focus on the topic which is the title of this chapter: *Consecrated life as charism of the Spirit and at the service of his dimensions*. The title itself points clearly to the difference and to the complementarity between the one and the other. The *dimensions represent the common setting* in which charisms find their place. They are ways toward communion in the rich variety of each one's particular gifts. (1 Cor 12:7-11)

First we will speak about the *dimensions of the Spirit*. Next we will spend some time explaining *the meaning and function of charisms*. We will then conclude with some considerations of *charism and the institution* in the church at the service of the dimensions of the Spirit.

#### **A. The Dimensions of the Spirit**

Dimensions of the Spirit are the *directions* toward which the Spirit guides his action. Biblical history comes across as constantly animated by the Spirit's power. He guides the great figures of salvation history, raising up prophets, guiding the "wise" in their reflections, helping them to know his will and to put it into practice in the various situations of life.

The author of *Acts* is aware that the Christian movement unfolds within the context of a great expectation of some special liberating intervention of God. That explains why Christian history starts with the Pentecost event when the Holy Spirit comes down on the new community in a striking, perceptible way. At that moment the new covenant with the new People of God begins. In comparison with the Old Testament, the newness here is that the pouring out of the Spirit takes

place in all the members of the community. This is a sign of the new age inaugurated with Christ's resurrection.

Just as the Holy Spirit's action enabled Jesus to begin his historical mission (Lk 4:18, Acts 10:38), so believers in him share in the fullness of the Spirit, the gift promised for the end times. The Pentecost event, which stands at the beginning of the life of the Christian community, appears again at critical moments of its journey: when the Samaritans are converted (Acts 8:4-17), when Cornelius and his household accept the faith (Acts 10:34-38), and when John's followers are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 19:1-7)

Whereas in the first part of *Acts* the Spirit sustains and informs the Apostles' activities and undertakings, in the second part he appears as the one taking the initiative. (Acts 13:1-2, 16:6-7) The Spirit leads the Church permanently and continuously. His presence and activity signal God's gratuity. The Spirit is called a *gift* (Acts 2:38, 8:20, 10:45, 11:17) and a *promise*. (Acts 1:4, 2:33, 38) The Spirit is portrayed as the divine force that propels the protagonists of salvation history. At the same time, however, we see in *Acts* the process of personalizing the Holy Spirit.

The author of *Acts*, while employing effectively the symbolism of a storm, a fire and an earthquake to describe the Spirit's activity, does not limit himself to pointing out the power of the Spirit's intervention. He goes beyond that to emphasize some of the effects of that activity. It is these that we are calling the *dimensions* of the Spirit.

### 1. The dimension of communion

The first dimension brought about by the Spirit is the *koinonía* of believers (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35) who become a community of brothers and sisters gathered together in the Lord's name. The Spirit, who is personal love in God, unites disciples to the Father and to one another. It is the Spirit who pours into us the love of God (Rom 5:5), and he enables us to love and unites us in the diversity of gifts and ministries.

This dimension of communion makes the Spirit's presence known and becomes concrete in four moments intimately linked to each other: the teaching of the Apostles, *koinonía*, the breaking of the bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

Above all, the community perseveres in the Word, that is, in deepening the message of salvation so as to endure in the faith, given that each one will have to undergo many trials to enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22) Faithful to the Word, the community perseveres in brotherly/sisterly communion starting with faith in Christ Jesus. This leads, among other things, to sharing one's possessions. (Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-35) Connected to the Word, to the teaching of the Apostles and to this communion is the breaking of the bread, the Eucharist, that unites the faithful in Christ and commits them to live the demands of charity in the concrete existence of each day, expressed in proclaiming the Gospel and celebrated communally. Finally, the Spirit at work within us (Rom 8:26-27) inspires the community to persevere in prayer as the privileged moment when God's presence and action are revealed and

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made known in order to accomplish salvation in history. The basic characteristic of the Jerusalem community's prayer is harmony and unity. And with that goes the search to do God's will. Persevering in prayer enables one to stand before God in faith and freedom, welcoming the power of the Spirit who prophetically accompanies the decisions of those he has brought together in union and communion.

The dimension of communion is lived out in the midst of *conflicts* because the Gospel reveals and proclaims God's will, and this results in rejecting and condemning any human decisions or opinions that run contrary to that will. (Acts 5:28-30) Conflict is a reality, too, because within the community itself there are always weaknesses and inconsistencies.

This first dimension of the Spirit remains the central one. It refers to the Spirit's opening the triune God to the world of human beings and unifying in Christ what was divided. He makes the past present by reminding us of all that Jesus told us (Jn 14:26), and he joins the present to the future by guiding everything toward that perfect and full communion of which he is the down payment and first fruits. As the most profound principle of the Church's unity, the Spirit unites believers. If the church allows herself to be guided by the Spirit, she will always be a *church of communion*, organized into communities. There remains, for now, an imperfect communion lived out amid tensions, but these tensions can be brought together in harmony which keeps opening up more and more to the unforeseeable paths of the Spirit.

## **2. The dimension of freedom-love**

The second dimension of the Spirit, experienced from the very beginning of Christianity, is that of *freedom*. The community must remain firm in the freedom for which Christ has set us free. (Gal 5:1) It is to be a community of free people.

This freedom is *intimately linked to love*, the first fruit of the Spirit. For this reason Paul alerts us to be careful not to make freedom the pretext for indulging selfishness but rather to use it as the opportunity for serving one another in love. (Cf. Gal 5:13-14)

By means of love the Spirit creates a context, or setting, for freedom within which Christian life unfolds free from slavery: slavery to sin, slavery to death, and slavery to the law. Regarding this last item, the Spirit helps to overcome the narrowness of Jewish legalism: "It is the decision of the holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities." (Acts 15:28)

Liberation constitutes the ideal toward which the community of believers should tend. Believers have been radically emancipated from the slavery separating them from others and have become capable of a new kind of interpersonal relationship, in which there is no place for discrimination and oppression stemming from power, knowledge or possessions, from race or gender. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:38) At the heart of the Christian community, if it is faithful to this

freedom dimension, there can be no room for preferences based on injustice or on privileges of status. In fact, anything social, historical or natural from the past which is based on a power that dominates must disappear.

The Christian love that liberates must be like Christ's love: universal, generous, gratuitous and effective, enriched by and demonstrated in works. "Let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth." (1 Jn 3:18) The presence of Jesus in our sisters and brothers leads us to live in love, in the way that Christ loved us and handed himself over for us. (Eph 5:2)

Freedom leads to the building up of communion and sharing which takes shape in definitive terms *on three inseparable planes: our relationship to the world as its master, to other persons as brothers or sisters, and to God as God's children ...Through freedom projected on the material world of nature and technology...always in and through a community of joint efforts, this initial realization entails subduing the world through labor and wisdom, and then humanizing it, in accordance with the Creator's plan.*<sup>17</sup>

Freedom-love has an historical dimension which needs to be made concrete in action as required by changing circumstances. What was directed in earlier times toward helping and promoting individuals must today be expressed in new approaches from a social standpoint.

The Spirit prompts the creation of reference points which can make visible and understandable the freedom-love that he communicates as a means to and as an expression of the presence of the Kingdom. In this dimension, besides love, other virtues emerge



as fruits of the Spirit, as enumerated in the letter to the Galatians: joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal 5:22)

### 3. The prophetic dimension

Although Paul includes prophecy among the charisms, understood as the gift of building up, encouragement and solace (1 Cor 14:3), we can speak of a prophetic dimension which the Spirit communicates to the community of believers and within which the other charisms are exercised.<sup>18</sup>

One sign of the sending of the Spirit to the apostolic church is his coming to all believers (Acts 2:1-4) and even to pagans. (Acts 10:45) Peter addresses the surprised crowd on the day of Pentecost quoting the prophet Joel, who had spoken of this universal pouring out of the Spirit. (Acts 2:17-21)

There exists a prophetic vocation common to Christians. Christ continues his prophetic mission

*not only by the hierarchy who teach in his name and by his power, but also by the laity. He accordingly both establishes them as witnesses and provides them with the appreciation of the faith [sensus fidei] and the grace of the word (cf. Acts 2:17-*

*Bruce Schultz, OP; Alex Steinmiller, CP; and Paul Montero, SC.*

*18, Rev 19:10) so that the power of the Gospel may shine out in daily family and social life.*<sup>19</sup>

The prophetic dimension leads believers to witness to the power of the Gospel, proclaiming what the plan of God requires and denouncing anything opposed to it that would either hinder sharing in building up the world or that would jeopardize equality, justice and freedom in human relationships.

To exercise the prophetic dimension that the Spirit is prompting calls for *parrhesía*, that is, confidence, freedom and courage to proclaim the Word: "...enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness [*parrhesía*]." (Acts 4:29) This is needed because the prophetic function has to face risks, dangers, even persecution. With *parrhesía* Peter acted in the name of the apostles and denounced the Sanhedrin's abuse of power when it tried to curtail the Christian proclamation. (Acts 5:29-32) Stephen, in turn, was full of grace and power (Acts 6:8) when he confronted the Jews and sealed his prophetic mission

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Promis, CSSp.*

with martyrdom. (Acts 7:55-60)

*Parrhesia* confers boldness on the Christian to open oneself to the unforeseeable ways of the Spirit, as happened in the early church when it made the decision to leave the confines of Palestine and move out toward other peoples. As it opens up to anything new that God proposes, the community matures and discovers the presence of the Spirit in historical circumstances, read now in the light of faith. (Cf. Acts 13:1-3, 16:6-7) The Spirit continues to be present in the church in all ages and prompts her to read the signs of the times and discover God's plan in humanity's deepest desires and dilemmas.

#### ***4. Communion, freedom-love and parrhesia in consecrated life***

These three dimensions of the Holy Spirit in Christian life take on certain special features in consecrated life as a result of the vows and community life.

The communion dimension is expressed above all in sisterly/brotherly life, which is "an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion. It is practiced with special care in religious institutes and in societies of apostolic life, where community living acquires special signifi-

cance."<sup>20</sup> *Vita Consecrata* exhorts communities of consecrated religious to try to live this fraternal life in the image of the apostolic community because this communion plays a fundamental role both for their constant renewal and the full accomplishment of their mission in the world.<sup>21</sup>

Besides community life the vows, too, with the implications they have for the life of brotherhood/sisterhood, can serve as an evangelizing prophetic witness for consecrated life.

