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FIDELITY IN RELIGIOUS LIVING
AN EVALUATIVE AND EMPIRICAL STUDY ON
RELIGIOUS FORMATION TODAY IN INDONESIA

Thesis ad Doctoratum in Theologia Vitae Consecratae adsequendum

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AA	<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i> , Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity by Pope Paul VI (18 November 1965)
AAS	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
ACS	<i>Ad Catholici Sacerdotii</i> , Encyclical of Pope Pius XI's on the Catholic Priesthood (20 December 1935)
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i> , Decree of Second Vatican Council on the Mission Activity of the Church (7 December 1965)
AL	<i>Amoris Laetitia</i> , Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Francis on Love in the Family (19 March 2016)
<i>al.</i>	<i>alii</i> (others)
<i>c.</i>	<i>circa</i> (About)
CC	Congregation for the Clergy
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> , Pope John Paul II, (October 11, 1992)
CCE	Congregation for Catholic Education
CD	<i>Christus Dominus</i> , Decree of Pope Paul VI on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church (28 October 1965)
CDC	<i>Caminar desde Cristo</i> , Walking from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium by CICLSAL (16 May 2002)
CDF	Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
CDRL	<i>The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life</i> , Plenary of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (7 March 1980)
Cf.	Confer
CICLSAL	Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

- CL* *Christifideles Laici*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (30 December 1988)
- CL Consecrated Life
- CM Claretian Missionaries
- CMFC* *Claretian Missionaries' Constitutions*
- CT* *Catechesi Tradendae*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on Catechesis in Our Time (16 October 1979)
- CV* *Christus Vivit*, the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis to Young people and the Entire People of God (2 April 2019)
- DCE* *Deus Caritas Est*, Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI on Christian Love (25 December 2005)
- DFRI* *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, Document from CICLSAL (2 February 1990)
- DH* *Dignitatis Humanae*, Declaration on Religious Freedom by Pope Paul VI (7 December 1965)
- DIM* *Divini Illius Magistri*, Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Christian Education (1 December 1929)
- DR* *Divini Redemptoris*, Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Atheistic Communism (19 March 1937)
- DV* *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican Council II on Divine Revelation (18 November 1965)
- EAs* *Ecclesia in Asia*, Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on Church in Asia (6 November 1999)
- Ed. Editor/editors
- EE* *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life*, Document of the Holy See by SCRSI (31 May 1983)
- EEa* *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II on the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church (17 April 2002)
- EEu* *Ecclesia in Europa*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on Jesus Christ Alive in His Church the Source of Hope for Europe (28 June 2003)

<i>EG</i>	<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (24 November 2013)
<i>EN</i>	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI on Catholic Evangelization (8 December 1975)
<i>ES</i>	<i>Ecclesiae Sanctae</i> , Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI (6 August 1966)
<i>ET</i>	<i>Evangelica Testificatio</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI on the Renewal of Religious Life According to the Teaching of the Vatican Council II (29 June 1971)
<i>etc.</i>	<i>et caetera</i>
<i>EV</i>	<i>Evangelium Vitae</i> , Encyclical by Pope John Paul II on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life (25 March 1995)
<i>FC</i>	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on the Role of the Christian Families in the Modern World (22 November 1981)
<i>FI</i>	<i>Faith And Inculturation</i> by International Theological Commission on the relationship between faith and culture (8 December 1988)
<i>FLC</i>	<i>Fraternal Life in Community</i> , Document of the Holy See by CICLSAL on Community Life for Religious (2 February 1994)
<i>FT</i>	<i>Faciem Tuam</i> , Document of the Holy See by CICLSAL on the Service of Authority and Obedience (11 May 2008)
<i>FTu</i>	<i>Fratelli Tutti</i> , Encyclical letter of the Holy Father Francis on Fraternity and Social Friendship (3 October 2020)
<i>GE</i>	<i>Gaudete et Exultate</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the Call to Holiness in Today's World (19 March 2018)
<i>GEd</i>	<i>Gravissimum Educationis</i> , Declaration of Vatican Council II on Christian Education (28 October 1965)
<i>GFJP</i>	<i>The Gift of Fidelity and the Joy of Perseverance</i> , Guidelines promulgated by CICLSAL (2 February 2020)
<i>GPF</i>	<i>Formation of Missionaries, General Plan of Formation 2020</i> , Claretian Missionaries (19 March 2020)
<i>GS</i>	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , Pastoral Constitution of Vatican Council II on the Church in the Modern World (7 December 1965)

