THE VOWS: AN ALTERNATIVE WAY OF LIFE

UISG BULLETIN NUMBER 149, 2012

FOREWORD

CELIBACY FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM

Rosanna Virgili

THE VOW OF POVERTY IN AFRICA:
LIGHTS, SHADOWS AND CHALLENGES FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS

Sr Carmen Sammut, MSOLA

MUST WE OBEY PEOPLE IN ORDER TO OBEY THE LORD JESUS?

THE DELICATE SUBJECT OF OBEDIENCE IN CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

Fr. Adrian Schenker, O.P.

THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP IN CONSECRATED LIFE
A THEOLOGICAL VISION FOR OUR TIMES

Fr. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

TESTIMONIES OF LIFE

THE KINO BORDER INITIATIVE: A BI-NATIONAL MIGRANT MINISTRY ALONG THE U.S./MEXICO BORDER

P. Sean Carroll, S.J.

LIFE IN UISG
In this edition of the UISG Bulletin, we would like to offer a new perspective on those religious vows which constitute the character of our discipleship of Jesus and of our work in building up his Kingdom on this earth.

Having remained silent about these for several years – as one does with those things which one takes for granted or no longer requires as part of a renewal – we have begun to explore them in greater depth as a part of our identity, of this particular way of living out Christianity, which identifies us within the Church.

Rather than offering a systematic presentation, we singled out stimulating yet specific contributions that may bring something new to the discussion or will at least re-examine that which is already familiar to us.

As a Biblical expert and a married, Christian woman, Professor Rosanna Virgili offers us, in evocative yet sometimes provocative language, a profound reflection on the significance of “Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom”. Beginning with Jeremiah, she draws us towards the Jesus’ own experience and to the sources of his affective life: the Father, the women and the disciples. The article reveals the spousal character of a celibacy lived for the sake of the Kingdom and the paradoxical posterity of this prophetic sign, namely life and hope. From the impotent body of the eunuch we see “a stream of descendants issuing forth, a sea of unexpected joy.”

Religious poverty is given a concrete context in “The Vow of Poverty in Africa.” Rather than an article, this is a presentation prepared by Sr. Carmen Sammut, MSOLA, together with other speakers, with the intention of providing a basis for further discussion. It is to this that it owes its synthetic and practical style. Sr. Carmen not only appeals to her own experience of over 30 years of living in Africa, but she has also managed to include the points of view of the Superiors of various African Congregations.

“Must we obey people in order to obey the Lord Jesus?” is the question posed directly by the Dominican Fr. Adrian Schenker, OP. He affirms that obedience is essential to following Jesus; “surrendering control of oneself to another who supplants our ego.” This is a path that must be chosen freely and is indispensable, even while knowing how open it is to the risk of abuse. Obedience, as mediated by the consecrated life, is a quasi-sacramental sign of the authority of the Master, Jesus, yet it is also a serious matter for the
Complementing the articles on the vows is that of Fr. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF on “The Challenge of Leadership in Consecrated life.” It is only with a theological foundation that the true task of the leader can be understood, and it transpires that it is not he who plans and directs, but it is he who follows the plans of the Spirit and is directed by Him. “The problem is not whether there are any people who have the charism of leadership, but whether there are people willing to participate in and contribute to the flow of God’s grace that pours out on the world generally, or on a community or group.” There follows a description of the symbolic and anthropological profile of a leader; this is concluded by a profound examination of the nature of the service expected from those in authority, which should be stimulated by compassion and a desire to help those under them to grow.

Finally, we would like to present the experiences of The Kino Frontier Initiative. This is a missionary outreach to the immigrants along the USA-Mexico border, which has been made possible by the combined efforts of various congregations. Its services include immediate personal attention (food and health), as well as educational and consultative support. Furthermore, the centre is open to immigration researchers and for educational purposes. Finally, this inter-congregational service also has a political side in that it seeks judicial reforms for fairer immigration laws.
CELIBACY FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM

Rosanna Virgili

Rosanna Virgili, biblical scholar, teaches exegesis of the Old Testament and the Pauline Corpus at the Marchigian Theological Institute of Ancona and Fermo (affiliated to the Pontifical Lateran University in Roma).

Author of numerous publications, articles and translations, she also writes for various specialist and popular Biblical reviews.

Original in Italian

10 The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.” 11 But he said to them, “Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given. 12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.” (Mt 19:10-12).

Understanding firstly the context in which Jesus is to be found discussing the subject of eunuchs is helpful in grasping the full sense of this unexpected discourse. In the preceding verses, Matthew the Evangelist tells us about a controversy between Jesus and some of the Pharisees. It had earlier been said of the latter that rather than sincerely seeking to understand Jesus’ interpretation of the Law, they sought to put him to the test (cf. Mt 19:3-9). The debate centred on the question of divorce, more specifically regarding when it would be licit for a husband to divorce his wife. After hearing Jesus’ response, in which he legitimated divorce only in the case of concubinage, his disciples demonstrate their incredulity by turning to their master and stating frankly: “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry” (Mt 19:10).

An affirmation such as that made by the disciples might indeed astound its audience, especially a modern audience such as ours. But if that is the case, Jesus’ reply to their words would have the power to astonish even more. Instead
of concluding the discussion and bringing the matter to a close, he virtually concedes the point to His disciples, whilst taking the opportunity to present them with a different, better alternative, even if it is one which “not all persons can receive.” Seeing how marriage presupposes less-than-advantageous conditions, why not consider a celibate state of life? In introducing this possibility, as distant as it is from the Jewish mentality and culture, Jesus is firmly putting aside certain people whose presence was common in the ancient world of the Mediterranean Basin: the eunuchs.

The Bible however, does also speak of the eunuchs, presenting them as the most trustworthy of all the courtiers (one calls to mind those at the court of Ahasuerus, King of Persia, cf. Est 1:1); their trustworthiness due to the necessary direction of their care towards the lives of others, unable as they were to enjoy their own. The eunuch’s inability to have a wife or children removes every dignity, propriety and sweetness from his life. From a religious perspective, the eunuch is seen as particularly unfortunate: neither can he aspire to priesthood, since this requires a body free of defect, nor can he enjoy God’s blessing, the first sign of which is an abundance of children, especially males. In short, the eunuch is precluded from every human and divine joy, everything that is proclaimed by Psalm 128:

_Blessed every one who fears the Lord,
who walks in his ways!
You shall eat the fruit of the labour if your hands;
you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.
Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.

Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord._

Jesus will have known well that in the faith of his people the eunuch was effectively cut off from the presence of God and His blessings. He was a man whose existence was bitter, whose destiny was broken, and who was excluded from the joys of the holy assembly of the faithful. So why does Jesus put forward a state of life based on that of the poor eunuchs – some of whom were eunuchs by birth and others emasculated by human volition – and why should it be desired “for the Kingdom of heaven”?

In Matthew’s text the discussion is then interrupted and Jesus speaks no more on the subject.
Jeremiah’s celibacy

In the Old Testament there is one figure who God expressly asks to live in the celibate state: that is the prophet Jeremiah. Celibacy, however, cannot be confused with the status of eunuch, since they are far from the same thing. But it would be correct to think that when Jesus spoke of “eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” he was referring to the celibate state rather than eunuchs in the proper sense. The celibate person does not actually bear different physical characteristics as does the eunuch, but simply decides not to enter into matrimony. As we have seen, it is within this context that Jesus speaks about such “eunuchs.” Therefore it only remains to explore the rare state of celibacy that Jeremiah entered in order to find an example that might indicate to us some of the characteristics of the model introduced by Jesus.

1
The word of the Lord came to me: 2You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place. 3For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bore them and the fathers who begot them in this land: 4They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried; they shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth.” (Jer 16:1-4).

Reading the words that God directs to Jeremiah is rather unsettling! God asks the prophet not to take a wife or to have children, as every mother and father will have to see them reduced as to filth on the ground! What a horrible prophecy! And what a horrible end for the prophet! His celibacy is not the fruit borne of a choice, but will instead be a sign of Jerusalem’s destiny. Within it is written the future of the Holy City and of all the people of Judea. Jeremiah’s renouncement of marriage and fatherhood itself becomes his “prophecy.”

It is a prophecy of contradiction, of death, of desolation, of woe, of shame, of horror, of an end to every human life and every human dignity. The image of the corpses of children lying exposed to the rain and to the hunger of wild animals, without any sign of pity shown towards the wounded and dismembered bodies, cries out in Jeremiah’s celibacy. It is a celibacy that speaks of Jerusalem’s end, of a diminishing of the voices raised in joy and happiness of young people at the wedding of the virgin-bride Israel and the Lord, her spouse. This image is indeed shattered by Jeremiah’s closed and deluded body. The promises made to Abraham of a beautiful and spacious land, on which his descendants were to freely flourish for all eternity, and of a stream of descendants as many as the stars of the heavens – these are all brought to a crushing halt in the celibacy of Jeremiah!
What a terrible prophecy, and what a sign of contradiction thus becomes his celibate state. The sign of an impotent man points to the limits of the power of God over the very people He had chosen for Himself! There will come, though, the day in which these prophecies will be realised: a day of lament, of the sword, of hunger and of wars which will devour the nation and its children. This will be the day in which strangers will descend upon the land like vultures upon the wounded flesh of the children.

What will become of Jeremiah? And what significance will his celibacy retain? A surviving seed of life; a seed of hope consigned to a distant future which nevertheless will one day come; credit given to an exhausted and absent God, who nevertheless lives on in memory and desire, and who is essential for that surplus value of time, for further glimmering dreams, and who is inseparable from the hunger of life.

That celibacy remains an explicit mockery, crying for ever of that hunger, in an endless struggle against the injustice and the absurdity of the death of the City of God, and the decay of her virginal, bridal and motherly body. That celibacy expresses the awaiting of what is to come, of the “now but not yet”; Israel’s wedding-garment for a wedding that is yet to happen, when “the maidens rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry... over the grain, the wine, and the oil... they will return.” (Jer 31:13). It is a challenge to faith, which hopes against every hope.