*Consecrated chastity* at the service of the Kingdom enables the creation of community as a family gathered together in the Lord's name. This gathering manifests his presence. By a communal living together of chastity, individual religious make the vow's social and affective dimension universal. While consecrated chastity expresses communion with God, it cannot be separated from sisterly/brotherly union in community. Then community, for its part, opens up to wider relationships which allow it to keep extending brotherhood/sisterhood built on generous love, as it denounces that selfish love that seeks only pleasure and to use others. Religious community, because of consecrated chastity

which brings it into existence, is called to be a witness to God's covenant with his people, a covenant that frees one for service and for fraternity and that makes the love of neighbor universal. This is love that goes beyond the bonds of flesh and blood and which is transformed into "a reflection of the *infinite love* which links the three divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity."<sup>22</sup>

The vow of *poverty*, among other things, leads to a sharing of goods in common, showing that a person's worth does not come from what one has but from what one is. In this, the vow likewise makes it clear that the purpose of material things is to provide a meeting place with God and with the sisters and brothers. By means of this type of religious poverty one learns openness to God and to others. With poverty, the social value of material goods is expressed, and the necessity of work for shaping a just and human society for everyone is understood. At the same time, the religious community that puts what it is and what it has at the service of the poorest and neediest of people in order to work for their betterment denounces in a truly Gospel way the use of material goods in society for the sake of prestige and power. Such a use of the world's goods for prestige and power goes against God's plan, which is to bestow them on the world for everyone's use in sisterly/brotherly sharing. *Vita Consecrata* highlights this communitarian aspect of practicing the vow of poverty when it presents poverty as "an expression of that *total gift of self* which the three divine Persons make to one another."<sup>23</sup>

*Religious obedience*, lived in

its dimension of a communal search to do God's will together with those who exercise the ministry of authority, can and should stand out as the way to resolving in a Gospel manner the problems that arise from both individualistic freedom (not taking brothers and sisters into account) and totalitarian authority (oppressing human relationships). As it seeks the Father's ways through prayer and dialogue, the community denounces that kind of freedom and that kind of authority. It proclaims that authentic freedom takes into account the good of others and that the meaning of authority is for sisterly/brotherly service. In this way obedience becomes "a reflection in history of *the loving harmony* between the three divine Persons."<sup>24</sup>

### **B. The Charisms of the Spirit**

In the experience and reflection of the early church, along with the dimensions of the Spirit which are communicated to the entire church, there appear various *particular gifts* which the Spirit bestows on individuals for the common benefit. (1 Cor 12:7) The name *charism* has been given to these gifts.

The Second Vatican Council reflected on these gifts together with the ones that the Spirit imparts to the church as a whole. It did this in light of New Testament experience and witness.<sup>25</sup>

The word *charism* (in Greek: *charisma*) is originally a religious and Christian term, but in our times it has entered the general vocabulary to indicate a certain magnetism or brilliance some people enjoy. We use it in a faith context either to designate the interior impulse of the Spirit (as opposed to purely human forces) or to indicate

a particular personal experience of God. In a theological context, however, the word is reserved for the special graces, whether ordinary or extraordinary, that the Holy Spirit distributes to the faithful "to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church."<sup>26</sup>

In the theology of St. Paul we find helpful approaches for reaching an understanding of charism. Like other biblical authors, Paul does not present abstract theories but always starts with lived experiences in the Christian community. He describes them without claiming to define them. He presents this description beginning with the observation that all the phenomena that occur in the life of the community and the experiences of its members have common elements even within their diversity.

#### **1. Pauline description of the charisms**

Among the many texts where Paul mentions charisms, chapter 12 of the first letter to the Corinthians stands out. Using four special terms, he describes there the gifts that the Spirit bestows on members of the church for the good of the community, that is, at the service of the dimensions which arise from the Spirit's activity.

We get this description by analyzing the words Paul uses for the charisms. The first term is *pneumatika*, which points to the origin of the charisms. We are dealing with gifts *that the Spirit gives*, manifestations of his presence and activity. (Cf. 1 Cor 12:1, 7) Another word used in Paul's letters is *charismata*. (1 Cor 12:4) This emphasizes the gratuitous nature of the gift. We

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*We are dealing with gifts that the Spirit gives, manifestations of his presence and activity.*

are talking about *gifts of grace*, gratuitous gifts. When Paul calls the charisms *diakoniai* (1 Cor 12:5), that is *ministries*, he helps us to understand the purpose of these gifts. They are intended for the service of the community. The gifts, finally, are described as *energemata*, which means *activities* (1 Cor 12:6), highlighting the fact that God acts with power in the charisms, given that “God is the one who...works in you both to desire and to work.” (Phil 2:13)

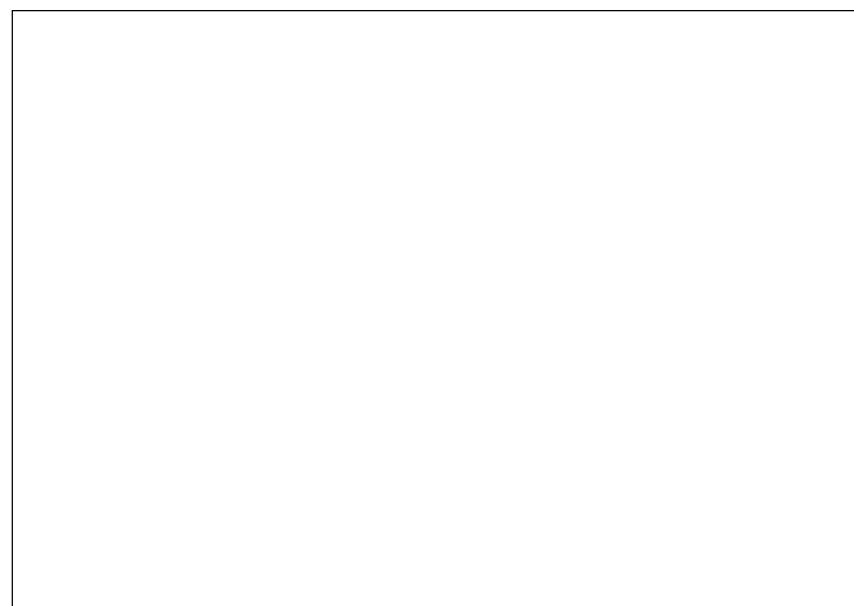
Keeping in mind Paul’s terminology, we could describe charisms as *gifts which the Spirit bestows gratuitously and powerfully to serve for the good of the community*.

According to the text quoted above, charisms find their source in the Trinity. They are gifts of the Holy Spirit which the Spirit distributes (1 Cor 12:11); they are ministries which Jesus Christ confers (1 Cor 12:5); and it is God (the Father) who “produces all of them in everyone.” (1 Cor 12:6)

## **2. Ministerial and charismatic gifts**

In Pauline theology, we find the affirmation that the charisms are not the only extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit. (1 Cor 12:8-10) Permanent ministries are also. (Cf. 1 Cor 12:28-29, Rom 12:7-8, Eph 4:11) From Paul’s point of view institutional ministries are charisms just as much as non-institutional ones are. He includes both without distinction when he lists the gifts of the Spirit: apostles, prophets, teachers, mighty deeds, healing assistance, administration and varieties of tongues. (Cf. 1 Cor 12:28-29)

These two types of charism are related to each other. Paul, in fact, experienced this in his own



*Patrick McNamara, FMS; Steven Henrich, OSC; and Leo Shea, FMS.*

apostolic ministry and in this way discovered the common source they have: the Holy Spirit. From the Spirit comes the connection that links them all, given for “some benefit.” (1 Cor 12:7) The Spirit is the unifying principle of the charisms. “As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” (1 Cor 12:12-13) The Spirit has poured out the love of God into the hearts of the faithful (Rom 5:5), and love is the charism of the charisms. (1 Cor 12:31) Love is what unites them and gives value to even the smallest. (1 Cor 12:21-26)

Paul mentions both the charisms given for the exercise of some permanent office or ministry as well as those that appear sporadically. What matters for Paul is not that an office or a free gift is being conferred but that the Holy Spirit is the source of these charisms and that all of them are given for the building up of the Body of Christ. This tells us how

important the two types of gifts are for the life of the church, and it also makes us realize that one has no right to attack the institution in the name of some false spiritualism, just as one cannot put down non-institutional charisms in the name of some sense of juridical order or organization.

## **3. The coordination of charisms**

When Paul presents practical rules for charismatic ministries in Christian assemblies he affirms that God, who communicates the charisms, “is not the God of disorder but of peace.” Consequently, everything must be done “properly and in order” (1 Cor 14:33, 40) so as “to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.” (Eph 4:3)

Christian love, which is the greatest of the charisms (1 Cor 12:31), becomes the great coordinating principle of all the gifts which the Spirit imparts. This love leads us to recognize in other people’s charisms the true contours of our own and helps us to consider ourselves no more or

better than we are, “but to think soberly, each according to the measure of faith that God has apportioned.” (Rom 12:3) What follows from this is to live in Christ through “solace in love, . . . participation in the Spirit” as well as humbly regarding others as more important than ourselves. (Phil 2:1-3) Each gift recognizes the other gifts because every one of them has been communicated in love and because all of them lend each other mutual assistance. By means of the charism of love, the Spirit arranges and orders all the various charisms he bestows upon the church.

Coordinating the charisms also requires apostolic leadership. To authority in the church belongs the responsibility of judging the authenticity and exercise of the charisms.

*He gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God....* (Eph 4:11-13)

In the process of discerning as well as organizing the charisms, one must not quench the Spirit but test everything, retaining what is good. (Cf. 1 Thes 5:19, 21) Within the People of God all members are servants of the Gospel, each one according to his or her own ministry and charism.

The communion that unites all the baptized does not prevent but, rather, requires that there be a multiplicity of specific ministries within the church community. God himself raises up in the community the different charisms so that the church can be built up and accomplish its mission. The charisms

indicate to each person her or his particular role in the life and activity of the People of God.

This coordination and union among the charisms does not exclude contrasts or tensions. Each gift is different. What one person possesses, another does not. What results from this is that exercising a charism can bring with it the cross and suffering. One gift is limited by other gifts. The same Spirit who imparts the various charisms allows opposition among them to purify those who have received them and so that they might acquire a paschal dimension, which is a sign of Gospel authenticity. From this emerges the need not to overdramatize conflicts but to take them in stride, without bitterness but with an active hope.

*Vita Consecrata*, in Chapter 2, insists on the importance of this witness of unity of charisms in the midst of their diversity, within a fruitful and well ordered church communion, through a continual dialogue animated by charity so as to give witness to charity in a divided and unjust world.<sup>27</sup>

### **C. Charisms and Institutions in the Church at the Service of the Dimensions of the Spirit**

The presence and activity of Christians living out community relationships in history cannot be separated from at least a minimum of organizational structure in which different roles and responsibilities are acknowledged in some orderly articulation and integration.

On the other hand, it cannot be forgotten that in the church charism and institution both spring from the same source, the one Spirit. Admittedly, most present-day church institutions do not go back to Jesus but are the result of

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... the Holy Spirit communicates a vital energy to the church enabling it to adapt existing institutions to new circumstances and to establish new ones required by the new needs

...

historical development which shaped them according to new situations or built-in challenges. The church, which came to birth historically in many areas in accord with the tenor of the times, is subject like any human institution to atrophy, inertia, sclerosis, and hypertrophy. For this reason the church must be open to change and evolution in the same way that it was in the past whenever it had to come up with needed new structures. For this task the Holy Spirit communicates a vital energy to the church enabling it to adapt existing institutions to new circumstances and to establish new ones as required by the new needs that keep cropping up throughout history.

### **1. Complementarity between charism and institution**

There lies within the inner nature of the church as a community the basis for complementarity between charism and institution. Every human community needs the charismatic as well as the institutional. The church is clearly a community and, therefore, needs structures, laws and rites. Otherwise it would not be a people whose members acknowledge and accept each other, or who live their communion in celebrations, or who work together for evangelization and service. Institutions by themselves, however, do not create a people. They are merely the setting within which life unfolds. And here we mean the life that comes from the vital energy of the living members who make up the community and animate it with their gifts and deeds.

The same thing happens in the church. It needs charisms which build it up and renew it.

*It is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the Church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the People, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts according as he wills (cf. 1 Cor 12:11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church.*<sup>28</sup>

### **2. Church institutions as channels for the charisms that renew the life of the Church**

Jesus Christ gives unity to all the charisms. The community of Christ is founded on the one Spirit, on its one call, and in one baptism. Its measure is communion in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has imparted gifts to all members, gifts which are intended for service. There is no difference between when the Spirit prompts one toward an established ministry and prompts another toward an unstructured ministry. Diversity exists in view of the ministries, since equality does not mean uniformity.

