

**Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo**

Faculty of Theology

**The Location of Religious Life in Current Theology:  
A reading in light of the Sacrament of Baptism and the  
Rite of Religious Profession**

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Prof. Andrea Grillo

by

Neville O Donohue S.M.

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# I. The Religious: Expressing The Archetype of the Monk in a Liminal Context

## 1 Introduction

Religious Life is a state for which celibacy is a central phenomenon. Not only in the Christian tradition but also in Hinduism and Buddhism we find people at the margins of their religious social nexus who live 'spiritual lives.' These marginals or 'liminals' as we will term them are not therefore unique to any one religious tradition (nor are they found in all religious traditions) and they suggest an expression of human life that is universal. Our starting point then is to explore the common ground which this human propensity exhibits. If we can suggest a universal type compassing the common elements found among religious 'marginals', whose eyes are turned to the divine, the mysterious or the transcendent, we will then be able to consider how this 'type' expresses gospel truth within Christianity. We are not suggesting that Christian religious and monks are a subset of some innate human propensity but rather that a 'type' can be located using anthropological studies and we shall wait until our later chapters to consider how this archetype finds expression in the truth of the divine revelation of Jesus Christ. Like all models or 'types' that can be found to exist, the type fractures or needs to be fractured on encountering the gospel of Jesus Christ thereby allowing the paradigm to itself become a revelation of Revelation.

In order to enter our theme let us consider a classical text that presents an anthropological image. The text is a passage from St. Athanasius' Life of St. Antony and conveys a view of humanity and of the hermitical life. It speaks of the latter in terms of human transformation and perfection as a result of years spent in prayer and solitude. Anthony's friends sought him out after he had spent many years in solitude and prayer and found him, Athanasius suggests, 'perfect'. They

marveled at seeing him neither corpulent from lack of exercise, nor emaciated from fasting and his war against the demons. Spiritually pure, he was neither disheartened by sadness nor dissipated by pleasure, neither dejected nor jubilant. The sight of the crowd did not elate him nor did their greeting embarrass him. He was completely controlled, a man of perfect equilibrium as one governed by reason and keeping himself in his natural condition.<sup>1</sup>

Here we have a perfect balance of the body as a mirror of spirit. Antony achieved a goal which all, not only Christians, can understand and appreciate. We have an image of a transformed humanity that is the anthropological prize. This historical text is methodologically a recourse to a history of Religious Life and its origins in monasticism. While I will not undertake a consideration of the evolution of Religious Life I will seek to follow up on the idea of perfection, of 'monkhood' and the link of both to Religious Life.

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<sup>1</sup> Mayeul de Dreuille, *Seeking the Absolute Love: The Founders of Christian Monasticism*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1999, p. 20.

## 1.1 The Archetype of the Monk

### 1.1.1 A Regression or a Necessary Corrective?

To undertake a study of Religious Life as being linked in some way to monks is to open oneself to controversy. Many religious claim that their life has no fundamental links with monasticism. The objection of some religious to any mention of monasticism is understandable given the tendency within the church historically to want to impose enclosure on women religious. Furthermore there was the tradition, in many cases up to the Second Vatican Council, for apostolic congregations to have an *horarium* suited to the singing of the divine office while adding to it requirements to work at teaching, in a hospital, or other institution. As early as Augustine there was a problem of making too great a distinction between the active and the contemplative lives. When Augustine was considering the gospel story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10: 38 – 42), and above all on the passage in Genesis concerning the two wives of Jacob (Ch. 29 – 30:22), he gives the name ‘active’ to the life concerned with moral and human activities and ‘contemplative’ to that life spent seeking eternal truth.<sup>2</sup> The former can be practiced in this life, the other is fully developed only in eternity but begins in this life. However previous to Augustine the active life had been viewed as the struggle of the early phases of the spiritual growth. It was particularly focused on fighting sin, which is an active phase in the move to spiritual maturity. On achieving a certain level of spiritual maturation there is a move to contemplation, that is to say the intuition of the divine, given by grace and union with God through love. St. Augustine, on the contrary, saw these as two kinds of life and these as opposed to one another. The active life simply concerned leading a good moral life in the world and this differed from the preferred attitude of Mary who had chosen the better part and whose example Augustine recommended to the faithful. St. Thomas Aquinas later took up this clear division in terms of active and contemplative life in terms of forms of life rather than the spiritual life. Furthermore he suggests there are two forms of the active life; one that emerges from contemplation and the other ‘consists completely in exterior activity.’ Thus he suggests:

. . . religious institutes dedicated to preaching and teaching have the highest place. . . . The second place belongs to those institutes dedicated to contemplation, and the third, to those which engage in exterior activities. But within each of these grades superiority results from the fact that a religious institute is directed to a higher activity in the same genus; e.g., in the works of the active life it is more excellent to ransom captives than to receive guests, in the works of the contemplative life prayer is more excellent than spiritual reading.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of grades of Religious Life did not, nor does it help the theology of Religious Life.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.99; See St. Augustine: Martha and Mary *De Trin.* I, 20; Rachel and Lia *C. Faustum* 52 –58.

<sup>3</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae. 188, 6, Reply; Blackfriars, London, 1973, Vol. 47, p. 205.

### 1.1.2 The Human Search for Blessed Simplicity

The central ideas of this section are those developed by Raimundo Panikkar when he suggested that we can speak of the archetype of the monk as one of the human archetypes. Panikkar does not address the notion of the monk as a paradigm of human life, but explores the archetype of the monk, i.e. 'monkhood' as a possible human archetype. It is one which the monk works at developing as the central expression of his or her being but as archetype all humans relate to it in some way.<sup>4</sup>

Archetype in this case means a product of different forces and factors, conscious and unconscious, individual and collective, which go into shaping a particular human configuration. Since archetype here does not mean a model, but rather the product of human life itself, this very archetype is thus mutable and dynamic.<sup>5</sup>

So we need to be clear of the difference in the idea of the archetype of the monk and that of the monk as archetype. The former is the universal archetype, where universal means 'for all humanity'. The second concerns how monasticism sees itself. If we maintain the distinction between these two we will not fall afoul of imposing something inappropriate on Religious Life or of imposing a dualism on the broad panorama of individual or corporate responses to the gospel. We are considering then

three types of monk. We should carefully distinguish them . . . Monk Number 1: the archetype, the central dimension which exists in the human being. As I have said time and again, if we hold up this monk Number 1 as a model for the *humanum*, then the trouble begins. It is only a dimension. Then monk Number 2: people and groups who strive to cultivate the dimension of monk Number 1. And monk Number 3: institutionalized or traditional forms of monasticism.<sup>6</sup>

The archetype is the prototypical form of both the 'active' and the 'contemplative' life, because: 'The monastic vocation as such precedes the fact of being Christian, or Buddhist, or secular.'<sup>7</sup>

The promptings around the archetype are those, not of doing but, of being. But the only being that I can fully encounter is my individual nodule of humanity. The human cannot become the fullness of humanity – the 'perfect' human is not the fullness of humanity but rather 'the incommunicable and unique existence of the person.'<sup>8</sup> Panikkar calls the core of humanity that can be realized in as many fashions as there are humans, the *humanum* (as opposed to humanity). But what dimension of the *humanum* does the archetype express? Nothing less than the search for 'perfection'. Each person can become a unique

<sup>4</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype*, The Seabury Press, New York, 1982.

<sup>5</sup> Panikkar, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Panikkar, p.111.

<sup>7</sup> Panikkar, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Panikkar, p.13.

expression of perfect *humanum*. To do this they must focus on the center or the source of that humanity. We all seek in one way or another to unify our lives around a center even should the understanding of the nature of that center differ in the Eastern religions from those of the West. Perfection as described by Panikkar is rather a search for the center. The center suggests a holy indifference because we are equidistant from everything. 'Inasmuch as we try to unify our lives around the center, all of us have something of the monk in us.'<sup>9</sup> Furthermore the search for the center is crucially linked to simplicity – the simplicity of the source. This can best be seen as a Blessed Simplicity; where blessed suggests the gifted element of the possible resolution of this search. To unpack the depth of this understanding Panikkar suggests nine Sutras with which to open the archetype.<sup>10</sup>

Monasticism does not seek to give testimony to itself because that would in many regards be decentralizing. However Religious Life is aware of its horizontal relationships. (The archetype is a dimension that has to be integrated with other dimensions of human life in order to fulfill the *humanum* and is thereby open to all.<sup>11</sup>) Does this imply a negation of the center by Religious? I suggest no; a modification possibly but not a negation. No religious congregation fails to aim at the sanctification of its members. However Religious Life approaches the center with greater attention to the movement outwards and the return to the center (all humans relate to the archetype in this manner, but Religious Life lays stress on the outward movement and would seek to speak of it as a 'being sent', *apostolein*).

### 1.1.3 Simplicity and Integrating Complexity

One issue that touches on the validity of the archetype is how we view the question of complexity in relation to the archetype that seeks the simple perfection of its *humanum*.

While traditional monasticism tends towards simplicity (*aplote*) through *simplification*, with the accompanying danger of reductionism, contemporary "monasticism" seeks simplicity through integration with the consequent danger of an eclectic juxtaposition. If the temptation of the first is pessimism, that of the second is optimism. Nothing is said about whether or not this new attempt will succeed.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Panikkar p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Panikkar offers nine sutras, (See p. 39) or orientations, which suggest the monk seeks a blessed and harmonious simplicity with a focus on:

- 1 The Breakthrough of the Primordial Aspiration
- 2 The Primacy of Being over Doing and Having
- 3 Silence over Word
- 4 Mother Earth Prior to the Fellowship of Men
- 5 Overcoming Spatio-temporal Parameters
- 6 Transhistorical Consciousness above Historical Concern
- 7 The Fullness of the Person over the Individual
- 8 The Primacy of the Holy
- 9 The Memory of the Ultimate and the Presence of Its Gate.

<sup>11</sup> Panikkar, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Panikkar, p. 33.



This is troublesome. The 'contemporary monk', as described above, bears considerable similarities with what a member of a Religious Community would see as the justification for entering into complexity with the hope of being true to the center. Complexity in such issues as life, nature and human diversity must have a locus of unity if we are to be able to speak of them in terms that are compatible with monotheism. Either we arrive at simplicity where 'multiplicity is reducible to unity or . . . there is no way of salvaging all those "inferior" elements, since they belong to a merely apparent world.'<sup>13</sup> For complexity to be embraced with success implies that 'the internal tendencies of the different constituents are not incompatible with one another.' Without this compatibility we are suggesting some organism that is not compatible with a monotheistic view of reality.<sup>14</sup>

So it is only in a harmonious complexity, that is a transformed complexity, that all can be joined. The cause of that harmony is the engaged religious spirit not some transformation of the complex items themselves. 'Monkhood' is the search for the center where the center is viewed as the totally simple. The monk arrives at the center by simplification but the Religious will engage the complex in order to move all things to simplicity even if this is at the expense of his or her own simplicity. This means there must be an ability to integrate or assimilate the complexities and not simply juxtapose them. 'Simplicity and complexity are not dialectically opposed' but find a new singleness in what Panikkar calls a 'monoplexity', i.e. a oneness that enfolds the folds of plurality. 'The Trinity is neither one nor three, i.e. neither simplicity nor complexity.'<sup>15</sup> So while the archetype of monk speaks of the search for human perfection in the simple there is also coupled to this, the complexity of the *humanum* and what we might call the secular. The two, an asceticism of interiority and an asceticism of action, can be brought together if the two are seen as 'two aspects of one and the same ontological dynamism of the Person.'

#### 1.1.4 The Lack of a Postmodern Critique

The original symposium, on which Panikkar's work was based, took place in 1980 and there is little indication there was much engagement with a de-centering postmodern philosophy. This is most noticeable in Panikkar's use of the term "modern" in the text. Panikkar suggests that there is uneasiness in the younger generation, and the proliferation of religions and schools of spirituality, are evidence of an apparent conflict between tradition and modernity. However the new millenium surely sees a great passivity among the young who have a complex relationship of association with, but not necessarily a follow-through with regard to the consequences of, religious and spiritual interests. The extent to which this lack of postmodern awareness limits this work for our purposes today I will not seek to determine. I will consider postmodernity in Chapter 3.

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<sup>13</sup> Panikkar, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> Panikkar addresses this complex question in two places in his work, pp. 35 – 39 and pp. 122 – 130. His suggestion on the relationship of complexity to monotheism is found on p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> Panikkar p. 128.

The second element of the work that might cause concern also relates to its age and concerns what is meant by 'contemporary monk'. For example when Panikkar is offering the nine sutras which develop the theme of blessed simplicity he offers a gloss on each from the point of view of a traditional view of the monk and secondly from the point of view of what he calls the 'contemporary' monk. Has this 'contemporary' monasticism of twenty years ago come of age and moved into the mainstream? Or again has it died or had Panikkar indeed observed a quantum shift in perception? It may well have represented the upheavals in Catholic 'monkhood,' general unease some 15 years after 1968 or indeed the deep consequences of the inter faith contacts and the peaking of technological optimism. What is important to note here is that the questions that this uneasy 'contemporary monk' raises in seeking to integrate the complexity of his or her world are crucial explanations of how religious today see their relationship to the world and mission.

### 1.1.5 The Archetype in Summary

In summary, I consider that the archetype of monk offered by Panikkar gives Religious Life access to a central truth of its human reality: perfection, the simple and the center. Perfection is a dangerous word among religious. It has been used to suggest a type of heroic accumulation of virtues and has all too frequently been divorced from charity and the values of the gospel. Furthermore it was often seen as an objective state of life in comparison with other 'less perfect' choices. I believe that Panikkar has offered us a very attractive approach with its focus on the individual seeking the fullness of their *humanum* in simplicity. Simplicity is probably the more difficult aspect of Panakkar's presentation both because it is here that the Religious sets off as pilgrim to the complex and also where the contemporary focus on appearance is inclined to negate simplicity.

## 1.2 The Center, the Horizontal and the Vertical Aspirations

The image of centering when speaking of the archetype of monk suggests another spatial image of human orientations. The anthropological ideas suggested by Paul Tillich when considering the relationship of humans to their spiritual dimension may help to vary our anthropological understandings.<sup>16</sup> He suggests three self actualizations in life: that relating to the person and their center, that dealing with the horizontal movement suggested by growth and a third which is in contrast to the center and horizontal i.e. the vertical, suggesting self transcendence. In speaking of the archetype of monk we have discussed the first of these and read it in a particular way as it might pertain to Religious

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963, Vol. III, pp. 30– 32. The idea of exploring this spatial image was taken from an idea briefly opened by Jose C. R. Garcia Paredes in his book *Teologia de la vida religiosa*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Publicaciones Cristianos, Madrid, 2000, pp. 544 – 547.

Life. The relationship of the center to the complexity that we have discussed above can be considered as the relationship on the horizontal level, (what Panikkar called at the last moment the archetype of the secular<sup>17</sup>) while the image that we are about to consider now, that of liminality may well describe the location of the transcendent thrust of the human spirit. To jump ahead a little we might suggest these three represent the relationship of the religious to him or herself, to ministry and to God.

### 1.3 Liminality

Etymologically: *limes* refers to frontier space between two territories; it was a neutral space in which markets for exchange were held or disputes between two territories settled. The relation of the center of the Empire to its *limes* was always mixed because it was never clear if they would be a buffer against attack or collaborators with the beyond. The center was viewed as the space in which language, culture and law existed while beyond the *limes* was the distant, the barbarian and the unknown. The inhabitants of this *limes* were defenders of the empire while at the same time being associated with both civilization and barbarity, defender and attacker.<sup>18</sup> Victor Turner, following the thought of van Gennep, applied the term to anthropological and ritual studies.<sup>19</sup> For him the liminal was the threshold between the sacred and the profane which was frequently entered through the rites of passage and other rites of preparation for a covenant or for purification and which could also be encountered in the process of pilgrimage. The person undergoing these experiences is at that moment not only marginal but also liminal.

For some all that exists is their own space, the space of the empire, and to speak of limits is to suggest something negative: beyond this there is nothing. The most we can have are imaginings of a negative type; that is to suggest that beyond these limits there is 'in – finite' which is a negative category. This is simply a negation of the positive (finite). But it is not necessarily a negative "place" but one between the familiar and the unknown. It would be very dogmatic to say there is nothing beyond the "here". Thus the limits can speak (the Christian metaphysical tradition gave the beyond the nature of Being) and it is there, at the limits, that symbolic language emerges. The liminal person is an existential mediation between the world and the mystery of God. In the postmodern world this can be expressed as being a person caught up in a vacuum between the world of appearances and the world of hermeneutics. We note that the appearance of religious certitude is one of the realities of fundamentalism.

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<sup>17</sup> Panikkar, p. 130.

<sup>18</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, 'Liminalidad', in *10 palabras clave sobre vida consagrada*, Ed. Marciano Vidal, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella, Spain, 1997, pp. 307 – 346.

<sup>19</sup> The most concise definition of what Turner means by liminality is given in Appendix A of *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Victor Turner and Edith (L.B.) Turner, Columbia University Press, New York, 1978, pp. 243 - 256. The work that influenced our considerations the most was Victor Turner's, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1969 particularly the first section of Ch. 5.

Some scholars have used the idea of liminality as a means of explaining the relationship of the Religious to their society and to the Church. One such, O'Murchu, rather than first considering the liminal reality from the perspective of the individual, stresses the role of the culture in moving the person to the liminal position.<sup>20</sup> It is the culture, he suggests that chooses the person for the liminal state while at the same time maintaining an ambivalence with its liminal people and often seeking to regulate how they operate. 'We are never at ease with our liminal people' he suggests.<sup>21</sup> O'Murchu goes further and suggests: 'The vocation to liminality comes from the people rather than from within the liminar himself/herself. For Christians this may be a disturbing notion . . .'<sup>22</sup> What is being placed at the center here, in an overstated way, is the desire of the author to stress the incarnational nature of the Christian faith where God works through people. It is best to leave these theological points aside for the moment and to note that the role of the liminal *group* is to mediate universally shared values and that monastic and religious lives can be primary examples of such groups. It is their role to mediate and not simply to redouble efforts for the sake of these same shared values. Liminars are no longer liminal if the call they receive is simply to redouble efforts to work for the end of some project.

Turning our attention then to the individual who is the subject of a liminal movement we will consider ideas appropriated from Mircea Eliade. Alessandro Toniolo suggests that those in new religious movements are often working out of basic tendencies that Eliade outlined in *Myth and Reality*.<sup>23</sup> These preoccupations include the need for:

A "destruction" for the recreation of the initial perfection; Certitude of a new beginning; The security of being among the "just"; A greater sense of escathological tension; *Regressus ad uterum*.

Many of these elements are evident in diverse religious traditions and in the Christian tradition also. Thus the Bible speaks of the Garden of Eden, the expulsion and the covenants. Or again the Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions suggest the need for an ongoing vigilance about the end and the coming again of Christ. The themes of new beginnings has been a tradition in monastic thinking. Furthermore the '*ritornare all'indietro*', the going back to the maternal womb of God, is often expressed in the determination to return to some golden era. This golden era can be located, at the personal level, in terms of the innocence of a child at the breast, or a variety of other expressions. It may also give rise to an ecclesial interpretation. Thus the period of early Franciscan movement or of the clear directions of the post-Tridentine Church or again of the period when West and East were in communion, can all be used to express the womb like golden experiences to which the group or individual regress. Toniolo suggests there

<sup>20</sup> The application of the idea of liminality to Religious Life was treated by: Diarmuid O'Morchu, *Religious Life: a Prophetic Vision*, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1991.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Alessandro Toniolo, 'Nostalgia della origini: Profezia o anarchia celebrativa?', *Rivista Liturgica*, LXXXIV (1997), pp. 787 – 812. He cites Mircea Eliade's *Myth and Reality (Religious Traditions of the World)*.

are two ways that this utopia is sought, either: a) by a road of initiation, that is by means of the different types of discipline or system of meetings which enable the person to appropriate the values being sought; or b) by revelation or vision that forms a perfect memory. Our considerations will be limited to the first of these. We will see some of the elements proposed by Toniolo emerge in our later discussions. Entry, for example, into a monastery was often seen as a 'second baptism' with a move away from sin and the taking on of a new life. This link between the new beginning on entering the liminal group to the beginning suggested by Baptism will occupy us in Section 4.4.

Toniolo terms the five orientations above elements in a paradigm of nostalgia for origins. There are two comments to make however in how we may want to consider what Toniolo says for our purposes. First we need to note the difference in the view of perfection that is used here to that suggested by Panikkar. It may well be the case that somebody identifying with a group that has little social or ecclesial status will have a greater awareness of their distance from their origins in a nostalgic sense. There may be a prompting of conscience and awareness of sin at this early stage of comprehending their particular vocation. However Pannikar's view of perfection is far more individualizing and it can only be arrived at by the individual moving forward toward a new vision of what they are to be. The second reorientation or possibly a lack in his reading is that there is something very "religious" about what Toniolo says. I suggest that the sociological and anthropological are somewhat removed. How, in a Christian context, would we read these tendencies? They are removed from any element of service to society or the culture or the Church. There is a marked absence of the prophetic in this tendency to be aware of origins.

#### **1.4 Interpreting the Archetype of Monk and Liminality for Religious Life**

We are able to use the idea of the liminal as a metaphor for the position of the religious in a number of spheres both social and spiritual. He or she seeks to be in the frontier between God and the world. The religious can interpret the symbols of the one to offer them to the other while being inserted in the eschatological One who is the alpha and the omega. We shall speak of four diverse expressions of the liminality of the religious:<sup>24</sup>

1) The liminality of service: the traditional suggestion of flight from the world is a form of liminality. Historically there has been an evolution in this view of marginality. For the monk it was between solitude and the city, for the mendicant between poverty and riches, or between the frontier of the Church and the '*campesinos*' and for the apostolic religious orders it was at the frontier between knowledge and ignorance, health and well-being, religious participation and isolation.

2) The liminality of faith: the religious is at the frontier of faith and hope before an often hidden but revealing God. To the extent that the religious participates in this liminal reality, he or she is liminal between the presence and mystery of God and the absence and

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<sup>24</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, 'Liminalidad', pp. 334 – 339.

darkness of God. In this liminal space the religious may be able to offer only a testimony to the hope that he or she holds while not fully verbalizing it. Here the religious stands in the expectation of faith and what is to come.

3) The liminality of the pilgrim: the attention to spiritual growth. Here frequently it is the monk who is the model of the spiritual growth, focused on prayer and witnessing to transformation. The guardian of the gate lodge of the spiritual journey - he is at the frontier of the journey under his abbot and the community. The apostolic Religious is also on the spiritual pilgrimage often becoming culturally marginal in his living the spiritual life.

4) The liminality of the silence: seeing the reality of divine presence in its different modes. The language around Religious Life is more symbolic than declarative. This symbolic function is for the purpose of the revelation of the divine mystery. The contemplative life is wrapped in a profound symbolism; in gesture and in annual and daily rhythms. The apostolic life tends to be more a symbolic stimulus than solution, more a sign than a conductor.