In his celibacy Jeremiah both anticipates and announces the miracle of the faith expressed by the whole Bible: “Can a man bear a child?” (Jer 30:6). It might seem like a rhetorical question, but it is not so for Jeremiah! It is he who “see[s] every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labour.” He sees new things with new eyes: things that are hidden but which will be brought to light, things that have never occurred before but which will occur. From a man devoid of any seed, just like an eunuch, springs a stem of life which will endure for ever.

**Jesus without a home**

26*He who acquires a wife gets his best possession,*  
*a helper fit for him and a pillar of support.*  
27*Where there is no fence, the property will be plundered;*  
*and where there is no wife, a man will wander about and sigh.*  
28*For who will trust a nimble robber that skips from city to city?*  
*So who will trust a man that has no home,*  
*and lodges wherever the night finds him?*  
(Sir 36:24-26)

The words of the Book of Wisdom reveal to us Jesus’ celibate condition.
That condition is certainly not one of happiness! The Son of God Himself states as much, almost echoing the words of the Book of Sirach: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head” (Lk 9:58).

The hostility of a world which discriminates against him and isolates him from everyone leads him to envy even the animals! Every living being has its own bed, its own shelter, and its own family to go home to. In disillusioned and pitiless terms Jesus denounces his loneliness, his otherness to every other being on earth. We notice his sadness in not having a wife, a home, a family, all that actually makes a man “blessed.” Perhaps he feels like the robber that the Book of Sirach speaks of, forced to flee from city to city! His life is in any case a unique and great journey, a migration across the length and breadth of the regions of Palestine, whilst often having to escape the hostility of the Scribes and Pharisees.

And when Jesus will die on the Cross he will not leave any sons to perpetuate the memory of his name. Jesus’ name will remain on the Cross with him. He will die between two robbers: also strangers to a peaceful and communal lifestyle. At the foot of the Cross will be his mother, who will be given to another. Even the bond with his mother which was the only blood-tie which Jesus had is dissolved on the Cross, when He himself bestows it on the beloved disciple! (Jn 19:26-27).

That which tells us most about Jesus’ celibacy then is his constant and personal relationship with God. The Gospels tell us how he often withdraws from his disciples and goes into deserted places to pray. It is as if the centre of his affective life were in “the desert”, as Mark says (cf. 1:35). This too is a genuine peculiarity: to find one’s affective centre in a solitary and empty place, where scorpions and snakes lie in wait, where Jesus himself found Satan’s temptation in the first instance (cf. Mk 1:13). But it is precisely in unfamiliar, impervious and solitary places that Jesus most often goes to seek conversation, intimacy, escape, rest.

It is in those uninhabitable places that his Father dwells; or rather, it is there that Jesus goes to find Him. In the same manner as if he were seeking out his family or his children, or his spouse, so he seeks out his Father. This too is an expression of his celibacy. In accordance with the words of Jeremiah who reminds his people how God guided them: “in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through, where no man dwells” (Jer 2:6). This happened in the time of “her youth”, of the betrothal of Israel to God. For Jesus, his celibacy is a betrothal in the wilderness of thirst and solitude, where it is his very body that will become the manna of bread and his heart that will deliver the blood and water of life.
But the fullest and most profound sign of Jesus’ state of life as an unmarried man who renounces a family of his own is without doubt his relationship with those who are “his own.” The pronoun not only refers to his disciples, but also to all those who “gathered around him.” These are people who do not belong to his family and yet are considered by Jesus as his mother and brothers (cf. Mk 3:31-35). His life appears to detach itself from that of his mother and his brothers – those “according to the flesh” – and instead attaches itself to all those who carry out the will of God. They are the ones who will make up Jesus’ destined family.

It is of this family that God is Father (cf. Mk 11:25), and with this same family the Son of God shares every aspect of his earthly experience. He lives with them; he sees their wants; he is sensitive to their sufferings and is generous to them in their need. He learns how to become a Son of man! Jesus cleanses the leper, heals the paralytic, cures the woman suffering from blood loss, has compassion at the sight of the crowd who are “like sheep without a shepherd” (Mk 6:34). The celibacy of Jesus is love which is certainly not conserved, but multiplied; a love without possession, name, or copyright; a love which is total, free and gratuitous; a love that is ordered towards forming a different sort of family on earth, where the Promise becomes the Kingdom of God manifested in this world. And so Jesus lets himself be loved by “his own”, with spontaneous and all-embracing desire. Amongst these are women, as present to him in his life as his very soul. Women, each with a different name, yet many of them called Mary: the mother (Mary), the friend (Mary of Bethany), the “bride” of Easter morning (Mary of Magdala).

From them Jesus continually draws energy and strength. Furthermore, it is only these women who never abandon him! They remain near him at the foot of the Cross; when he is deposed from the Cross they seek his body to pour out on it a flood of love and hope. They are the first to go and reclaim that defeated body the morning after the Sabbath. Defeated in the eyes of the world and perhaps even in those of his own apostles; but for them it is precious, unique, irreplaceable and eternal. In their arms it is fresh and fragrant.

Without the women Jesus would never have been able to live his “celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom.” Companions, disciples, mothers, sisters, daughters, prophetesses and deaconesses, all announce the flowering of New Life from the body of a man without offspring, without riches, rejected by all; horrible even to look at, hung to a beam as he is like an accursed man.

Finally, of particular intimacy is the relationship between Jesus and the Twelve. They lived in the same house and travelled together with him, preaching and working miracles in the name of the Kingdom of God in union with the Son of God. With them Jesus formed one, unique “body” when he called them to
follow him and “appointed twelve [the Greek verb is poiein], to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons” (Mk 3:14-15). An authentic “spouse-ship” is to be found in this relationship: Jesus establishes a complete oneness with the Twelve who, in their turn, are “made” as such – that is a reality of communion. A new creation, a new anthropology, a new way of living with extreme purity, “spouse-ship”: this is Jesus’ celibacy for the Kingdom.

Paul’s celibacy

Whilst Jesus’ celibacy must be inferred from what the Gospels tell us about him, it is not the same for Paul, since he himself speaks very explicitly about it. In the seventh chapter of First Corinthians, Paul introduces the theme of celibacy in the midst of his response to the questions of the Corinthians concerning marriage:

“Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. It is well for a man not to touch a woman. But because of the temptation to immortality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. (…) I say this by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion. (…) let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him.” (1 Cor 7:1-2, 6-9, 17).

Paul gives a very clear and simple message on celibacy: he “would like” that all should be like him, that is unmarried, though this is not a tenet of particular importance in the Christian faith and Church. Whether married, or celibate, or widowed, all can live and celebrate the gift of God and of His grace in the Risen Lord in any state of life, be it married or celibate. These choices take a second place in Paul’s discourse. What matters most for him is that “God has called us to peace” (1 Cor 7:15); as for the rest, no-one should change the state of life in which they find themselves! Paul certainly realises – as did Jesus’ disciples in Matthew’s text – that getting married was not wholly profitable. In fact, marriage gives rise to many concerns and can distract from an “undivided devotion to the Lord” (1 Cor 7:35). At the same time however, intelligence and good sense prompt him to state with great spontaneity that it is better to get married than to fall prey to the many dangers of a barely-controlled sexuality, because celibacy is certainly not a deciding factor in the Christian way of life! Even the Apostles were accompanied by women who were believers (cf. 1 Cor 9:5).
Paul’s choice is due to his visceral passion for the Gospel and for the crucified Lord. His life is made up of nothing other than the absolutely free proclamation of the Grace announced by the Gospel. It is a passion that renders him so utterly filled with the “spouse-ship” of Christ that he ends up saying: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20) and again: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? (...) But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1 Cor 6:15, 17).

Paul’s contribution to the scriptural basis for the Catholic doctrine of celibacy is huge, yet Paul clarifies without any doubt that clothed as we are with Christ, what matters most is neither marriage nor celibacy, “but faith working through love” and being “a new creation” (cf. Gal 3:28; 5:6; 6:15).

“About whom does the prophet say this?”

The Acts of the Apostles recounts a story concerning an eunuch. It forms one of the most beautiful texts in the New Testament (Acts 8:26-40). It concerns a man who hailed from the deepest South, an African, who was in the service of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia. Luke presents him as he travels down in his chariot from Jerusalem to Gaza. He had been to Jerusalem seeking words of consolation. Indeed he was still reading the Book of the prophet Isaiah, where it says: “As a sheep led to the slaughter (...) Who can describe his generation? (...) For his life is taken up from the earth” (Acts: 8:32-33).

Suddenly, the deacon Philip, inspired by the Spirit, comes to meet him along the road and asks him: “Do you understand what you are reading?” The eunuch replies: “How can I, unless someone guides me?”

What the eunuch did not understand but wanted to find out at all costs was who the Prophet was speaking about – was it himself or somebody else? Philip takes this opportunity to talk to the eunuch about Jesus, and to explain that it was Him of whom the ancient prophecy spoke. In fact it spoke of a man who had been rejected and unjustly condemned, celibate and without progeny, but from whom had issued forth at a certain point an indescribable posterity! And so the eunuch understands that the prophecy also applies to him, to his “blunted life”, to the future he was denying, to his name which would be forgotten for ever. From this moment the Ethiopian eunuch, the one by rights furthest from salvation, a dark-skinned African, experiences Hope lighting up in his heart. From his impotent body he could already see a stream of descendants issuing forth, a sea of unexpected joy.

It is a celibacy in which the Kingdom of God would dwell.
THE VOW OF POVERTY IN AFRICA:
LIGHTS, SHADOWS AND CHALLENGES
FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF WOMEN
RELIGIOUS

Sr Carmen Sammut, MSOLA

Sr Carmen Sammut is the Superior General of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa. She was born in Malta. Sr. Carmen is a teacher by profession. As MSOLA she did studies at PISAI, the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome. For 30 years her host countries were the countries of North Africa, Mauritania, Algeria and Tunisia.

This paper was written with the contributions of 7 women Superior Generals of African Congregations and presented to the ‘Council of 18’ in Propaganda Fide, Rome, May 15, 2012.