On the other hand, Jesus, the Universal Shepherd, guides the community of believers through those who have been ordained so as to continue the ministry of leadership of the People of God. The church is a structured society in which the authority to teach and guide the faithful pastorally is linked to an established office, which cannot be reduced to the kind of leadership that comes out of the community in a purely charismatic fashion and is subject to the group's authority. On the

contrary, judging the genuineness and proper use of the gifts belongs to those who have the charism of leadership in the church.<sup>29</sup>

It cannot be denied that, on occasion, institutional ministries have held back the renewal and dynamism that charisms foster. An authentic reform, however, cannot take place except through those means intended by the Lord in a church which is truly incarnated in human reality. Institutions are the channels through which there is supposed to flow the life-giving energy of other charisms which the one Holy Spirit brings forth.

Pastoral ministry is not solely the result of a juridical structure. It forms an integral part of the mystery of salvation. It is an instrument which the Lord uses to build his church. By means of pastoral ministry he remains present to lead his people. In this sense, we are dealing here with a charismatic reality, given that charism is not opposed to ministry but rather includes the gift of ministry as it also does non-hierarchical ministries.

For their part, non-institutional charisms are intended to foster the life of the Church. Thanks to them, the community of believers avoids turning in on itself so that it can, instead, be open to the needs of the world, taking on tasks and missions even on far frontiers, to en flesh the Gospel in all cultures and to be open to present-day challenges and the signs of the times.

Charisms and institutions need one another since they are rooted in the Incarnation of the Word and the sending of the Spirit. From the Incarnation flows the church's visible and institutional character. The invisible presence and action of the Spirit give it its charismatic

and mystical aspect, and they animate and renew the church.



*CMSM executive director Ted Keating, SM (right) with Archbishop Montalvo, Apostolic Nuncio, during a visit to the CMSM offices.*

### **3. Institution and charisms at the service of the dimensions of the Spirit**

The ecclesial community is called to bring into accord the needs of the present order with those of a new order, to reconcile institutional forms with the renewal required by the Spirit who fosters communion, defends freedom and confers the *parrhesía* needed for prophecy.

The church is called to give witness, within the very heart of its institutional structure, to the charism of the Spirit. To do this it needs to integrate the inevitable and necessary tensions between charism and institution, placing these complementary realities at the service of *the dimensions of the Spirit*. In this way the charism-versus-institution antipathy can be overcome, because both of them come to be taken

over by Kingdom of the Spirit of Christ.

The love of God “poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5) of necessity becomes a communion of love with others and brotherly/sisterly sharing. Institution and charism are meant to be at the service of this *communion*, creating and fostering living and dynamic communities that turn the church into a sign of the unity of all human beings with each other and of the unity of the human race with God.<sup>30</sup> In this way, through the variety of charisms seen as the expression of sisterhood/brotherhood that makes possible and strengthens sincere dialogue between “all who constitute the one people of God... whether they are pastors or other members of the faithful,”<sup>31</sup> *koinonía* will emerge. This requires that there

be respect for unity in what is essential, freedom in what is secondary, and charity in everything.<sup>32</sup>

The second dimension of the Spirit, whom the institution and the gifts are meant to serve, is that of *freedom*. This, as we have seen, is intimately linked to Christian love which implies brotherhood/sisterhood. The institutional and the charismatic are to foster fraternity. Structural ministries need to surmount the temptation to legalism, which oppresses, and to power, which crushes and manipulates. Charismatic ministries, on the other hand, must not let themselves be seduced by a so-called freedom that, in fact, causes divisions or turns into licentiousness which closes in on itself, pure selfishness. (Gal 5:13-14)

Lastly, institution and charism are called to empower the *pro-*

*phetic dimension* of the entire People of God. Both of them should question any situation that does not correspond to God’s plan and denounce social sin that influences the structures of an unjust world. An effective and courageous Gospel commitment to human rights, in word and in deed, is another way toward integrating these two aspects of the church’s life in the exercise of prophetic ministry.

The Holy Spirit unites the different gifts in the union of the one commitment to live, defend and promote within the church and the world the dimensions of communion, freedom and prophecy, which the Spirit creates as a sign of his presence in history. His activity reaches even those who do not know Jesus Christ and thus becomes a unifying principle for the richness of the various gifts.

The dimensions belong to everyone, and this underscores universality. At the same time, no one possesses every charism, and this highlights the special quality of each gift. This specialness, however, must not become the basis for rivalry or disruption among the gifts, but should lead toward “the still more excellent way” of love. (1 Cor 12:31) To this end, the words of the first letter of Peter are always timely:

*Above all, let your love for one another be intense.... As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. (1 Pt 4:8-11)*

### *Questions for personal and community reflection*

- 1. What does this view of consecrated life as a charism of the Holy Spirit at the service of the dimensions of the Spirit commit us to?**
- 2. How can we overcome the practical tensions between our charism (consecrated life) and the institutional channels of the Church?**
- 3. How can we experience the normal tensions between charism and institution from a faith perspective and in a healthy way so as to let ourselves be open to the activity of the Spirit?**

# Chapter Two

## Challenges of the Holy Spirit and the New Evangelization

When the postsynodal document *Vita Consecrata* speaks of the new evangelization, it is charting a course that consecrated life can take to respond to the challenges that the Spirit furnishes today.

**This evangelization does not seek as its goal “the salvation of souls” but rather the salvation of persons.**

*If the great challenges which modern history poses to the new evangelization are to be faced successfully, what is needed above all is a consecrated life which is continually open to challenge by the revealed word and the signs of the times. ... The new evangelization demands that consecrated persons have a thorough awareness of the theological significance of the challenges of our time. These challenges must be weighed with careful joint discernment, with a view to renewing the mission. ... All this requires a careful discernment of the calls which the Holy Spirit makes to each institute.*<sup>33</sup>

### **A. Multiplicity of Situations for the New Evangelization**

The church has as her essential mission to evangelize every human being. This constitutes her most profound identity; she exists for this.<sup>34</sup> To accomplish this evangelizing task the community of believers has continually grown in its understanding, always with greater and greater clarity, of the various facets of evangelization. It has recognized that anthropologi-

cal, theological and Gospel links exist between evangelization and human advancement, that is development and liberation.<sup>35</sup> The community also acknowledges that we have to consider deliverance from sin (the personal dimension) to be connected with liberation from the institutional evils of social sin (the social and historical dimension), without forgetting the eschatological projection toward deliverance from death and experiencing the fullness of life.

This new concept of evangelization begins, there is no doubt, with an approach from the viewpoint of faith. This evangelization does not seek as its goal “the salvation of souls” but rather the salvation of *persons*. They live in a world of pluralism and multiplicity, in touch with the particular problems of every social context. Hence they are responding to the challenges that a constantly changing world offers at any given moment.

The world we live in is marked by a great economic divide (North—South) and by the remnants of a great ideological divide (East—West). Ours is also a world of multiple cultures. From

one end to the other and within nations, we find different ways to use and even transform nature; different ways to relate with others in family, education, work, and the economy; and different ways to interpret reality.

These are not neutral or insignificant facts as far as the mission of evangelization is concerned. On the contrary, they present special needs in each particular socio-political context, and no matter what the specific problem may be, the priority remains to proclaim the Good News. The Synod on Consecrated Life, when speaking of mission, took note of this phenomenon of multiplicity:

*A pedagogy of “the signs of the times” is needed...or the art of teaching how to read history from that viewpoint, or as “the voice of God calling the Church here and now” to renew her mission on the new Areopagus of our times.<sup>36</sup> ... We must face the challenges of new Areopagi in a satisfactory manner, that is, with a clear understanding of the challenges themselves and, above all, of what they mean for the Church’s mission at this time, appropriately establishing what the “priorities” are among the many and various challenges.<sup>37</sup>*

In *First World* countries and societies, the focus is on the relationship between *faith* and *science*. The person who is to be evangelized is one surrounded by materialism and who values science and technology. What is needed, then, in this context is to emphasize transcendental Gospel values: how faith and science are compatible, what Christian hope means (it transforms history), and

being aware of social injustices at national and international levels so as to recognize where they come from and how they are perpetuated.

In the *former Socialist World*, which is convulsed at present and susceptible to enormous changes and revisions, the main problem is to demonstrate *the liberating dynamic of faith*, the human right to religious freedom, and the Gospel path to transforming society’s structures. The subjects of the Gospel proclamation here are persons formed in atheism and who consider religion the opiate of the masses.

In the *Third World* the priority falls on the relationship between *faith* and *justice*, which goes through specific shades of emphasis in Latin America, Asia and Africa. In *Latin America*, the subject of evangelization is mostly a believer who lives in conditions of inhuman poverty. It is there that stress needs to be placed on faith as the force for transformation and liberation from personal and social sin, “from everything that tears apart the human individual and society; all this finds its source to be in egotism, in the mystery of iniquity.”<sup>38</sup> In *Asia*, with the exception of the Philippines, the person who needs to be evangelized is usually someone who lives the faith of the great Eastern religions. Dialogue with these religions and with their ancestral cultures lies at the heart of any evangelizing effort. And finally, in *Africa*, up to recently a continent of colonization where the African people are now seeking to affirm their identity, inculturating the Gospel should lead to human development and liberation.

## **B. Consecrated Life in Latin America and its Commitment to Evangelization Responding to the Challenges of the Spirit**

Starting with the Latin American Bishops Conference meeting in Medellín (1968) and continuing through Puebla (1979) and Santo Domingo (1992) the Latin American church began to listen to the Spirit and discovered that “there are close links [of an anthropological, theological and evangelical order] between evangelization and human advancement, that is development and liberation.”<sup>39</sup>

The encyclical *Redemptoris missio*,<sup>40</sup> for its part, uses human advancement as one of the approaches toward mission, which ought to be directed toward proclaiming the Gospel while at the same time drawing from the Gospel and its proclamation its dynamism. It is worth noting that when explaining the meaning and extent of this topic, the encyclical uses two interesting paragraph headings: “*Promoting Development by Forming Consciences*” and “*Charity: Source and Criterion of Mission.*”

Just as noteworthy is the way the encyclical quotes a text from the *Puebla* document: “The best service we can offer to our brother is evangelization which helps him to live and act as a son of God, sets him free from injustices and assists his overall development.” (*Puebla* Document, 1145)<sup>41</sup> In the same vein, the pope quotes from a speech he gave to the people living in the *favela* [shantytown] of Vidigal in Rio de Janeiro on July 2, 1980: “The Church all over the world wishes to be the Church of the poor. She wishes to draw out all

the truth contained in the Beatitudes of Christ, and especially in the first one: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' ... She wishes to teach this truth and she wishes to put it into practice, just as Jesus came to do and to preach."<sup>42</sup>

Number 58 of the encyclical begins by highlighting the fact that the mission *ad gentes* has been accomplished throughout history especially in places where action in favor of total development and liberation from every oppression was most urgent.