By the quality of their lives will you know them: Religious are called to live this liminality clearly, simply and authentically:

Their religious experience and their social functions are called to be evident and for there to be determined values of the human person such as: simplicity, austerity, the centrality of the relation and encounter with the holy, mercy, non violence, moderation and recollection, harmony with the cosmos and the common life.<sup>25</sup>

Religious Life, as lived, is a plurality of expressions of the archetype of the monk in various modes of liminality. We have already noted the difficulty of not staying with the continuum that both metaphors offer us. And yet we need to particularize the reality we are trying to describe. Sandra Schneiders suggests the best way of addressing differences between the nature of the monk and the religious is best spoken of in terms of behavioral expression: the behavioral expression of the monastic life is prayer, the behavioral expression of the apostolic life is ministry. However both are expressions of the same archetype.<sup>26</sup> The distinctions between monastic and apostolic lives with regard to liminality are best seen in terms of the preponderance of stress on one of the 4 liminal expressions above. Thus the liminality of silence or that of service will be configured differently in the two styles of life. I suggest that there is in the religious the propensity to use the language of the *limes* for the benefit of the discourse in the 'empire' while for the monk the language is more that of the ineffable encounter with the spiritual.

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<sup>25</sup> My own translation from a section of the article by Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, 'Liminalidad' which the author attributed to Festugiere, p. 338. He cites A. J. Festugiere, Sur le 'De vita pythagorica' de Jamblique, *Revue des Etudes grecques* (1937), pp. 470 – 479.

<sup>26</sup> Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure*, p. 304.

I have presented three metaphors for the human and sought to address them to garner insights about the reality of one particular expression by a minority of humans who live celibacy. While indeed it is may be too tidy to combine these metaphors it is tempting to link them in the series of polarities that Tillich uses and which are a play with spatial reality:

The archetype of the monk focuses on the centeredness of the undivided being;  
The archetype of the secular, addresses the horizontal movement of growth and self creativity and the integration of the complex;  
The metaphor of the liminal suggests a removal to the margins to express the vertical orientation, the movement toward self transcendence.

### 1.5 Conclusion

This chapter is based on the assumption that some anthropological sociological model is necessary in considering the dynamics of a spiritual call such as Religious Life. Without such we will move too quickly into reading the call from within the ecclesial context and possibly lose heart at times of ecclesial change or paucity. What I have suggested is that Religious Life is linked to the human archetype of monk and that this reality shapes the spiritual foundation of Religious Life within the Christian Churches. Secondly the archetype calls for a limitation on the degree of complexity that religious can engage in given the central place of the simple centered *humanum*. For that reason each religious community limits its contribution in its Rule or Constitutions. Furthermore I have suggested that the concept of liminality, in a variety of forms, is the true location of Religious Life within the spiritual ecclesial constellation and is a starting point to any considerations of the relation of this life to the Church or to society. Finally it is worth noting that liminality will be an important theme in our consideration of the nature of the rites for entry into Religious Life, which we will undertake in Chapter Four.

## II. From Vatican Council II to the Dawn of the New Millenium: New Directions for the Theology of Religious Life

### 2 Introduction

In Chapter One I suggested an anthropology that places Religious Life on the margins of society for the benefit of holding more fully the center, for the benefit of 'speaking' more clearly of the sacred which requires a journey to the margins and for the benefit of being a sign of the transcendent. We now turn our attention to theology: to the consequence of the revelation of Christ. Christ is the truth of that human center, Christ is the revelation of God's love for those on the margins of society and Christ is the Way to the transcendent. In this chapter I hope to trace the evolution of the theology of Religious Life from the Second Vatican Council up to and including the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*. In the next chapter I will consider two recent works on the theology of Religious Life and also state more clearly my own opinion on what has emerged in the work to that point. Here I will begin with the briefest consideration of St. Thomas Aquinas and the ideas of the Second Vatican Council. This will be followed in the second section by considering three representative writings on the topic between the Council and the preparation for the Synod on Religious Life held in 1995, those of Von Balthasar (1977), Tillard (1975) and Regamey (1969) / Galot (1985). The third section of this chapter will consider the exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (1996).

### 2.1 The Ascetic Model of Perfection and the Impact of *Lumen Gentium*

#### 2.1.1 St Thomas Aquinas

Firstly let us take note at what point the Angelic Doctor considers Religious Life in his *magnun opus*. In the *Secunda Pars* of his *Summa Theologiae* Thomas begins by considering the theological virtues and then the moral virtues grouping them around prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. He then turns attention to religion and worship, where he treats vows in general along with other necessary offerings to God: devotion, prayer and tithes. It is only having worked his way through the social virtues and additional issues such as mysticism, miracles, activity, and contemplation that Thomas deals finally, in 2a 2ae 186 – 189, with Religious Life. Thus it is located alongside the growth in virtue and the human response to Jesus Christ. The issues that concern us are what Thomas says about the idea of perfection and the idea of profession. A synthesis of the position is that

anything is said to be perfect so far as it attains its proper end, which is its ultimate perfection. But it is charity that unites us to God, who is the ultimate end of the human soul, since, as St. John says, 'He that abideth in charity, abideth in



God, and God in him' (1 John 3,14). Therefore, the perfection of the Christian life consists principally in charity.<sup>27</sup>

Is this ultimate perfection a predetermined concept or a reality that needs to be individually appropriated? If it is the former then there will be much more stress on the negation of individual tendencies to arrive at the proper end. However if 'proper end' refers to a particular expression and authentic response by the individuals themselves, then a different construction can be put on how to attain this goal.

In the vows of religion 'one *consecrates* (my emphasis) his whole life to the service of God, his whole life is under the virtue of religion.'<sup>28</sup> This religious state can be considered in three ways:

first as a certain exercise for tending to the perfection of charity; secondly, as freeing the mind from external cares, according to 1 Corinthians, 'I would have you be without solicitude'; thirdly, as a kind of holocaust by which one offers himself and his possessions completely to God.<sup>29</sup>

This giving of one's whole life is by means of a vow because we cannot offer our whole selves including our futures in any other manner.

The obligation of a vow proceeds from the will, because to vow is an act of the will, according to Augustine. Hence the obligation of a vow extends as far as the intention and will of him who makes it.<sup>30</sup>

We have then a search for perfect charity expressed with vows centered on three elements of human life. The life of perfection to which Thomas refers is linked to the autonomous appropriation of a way of life that moves to greater charity.

It became obvious over time that Thomas's treatment was 'incomplete and arbitrary.'<sup>31</sup> Before the Second Vatican Council there was dissatisfaction at the inadequate biblical foundation of the concept of the state of perfection especially when it was being considered more from the point of view of asceticism than from a theological perspective.<sup>32</sup> Cardinal Leger is reported to have said at a Preparatory Commission meeting for Vatican II that in the New Testament, the Christian life never appears as a

<sup>27</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae. 184, 1, Blackfriars, London, Vol. 47, 1973.

<sup>28</sup> And Thomas continues: 'Hence, because of the religious life that they lead, those in the state of perfection are called religious,' 2a 2ae. 186,1. The original text reads: 'Et secundum hoc, si aliquis totam vitam suam divino servitio deputet, tota vita sua ad religionem pertinebit. Et secundum hoc, ex vita religiosa quam ducunt, religioni decuntur qui sunt in statu perfectionis.' For this reason I have continued to use the term Religious Life. *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 2a 2ae. 186.7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2a 2ae. 189.4.

<sup>31</sup> Introduction, Blackfriars Edition of the *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 47, p. XV.

<sup>32</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Teologia de la vida religiosa*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Publicaciones Cristianos, Madrid, 2000, p. 88.

perfect acquisition of Christ but as an imitation of Christ.<sup>33</sup> While the discontent with the idea of the state of perfection was widespread, St. Thomas has many insights to give us about the nature of the process of entering Religious Life. Obviously the central reality for Thomas is the making, the professing, of a vow once and for ever. While there is little talk of formation of candidates, nor of periods of temporary profession (which at that time did not exist), nor of the relationship of Religious Life to its social context Thomas gives emphasis to the personal choice of the individual.

### 2.1.2 *Lumen Gentium And Perfectae Caritatis*

Vatican II considered Religious Life in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and in the Decree on Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*. It is worthwhile to note the position in which *Lumen Gentium* considers Religious Life. The Mystery of the Church (Ch.1), expressed as the people of God (Ch. 2), is assured growth by a variety of offices, the hierarchy (Ch. 3), who are in direct relationship to the Laity (Ch. 4). All are called to Holiness (Ch. 5) with some expressing their discipleship by professing evangelical counsels (Ch. 6). All together are pilgrims (Ch. 7) and in this pilgrimage they take hope from and are inspired by Mary, Mother of the Savior (Ch. 8).<sup>34</sup> Thus the mystery of the Church is expressed as one people ordered in two principle expressions.<sup>35</sup> Once the document has considered the call of each to holiness then at that stage it addresses the question of Religious Life. Religious Life is related more closely to the movement of all people towards holiness than it is to the ordering of the Church.

*Lumen Gentium*, Chapter Six begins by speaking of the evangelical counsels and makes them the center of its reflection. The religious institutes have ensured that gifts are 'multiplied for the spiritual progress of their members and for the good of the whole body of Christ.'<sup>36</sup> Thus the first affirmation is what these institutes do for their members in their call to perfect love. The institutes are not battalions in an ecclesial task force. Furthermore this life is not to be seen as a middle way between the ordained and lay life. 'In order to draw still more abundant fruit from the grace of their Baptism they make profession of the evangelical counsels in the church.'<sup>37</sup> They do this to be freed from hindrances (a theme taken up by Tillard). And they make this profession to be 'consecrated more closely to his service.'<sup>38</sup> 'Consecration' was later taken up by some authors as a central theme for Religious Life, as we will see in section 2.2.3.

<sup>33</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Teologia de las formas de vida cristiana*, Vol. 1, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid, 1996, p. 494.

<sup>34</sup> See Bruno Forte, 'Il Laicato', in *Dizionario Teologico Interdisciplinare*, Vol, II, Marietti Editori, 1977, p. 339 ff.

<sup>35</sup> Paragraph 31 in defining what is meant by laity say 'the term is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church: all the faithful, that is, who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are constituted the people of God . . .' Thus a simple division into two orders with a later modification for religious or members of secular institutes is not what is intended. Both are members of a recognized state of life.

<sup>36</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, No. 43.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 44.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

*Perfectae Caritatis* is a brief decree that outlines broad guidelines for the *aggiornamento* of religious institutes. Its concern is a return to the sources of the Christian life and of the institutes' foundations and secondly the adaptation of these sources so the institute may better share its gifts for the life of the Church. As an overview of what the life is considered to be, the Decree says of the religious:

When they made profession of the evangelical counsels they were responding to a divine call, to the end that, not merely being dead to sin (see Rom 6:11) but renouncing worldly things as well, they might live for God alone. They have dedicated their entire lives to God's service. This constitutes a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in their baptismal consecration and is a fuller expression of it.<sup>39</sup>

The religious should be 'refreshed at the table of the divine law and of the sacred altar,' 'love the members of Christ as sisters and brothers, . . . reverence and love their pastors in a filial spirit; . . . more and more live and think with the church.'<sup>40</sup> The distinctions between contemplative and apostolic institutes is very nuanced and we are told that the former are 'always assured an honored place in the mystical body of Christ in which "all the members do not have the same function" (Rom. 12:4).'<sup>41</sup>

The theological language in *Perfectae Caritatis* is also focused around profession of the evangelical counsels: chastity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, voluntary poverty as a symbol of Christ and obedience as a sacrifice to God.<sup>42</sup> This reading of the vows is far from a juridical reading, that we even find at times in Thomas, and it suggests the counsels as the key to following Christ in his human destiny. The dedication by the religious of their entire lives is interpreted as a 'consecration.' So in summary: in the consideration of Thomas I have stressed the act of profession of vows as being central to his view of what the religious is while the Second Vatican Council sees the theological consideration centering around that of the evangelical counsels.

## 2.2 A Consideration of Religious Life in Light of Vatican II

The period after Vatican II saw huge changes in, defections from, and new experiments associated with Religious Life. There was also much rich reflection. Jose C. R. Garcia Paredes, whose recent work we will consider in greater detail in the next chapter, suggests that those writing after the Council can be grouped in three:<sup>43</sup>

- a) Those who focused on Religious Life as a radicalization of the gospel and sought a new identity for it, either in christological or ecclesial terms.

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<sup>39</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, No. 5.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 7.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos. 12 – 14.

<sup>43</sup> Jose C. R. Garcia Paredes, *Teologia de la vida religiosa*, pp. 90 – 115.

They sought to move to a dynamic view of the states of life in the Church. Included here would be many of the writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner.

- b) Those who focused on the relevance of Religious Life for the world: based on the experience of faith and with a symbolic function; this we see expressed in the ideas of J.M.R. Tillard. Another expression under this heading is more in terms of the eschatological significance of Religious Life, even in the political realm, an example of which is the thought of J.B. Metz. Thirdly there are the documents of CLAR, from its meetings at Medellin, Pueblo, and Santo Domingo coming more from a perspective of liberation theology.
- c) Those who focused on 'consecration and charism' including P.-R. Regamey, J. Galot and J.G. Ranquet which was elaborated more for the purpose of the renewal of religious than for speaking of the relationship of religious to the people of God.

I have chosen to consider one author from each grouping: namely von Balthasar, Tillard and Regamey.

### 2.2.1 Von Balthasar's *The Christian State of Life*

In his Preface to 'The Christian State of Life'<sup>44</sup> von Balthasar states that in the work: 'There is no direct reference to the *aggiornamento* of the states of life that was inaugurated by Vatican Council II.'<sup>45</sup> Furthermore he points out in the preface it was his intention to explore why there should be an 'either or' when considering Christian states of life. Why should there be either the secular state or the religious state? (It has been suggested to me that the purpose for this inquiry was von Balthasar's interest in having the secular institutes he was associated with more widely accepted). First he reflects on the original and final states of human reality. Following the commandments or following the evangelical counsels leads to the same perfection of love. For von Balthasar the unifying foundation to understand this 'either or' is found in 'one' state of election which he explores in Part II of the work. The correlative consideration of call occupies the third and final section.

The various states of life in the Church are best linked to the life of Jesus. There is a fundamental presupposition in this work: Jesus, in calling the Twelve and challenging them to radically follow him, intended a primary election in which the personal element – the decision to share his life – was the definitive one and the element of ministerial calling was a secondary stage.<sup>46</sup> This special call and the ordinary state, 'neither of which

<sup>44</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, Trans., Mary Francis Mc Carthy, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1983. Original title *Christlicher Stand*, 1977.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

excludes the other, existed in the Church from the beginning, as did the priestly office.<sup>47</sup> There is a fruitful complementary relationship between the states of life.

### 2.2.1a Defining States of Life on the Basis of Love?

'Even though perfect love is a commandment and as such includes in itself the 'counsel of love' . . . there are, nevertheless within the Church, two forms or "states" of life distinguishable . . . as "the way of the commandments" and "the way of the counsels."<sup>48</sup> How do we explain this, and can we use love, that defining distinction of the Christian life, as the basis of the difference? How can the "counsels" which were formerly but a constitutive part of the unconditional "commandment" to love, now divorce themselves from the commandment and become separate entities in their own right? Is it permissible to distinguish, within perfect love to which every Christian is called, degrees of love that range from the lower one to the higher one i.e. to a free acceptance of the counsels? This was the approach St. Thomas had taken.

The counsels are the striving for this love; 'I press on to make it my own' (Phil 3:12). The more the human heart withdraws from a multiplicity of objects, the more intensely it is drawn to one.

The counsels function as a means of disposing us to remove not only the things that are incompatible with love, but also the impediments that, without being incompatible, render the exercise of love difficult. When the counsels are considered as not only a means of attaining a goal toward which all must strive, to being considered from the standpoint of a sacrifice which we offer to God, then the counsels shift noticeably to an evaluation of them as a higher 'degree of love' as there is a greater renunciation. The second aspect of this consideration is that of the counsels with regard to love of neighbor. Von Balthasar notes that Thomas tried three approaches in this regard: first love of neighbor under counsels is more comprehensive; e.g. love of enemies relates to perfection. Secondly it is more intense; there is a renouncing for the benefit of the other. Thirdly, this love is superior in its efficacy: we can enrich our neighbor with supernatural gifts. Gradually the attitude is moving more and more to what the commandment of love oblige us to and what we can freely accomplish beyond what is required, i.e. we move to a question that love would never ask.

We have not shown then, sufficient cause for differentiating the two states on the basis of love. When speaking of love it is meaningless to distinguish between commandment and counsel. Only by reflecting on the reality of sin do we come to understand why so much emphasis has been placed on the counsels as a means of removing the obstacles to love. Secondly love concerns more than ourselves alone. Even when we love God, it is still God himself who is love and consequently also the measure of our love for him. This

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

leads to the way of indifference; whether more is asked or not asked, does not matter; whether the groom comes or not does not matter.

### 2.2.1b The Movement from Creation to Redemption

The universal call to love does not explain the distinctions in the Christian life but this does not negate their value. We are faced with the realization that the call to love is not a simple matter for humans to respond to. Rather it is the journey from an original state through a fallen state to a redeemed state and with hope for a future more transformed state that is the background to the call of love. Von Balthasar turns his attention to each of these states in his second Chapter with four sub headings.

1. Creation and service: In reality humans have to journey through all the stages of imperfect love. Since the twelfth century this striving for love has been divided into three elements, chastity, poverty and obedience, that speak of the totality of the person and represent the journey from imperfect to perfect love. And it is truly a striving forward. If humans want to understand their essence, they must not look backward to their origin in the dust of the earth, but forward to their calling to be the image and likeness of God.

2. Grace and mission: All creatures are oriented to their goal and calling, which for humans is always that of love. All else is but a means to this end. Because the human is not love, the call they receive to love is like a magnet. It makes our humanity a form of service. The human is free to serve because nothing frees the person more than love.

But he can never regard himself in his human nature as identical with his calling, therefore his love will always be a service. And herein lies the foundation of the concept of "state of life."

"State of life" is etymologically related to the verb "stand." It means in this world, the permanent stationing of an individual in a certain corporal or spiritual position. In civil life, "state" is based on a lasting "obligation of a man's person, as far as he is under his own dominion or another's . . ."<sup>49</sup>

The call to humans to take their place in the will of God is the primal reality that anticipates, conditions, and provides the foundation for everything else in the human condition. Without this stand and service 'reality is but an incomprehensible mass of meaningless and formless matter without purpose or stature.'<sup>50</sup> But with attention to the divine calling in human life and the personal mission of each individual, human existence becomes meaningful and unified.

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72, The closing sentence of this quote is taken from the *Summa Theologiae*, 2a 2ae 183, 1<sup>st</sup> Reply.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

3. Men in Paradise: There is a line of division that runs through the Church. All Christians must decide where God has called them to stand. However this line was never 'foreseen in the original creation' nor was the 'the whole visible structure of the Church.'<sup>51</sup> Once there was a unity of the states of life that now are different and sometimes can even seem divisive. For faith and love, the fallen human has substituted the good of self-determination. But this good, which is positive in itself, has its origin in the fall into sin. Without faith and love this fallen state cannot enable humans to attain their original calling. Primitive man was not just inwardly disposed to choose poverty, chastity, and obedience if God should call him to this state; he had actually been placed in this state, which was the 'state of perfection' judged by God to be the best he could design for man.

4. Heaven: But even if banished from paradise there is hope of fullness of life and von Balthasar centers the image of that hope on Mary. The hope that she bears is transformed into the glory of heaven, where there will be 'perfect union of what is now found disunited in the two states of life.'<sup>52</sup>

### 2.2.1c The State of Election

In this second of von Balthasar's three sections he deals with the Christian states of life and puts forward his view of their being a state of election within the Church and within this election there are two divisions. The second division internal to the state of election relates to the ministerial call. Jesus does not hesitate to confront humanity with the ultimate decision it has to make. His mission forces those who hear to discern their response, to accept or not to accept the life stand sought. It is only when the Lord receives a clear 'Yes' or 'No' that he can and will act as love. He knows what the results of such ways of acting will be and makes known to his disciples the fate that lies in store for them.

The process of division leads to the formation of the Church which is opposed to the 'world' . . . This separation is accomplished by a twofold yet undivided act of God: election and vocation. By election, God chooses an individual or a people, thereby distinguishing "the elect" from the "non elect." By vocation he makes his choice known to those whom he has chosen . . . It is inconceivable that God would choose an individual . . . without making his election known by divine vocation. Vocation is the revelation of God's choice. The two concepts, election and

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

vocation, . . . stand together to form the basis of the *state of life* of the Christian in the Church.<sup>53</sup>

The Church is the totality of those chosen and called forth *ek klesia* (election). By reason of election and vocation taking a stand within the Church is nothing other than the objectification of election and vocation and so it would appear that all Christians belong to one common state.

However the gospel offers quite a different picture. The process of division is not confined to Church and 'world.' It also becomes immediately operative within the Church in a twofold manner, a division that is both horizontal and vertical, like the form of the Cross.<sup>54</sup> Jesus encountered two realities in people around him: the people who pressed in close and crowded him and on the other hand the apostles who he sent out two by two. Most frequently those who came to Jesus, when they were cured, were told 'go now' or 'go to your house'. The movements of the two groups, those who come and those sent out are diametrically opposed. It is not at once apparent in the Gospel that the division is a twofold one. The first division, articulated in Jesus' lifetime, is the calling of some to share in his divine mission. Only when this mission becomes identified with Jesus' perfect offering of himself, when he entrusts his sacrifice sacramentally to his followers and gives them power over its effect, the forgiveness of sins, is the second division clearly distinguishable from the first. First then there is a division between the state of the evangelical counsels and the secular state, then the division between the priestly state and the lay state.

#### The Founding of the State of Election

The call to the state of election is a qualitative, special, differentiated call. There is no similar qualitative call to the secular state, which is characterized by the absence of any such call. This is not only a call out of the world that lies outside the Church but also out of the world that lies within the Church. There is a leaving of all things here. The privilege of taking one's stand in the place of mission depends primarily on the radicalness of one's renunciation of all things. Not only is there a renunciation but there needs to be a pure emptiness that possesses a blind trust, a naïve freedom from care. The state of election is preeminently the state of Christ. In creating this state out of the secular state by election and vocation, Jesus gave humanity the possibility of taking a stand where no such possibility had existed before. He made himself the foundation of this possibility: of taking one's stand in him, of being rooted in the call to go to him, to be at his side, and to share his fate.

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.



### 2.2.1d The Relationship between States of Life

The spirit of love is a spirit of self-giving and consequently of 'choice.' Hence every true love has the inner form of a vow: it binds itself to the beloved and does so out of motives and in the spirit of love. This is also true when speaking of our relation to God. Every participation in the love of God partakes of the nature of a vow: the entrance into the Christian life through Baptism, for instance, explicitly requires the taking of the baptismal vow by the one being baptized as an answer to the gift of divine love.<sup>55</sup> The connection between the two states of life is clear because the inner form of love is essentially a 'vow.'