<i>II</i>	<i>Inter Insigniores</i> , Declaration from CDF on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood (15 October 1976)
<i>IM</i>	<i>Inter Mirifica</i> , Decree on the Media of Social Communications by Pope Paul VI (4 December 1963)
ITC	International Theological Commission
<i>LG</i>	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , Dogmatic Constitution of Second Vatican Council on the Church, promulgated by Pope Paul VI (21 November 1964)
<i>LOR</i>	<i>L'Osservatore Romano</i>
<i>LS</i>	<i>Laudato Si'</i> , Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis on Care of our Common Planet (24 May 2015)
<i>MC</i>	<i>Marialis Cultus</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI for the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary (2 February 1974)
<i>MR</i>	<i>Mutuae Relationes</i> , Church Document by SCRSI on Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church (14 May 1978)
n.	Number/numbers
NT	New Testament
<i>NWNW</i>	<i>New Wine in New Wineskins</i> , Church Document by CICLSAL on the Consecrated Life and Its Ongoing Challenges since Vatican II (12 September 2017)
OT	Old Testament
<i>OT</i>	<i>Optatam Totius</i> , Decree on Priestly Training Proclaimed by Pope Paul VI (28 October 1965)
p.	page/pages
<i>PC</i>	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> , Decree of Vatican Council II on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (28 October 1965)
<i>PCFE</i>	<i>The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization</i> by The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops (8 December 2014)
<i>PCor</i>	<i>Patris Corde</i> , Apostolic Letter by Pope Francis on the 150 th Anniversary of the Proclamation of Saint Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church (8 December 2020)

<i>PDV</i>	<i>Pastores Dabo Vobis</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of Present day (15 March 1992)
<i>PF</i>	<i>Porta Fidei, Motu Proprio</i> of Pope Benedict XVI for the Induction of the Year of Faith (11 October 2011)
<i>PI</i>	<i>Potissimum Institutioni</i> of CICLSAL on Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes (2 February 1990)
<i>PJP</i>	Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace
<i>PO</i>	<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i> , Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests by Pope Paul VI (7 December 1965)
<i>PP</i>	<i>Populorum Progressio</i> , Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Development of Peoples (26 March 1967)
<i>PT</i>	<i>Pacem in Terris</i> , Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty (11 April 1963)
<i>QC</i>	<i>Quanto Conficiamur (QC)</i> , Encyclical of Pope Pius IX on Promotion of False Doctrines (10 August 1863)
<i>RC</i>	<i>Renovationis Causam</i> , Directives on Training in Religious Institutes by CICLSAL (2 February 1990)
<i>RCu</i>	<i>Redemptories Custos</i> , Apostolic Exhortation by Pope John Paul II on the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph in the Life of Christ and of the Church (15 August 1989)
<i>RD</i>	<i>Redemptionis Donum</i> , Apostolic Exhortation by Pope John Paul II to Men and Women Religious on their Consecration in the Light of the Mystery of the Redemption (25 March 1984)
<i>REJOICE</i>	<i>Rejoice</i> , Church Document by CICLSAL in View of the Year of Consecrated Life (2 February 2014)
<i>RFIS</i>	<i>Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis</i> , Document from Congregation for the Clergy on the Gift of Priestly Vocation (6 January 1970)
<i>RHP</i>	<i>Religious and Human Promotion</i> , Document from the Plenary of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes (12 August 1980)
<i>RI</i>	<i>Religiosorum Instituti</i> , Instruction from the Sacred Congregation for Religious on the Careful Selection and Training of Candidates for the States of Perfection and Sacred Orders (2 February 1961)

RM	<i>Redemptories Mater</i> on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the Pilgrim Church by Pope John Paul II (25 March 1987)
RMis	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> , Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate (7 December 1990)
SAC	<i>Starting Afresh from Christ</i> , Instruction from CICLSAL on a Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium (19 May 2002)
SB	Synod of Bishops
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> , Constitution by Pope Paul VI on the Sacred Liturgy (4 December 1963)
SCR	Sacred Congregation for Religious
SCRSI	Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes
SS	<i>Spe Salvi</i> , Encyclical by Pope Benedict XVI on Christian Hope (30 November 2007)
SSa	<i>Sedes Sapientiae</i> . Apostolic Constitution by Pope Pius XII (1 May 1956)
SV	<i>Sacra Virginitas</i> , Encyclical of Pope Pius XII on Consecrated Virginity (25 March 1954)
TC	<i>A Tutti i Consacrati</i> , Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Year of Consecrated Life (21 November 2014)
UR	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i> , Decree on Ecumenism by Council (21 November 1964)
USG	Unione dei Superiori Generali
VC	<i>Vita Consecrata</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on the Consecrated Life, and Its Mission in the Church and the World (25 March 1996)
Vol.	Volume
VS	<i>Veritatis Splendor</i> , Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II (6 August 1993).