*The Church has always been able to generate among the peoples she evangelizes a drive toward progress. Today, more than in the past, missionaries are being recognized as **promoters of development** by governments and international experts.*<sup>43</sup>

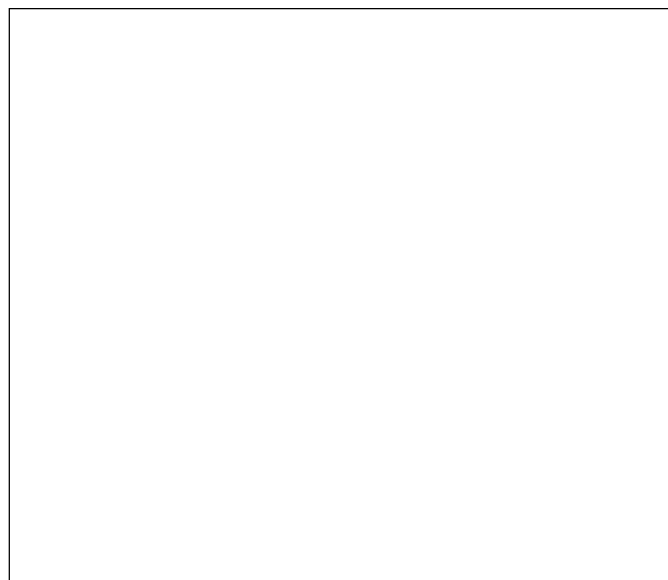
### **1. The challenge of the longings for a salvation that liberates**

The Second Vatican Council spoke of humanity's most universal aspirations, pointing out especially the yearning for justice, freedom and liberation as one of the most characteristic of our time.<sup>44</sup>

- *Becoming aware of the reality of injustice*

One of the signs of the times in today's world is undoubtedly the awareness of the reality of injustice in which we live. Poverty is a daily given for enormous masses of human beings all over the world. Millions of people lack the opportunity to work in productive employment or receive a just wage. Flagrant injustices are to be found everywhere. Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* clearly faces

*... the persistence and often the widening of the gap between*



*the areas of the so-called developed North and the developing South.... The abundance of goods and services available in some parts of the world, particularly in the developed North, is matched in the South by an unacceptable delay, and it is precisely in the geopolitical area that the major part of the human race lives.*<sup>45</sup>

The analysis of *social systems* has led to the discovery that unjust structures cause the spread of misery. This does not occur by chance but is the result of human malice: internal and external colonialism and neo-colonialism, imperialism, dependence, and economies based on war profits. At the same time the conviction is growing that there really does exist a unity of the human family and that peoples and nations are interdependent.

The sense of human solidarity has grown, and the great social, economic, racial and ideological divisions and injustices that characterize life on our planet have become more obvious. Hence the need for a transformation of the social, political and economic

*Above: Leaders at an InterAmerican Conference learn from one another about the "injustices of our time."*

**There is a movement in the world today that seeks a more just international world order, and it moves outward in concentric circles.**

systems within nations and in the international community. Connected to this is the concern for peace that “demands an ever greater degree of rigorous respect for justice and consequently a fair distribution of the results of true development.”<sup>46</sup>

- *Solidarity as a way to peace and development*

The interdependence of nations has led to the conviction, spreading ever more widely (especially in view of the problems of foreign debt), that peace and development can only be achieved through an active and effective solidarity.<sup>47</sup> There is a movement in the world today that seeks a more just international world order, and it moves outward in concentric circles. The circles start with the individual and move out toward international organizations, passing through community and national groups.<sup>48</sup> Foreign debt is the most serious economic problem facing the Third World, and only solidarity, which is today “the new name for peace,”<sup>49</sup> can work those changes that will permit development which can benefit the marginalized and oppressed majorities.

- *A first reaction from the perspective of faith*

Faith prompts us “to discern the summonses of God in the signs of the times; to bear witness to, announce, and promote the evangelical values of communion and participation; and to denounce everything in our society that runs counter to the filiation originating in God the Father and the brotherhood rooted in Jesus Christ.”<sup>50</sup>

The anthropological-historical approach of theology in the wake of Vatican II understands, better

than before, how God wants to save the human race which is living in this world, a human race suffering from misery, ignorance, oppression and death. To eliminate these evils *is part of the evangelizing effort of the Church*, which strives to promote the complete liberation of humanity. This does not mean just a temporal and intrahistorical liberation, although it does include that, but it aims at a complete liberation which also covers the social dimension of sin. In his encyclical on the social concern of the church, John Paul II speaks of the “structures of sin” which are “rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove.”<sup>51</sup> This social sin is the result of the accumulation and concentration of personal sins, and it contributes to the continued existence of oppression and injustice.<sup>52</sup>

Since Vatican II, the church has repeated in many ways that *the true nature of the evil which faces us with respect to the development of peoples...is a question of moral evil, the fruit of many sins which lead to the “structures of sin.”*<sup>53</sup>

This is opposed to the Creator’s plan for humanity, and human beings must overcome sin and the structures which make sin manifest as a first step toward authentic liberation.<sup>54</sup>

## **2. Liberation and human development in the Church’s mission and in the commitment to evangelize which consecrated men and women make**

When we examine the history of evangelization we notice a

constant concern in the church for liberation and human development. There is no organization or group that can come close to the church's historical record of numbers of concrete works of charity performed for the neediest of people. Thumbing through the pages of history we continually run across works aimed at advancing and developing people while, at the same time, evangelizing them. We find institutions established for education and health care, structures created for solidarity and development, commitments made in defense of the rights of the human person and work done for justice and for peace.

One only has to think of the first centuries of the church and all that popes, bishops, and so many Christians accomplished in the service of the poor.<sup>55</sup> Equally well known is the work done by Benedictines, Cluniac monks and Cistercians to transform the land, improve seeds and herds, and to do all these material works for the benefit of the poor and marginalized.<sup>56</sup>

Although it is true that at the very beginning there did not appear completely or clearly a deep connection between the Gospel proclamation and human liberation and development, nevertheless the church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has continually become more and more aware that the transcendental character of Christian salvation calls for a commitment to transform society.<sup>57</sup>

- *The preferential option for the poor: an expression of Christian love committed to human liberation and development*  
Already at its beginning,

Christianity expressed the Gospel proclamation and bore witness to it in solidarity with the poor:

There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need. (Acts 4:34-35)

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul mentions the task Peter and John entrusted to him for his preaching the Gospel to the gentiles: "only, we were to be mindful of the poor," and he adds, "which is the very thing I was eager to do." (Gal 2:10)

In every age the church has spared no effort to resolve the problems of the poor and has considered this part of her mission to witness to God's plan for the world. This plan would have us all live as responsible children of God, as brothers and sisters united in a new family, sharing justly the goods God has created for everyone. The church has done this throughout history according to the way society was seen at any given time. Within that optic, the structural roots of poverty and marginalization did not appear so clearly as they do today. In earlier times the church's greatest contribution was to raise human consciousness and educate it concerning the plight of the poor. The prophetic stance of the Fathers of the Church is well known as they emphasized that what the rich consider superfluous is precisely what the poor need, that we are only the stewards of the things we have, we do not own them, and that Christ is in the poor.

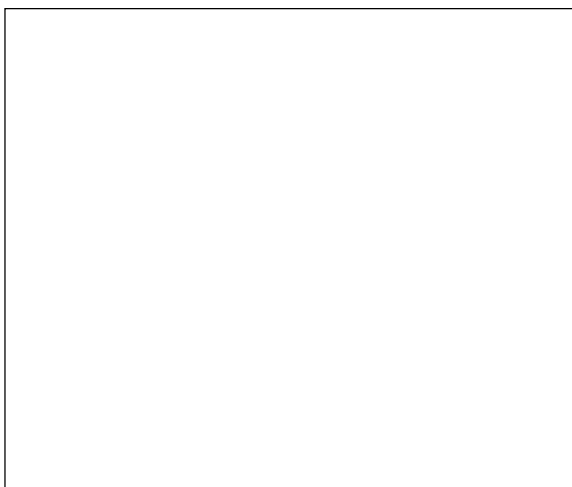
In today's new social and missionary conscience, the option for the poor has taken on stronger

accents of solidarity and prophetic condemnation. To opt preferentially for the poor means something more in today's mission than feeling mercifully benevolent toward the underprivileged. The issue today is also to apply a critical vision of society and to call into question the systems that generate injustice. The Second Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod (1985), observing the twentieth anniversary of the closing of Vatican II, asserted this when it said, "the Church became more aware of her mission in the service of the poor, the oppressed and the outcast."<sup>58</sup>

- *Experiencing God in the evangelizing mission of the Church within a world of injustice and oppression*

In accomplishing its mission to evangelize, the church has always been called to account through its experience of God in a world of injustice and oppression. This is the experience of a God who asks what has been done for the sake of life where there has been an environment of death. This is a God who sees the suffering of his people. (Ex 3:7-12) This God hears the cry of the poor and takes them out of slavery and leads them into a land of freedom. (Cf. Exodus) This God stands on the side of the oppressed in such a way that he will once again free them with a mighty exodus and bring them back from their exile in Babylon. (Cf. Is 40-55) This is a God who becomes poor for our sake, to make us rich by his poverty. (Cf. 2 Cor 8:9) Jesus Christ, who is close to and actually present in every human being, has desired to be in a special way in the sisters and brothers who live this poverty, to be in the poor and

*Together, CMSM members share their struggles with transforming social institutions.*



in the oppressed. “And with particular tenderness he chose to identify himself with those who are poorest and weakest.”<sup>59</sup> There is a privileged presence of the Lord in the poor, and it is Jesus who reveals himself to us in them. (Cf. Mt 25:42-43) He reveals himself in them as weak, needy, forsaken, persecuted. The passage from Matthew explains why works of service for others constitute “the criterion and gauge that Christ is going to use in passing judgment on human beings, even on those who had not known him.”<sup>60</sup>

The church’s evangelizing mission is directed toward everyone, because everyone stands in need of conversion. Hence the option for the poor is preferential, not exclusive. What that implies is a conversion to see reality from the standpoint of the poor and to seek, in solidarity with the poor, a complete and integral liberation. The reasons for making an option for the poor come from the Gospel, as the Third General Assembly of the Latin American Bishops Conference makes abundantly clear.<sup>61</sup> Christ preached the Gospel message according to this option. The poor

are the first ones to whom Jesus’ messianic mission is directed (Lk 4:18-21), and they are the first to hear his preaching. (Lk 6:20) This option, therefore, is a sign of Gospel authenticity, and it enables one to proclaim the Gospel to all people helping them to “incarnate in their lives the evangelical values of solidarity, service, simplicity, and openness to accepting the gift of God.”<sup>62</sup>

- *A challenge for consecrated life*

The postsynodal document *Vita Consecrata*, when it speaks of the commitment that consecrated men and women make with respect to the new evangelization, stresses the fact that they should especially embrace a predilection for the poor and further the cause of justice:

*Strengthened by this living witness and in ways consistent with their choice of life, and maintaining their independence vis-à-vis political ideologies, consecrated persons will be able to denounce the injustices committed against so many sons and daughters of God, and commit themselves to the promotion of justice in the society where they work.*<sup>63</sup>

### **C. The Social Dimension of the Evangelizing Mission**

One of the greatest challenges which the church needs to face in accomplishing her evangelizing mission is that of injustice which engenders inhuman poverty in the majority of human beings. Poverty is a global human situation. It means death, and the church has the task to proclaim life, the divine plan for life announced and begun by Jesus as the Reign of God. This implies a new type of relationship

among human beings, between human beings and God, and between human beings and things.

The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, in its pastoral guide (1989) for new mission churches, "*The Young Mission Churches*," affirms that *Human development is linked to evangelization. There is, in fact, only the one mission of the Church, which considers itself by the will of Christ (cf. Mt 25:41-45, Lk 16:19-31), involved in the integral development of man and woman, as individuals and in society, to the point of denouncing, when necessary, the evils and social injustices that oppress them.*<sup>64</sup>

### 1. The social dimension of Christian faith and hope

To apply the adjective "social" to these two basic virtues and attitudes of Christian life might seem strange because "social" is related to "political," and the idea of "political" has acquired negative connotations. We need to give it back its authentic meaning of society being organized to respect the fundamental values of the human person: freedom, dignity, basic rights, and in constructing a peace based on justice.