There is . . . nothing on the part of the world, of man's nature, or of his striving to realize his calling to love that would justify the dividing of the states of life. Only from the perspective of God and his positive will and vocation is a view of the states of life possible in which both states are shown to be intended by God and, hence, to be two positive forms of the Christian life.<sup>56</sup>

If all were to be religious it would lead to Marcionism and the separation of the order of creation from that of redemption. The state of election must always exist by way of exception. It is a representative state: it brings to mind the idea of man as God conceived him and as he ought to be. Because the elect are a minority, those in the secular state, the majority, are not just the negative side of the state of election but rather a true state in the realm of redemption and of the Church. But it would be incorrect to designate this as a second vocation to the Lord's service of equal rank with the first. 'Being placed in the secular state can be described only as not-having-been-called to a qualitatively higher state.'<sup>57</sup>

That is not however to say that there aren't positive things to be said about the ordinary state: it is part of the Creator's command that the Christian remains and must be actualized in the fallen world. The Christian is one who has been called out of the world; one who has been touched by grace and translated into the company of the Redeemer all of which he receives without the qualitatively higher state. The secular 'cannot claim to represent the integrity of the paradisaal state'<sup>58</sup> on account of the Creator's influence on all culture, as fully as the elect represent it by virtue of their renunciation. The elect live in the wholeness of a renunciation established by the call of the Lord which allows them to share in the unity of Christ.

The Christian in the world on the other hand is left within the order of fallen nature but in such a way that the shadow and form of the Cross fall up him; in such a way therefore that although he obeys the law of the world he is nevertheless not of this world.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Thus while the state of election by reason of God's special call, allows one to anticipate the world to come even in this world, based on the victory of the Cross, the secular state embodies life in transition from this world to the world to come. The division inherent in this secular state is tolerable only in movements of transition. It is not possible to establish a peaceful balance between affirmation of this world and rejection of it. In consequence, the Christian when he seeks to fulfill the cultural task assigned him by God performs works of longing not fulfillment. In the transitory nature of the Christian life in the world there is a kind of surrogate for the special vocation not accorded him.

By reason of his baptism and with or without his awareness, *the spirit of the vows* pervades his life with increasing clarity and, in a mysterious manner, enables him to participate interiorly in the essence of the other state of life, in the spirit of the undivided love in the forms of poverty, virginity and obedience. As long as the Christian does not withdraw himself from God's guidance, he is assured that these forms will be realized in his life without an explicit severance from the world.<sup>60</sup>

### 2.2.1e The Two States of Election

'The state of election then is *forma sui et totius*, the definitive form of Christian life which as form must also inform the matter of the Christian secular state.'<sup>61</sup> It being the definite form is illustrated by von Balthasar when he notes that Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables and then later explained these in other words to his apostles. There is a progression from the mere fact of being a Christian to the requirement of perfect love and the two are held in relationship. There is more than just a copy of the image in the secular state. The common call to all permeates the relationship between the two states. On the one hand the image of Christ and his apostles is not some vague utopia for the secular state but is a constant challenge at every level of human life. In this sense the state of the elect permeates the secular.

The state of election, on the other hand, is established so entirely for the service of the community, for the purpose of patterning what is communicated to those for whom it is communicated, (that is, for the community), that this service becomes its whole *raison d'être*, to which it is ordained as the secondary is ordained to the primary.<sup>62</sup>

Like the two complementary halves of a whole, the two states move toward each other. In the supernatural order of the Church their relationship acquires a meaning analogous to that of the relationship of the sexes in the natural order.

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

### The Evolution of Two States of Election

'It is because the New Testament so strongly emphasizes the personal and actual *unity* of both official and subjective priesthood that the thought did not immediately occur, despite the many differences in their particular ways of life, of setting up different canons of evangelical perfection.'<sup>63</sup> Von Balthasar thus introduces his argument that, based on his reading of the scripture, the 'official' priesthood, which might take up an option outside the counsels, was a second division within election, and a secondary one. He rejects the assertion by Mercier that in reality it is the ministerial priesthood that is the state of election.

The early Church regarded the state of virgins and monks as complementary to the lay state. This fact obscured for a time the original evangelical unity of the state of election. The evolution of the vows proper to the Religious Life shows that in the beginning there were three states of life in the Church . . . clergy, monks and virgins, each with a vow proper to itself which however was generally called a promise or a profession, seldom a vow.<sup>64</sup> The ongoing use of patristic texts and the *ad hoc* nature of developments within Religious Life meant that in the Middle Ages the systematization of the scholastics failed to sufficiently move to unify the diversity that was being lived. Evidence of this may be found in the fact that the religious state was never regarded as anything but a lay state; the monks of Saints Basil, Benedict, and Francis of Assisi, were all predominantly lay persons. Further the contemplative tendency, with its apparently personal almost private character and ecclesial mission belong inseparably together, a fact entirely foreign to Scholastic speculation. This had, in the opinion of von Balthasar, to wait for Ignatius of Loyola before being developed.

### Mercier and Elevated Election for the Ordained.

The presentation of Mercier's thoughts are summed up by von Balthasar as follows: the religious is concerned with his own personal, even private, salvation while the priest does not stress this, as he consecrates himself wholly, in the perfect love of the Lord and his apostles, to the salvation of others. 'Basically, the religious does no more by his three vows than the ordinary Christian does by his baptismal vow: Both commitments are 'essentially' of the same nature.'<sup>65</sup> The clerical state forms the real dividing line between the states of life. It alone is a true calling to leave the general Christian state to which lay persons and religious belong.<sup>66</sup> This definition of the nature of the Church seemed potentially useful to me and I was interested to see how von Balthasar dealt with it. He sees the biggest problem in Mercier's ideas being its omission of women; he suggests that women are in this approach not seen to be called to the state of perfection. There is a

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324 – 329.

need to reclaim the primitive evangelical unity of the ecclesial state of life from the divisions that obscure it. For – with the exception of Mary's preeminence over both the lay state and the state of the counsels . . . the personal unity between the state of the counsels and the priestly mission as it existed among the apostles under the leadership of Jesus, is a unity . . . [or] the original order.<sup>67</sup>

Von Balthasar's approach is to consider Christ's state of life as a unity of his priesthood which is 'both official and personal.'<sup>68</sup>

The two complementary states of election are engaged in the formation of the Church as the sacrament for the world. Members of lay institutes insist that they be listed as lay people. On the one hand, all Christians, to whatever state of life they may belong, belong to the *laos*, the people of God. Throughout the history of the Church the state of the counsels has assumed forms that are historically conditioned and molded, that have been codified in canon law and to which new forms of the same state can rightly be assimilated if they satisfy basic requirement of this state. Members of Secular Institutes may call themselves lay persons but they do not thereby cut themselves off from the evangelical state.

If, in order to emphasize their lay character, they speak of the evangelical counsels as being potentially contained in the baptismal vow, this is acceptable only if the emphasis is thereby on the word "potentially" - for every Christian is obligated to the spirit of the counsels; it must not be overlooked however that the *sine qua non* for the foundation of a theologically defined and qualitatively higher state of life is and remains acceptance of the obligation 'actually' to live the life of the counsels.<sup>69</sup>

## 2.2.1f Conclusion

Von Balthasar uses a traditional model of states of life but breathes new life into it by seeking to see a dynamic unity between the states. In placing the call to the counsels in the sweep or the movement of salvation history, from creation of humanity through the idea of mission to its heavenly home, he gives Religious Life a rich and dynamic context in which to actualize itself. This approach takes more account of the fallen nature of religious than any other recent work I have seen and I believe this is one of its strengths.

The second area of interest, though more problematic, is von Balthasar's view of one election with two divisions. I will have to admit to remaining uneasy about this approach. A clear presentation is made of the one state of election that distinguishes the Christian from the world and which suggests a common state. Immediately following this von Balthasar continues with the division of world within the Church and the state of

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

election becomes 'reduced' to those who are called to be with Jesus. I suggest the 'world within the Church' is not escaped by anyone, lay or elect, and in a world that struggles to understand creation and to follow Jesus Christ the incarnated Word of God, the world need not be avoided. (To be sure, we are invited to journey from our old dwelling place to a new land but only pure spirits leave the world). The Christian community speaks of those seeking Baptism as the elect.<sup>70</sup> I believe that von Balthasar's reasons for leaving this perspective behind (for he outlines it most wonderfully<sup>71</sup>) are not persuasive and relate mostly to his reading of how Jesus called his disciples.

When Jesus called his disciples he did so with a view to a mission of preaching and curing. There were also those who followed him who were not, seemingly give any particular mission or evident role; some of the women followers who traveled with him are a case in point. These received and heard the call of Christ to change their lives, and they followed him, but they may not have been sent out. This approach upsets the less streamlined distinction between those sent home and those called to follow Jesus. The call to follow Christ needs also to be read in light of writings about the early Church and not simply from the Gospels. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told of the idealized situation where the disciples sold property and laid the money at the feet of the apostles (Acts 4:32 ff). These disciples took this radical step for the fledgling Church but there is no suggestion that they were set apart for any particular role within the Church. Therefore, in light of the diversity of the group of disciples who moved with Jesus and the loose distinction in the early Church with regard to setting certain people apart for special service, I think it is better to avoid the idea of state of election in any other sense than referring to the Church. I suggest we need to stress the diverse life style God calls people to and that some are specially set apart for a particular mission or ministry.

Related to the idea of election is Von Baltahasar's reflection, in the third section of the book, on the call of God as interpreted by Ignatian Spirituality. He sees the early and medieval Church as having a view of Religious Life as being linked to human or Christian striving. 'A scale, as it were, of correct behavior, a course that had to be followed.'<sup>72</sup> Ignatius of Loyola caused a huge change in how people read the scriptures. Ignatius wanted everybody to ask what it was they were being called to be and do in light of their prayer or meditation. When the Christian is spoken to, he or she encounters 'at the same time a free election, the grace of friendship, and a prophetic mission.'<sup>73</sup> This then is the foundation of the theology of election that has occupied us above. A question I have is what the relationship is between this theological reading and the ecclesial setting in which the reading was initiated. I suggest that the stable Christian world of the Middle Ages was one where Religious Life was a choice of a state of life within a stable context.

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<sup>70</sup> The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults has, for example as its second step the 'Election or Enrollment of Names' during which there is a prayer over the elect: '... add these chosen ones to the harvest of your covenant.' *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, Vol. I, Study Edition, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1990, p. 105.

<sup>71</sup> Von Balthasar, pp. 133–142.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 396.

In the context of the Counter Reformation however a more deliberate choice was needed that needed to rely more on a sense of call. Furthermore the Society of Jesus was to be a society of priests (with lay assistants) and this added to a stress on call. Thus spiritual discernment, the needs of that time, and the nature of this most notable Society all had an effect on a reading that wanted to unite all call into one state of election. Maybe then the systematization of the scholastics did not fail to unify in one category the diversity of those with vows and those in ministry but wisely chose to leave them separate. We will need to be ask the question at a later juncture what the spiritual, ecclesial, and organizational configurations of our time are and what impact they have had on emerging theologies. Despite his valiant efforts to seek a dynamic relationship between the States of Life von Baltahasar asserts, even if not as a central premise, that the state of election is to a 'qualitatively higher state.'<sup>74</sup> This is difficult to equate with a communion of persons all baptized into the new life of Christ, dead in Christ, even if the relationship is one of dynamic interaction and complementarity. This approach is not simply a legacy of thinking that existed before the Council as we shall see when we come to consider *Vita Consecrata*.

## 2.2.2 Tillard's (Existential) Gospel Path

Tillard's *A Gospel Path: The Religious Life* is the most pastoral of the three works we will be considering in this chapter.<sup>75</sup> There are many references to 'the changes' encountered in Religious Life in the years after the Council and the adjustments needed in a changed western context. Tillard seeks to help religious understand what is transpiring and suggests some reasoning for future directions. Frequently this is done by pointing out less than complete ideas that had emerged in the confusion of change. Tillard's approach has a clear focus on the existential reality of the religious persons and their freedom to live the gospel fully. There is an underlying optimism in the work that 25 years later may seem to have been excessive. The use of existentialist thought, a theological approach that is focused on the Holy Spirit as its starting point and a more limited ecclesial consideration than we might expect, will have to be born in mind when we come to evaluate this contribution.

### 2.2.2a Believing Utterly

Overly particular or local readings of a founder's or an institute's charism had led some to view religious institutes as the 'specialized' bodies in the hierarchical Church. But that approach proved to be a somewhat shallow *raison d'être* for Religious Life. Tillard warns that a corrective to this situation must not seek to reduce the apostolic commitment to the secondary rank. The apostolic religious is the believer who indeed wants to be more and more penetrated by the Gospel but also with the firm hope of giving his apostolic commitment a seal of ever increasing authenticity. But is a desire to carry out

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>75</sup> J. M. R. Tillard, *A Gospel Path: The Religious Life*, Lumen Vitae Publications, Brussels, 1975. Originally published as '*Religieux, un chemin d'évangile.*'

an apostolic activity enough for a theology of Religious Life? The common ground we seek is one for both the religious spirit and the apostolic commitment. Religious Life is one of the responses to the proposition of the Holy Spirit to live freely a life of faith. It is not based simply on a word of the Lord's, e.g. being a eunuch for the kingdom, but on a life of faith, based on all aspects of His revelation, that is, a faith of the heart that seeks to embrace the beatitudes.

The Gospels show two ways to fulfill the desire to belong to Christ: that of Lazarus and his two sisters and that of the apostles. The first lived the gospel in their homes and at their trades. The second group was more elusive, it was a smaller group and they left everything to be with Christ. This apostolic life was not based on a calculated desire to achieve perfection but to respond to having been captivated by Jesus in such a way that it was worthwhile to give themselves completely to him. Their choice did not put them in a special moral universe but in a different existential situation. Does the project of the religious directly link up with the experience of the apostles? The foundation of Religious Life is the whole of the Gospel. Religious Life then is not a special imitation, nor a question of claiming possession of evangelical values that all Christians strive to live. The one goal sought by the religious is a life in Christ and the constant refocusing of life to this one end is a way of life. To read this negatively: the married lay Christian who loses his or her faith can still continue in the 'good' he has received, in the applause of professional acclaim, and in being surrounded by their family, accomplishments etc. The life of a religious who loses his or her Christian faith is an absurdity. The religious takes the risk of believing utterly. His or her possessions, power and sexuality are all slowly allowed to be shaped by the Paschal mystery alone.

The religious seeks joy and happiness in their life choice; the quest for happiness is natural to all life and cannot be denied the religious; to deny it would be suggesting something awful about the God they are dedicated to. The true motivation for Religious Life is not the urge to 'escape from the world' but a desire to cling to the demands of the Kingdom by following Jesus. Religious Life does not lead to condemnation of the world even if it involves renouncing many things that are good. It is hard to withdraw from the world and still work for it; this approach will only work if everything is united in Christ and the eschatological unfolding of his coming.

### Christian Praxis

The faith that is being lived by the religious is not simply a matter of commitment to a confession of faith but a thing of the heart that needs a living attitude. It is not a once for all; it is also a discovery of God made by living life. One learns the truth of the gospel of love by acting in that truth and with this action one can lose the impurities of heart so that the essential becomes central. This is achieved by the Holy Spirit in the experiences of the life of the religious. In their humble attempts at mercy, reconciliation, justice and love, the religious discovers a reflection of God's own mercy; he or she learns God. The 'osmosis' between the confession of faith and the practice of what is confessed represents

more than a desire to be faithful to the authentic nature of faith. It is the salvation of his or her own faith and by extension, of his or her loyalty to the life project. For it justifies their efforts to continue seeking the face of God. With time he or she may find that their positive knowledge of God is gradually reduced to the core of essential convictions received from Scripture and the faith of the Church. From this will radiate a set of perceptions about the inaccessible and impenetrable One whose mystery humans have been allowed to behold through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This life cannot thrive on an unproductive orthodoxy. Active commitment to the risk of living the gospel gives the project of the religious the power of self-generation.

### 2.2.2.b A Freedom Project

The existential nature of Tillard's approach deepens with a consideration of freedom. Jesus is the radically free man *par excellence* where freedom is considered not in terms of the number of choices available but in terms of a decision to follow something to the depths of its consequences. This linking of freedom to Christ is the strongest Christological affirmation in Tillard's work which has up to this point focused more on the Spirit filled choice. This freedom clears a path for itself only by encountering doubt, as Jesus did at Gethsemane, and not by heroic force. It is thus a costly freedom. Jesus expresses his freedom in going to the homes of sinners and speaking his mind about the religious structure of his day. The contagious freedom of Jesus gives freedom from sin and wipes away guilt. Secondly the Holy Spirit of the risen Jesus, the Spirit of Freedom, is gifted to freed humans. Christians in turn offer to others what they have received. 'In the dynamism of baptismal grace, the Spirit who calls him [the religious] thus invites him to witness in a special manner in his being and in his action, to the freedom given by unconditional attachment to Him, whom he recognizes as the "the one thing necessary."',<sup>76</sup>

One becomes a religious to vigorously enter into the freedom of the Gospel and to witness in this way to the Gospel's liberating power. As St. Augustine says in paragraph eight of his rule - live the rule 'not as slaves governed by the Law but as free men governed by grace.'<sup>77</sup> St. Thomas said Religious Life leads people to 'a state of evangelical freedom.'<sup>78</sup> The three vows are linked to three representative elements of life in Christ and offer a potential space which both the freedom of the religious and of the Holy Spirit may invade. All true evangelical freedom matures in trial; trials of doubt and trials to back away from the commitment given. What distinguishes this freedom from that of other Christians? It is neither more concentrated nor an anthology of the more sublime texts for an elite but an embracing of the whole of the Gospel. Religious profession aims to liberate in people an infinite number of small points that highlight a true face of the Gospel. Tillard suggests that the details of the Last Judgment of Matthew

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>77</sup> Tillard cites this as No. 8 of the Rule of St. Augustine, *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>78</sup> Tillard cites *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 183,4. The Blackfriars edition we have used earlier in this chapter speaks of spiritual freedom and not evangelical freedom.



25 or of the Sermon on the Mount can be explored and attempts be made to make them lived realities.

### 2.2.2c A Faith Making Common Cause with the World's Needs

For the religious as for all Christians the truth of the Gospel is 'wrought in the problematic crucible of direct involvement in the economic, political, cultural, and social life of his time.'<sup>79</sup> It is in the world that he will find the sphere of his fidelity to the Spirit's call. The radical act of believing which he or she has freely chosen to make the backbone of a life project, will be inseparably joined to participation in the creation of the new world through involvement in the realities by which society gradually attains its full stature. This is not flight from the world but radical fidelity to the vision of the world revealed in Jesus Christ. 'To center one's existence radically on faith, is, in Karl Barth's phrase, to center on the humanity of God.'<sup>80</sup> The transcendental values of the kingdom are revealed in effective service to humankind. The demand of the evangelical project of the religious is onerous but more than onerous it must be radical. In approaching his activities he expects to go beyond what human energies can achieve on their own. The intervention of God is relied upon in the faith filled hope of the resurrection. This hope gives the meaning to everyday activity. Faith holds that in the inmost depths of the human enterprise there is a hidden urge to achieve transcendence, to open out to something greater than the mere efforts of humanity. The religious is not at the service of efficiency in the world but his service is an activity of hope. The realities of forgiveness, mercy, and fidelity are present and in this way the action of the religious focuses its objective on God and the religious becomes an eschatological sign in the midst of faith filled activity.

Through the freedom which it makes possible, the religious project sets the Christian on a path of behavior that accords with conviction whereas usually the other vocations are to a greater extent bound up with responsibility. Here Tillard offers us the example of Maximilian Kolbe as one who, in offering his life in place of a married man, was living by conviction. The person of conviction reminds the person of responsibility of the fundamental demands their faith places upon them. Thanks to the religious there is in the Church what may be called a ministry of freedom, which constitutes one of the important elements of the dynamism of the People of God. In which way do the religious enter in the messianic liberation movement inaugurated in Jesus? Tillard uses Paul Ricoeur's idea of immediate relations (family, partner etc.) and broad relations (political, economic, social institutions).<sup>81</sup> Christians cannot confine themselves to the immediate. The religious must balance the two sets of relations as did Jesus. Charity is not a substitute for justice but justice where there are no immediate relations is not representative of the love of Christ who freely offered his life for his friends. The specific contribution of the religious to the mission of God's people lies in their function as a sign or a memorial.

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<sup>79</sup> Tillard, *A Gospel Path*, p. 62.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

The witness a religious bears to the absoluteness of God and to His transcendental priority over purely human ends shines forth only if it is linked, by the 'osmosis' that we mentioned earlier and with a genuine effort at communion with the problems of humanity.<sup>82</sup> The religious seeks to retain their attention to the absoluteness of God using the traditional division of theology obedience, poverty and chastity constantly reshaped as the sign of their memorial of Christ.

### 2.2.2d Conclusion

There is a clear desire in Tillard's approach to view the religious in terms shared by all Christians, that is of faith. We have also seen a stress to link the activity of the religious not simply to the building up of the Church but to the building up of the human project (with correctives that this is seen from an eschatological point of view). The question I have been left with on considering Tillard's approach is whether it was a corrective to a closed and repressive Religious Life that may have marked the years before the Vatican II or if it is a complete theology of Religious Life. The doubts raised in my mind about the long term durable nature of Tillard's approach is due to the question of what would cause such a passionate need to experience the exercise of human freedom. Where in Tillard's thought is the indifference of perfect love that von Balthasar suggested was an element of the choice of obedience? Is Tillard suggesting an exercise of choice or a freedom not to exercise choice because the one central choice has been made? What would prompt such a stress on freedom? I suggest that there is something of existential philosophy behind this approach and the question remains if this is fully compatible with Christian discipleship.

The advantage of Tillard's approach is, I believe, that it lays stress on assuming a Christian life and would seem to lay stress on an attention to the Holy Spirit. In not speaking a great deal about the call of God, however, we are left in the dark as to how this decision is sustained, suggested to others, or finds value. There is little reference to the idea of the leaving the 'world' and so also an avoidance of any benefits to be had from speaking of renunciation. Renunciation is an element of the freedom, the interior freedom needed to be attentive to the Holy Spirit. The religious who Tillard describes as very involved in the 'human project,' is in need of more abilities at discernment than he or she who considers themselves as part of an objectively higher state.

While the role of witness is clear the place of preaching and evangelizing is less clear. I was left with the impression that the culture Tillard's religious is in, is one where there is a strong religious presence but it lacks certain elements of human warmth or is rigid. The stress is on the free religious pointing with their life to gospel values. However, the religious presumably needs, in certain contexts, to speak the Word, to offer the Word or

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

give praise with the Word of God before he or she can be considered fully fulfilled in their service. This opens the question of what is the link of Tillard's religious to the rest of the Church? What would happen should he or she find themselves in a culture, not based on individuals appropriating the gospel for themselves and exercising their freedom as lay members of the Church but, based on greed or selfishness?