Original in English

Introduction

“R
emember how generous the Lord Jesus was: He was rich, but He became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty.” 2Cor 8,9

The African young woman who knocks on our door to become a religious, and so to freely embrace a life centered on Christ through the vows, is also very rich and is called to transform her riches into means to enrich others. She has a story of cultural richness such as the belonging to an extended family, where the good of the group is often more important than the individual’s desires or even rights. She has known the support of a wide family. She has learnt and practiced sharing, hospitality and mutual help. She has a lot of know-how in order to face the exigencies of life and has often carried responsibility in her family. She has lived in an atmosphere where life is seen as a gift and as a whole, without our usual separations of body and soul, life and death, the natural and the supernatural. She looks at time as a servant to relationships and not so much as a good in its own self. There is a unity between the past, the present and the future. In many cases she has been very near to nature and lives in oneness with the cosmos. She
often knows how to sacrifice herself for others, how to give generously and how to feast joyfully.

We can also notice that in many countries the young woman has lived at least part of her life in an atmosphere of war or ethnic strife; sometimes she has lived in countries where material poverty is the usual stance for many and where this is seen as a curse; has often not had adequate schooling because of circumstances beyond her, has suffered trauma in diverse ways.

All of this influences the way the vow of poverty is lived. All of this needs to pass through the crucible of the Paschal Mystery to become life-giving for all.

**Lights**

The vow of poverty has to do with spiritual poverty and with a commitment to follow Christ in the way He lived and related to others.

Spiritual poverty: With Jesus, we realize that all we are comes from God and so we receive our being and all we have, with gratitude, as stewards, not owners. We are called to be co-creators, liberating ourselves from our own selfishness and our desire to accumulate and possess in order to bring life. In this exchange of gifts, no one is too poor not to have something to contribute, and no one is too rich to have nothing to receive. We are indeed called to dependence on God and co-dependency on each other.

When we speak of the vow of Poverty we mean a commitment where one takes up the condition of the needy voluntarily in the manner of Christ who became poor to enrich us. It is recognizable by joy even in difficult circumstances. This is a free choice to possess nothing in order to follow Christ. The most difficult of this, in the African context, is not to have children, not to have one’s own family, not to give descendants to one’s parents. As the young woman allows herself to be seized by Christ and his ways, she is invited to follow Christ who left his family and did not form a family of his own. Not to have one’s own family and not to have one’s relatives and friends nearby is often felt as the greatest poverty.

Sometimes we have difficulties speaking of a vow of poverty for we have more than the people around. A more significant name would be the vow of sharing. Sharing what we receive and what we earn, having a non-possessive attitude to material things, positions, power, persons, talents, even one’s life; living peacefully together in community, in a simple life style, often coming from various cultural and ethnic groups, each receiving what she needs, is a sign of contradiction in the world of today, where grabbing material goods, positions, power, seems to be the thing to do and where inter-ethnic strife is still very present. This type of sharing creates a strong bond among members. This also
entails great inner freedom, being accountable and caring for the goods put at each one’s disposal, as well as creating a climate of trust where the members can challenge each other in the living out of this vow.

Sharing also entails a preferential love for the poor which puts religious often at the service of the marginalized: those who are sick, orphans, prostitutes, old, vulnerable, drug addicts, street children, prisoners. Religious live in solidarity with the poor, in respect of the poor, they work with and for the poor. Thus they strive to fulfill the mission of Jesus to bring about the kingdom (Lk. 4: 16-19). They do not only give help but also share their know-how to teach self-help. They fight to defend the rights of the marginalized and to ensure that they are treated with dignity. This demands to confront social and political barriers. This justice is also practiced with their own workers through paying just wages and respecting their rights.

A sure sign of generosity in following Christ is the consent to go to live in an area where even some basic needs such as electricity, running water and internet connections are missing, for the sake of the mission.

Earning one’s living through work, including manual work is another aspect as are the Congregations’ projects so as to become self-reliant for their needs and for the needs of their mission. This requires creativity, daring and sacrifice. It also poses some important questions.

Sharing, welcoming, hospitality, generosity are capital values. The religious are often called to use some of their “free” time to listen to others. There are often people coming to them because they know they can trust them with their stories. Trust in Providence like the widow of Sarepta helps religious share with the one who comes unexpectedly the little they have in the house. There is always enough space and time for welcoming.

The Earth is a value in itself in Africa. Protecting nature, struggling against erosion by planting trees and grass, caring for water sources, not wasting electricity or food is an integral part of living this vow.

**Shadows**

Many of the candidates to religious life in Africa have known poverty in their milieu. Some regard religious life as a source of social promotion. Varied motivations can lead a young woman to a religious congregation: the desire to study, to live a comfortable life and avoid effort, to help the family. Thus many leave after having finished their studies so as to help their family.

Our houses and life style are often not comparable to the surroundings and we are seen as rich. This can give a contrary witness to what we want to announce.
The families rarely understand what the vow of poverty is about for they see our houses, farms, schools, cars … so they expect to be helped to improve their condition when their daughter joins religious life. They do not understand that the individual religious does not possess anything. They need to be introduced into the meaning of the vows and of poverty in particular.

Some families put pressure on their daughters so that they can be helped build a house, pay school fees, pay for medical care, give a share to organize a feast… This is not simple. In many cultures a young person who has been given the opportunity to study will pay the school fees for a younger brother or sister. There is real sharing in the family to help one’s older or sick relatives. There is a big question of justice involved here. It can cause much worry to particular members. The institute needs to examine each situation for one cannot leave one’s parents die of hunger and oneself live where nothing is lacking. On the other hand, some families can be terribly in need and not ask for anything. This needs a spirit of discernment in community so as to know who, when and how to help and at the same time not make the family dependent on the congregation.

Others have too great an attachment to material goods for fear of lacking. They accumulate what they receive or even sometimes look for benefactors in order to obtain what they want. Some can live in hypocrisy and untruth, not putting all in common, searching for compensation and security. One becomes rich to the detriment of the Institute.

One also finds comparison and jealousy in some communities, sisters wanting what another one has, even if they don’t need it for their apostolate. There can exist the tendency to think of a person’s value as equivalent to what she possesses or what she earns or receives and brings to the community budget. The challenge is how to become a community of equals.

In spite of a background of lack of material goods, one can find sisters not taking enough care of the goods put at their disposal, such as cars, motorcycles, houses or even waste money or time.

Work with the poor, trying to fight injustice and to promote justice can be very unrewarding and lead to discouragement. It is also such a vast issue that what we do seems to be a drop in the ocean.

**Relations with our pastors**

Sometimes religious need a lot of endurance and courage to collaborate with the local church in announcing the Good News although they do not receive a salary (even if it is promised). They know that their primary fidelity is to Christ. Giving little pay to their services is unjust as they are unable to live decent lives and take care of themselves through their work. There is a need for clear contracts
between the religious and the diocese concerning the work furnished by religious. The dioceses often also accuse religious leaders of taking away a member without giving enough notice. Establishing contracts would also clarify the time limit for a particular apostolate and sister.

The question of property can also be a bone of contention in some dioceses. It is not always easy to obtain title deeds for one’s property which had been registered as belonging to the diocese. This differs a lot from one diocese to another.

**Challenges**

One of the main challenges I think is formation: how do I use my culture as a stepping stone to take on Christ’s mindset? We need to inculturate the formation of candidates, capturing the values that can enable one to live the vows in a meaningful way. Thus transformative faith can better influence actions, words and lifestyle.

There is the need to help the candidates discern their motivations and to purify them in the early years.

The need of ongoing formation, especially during the years of temporary vows is also felt, for living the vows entails personal and communal conversion in the ways of Christ. We need to continue becoming true witnesses of reconciliation, justice and peace. Formation is also entailed so as to learn to influence unjust structures.

Another challenge is for the congregations to be self-sustainable so that the members do not look for what they need outside, sometimes through inappropriate means. Professional training and the training of bursars is of capital importance.

One needs to help the families understand what religious life is about. As a Congregation one also needs some type of discerning policy as to how and when to help the families.

**Conclusion**

To conclude I would like to state that religious are a great wealth in the African Church and countries. Their love of Christ made visible through the vow of poverty enables them to reach out towards the poor, to share their conditions and to be truly “all to all”. The call we hear is for our Congregations to work together so as to better inculturate religious life in Africa and to help young congregations in their struggle to form their members.
MUST WE OBEY PEOPLE IN ORDER TO OBEY THE LORD JESUS?
THE DELICATE SUBJECT OF OBEDIENCE IN CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

Fr. Adrian Schenker, O.P.

Fr. Adrian Schenker O.P. was born in 1939 in Zurich and studied in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Jerusalem and Egypt. He was professor of Old Testament studies at the Biblical Institute of the University of Freiburg in Switzerland. Professor Schenker is a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and president of the Theological Commission of the Swiss Bishops Conference. He is author of many publications and articles, which have been translated into various languages in numerous international biblical and theological journals.

Original in French

1. Obedience in the life of Jesus’ disciples and in the community life of the Desert Fathers

The Desert Fathers wanted to obey their own master because the disciples obeyed Jesus as their Lord and Master. The renouncement of their own will is, in fact, a part of the lives of the disciples: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24 & 8:34, Lk 9:23). Renouncing or denying one’s self means surrendering control of oneself to another, who supplants our ego. It is no longer I who is in command. There is nothing more for me to desire or to refuse.

The super-human radicalism of this requirement reflects the obedience of Jesus himself towards his Father: “Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this chalice from me; yet not what I will, but what you will “(Mk 14:36 and the parallel texts in Matthew and Luke). The first generation of Christians will sing of Jesus: “He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). And, since “a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master” (Mt 10:24-25), obedience, as promoted and practiced by the Lord Jesus, becomes the very desire of his disciple and servant. He will want to live like his Master, to do what he has seen done by his Lord.
One cannot read the New Testament without bearing in mind the double renouncement of will that Jesus asks of anyone who wants to follow him, and which he himself lives in his relationship with the Father. In both situations we find the same fundamental requirement, the same overcoming of natural inclinations. And, since Jesus revealed to his disciples that he wanted to live this dependency with regard to the Father, they understood that the self-renouncement asked of them was based on that of Jesus himself.