In the church's evangelizing mission, committed to liberation and human development, *the social dimension of faith* prompts her to analyze reality in the light of God's plan for humanity, to announce this divine project, and to denounce anything opposed to it. This faith leads to discern God's calls in the signs of the times and to discover social sin wherever it lurks. This faith likewise leads to a commitment to overcome anything that denies the status of God's

children or the brotherhood/sisterhood that Christ established among human beings. Any problems or conflicts that the church has to face in carrying out the Gospel proclamation from the standpoint of commitment to faith only serve to purify her and bring her to maturity.

*Hope also has a social dimension.* It seeks to anticipate the Reign of God by defending the dignity of human beings both in their freedom and in their work of creating sisterhood/brotherhood in the world. In its social dimension, hope stirs us to discover the seeds of life and of resurrection in everyday things, in interacting with others, in oneself. Moreover, the experience of poverty in the work of evangelizing and of the slow pace of things to change require an active hope that lives out the tension of a persevering patience. (Cf. Rom 5:3-5)

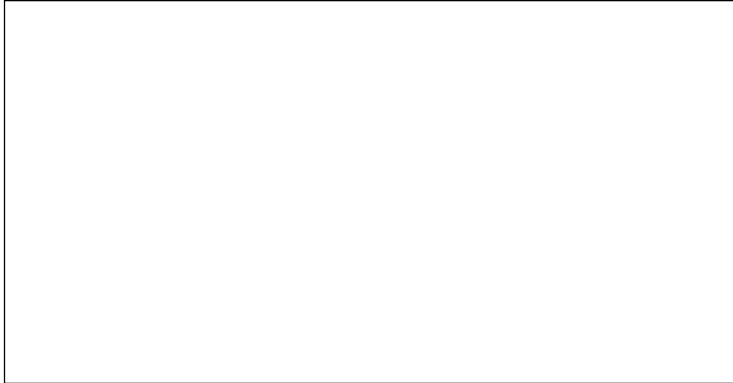
### 2. The social dimension of Christian love

The social and community aspect of Christian life requires especially today *love with a social dimension.* The fact of widespread injustice and oppression has made us understand how necessary it is to promote and develop people and to transform society in accord with the Reign of God. From this point of view, working on behalf of human rights is humanity's noblest cause and, by the same token, a Gospel demand. The church has to evangelize the whole of human existence, including its socio-political aspect, understood as a defense of human rights and of all that is true, honorable and just. (Cf. Phil 4:8) Working for justice and peace is an expression of living together in universal communion and sharing,

*Hope ... seeks to anticipate the Reign of God ... hope stirs us to discover the seeds of life and of resurrection in everyday things, in interacting with others, in oneself.*

in which all creation (cf. Rom 8:19-24) and all humanity (cf. Gen 1:27-31, Jn 1:2-3, Eph 1:3-14, Col 1:15-20) are involved.

It is true, as we said earlier, that, depending on circumstances,



*Janet Mock, CSJ, director of the Religious Formation Conference, with Gary Riebe-Estrella, SVD, of Catholic Theological Union.*

the Christian tradition has always sought to live a concrete and effective love within the mission of proclaiming the Gospel. All the same, it is particularly in today's world that we are more clearly aware of the fact that our neighbor living in need refers not to a few isolated individuals; they are great masses of people. Relying on loving individuals to help is a limited response and not enough, and it runs the risk of letting things stay as they are. It has become necessary in our day to work toward transforming oppressive systems as well as working within economic, political, national and international institutions. The social encyclicals of recent popes have guided and enlightened reflection on these new features of "fraternal love."<sup>65</sup> This has helped to counteract an exclusively personal and individualistic understanding of love of neighbor.

Love toward one's neighbor has an historical dimension which has to be made concrete in deeds demanded by new and always changing circumstances. In other times the church used all the

means at her disposal to accomplish her mission to spread the Gospel. This included being able to integrate the ideas of pagan philosophers like Plato and Aristotle in presenting the revealed message. New intermediaries are needed today who can provide for Christian love the effectiveness it sometimes lacks.

*Demands of Christian non-violence, environmental protection, responsible family planning, health care, political responsibility, and so forth, can be of at least as much moment as the particular injunctions of Christian love of neighbor that have been reflected upon and preached in the past as the content of the commandment to love one's neighbor.*<sup>66</sup>

The same works of mercy listed in Matthew's Gospel in the description of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) ought to be interpreted in the church's evangelizing mission from a social point of view. Giving food and drink to the needy means to collaborate so that there can be created sources of work and structures in society that will guarantee a just wage, thus allowing anyone to satisfy these basic needs of the human person. To visit the sick would imply seeing to it that no one lacks social security or medical insurance. To show concern for those in prison should lead to denouncing any violation of prisoners' human rights, or any torture inflicted on them, as well as arbitrary arrests.

In light of these requirements of Christian love today, the 1987 World Synod of Bishops "On the Laity," affirmed

*The Holy Spirit leads us to understand more clearly that holiness today cannot be attained without a commitment to*

*justice, without a human solidarity that includes the poor and the oppressed. The ideal holiness of the lay faithful must integrate the social dimension of transforming the world according to the plan of God.*<sup>67</sup>

This means that the church realizes that today, in the face of instances of structured oppression, she must respond with a love which critically analyzes the situation and which seeks to find organized global responses promoting the integral development of the whole human race.

*3. Consecrated Life's responses to the challenges of human liberation and promotion in the mission to evangelize*

The new horizons of evangelization and its connection to human promotion, development and liberation<sup>68</sup> have elicited new responses both at the level of Christian praxis and reflection (especially in the Third World) and at the level of the Magisterium. From the latter has come an illuminating clarity for understanding the needs of the church's, and particularly consecrated life's, mission to evangelize today.

Whenever the church has offered guidance to shed light on the believer's path in search of God in today's world, it has helped to clarify the meaning and scope of human liberation and progress as well as clarifying how they are connected to the Gospel.

The following notion is particularly noteworthy:

*Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic, or social order: the purpose he assigned to it was a religious one. But this religious mission can be the source of commitment, direction,*

*and vigor to establish and consolidate the community of men according to the law of God.*<sup>69</sup>

Proclaiming the truth about Christ, about herself, and about human beings, the church offers her first and most important contribution toward solving the urgent problem of development and liberation.<sup>70</sup>

Uncovering unjust social systems has stirred Christian sensitivity and has made us realize the urgency of practical commitments and decision making. Without proposing any technical solutions,<sup>71</sup> the church has not ceased to give guidance and offer courses of action, particularly in the universal and in the specialized documents that deal with a social message or evangelization in today's world.<sup>72</sup>

These *social teachings* of the church offer guidelines for the committed action of Christians and consecrated persons. Together with changing elements that correspond to the particular conditions of each country and each epoch,<sup>73</sup> these teachings contain permanently valid elements based on what is the essence of Christ's message and the perennial values of Christian ethics. The church's social doctrine always seeks respect and promotion of human dignity and the complete liberation of all human beings because the church maintains the conviction that a Christian's social conduct is an integral part of being a follower of Jesus.<sup>74</sup>

Observing these teachings of the Magisterium will avoid two obvious errors: reducing Christian salvation to a liberation merely from social, economic or political woes, and restricting salvation to just the realm of the spiritual.

**The church's social doctrine always seeks respect and promotion of human dignity and the complete liberation of all human beings because the church maintains the conviction that a Christian's social conduct is an integral part of being a follower of Jesus.**

A section of the encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* represents a marvelous summary of the important synthesis which has been achieved between evangelization, liberation and human promotion in the church's consciousness. This passage points out the fact that, although no temporal accomplishment can be identified with the Kingdom of God (which will reach its culmination only at the end of history), nevertheless that expectation

*can never be an excuse for lack of concern for people in their concrete personal situations and in their social, national and international life, since the former is conditioned by the latter, especially today.*

*However imperfect and temporary are all the things that can and ought to be done through the combined efforts of everyone and through divine grace at a given moment in history in order to make people's lives "more human," nothing will be lost or will have been in vain.<sup>75</sup>*

In the same line as these teachings, the postsynodal document *Vita Consecrata*, which speaks of the new evangelization, offers to consecrated women and men precise guidelines concerning preferential love for the poor and working for justice, concerning the prophetic dimension that this calls for, and concerning faithfulness even unto martyrdom.<sup>76</sup>

### *Questions for personal and community reflection*

- 1. What do you consider the most urgent needs at the present time for the new evangelization?**
- 2. How can we grow in our living the social dimension of faith, hope and love?**
- 3. How can we grow in awareness of the Spirit's presence and promptings in the challenges of the new evangelization?**

# Chapter Three

## Witnesses of Hope: Signs and Instruments of Communion and Unity in Diversity

Consecrated life possesses an eschatological dimension linked to Christian hope. *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* proposes the rediscovery of hope which ...

The history of the world is oriented toward the second coming ...

*on the one hand, encourages the Christian not to lose sight of the final goal which gives meaning and value to life, and on the other offers solid and profound reasons for a daily commitment to transform reality in order to make it correspond to God's plan.<sup>77</sup>*

*Vita Consecrata* speaks of the eschatological aspect of consecrated life. Its members *become signs of the Spirit pointing to a new future enlightened by faith and by Christian hope. Eschatological expectation becomes mission... [and they] are able to bring hope to their brothers and sisters....<sup>78</sup>*

For its part, the church *entrusts to communities of consecrated life the particular task of spreading the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community and even beyond its boundaries, by opening or continuing a dialogue in charity, especially where today's world is torn apart by ethnic hatred or senseless violence.<sup>79</sup>*

### A. The Eschatological Dimension of Consecrated Life

The alternative lifestyle of the vocation to consecrated life within the church is called upon to accentuate the church's pilgrim character. It tries to live in the "not yet" the definitive quality of the "already" in its fullness. The Second Vatican Council highlighted this eschatological accent which results from professing the evangelical counsels by means of the vows:

*For the People of God has here no lasting city but seeks the city which is to come, and the religious state of life, in bestowing greater freedom from the cares of earthly existence on those who follow it, simultaneously reveals more clearly to all believers the heavenly goods which are already present in this age, witnessing to the new and eternal life which we have acquired through the redemptive work of Christ and prelude our future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom.<sup>80</sup>*

The history of the world is oriented toward the second coming

*Peregrine Graffius, OSM,  
talks with a Region 6  
colleague during last  
year's Assembly.*



of Christ. His Kingdom is already present in time in a mysterious, but also in a real way. It breaks through, however, inasmuch as our hope is alive and stretched toward the fullness of the Pleroma to come. Here, from this viewpoint, is where the eschatological nature of consecrated life comes in.

Through the vow of poverty a religious lives in the eschatological tension of using things, but with the detachment of sharing them and putting them at the service of others as a necessary, but passing means. Consecrated chastity speaks to the provisional quality of the earthly condition of our world which is passing away. Finally, obedience situates consecrated life in the dynamic projection toward the complete fulfillment of the Lord's will. In a word, to adopt a form of life that springs from a charism of the Holy Spirit and that breaks the mold of ordinary daily experience is in itself a way to remind others to consider that which does not pass away and to live consciously the reality that we do not have here a lasting home.