## 2.2.3 Religious Life as Consecration

### 2.2.3a A French School?

Three writers on the topic of Religious Life in the period after Vatican II spoke of Religious Life as a form of consecration and all were French, P.-R. Regamey, Jean Galot and Jean-Gabriel Ranquet. I have therefore entitled this section, tentatively, 'A French School?' While the term 'consecration' (of religious) has grown in importance in the last 10 years, even currently as we will later see when we move to consider two recent writers, the terminology is not widespread in all areas, especially the Anglo Saxon world. Is a religious who becomes a bishop still a religious, Regamey asks in passing, to highlight one of his central ideas. He immediately implies his answer as affirmative. The reason for this is that he believes that there is something more than a juridical bond instituted when somebody makes religious profession. Rather there is something touching on the mystery of faith. This mystery is a consecration. Regamey suggests that the idea that religious profession is a form of consecration is traditional in the Church and it was taken up by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. However our author states that he regrets that the Council Fathers did not explicitly state that this consecration is a consecration by God.<sup>83</sup> So while the Council used the idea of a 'particular' consecration it was careful how it used the term. Firstly it left open the nature of the consecration - that is whether it is to be considered a consecration to God or by God. Secondly the Council did not use the idea of 'adding to' or 'completing' what occurs in Baptism. The danger of this type of language is that it elevates the religious above that of 'being in Christ' which Baptism achieves and what could be more full than 'being in Christ'?

Regamey says: 'It is necessary to say we think that by the ministry of the Church, it is God who consecrates the professed.'<sup>84</sup> This 'descent' by God in response to an offering made, Regamey suggests, is a biblical image that we term 'consecration.' Consecrations are, as divine mysteries, analogies. Some consecrations imprint a sacramental character (or quasi character) e.g. those of Baptism, confirmation, orders and marriage. The consecration of the eucharist transforms bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ. Consecrations of another type cause a being to be taken hold of by God by means of some particular title.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> P.-R. Regamey, O.P., *L'exigence de Dieu: Problemes de vie religieuse*, Cerf, Paris, 1969, p. 158.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.160.

In a delicate and suggestive argument he compares the consecration of Baptism with that of religious profession or 'consecration'. He first outlines the traditional three levels of *sacramentum tantum*, *res et sacramentum* and *res tantum* of Baptism which convey a sacramental character and he then speaks of religious profession at three levels. The sensible level is where the witnesses hear and see the profession of the vows for a certain way of life. This element, profession, is not the state but the entry into the state. 'The Church gives liturgical expression to the fact that it is a state consecrated to God.' It 'receives the vows of those who make profession, implores the divine aid and grace for them in its public prayer, commends them to God and bestows a spiritual blessing on them, joining their self offering to the eucharistic sacrifice.'<sup>86</sup>

But how can religious consecration, 'which is deeply rooted in their baptismal consecration' be a 'fuller expression of it,'<sup>87</sup> that is, be a fuller expression of baptismal grace? It is in terms of accomplishment. The religious is less hindered to give perfect worship with his or her life ordered to God alone and so the grace of Baptism achieves more abundant fruit. Regamey then quotes a 12<sup>th</sup> century source as supporting his intention: 'What is accomplished by a sign (*specie*) in the first baptism is accomplished anew (once again) here in reality (*veritate*).'<sup>88</sup>

### 2.2.3b A Survey of Consecration in Post-Conciliar Documents

Jean Galot<sup>89</sup> surveyed the use of the term consecration as it applies to Religious Life in documents mostly from the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes in the fifteen year period 1969 to 1984. The timing of his article coincided with the approval of the new Code of Canon Law with its Chapter on The Consecrated Life.<sup>90</sup> Galot suggests that the principle concern of these documents is that of *testimonianza* or witness and he seeks to show how the idea is founded on a view of religious consecration. He recounts that during the redaction of *Lumen Gentium* certain religious requested a revision to better highlight the value of consecration as the foundation of this witness and mission, and the text was so modified. From the time of the Council to Galot's writing there had been an ongoing elaboration of this idea as the basis of mission and witness, and this was to continue until it reached its climax in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*.

<sup>86</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 45.

<sup>87</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis* 5.

<sup>88</sup> Regamey, *op. cit.*, p.166. He is referring to Gueric D'Igny, a Cistercian Abbot of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>89</sup> Bruno Secondin has suggested that the thought of Jean Galot was evidently influential in official circles prior to and during the writing of *Vita Consecrata*. See *Il Profumo Di Betania*, Centro Editoriale Dehoniano, Bologna, 1996, p.28.

<sup>90</sup> Jean Galot, S.I., 'La consacrazione religiosa nei documenti post-conciliari', *Vita Consecrata*, No. XXI, No. 2, 1985, pp. 142 – 157. He considers seven documents: *Renovationis causam* (1969), *Evangelica testificatio* (1971), *Mutuae relationes* (1978), *Religiosi e promozione umana* (1980), *Dimensione contemplativa della vita religiosa* (1980), *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate* (1983) and *Redemptionis donum* (1984).

### The Nature of Consecration

The consecration of a religious is the result of a divine action: it is not enough to say one is offering oneself to God or that one is consecrating oneself. This divine action is an affirmation of a doctrinal development, Galot argues, of what Vatican II said in *Lumen Gentium* 44: by means of the profession of the counsels one is completely gifted to God, by a more intimate consecration to his service. Here the Council, rather than saying according to common usage 'give oneself' or 'consecrate oneself,' that is the reflexive, employed the passive, i.e. 'to be gifted,' 'to be consecrated' to focus the divine action. The document *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate* for example, speaks of 'the consecrating action of God' and 'consecration effected by God himself.'<sup>91</sup> These documents show a consistent development in the concept of consecration even in those documents which emphasize 'witness' as central, in speaking of witness to the consecration. The pre-conciliar focus on the three vows failed to unite the diverse elements of the life. When it became necessary to define what religious were in the Church, the Council, while it didn't forget to talk of the three vows, recognized the fundamental reality of the total consecration to God.

### Christocentric Intent of Consecration

It is unclear from these documents where to designate the act of consecration. The documents of Vatican II had spoken of Christ and God. By means of the evangelical counsels one follows Christ according *Perfectae Caritatis* 1 and 2a but *Lumen Gentium* 44 speaks of consecration to God as does *Perfectae Caritatis* 5. This second application is used in these two documents without much consideration to harmonizing it to the evangelical concept of following Christ. The post-conciliar documents take up this double usage with a tendency to speak of being consecrated to Christ. *Redemptionis donum* speaks of religious as people 'consecrated to God in Jesus Christ' (No. 7). Thus religious consecration has its origin in Christ Jesus; it is He whom the Father consecrated in the supreme fashion and sent to the world. Christ shared His life as the consecrated one with His disciples. To some, but for the benefit of all, God gave the gift of a more intimate following of Christ in poverty, chastity, and obedience. This following expresses baptismal consecration more fully. This 'greater fullness' of Baptism recalls the assumption of human nature on the part of the Divine Person of the Word, and suggests an analogous penetration of the human nature of the religious. As a consequence of a reflection on the incarnation, the dominion of the Word over his human nature expressed in poverty, chastity and obedience, suggests the road to be followed by the religious: '...the hold of the divine person of the Word over the human nature which he assumed...invites a response like that of Jesus: a dedication of oneself to God in a

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<sup>91</sup> This document was issued in English dated May 31<sup>st</sup> 1983. This quote is taken from No. 42.

way which he alone makes possible.'<sup>92</sup> Thus the consecration being spoken of emerges from the mystery of the Incarnation.

### Consecration and Mission and their Role for the Church

It is the Church which authenticates the gift of this consecration. It does not simply receive the profession; the whole Christian community supports the person who wants to live the counsels, because these are for them a sign of the Christian vocation, and an orientation to the heavenly goods. EE Nos. 9 and 10 distinguish two types of consecration according to the evangelical counsels. On the one hand those in the midst of the world, members of secular institutes, who live with little difference in the style of life to other Christians. On the other hand, the religious, more marginal who live in community. (The counsels themselves do not require a separation from the world.) The goal of an apostolic institute is not simply to achieve some human good, but rather to help all its members to be animated by the religious spirit. By their consecration the members are dedicated to God and open to being sent. Their consecration is a specific and concrete participation in the mission of Christ. Mission is implied in consecration – they are two elements of the one reality. The religious consecrated to Christ, is by this fact consecrated to the service of the Church. If Christ takes possession of the person, His contemplative attitude and apostolic activity will manifest themselves in the witness of the religious.<sup>93</sup>

### Religious Life and Baptism

The relationship of religious consecration with that of Baptism was considered in these post-conciliar documents but it was never identified with this alone. Religious consecration is a development of the baptismal consecration 'assuming a particular character.' It cannot be reduced to simply the baptismal consecration because this does not require particulars such as celibacy. It is true that already from Baptism the person is totally consecrated, 'but in virtue of Baptism the consecration has not yet reached all its fullness and all the depth that it acquires in someone who responds to the call to follow Christ.'<sup>94</sup> Religious consecration is total because it belongs completely to Christ in the most complete manner. This is not in opposition to the universal vocation, Galot argues, it is a contribution, a help to the common vocation. Far from being a privilege this way of life is seen as a cooperation on the way to sanctity all Christians. For this the Christian community recognizes with love all who give themselves this way. The consecrated give an orientation to all people of the destiny of humankind in the spiritual good and are an encouragement to live a Christian life.

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<sup>92</sup> *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, Enchiridion Vaticanum, No. 9, 1983 –85, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., EDB, Bologna, No. 7, page 186.

<sup>93</sup> Galot, p. 143.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

### Consecration as an Alliance

Galot argues that Vatican II had already conceived religious consecration as a divine action and not simply as an act of self-consecration if one can speak in such terms. He lays special stress that LG 44 does not speak of a person giving or consecrating but of being given and being consecrated. Galot claims the passive is in the original and was intentionally chosen. Thus some post-conciliar documents stress this intent: 'The Church places the first emphasis on the initiative of God . . . Consecration is a divine action' (EE 5). The divine initiative is shown in the call and the divine choice on those implicated. Note that nothing is being taken away from the human duty; it has to be a free response. The action of grace tends to provoke a co-operation in the person. Thus the consecration can be considered an alliance. In *Redemptionis donum* we read that some in the Church live the 'covenant of profession of the evangelical counsels' (No. 8). For this reason religious should renew their awareness of their participation in the cross of the Redeemer. In this the religious forms a particular 'covenant' of spousal love which echoes incessantly before the whole people that God has chosen them as His possession. Thus the entire people are elected in everyone whom the Lord chooses from the midst of this people. This language of covenant speaks to me of a relationship of God to his people and less to the individual. Those, I might suggest, who are called to Religious Life offer the reminder to all Christians that they are consecrated in the covenant of love that God made with his people in Christ.

It seems appropriate to note here what was later added in official documents with the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church in 1994.<sup>95</sup> The section dealing with Christ's faithful is presented in the order: hierarchy, laity and the consecrated life i.e. the same order as in LG but with the title 'Religious' being replaced with 'Consecrated Life.' The order in the third section is a brief consideration of the evangelical counsels followed by a presentation of the diverse ways these are lived: heremitically, as consecrated virgins, as religious, in secular institutes, as members of societies of apostolic life. There are then three paragraphs that link consecration and mission. Christ proposed the evangelical counsels 'in their great variety.' 'It is the profession of these counsels, within a permanent state of life recognized by the Church, that characterizes the life consecrated to God.' This allows the person to experience in a "more intimate"<sup>96</sup> way their baptismal consecration. Those moved by the Holy Spirit, though already dedicated through Baptism, and who surrender themselves to God thereby consecrate themselves more intimately to God's service and to the good of the Church (No. 931). This approach places more focus on the individual's choice as witnessed by the public declaration of profession than does the earlier focus of Galot on the consecration being an act of God. In the CCC the stress is more on the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the response of the individual, and thereby a consecration. This 'shows us how the Holy Spirit acts so wonderfully in her' [the Church] No. 931.

<sup>95</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 914 – 933; hereafter CCC.

<sup>96</sup> CCC, No. 916

### 2.2.3c Overview

Galot sees in the post-conciliar texts a response to the reality that the vows explain three essential tasks in Religious Life but not the internal object of the complete offering to God which is of the essence of consecration. I will take up the questions raised by this approach in the next chapter. There we will need to consider the nature of Baptism and the exact intention of the Council in *Lumen Gentium* when it speaks of consecration of religious. Furthermore we will need to consider the question of the starting point for a consideration of consecration: is it best to consider it an action of the Church in response to the Holy Spirit, thereby laying stress on the Rite of Religious Profession, or do we speak of God consecrating? Two observations seem appropriate at this stage. First to recall Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes' comment that those writing on religious consecration were generally more interested in the reform of Religious Life than in addressing questions for all the People of God.<sup>97</sup> We note the almost complete omission of any reference to the idea of the states of life in the approach Galot offers. Second Galot notes in his survey of these post-conciliar documents that 'there is evidence here of a certain reaction to the excessive secularization of certain institutes.' This reflects the ecclesial political reality that existed in the Church in the years after the Council, some of the ferment and reaction to the ferment was caused by the very prompting of the Council itself, with religious institutes rediscovering their individual charism. The question that this raises however is whether the theological movement and reflection that this turmoil caused will assist the Church, Religious Life and most importantly our theology of Baptism in the future.

## 2.3 The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*

Following the Synod of Bishops called to consider Religious Life Pope John Paul II issued the apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*. This was the fourth in a series of synods that had dealt with the forms of Christian Life: that on marriage and the family (*Familiaris consortio*), that on lay people (*Christifideles laici*), that on the ordained ministry (*Pastores dabo vobis*) and then in 1994 the Synod on Religious Life.<sup>98</sup> It has been suggested that the synod addressed two trends – the first related to the wish by some bishops to address more the question of new movements and less the question of traditional Religious Life. This proposal was not accepted. The second major discussion was whether to stress mission in considering Religious Life, as suggested by the Union of Superiors General, or to stress consecration.

The basis of the Religious Life as defined in the exhortation is found in the relationship which Jesus established with some of his disciples. 'He called them not only to welcome the Kingdom of God into their own lives, but also to put their lives at its service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own way of life.'<sup>99</sup> Many of the baptized

<sup>97</sup> Jose C.R. Garcia Paredes, *Teología de la vida religiosa*, p. 90 – 115.

<sup>98</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, (Vatican Translation), Pauline Media, Boston, 1996.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 14.



throughout history have been invited to live such a life 'in the image of Christ.' But this is possible only on the basis of a special vocation and in virtue of a particular gift of the Spirit.'<sup>100</sup> There are then three elements to this definition: 1) welcoming the kingdom, 2) putting one's life at its service, 3) leaving everything behind and closely imitating His life. There is no element of 'being sent' in this definition and I believe that omission was the correct choice. I will here comment on four aspects of the exhortation: the biblical image of the transfiguration used; the conscious Trinitarian discussions (mostly in Chapter One); the understanding of consecration presented (mostly the third section of Chapter One entitled 'In the Church and for the Church'); fourthly, I will consider the ideas of mission that are present in the exhortation.

## 1. The Biblical Image of the Transfiguration Used and Explored

The central biblical theme that is strongly present in the document is that of the Transfiguration of Christ mostly in the Matthean version (Ch. 17, 1 –9). In the life of Christ the Transfiguration is a moment of a transformed humanity foretelling the exodus he would achieve for his disciples in the paschal mystery. The image is suggested in the first paragraph of the first chapter, No. 14, entitled: 'Icon of the Transfigured Christ' and is a motif for the rest of the chapter. I find it one of the most appealing aspects of the letter. Under its reading the trinitarian, (Nos. 17 – 22), the paschal (Nos. 23 – 28), the ecclesial (Nos. 29 – 34) and the call to sanctification (Nos. 35 – 40) are all held together and given a biblical foundation. While there are other biblical images present (reference to the rich young man<sup>101</sup>) the main approach is that: 'the consecrated life truly constitutes a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word. . .'<sup>102</sup> So while not all the apostles or his followers had this experience of the union of Christ with the Father the light of this experience is available to all in the period after the resurrection.

## 2. The Conscious Trinitarian Discussions

Bruno Secondin, suggests that the strong trinitarian integration found in the exhortation when it was published was a surprise, though a pleasant one, to participants of the synod.<sup>103</sup> This trinitarian orientation has suggested a mystic dimension to the life and prevented its being read from an ecclesial point of view only. The Father takes the initiative and calls for a complete response which is achieved in following His Son. This union is consecrated for mission by the work of the Holy Spirit (Nos. 17 – 19). This is followed by a reading of the counsels from this trinitarian perspective and further, 'Even fraternal life, . . . , is put forward as an eloquent witness of the Trinity' (No. 21). In seeking to make this parallel between the life of the counsels and the life of the Trinity Secondin suggest the two perspectives, christocentric and trinitarian do not appear to be

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Matthew 19.21, Mark 10. 17 ff and Luke 18.18ff are found at least twice: Nos. 18 and 93.

<sup>102</sup> VC 22.

<sup>103</sup> Bruno Secondin, p. 117.

fully mature and balanced.<sup>104</sup> While this link between the Christian life and the Trinity is true for all who live their Baptism, it also give us a context for deepening our understanding of what the exhortation means by consecration.

The understanding of consecration:

The movement of the first three sections of chapter one is, as we saw above, to focus firstly on the Trinity, then on the eschatological witness of religious and then on the relationship of the religious to the Church. The last of the six paragraphs in both the first two sections speak of the idea of consecration and they act like a prelude before the theme is taken up in its own right in the third section. There is then a strong intention to build on this reading. The religious is consecrated in the Holy Spirit (the suggestion of No. 19) and the reflection on this is placed within a consideration of the Church. In the mystery of the Church some receive a special call.

The call is accompanied, moreover, by *a specific gift of the Holy Spirit*, so that consecrated persons can respond to their vocation and mission. For this reason as the liturgies of the East and West testify in the rite of monastic and religious profession and in the consecration of virgins, the Church invokes the gift of the Holy Spirit upon those who have been chosen and joins their oblation to the sacrifice of the Christ. The profession of the evangelical counsels is also a development of the grace of the Sacrament of Confirmation but it goes beyond the demands of the consecration received in Confirmation by virtue of a special gift of the Spirit which opens the way to new possibilities and fruits of holiness and apostolic work.<sup>105</sup>

I find this a particularly fine summary as it contains most of the essential elements. This consecration means the person has a particular (29 b) and a 'further consecration' which 'differs in a special way from baptismal consecration, of which it is not a necessary consequence' (No. 30). Their consecration is 'new and special' (No. 31) and it 'is to be recognized that the consecrated life, which mirrors Christ's own way of life, has an objective superiority' (No. 32).

We encountered this last idea also in the work of von Balthasar (the qualitatively higher state). It seems to me a flagrant contradiction to the nature of one faith, one Lord, and one Baptism. What we are to make of calling the Religious Life a new consecration will be considered in Chapter III though it is worth noting that in VC No. 30 there is considerable reference made to the Rite of Profession and it suggests to me that what is new about the consecration is the fact of having celebrated a rite. To put a positive spin on the difficulties I see we can say that the view of consecration is a) linked to consideration of the Holy Spirit and b) is seen in the context of the Church.

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>105</sup> VC 30.

The term consecration would seem not to be explained. In particular we are without a clear theological statement on the nature of this 'new' consecration in regard to that of baptism. A consecration in ontological terms is unacceptable because this produces a substantial change in the subject. Equally a silence on the nature of the biblical concept of the 'counsels' is equally unacceptable; and they are used in the text from the outset without demonstrating their biblical origins.<sup>106</sup>

### The View of Mission

The second chapter of the exhortation is of a poorer quality to that of the first and seems, in the midst of speaking of Religious Life in Communion with the Church, to have a need to cover odds and ends that didn't fit in elsewhere. At the beginning of Chapter III however the focus on consecration is balanced with a consideration of mission even though it had been touched on in chapter one. The first missionary duty of the religious, we are told, is to his or herself – to the opening of their hearts to the prompting of the Holy Spirit (No. 25). Thus the interior dimension of a missionary orientation is the first element. The title of Chapter III is 'Consecrated Life: Manifestation of God's Love in the World.' The religious is 'consecrated' for mission and this finds expression by some religious in evangelization, inculturation, and the prophetic character of the life. This requires an ability for discernment of the signs of the times: the Holy Spirit

calls consecrated men and women to present new answers to the new problems of today's world. These are divine pleas which only souls accustomed to following God's will in everything can assimilate faithfully and then translate courageously into choices which are consistent with the original charism and which correspond to the demands of the concrete historical situation.<sup>107</sup>

The presumption of and the expectation by others that religious be masters of discernment strikes me as a positive orientation for the future. The difficulty of stressing consecration is that while it affirms religious in their vocation it doesn't necessarily focus them outward on mission or sufficiently affirm those other Christians they will work alongside.

## 2.4 The Theology of Religious Life 1965 - 1996

In this chapter we have sought to trace some of the evolution in the thinking on Religious Life from the Second Vatican Council to the publication of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*. We have noted three trends that emerged in the period. Theologies that focused on states of life read from a variety of keys, e.g. within the sweep of creation to eschatological reality of von Balthasar, or in an ecclesial key often with an awareness of the symbolic nature of the life. Secondly theologies that focused on Religious Life as a concentration of the experience of faith with a view to speaking to the

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<sup>106</sup> Bruno Secondin, p. 54.

<sup>107</sup> VC No. 73.

world more fully the message of life that this faith offers. Thirdly there were those who have stressed the theology of consecration.

The biggest surprise to emerge from these considerations was the existence in 1977 (von Balthasar) and again in 1996 (*Vita Consecrata*) of a continued reference to the superiority of Religious Life. This seems to be a legacy of the past we do not consider it opportune to place within a dynamic corporate image of the Church. It raises questions we will consider in detail in the next chapter about what the nature of Baptism is considered to be if new consecrations are not necessarily a consequence of it (VC No.30). The continued existence of this approach suggests to me a need to defend Religious Life from some loss of identity which was certainly an issue in the period. The second issue that has struck me is the inconsistent approach and different levels of stress given to the evangelical counsels. The vows express the central issues of the Religious Life and can be expressed in whichever of the three approaches noted above. The evangelical counsels are the acceptance of election; they express the content of the freedom project; they are the locus for the consecration of the religious; etc. For this reason I believe that the stress we noted Vatican II placed on the counsels is worth stressing over some other approaches.

While I do not wish to be in any way comprehensive nor am I seeking to arrive at a synthesis, I believe the various authors and documents in the period have suggested the following sketch for a representative theology of Religious Life of the period we are considering. The structure would follow the suggestion of VC and be Trinitarian. The Father, the source of all creation acts for the redemption of his people and offers them heavenly life. Von Balthasar gives us insights into how this dynamic flow, including the fallen nature of humankind, is the initial context for viewing Religious Life. The transformed humanity placed between the cross and the final eschatological moment, symbolized in the Transfiguration and spoken of in VC, suggests the place of the religious in the unfolding of divine salvation. The religious imitates the free choice of the Son to be obedient and powerless in loving care for those who he came to save (in this one might borrow from Tillard). The Spirit calls some of those who are baptized and carries them to deeper attention to communion with God and the enfolding of the Kingdom. It is at this juncture that the models we have followed seem most divergent. We could stress that those called by the Spirit share in a state of election (the direction von Balthasar follows) or secondly that the Spirit inaugurates a new dimension of their baptismal consecration and they are thus consecrated for the service of Christ. A third approach, which we have not seen but which is possible, is to speak of the individual seeking to comprehend the movement of the Spirit. Their lives would then be marked by their appropriation in faith of the Spirit's charism for the benefit of a life that follows Christ and is of service to the Church – this approach would focus more on attention to the Spirit than on a new relationship in Christ.