John Cassian (late fourth and early fifth century) reports in conference 19.6 the example of Abbot John, who moved from the solitary anchorite life to the cenobitic life. John explained to a visitor of his why it was that he had made that choice, and it was for two reasons:

“For all the advantages of solitude certainly do not exceed that of not having any concerns for tomorrow or for power, in the submission until the very end to the guidance of an abbot, thus imitating in some way Him of whom it was said: ‘he humbled himself and became obedient unto death’ (Phil 2:8) and repeating humbly with him: ‘I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me’ (Jn 6:38).” In effect, a hermit is concerned with his livelihood, however modest it may be: with the sale of the product of his labour, with giving a hospitable welcome to those who pass by or come to visit; whilst the monk who lives in community is free of such concerns. Thus the monk can realize the evangelical precept of not worrying about tomorrow, as per the words of the Lord himself in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:34). The reward that comes from the fulfilment of this commandment of Jesus alone is comparable to all the fruits that are produced by a solitary life in the desert. It is quite evident that Abbot John is to be placed together with the disciples who are gathered around the teacher on the mountainside, and that he proposes, first and foremost, to follow the teachings of Jesus. It is for this reason that John preferred to live a cenobitic or community life over the life of a hermit, because it enabled him to obey all the better the Lord’s teaching regarding a trusting abandonment to divine providence.

Secondly, Abbot John adds, “he will be able to imitate” Jesus Christ, obedient to his Father. The term “to imitate” is similar to the original Latin aemulari: to emulate the Lord Jesus, who wanted to live in obedience. The monk, therefore, freely chooses the path of obedience to the abbot of his monastery in order to be able to do, in all humility, what Jesus himself did. In the monastery he wants to learn to do the same thing that Jesus asks his disciples to do in the Gospel.
2. The theological implications for the Desert Fathers of imitating Jesus and his disciples

It was in the late fourth century that Abbot John, whose words Cassian reports, sought to live out the obedience of Jesus in some way. He was convinced that this was possible not only in the time of Jesus, when he taught it personally to his disciples by his words and example, but also four centuries later, long after the Lord walked this earth. The submission of self to the abbot, made possible by the renunciation of the will, is for the monk exactly the same as that of the twelve apostles, and the other disciples, who lived in the presence of their master Jesus. Thus the monk, in a monastery, lives under the guidance of the Abbot in the same manner in which the disciples tried to conform themselves to the teachings of Jesus. He will receive the same “reward” as they, i.e. the joy that comes from a life lived with Jesus and according to his teachings.

The monks’ life then, makes present Christ amongst his disciples. It is like a sacrament, in the sense that for people living so long after Jesus and the twelve disciples, that same reality – of the Teacher, Jesus, who transmits his wisdom to his disciples – is re-presented in the person of the abbot who introduces the monks of his community to a life of conformity with Jesus Christ. It is of their own volition that the monks want, as did the Abbot John to whom Cassian’s Conference refers, to surrender their will and to submit to that of their abbot in order to live as Jesus himself lived in his relationship with the Father, and as he taught his disciples to live. Similarly, the monks wish to conform their lives to that of Christ and his disciples in order to gain the rewards associated with this life.

In a word, the obedience given to the Abbot is united to the obedience of Jesus and his disciples, as explained and demonstrated by the New Testament.

3. How can we become disciples of Jesus today?

Cassian appreciated the experience of Abbot John with conviction and admiration. Was he not right in proposing it to his many readers over the centuries as an example to follow? Such a strength of conviction is rooted in a faith in the ever-alive reality that is the word of Holy Scripture. The obedience of Jesus to the Heavenly Father and the requirement for obedience that Jesus imposes on those who want to follow him, thus retain all their truth. They have not passed away. That is why those who read the Scriptures with a living faith instinctively seek ways and opportunities that allow them to practice the example set by Jesus and so comply with his precepts as Teacher and Lord.

The Rule of St. Benedict expresses well the profound attraction which imposes on him a life marked by obedience to God. The prologue of the Rule is highly informative on this matter: “Listen, O my son, to the precepts of thy
Must we obey people in order to obey the Lord Jesus?

master, and incline the ear of thy heart, and cheerfully receive and faithfully execute the admonitions of thy loving Father, that by the toil of obedience thou mayest return to Him from whom by the sloth of disobedience thou hast gone away. To thee, therefore, my speech is now directed, who, giving up thine own will, takest up the strong and most excellent arms of obedience, to do battle for Christ the Lord, the true King.”

The instruction given to the son, that is to say to a young man still inexperienced in life, from a father who is full of affection, opens up the possibility of learning; the fatigue of the obedience required to return after the chaos caused by the quest for false freedom calls to mind the difficult return of the prodigal son; the battle of the soldier fighting under the banner of the true king, Christ, demonstrates the need for and benefit of obedience in bringing about the final victory.

These lines from the Prologue of the Rule of St. Benedict are imbued with Holy Scripture, and they imply a faith that is alive with the reality of its words. Even today it is possible to conform one’s life; according to Benedict, the Rule that he wrote seeks to be nothing more than a practical way of living the example and words that the Lord Jesus proposes to those who believe in him and in his teaching.

4. Is it legitimate to trust a human being in the name of the obedience owed to Lord Jesus?

Today, the main difficulty that stands in the way of a renouncement of personal will is the risk of manipulation and abuse. It is a grave risk, and those instances of an abuse of power in this area are extremely serious. History has witnessed innumerable cases. Obedience that is imposed to a person’s detriment can cause serious distress and alienation. Since such distresses and alienation have affected and still affect real people, it is imperative that we consider very seriously the danger of alienation and the great suffering that it causes.

Will faith in the truth of the words of Scripture, when they invite us to confidently undertake the way of self-renunciation, not falter before the risk of possible abuse? No; indeed it will retain its relevance, since human existence is not possible without obedience. In fact, it is impossible to do without obedience. St. Thomas Aquinas bases the obedience proper to the consecrated life on the omnipresent and universal necessity of understanding and constantly exercising our human capacity. It is clear that this is true for everyone, since by his very nature, the human being needs to gain in competence in all areas. The love of God and of neighbour is no exception in this regard: we must therefore learn and practice with diligence. But in order to learn, we need teachers who can teach us that which we want to learn: it is they who show us what to do. However, the teacher will not let be able to help us progress if we do not recognize his
authority. He must be able to give us guidance, which we in turn must accept with submissiveness and trust. Learning and obedience go hand in hand.

However, St. Thomas adds that “man can give nothing greater to God, than by subjecting his will to another man’s for God’s sake” (Summa Theologica, II-II, Question 186, Article 5, reply to objection 5). In order to give basis to this claim he cites John Cassian’s Conference 18.7, where the abbot Piamun, referring to corrupt monks, says: “Their main activity is to remain free from the yoke of the elderly, in order to have the freedom to with which to fulfil their own will (voluntates suas) … to do what they want. Hence they are far more dedicated to carrying out works of mercy, which they do day and night, than those who live in monasteries.”

This passage of Cassian, according to Thomas Aquinas, provides the role of “authority” with theological evidence. He contrasts monastic “works” with the renunciation of the will. These works have less value than the submission of one’s own will to that of the abbot. Let us try to understand why. These works are external activities that are only carried out when they stem from the will of the person himself. By submitting his own will instead to the will of another, thus doing what Christ did in relation to his Father, a person gives himself to Christ and to God. However, he must learn and put into practice, because all teachings regarding the way of perfection need to be learnt and assimilated through practice, under the watchful eye of a competent teacher to whom one confidently submits himself.

In conclusion, whilst obedience certainly exposes itself to great abuse, without it nothing would be learnt. It is therefore essential for the acquisition and development of human skills and capabilities. Amongst them, the gift of self to Christ and to God occupies pride of place because it corresponds to the love of God and Christ. This is the highest perfection possible for man: the consideration of human life in the light of faith.

5. Conclusion: the purpose and conditions of obedience in religious life in the light of Sacred Scripture

Religious obedience is the same as the obedience of the disciples to Jesus. They followed Jesus as their Master and they submitted their will to his. The consecrated life makes the Lord Jesus present for those who wish to follow in his school. He gives himself to them as their teacher. Under his leadership, his disciples learn to love God and their neighbour. It is a presence similar or analogous to that which is realized in the sacraments. Jesus is present through the Holy Spirit, and he manifests in that moment that which he once manifested in his human life on this earth. In the consecrated life, he teaches his disciples how to conform to the will of God by the renunciation of their own wills.
Similarly, the sacraments make the Lord present through the signs and words that indicate his presence. The will of the abbot or the community, which is expressed by their guides or leaders (in their constitutions, superiors and chapters), is a sign of the will of the Teacher, Jesus, to whom the disciples submit themselves voluntarily, with the aim of renouncing themselves and following Jesus who submitted himself to his Father.

Consecrated obedience cannot but be freely chosen and desired. Why did the disciples follow Jesus freely? They chose to do so. Indeed, they saw that Jesus was the true authority that came from God and they would have thus missed the greatest opportunity of their lives if they had ignored his call to follow him and to join his school. This was the cause of the drama surrounding the rich young man mentioned in the Gospel (Mt 19:16-30, Mk 10:17-22, Lk 18:18-30). Similarly, those who heard the call of Jesus to follow him in the consecrated life, freely and knowingly chose to submit to the will of their particular human authorities for fear of not showing recognition for the highest authority: that of Jesus.

Within communities of consecrated life the exercise of authority is a serious matter of conscience for those who are in authority, because their authority is a quasi-sacramental sign of the Teacher, Jesus. How should the authorities behave so as not to offend the Lord, whom they claim, and indeed must claim, to represent in concrete human form? He who has authority in religious life is no answerable to the demands of obedience than he who wishes to submit himself freely, because his authority should be similar to that of the Lord Jesus, of whose authority his is a sign and a representation.

Where authority and obedience are found, conflict can never be far. Indeed, even Peter did not want to let his beloved and revered teacher wash his feet (Jn 13:6-10). In these conflicts, the search for fair and equitable solutions is for both parties a form of humble self-renouncement, since such solutions are usually a compromise and thus require restraint and the abandonment of some of the rights that could have legitimately been claimed.

1 Jean Cassien, Conferences, éd. E. Pichery, t. 3, Sources chrétiennes 64, Paris: Le Cerf, 1959, p. 43-45.
2 Jean Cassien, Conférences (cf. note 1), p. 19. The text cited by St. Thomas is not the same as that of Sources chrétiennes. The latter text is difficult to understand, probably because it does not follow a particular order. For our purposes we have used the text of St. Thomas.
THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP IN CONSECRATED LIFE
A THEOLOGICAL VISION FOR OUR TIMES

Fr. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

Fr. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, a Claretian Missionary, is a Doctor of Theology, expert in Mariology and Consecrated Life. He is a professor at the Institute of Theology for Religious Life in Manila (the Philippines) and Madrid (Spain).