## **B. An Ongoing Attitude of Exodus and Conversion in Hope**

Consecrated life, because of the symbolic function it has, needs to be lived in a permanent attitude of exodus and conversion. Exodus means breaking fetters, living in an attitude of poverty and simplicity, and placing oneself on the front lines of announcing the Gospel so as to make clear what God's plan is and to question society. The *Working Paper* for the 1994 World Synod on Consecrated Life recalled that consecrated persons *are often found in the "desert" where there is no one, on the "margins of society" where they experience poverty and share the necessities of people, and on the "front lines" where they face the risks of proclaiming the Gospel in difficult situations.*<sup>81</sup>

The exercise of active hope orients consecrated life to the commitment of transforming the world starting with the integral liberation of the person. Everything else should be ordered and subordinated to that. Christ has begun this liberating process and will continue to complete it little by little until the day he comes. (Cf. Phil 1:6) That point will mark the end of history when "God will be all in all." (1 Cor 15:28)

Vatican II energetically makes the point that Christians are mistaken who "think that, because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities."<sup>82</sup> Likewise, after admitting that we do not know what the new heavens and the new earth will be like, nor do we know when they will come to pass, the Council confirms that in the

end there will remain charity and its works and that all creation will be set free from its bondage to decay. But principally the Council emphasized that longing for the consummation of the new age should not dampen our resolve but should rather spur us on toward transforming the world and society precisely because this involves the Kingdom of God already mysteriously present here on earth.<sup>83</sup>

*Tertio Millennio Adveniente* invites Christians to appreciate and to deepen

***the signs of hope present in the last part of this century, even though they often remain hidden from our eyes. In society in general, such signs of hope include: scientific, technological and especially medical progress in the service of human life, a greater awareness of our responsibility for the environment, efforts to restore peace and justice..., a desire for reconciliation and solidarity among different peoples, particularly in the complex relationship between the North and the South of the world. In the Church, they include a greater attention to the voice of the Spirit through the acceptance of charisms and the promotion of the laity, a deeper commitment to the cause of Christian unity and the increased interest in dialogue with other religions and with contemporary culture.***<sup>84</sup>

In all these signs of hope we have to discover seeds of resurrection and life. Consecrated persons cannot forget that an active hope is nourished by contact with the poor who are the main evangelizers of hope. In this focus on hope born out of faith, consecrated life will find that persever-

ing patience and action (Rom 5:3-5) are both a challenge and a program for action. Inasmuch as it lives out the implications of its consecration, communion and mission, consecrated life will continue to be the artisan of the Kingdom and the witness to its fulfillment. Consecrated persons are called upon to connect the conviction that 'all activity for liberation is only relative' to the belief that 'these actions must be done.' They also have the responsibility to link disappointment that comes from imperfect achievements to the certainty that these achievements somehow actually proclaim and pave the way for the perfection and fullness of the coming of the Kingdom which, in fact, has already begun in history.

The *fuga mundi*<sup>85</sup> does not separate one from the world which God so loved that he gave his only Son. (Cf. Jn 3:16) It is meant to separate one from the world dominated by evil.

### **C. Signs and Instruments of Communion and Unity in Diversity**

In the years following Vatican II, the journey is still being made, not without difficulties and tensions, toward unity and diversity within the church. Consecrated persons are called upon to live, foster and bear witness to what *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* asks all Christians to commit themselves to:

*the reflection of the faithful in the second year of preparation ought to focus particularly on the value of unity within the church, to which the various gifts and charisms bestowed upon her by the Spirit are directed.*<sup>86</sup>

*The fuga mundi does not separate one from the world ... It is meant to separate one from the world dominated by evil.*

**Fraternal  
communities  
already  
contribute to  
the new  
evangelization  
because they show  
to the world the  
humanizing effect  
of the Gospel.**

1. *To live the consecrated life in a church of communion*

The postsynodal document *Vita Consecrate* emphasizes the ecclesiology of communion, and from that point of view it speaks of consecrated life, especially in Chapter 2. An overall view of its contents can help us understand the requirements and the consequences of this responsibility of consecrated life in the church and within each institute: to live and to bear witness to communion and unity in diversity.

The starting point of Chapter 2 is **trinitarian**. From the moment the Spirit brings believers into sharing the trinitarian life, sisterly/brotherly living with its requirements becomes a confession of the Trinity, creating a new type of solidarity.<sup>87</sup> After the Ascension, the gift of the Spirit created communities around the apostles. These were a source of inspiration for consecrated life. These communities of consecrated persons show forth the reconciling power of God.<sup>88</sup>

The **mutual love** of community members makes the risen Lord present. He is the one who guides consecrated persons to put all they have in common: material goods along with spiritual experiences, talents and apostolic ideals. Brotherly/sisterly communion is a “God-enlightened space” in which to experience the Lord’s presence. Fraternal love is nourished by the presence of the Lord Jesus and in the Eucharist, and it is purified in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.<sup>89</sup>

**Superiors** have a role in the community for coordination and decision making regarding spiritual life and mission. Authority should be sisterly/brotherly, spiritual and participative in the decision-making process. But the final word

belongs to authority.<sup>90</sup>

In communities, especially in those areas of the world where the number of **elderly consecrated persons** is increasing, care for them and for the sick forms an important part of brotherly/sisterly life. These individuals are called upon to witness to the value of life and to continue to live their vocation in many and various ways in accord with their age and their ability. The wisdom and experience of the elderly and sick can be of great help to the community.<sup>91</sup>

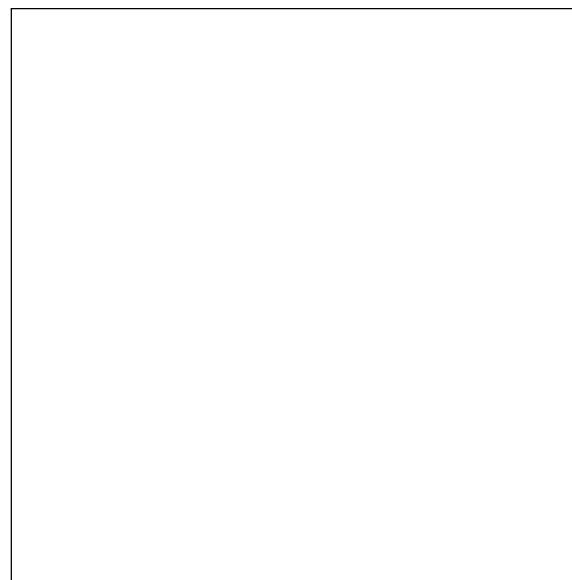
Communities of consecrated persons are, above all, **Christian communities**. In imitation of the early Jerusalem community they nourish sisterly/brotherly life by listening to the Word of God, allegiance to the teaching of the apostles, assiduous prayer, taking part in the breaking of the bread, and sharing whatever goods of nature and grace they have. These communities already contribute to the new evangelization because they show to the world the humanizing effect of the Gospel.<sup>92</sup>

Consecrated persons are asked today to live a **spirituality of communion, in a church of communion**. Founders and foundresses have always had a lively sense of the church which leads them to “*sentire cum Ecclesia*”<sup>93</sup> and to adhere to the magisterium of her shepherds from a faith perspective that can overcome human weakness and deficiency.<sup>94</sup> This sisterhood/brotherhood is lived at different levels, but primarily at that of the **universal church**. At this level, consecrated persons are called to become a leaven of communion at the service of mission and, hence, to have a particular bond of communion with the charism of unity and missionary universality,

which belongs to the successor of Peter. This gives them a supradiocesan character, while fostering an inculturation of the Gospel at the same time that it opens the individual cultures to the dimension of catholicity, or universality.<sup>95</sup>

Another level of communion is that of the **particular church**, within which consecrated persons live according to their charism in such a way so as to put that charism at the service of the People of God which includes mutual relations of charity and collaboration with bishops and among the institutes of consecrated life. This does not prevent rightful autonomy of life and government from enabling consecrated persons to keep intact their own charismatic, spiritual and apostolic patrimony.<sup>96</sup>

The bishop is called upon to foster a **fruitful and ordered ecclesial communion**, discerning and respecting individual charisms of consecrated life, and promoting and coordinating them. For their part, consecrated persons will cooperate in diocesan pastoral outreach, while maintaining respect for their own charism. The exemption which a number of them enjoy does not justify choices which actually conflict with the demands of organic communion. There should be constant, cordial dialogue between bishops and superiors of the different institutes of consecrated life. Also of great help would be the creation of mixed commissions of bishops and major superiors for the joint study of problems of common interest. Equally helpful would be reciprocal participation in structures of the bishops' conferences and of the conferences of major superiors, as well as the study of theology and



*Ann Carville, OSF,  
associate director of  
CMSM, with Mark  
Miller, CPPS.*

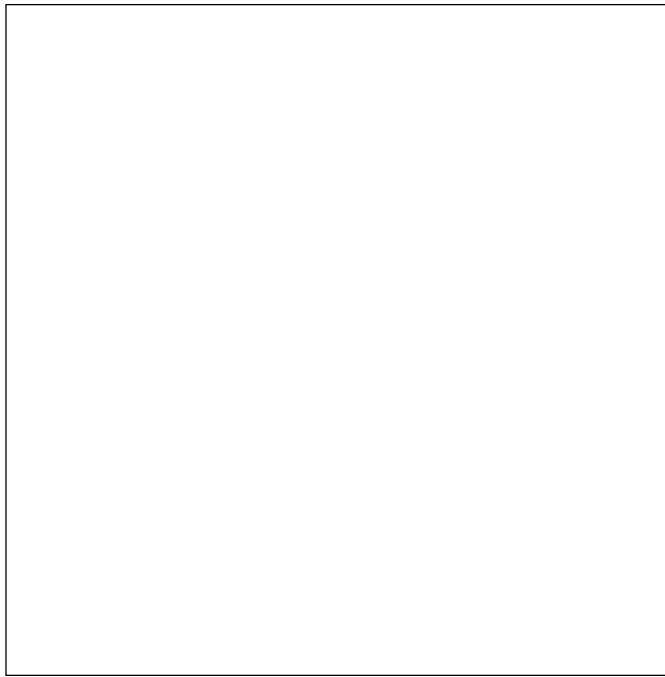
spirituality of consecrated life on the part of diocesan seminaries, with the corresponding study of the theology of the particular church and the spirituality of the diocesan clergy as part of the formation of consecrated persons.<sup>97</sup>

The church “entrusts to communities of consecrated life the particular task of spreading the *spirituality of communion*”<sup>98</sup> first of all in their internal life, but also in the ecclesial community and in society at large, especially where today’s world is torn apart by ethnic hatred and violence. Brotherly/sisterly life has the role of being a **sign in a divided and unjust world**. In their wide cultural and social diversity, consecrated persons are called today to witness to the meaning and possibility of communion at many levels. All institutes, but especially the international ones, are called upon to help overcome nationalism and “to uphold and to bear witness to the sense of communion between peoples, races and cultures.”<sup>99</sup> The challenge of combining fidelity to

the community’s charism with willingness to inculturate it will enable international institutes to achieve this effectively.

The ecclesiology of communion has led today to a growing **communion and collaboration among different institutes** with each one always remaining faithful to its own character and charism.<sup>100</sup> **Conferences of Major Superiors of Men and Women and Councils of Secular Institutes** are to promote consecrated life, to express the communion among consecrated persons and to seek ways to strengthen that communion. The Conferences of Major Superiors need to be in contact and dialogue with the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life as well as with the episcopal conferences. Organizations which promote coordination and communion are helpful in formulating solutions to pastoral problems and in avoiding misunderstandings and tensions both on the theoretical and the practical levels.<sup>101</sup>

It is important that **commun-**



Bernard Smith, OFM Conv, and a colleague chat at last year's CMSM Assembly.