### III. Theology of Religious Life in the Year 2000 and its Reading of Baptism

#### 3 Introduction

In this chapter I will consider two recent works on Religious Life. I will start with a consideration of a phenomena that is new to the reflections we have seen so far: a consideration of the postmodern context. In the second section I will consider Sandra Schneiders<sup>108</sup> recent work on Religious Life. This will be followed by a consideration of a second recent work that of Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes.<sup>109</sup> The manner in which I will approach this second work will suggest elements of my own presentation. Fourthly, I will address directly questions of Baptism and religious consecration. The two major themes of this chapter are in effect the relationship of mission or consecration as the defining issue for Religious Life

#### 3.1 Religious Life and the Postmodern Reality

One difference between the works of Jose C. R. Garcia Paredes and Sandra Schneiders and those of the previous chapter is their speaking of Religious Life in the postmodern context. Vatican II enabled Catholic Theology to catch up with philosophical and scientific advances that had occurred in the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution. While in the pre-modern period humans could be said to have fitted into reality, in the modern period reality was viewed as being shaped by the human. This philosophical shift was large enough to digest without also having to cope with the pace of change and the degree of turmoil Vatican II heralded. Within twenty years the intellectual world was addressing another set of presuppositions; the postmodern as it is termed. Postmodern thought recognizes human limitations and in the main is opposed to permanent values or any language of maximization. In the postmodern there is a preference for fragmentation, which has a different impact than a preference for a hermeneutic of suspicion.

In a context where fundamentals are considered fictions of social construction, permanent commitment is hard to propose. Secondly the global world view that Religious Life suggests, with its traditions that often expect even the smallest details of life to be harmonized with the one central relation with Christ, is thereby open to attack especially if it is interpreted as an effort to produce a religious elite. Furthermore in this context spirituality is considered in terms of mystical experience rather than in terms of truths, and discussion is seen as a necessary preface to religious experience. This discussion is in some ways an indication of the loss of the consciousness of the world as real.

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<sup>108</sup> Sandra Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context*, Paulist Press, New York, 2000.

<sup>109</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Teologia de la vida religiosa*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 2000.

How is Religious Life, in the postmodern context, to communicate a communion with the historical salvation of Christ? How is Religious Life to express its values? Three elements are needed in any process of communication: emission, transmission and reception. If the person emitting the communication is using a different code from that of the receiver there is a difficulty. So in this new context how does Religious Life communicate, and what message does it suggest? Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes suggests that the form of life itself may be the best language to use in this communication because the way of living configures language and vice versa. The Christian life needs a language that believes in and emerges from life. The change in language in the postmodern culture, its increased flexibility, and its link to the economic world means there has been a retreat from the rhetorical. Implicit in this is a flight for many people from magisterial teachings and theology, which is linked to the rhetoric of truth.

Schneiders suggests there are three streams within the postmodern: 1 A radical deconstructionist group that repudiates the idea of a stable subjectivity, 2 A group which has not moved beyond the modern but simply rejected it. This group accepts the advantages of the modern but seeks to adopt values from the pre-modern. 3 A third group, classified as the 'late-moderns', which resonates with the intuitions of the postmodern critique of masculinism, materialism, progressivism etc. but seeks to maintain certain values of the modern. This last group wants to throw out the dirty water of *modernity*, particularly ideology, while retaining the modern era. The first group suggests views that could easily border on the 'nihilistic and [are] fundamentally incompatible with Christianity or any other religious tradition.'<sup>110</sup> It is not difficult to end up absorbing certain of the secularizing and alienating tendencies of this postmodern thought into the Church.<sup>111</sup> One response of Christians in facing such trends in society and possibly within the Church is to resort to a type of fundamentalism. The in the past has not been adverse to becoming excessively defensive, but this has been to the detriment of its long term evolution and to the clear proclamation of the gospel.

What might emerge in such a context is the importance of language of gesture and of the visual often in very concrete and practical forms. Furthermore there will be a closer attention to the emotional content of communications. These possibilities give the emitter of the communications a much greater freedom of choice. Religious Life must renounce certain elements of a messiah complex and move to a greater dialogue in evangelization where the person says only what they truly believe and comprehend personally. In this new consciousness the role of dialogue with its openness to the diversity will be crucial. Acceptance of plurality is the postmodern expression of catholicity.<sup>112</sup> This is not the acceptance of everything but a means to discover elements of truth and grace so that all may move towards fullness.

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<sup>110</sup> Schnieders, *Ibid.* p. 115.

<sup>111</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Teologia de la vida religiosa*, p. 141 cites a number of authors who have gone in this direction the most recent being N. Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, Trinity Press International, Valley Forge, Pa., U.S.A., 1996.

<sup>112</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Teologia de la vida religiosa*, p. 571.

The challenge facing Religious Life is to be able to discern strategies for combating the possibly debilitating forces of aspects of postmodernism.<sup>113</sup> The danger might be to spend too much time in creating a new language and not in learning to communicate the state of life as the language, learning to give witness to the theological truths that the life holds rather than developing a new linguistic construct. I am suggesting the focus may best be placed on the transmission rather than the emission. The postmodern context requires that the announcement of Jesus Christ be credible. The Church into which people are being invited so as to be supported in living the gospel life must appear to be a community; secondly, there must be an option for the poor; third there needs to be an option for non-violence and a dialogue of life.

### 3.2 Religious Life in 2000: A View from the U.S.A.

Sandra Schneiders I.H.M. is well known as a commentator on Religious Life. Her recent work<sup>114</sup> is the first of two projected volumes that are designed to consider the position of Religious Women in the North American Church. Thus the work is a specific reading and may be considered, if not principally theological, at least a dialectical reading of theology and context. It is part of her approach to mix certain basic *anthropological* and *theological* positions with her insightful *analysis of the location of women religious in the Church in USA* and to see this within *an ongoing and continuing reform*.

The *anthropological* ideas Schneiders offers seek to put in play three relationships, that of the Religious to the person of Jesus, to the Church, and to the world. It was her work that suggested Panikkar's writings that occupied us in Chapter One and Schneiders asserts clearly the image of monk and virgin as archetypes for contemporary Religious Women. Her *theological* consideration does not develop the idea of consecration other than affirming Religious as consecrated celibates who seek God and follow Christ while being involved in a mission given by the Holy Spirit to the Church through their congregation. A theology of Religious Life does not seek to show that this form of life expresses something that none other succeeds in expressing. It is a state of life, entered by profession, that is committed to Jesus Christ in lifelong consecrated celibacy and this commitment becomes the organizing principle of a specific Christian form of life. Celibacy is the constitutive element of Religious Life, she suggests,

whose prophetic character is rooted in and derives from the celibate solitude that unites contemplative immediacy to God and solidarity with the marginalized of

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<sup>113</sup> See also the work *La Vita Consacrata nella postmodernità*, Jan Schotte *et. al.*, Editrice Rogate, Rome, 1994. We shall refer the relation of the postmodern critique and the Rite of Religious Profession in section 4.4.below.

<sup>114</sup> Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context*.

society and expresses itself in the vows that address to the world the challenge of the Reign of God.<sup>115</sup>

Two main characteristics follow: a particular type of relationship with God and to one's neighbor in ministry. The by-passing of sexual intimacy, with its possibility of fruitful mutuality, is not asceticism but a 'single-minded absorption in the quest for God' and allows for the renunciations that express and support it.<sup>116</sup> I am puzzled by the use of the expression 'contemplative immediacy.' It suggests more a spiritual theology than a systematic approach.

This 'immediacy' is a gift open to all who remain attentive to the movements of the Holy Spirit in their lives.<sup>117</sup> It is immediate for the Religious only in the sense that God can be the direct and 'immediate' focus of one's life project. It expresses the starting point in seeking God. The religious will be among those who first seek to see all things in God rather than, with the help of a more concrete focus on creation, one who comes to see God in all things. In expressing her opinion of this, Schneiders suggests that, at least in desire, the Religious comes to every experience with an 'immediate involvement' with God rather than seeking God through historical experience. The following sentence, in light of what we might later say about the *a priori* gift of consecration as distinct from an idea of auto consecration, strikes me as significant while not developed.

It is the experience of having been 'found' already, having been claimed and possessed in a way that relativizes all other claims upon oneself, that dominates and shapes the consciousness of the Religious no matter what the activity or sphere of engagement.<sup>118</sup>

There is here a language that might suggest a bypassing of the normal or at least the most common natural mediations of the God-human engagement.

The companion of this contemplative immediacy and social marginality is a call to prophetic action, to the 'cultivation of participation in the divine pathos.'<sup>119</sup> The marginality of religious is not a hiding but a 'service of prophecy' assisting the centering of the person on the word of God so as to better announce it to the socially marginal (and also to the oppressors). But even more the energy of the prophetic life is addressed to the Church itself, to the people God. Such a prophetic role involves an attention to the movement and shaping forces in the world and 'the living of the question.' We might suggest that attention to transmitting the message of Religious Life and attention to the complex possibilities of its symbolism, which the postmodern demands, are examples of such 'living the question.'

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* p. 126.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p. 130.

<sup>117</sup> The American spiritual author and monk Thomas Merton is frequently referred to in Schneiders' work and his insights suggested.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.



Schneiders asserts that the history of Religious Life indicates there was a move from 'an understanding of Religious marginality in terms of physical separation and nonparticipation toward an understanding of Religious Life as an alternative reality construction by which Religious are in the world, but not of it.'<sup>120</sup> The theological elements of an active Religious Life struggled to be considered a state of life, a category Schneiders finds useful as it neither describes the hierarchical duality of the Church nor the simple triple division of canon law. State of life is a theological consideration she approaches very differently from von Balthasar. States of life seek to explain theologically the relationship of a person to the world and secondly, via public commitment to either marriage or Religious Life but 'leaves unaddressed the theological state and spirituality of those who for various reasons are in neither of those states of life.'<sup>121</sup>

In her *analysis of the location of women religious in the Church in USA* Schneiders seeks to see their evolution as a journey in spiritual deepening and suggests analogies to the spiritual theology of St. John of the Cross. As we suggested above, apostolic religious congregations have had to fight for recognition.<sup>122</sup> Her assessment of the evolution for women Religious since the Second Vatican Council is novel and at the same time, in using the spiritual categories of St. John of the Cross, somewhat risky. While noting all the signs of sociological decline that exist currently in religious communities there is also, she asserts, energetic and visionary planning for the future accompanied at the individual, personal level by much darkness in the day to day. To apply the insights of St. John of the Cross as analogy for current Religious Life was one Schneiders resisted for some time for fear of messaging a type of 'pious victim-hood' and secondly the application to a corporate level, analogously, of what is a description of personal experience. The darkness described in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night of the Soul* is experienced in distinct stages and is at the same time unitive and purgative. The style of Religious Life lived by many apostolic Religious before the Second Vatican Council would suggest an active night of sense. The structures of the life lived allowed one to sense the gradual turning from evident sin and centering one's life on God while these same structures 'did not, institutionally, encourage Religious to move beyond this initial stage.'<sup>123</sup> The active night of the spirit seeks to remove the sweetness of the spiritual life and move the person to a deeper and more personal faith. Thus, there is a certain letting go of props of the spiritual life which may well be covering a multitude of doubts and fears. Schneiders suggests that Vatican II launched, analogously, such an experience – the stability that had previously been the hall mark of community life was abandoned for sessions of renewal and challenges to grow and to personalize and make more adult the life of Religious. The call to holiness of all the baptized, not only the perfect, was the removal of a theological prop that many may have been using. Those who continued to

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>122</sup> Schneiders gives the example that the majority of women's religious congregations in the USA were not recognized as such by the church until 1900.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

live the life 'had now to choose it in purified faith, unsupported hope, and generous love, because it was largely devoid of compensatory packaging.'<sup>124</sup>

A hard look at Religious Life in the early post-conciliar period reveals traits that were possibly egoist or a secret pride and suggest the passive night, namely the passive night of sense:

Religious were very sure of themselves, appealing confidently to their own experience as a nonnegotiable norm of valid renewal. We were proud of our increasing humility in reclaiming our lay status, renouncing our "perks", dismantling hierarchical systems in our own congregations, and living more simply. . . . But the deep agitation and lack of peace that was often evident was probably a sign that mixed in with very real virtue and growth was a great deal of egoism that was largely invisible to us, individually or as a group.<sup>125</sup>

This experience was akin to being incapable of 'active' meditation and experiencing an emptiness and dryness that is aware of the distance from God. These feelings led large numbers to leave Religious Life, others to adopt personalist attitudes to work and compensations in non-congregational works. These situations often caused concern among bishops but if they involved themselves they were often fueling a fire that was well alight within the congregations. There was a great sense of powerlessness. Gradually, painfully and with a certain sense of exhaustion

Religious are acknowledging to themselves and one another that the attempt to replace theological interpretation of their life with sociological, psychological, and professional expertise has left a serious vacuum.<sup>126</sup>

There is a presumption of *an ongoing and continuing reform* needed in the Church. Schneiders is keenly aware of trying to steer a middle course in this regard though sometime the tone is combative. She offers certain remarks that are aimed at surprising the 'liberal wing' to use a loathsome term, but one that is well understood in the strongly polarized Church of the United States. For example, the idea that should at some future time women be allowed to be ordained presbyters, religious communities of women would be best not to move in that direction.<sup>127</sup> At the same time there is a strongly critical stance taken on certain institutional ecclesial ideas. She would suggest the papacy of John Paul II is restorationist and she speaks of interference on the part of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life in regulating members of Congregations. I believe these elements of the work reduce its accessibility for some. I do not wish to enter into the details of the underlying emphasis in the book on the need for reform, improved positioning of women, less centralized

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

control of religious congregations, etc. I will simply note that the emphasis here is on the prophetic role of religious within the Church itself which Schneiders suggests needs to be attended to. Secondly she sees a clear distance between religious and the hierarchy of the Church. At one point she comments: 'the [hierarchical] institution did not invent that life, cannot impose it, and must not impede it.'<sup>128</sup>

Overall, Schneiders' approach is a most reasoned assessment. In its evaluation of the movement over the last 30 years it is an honest critique. With regard to a theology of Religious Life it strongly stresses ministry, is fully aware that the context of this is a new postmodern context as we saw earlier and stresses elements of prophetic action. She does not consider consecration at all and centers her theology of the life on the vows with a strong stress on the centrality of chastity.

### 3.3 A Spanish Perspective on Religious Life: Jose C. R. Garcia Paredes

The work by Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Teologia de la vida religiosa*, is a compendium and a major resources for those considering a theology of Religious Life. It is, in effect, a condensation of his three volume *Teologia de las formas de vida cristiana*, which was published between 1996 and 1999.<sup>129</sup> The review of the history of Religious Life since Vatican II that *Teologia de la vida religiosa* offers has provided us with the basic structure for Chapter II above. Furthermore the anthropological ideas used by Cristo Rey are centered on Victor Turner's ideas of liminality that we considered in Chapter I.

The theological reflection in this work follows five distinct points as follows: The action of the Spirit, for the sake of *mission* (1) inspires founders to live the mystery of Jesus and to call others to do the same in special characteristics of services. Those who follow and enter the communities and institutes, enter with a 'con-vocation'; a *vocation* (2) from God to build charismatic community on the basis of *pura gracia* to become a movement in and for the Church. These communities seek to be a gift of one mind and one heart and thus to live *communion* (3). All this, mission, vocation, and communion is due to grace which embellishes the different communities with different charisms so that the individuals may realize their vocations. These embellishments allow for a form of life, which we can define as evangelical, in which the Holy Spirit gives the *charism* (4) to cultivate the liberty to follow Christ. With all this said we are in position to speak of this life in relationship to the Church as a form of *life* (5).<sup>130</sup>

The first point to note is the different orders of presentation in Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes' recent works. In Vol. II of the earlier work Cristo Rey dealt with systematic

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

<sup>129</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes has also written two works on sacramental theology: *Teologia fundamental de los sacramentos* (ed. San Pablo, Madrid, 1991) and *Iniciacion cristiana y eucaristia* (ed. San Pablo, Madrid, 1992).

<sup>130</sup> This is taken from a 2 page summary Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes offers; see *Teologia de la vida religiosa*, pp. 533 and 534.

considerations of Religious Life in four, not five sections, in the order: Vocation, Consecration, Mission, and Communion (the last of these being quite slight). We note then the enlargement, the changed order and the change in two of the headings. Besides 'Vocation' to 'Con-vocation' the more significant alteration is the placing of the ideas of 'Consecration' with the consideration of 'Charism'. Why this change was made is not completely clear to me, but I believe that the mission, as a given reality, was crucial factor in influencing the change. Introducing his section on mission in the work of 2000, that is the first section, he states his approach to mission is ascending. Thus it begins with the phenomena that is encountered in the Church; men and women who have professed celibacy and who are on mission for the sake of the kingdom. The alternative, a descending approach, begins with the view of the life of the Trinity.<sup>131</sup> I prefer to explore the very rich contribution of Cristo Rey, the best single contribution I have found to date, but I wish to suggest a different structure.

I suggest that in a theological study it is correct to begin with vocation or convocation and to view the second element for consideration as that of the charism. The individual and the group who are called, receive a vocation (A) from God on the basis of their baptismal life and their member-ship in the Son. When this call is heard and attempts are made to respond an effusion of spiritual gifts, charisms (B), are poured out to allow the person to enter into alliance with God (or to use another language their baptismal consecration is particularized). This call and these spiritual gifts are offered to the Church for its mission (C) for the sake of the Gospel and all three effect communion (D) of the religious; with God, with the Church, one with another, and for the world. All four of these elements make up the religious Form of Life (E) that speaks of the prophetic witness to the incarnation and the eschatological dimension of the Christian life.

### 3.3.1 Vocation

While in the OT each vocation conferred a mission, in the NT the call involves not only a mission but also a particular style of life, a new 'ontological and existential situation,'<sup>132</sup> to be 'with Him.' To be in union with Christ is the Christian vocation with each individual's vocation being a particular biography of following and union. The diverse aspects of following and union are what configure different forms of Religious Life. Some are called to a particular, celibate life style with a mission for the Church. This call is a con-vocation – a call that God makes to an individual but also to others – a call with, *con*, others. Anthropologically call is akin to a seduction to particular values; values for one's life, that give life a unifying center, a horizon that suggests a life project and transcendence in which the individual can dream.<sup>133</sup> Religious Life offers such a set of values: those of community, mission, and religious experience; and an individual's conscience is a key to understanding how these values resonate in a person in the early stages in the growth of an individual's vocation. The tradition of the Church had been to

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153ff.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

overstress an intellectual concept of conscience which Vatican II sought to correct with a greater openness to religious experience (as for example in *Gaudium et Spes* 16). When God's voice is heard in the most intimate whispers of conscience, it is the call to an authentic existence, to borrow a Heideggerian interpretation.

The structure of call in the individual usually encounters a sense of inability to respond, while at the same time there is sufficient drive in the person to attempt to respond and speak a yes to God's call. This urge to speak yes is part of the gift of God. God endows those he calls with a gift of the Spirit. 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you'; the words of God's messenger to Mary in Luke 1:35. Or, 'I will be with you,' God's assurance to Moses in Exodus 3. 12 or again 'I have put my words in your mouth,' God's words to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:9. This gift of the spirit is a sacralisation, a relationship with God which can be termed, with the tradition, a consecration. The fourth element of vocation (besides call, a sensation of inability and gift of the Spirit) is that of sign. Mary is given the sign that her kinswoman, Elizabeth, is with child; Moses is given the sign that the people will worship on the holy mountain. With this basic structure we can suggest that God's call, without enslaving anyone, helps move people to particular and varied styles of life and mission.

Vocation is not dependent on the human choice but on God's call ('You did not choose me but I chose you.' John 15:16.) and this expresses itself in the following and imitation of Jesus. One such call is to a stable or permanent form of life in 'religious liminality' – founded not on a renouncing of goods but on the values assumed. For the sake of the values assumed and pursued, a renunciation of certain goods is necessary. This renunciation is not a primary objective, but it enables the person to be free so as to be exclusively absorbed by the values and the graces offered in there call. '*La pasion per lo religioso. . . crea un nuevo tipo de vocacion. Es la pasion por el reino de Dios.*'<sup>134</sup>

### 3.3.2 Charism

The most interesting sections in both books we have seen in this chapter were for me those on charism. Schneiders suggests charism is not a theologically precise term so it can be understood at four levels: Religious Life is a gift to the Church. Secondly charism is a phenomena between groups that share a basic form of Religious Life, for example the mendicants. Thirdly there is the charism of a particular congregation and fourthly the charism an individual receives to live Religious Life for the Church.

For Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes there has been no successful attempt to find a direct foundation for Religious Life in any one scriptural text or group of texts. Rather the combined teaching of the scriptures serves as the foundation on which Religious Life builds. The life wishes to follow the full teaching and example of Christ. A principle consideration in this approach is the biblical understanding of covenant. In his meeting with the rich young man in Matthew Ch. 19 the question Jesus asks relates to the

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

covenant, as following Him requires its reinterpretation. We cannot suggest that some are called to love while others are called to the commandments, that is not what is spoken of between Jesus and his possible disciple. Rather some are inspired by the Holy Spirit to shape their life in a particular way using the evangelical counsels. These, while considered by St. Thomas to represent the three 'concupiscences,' are better termed the three great areas of human life: autonomy, possessions, and affectivity. The counsels are three forms of expression that better aid a single interior appropriation of the gospel, but do not provide a clearer and more explicit list of requirements. The triad is a symbolic expression that needs to be approached from the point of the Gospel and the imitation of Jesus and not the other way around.

The vows are an expression of this alliance with God which is understood christologically. Rather than using terminology such as evangelical counsels, vows, and consecration, would theological reflections, Cristo Rey asks, be helped were we to change these to: evangelical charisms, the following and memorial of Jesus, and charismatic consecration? I will rely heavily on Cristo Rey's idea of 'charismatic consecration' when I come to it below. It needs to be said that the in Ch. 11, where he speaks of professing vows, his work seems to move in something akin to the sequence I have chosen to present his work. God has acted in his elect and called them, consecrating them and sending them on Mission. Thus we see here the relation of consecration to charism in terms of a charismatic consecration in the midst of a Holy and Consecrated People.<sup>135</sup> The response 'I vow to God . . .' is a response to the covenant offered by God to his elect and the only Christian vow that can be made is a vow of love. God promises to give the gifts necessary while the elect promises to offer himself freely. The 'clauses' of this alliance, like that of God with his people, are termed in the new commandment of love. The unity of the tripartite vows is found in the command of love which involves all the heart, all the mind, and all the soul. Religious profession is a symbolic moment of alliance, the new alliance that involves unity with the Son of God who suffered for humanity and who opened an eternal life in his outpouring. The three vows are dimensions that help give expression to the covenant. They give it a theological dynamism. This covenant is, in christological terms, the following of Christ, and in terms of Christian existence, it is the charism of love. At one point Cristo Rey suggests: 'Jesus is the mediator of the covenant and also of the covenant of our Religious Profession' which is obviously an analogous reading that gives the new covenant as the model for profession. He then outlines over the next 115 pages each of the three vows,<sup>136</sup> starting with 'Obedience to the Covenant and Mission,' suggesting under each a threefold reflection. First the vow as a charism and as a responsibility (both a gift and a human struggle). Second he reflects on each vow as a following the obedience, poverty, or celibate virginity of Christ, and third he offers an elaboration of each vow under four headings: the missionary and political dimension, the communitarian, the ecological, and

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

<sup>136</sup> It is interesting to note that while Cristo Rey observes the change in the order of the presentation of the three vows in Vatican II from poverty, chastity and obedience to that of chastity, poverty and obedience he himself suggests a return to great monastic tradition of obedience, poverty and celibacy, *Ibid.*, p. 400.

the mystical. I consider the idea of covenant causes less sacramental confusion than does the idea of a consecration. The covenant is an expression of the charismatic strengthening of the individual to undertake a particular way of life.