Original in Spanish

We do not live in an easy time for steering the ship of consecrated life, of our orders, congregations, institutions and communities. At times we have the impression that we are not steering the ship, but that the ship is simply floating, moored on the same patch of sea. We have in our hands precious documents that map the route towards new seas, but after a number of failed attempts, those who captain the boat tend to steer it to a safe haven and remain anchored there in the same reality, lacking in further wonder.

We know where we want to go, but do those who govern know how to lead the group to the desired destination? We thought that we had good leaders, but great have been the delusions we have suffered. How many leaders enjoy the respect and the trust of the majority? How many leaders have real authority? What effect do their words and their proposals have on our groups? Do they generate vision and communion or rather delusion and indifference?

Our leaders are overburdened with work, travel, meetings, acts of representation, important documents that need to be published, etc. They lack calmness: the calmness necessary to face challenges at a personal and institutional level. They tend to make use of simple resources, choose solutions that do not resolve anything or move other projects forward which correspond to current trends but offer no lasting solution.

We can see what the consequences are for an institution that has a leadership without vision or authority that has an incompetent leadership for
any length of time. On the other hand, an “ethic of renouncement” is hardly common amongst us and there are many superiors who think that “re-election” is an acknowledgement of and a reward for their work, thus increasing the number of instances where a leadership is actually worse in its second term.

We can evidence what I am saying in the political sphere (both within national and inter-national politics), in the ecclesiastical sphere and in that of the religious life.

We need guides and leaders. But the question is: what kind of leaders? Why do we need leadership? I would like to demonstrate now the change of perspective that a theological vision of leadership demands of us. I would like to outline the profile of such a leader and to examine how they might exercise their leadership in terms of service and authority.

“Another perspective” on leadership

1. Why the language of “Leadership”?

We have rarely applied the term “leadership” to the authorities within the Church and the consecrated life. It seems to be more of a lay term, unsuited to religious life. Tradition has handed down a different language: authority, divine power, sacred hierarchy, superiors. Society is changing. It prefers the language of “leadership”, which applies to a variety of areas in life: political, economic, entrepreneurial, academic and religious.¹ We speak and write much about female leadership. Consecrated life appears to be the principal female group that is self-governed and that retains great importance within the Church in its experience of leadership. ²

Consecrated life constitutes, within society and the Church, a space that contains much wisdom within which tradition and innovation can be brought together without too much conflict. For this reason, we are using more and more the terminology of “leadership” whilst considering as obsolete the terms “superior and subjects.” It is true that at certain levels, for example at that of a family, the term “leader” seems excessive. But above all, we demonstrate our acceptance of this terminology when we refer to the religious institute in its complexity and to its structure of leadership. With this change in terminology one can see that an important change is also happening in the concept of authority and obedience in religious life. What is this change? Could it be that behind this terminology is hidden a new form of authoritarianism? Therefore, the objective of this article is to link this new terminology with our rich tradition: I would like to present a “theology of leadership” and its theoretical-practical implications within religious life.

In our society of today the emphasis on leadership is very strong, and is
even at times exaggerated by those ‘gurus’ who speak and write on the subject. The expectations regarding a leader are at times so completely elevated that they become an almost idol-like figure. We begin from the assumption that the role of the leader is that of “managing” institutions. And we attribute the success or failure of these institutions to the leader.

The theory of the leader-manager rests on three things:

1) that human beings can control and enter into the future in an effective way, on condition that they are able to count upon appropriate techniques;

2) that individuals should be dedicated to the organisation’s objectives and to their superiors;

3) that relationships are fundamentally hierarchical and require clear guide lines that can be justified from the top and that are assumed co-responsibly from the bottom. This could lead to a kind of idolisation of the leadership.

We Christians appear critical when faced with this model. Certainly, be it in the Church or in religious life, we need leadership. The question is: how should we understand it? The problem lies in trying to understand leadership without theology. We need to reflect theologically on leadership and on what it brings. We find ourselves to be at an advantageous point, because we are on the brink of a Copernican revolution regarding our concept of “mission” and consequently, of our comprehension of the service of authority and leadership in this context.

2. From an Ecclesio-centric mission to a Theo-centric mission (“Missio Spiritus”)

We are refining more and more our comprehension of mission. That mission is, above all, an attribute of God rather than an activity of the Church. Some believe that this concept of mission is like a Copernican revolution. It is a move from an ecclesio-centric concept to a Theo-centric or Trinitarian-centric concept of mission. The one who carries out the mission is not primarily the Church; rather the Church, and of course the Holy Spirit, are their ally.

God is revealed as a “missionary God”, a “missionary Trinity”. The missions are born from the heart of God the Father who sent His Son to the world. The letter to the Jews explicitly calls Jesus “the Apostle” (Heb 3:1), which is to say ‘one who is sent.’ The fourth gospel also presents Jesus as he who was sent by the Father to the world to become the way, the truth and the life of humanity. The entire life of Jesus was a response to a missionary vocation (Jn 4:34). At a certain point Jesus relativizes his mission and says to his disciples: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I
go away, for if I do not go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” (Jn 16:7). On the cross, Jesus had completed his mission, exclaiming “Consummatun est” (Jn 19:28; 30). And so he “gave up his Spirit” (Jn 19:30), and this was poured upon his disciples, upon the world, and upon all flesh (cf. Act 2:17).

The mission of the Spirit is intimately connected with the historical mission of Jesus: the Spirit neither cancels him out nor substitutes him. The Spirit in its mission always evokes Jesus, remembers him, and makes him present. The Spirit of the cosmos, of nature, of humanity – confessed by all religions – is, above all, the Spirit of Jesus. It is because of this that those who do not know Jesus do not know the mystery of the Spirit (Jn 14:16-17). But the Spirit will teach us all, remind us of all (cf. Jn 14:26), and will bear testimony to Jesus, and the disciples will join in this song of testimony (Jn 15:26-27). The wisdom of the Spirit knows how best to introduce into our societies the teachings and works of Jesus, it knows how to draw all to the crucified Lord. But the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, which in union with the Church – the Bride – constantly attests to his coming: ‘The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let him who hears say, “Come”’ (Rev 22:17).

Through the Church as the Body of Christ, the Spirit carries out the mission that God the Father and the Risen Lord entrusted him with. To realise this, the Spirit incorporates every person and every community into the Body of Christ and gives them special charisms, like energy, with which they can participate in its mission. From the mission of the Spirit is born the Church: the mission is the mother of the Church. The mission was not entrusted to the Church, but the Church was entrusted to the Mission of the Spirit.

3. From a hierarchical leadership to a participatory leadership (perichóresis)

From this theological perspective we deduce that he who invents, plans, organises, evaluates and realizes the mission is not the leader of the church; it is instead the Mission of the Spirit that makes use of people and that visibly manifests the leadership of the Spirit. But neither is the Spirit autonomous in itself: it is the expression of the “Missio Dei”, of the will of the Father (Abba), and it is he who continues the mission of Jesus. Between the three persons of the Trinity there is an ebbing to-and-fro, a very intimate intercommunication that renders the persons different, while at the same time generating among them the greatest communion. Theological tradition has called this relationship “perichóresis”.

The doctrine of “perichóresis” may help us to elaborate a theology of missionary-religious leadership. Religious leadership flows from the Triune
God. According to this perspective a person is not a leader because of their natural qualities or their charisms or because of having received training or preparation for such a role, nor are they a leader because they themselves have the authority and power to guide the group. God is the source of Christian leadership. We do not govern for God, or in the name of God, but we participate in the leadership of God... Graham Buxton rightly said: “Having a vision of ministry is having a vision of God in His ministry.”

It is not the missionary minister that guides the Church, but Christ that guides his Church according to the will of the Father, with the power and in the power of the Spirit. But the doctrine of the “perichóresis” is essential if we are to understand this correctly.

The word “perichóresis” has a rich theological history. It has proved to be a flexible term. Applied in Christology it referred to the reciprocal nature of the action between the human and divine nature of Jesus. There is no fusion or confusion between the two natures – divine and human – of Jesus; instead there is inter-penetration and inherent unity (Maximus the Confessor). Applied to the persons of the Trinity this means that, whilst preserving the identity and the distinction of each of the three divine persons, the three people maintain an on-going mutual relationship (St. Athanasius) in such a way as to establish among themselves a “mutual interiority” (Miroslav Volf), an “inter-penetration with each other”, a “co-inherence” (Karl Barth, Gerald O’Collins), without ceasing to be distinct.

We, the disciples of Jesus, have been invited to participate in this “Trinitarian perichóresis.” Jesus has revealed this in his priestly prayer at the Last Supper, according to the fourth Gospel: “that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:21). We were invited to participate in this intimate and ontological dance of the Triune God. In ancient times “perichóresis” would have been understood in relation to the dance. The divine dance always leaves room for others to participate. We have been invited to participate in this giving and taking: in worship and in mission.

4. From a charismatic leader to a servant leader of the Spirit

The invitation to participate in the “Missio Dei” and the Trinitarian “perichóresis” has profound implications for a theology of Christian leadership.

A person is a leader of a group or a community or a congregation, not so much for his skills in the technique of direction, as for a movement of grace that comes from the most Holy Trinity that envelops and activates them. The leader spreads this divine leadership throughout their community by going outside of themselves (ecstasy) and by entering into relationship (mutuality,
This divine leadership is, above all, humble service, loving kenosis in relationship with the other, with what is different.

This is the “authority” that we receive from God (John 19:11): a movement of mutual giving and handing over between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the authority that comes from God does not impose itself, but attracts the other and secures their trust by way of humble service. Being chosen to participate in the leadership of the invisible Spirit of Jesus over a redeemed world, the Church, the consecrated life and its communities is a gift and a grace. This theological foundation of spiritual leadership is not to be confused with the theory of “management”! Being a leader is not about being a manager but being a person who tries to make visible the guidance of the Spirit of Jesus through his humble service.