**ion and collaboration with the laity** grow and increase with a view toward “cooperation and exchange of gifts.”<sup>102</sup> The renewed communion between consecrated persons and lay people “can give rise to the spread of a fruitful spirituality beyond the confines of the institute”<sup>103</sup> and can rejuvenate spiritual and apostolic dynamism. Finally, it is important for institutes to be open to the “new form of so-called associate members.”<sup>104</sup> Consecrated persons can also take part in specific forms of cooperation in lay initiatives, particularly in organizations and institutions which work with the poor and in those on the margins of society and which have the purpose of alleviating human suffering. They will do this always with the consent of their superiors. One could further mention participation in one or other of the “ecclesial movements” which have spread in our time. Membership in these move-

ments should not endanger the requirements of common life or the spirituality of the institute of origin. Charism and discipline of the institute need to be respected.<sup>105</sup>

The exhortation *Vita Consecrata* takes note of the many consecrated women who took part in the Synod and made their voices heard. This made for a greater awareness of **women’s dignity and role in society and in the church**. It is imperative, therefore, to recognize more clearly in the church and in everyday life the ability and mission of women because

*the future of the new evangelization, as of all other forms of missionary activity, is unthinkable without a renewed contribution from women, especially consecrated women.*<sup>106</sup>

This requires opening up to women new possibilities of presence and action, providing for

them “room to participate in different fields and at all levels, including decision-making processes.”<sup>107</sup> Moreover, in the field of theological, cultural and spiritual studies much can be expected from “the genius of women.” An appropriate formation is needed to permit women to embrace these new roles of responsibility.<sup>108</sup>

2. *To live the elements of a Christian community*

Before becoming a religious community it is necessary to be a genuine Christian community.

New Testament sisterhood/brotherhood finds its greatest expression in the early communities. One can tangibly sense in them the first fruit of the Spirit: love. (Gal 5:22) The communion of hearts and the sharing of material goods does not appear as a trait of just the Jerusalem community, but it is also held up as the ideal for all Christians and for all times. (Acts 4:32) Beginning with the *one faith* (Acts 2:42) believers welcome the word of God that brought them together, and they are united in brotherhood/sisterhood. This has as its fruit, and also its requirement, *koinonía* or communion with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, as well as among the believers. In *koinonía* we see faith and life integrated. This communion is made externally visible in the way disciples accept one another, share their possessions with each other, and spread love through the community. The *Eucharist* acquires the deep meaning of sharing life, which is Jesus, the one bread of which each one partakes (1 Cor 10:17), the source and nourishment for sisterhood/brotherhood. “In a home, around a simple table, listening to the Gospel

and breaking the bread, they know they have been gathered together by the Father in Jesus Christ.”<sup>109</sup> *Prayer* is lived as an attentive listening to God so as to dedicate oneself with brothers and sisters for the service of brothers and sisters. The *variety of charisms* leads to service for each other in the Father, Son and Spirit who bestow these gifts to build up the community and to provide benefit for all. (1 Cor 12:1, 4-6)

### 3. *Uniformity and multiplicity within the same Institute*

Anyone of us who has had the experience of living in international communities before Vatican II, and even more in international seminaries in Rome, can bear witness to the truth of the preceding observations.

On the one hand, within the same provinces or districts of religious congregations, whether located in Europe or outside it, a certain uniformity prevailed, dictated by the European majority membership, such that if one joined an international community it felt almost like being transported to some new place. Within any one of these communities you could find the exact same lifestyle as in all the others, even down to the smallest details. On the other hand, the use of Latin everywhere for church studies, the universal study of scholastic theology, the same liturgical rites and a limited contact with the contemporary world only served to reinforce the uniformity, which was an undeniable given. In this regard, I remember as a young religious that the way to solve controversial issues concerning the interpretation of local customs and traditions was to write to Rome “to see how they do things there.” The answer that came “from

there” was considered the definitive word that determined praxis, even though it might not have matched up with our experience or culture.

It was only with Vatican II that one began to call into question this cultural flattening out that seemed an inevitable part of membership in a religious institute which originated from somewhere in Europe and from some period in history so culturally different from the middle of the twentieth century.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) encouraged the church to live in contact with today’s real world. As a result of this contact, the church has become aware of cultural diversity that requires different styles in pastoral ministry, in liturgy, in the manner of proclaiming the Gospel and of organizing the local church. Following Vatican II, a decentralization in rigid church structures began to take place.

Consecrated life, even though predominantly western European, began to seriously question itself. It had to adapt to needs and requirements that were now appearing in a new light because of contact with diverse cultures. Examining its own traditions helped it to understand, vaguely at first, that “the structures of the consecrated life drawn up in the rural societies of the Middle Ages or those coming from the period of the industrial revolution in the last centuries”<sup>110</sup> do not respond to the challenges of a changing and multicultural world.

### 4. *Renewed Constitutions and openness to cultural diversity*

The *Motu proprio* “*Ecclesiae Sanctae*,” which lays out the

*The communion of hearts and the sharing of material goods does not appear as a trait of just the Jerusalem community, but it is also held up as the ideal for all Christians and for all times.*

**Openness to inculturation does not come about without tensions and difficulties. The first and main problem is to be able to substitute unity in the place of uniformity ...**

norms for implementing the Vatican II Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life (*Perfectae Caritatis*, October 28, 1965), asked religious institutes to revise and renew their legislation (constitutions, directories and similar documents). Particularly when it speaks of the Fundamental Code for religious congregations, the apostolic letter asks that

*one shall exclude anything which is now out of date, or anything which may change with the conditions of time, or which is of purely local application. These norms which are linked with present-day life or with the physical and psychical conditions or situations of the subjects should be entered in separate books.*<sup>111</sup>

With these guidelines the church recognized socio-cultural conditioning within the structures of religious life and was pointing out the need to keep it in mind, which would thus permit members to incarnate the institute's charism in different historical, geographical and cultural circumstances.

The new constitutions of religious institutes, developed in the light of *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, have endeavored to maintain as a unifying element the original charism along with "the juridical norms necessary to define the character, aims and means employed by the institute."<sup>112</sup> For the rest, constitutions have generally left room for provincial and local decisions more in accord with particular needs and cultural situations.

#### *5. From the northern hemisphere to the southern*

At this same time the so-called "Third Church" came forcefully

onto the scene. The number of believers in the Third World has changed the face of the church. From a western-European church [at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century 77% of members were in Europe and in the United States – a nation of European immigrants] with other faithful scattered throughout the rest of the world [23% of membership], the church has now come to be seen as a church "of the Third World" [almost 70% of believers] with some adherents in Europe [only 30% of total membership]. This has brought up the problem of religious, cultural and theological monocentrism as well as the challenge of being open to more polycentrism in the church.

#### *6. Problems and tensions*

Openness to inculturation does not come about without tensions and difficulties. The first and main problem is to be able to substitute unity in the place of uniformity, but to do it within the context of "multiformity" or multiplicity. Other difficulties are:

-combining an appreciation for one's own culture with openness toward and acceptance of other cultures in which the institute's charism can be legitimately expressed

-the urgency and the prudence of efforts to re-read the charism

-experiments with the new that need to be evaluated along with attachment to the traditional in which religious life has been experienced for such a long time

-knowing how to distinguish between what is universal and unchanging in the charism and what is merely the mode of expressing it based on custom and circumstance.

All this presupposes the ability to abandon attitudes of self-sufficiency and superiority.

Inculturation requires insertion into new and different cultural contexts. The ones who can do this best are those who belong to a group of people by birth and by background. On occasion, the idea of an apparent or even real superiority of one's own culture over others, or of the superiority of one's institute because of its origins, leads religious to try to take on a new culture wholesale rather than making an effort to re-read and re-interpret the charism from the viewpoint of the new culture.

In a world like ours which is obviously multicultural, in which differences are accentuated and occasionally lead to deep division, racism, and even war, consecrated persons are called to be signs and instruments of unity in the midst of diversity and to work for increasing understanding and cooperation along the lines of solidarity. Religious should strive to make cultural diversity a source of mutual enrichment among people rather than the excuse for fratricidal conflict between brothers and sisters, all children of the one heavenly Father.

#### *7. Religious fraternity and Christian communities*

Basic ecclesial communities (*comunidades de base*) and other Christian groups are trying to recover the sisterly/brotherly dimension of salvation history which was lost as a result of too individualistic a focus on faith. Christian brotherhood/sisterhood sets out to meet three basic human psychological needs, seen from a Gospel point of view. The first of these needs is *to love and to be*

*loved*. Agapé or Christian love, which is rooted in God, is the path toward fulfilling this need. The second need is *to produce and be useful*. This finds expression in Christian hope which labors for the transformation of society and the world. The last need is *to understand the meaning of existence*, which reaches its fulfillment in faith by which we can understand and assess our experiences of existence in dialogue with others.

Religious communities, as they take their place within the wider church community and live out their own proper sisterhood/brotherhood, both contribute to and draw strength from Christian *koinonía*. They are able to resist the danger of getting closed in on themselves in the narrow confines of little interest groups, and they learn how to live and move in a

less clerical church. They can strip off the trappings of security which come from power and prestige. And, above all, they acquire a new understanding of the Gospel and its demands for brotherhood/sisterhood. This leads religious to build up simpler communities within the people of God.

The sisterhood/brotherhood of religious life is not fashioned according to only one type of community living, like the monastic-conventual model. Experience tells us that we can live according to a *multiplicity of models of communion* that take on the qualities, culture and the human and religious values of the people with whom we live and work. This allows the brotherhood/sisterhood we strive to live to become a leaven for communion and unity.

### **Questions for personal and community reflection**

- 1. What signs of hope can you point to in the social and ecclesial context in which you live?**
- 2. What are the major problems in trying to live and witness to communion in a church open to unity within multiplicity?**
- 3. How can we be more transparent and understandable signs of sisterhood/brotherhood in today's world?**
- 4. What obstacles prevent the growth of unity within diversity in the life of our institutes?**

# Conclusion

## Mary, Woman of Hope Docile to the Voice of the Spirit

When *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* speaks of the immediate preparation for the Jubilee Year of 2000, it presents Mary as “the woman who was docile to the voice of the Spirit, a woman of silence and attentiveness, a woman of hope who, like Abraham, accepted God’s will ‘hoping against hope.’” (Rom 4:18)<sup>113</sup>

The representation of Mary as docile to the Spirit is summed up in her attitude of prayer, which relates her to the Word and to God’s action both in her own life and in history.

The Virgin Mary, described in the New Testament as one praying, stands out as the model of what openness to the Holy Spirit implies and what commitment to evangelization with an active hope involves. In the Annunciation (Lk 1:36-38), she teaches us how to practice discernment of God’s ways and how to maintain an attitude of being open and available to the Spirit’s action. In her contemplative prayer, when she did not understand (Lk 2:19, 50), she guides us to wait, in an attitude of hope and longing, for God’s plans to become clear so that we can understand his will. At Cana in Galilee (Jn 2:1-11), we discover in Mary the importance of a prayer both confident but also concerned about material needs. Mary at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:25-27) speaks to us of faithful contemplation that knows how to face the agonizing challenge of darkness and suffering. In Acts we see the

ecclesial dimension of living in hope when Mary is presented in prayer with the disciples preparing to receive the Spirit at Pentecost. (Acts 1:14) And for commitment to the evangelization that liberates, the Magnificat invites us to regard Mary as “the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation of humanity and of the universe.”<sup>114</sup>

Mary was the first to receive the Good News of salvation, and she teaches us the need we have of being evangelized before we can evangelize, with the dynamism of the Spirit and sustained by hope, since the word of God reveals itself to us wrapped in a certain obscurity, and this requires of us a faith response in obedience to God’s plans.