### 3.3.3 Mission

Jose C. R. Garcia Paredes notes at the outset of his section on ministry that there are two approaches possible in a consideration of ministry, a view that descends, starting with a strongly Trinitarian view and secondly one that focuses on the observed reality. He uses the second of these. The Church assists in con-voking its members for mission, not in a manner that she is at the center of the work for the glory of God but that in all nations the glory of Christ resurrected be affirmed. The Church's members are invited to an extroverted movement to carry the word and to be agents to help the realization of God's actions in the world. It is an activity that is not 'super-added' to the life of the Church but is intrinsic to its one nature. The Church was born of the missionary impulse of the Spirit and the Church now is for mission – it is the *sacramentum missionis Dei*.

All who have faith in Christ (*christifidelis*) have received a particular vocation to live and work for the building of the Kingdom of God and mission. In the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation all Christians are consecrated by the Spirit and through the charisms that the Spirit gives they not only collaborate but they are on mission. The gifts of the Spirit are personal. In the case of founders they seem to be unique. For others the gift is to live in community for the sake of the kingdom. The Church recognizes broad groups of these gifts: the contemplative life (a term, as we saw, Schneiders would question as it relates to all, and which we might suggest be better termed the monastic and hermitical life); the apostolic Religious Life; societies of apostolic life and secular institutes.<sup>137</sup> The thrust of the mission of Religious Life in particular could be said to have been mission *ad intra* and evangelization of the baptized. The increased emphasis today is on mission as diaconal service (the much saluted option for the poor) and dialogue.

'Devoting themselves wholly to "mission" is therefore included in their call' and 'a sense of mission is essential to every institute' (VC 72). Only those 'accustomed to following God's will in everything can assimilate faithfully and then translate courageously into choices', responses to the problems of today's world (VC 73). There is a strong suggestion of participation in the prophetic action of Christ in this mission, as we noted also in Schneiders, and it will be carried out in the postmodern context. For this the mission of the religious is characterized less by the actions of achievements: to do, to educate, to care and to attend but rather with actions that are symbolic: to inspire, to allude, to show, to stimulate, to translate and to transmit. Thus, in summary, the religious has the same mission as the *christifideles saeculares* but not in the same form; the latter

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<sup>137</sup> These four types are reduced to three in Canon Law, with the first two considered as one, Religious Institutes, giving us the three broad categories of the Consecrated Life in Book II, Part III.

under the mystery of the incarnation and of human values, while the former under the contrasting and less frequent prophetic role.

### 3.3.4 Communion

The communion which humanity can express and experience is at three levels, ontic, existential, and spiritual and all three are the anticipation of a mystery which requires faith to become fully realized. The Spirit gifted to us and revealed in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation allows us enter into communion, and in the Spirit, a *koinonia* is established among all the faithful. Vatican II did not raise the Trinitarian dimension of Religious Life as did *Vita Consecrata*<sup>138</sup> where community life is considered as following the image of the Trinity. Religious, like all Christians, are invited to live an imitation of that reality, to be in a state of communion as a consequence of the call and election that they have received. Thus no form of Christian life is defined in and for itself. As in the case of vocation here again in speaking of communion, the under-girding is that of charism.

The missionary thrust that apostolic religious engage in is an outward movement suggested by the call of God, but it finds its compensation in the exchange of gifts that is the basis of communion. The model to help religious to live this community is the imitation of Jesus and his apostles and, the primitive community. The first gives rise to the name by which many congregations since the mendicants are frequently known, apostolic missionary congregations even though canonical recognition of this life style was slow in appearing.<sup>139</sup> Community is an imitation of the apostolic life of the itinerant community which Jesus led. It was often antithetical to the religious world of his day. When these dimensions of the Christian life are lived today they involve a renouncing of the ego, a style of community life seeking the values of the historical group of followers and a carrying out an apostolic life in concrete service.

Moving to the image of the early Christian community in the post-paschal period, the principle characteristic that inspires us is that the community was of 'one heart and one soul and no one claimed private ownership' Acts 4:32. It sought to be an embodiment of what Christ had taught and they recalled the words of Jesus: 'Do this, and you will live' (Luke 10:28). Community in Religious Life seeks to express in concrete terms and for the benefit of those building it and for the Church some elements of this utopian Lucan presentation. Pride of place must be given to love: love of God and of one's neighbor who is an image of God. On the basis of this all the other virtues must also be attended to. If there is truly a mission for the Church there will be suffering, and some will be called to carry their cross to live authentically this mission. This calls for solidarity of heart and tangible unity. Communion involves an uniting of the activities of mission under the

<sup>138</sup> Reference here is to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Apostolic Life, 'Fraternal Life and Community', of the 2 Feb. 1994.

<sup>139</sup> Note that the apostolic mission is proper to the institute and is not a sharing in the apostolic office of the hierarchy.



Holy Spirit to build unity in the body of Christ. Such communion is a gift of the Spirit and it is an image of the Trinity, a following of the itinerant community of Jesus and an emulation of the early Christian community.

### 3.3.5 Life as an Identity

The movement that we have suggested, based on that of Jose C. R. Garcia Paredes could be said to have concluded with our consideration of communion. This communion is a gift of God but it can also be seen to be an offering, a sign of union with God. In speaking of a form of life that is liminal we have return again to some anthropological issues we have spoken of in Chapter One. However, there is a further symbolic dimension that we have noted as an element of Communion. This way of life is one that speaks to the other states of life, of the eschatological reality of faith in Christ. While marriage may suggest the incarnation, the various forms of the Religious Life, with their abstinence from sexual activity symbolize an identity with the original state of creation and more importantly an eschatological future in Christ.

Internal to this life Schneiders suggests that in speaking of types of religious life, the language of contemplative and apostolic is unhelpful – all are invited to contemplate. More simply the distinctions between the monastic and the missionary style of life is the approach of both groups to the questions of prayer and ministry. Both ‘groups’ are involved in both activities, the monk being ministerial in hospitality, community charity and opening the liturgy for the benefit of others. The behavioral expression of the monastic, ‘contemplative’ life is prayer while that of Religious is ministry.<sup>140</sup> These behavioral expressions shape how each live their lives. An activity that takes the monk away from prayer is foregone, while for the religious the weight given to the apostolic love of one’s neighbor might lead to a reduction in the amount of time spent in community prayer and maybe in regular prayer in general.

### 3.3.6 Conclusion

I have in reality raided Jose C. R. Garcia Paredes’ principal ideas under his own headings but I have sought to place them in a more dynamic theological order. My reading has suggested to me that the action of God calls the already elect (understanding Baptism as a rite for the elect) to further their baptismal faith for the purpose of the mission in the Church. The response to that call is affirmed in the particular charismatic configuration of the person in a congregation and is celebrated and formalized in the profession of vows. God’s call is responded to in the charismatic consecration suggested by profession. It is an ecclesial affirmation of the charism to live a form of Religious Life. There is then an invigorated appropriating of the movement of the Spirit in order to return human energies for service of the world and the Church to the glory of God. This double interplay of offering and response allows a new communion to be born and it is this

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<sup>140</sup> Schneiders, *Ibid.*, p. 301 ff.

communion of the subject to God, to others in the congregation, to the rest of the Church and to the world that, gives the life its identity.

### 3.4 A Summary of Trends in Light of Seven Approaches Considered

In the course of the last chapter and this we have considered six authors and one Papal exhortation. The means of classifying these are considerable; in terms of theological theme e.g. election, stressed more by Hans Urs von Balthasar; in terms of the dating of the reflections with regard to Vatican II or by some other classification. Some of the insights I have noted include:

1. A reduced stress in most of the writing of using any idea of religious perfection – despite the use of the term in the title of *Perfectae Caritatis*. There is in this sense a reading of perfection more in terms of Matthew 5:48, an instruction to all the faithful: 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect'.
2. The understanding of the world present in the writings. Once we had left the reflections of von Balthasar we had far less problem with the 'world' as a category. Thus – 'Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectations of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 39).
3. When speaking of the vows in Religious Life less focus is placed on the distinction between commandments and counsels. Rather the vows are seen as three elements that distinguish the complete person as offered to God in a particular relationship and in response to God's call.
4. A single unifying theological expression has been sought to underpin the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty. The evangelical councils, following the ideas of Vatican II are a crucial key to understanding Religious Life. We note that Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes spends 20 percent of his recent work in elaborating them. The vows express the response to God's call and cannot be viewed as three separate undertakings:
  - a) Religious consecration has been increasingly used as that unifying element.
  - b) Generally the English speaking world uses the underpinning of consecration far less than do other language areas.
  - c) Two recent writers have been less focused on consecration as a unifying underpinning for Religious Life.
  - d) One of these authors suggested covenant as the unifying theme. This idea was earlier used in *Redemptionis donum* No. 8.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptionis donum*, March 1984, Enchiridion Vaticanum, No. 9, EDB, Bologna, p. 717.

Mission, and awareness of the testamentary dimension of Religious Life is much clearer than at Vatican II. The challenge for those who stress apostolic involvement within a particular congregation is to see a broader and more general charismatic foundation for their activity. The newer approach had been to relate the founding event to a charism that flowered in a time and place and thereby better understand its rootedness in the Spirit. The advantage of the language of consecration has been to give mission, what was formerly termed apostolic activity, a richer theological grounding.

A prophetic dimension to the Religious Life has been a serious issue in the last ten years but I have a suspicion that it has not yet arrived at a complete synthesis.

The concept of state of life remains an important term to express the nature of the Church but it is read less ecclesially, at least, hierarchically, and more anthropologically and theologically. Some authors speak of forms of life.

There is some concern that the doctrine that developed around consecration, while affirming Religious Life as to the nature and depth of God's call, will open a return to a more hierarchical reading of the states of life. Language such as a new consecration suggests this concern.

Consecration presents us with certain insights but also carries certain limitations. In particular there is a danger of confusion in those areas relating to sacraments and the relationship with the Sacrament of Baptism.

### **3.5 Baptism and Consecration**

One intention of Vatican II was to initiate all the members of the Church into a greater awareness of their full dignity and role in the mission of Christ to the world. One element of this emphasis was the clear wish to de-couple Religious Life from the hierarchical configuration of God's people.<sup>142</sup> Addressing God's people as sharing in the kingly, prophetic, and priestly nature of Christ put a renewed emphasis on the Sacrament of Baptism. The launching of The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults has further brought to light the rich history of the sacraments of initiation while also causing a certain theological obsession about it. Following the Council many religious had stressed their common bond with lay people. At the same time, partly caused by a certain excess in this thinking, partly by the seeming disarray in many congregations and furthermore by the impulse towards the New Evangelization and the need for people to undertake it, a certain need to evolve the thinking of religious was felt with some going so far as to suggest Religious Life involves a new consecration. Both tendencies, that of focusing on the

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<sup>142</sup> LG 43 – where the council says that 'from the point of view of the divine and hierarchical nature of the church' Religious Life is not to be seen as a middle way between ordained and lay. Thus when VC (29c) suggests a threefold division in the church it is not necessarily flying in the face of the Council if we can clearly distinguish the hierarchical structure of the Church from the Church as manifestations of Holy Spirit in God's people.

similarity to laity and that emphasizing a 'high' consecration, suffered from an overly ecclesial reading of Religious Life and not sufficient attention to the pneumatological. The danger remains, as it did in the past, that any effort to affirm Religious Life or to call it to account can easily slip into a seeming deprecation of the graced nature of all those who have been fully initiated in the Church.

I will seek here to consider briefly the scriptural understanding of consecration, then move to a consideration of consecration in the sacraments of initiation. I will then consider the intent of Vatican II when speaking of religious consecration and what the impact of this language might be on the sacramental discourse and on the position of religious in the Church. In this regard I will suggest speaking of a 'new' consecration is inappropriate. Finally I will suggest that the questions that we are raising relate to how we see Christian initiation. It is best to place the idea of consecration of religious in the context of the dynamic movement of all the members of the church in their participation of the Eucharist and in their living its mysteries in the world. In summary I will be suggesting caution in speaking of religious consecration.

### 3.5.1 Consecration in Christ

Firstly let us consider some *biblical* elements of the term consecration:<sup>143</sup> the term consecration is related to that of 'holy,' *qds*. The Old Testament knows of an objective or ritual consecration and a subjective personal sanctification. The latter is the aim, the point of arrival for the whole people. 'For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy' (Lev. 11:44). Or 'you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation' (Ex. 19:6). The evolution of the term *qds* can be seen in a move from an interest in the preparation of space and time for encounters with God, to something far more personal. In Exodus 3, Moses is told to be distant because the burning bush and the mountain are a holy place. As a result of the encounter with God the mountain became holy. Again in Exodus 19, Moses is told to prepare the people for the third day or in Joshua 3:5 the requirement of a ritual is part of the expectation. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, however, the concept takes on a much stronger and more personalized dimension: Jeremiah 1: 5 reads: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations".

The idea of selection and appointment here is in relation to the salvific work God is accomplishing for his people. Here a person is set aside for God's service which we see in a variety of expressions: service as a king (political service) or a prophet (spiritual service) or a priest (cultic service). Generally this consecration was in the form of an anointing with oil and in fact 'anoint' is frequently used as the preferred translation in many of the English liturgical books for consecration. There are three elements to consecration on its evolution into a more spiritual, sanctifying concept. The first is election; suggesting an element of separation but this in terms of the relationship of God

<sup>143</sup> Much in this section and below is drawn from Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes; *Teologia de las formas de vida cristiana*, Vol. II, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid, 1999, pp. 167 – 202.

to the person. The second is installation; being in a permanent state of relationship and third is testimony of this by means of an alliance or covenant.

Theologically consecration is a separation which changes something or someone, by an ascending or descending action, to be in some way 'between' God and humanity. The person or possibly place or object begins to be made sacred when it is separated from the profane and withdrawn for a special purpose. The rite in which this is realized is a rite of consecration. God offers his elect the opportunity to participate in his own holiness and offers them a covenant to assist this relationship. The distinction between consecration and sanctification is clear. God is not sacred but is holy. Thus consecration is a means of communication between the divine and human. Thus while the sacralizing may separate the person, sanctification does not.

The consecration of sacralizing does not imply any interior transformation, but sanctification penetrates the being of the human and transforms it. The consecration of sacralization consists in a punctual, initial act, orienting the subject towards a service that must be carried out; sanctification is always a continuous process that has a fulfillment and growth which is not reached except in the eschaton.<sup>144</sup>

Jesus Christ is the consecrated one and any act of consecration of the Church is carried out in Him and with Him. The consecration is an action of configuration to Christ that allows sanctity to be communicated and enveloping. Often in the past the view of consecration was not this personal view of the subject's relationship in Christ to the Father. A perennial problem is a view that sees consecration in terms of a juridical action or a juridical separation where place, person, or things are dedicated to worship or service of God.<sup>145</sup> This approach has been curtailed somewhat in the rites of the Church where the use of the word consecration is applicable only to people.

Ritually the Church has understood degrees of consecration in its liturgical life. A clear distinction between an act of blessing and a sacramental evocation can be found in the prayer of blessing or consecration and the solemnity with which it is surrounded, particularly the element of ritual gesture. For example the bishop elevates his arms out over the person receiving his solemn blessing (e.g. in the case of the Consecration of Virgins) while in the case of a more simple blessing the hands are joined (as in the case of the Institution of Ministries).

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171

<sup>145</sup> Severino-M. Alonso, 'Consagración', *Diccionario Teológico de la vida consagrada*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, eds. A.A. Rodríguez and Joan Canals Casas, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid, 1992, p. 371.

### 3.5.2 Baptism

'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light' 1 Peter 2:9. This passage suggests the three elements of the move to sanctification that we spoke of above. These elements are election, (you are chosen), a permanent presence of God (priesthood and a holy nation) and testimony (called out of darkness). Christ is the one who is consecrated and in his body we have all a participation in his life, in him we can offer spiritual sacrifices. In him we give witness that He has called us out of darkness to share in his priesthood.<sup>146</sup> Thus the 'laity, dedicated as they are to Christ and anointed by the holy Spirit, are . . . prepared so that even richer fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them'.<sup>147</sup> There is but one Christ and in the Holy Spirit many modes of that presence, Christ the priest, head of his body, Christ spouse of his Church, Christ the prophet and Christ the Paschal Victim. There is in Baptism a double gift – it is a revelation by God to the baptized of the One he consecrated and secondly a participation in him by the gift of the Spirit. Thus as Christ was consecrated and sent to the world, the Christian is not separated from the world in any way other than Christ was separated from the world. It is a consecration of sanctification and a filling of the human with the sanctity of God which the individual is free to participate in or reject.

This language of consecration is present in both the Rites of Baptism and Confirmation: In the Rite of Baptism of Children, the prayer that accompanies the anointing after Baptism reads:

The God of Power and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin and brought you to a new life through water and the Holy Spirit. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation, so that, united with his people, you may remain forever a member of Christ who is Priest, Prophet, and King.<sup>148</sup>

Furthermore the prayer used at the time of anointing of the candidate in the Sacrament of Confirmation shows that all the faithful are truly consecrated and anointed in the Spirit and have as an inheritance a charismatic life, personal gifts and personal charisms, which they are able to develop and make more explicit:

My dear friends: in baptism God our Father gave the new birth of eternal life to his chosen sons and daughters. Let us pray to our Father that he will pour out the Holy Spirit to strengthen his sons and daughters with his gifts and anoint them to be more like Christ the Son of God.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> PO, 2.

<sup>147</sup> LG, 34.

<sup>148</sup> The Rite of Baptism of Several Children, Anointing After Baptism, No. 62, *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, Vol. One, Study Edition, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1990, p. 388.

<sup>149</sup> The Rite of Confirmation Within Mass, *ibid.*, p. 490.

The consequence of being a chosen son or daughter, sharing in the 'Sonship' of Christ, is that each is associated with his mission. Filial adoption and mission are inexorably tied.

### 3.5.3 Religious Life as a Consecration: Sacramental Implications

Given what we have seen so far it seems that biblically, theologically, and ritually it would be conceivable to speak of Religious Life as a consecration. Let us turn our attention to whether in fact it is beneficial to consider Religious Life in terms of consecration. In LG 44 there is reference to all the baptized being dead to sin and consecrated to God. Religious profess, it continues, in order to be consecrated more closely to the service of Christ and the more stable bonds they have, the more perfect their religious consecration. In LG 45 we are told that it is a state consecrated to God. One suggestion might be that consecration is a dedication or a 'self' consecration but how does that match what we understand by consecration as being something that at least is initiated by God. The language used in Vatican II might be said to support the view that the consecration of Religious leans more on the side of being a human response than it is a divine action. If this were to be the case we can suggest the beneficial distinction that sanctity is the gift of God, for which the Spirit showers charisms, but consecration is the testimonial response to this grace by the Church. The elect who have been called must then prepare to declare (dedicate) themselves and accept the spiritual gift of communion and sanctity that God offers them. In this sense dedicating and consecrating actions of the Church are declarations of acceptance rather than acts of self-direction, though presumably at the early stages of the call the movement towards acceptance has its own energy that is itself graced consolation. The act of profession is an act of the Church, not of the individual and the Holy Spirit in the Church enables us to speak of consecration. Galot, as we noted in the last chapter, lays some stress on the fact that in the middle of the first paragraph of LG 44 we come across consecration in the basic form 'in order *to be consecrated* more fully' and he suggests that this signifies divine action. I suggest that within the flow of the paragraph there is a strong sense of human action needed and that in light of this action of dedication – the consecration occurs. The following 'skeletonization' of the paragraph may help to avoid an excessively 'divine' reading of consecration – it is a reciprocal place of meeting based on the never ending and never understood invitation by God for his people to share in his holiness.

Christians who embrace this way. . . bind themselves . . . by vows . . . . Dedicating themselves . . . to God . . . they are committed . . . in a new and special way . . . to serving . . . him. True, as baptized . . . they are dead to sin and [they are] consecrated to God; but . . . to draw . . . fruit from . . . their Baptism they make profession . . . . They do this . . . to be freed from hindrances that could hold them back from loving God . . . and in order to be consecrated more closely to his service. The bonds by which they dedicate themselves show . . . the . . . bond of union that exists between Christ and . . . the Church.

I believe that this combined idea of dedication and profession are integral to any discussion on consecration.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore according to Bruno Secondin there is an ambiguity in *Vita Consecrata* as to whether one is dealing with an action of God or whether one is dealing with an initiative of the person. The 'thought of the Pope oscillates from one to the other of these aspects'.<sup>151</sup> In VC 17 we read:

. . . the call to the consecrated life: it is an initiative coming wholly from the Father (cf. Jn. 15:16) which asks those whom he has chosen to respond with complete and exclusive devotion. The experience of this gracious love of God is so deep and so powerful that the person called senses the need to respond by unconditionally dedicating his or her life to God, consecrating to him all things present and future. . . .

Here it is clear that the call is seen as the initiative of God and the act of the subject is that devotion or dedication. The result of God's initiative, the person's response and the Church's ministry means we can speak of a consecration of the Religious. On this reading we can at least say the consecration is not such without the call. An example of the other approach might be VC 31 'Consecrated persons, who embrace the evangelical counsels, receive a new and special consecration which, without being sacramental, commits them to making them their own . . . the way of life practiced personally by Jesus . . .'

The implication here is the person is not simply being called but is consecrated prior to embracing the evangelical counsels. This is not the manner in which I feel it helpful to proceed for the simple reason that it omits the need for the human action to be seen as more than a mere acceptance – rather it is profession, a declaration that enables the fuller acceptance.

### 3.5.4 A reading too far: A 'New' Consecration

The new Code of Canon Law breaks new ground in having united the different categories of people who profess the evangelical counsels under title: The Institutes of Consecrated Life. One author notes that '*Mediante la professione dei consigli evangelici, la persona che li professa viene consacrata in tutta la sua vita, al punto che appartiene a Dio in*

<sup>150</sup> Antonio Queralto undertook an analysis of the use of the term consecration in the documents of Vatican II and found that the Council attributed to different persons the power to consecrate, the Father, Son and Spirit but also the bishop, the priest etc. The non-sacramental consecrations confer grace comparable to that of the sacraments and religious consecration can be located in participation of the salvific priesthood of Christ. See 'Il Valore della consacrazione religiosa', in *Vaticano II: Bilancio e prospettive, venticinque anni dopo (1962 – 1987)*, ed. Rene Latuourelle, Vol. II, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi, 1987, pp. 1084 – 1118.

<sup>151</sup> Bruno Secondin, *Il Profumo di Betania: La Vita Consacrata come mistica profezia terapia*, Centro Editoriale Dehoniano, 1996, p. 49.