According to this perspective the problem is not whether there are any people who have the charism of leadership, but whether there are people willing to participate in and contribute to the flow of God’s grace that pours out on the world generally, or on a community or group. St. Paul has given us - as did the philosopher and sociologist Max Weber in the last century - a technical definition of “charism”. In traditional theology “charisms” are defined as grace “gratis data”, which in itself does not sanctify those to whom it is granted, as opposed to grace “gratum faciens”. This duality and opposition is not found in the thought of St. Paul. When he speaks of gifts (charis-mata), he always considers them from the perspective of grace (charis). Ministers are, according to St. Paul, the concrete means by which God manifests His grace amongst people. Any ability, occupation, position, circumstance, relationship or life experience of a believer can be described as a “charism”, a spiritual gift, when considered from the perspective of God’s grace being given to us and when it plays a special role in the Body of Christ, the Church. The emphasis is on God and His grace and not on people and their gifts. The emphasis is on “perichóresis” and a participatory and ministerial role.

For this reason a Christian leader does not establish hierarchical relations from top to bottom: we are all called to participate in the dissemination of grace, which flows from the bosom of God the Father and by the mediation of Jesus and the Spirit. The way in which the leadership of Jesus and his Spirit is exercised (the “discretion of God”) is a method that not only the Church, but also any kind of political, economic, academic, or religious leadership must adopt. Leaders must not dominate, but ensure that grace flows everywhere and can revitalize everything. Those people who apparently do not possess the charism of leadership (as understood in secular terms) can be leaders in the Spirit inasmuch as they let God be God and themselves become “patrons” of everything that God’s leadership expresses and does, relying as it does on
everyone. It is not a matter of imposing their own vision but of sharing it with everyone, and, on the basis of the diversity and communion of persons, to find a new vision to achieve the mission that the Spirit wants to achieve at that moment. Leadership must never rest on one person alone. If the leadership is based on the Triune God, it must be a shared leadership. Simon Peter can be the leader of the community of Jesus only when he expresses his love with an irrevocable covenant; as is the case with Paul and John, who lead their communities into an ever-deeper intimacy with the Triune God (Eph 1, John 17).

5. Three images of a participatory leadership

It is leadership, understood in this sense, which harmonizes diversity into a unity. This is the most profound intention of the Spirit of God and Jesus: to generate diversity to unexpected limits, to express itself in this diversity and to open up the hearts of people so as to harmonize this diversity into one, great, common project, from which no one is excluded.

Leadership has been compared to the agricultural image of the shepherd: the king of Israel was considered the “shepherd of his people”. He would have had to take care of his people, guide them, ensure they wanted for nothing, nurture them, and protect them. Psalm 22 is the most beautiful expression of a God who shepherds His people. However, Jesus further expanded this image, beginning from the perspective of perichôresis: he knows each of them by name; he gives his life for those who have been entrusted to him; he ensures that no one is lost, and if they are he goes out in search of them and once found, celebrates with them. The image of shepherd expresses the profound personal interest of God in His people.

Another image of leadership is that of the “wounded healer”, which Henri Nouwen presented in a marvellous manner. This talks about the compassion of the leader as itself therapeutic and healing. The leader is not disinterested in the suffering of his community and of the persons that make up the community. In fact he feels the wounds of others as his own, suffers their pain, and identifies with the suffering caused by the loss of their own objective, the status of superiority. The leader – according to the image of the wounded healer – is he who realizes the beatitudes of Jesus. “Blessed are those who cry, because they will be comforted”: the evangelical leader comforts – rendering visible the action of God the consoler – he understands, he does not condemn. In this way those who suffer feel the nearness of God Himself. This type of leadership demands a strong sense of compassion, of empathy, because it also comprises the suffering of God. Do we not say of Jesus that “with his stripes we are healed” (Is 53:5)?
Another image of leadership is that of the “wise fool” or that of the “shaman”. He who participates in the leadership of God cannot be a rational, calculating, realist, who tends to repeat the past and its obsolete traditions. The wise fool participates in the desire of God that leads us towards the New Jerusalem, to the new heaven, the new earth. Because of this, those who share this sensibility do not bind others to a past that no longer exists and do not defend that which kills off the future. They believe in the magic of the sensible and do not transform the natural world into a market. They are interested in alternative visions; they are attentive to the signs given by the Spirit, however strange they may seem. A few years ago the Abbot General of the Cistercian order of strict observance convened a General Chapter using these words: “Less common sense and more foolishness”. This image represents well the eschatological and apocalyptic character of the service of leadership, which moves in the path of the Spirit. Leadership is an intentional movement that regards the future. It leads that which should be. In this way the letter to the Jews presents Jesus as the “archegos” (author) of salvation and faith (Heb 2:10, 12:2), that is, the pioneer leader who leads us to the Promised Land, towards a future yet unknown.

II. The Profile of a Leader

We will now examine the profile of a suitable leader for those groups that seek to be always open to the will of God and to the action of the Spirit in the world.

1. The Symbolic Profile

The role of the leader in the consecrated life at all its levels is very important for both its symbolic character and the concrete responsibilities of governance. The symbol unites, inspires, motivates....We are reminded of Jesus. He used to express himself under the symbolic profile of “Son of man”. This image of the apocalyptic prophet Daniel allowed us to ÿÿ grasp the transcendence of his person so as not to remain at the level of external appearances. At times, he even gave the impression of speaking with another person altogether. This occurs when we use symbolic language: when we refer to the “father- or mother-general” as we might to a character in whom reside notions that are fundamental to the Institute.

For a group, for a congregation, this symbolic character as successor to the symbolic leadership of the founders is very important. But even more so, this symbolic character is identified with the “Missio Spiritus,” in which lies its fidelity to the Spirit and the ability to reject the influence of “evil spirits.” These latter are well-known names to us: the seven deadly sins. How different
The Challenge of Leadership in Consecrated life

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

it is to lead a group motivated by ambition, greed, anger, jealousy, arrogance and laziness, from guiding a group inspired by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus!

We have a simple ritual for discerning the expression of the “Missio Spiritus” within our leaders: we pray for them in public, and sometimes we ritualise our adherence to that which they symbolize. Respect for those who represent all of us is tantamount to respect for all. A group can demand this or for ask it. The devaluation of the figures of Superior-General, Provincial or Local goes far beyond the strictly personal sphere; it turns into contempt for the represented group and the collective charism.

The election of our superiors is about choosing a life-giving and personal symbol for a given period of time. The Superior-Generals and their governance are not only re-vested with symbolism, but they must lend their actions a symbolic character; they should not underestimate symbolic gestures, but they should rather introduce a new symbolism adapted to the new times.

I’m not the best person to say what these symbols should be; however, some examples might be the choosing of symbolic places for certain Assemblies, the choice of actions or gestures that may be more significant for the Institute in its totality and internationality, and the choice of images, symbols and signs which embody the charism of the present time.

Focusing on the theme of the symbolic figure of the Superior-General is very important, as are the symbolic gestures of our leaders, the symbolism in their self-presentation and their mode of expression, the use of symbolism in their mode of governance. The effectiveness of the symbolic is far greater than that of what is merely instrumental. But how rapidly diminished is the Superior-General’s symbolic capacity when it is discovered that they are biased, self-interested, and profiteering!

2. The Anthropological Profile

Our leaders must be capable of realizing, bringing to fulfilment and guiding the life and the mission - the plan for which results from the discernment of the Institute in its General or Provincial Chapter, or the community Assembly - as a prompting of the Spirit, and as participating in the great “Missio Dei”. We must add that, when the Spirit calls us to work with him, he is not asking for passive obedience, but he asks us to put our whole selves at the service of his plan. With this in mind, we can and must speak of an anthropological profile of the leader.

Today we require a leadership that is innovative and transformative. Given this, the qualities that a leader should have are as follows:

* vision: to bring about the necessary changes, an organization must have
vision. That vision is like an attractive prospect which galvanises everyone into action, or like a credible future that draws everyone to bring it about;

* an agent of change: someone who will intervene in order to resolve any difficulties. Problems should be resolved and not left unresolved;

* a team player: leadership is not the task of an individual, but that of a group; governance is now so complex that only as a team can one respond to the will of God in our time;

* openness to learning new things: a person who creates the space needed for his own on-going formation in a world of continuous change, especially in technology; a missionary who does not get carried away by the activism and desire of the Government or the omnipresence of the exterior;

* credibility due to honesty: they must have those moral qualities which inspire respect and confidence. Honesty is one of the most appreciated of qualities in a leader. Honesty manifests itself in the correspondence of words and actions or events. The Austrian researcher Hans Selye (1993) stated that “leaders are only truly leaders when they nourish respect and loyalty towards their followers.”

To these we can add other qualities, such as the willingness to take risks; the ability to make decisions, especially in difficult situations; and the capacity to get to know the people, the mission and the work well. Genuine leaders also know their own strengths as well as their limitations and weaknesses, and act on the basis of that knowledge. These leadership skills can be learnt, but only a person with an instinct for leadership knows when and how to use these skills.

III. Leadership as authority and service

It is quite common to hear said that our superiors or leaders were elected “to serve”. We often speak of a “service of authority”. Jesus himself said: “I came not to be served but to serve”. What is not made explicit and concrete is the question, what does it mean to serve? We also speak of authority: but what does authority mean? Let us recall!

1. Leadership of service

The most natural thing for us is not to serve but to be served. We do not innately tend towards serving. We serve because someone asks us or orders us to do so or, perhaps, because our situation requires it. When we serve, a twofold feeling is born within us: the kindness of service and, at times, a bitter resentment or a certain repressed hostility. An awareness of our own human dignity does not permit us to assume an attitude of service to another person
equal to us without it being reciprocated, since it otherwise reduces us to the status of servant. Other words related to the word “service” include servant, slave, slavery, servitude, servility. All these words derive from the Latin word, “servus”. In our culture, service does not confer power. Power is held by those who demand or the system that requires service.¹⁴

Politicians promise us “good services” and “quality services”. Most developed societies have improved services such as transportation, control systems, financial, public safety, media, food production, household appliances, etc. This improvement of services is linked to the progress of technology and the introduction of “new generation” equipment. However, this type of service is impersonal.