Mary, the one who prays, is the synthesis of everything that is implied in being open to the Spirit, in placing one’s charism at the service of others, and in working for communion and unity.

*The reading of the divine Scriptures, carried out under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with the discoveries of the human sciences and the different situations in the world today being taken into account, will*

*help us to see how Mary can be considered a mirror of the expectations of the men and women of our time... [and how she] does not disillusion any of the profound expectations of the men and women of our time but offers them the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord.*<sup>115</sup>

In other words, Mary encounters the Spirit’s call in the challenges of a church of communion and of the new evangelization toward which the Spirit leads us. Because of this, she helps us to be available and trusting, to open ourselves to the Lord, to remember all the liberations God has wrought in the past and, from this experience of remembering/praying, to commit ourselves to God and neighbor in those ways that lead to complete liberation, while we remain always firm in the hope that rests on the goodness and fidelity of God.

With Mary we pray that the Holy Spirit will give us *the courage to face the challenges of our time and the grace to bring all humanity the goodness and loving kindness of our Savior Jesus Christ. (Cf. Ti 3:4)*<sup>116</sup>

## Notes

1 John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* [“As the Third Millennium Draws Near”], Apostolic Letter for the Jubilee of the Year 2000 (November 10, 1994), 44-45. [Hereafter abbreviated as *TMA*.] In **Origins**, November 24, 1994. [Vol. 24, #24]

2 *TMA*, 45.

3 Cf. *TMA*, 46.

4 *TMA*, 47.

5 *TMA*, 48.

6 John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* [“The Consecrated Life”], Apostolic Exhortation reflecting on the proceedings of the October 1994 world Synod of Bishops on the consecrated life and its mission in the church and in the world (March 25, 1996), cf. n. 19. [Hereafter abbreviated as *VC*.] In **Origins**, April 4, 1996. [Vol. 25, #41]

7 Cf. *VC*, 26, 27, 84.

8 Cf. *VC*, 25, 72, 77, 78, 81.

9 Cf. *VC*, 41-42.

10 *VC*, 28.

11 Cf. *VC*, 112.

12 This appeared in English as “Witnesses of Christ in the World,” in *CMSM Forum*, No. 76, [Spring 1998].

13 *TMA*, 48.

14 *VC*, 1.

15 Cf. *VC*, 5-12.

16 III General Conference of Latin American Bishops [held in Puebla, Mexico, 1979], “*Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America*,” n. 208. English edition published by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, 1979. [Hereafter abbreviated as *Puebla*.]

17 *Puebla*, 322-323.

18 Cf. *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II, November 21, 1964], 34.

19 *Lumen Gentium*, 35.

20 *VC*, 42.

21 Cf. *VC*, 45.

22 *VC*, 21.

23 *VC*, 21.

24 *VC*, 21.

25 Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

26 *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

27 Cf. *VC*, 46-52.

28 *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

29 Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

30 Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

31 *Gaudium et Spes*, [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Vatican II, December 7, 1965], 92.

32 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, [Decree on Ecumenism, Vatican II, November 21, 1964], 4.

33 *VC*, 81.

34 Cf. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, [Encyclical “*Evangelization in the Modern World*,” December 8, 1975], 14.

35 Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 31.

36 [An allusion to St. Paul preaching to the Athenians on the Areopagus, or “Hill of Mars.” See Acts 17:16ff. Tr.]

37 Synod of Bishops, October, 1994. “*De Vita Consecrata deque ejus Munere in Ecclesia et in Mundo*” [“On the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World”]. Elenchus Unicus Propositionum. Proposition 35.

38 *Puebla*, 482.

39 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 31.

40 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, [Encyclical “On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate,” December 7, 1990].

41 *Redemptoris Missio*, 58.

42 *Redemptoris Missio*, 60.

43 *Redemptoris Missio*, 58.

44 Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 6, 9.

45 John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, [Encyclical “The Social Concern of the Church” for the Twentieth Anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, December 30, 1987], 14. When this statement of Pope John Paul II is translated into *statistics* it makes the accusation of terrible injustice echo all the more loudly. “One fourth of the human race lives in absolute poverty, that is, one billion people cannot get the food they need to live a normal life. 35,000 children die each day from causes directly related to poverty. 130 million children receive not even a basic education. (70% are girls.) One billion 300 million people do not have access to clean drinking water. (80% of the world’s diseases are attributable to contaminated drinking water.) The distribution of wealth in the world is terribly unjust: 15% of the population possesses 70% of the world’s wealth, while the remaining 85% possess about 21%. The population of industrialized nations represents approximately 20% of the total world population, but it consumes ten times more energy than developing countries and, in turn, produces 70% of the earth’s carbon monoxide emissions and 68% of the chemical wastes. 70% of the people living in extreme poverty are women. . . . The discrepancies are increasing. . . . In 1960 the average income of the 20% of rich nations was 30 times higher than the income of the 20% of the poorest nations. In 1990 the figure was 60 times higher.” [The author is quoting an article available to his Spanish-speaking readers: “La pobreza en el tercer

Mary was the first  
to receive the  
Good News  
of salvation,  
and she teaches us  
the need we have  
of being  
evangelized  
before we can  
evangelize

mundo y su erradicación” (Poverty in the Third World and its Eradication), by F. Almansa and R. Vallesca, published in a book by various authors: *1996, año de la erradicación de la pobreza (1996, the Year of Eradicating Poverty)*. Barcelona, 1996, p. 3.]

46 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 26.

47 Cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39.

48 Cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 43.

49 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39,

quoting a phrase from Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* [Encyclical “On the Development of Peoples,” March 26, 1967], 87.

50 *Puebla*, 15.

51 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 36.

52 [The author recommends here a section from a book in Italian on the meaning and scope of social sin: D. Tettamanzi, *Verità e libertà, temi e prospettive di morale cristiana. (Truth and Freedom, themes and prospects for Christian Morality)*, Casale Monferrato, 1993, pp. 585-599.]

53 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 37.

54 Cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 47.

55 [The author refers here to a classic work of church history, *Histoire de l’Eglise*, by Augustin Fliche and Victor Martin. There were eventually 18 volumes in the French edition, which began to appear in 1934 and continued until 1960. Fra Camilo cites the Italian version, *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. III/1, pp. 419-433.]

56 Cf. Fliche, Martin: *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. XII/2, p. 685.

57 [The author here recommends several works in various languages to help the reader learn more about the historical evolution of the church’s option for the poor (intimately linked to human development and liberation). For the early church: (No author given) *Il messaggio sociale del Cristianesimo (The Social Message of Christianity)* Rome, Editrice Città Nuova, 1960. For the 6th to the 16th centuries: Mollat: *Les pauvres au Moyen Age, Etude sociale (The Poor in the Middle Ages, A social study)* Paris, Editions Hachette, 1978. For the modern and contemporary era: D. Menozzi: *Chiesa, poveri, società nell’età moderna e contemporanea (The Church, the Poor and Society in the Modern and Contemporary Age)* Brescia, Ed. Queriniana, 1980. For all aspects of the subject: J. Pixley and C. Boff: *Opción por los pobres (Option for the Poor)* Madrid, Ediciones Paulinas, 1986.]

58 The Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Session of the Synod of Bishops. *Message II. Particular Decrees of the Synod, D. The Church’s Mission in*

*the World, 6. Preferential Option for the Poor and Human Promotion*. In **Origins**, December 19, 1985. [Vol. 15, #27]

59 *Puebla*, 196.

60 *Puebla*, 339.

61 Cf. *Puebla*, 1130-1147.

62 *Puebla*, 1147.

63 *VC*, 82.

64 Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples [formerly known as *Propaganda Fide*], *Pastoral Guide for Diocesan Priests in Churches Dependent on the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (“The Young Mission Churches”)* October 1, 1989, n. 9.

65 Cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 26.

66 Karl Rahner, *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*, (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 74. [Translated from: *Wer ist dein Bruder?* Herder, 1981.]

67 1987 World Synod of Bishops, “On the Laity.” *Message to the People of God* (October 29, 1987), 4. In **Origins**, November 12, 1987 [Vol. 17, #22], p. 387.

68 Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 31.

69 *Gaudium et Spes*, 42.

70 Cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41.

71 Cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41.

72 Cf. especially the following encyclicals: *Pacem in Terris* (1963), *Populorum Progressio* (1967), *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), *Centesimus Annus* (1991); and two documents from the Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission: “*At the Service of the Human Community, An Ethical Approach to the International Debt Question*” January 27, 1987 [**Origins**, Feb 5, 1987, Vol. 16, #34, pp. 601-611], and on the occasion of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless: “*What Have You Done to Your Homeless Brother? The Church and the Housing Problem*” December 27, 1987 [**Origins**, Feb 11, 1988, Vol. 17, #35, pp. 602-608]. See also documents from the Bishops Conferences of various countries on the themes of justice, economy and peace. Of particular interest are the documents of the Bishops of Latin America: *Medellín* (1968), *Puebla* (1979), and *Santo Domingo* (1992).

73 Cf. *Puebla*, 472.

74 Cf. *Puebla*, 476.

75 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 48.

76 Cf. *VC*, 82-86, 90.

77 *TMA*, 46.

78 *VC*, 27.

79 *VC*, 51.

80 *Lumen Gentium*, 44.

81 Synod of Bishops, October,

1994. “On the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World,” *Working Paper*, 10. In **Origins**, June 30, 1994 [Vol. 24, #7], p. 101.

82 *Gaudium et Spes*, 43.

83 Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.

84 *TMA*, 46.

85 Latin for “fleeing the world.”

86 *TMA*, 47.

87 Cf. *VC*, 41.

88 Cf. *VC*, 41.

89 Cf. *VC*, 42.

90 Cf. *VC*, 43.

91 Cf. *VC*, 44.

92 Cf. *VC*, 45.

93 [An expression from St. Ignatius of Loyola. Literally, “to feel with the Church.” Today we would more probably say, “to be attuned to the Church” or “to be of one mind with the Church.” Tr.]

94 Cf. *VC*, 46.

95 Cf. *VC*, 47.

96 Cf. *VC*, 48.

97 Cf. *VC*, 49-50.

98 *VC*, 51.

99 *VC*, 51.

100 Cf. *VC*, 52.

101 Cf. *VC*, 53.

102 *VC*, 54.

103 *VC*, 55.

104 *VC*, 56.

105 Cf. *VC*, 56.

106 *VC*, 57.

107 *VC*, 58.

108 Cf. *VC*, 58.

109 M. Legido López, *Fraternidad en el mundo, un estudio de eclesiología paulina [Fraternity in the World, a Study of Pauline Ecclesiology]*, Salamanca, Editorial Sígueme, 1982, p. 158.

110 Synod of Bishops, October, 1994. “On the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World,” *Working Paper*, 93. In **Origins**, June 30, 1994 [Vol. 24, #7], p. 130.

111 Paul VI, *Ecclesiae Sanctae* [Apostolic Letter, written *motu proprio*, “The Government of the Holy Church,” Norms for Implementing the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, August 6, 1966], Part II, 14.

112 *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, Part II, 12b.

113 *TMA*, 48.

114 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater* [Encyclical “Mother of the Redeemer, on the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church,” March 25, 1987], 37.

115 Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus* [Apostolic Exhortation “For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary,” February 2, 1974], 37.

116 *VC*, 111.