*modo totale e nuovo.*<sup>152</sup> As we saw earlier VC uses the same idea of 'new and special consecration.' The argument for this would suggest, in line with Canon 574, art. 2, that this is a special vocation, and thus the consecration is not simply that of Baptism, nor is it caused by Baptism. The same canonist further argues that the consecration of Religious is not founded on a sacrament.<sup>153</sup>

How is it particular and new without this being seen as superseding baptismal consecration? One approach would be to suggest that the call of God to a person is the one call for their life and thus the two 'consecrations,' that of baptism and profession are two sets in the appropriation by the subject of their unique call with the aid of the Church. This reading has the advantage of suggesting divine consistency while also suggesting an theological anthropology for Religious Life. If, however, we stress consecration more in terms of separation then we are in difficulty. Seeing it as a separation, a distinguishing, from one state of life to another without referring this back to the christological basis of all states would mean consecration of religious becomes a point of division between Christians. I consider this term of a 'new' consecration questionable and I note that others do also.<sup>154</sup>

The question behind these efforts to understand VC's understanding of a 'new' consecration is: How can it said that the consecration of a religious does not add something to the relationship of the individual to Christ, which is complete and full in baptism and confirmation? I believe it is best to rely on VC itself and follow the movement suggested in *Vita Consecrata* 14:

Many of the baptized throughout history have been invited to live such a life "in the image of Christ." But this is possibly only on the basis of a special vocation and in virtue of a particular gift of the Spirit. For in such a life baptismal consecration develops into a radical response in the following of Christ through acceptance of the evangelical counsels, the first and essential of which is the sacred bond of chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.

So indeed Religious Life is a particular call and yes therefore we can speak of a particular consecration but a new consecration? It is a renewed dedication by the Christian of their Baptism and in this sense not new – it is new in the sense of being the response to the call to a new state of life and the acceptance of God's charismatic outpouring for the individual to live that way. But the religious is not in a new relationship to Christ nor sharing in the ministry of Christ head of his Church. The relationship with others in the body of Christ, the Church, is special to the extent it highlights the eschatological hope the Church has in Christ. The religious is bound to his or her original configuration to Christ and to a new set of relationships with his fellow Christians.

<sup>152</sup> Velasio De Paolis, *La Vita Consacrata nella chiesa*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 1992, p. 23.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>154</sup> Maria Ignazia Angelini, suggests that it would be better to speak of 'singolare e fecondo approfondimento della consacrazione battesimale.' "Dedicare la vita: Il paradigma monastico", in *Corso di teologia sacramentaria*, Ed., Grillo, A., et. al., Vol. II, Queriniana, Brescia, 2000, p. 289.

### 3.6 The Eucharist as the Touchstone for Understanding Consecration

I have had the sensation that for some, religious profession is as it were the conclusion of Christian initiation. The Church has discovered its rich liturgical, catechetical and mystagogical traditions in regard to Baptism and yet faces the pastoral problem of how to refuse Baptism to parents who do not manifest the signs of faith. In light of the emphasis on the New Evangelization it is evident that there are sizable numbers of baptized Catholics who have a negligible understanding of the graces they have been offered in Baptism. This can lead to a perception of a mixed membership in the Church with religious seen as more serious than other Christians. Furthermore it is difficult to speak of states of life as such an approach might suggest a view a Christian society, an expression of Christendom, foreign to modern thinking. It is easy in such a context to overlook the fact that initiation is at some point complete and the new members of the Church should be able to live with the food of the Eucharist, a life of the Spirit. The adult initiate has the possibility of growing on the way to conversion and imitation of Christ as his son or daughter. If we overlook such truths religious profession might be considered the place where initiation is completed; where finally persons appropriate for themselves what others promised for them in their infant Baptism.

In summary, I believe, I have shown that the idea of religious consecration has emerged rapidly in the last thirty year and has some potential for understanding the profession of the evangelical counsels. I have also shown that it is reasonable that it has not been universally placed at the center of all recent theological reflection. This caution is justifiable for the following reasons: 1. there are, as we have seen, theological problems in whether to stress the ascending or descending starting point for this terminology in relation to Religious Life. 2. The term consecration, with its traditional use in the Eucharist, suggests a strongly sacramental reading, which confuses the understanding of the Church on the issue of religious profession. 3. The terminology is often removed from an epicletic understanding and is placed within a highly personal or too highly ecclesial reading. 4. When we speak of consecration we are not speaking of sanctification. To be consecrated and to be holy are two different realities and only the latter can be said to pertain to God's person. 5. Crucially, the concept impacts strongly on the potential to stress the celebration of Baptism and confirmation as being the sacraments that confer consecration on a person. For this reason I believe it is absolutely essential to avoid the term the Consecrated Life (or *Vida Consagrada* or *Vita Consacrata*) when speaking of Religious Life even when speaking of there being a consecration in religious profession. The Consecrated Life, (with the emphasis of 'the'), is the life of all consecrated in Baptism. 6. I believe the move to a more sacral language for Religious Life may be prompted by a weakness in how we view Christian initiation.

Our consideration of the relationship of Baptism, Religious Life and the concept of consecration reaches its meeting place in the Eucharist. All the forms of the Christian life may worthily stress their particular consecration but no such stress must overlook the view of the Eucharistic people. All are sustained by the food of life and this enables

those consecrated in Baptism to move towards holiness and experience themselves as a pilgrim people working to build the Kingdom of God. From the point of view of initiation the celebration of the Eucharist closes the process of initiation – the Christian is invited to live the mysteries they have celebrated and to seek to grow in grace and perfect love. The Religious will have greater access to or at least more opportunity to participate actively at the eucharistic celebrations and thereby allow his or her life to become more fully a life of praise and communion. It is also in the eucharistic celebration that all encounter the gift of the Holy Spirit when in the anaphora the Holy Spirit is invoked over the assembly, recalling and furthering the one consecration and the one communion all share.

## IV. The Rite of Religious Profession

### 4 Introduction

The Rite of Religious Profession that was published by Pope Paul VI in 1970 was the first such rite proposed to religious institutes to form part of the Roman Pontifical in the history of the Church. This rite and the Rite of the Consecration of Virgins which had been revised (and also approved in 1970) have had an impact on the theology of Religious Life. In the first section of this chapter I will consider a very brief history of what we know of how professions were celebrated in the past. Second I will consider the Rite of Religious Profession and suggest some of the theological points that are highlighted. In this regard I will consider how the rite reflects or fails to reflect some of the themes that are current in the theology of Religious Life; how it speaks the of Baptism, of religious consecration and mission. The final section of this chapter will return to anthropological questions which had also occupied us in our opening discussion in Chapter I. The purpose of this is to ask the basic question of whether the Rite as such is serving the true nature of Religious Life, i.e. is it at the service of a liminal group focused on mission in response to the Spirit? In this regard I will suggest a need for diversity, certain 'ludic recombinations' of the more basic life choices and rites expressed in Baptism and the need to see the rite in terms of the processes of formation and discipline within the religious community.

#### 4.1 A Brief History of the Rites of Religious Profession

Before noting the different stresses through history with regard to religious profession it is important to note that in the first centuries women were consecrated as virgins and thereby stood against their culture for the sake of the gospel. The first documented rite for this that we have is of the rite for the sister of St. Ambrose. The rite consisted of 'a short prayer, a longer text in the form of an Eucharistic prayer and the giving of the veil.'<sup>155</sup> By this time, the fourth century, the terminology for the prayer used for this rite had changed from benediction or *velatio* to that of *consecratio*. This term was not applied, in any consistent manner, to the rites of monastic commitment and I suggest the reason for this was the relationship in the case of Virgins as individuals to the bishop and the local Church. The monastic profession on the other hand was in a context of a group of people often far more independent and also at a distance from local Church structures. Odo Casel suggested that monastic profession was considered a consecration in eastern monasticism as early as the fourth to the sixth centuries.<sup>156</sup> Auge notes however that certain Latin monastic sources speak of profession as ordination, blessing and also consecration though the last of these was used only by a minority.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Edward Foley, *Rites of Religious Profession: Pastoral Introduction and Complete Text*, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, IL, 1989, p. 14.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Matias Auge, "La professione religiosa in occidente," in *Scientia Liturgica*, IV, ed., Anscar J Chupungco, Edizioni Piemme, 1998, p. 327.

We can speak of four principle historical periods in considering rites of profession. The earliest relates to monasticism, the second to the development of the 12th and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries with the emergence of the mendicant groups, the third is the tradition associated with the Jesuits and many female congregations of the XIX century and finally we have the current rite. In considering the monastic tradition we need to separate what St. Benedict wrote in Chapter 58 of the Rule, between 530 and 540, and what evolved in practice.<sup>158</sup> In the tradition that evolved in the Benedictine houses a candidate's initial year was punctuated with two or three formal readings from the Rule so that he was better prepared after twelve months to make an informed decision to profess or to leave the abbey. The rite of profession involved a questioning of the candidate's free choice of the decision to make vows, a prostration during the litany of the saints, a prayer by the abbot for perseverance for the candidate, the promises, written in the candidate's hand, were read aloud by the candidate who signed it and placed it on the altar, he then intoned *Suscipe me, Domine* ('Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live, and let me not be put to shame in my hope'; Psalm 119:116) to which the community responded. He then received the 'great' habit and offered the sign of peace to the community. In the Benedictine tradition profession is made at the altar of the Church with the community present. There is a suggestion here of linking the candidate's life as an offering to the eucharistic sacrifice; of connecting the professed life to the obedient offering to the Father by Christ. The candidate is making an offering to God in response to the love of the Father and in the service of Christ. The final element of the ritual was the celebration of the Eucharist by the abbot.

The mendicant tradition approached the profession of vows very differently – it was less ceremonial. It suggested the feudal dependence and the patronage the friar needed given his greater mobility and exposure to difficulties. In the case of the Dominicans the candidate vowed obedience to the Prior, made no other vow and then exchanged the sign of peace with the prior only. In the mendicant tradition profession is made into the hands of the superior and this was at one time performed in the chapter house. This tradition, while it echoed the feudal practice of the vassal swearing allegiance to his liege and therefore of a civil contract, was also an expression of the marginality and the liminal nature of the mendicant in the eyes of the established expression of the monastic life. This profession suggested the mobility and new flexibility of the mendicant congregations as opposed to the fixed and local nature of the life of the monk focused as it was on work, *lectio divina et opus dei*.<sup>159</sup> We see here a certain loss in the sacramental analogies for the purpose of addressing the question that would continue to push Religious Life in the subsequent centuries, namely, the relationship of religious to the

<sup>158</sup> Phillippe Rouillard outlines the distinctions between the two. See 'La professione religiosa', in *Assemblea santa: Manuale di liturgia pastorale*, Ed. Joseph Gelineau, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 1999 p 526 ff.

<sup>159</sup> See Juan M. Canals Casas, 'Profesion religiosa', in *Diccionario Teologico de la vida consagrada*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, eds. A.A. Rodriguez and Joan Canals Casas, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid, 1992, pp. 1407 – 1425; p.1412.

world and their mission within it. The intentional move from the altar is a fine example of how such rituals are local.

It is worth noting the exclusion of religious profession from the Sacraments when their number was defined as seven at the Councils of the late Middle Ages.<sup>160</sup> Using the language of the schools, Religious Life is, analogously different from the Christian way of Life as is *opus operantis* to *opus operatum*. Religious Life is 'evocative' in character of its relationship to the Church. The Christian life however is the ecclesial form of the faith – it is irrevocably valid within all space and time.<sup>161</sup> One commentator dating from the 1960's and working out of the scholastic approach suggested; 'Profession does not confer sacramental grace nor does it remit punishment *ex opere operato*, but *rather ex opere operantis* because a work is not acceptable to God unless the one who performs it is a friend of God through grace.'<sup>162</sup> But he goes on to note that because the Church is involved in religious profession 'one cannot simply state that the effects of profession are produced *ex opere operantis*, as if the entire matter depended on the dispositions of the subject.'<sup>163</sup>

With the Counter-Reformation many religious congregations followed the tradition of professing vows at a special elevation of the host prior to communion. This tradition originated with the Jesuits and many of the female congregations of the XIX century that they inspired. With time a number of excesses emerged that broke the necessary simplicity needed for the rite e.g. the candidates were covered in a black pall from the time of the Litany to the time when they received communion. What must be noted in this historical sketch is the diversity that existed. This was partly the reason *Sacrosanctum Concilium* stated a 'rite of religious profession and renewal of vows is to be drawn up which will have greater uniformity, sobriety, and dignity.' However there is also the positive dimension of the diversity to be noted.<sup>164</sup>

#### 4.2 The Rite of Religious Profession of 1970

The Rite of Religious Profession (hereafter RRP) is in fact a number of rites as it includes 'rites for the different stages of religious life,'<sup>165</sup> the two principle of which are those of

<sup>160</sup> The Council of Lyon, DS 860, The Council of Florence, DS 1310 and the Council of Trent DS 1601.

<sup>161</sup> Maria Ignazia Angelini, p. 299.

<sup>162</sup> Josephus B. Fuertes, 'Professio Religiosa Complementum Baptismi', *Commentarium Pro Religiosis et Missionariis*, Year XLV, Vol. XLIII, 1964, pp. 292 – 319, p. 298. The translation of this article is a private translation undertaken by Ronald Dubson.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

<sup>164</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 80 reads: The rite of the consecration of virgins contained in the Roman Pontifical is to be subjected to review. Moreover, a rite of religious profession and renewal of vows is to be drawn up which will have greater uniformity, sobriety, and dignity. Except where there is a particular law to the contrary, this rite should be adopted by those who make their profession or renewal of vows during Mass. It is recommended that religious profession be made during Mass.

<sup>165</sup> To adopt a heading from the English translation of the *Praenotanda* for the RRP; Foley, p. 114.

the Rite of Temporary Profession and the Rite of Perpetual Profession.<sup>166</sup> These two rites are best located within the Eucharist, with the addition, at final profession, of solemnity. 'In order to promote esteem for the religious life, to give edification to the people of God, or to permit larger attendance, the rite may take place in the cathedral or other notable church.'<sup>167</sup> The gradual progression of the candidate through the rites to that of final profession shows how, in their structure, the rites show a concern for a particular person in particular context and presume growth in living Religious Life charitably. There 'are here a series of parallels and interconnecting analogies between the preparation for Baptism (Catechumenate) and the preparation for admission to vows . . .'<sup>168</sup> The presumption is that the Rite of Temporary Profession is to be celebrated by an adult who has made a dynamic personal appropriation of his or her Baptism at both the personal and social levels. To continue this existential presupposition it can be said that the rite we are about to consider suggests five sets of relationships; that to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, (the You of Trinity in other words), the candidate and the you of the community. This same dynamic exists in the case of the consecration of virgins where the bishop represents the community.

The *ordo* of the Rite of Perpetual Profession,<sup>169</sup> the more developed of the two rites we will be considering, follows the Liturgy of the Word: Calling or Request, Homily or Address, Examination, Litany, Profession, Solemn Blessing or Consecration of the Professed, Presentation of the Insignia of Profession, Statement of Admission or Sign of Peace.

The rite continues with the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It suggests a number of alternatives when it comes to gestures. These include possible prostration or kneeling of the candidate during the litany: different manners for making the profession (e.g. at the altar surrounded by the community or 'into' the hands of the superior) and the presentation of special religious garb. However during the Solemn Blessing the celebrant is instructed to extend his hands over the candidates i.e. the more solemn gesture of blessing.

We will here consider a selection of texts from the rites that relate to three principle topics in our last chapter: texts that make allusion to Baptism, or consecration and dedication or what is said about service and ministry.

1) Baptism: Baptism is mentioned a number of times in the rites and the most common usage is to suggest that on the basis of baptism the candidates now wish to follow Christ

<sup>166</sup> I have excluded from consideration the Rites of Initiation in the Religious Life and the Rites for the Renewal of Vows.

<sup>167</sup> Foley, p. 130.

<sup>168</sup> Achille M Triacca, SDB, *Fondamenti liturgico-sacramentali della forma di "Vita di Consacrazione"*, *Rivista Liturgica*, No. 3, 1973, p. 305, my translation.

<sup>169</sup> The Rite of Temporary Profession During Mass has the order: Calling or Request, Homily or Address, Examination.

Prayer for God's Grace, Profession, Presentation of the Insignia of Religious Profession, General Intercessions, Foley, p. 124.

with the 'bond' of religious profession. The Opening Prayer (B) at the Eucharist for Perpetual Profession reads:

(A) Lord, holy Father,  
confirm the resolve of your servants [N. and N.]  
Grant that the grace of baptism,  
may work its full effect in them,  
so that they may offer you their praise  
and spread Christ's kingdom with apostolic zeal.

The opening question in the Examination in both Rites of Temporary Profession reads:

(B) My dear sons (brothers), [sisters, (daughters)],  
by water and the Holy Spirit  
you have already been consecrated to God's service:  
are you resolved to unite yourself more closely to him  
by the new bond of religious profession?<sup>170</sup>

In the 'Solemn Blessing or Consecration of the Professed' (RRP; W. No. 72) there is the following petition:

(C) Lord, may the glory of baptism and holiness of life  
shine in their hearts.  
Strengthened by the vows of their consecration,  
may they be always one with you in loving fidelity to Christ,  
their only Bridegroom.<sup>171</sup>

A section of the Alternative Solemn Blessing gives a comprehensive overview of these baptismal themes:<sup>172</sup>

<sup>170</sup> The question asked at Perpetual Profession is somewhat different in both the Rites (for men and women): ' . . . in baptism you have already died to sin and been consecrated to [set aside for (Women's Rite)] God's service. Are you now resolved to unite yourself more closely to God by the bond of perpetual profession?

<sup>171</sup> Other texts that speak of baptism in the Rites are

1) the Opening Prayer (A) for the Eucharist for Perpetual Profession

God our Father,  
You have caused the grace of baptism  
To bear such fruit in your servants  
That they now strive to follow your Son more closely.  
Let them rightly aim at true evangelical perfection  
And increase the holiness and apostolic zeal of your Church.

2) A suggested Intercession for the Mass of first profession:

'For those . . . who . . . make profession . . . that religious consecration may increase the holiness to which baptism has called them. (RRP; M, No. 140, IV, c and RRP; W, No. 157, IV, e).

<sup>172</sup> RRP; M, No. 34



(D) By your sacraments  
 you make us your children and welcome us into your Church;  
 you distribute among us the many gifts of your Spirit.  
 Some serve you in chaste marriage;  
 others forgo marriage for the sake of your kingdom.  
 Sharing all things in common,  
 with one heart and mind in the bond of love,  
 they become a sign of the communion of heaven.

From these texts we can conclude two things. First there is little doubt on the basis of these texts that Baptism, more correctly the sacraments of initiation, are the foundation for profession or, more dynamically put, religious profession is a flowering of the life offered to us in Baptism. The grace of Baptism has 'worked' in a particular way and the Church asks God that it continue to do so in the candidate and that its glory continue to shine. Secondly the nature of the state of life is a particular relationship with Christ; to be united more closely to Christ.

2) Consecration to the Religious Life: If one selects texts from the diverse prayers offered in the various rites we can see an easy use of the term 'consecration' as referring to both Baptism and religious profession but obviously the latter is more frequent, given the nature of the Rite. There is a difficulty in using the English text in that the word 'consecration' is less frequently used than in the translations for example into Spanish and Italian. Even with this use of the term 'dedicate' there can be no doubt that in 1970, before much of the theological movement of considering Religious Life as the consecrated life had fully emerged, there is strong presence of the term 'consecration.' It is spoken of mostly as consecration to God's service. This phrase has, as we have seen in B above, also been applied to Baptism: 'by water and the Holy Spirit you have already been consecrated to God's service.' We saw in C above the term consecration being applied to profession. Another example of this is the prayer after the Litany and before the Profession in both Rites.

(E) Lord, grant the prayers of your people.  
 Prepare the hearts of your servants  
 for consecration to your service, . . .

And again in the Preface of the Mass of Religious Profession the Father is reminded that the Jesus Christ

(F). . . consecrated more closely to your service  
 those who leave all things for your sake  
 and promised that they would find a heavenly treasure.

The Prayer following the Profession is termed 'Solemn Blessing or Consecration of the Professed', and the title suggests some hesitation about the nature of the prayer being put into the rite; certainly the expression consecration was one that many religious up to that

point would not have been familiar with. The hypothetical question has come to mind as to the title this prayer would be given if the rite were to be revised today.

3. Service and Ministry: The following selections suggest the breadth of the terms connected to service. To make profession for the glory of God and the service of the Church<sup>173</sup>; the generous service of God's people<sup>174</sup>; religious promote the welfare of all people<sup>175</sup>; Many have given 'themselves wholly to your service and the service of all your people.'<sup>176</sup> A petition in the Solemn Blessing (RRP; M. No. 67.8) reads:

(G) May they build up the Church by the holiness of their lives,  
advance the salvation of the world  
and stand as a sign of the blessings that are to come.

Secondly, a prayer included in the suggested Litany (RRP; M. 62;a):

(H) By the self-offering of your servants and their apostolic work,  
make the life of your Church ever more faithful.

Finally it may be noted that the word 'ministry' only appears once in the texts, to the best of my knowledge (the phrase 'apostolic zeal' is used and an example can be seen in A above). In a Statement of Admission the Presider may say (RRP; M. 70.2):

(I) Be faithful to the ministry the Church entrusts to you  
to be carried out in its name

These texts indicate a strong awareness of the link between the Religious Life and service though the references are not very extensive, nor do they suggest a strong missionary orientation. This cannot be said to be a model of mission that is seen to flow from the Trinitarian life of God to which Christ involves his disciples. The term 'apostolic work' that appears a number of times suggests more a task than a missionary thrust. The exceptional use of the word ministry seems like a text that is misplaced. There is however a strong suggestion of the role of witnessing and symbolizing for God's people, the love of God. The suggestion that the rite is weak on ministerial specifics needs to be countered by recalling that the rite acts as a norm for congregations who 'should adapt the rite so that it more clearly reflects and manifests the character and spirit of each institute' (RRP; *Preanotanda* No. 14). In these more specifically tailored texts the missionary centrality of the congregation's life could be more clearly laid out.

Religious profession was often spoken of as a second Baptism not immediately but in the early thinking on the monastic life. There is no 'playing' with this image in the current

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<sup>173</sup> RRP; M, No. 55.

<sup>174</sup> RRP; M, No. 57.4.

<sup>175</sup> RRP; M, No. 62.

<sup>176</sup> RRP; M, No. 67.5.

rite, for example, there is no suggestion for an asperges at the beginning of the Eucharist. However the rich foundation of the rite on the sacraments of Christian initiation is stressed in the texts of RRP. The presentation of the habit to the professed, now normally found at first profession in the monastic contexts, was at one time a clear statement about ownership and possessions. The candidate discarded his or her own clothing and donned the clothing offered by the community. By the 7th century this had come to be explained in certain quarters as suggesting the clothing in baptismal garb.<sup>177</sup> Or again when the candidate came to his or her feet after the prostration for the litany this was interpreted as echoing the coming up out of the waters of Baptism as a new person and sharing in the death of Christ in hope of his victory over sin and death. These interpretations can indeed be seen as sweet, allegorical or excessive but they at the same time suggest a ludic ritual engagement. One such text reads

Behold, brothers, we have found the true Jordan, wherein we who have lost the grace of first baptism by indulging our sensual appetites can be rebaptized daily by humbly going down [into its water]. So great is it, that we cannot help from going down more deeply everyday, from being more fully immersed and inwardly buried in Christ.<sup>178</sup>

Playful interpretations like these when focused on Baptism help the candidate to seek to deepen his or her baptismal choice, that initiation as one consecrated in Christ. These interpretations return the candidate to a further appropriation of the Christian life and the daily rituals of the common life – be it the spirituality of community meetings, the common table or the tolerance of diversity. They suggest a *regressus ad uterum*; ritually speaking (see Ch. 1.3).