There are other types of quality services that are personal: such as a car and driver, personalised services, customer care, etc. Personalized services place the person before the service. One person serves another: “I am at your service, you are in my service.” In a master/slave relationship service, including personalised service, is not a service of alliance, of reciprocity. Only those who act with charity can offer a personalised service, without being influenced by the repressed hostility that service provokes. We have personalized services that do not take the person into account, but instead only the remuneration obtained through them. The service is identified with the employment. The work becomes a ritual activity that functions not for someone, but for something.

When we talk about the improvement of services, we should not only refer to the impersonal services, but also to the improvement of the personal services. What really humanises is the improvement of services to individuals (personal service), not as employment but as a calling that is free.

Authentically human service has an aesthetic dimension. Quality service gives rise to expressions of praise such as superb, elegant, beautiful, divine, incredible, wonderful! Good service gratifies both the giver as well as the receiver of the service. In addition, this beauty positively affects both the person serving – dignifying their service – and those who receive the service - dignifying their personhood - (like the unknown woman in the Gospel who anoints Jesus with expensive perfume: Mk 14:3-9). The quality of service therefore has a close relationship with beauty. The excellence of service improves the quality of life and beautifies it.

Within a global vision of the world we can perceive that everything is related and consequently, in a relationship of mutual service. Nothing and no one is isolated, and therefore the relationship of service enlivens the world. When someone only wants to be served, it bars the dynamism of life and creates dead space. Service does not occur only within human or interpersonal relations, but also within relations with the animal world, with the plant
The Challenge of Leadership in Consecrated Life

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

world, and with all of nature. Service is environmentally friendly. Interdependence with biocenosis, with habitats, with the ecosystem makes us accountable for the life of the planet and all who inhabit the planet. As part of the ecological system we are both givers and receivers, servants and served. Can we define a service that is "good for the soul of the world" as a "good service"? When a certain way of behaving or an action harms the world, we must ask ourselves: how much does it cost? What are we mortgaging our future for?

This understanding of service requires a commitment, a continuous attention to the Other. Sometimes this service becomes therapeutic. The Greek word ‘therapy’ is translated as attention and service. A therapist was one who welcomed, who served and, therefore, was able to cure. Service makes us therapists in reality, to our brothers and sisters. Service is an adequate ecological response, obedience to the whole. The whole which I obey converts me into a receiver of its wellbeing. Good service increases value and beauty.

2. Leadership with Authority

We know that the word authority comes from the Latin word “auctoritas”, which in turn derives from the Latin “augere”, which signifies “to grow.” Authority is therefore to do with growth, with the ability to grow.

a) Growth and its ambivalence

What grows is that which increases in size, which expands or enlarges. That which grows evolves in form and function, progresses, passes from one stage to another until maturity. A sign of growth is self-generation that allows for autonomy, independence. On the basis of this etymological and original meaning, “the service of authority” may be seen as a service that makes something grow, expand, evolve, progress and achieve independence.

The word “growth” was one of the magic words from the world of business, politics. We like to hear from our politicians that “our nation is growing.” It flatters us to know that our institutions, the number of people, our apostolic initiatives, institutions and economy “are growing.”

But we forget that the magic word “growth” is not innocent, as it does not only express something positive. Growth is not always advantageous. Maturing also means withering and dying. Becoming independent also means becoming isolated. Some growth leads to obesity. Jean Baudrillard spoke of an “obesity of systems “, which is reflected in the obesity of information, of communication, of control and of consumerism. Obesity distorts reality and makes it become flaccid: whilst reality is extended it loses consistency. Obesity is a meaningless, almost cancerous, repetition of the same thing. Information is increased, the
data is multiplied, catalogues and the products are increased, but the question remains, why?

However, growth continues to be marked by positivity: fertility, hope, good health, progress, optimism, strength. This is why we say: “to grow or to die”. However, today we talk about “sustainable” growth. Following on from our initial point we can say that growth - naively understood – is not a therapeutic solution for the world’s ills.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{b) Leadership that causes growth... but in what way?}

So, in our understanding of growth, we include the sort of authority that is conducive to growth. It is an authority that has as its objective a quantitative growth which multiplies laws, rules, programs, relationships, meetings, foundations and innovations. It promotes and helps the brothers to be good workers, because they are satisfied with what they do; ensuring that, without undue risk to their health, they are motivated and work to achieve good results. This model of authority has often been identified with that of the authority of a “manager”. This leads to the creation of an obese, gargantuan institution, which lacks consistency: a giant with feet of clay, an increasingly inept and possibly cancerous obesity.\textsuperscript{17}

Growth can also be understood in a further two ways. We must ask ourselves what helps us to advance, to grow and to progress today in an authentic and fruitful way.

Authentic authority manifests itself when growth results in a greater maturity and when it has a positive influence on everything.

The authority of a leadership that produces growth must express itself today in the following terms: profundity, intensity, detachment, self-emptying, simplification and memory.

\textit{A leadership of depth: }this type of leadership promotes growth that is born from within, from the inner, spiritual world that constitutes a part of us. The personalised services for each of our brothers and sisters within the Institute are aimed at supporting lives founded with a religious and spiritual depth. Without the interior life, exterior action is empty and useless. The principle and the richest characteristic of our human interiority is not the intellectual world but the affective, that of love. The “seventh mansion” - according to the metaphor that St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus used to describe the last stage of the spiritual journey - is not characterised by knowledge, but by a love which “transcends all knowledge.” To serve the interior life is to help our brothers and sisters to live “in love,” to allow themselves to be inhabited by Love. “If I... have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13:2). The St
Pauls of today are those who feel possessed by a great and passionate love. Love transforms our inner life into the “abode”, the “seventh mansion”, that is, the perfect interiority, which is inhabited by God, the cosmos and all our brothers and sisters. In the mystical terms of Thérèse of the Child Jesus we can say that the service of authority, in this dimension, helps our brothers and sisters to walk the way of the “interior castle” to the extent of making one’s own interiority into an authentic home.

A leadership of “densification”: real growth implies the intensification - as presupposed - and “densification” - as the result. It is interesting to note that in German the word for poet is Dichter and the word for poem is Gedicht. The German word “Dichten” signifies a making dense (a densification). Poetry is the artistic result of good densification. Much is said with few words. What is ‘falling in love’ if not an intensification or densification of the love that inhabits us? By a small fragment the whole is revealed. Poetry permits us to enjoy the miniscule, the miniature. The power of the intense is contrasted with the empire of vastness. The most life-giving processes are always those of concentration, of intensity, of a quality of density. An authority that densifies leaves aside the immediacy, the efficacy and the sheer greatness, and instead cultivates the miniature, the small, that which actually generates life and not a sterile grandeur. Intensification is not achieved with dramatic gestures, or with rapid and hasty actions. Intensification is the result of a slow, leisurely, serene and persevering pace.

A leadership of repetition: there exists a model of repetition that is neurotic and cancerous. But there is another type of iteration, of repetition, which is life-giving and absolutely necessary. Contemplation comes from repetition, beauty needs to be continuously contemplated, and love is kept alive only on the basis of a reiterating language of love. A human being who is constantly being created, who is always in search of fashions and novelties, constantly introducing innovations into his life, and who is independent of ritual, custom, usage, is a broken human being without a centre. An authority that puts itself at the service of a permanent innovation, which is carried away by current trends and which does not allow anyone to succeed is not needed, since it dissipates and destroys. Given all this it should be clear that the repetition of a defect becomes cancerous. For this reason, bad traditions result in death. The repetition of a prayer simply because it is prescribed is lifeless and of no use. The carrying out of traditional practices which are already outdated and flawed, only brings death. What in principle should be a virtue becomes a vice, a habit that is evil.

A leadership of detachment and self-emptying: there are times when, in order to grow we must prune, clean and even die. Jesus communicated this to
The Challenge of Leadership in Consecrated life

us in various ways in his allegory of life. Even St. Paul said that he brought the death of Jesus with him everywhere, “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Cor 4:10). Some years ago the theologian J.B. Metz, in referring to the religious life, spoke of “ars moriendi charismatica.” By this he was indicating that it is not only charismatic to grow, but also to die. However, there exists a charismatic art of dying to what will not give life in the future to the charisms themselves. Fear hinders change. Just as people do, organizations accumulate systems, tools and procedures that protect from the fear of change. We must learn to die, to turn away, to empty ourselves in order to grow. This is the art of the authority that encourages growth.

A leadership of simplification: we speak today - and quite rightly – of an obesity of systems. We are accumulating so much information that systems become obese: an obesity that prevents us from moving forward. We overly technify the evangelical life. Why so much information, so many relationships? Yes, the written history is the official history, but not the real one. Historical memory is often a partial and biased memory. It becomes necessary to somehow reach a simplification. It is important to unburden life and look to what is essential. Less work marathons and more wisdom and openness towards the revelation that is being effected today and which energizes us!

A leadership of the memory: we need to move from “memories” to “memory.” It is important to achieve one great synthesis of the “memory” of recent times. Memory does not mean an examination of our work and efforts, but remembering the action of God in our Institute and our response to and collaboration with His project. Remembering also entails a purification of the memory. We know to what extent the power of evil can penetrate the Congregation as well as individuals. The scandals which have come into public view little by little show that all that glitters is not gold, that a religious community can also be a place of corruption, of institutionalised infidelity. When evil is present amongst us, we should not only seek out the guilty, but examine to what extent the system cooperates with it.

Conclusion

We are well equipped with navigational aids. We must continue to move forward and to accelerate the regeneration that is offered to us. We do not need supermen or superwomen as leaders, but people who are aware of their duties, their mission and their service.

The ships must take up their voyage again, blown by the wind of the Spirit. We must take advantage of favourable moments.
“Service” is the magic word for the authorities in religious life. “Growth,” “to encourage growth” is the first function of authority. To offer a service of growth is the same as the “service of authority.” Religious life finds itself in at a point where it needs to grow and also needs service that is life-giving. We must not prevaricate. Without that intensity, any expansion is empty and sterile. Without that depth, missionary work is simply a job and life merely an existence or a survival.

We know where we need to aim for. Leaders, put your groups on that road! Change your vision, put aside your personal views, let yourselves be transformed by reality and do not be faithful to yourselves, but to the God of history! Do not deal with the Evil One. Do not shepherd yourselves. Do not accept mafias and favouritisms which impose their own law against those who are excluded from your group. Stand for everyone and everyone will follow you. Therefore, rather than seeking to present yourselves, seek to resemble the Good Shepherd, the only leader: the one who has the authority of the Father.


5 Karl Barth was the only one to include Mission in his systematic theology. In his book, I (1935) - sketch of his systematic theology - the mission was presented in this perspective.

The Challenge of Leadership in Consecrated Life


9 In 1 Jn 4:13 we find this relationship with the Spirit.

10 The charisms are defined as "ability, divine ability distributed by the Holy Spirit to all believers according to the design and the grace of God for the common good of the whole body of Christ": this notion is rightly disputed by some experts: cf. SIEGFRIED S. Schatzmann, A Pauline theology of charismata, Hendrickson, Peabody, 1987; KENNETH BEARING, What are Spiritual Gifts? Rethinking the conventional view, Kregel, Grand Rapids, 2006.

11 Paul uses the word ‘charismata’ 17 times in the NT for different realities, from the “gift of God is eternal life” (Rom 6:23) to “we have different gifts” (Rom 12:6). It means salvation (Rom 5:15), “eternal life” (Rom 6:23), “marital state” (1 Cor 7:7), his visit to Rome (Rom 1:11: this is the only passage which corresponds to the Greek words “spiritual gift”).

12 Nouwen opens the way for a new understanding of leadership: personal closeness to the social function. It is the image of Jesus who cries before Jerusalem, and who communicates his mission as a hen gathers her chicks and shares his pain, his fear (Luke 13:34). Today, many people look for the protection of a new inwardness and spirituality. This is a small, free reflection of leadership: Henri J. M., Nouwen, El sanador herido, PPC Editorial y Distribuidora. Madrid, 2000.


17 “Going on now means going downward into the faults of our culture and backward into the grief of its memories. Today we need heroes of descent, not masters of denial; examples of maturity that know how to stand sadness, who show love for the elderly, who show soul without irony or shame. Mentors and not animators; mentors and not promoters. It is better for sadness to stay in high places than have depression become an epidemic in the populations and economy. JAMES HILLMAN, Tipos de poder. Guía para pensar por uno mismo, ed. Granica, Buenos Aires, Barcelona, 2000, p. 55.

The long line forms early in the morning outside a small, simple structure near the Mariposa Port of Entry in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico. The facial expressions and body language of some of the men, women and children there communicate clearly what they are feeling: profound depression, deep sadness, great uncertainty and palpable fear. Many of them have been deported to Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, a destination for thousands of migrants deported to Mexico by the United States every year. Intermingled in the group are also Central Americans, many from Honduras, who have ridden “la bestia”, the train that arrives from southern Mexico, on which they have risked their very lives to come to the desert region of Ambos Nogales, along the U.S./Mexico border.

As these downtrodden men, women and children cross the threshold of the “comedor,” they are met by Jesuits from the Mexican Province and by the Missionary Sisters of the Eucharist, a women’s religious congregation based in Colima, Mexico. They are guided to a table where they await the morning meal. They have arrived at the CAMDEP, the Aid Center for Deported Migrants in Nogales, Sonora, a work of the Kino Border Initiative, a bi-national migrant ministry located in Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora, Mexico.

In January 2009, the Missionary Sisters of the Eucharist, the California and Mexican Provinces of the Society of Jesus, Jesuit Refugee Service/USA, the Diocese of Tucson and the Archdiocese of Hermosillo inaugurated this project, to work with a foot on each side of the border to provide a comprehensive response to the reality of migration. This event was the culmination of an eighteen-month needs assessment conducted by the California Province and
the JR Sj USA (USA Jesuit Refugee Service), to explore the possibility of beginning a migrant work on the border between the States of Arizona and Sonora. Interviewees were asked two simple questions: what are the greatest needs you see and experience with respect to migration, and do you think we can help? People talked about the need for more migrant services in Nogales, Sonora, especially for women and children who were vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. They expressed a deep desire for educational opportunities on migration and the Catholic Church’s teaching on this critical issue. It was also mentioned that any effort would need to be bi-national, since the issue of migration is a reality that crosses borders. A proposal was developed to begin a bi-national migrant work, which would focus on humanitarian assistance, education and research/advocacy.

The CAMDEP comprises part of the humanitarian support provided to migrants in such tremendous need and distress. They receive two meals a day along with clothing and pastoral support. Nazareth House, a shelter for women and children, hosts up to eight women and children at one time, and provides a safe space where women can eat, sleep, call their families and receive pastoral and psychological support. The KBI also staffs a first aid station to attend to migrants with injuries such as severely blistered feet, dehydration and flu symptoms.

In addition, the KBI engages in educational activities by hosting visiting delegations who want to learn more about the border and about migration. Frequently, the most powerful and transformative experience happens when groups dialogue with the migrants themselves about their experience. Deep solidarity emerges between them and numerous visitors leave with the desire to commit themselves to the issue. At the same time, the KBI goes to various parishes and other organizations to offer educational programming that help raise awareness and inspire action.

In the area of research/advocacy, the KBI hosts scholars and students interested in doing research that contributes to their respective academic fields as well as to the KBI’s ministry. Topics have included “student service learning” and “nursing care for migrants.” Through the collection of data in the CAMDEP, the KBI shares data with partner organizations in Mexico City and Washington, for the purpose of supporting positive policy change.

In 2010, the Kino Border Initiative and Lourdes Catholic School (LCS), a work of the Minim Daughters of Mary Immaculate, applied for and received a $5,000 grant from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, to create a student club called the “Kino Teens.” With this financial support, the KBI and LCS organized students to provide direct service at the Aid Center for Deported Migrants, by serving meals and by providing support to migrants.
They also offered presentations to religious educators and to youth from the Diocese of Tucson and carried out two border immersion experiences for local youth. Thanks to a “Quest for Justice” grant from the California Province Jesuits, three students facilitated educational activities on migration for students at Bellarmine College Preparatory and St. Ignatius College Preparatory, two Jesuit schools in Northern California. Through a “youth-teaching-youth” model, these young people helped shape the hearts and minds of peers who live and study far from the U.S./Mexico border. In the area of advocacy, LCS students made a visit to a Congressional office and a Senate office in Tucson, Arizona, to urge their representatives to support and pass just and humane immigration reform, as articulated by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. These students clearly exhibited the ideal expressed by their school, that they be men and women who are “beyond the ordinary.”

The collaboration among the six organizations has been deeply blessed and challenging at the same time. The staff and Board of Directors continue to learn about how to work together while respecting and valuing the great diversity of nationality, language, gender and religious charism. At the same time, after three years of working in Ambos Nogales, the KBI has experienced firsthand the spirit of Jesus, who with his friends feeds the thousands who were hungry and in need. (Mark 8:1-10) Though the task seems impossible, when they work together and offer what they have, everyone is fed, everyone is satisfied. Through our collaboration, we trust that Jesus will care for the migrants we serve, as well as the people we educate and those who benefit from the research and advocacy that is conducted. As we continue our ministry along the U.S/Mexico border, we, like Jesus, experience the anointing of the Spirit “to bring good news to the poor” and “to let the oppressed go free.” (Luke 4:18) With God’s help and the assistance of many volunteers, we are confident that this word will be fulfilled in our hearing. (Luke 4:21)
During these spring months, three National Conferences of Religious visited the seat of the UISG on the occasion of their visits to the various Roman Dicasteries:

* 7th March 2012 – the Spanish Conference, the CONFER, represented by its President, Fr. Elias Royón, SJ, and by the Secretary-General, Sr. Julia García Monge, ICHDP.

* 26th March 2012 – the Canadian Conference of Religious, the CRC, represented by its President, Sr. Mary Finlayson, RSCJ, and by the Director-General, Fr. Yvon Pomerleau.

* 23rd April 2012 – the two Conferences of Religious in the United States, the CMSM and LCWR, represented by their respective Presidents.

During these visits, meetings were held with the executive Council of the UISG and the USG, which presented an opportunity for a fraternal discussion of the issues relevant to the state of Religious Life in their respective countries.

Sr. Mary Lou Wirtz represented the UISG, in her capacity as its President, at the XV Assembly of the Union of European Conferences of Major Superiors (UCESM), which took place in Lourdes (France) from the 19th to the 25th March. Some hundred members of 27 nationalities considered and shared their thoughts on the theme of: “Religious Men and Women in Europe: life as vocation.” During the Assembly a new Executive Council, with Fr. Giovanni Peragine, CCRSP as its President, was elected.

From the 21st to the 28th March the secretary-generals of the UISG and the USG, as members of the Vatican delegation, participated in the Pre-Assembly on Mission, organised by the World Council of Churches (WCC) of Geneva and took place in Manila (Philippines). Approximately two-hundred members of different Christian churches participated and considered the principal theme in order to produce a preparatory document for the 2013 Ecumenical Assembly in Korea.

“The Council of 18,” which is formed of nine men Superior-Generals and nine women Superior-Generals of missionary Congregations, and is convoked twice a year by Propaganda Fidae and presided over by Cardinal-Prefect Fernando Filoni, has begun an examination of the practicalities of the religious vows in Africa. On the 15th May, it held a day of reflection on the vow of poverty, which was presented on from both the point of view of
male and female religious, as well as that of the Dicastery which collates the opinions of the Bishops.

“The Council of 16,” made up of the two executives of the UISG and the USG, convoked by the CIVCSVA and presided over by Cardinal-Prefect João Braz de Aviz, met for the first time on the 18th May. The meeting’s topic was Relations between the Religious Life and Pastors or Clerics, which is a reflection of the Council’s desire to examine the theme of Church-Communion. Two subsequent meetings will focus on relations with the laity and with other movements. The dynamism that was present and the attitude of openness lent themselves to a positive dialogue that looked towards a moving forward in communion and to concrete achievements.

On the 26th May, the JPIC Commission organised a seminar aimed at Superior-Generals and Formators, with the objective of bringing about a focus on justice in formation. A conference entitled “Jesus the Prophet of God’s Kingdom” was given by the Spanish theologian José Antonio Pagola, and another on “A formation that generates passion for Christ and for the Kingdom of God” was given by Rosemary Mangan, RMJ. Both conferences are available on the following website: www.vidimusdominum.org (under Documents Justice and Peace).