### 4.3 The Rite in Light of the Current Theology of Religious Life

The Rite of Religious Profession currently used by the Order of Preachers does not require the use of any prayer of consecration at final vows. This retains the Order's continued tradition of laying stress on profession.<sup>179</sup> The inclusion of the Prayer of Blessing or Consecration in the RRP has altered the sense of the rite. I would suggest that the reengagement with the ancient tradition of prayers of consecration in revising the Rite of Consecration of Virgins may well have influenced this stress in the RRP. A second reason for it may have been the greater awareness of the epicletic nature of eucharistic consecration which the liturgical movement highlighted with its return to liturgical sources. Thus if one is going to speak of consecration, as does Vatican II when speaking of Religious Life, it is necessary to speak of an epicletic prayer of blessing or consecration in harmony with that language. The consequence however is that the rite is in many ways a mixture of both the ordination rite and the rite of monastic profession.

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<sup>177</sup> Auge, pp. 329 and 330.

<sup>178</sup> Josephus B. Fuertes, p. 306. The author here quotes: Guericus, Abbot, *Sermo In Epiphania Domini*, ML. 185, 63. The translation of this article is a private translation undertaken by Ronald Dubson.

<sup>179</sup> *Rito Della Professione Domenicana*, Editrice Domenicana Italiana, Napoli, 1999.

There is an indication of hesitation here between a rite of profession and one of consecration. The rite which recognizes the religious who commits himself or herself before God and the Church, and whose action is acknowledged by a benediction, then 'changes register, transforming this blessing into a consecration'.<sup>180</sup> However adding the prayer of blessing does not of itself suggest a sacramental reading be given it.

The question that needs to be asked is if this addition has helped the understanding of the nature of Religious Life or has it complicated it. Has it superceded a tradition that better served Religious Life even though, as we have seen, there was an absence of clarity in many rites before Vatican II? The question is whether the Rite is best seen as:

- 1) the response to the need of marking in a prayerful and meaningful way the stated desire of the individual to be part of a religious community within the Church, what one might ecclesially call a local reading of profession,
- 2) a canonical commissioning to the title of member of the congregation whose state of life is recognized by all the Church as an expression of theological value,
- 3) a consecration noted by and accepted as such by the universal Church (and recognizable to all outside the Church) and seeking to express the conferring of a particular ecclesial role.

The focus on the Prayer of Blessing or Consecration may well have been one of the influencing factors in helping the wide scale acceptance of the idea of Religious Life as the Consecrated Life.<sup>181</sup>

My evaluation of current trends in theology of Religious Life has been that the stress is not a universal centralization on consecration nor consequently on a lifestyle that would stress the visibility of a consecration. Rather the emphasis is on mission and possibly on mission and consecration as related. Thus the first and second approaches to profession noted above would seem to be more clearly in keeping with what we have seen as the theological emphasis. This interpretation is in keeping with the texts of the prayers themselves. For example the Blessing from RRP; W. No. 72:

Father, in your loving wisdom you have singled out many of your daughters to be disciples espoused to Christ and to receive the honor of his love . . . Father, we earnestly pray you: Send the fire of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of your daughters to keep alive within them the holy desire he has given them

Or again the Alternative Prayer of Blessing from RRP; M., No. 143:

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<sup>180</sup> Rouillard, p. 529.

<sup>181</sup> It is interesting to note that A. Triacca in the article cited above which was written before the term 'vita consecrata' became popular speaks of 'vita de consecrazione', a term with more nuance than the former.

Send your Spirit upon these servants of yours, who have committed themselves with steadfast faith to the words of Christ your Son. Strengthen their understanding and direct their lives by the teaching of the Gospel. May the law of love rule in their hearts, and concern for others distinguish their lives, so that they may bear witness to you, the one true God.

The prayer of blessing or consecration then is a request to the Lord to send the Spirit:

To strengthen the candidate to fulfill what they have promised  
 To assist the candidate to love and express this love through the counsels  
 To help him or her to witness to Christ and build the Church.

The history of religious profession then was one of piecemeal additions and alterations surrounding the central action of the profession. The situation as it was in the late 1950's was viewed by Vatican II as needing more uniformity, sobriety and dignity. We note however the starting point was ritual diversity around profession in keeping with multiform expressions of Religious Life. The RRP gave the guidelines for uniformity and laid stress on profession being a flowering of baptismal life and on invoking the Holy Spirit to strengthen the candidates to fulfill what had been promised.

#### 4.4 An Anthropology of the Rite of Profession

In this section I will consider the work of the two anthropologists, separated in time who have reflected on Religious Life. Victor Turner in his work has used the person of St. Francis of Assisi to demonstrate his understanding of liminality and Talal Asad has considered the nature of certain rites within medieval monasticism. The first approach is more universal while the second is an historical consideration of particular rites in a precise context. The second part of this section will consider how the issue of rite raised by these two authors are treated in the thoughts of Nathan Mitchell. Lastly I will suggest the need for congregations to particularize the model outlined in the RRP to best express the nature of the liturgy.

Before opening these discussions we will enter the question of the relationship of rites of initiation with the postmodern context. G. Busani has considered this relationship in a favorable light.<sup>182</sup> He suggests the evolving nature of the rites in the RCIA means that it is not seen as a monolithic construction and this succeeds in breaking the link of cause and effect and to change the language, through its various rituals, to one of experience. The RCIA is thereby a critique of the modern in that it stresses that the way *to* faith is the way *of* faith. It does not expound the faith to the elect but rather consigns it to them as *traditio*. Busani uses the philosophical terms of 'The Origin' and 'The Beginning' to

<sup>182</sup> Giuseppe Busani, 'La rilettura del "rito di iniziazione (Sic.) cristiana degli adulti", A confronto con il postmoderno', in *Iniziazione cristiana degli adulti oggi*. Atti della XXVI settimana di studio dell'Associazione professori e cultori di liturgia, CLV, Edizioni Liturgiche, Rome, 1998, pp. 213 – 235.

suggest how this operates. (I take these terms to be a secular equivalent of 'In the beginning was the Word', implying that the Word predates the beginning). The postmodern cannot name The Origin and it has a fear of the Beginning. The Beginning is seen as a closing off, or possible entrapment, of a person in more of the same reality. The postmodern 'fears every mediation which could become an alternative to an immediate rapport. The RCIA shares the same doubts'<sup>183</sup> but, differently, does not refute it's nature as a ritual marking a beginning. Thus the rite acts as a figure for and mediation between the Origin and beginning. It allows the candidates live the beginning as an interrogation with The Origin. Applying this to the RRP. Ritually speaking the RRP as a 'beginning' interrogates its ritual Origin, namely Baptism and allows its truths, possibly lost over time to be experienced. Theologically speaking RRP offers rituals that allow the experiences of the Spirit's call to be discerned and responded to.

#### 4.4.1 Victor Turner and a Global Reflection on Ritual Process

In the fourth chapter of his work *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti Structure*, Turner suggests some reflections on the life of Francis of Assisi in light of his view that beyond the social structures ('relationships between statuses, roles, and offices'<sup>184</sup>), there lies 'not only the Hobbesian "war of all against all" but also *communitas*.'<sup>185</sup> *Communitas* is a relationship between individuals where there is no segregation by role or by status but one in which they confront one another as I and Thou. Thus when Martin Buber speaks of the essential 'We' he has introduced something of this liminal transient space. Behind *communitas* there is a view of the world where boundaries are coterminous with those of humanity and where, in the moment of *communitas*, there is a suggestion of opposition to structure.

St. Francis wanted all his friars to live on the margins, to own nothing and to live deep poverty. This wish, Turner suggests, was in some way summed up in the associations of Francis and nudity. Religion for Francis was *communitas*, between man and God and between man and man. His invitation was to a permanent *communitas* and as Turner shows, in the case of Francis of Assisi and his foundation *communitas* was eventually routinized. The antistructure became structured. Thus normative or even ideological expressions gave way to the existential *communitas* in early Franciscanism and the building of the basilicas in Assisi in honor of their founder so soon following his death is the proof of such a change. But between the ideal of permanent existential *communitas* and closely integrated structural systems lies the abundance of ideal social forms and Religious Life as such. 'Nowhere has this institutionalization of liminality been more

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<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>184</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1969, p. 131.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.* *Communitas* is used by Victor Turner and others as a technical term within his study and so I have followed his usage and not highlighted the word in the text.

clearly marked and defined than in the monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions.<sup>186</sup>

Turner's work entitled *The Ritual Process* is not dealing with rites as such but with 'meta structural aspects of social relations.'<sup>187</sup> There are some rich reflections here for an understanding of the Religious Life for the Church and how it operates but with regard to rites it says little. Earlier in the work Turner had made certain references to the Rule of St. Benedict and suggests: 'The Ndembu circumcision rites . . . present further parallels between the neophytes and the monks of St. Benedict.'<sup>188</sup> This raises the question on what basis these parallels are based. At a theological level the RRP is not a rite of passage but is so anthropologically. It marks the move from one form of the Christian Life to another form of that life which is markedly different – the commitment to remain unmarried for religious reasons.

Turner also offers the idea of pilgrimage and that of temporary marginalization as part of the process of the rites of passage and both can help us to consider Religious Profession.

1. Pilgrimage: In the process of pilgrimage the initiands are reminded the journey is of a particular nature and there are ritual stations to represent this. Badalamenti notes that there are three stages in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and also three stages in the movement to Final Profession.<sup>189</sup> These are in the case of RCIA: Admission, Intense Preparation and celebration of the sacraments paralleled to initiation into Religious Life, First Profession and Final Profession. Thus the process of movement in the RCIA through 'the stations' of the scrutinies etc. is also visible in the case of religious profession; the reception of the novice, the renewal of commitment in simple profession, up until his or her final profession.

2. Marginality: is integral to the nature of the rites of passage. It is also an integral part of the life of the novice in Religious Life both with regard to their previous life and also with regard to the social organism of the religious society he or she is joining. From the point of view of the candidate to a particular community he or she is on the periphery; they share neither in all the rights nor in all the responsibilities of finally professed members. They experience exclusion within the community, special contexts or houses of formation or personnel assigned to help them. Turner notes: 'Marginals like liminars are also betwixt-and-between, but unlike ritual liminars they have no cultural assurance of a final stable resolution of their ambiguity.'<sup>190</sup> The novice then is temporarily outside two groups; 1) the normal social context and also 2) the 'outsider group' that Religious Life is by its nature.

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<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>189</sup> Marcello Badalamenti, 'Teologia della vita religiosa alla luce della celebrazione rituale', *Vita Consacrata*, No. 32, 1996, pp. 91 - 106, p. 97

<sup>190</sup> Victor Turner, "Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas" in *Worship*, 1972, Vol. 46, No. 7, p. 395

Encounters with *communitas* are essential for all in the system in order to purify the structure that has normalized it. These efforts to break the normalization might include seeking to be open to *communitas* or / and to express contemporaneously the founding *communitas*. Turner suggests that 'by impetrative ritual means, attempts are made, mostly in the phases of liminal seclusion, to cause the deities or ancestors to bring this charisma or *communitas* among men'.<sup>191</sup> Ritual has a formative role in a dialectic of *communitas* and symbolic structure. This structure of symbols and ideas is

if you like, an "instructional" structure. . . [it is] . . . a way of inscribing in the mentalities of neophytes generative rules, codes, and media whereby they can manipulate the symbols of speech and culture to confer some degree of intelligibility of an "experience" that "perpetually outstrips the possibilities of linguistic (and other cultural) expressions."<sup>192</sup>

The rites for entry into Religious Life are linked to celebrating a journey in *communitas*, even if they themselves do not achieve this but simply help to reinforce and celebrate what is being affirmed in study and in community life. There is a link therefore in the ritual to the processes and patterns of activity well outside the ritual which we will explore when we consider Asad.

The Rite of Religious Profession celebrates an entry into a liminal group, socially at least, but as I have said earlier it is a rite of passage only in a limited sense and for the sake of the theological truths and the once and for all membership of Christ that Baptism confers, we need to both affirm and resist speaking of it as a rite of passage. Some real change has occurred well prior to the person seeking profession; and so profession 'depends on the prior existence of cognitive patterns and patterns of desire, of feelings structured by concepts, that have been built up over time through Christian discipline.'<sup>193</sup> In quoting Asad we move to our next author.

#### **4.4.2 Talal Asad and an Anthropology of Medieval Monasticism**

Asad's article entitled 'Discipline and Humility in Christian Monasticism' is a survey of recent writings on Monasticism in the middle ages and contains a reflection on the nature of ritual and a call to read rites within historical and particular contexts. Asad considers the following: 1) the medieval concept of discipline; 2) the project he sees within monastic life of reorganizing the soul; 3) the role of manual labor and its relationship to virtue and humility and finally 4) rites of discipline and obedience including confession and public chastisement in chapter. Asad carries out this study under the rubric that: 'While I take it for granted that communicative discourse is involved in learning, performing, and

<sup>191</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, p. 138.

<sup>192</sup> Turner, 'Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of *Communitas*', p. 400.

<sup>193</sup> Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1993, p. 155.



commenting upon rites, I reject the idea that ritual itself encodes and communicates some special meaning.<sup>194</sup> Rather these monastic rites were connected to a program of disciple and 'did not simply evoke or release universal emotions, they aimed to construct and reorganize distinctive emotions, desire (*cupiditas/ caritas*), humility (*humilitas*), remorse (*contritio*) - on which the central Christian virtue of obedience to God depended.'<sup>195</sup> The message is that the rites had a particular or specific intent and that they are not to be read at a level of symbolic universalism but as part of a power process the key to which is language. The homiletic and disciplinary rites are to help a set of abilities and virtues emerge, not general abilities and virtues, but specifically Christian ones.

Asad sees some connection here to performance: there are certain essential biblical, patristic and monastic texts that are performed as part of the program. However this performance is not theatrical and nor can a clear line be easily drawn between it and the program.<sup>196</sup>

Monastic rites belonged to a particular type of disciplinary regimen, some of whose elements were appropriated and transformed by secular projects in later centuries. Changes in the patterns of discipline within medieval and modern societies made Christian rites different at different times and places.<sup>197</sup>

In another article entitled simply 'The Concept of Ritual' Asad suggests in the pre-modern times ritual was seen more from the point of view of the text than that of an action (a social fact to be observed and inscribed) and ritual could be seen as follows:

If there are prescribed ways of performing liturgical services, then we can assume that there exists a requirement to master the proper performance of these services. Ritual is therefore directed at the apt performance of what is prescribed, something that depends on intellectual and practical disciplines but does not itself require decoding. In other words, apt performance involves not symbols to be interpreted but abilities to be acquired according to rules that are sanctioned by those in authority: it presupposes no obscure meanings, but rather the formation of physical and linguistic skills. Rites as apt performance presuppose codes – in the regulative sense as opposed to the semantic – and people who evaluate and teach them.<sup>198</sup>

Thus in the school of God's service that was medieval monasticism the liturgy cannot be separated out from the overall program of monastic life and if it were separated out it was only for the purpose of teaching more about it – in some senses a type of *mystagogia*. With the Renaissance and the development of greater distance between the subject and his perception this tight programmatic reading of ritual became more representational and

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<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

of course more open to be considered false. The visible and invisible was to be slowly replaced by the idea of the real and the figurative and a move to greater individual interpretation.

#### 4.4.3 Nathan Mitchell's *Liturgy and the Social Sciences*

Turner would link much in the rites of initiation into Religious Life to an underlying rite of passage model which, I believe, we need to use with care. Asad views rites within more historical and precise contexts: he sees them more from the perspective of a project of formation into virtues and not principally as symbolic occasions. These in the main are the two approaches I have been exploring. It remains to be seen then how we can relate these two approaches in a discussion with more theological nuance. Nathan Mitchell's Essay 'Liturgy and the Social Sciences'<sup>199</sup> maps well the evolution of the study of the understanding of rites used by liturgists. In the first of his three chapters he considers the analysis by many liturgists of ritual as being about the social production of meaning. Others are opposed to this position and focus on ritual as not only constant but emerging. In this context Turner is reevaluated and is found to have a processual image of ritual. The last section of the work comprises suggestions by Mitchell of new directions involving the thought of Margaret Bell and suggestions that ritual is the product of a culture and must be examined in an historical context.

Mitchell considers Asad's insights about particular contexts and the religious project of the monastery in light of what Michel Foucault's calls 'technology of the self',<sup>200</sup> that is an acquired attitude relating to the self. Ritual, Mitchell asserts of Asad's study

was not primarily a symbol system aimed at the production of meaning but a technology – an acquired aptitude or embodied skill – aimed at the production of a “virtuous self” i.e. of a person who is obedient, humble chaste, charitable, compassionate, hospitable, and wise.<sup>201</sup>

He suggests that no single universal anthropology can be spoken of but rather a dialog occurs where each historical culture produces knowledge and truth embedded in its religious rituals. The question then of the rite is to be seen in its particularity but in its religious particularity and, as Asad said, in its intent. This approach would separate the rite out from any one global theory of rite itself and insert the localized intention of the participants including as he has said a reading of the rite in the full hermeneutic of meaning which includes, evidently, the theological. Thus agreement on and performance of biblical and other revelatory texts move more to the center.

<sup>199</sup> Nathan D. Mitchell, *Liturgy and the Social Sciences*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minnesota, 1999.

<sup>200</sup> In speaking of Michel Foucault, Mitchell, p. 62, cites the following source: Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, eds., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

<sup>201</sup> Mitchell, *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Mitchell adds a brief reflection of his own on religious profession by suggesting that the rites of entry and profession cannot be linked to the rite of passage:

Novitiate is not catechumenate; monastic profession is not a “life-crisis rite” in the way initiation or marriage may be; the election of an abbot or abbess is not ordination. Rites of passage use encoded symbols to produce meanings that will support specific definitions of reality, reinforce social identity and cohesion, and guarantee the “success” of critical human transitions. But the rituals of asceticism do not try to produce meanings. . . . [these] rites are open ended. They lack both the social drama of a life-crisis event (like marriage) and the high symbolic stakes of a sacrament (like initiation or Eucharist).<sup>202</sup>

He is arguing then that the passages into the Religious Life are in effect a furthering of a passage that has already been entered; the candidate is already Christian. It cannot be equated to matrimony despite the temptation to see a symmetry between the two in an overview of the Christian life. The argument would seem to be that the rites of introduction to Religious Life are ‘particular’, not some expression of a macro construct but rather linked to the disciplinary code of the monastic life or by analogy to the religious family or congregation.

While I agree with the thrust of what Mitchell says, he has perhaps overstated his case in stating so starkly that religious profession is not a ‘life crisis’ rite. I say this for 4 reasons a) Religious Profession is a defining step and a choice of a liminal way of life. Many friends and former work colleagues will be saddened at the step and choice, others will celebrate it as being the true vocation of the individual, others will simply see it as a closure of other potential ways of living; b) The rite cannot be read simply in terms of Asad’s understanding of system of discipline or a technology of self, which Mitchell stresses. The RRP would be a crucial moment in the ritual discipline – and while it may be a ritual among many it is a defining ritual also. While the medieval world may have been able to create the mix of ritual and instruction and attention to the word of God, the contemporary religious lives in a far less overtly Christian place; c) I agree that we are outside the sacramental system; d) Religious Profession is not only a search for God but also an orientation for mission; a discipline of service as well as prayer and attention to God’s word. The relation of the monk to the Church is different from that of the modern religious. The rites of profession then are integrated into a system of discipline, a technology of self, that aims to assist the person discern and deepen their particular liminal path, with the aim at all times that this choice must serve the transcendent values and not become an end in itself. Mitchell, in line with this type of argument and quoting Margaret Bell, suggests the kind of power which ritual is, ‘is an imprecise way to organize the world of “local reality” by the seat of the pants, and so to construct ‘particular relationships of power effective in particular social situations.’<sup>203</sup> To the

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88, Mitchell cites Bell; Margaret Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, (New York: Oxford University Press) 1992.

question of the nature of religious truth Mitchell suggests that 'Ritual is not a source of truth independent of all the other practices, dispositions [and] . . . technologies . . . that together produce knowledge, faith and social life.'<sup>204</sup>

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Because ritual has strong ties with human culture we can speak of truth in ritual being expressed through specific social discourses and particular social contexts. The efforts to de-couple rituals from any efforts at universal symbolic readings have a particular role in rituals outside the sacramental system such as that of the RRP. Given that the candidate is already consecrated to God, the rites of profession are a ludic, personal and particular elaboration of that consecration within a particular religious family. The various stages between the rites highlight discernment in understanding the nature of the first and primary consecration, that is of Baptism. Given this then it is essential that the Rite of Religious Profession of 1970 be adapted to the particular circumstances and charism of congregations. This should ensure that the particular elaboration of the charism which Religious Life expresses and which grace has nurtured in the individual since Baptism will not be seen simply in terms of an ecclesial role but more in terms of a ecclesial gift.

It is appropriate that the RRP be the *locus* of our final theological reflection in this work. In approaching the rite I have sought to balance two possible exaggerations: that which might stress the individuals profession and that which might overstate the role of the Church in consecrating the religious. Religious respond to the call of God and firstly seek to center their lives on the search for God and on following Jesus. To do this 'centering' requires a social and ecclesially liminal space as we explored in Chapter I. Thus I have stressed the need to adjust the RRP, as is called for, to the individual liminal group in which the candidates will profess. Second in considering the rite I have stressed more the baptismal elements furthered in profession than on a consecration that might stress separation from the world. This approach is the result of the insights that emerged in Chapter II where we noted that the stress on a state of election, if not considered from the point of view of a movement in mission, can end up being seen as little more than 'leaving the world within the Church'. The Spirit is calling the individual to be a witness, in full existential freedom, to God in *doxa* and in *diakonia*. Thus the Prayer of Blessing stresses the confirmation of the religious in this life of dedicated service.

As VC suggested we view Religious Life from a trinitarian point of view. Future religious are those who have accepted the Father's gift of his Son and have sought to live the eucharistic life of the Church and to be attentive and nourished by His Body. This gift enables him or her to live a Spirit filled life which moves further away from sin and towards new life. With this foundation the candidate for Religious Life hears a particular and precise calling to live this life of the Spirit in a service that seeks to copy the obedience, poverty and chastity of Jesus. Thus the rite offers the candidate the grace to move in harm ony and close attention to the Spirit's movement in Mission, as we saw in

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<sup>204</sup> Mitchell, p. 91.

Chapter III. They will seek to enlighten all hearts of the Father's gift of the Son (a gift in which they continue to grow themselves) so that all people may find the truth of their own particular calling which is offered to them in the mystery of Baptism.

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