Biblical Quotations and abbreviations are taken from New Revised Standard Version Bible (1989).

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Fidelity and perseverance are two essential values that resonate globally. They hold significance not only in the secular world but also in the realms of spirituality and religion. In this research study, I would like to explore the concept of fidelity and perseverance in the context of consecrated life in Indonesia. Indonesia is the world's most populous Islamic country and is home to numerous indigenous clans and tribes. Due to its history of colonisation by various countries, Christianity has also taken root in this island nation. These differences in religion and culture bring diverse experiences and approaches towards the Church and consecrated life. Despite these differences, they contribute to the strength and beauty of living the Christian faith in all its forms. The missionary work of different groups of missionaries from various parts of the world has not only helped to promote educational and economic growth but also paved the way for the growth and influence of Christianity. Indonesia is currently sending a significant number of religious missionaries to various parts of the world.

Despite the abundance of religious vocations for the last few years, Indonesia has also started to experience a decline in religious vocations and indications of a lack of perseverance in consecrated life, like in the other continents of the world. Many people who choose a religious life face two significant challenges — finding their genuine calling and maintaining a lifelong commitment to their chosen path. Even those who have taken perpetual vows may find it difficult to stay dedicated and committed over the years. It is not uncommon for members of religious communities to leave their congregations unexpectedly, even after years of seemingly successful service. This issue of lifelong dedication is still a concern in modern religious practice.

According to the available statistics, the number of abandonments in consecrated life is slowly increasing, and the quality of consecrated life is decreasing for various reasons. Furthermore, we encounter a distinct cohort within religious circles, often referred to as “nesters,” who persist in residing within religious communities without genuine dedication or happiness. For

them, the religious community serves merely as a “hotel” where they satisfy their basic needs for food, shelter, and rest, lacking true commitment and fulfilment in their religious life. As can be seen in the chart¹ below, departures of consecrated persons are rising annually, both globally and locally².

Year	<i>Abandonment of Religious</i>	
	In the World	In Indonesia
2016	1927	77
2017	1832	106
2018	1840	91
2019	1763	88
2020	1862	90

Having twenty-three years of experience as a missionary working in Indonesia³, my research has centred on the abandonment of consecrated life in that country’s religious life context. Consecrated life is called “the state of perfection” (*VC* 35⁴, *RD* 4,13⁵), not because all those who belong to this state are perfect, but because this state provides every man and woman with sufficient opportunity and conditions to become perfect. A vocation is an odyssey, and fidelity provides the vital force that preserves it until it reaches the

¹ Refer to the interview by Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, the prefect of the dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. The interviewer was Alessandro De Carolis for Vatican News on 14th March 2022. The interview can be accessed at <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2022-03/institutes-of-consecrated-life-and-societies-of-apostolic-life.html>

² Pieces of information about the departures of religious members from Indonesia [accessed: 10.10.2022], <https://gatholic.org/dioceses/conference/051.htm>

³ As a Claretian Missionary in Indonesia, most of my service was in formation and administration. I also provided spiritual guidance to candidates from various religious institutes.

⁴ *Vita Consecrata (VC)*, Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on the Consecrated Life, and Its Mission in the Church and the World (25 March 1996).

⁵ *Redemptionis Donum (RD)*, Apostolic Exhortation by Pope John Paul II to Men and Women Religious on their Consecration in the Light of the Mystery of the Redemption (25 March 1984).

destination. The struggle for fidelity and the lack of strength to persevere have been challenges in consecrated life since its inception. This research endeavours to ascertain the challenges consecrated persons encounter and propose solutions to enable them to experience and live their distinctive way of life more joyfully. Fidelity, despite the seeming eclipse of this virtue in our time, is engraved in the profound identity of the vocation of consecrated persons: it has to do with the meaning of our life before God and the Church (cf. *GE* 170)⁶. This research aims to assist the consecrated persons in living more fully in this love of God with creative fidelity.

Purpose of the Study

Drawing inspiration from the words of Pope Francis, “Our time is a time of trial: it is more difficult to live as a consecrated person in today’s world”⁷, our research endeavours to unravel the complex motivations behind individuals forsaking their commitment to consecrated life despite their perpetual vows, as well as the underlying causes contributing to the rise of mediocrity among those dedicated to this path. Through our study, we aim to discern the direct and indirect influences hindering consecrated individuals from embracing fidelity and nurturing the enduring joy of perseverance. In our contemporary society, longevity and enduring significance are often overshadowed by personal gains or utilitarian considerations. The relevance of religion and spiritual pursuits has diminished among those who prioritise logic and secular ideologies. Consequently, fidelity and dedication to Christ’s mission cannot be attained overnight; they demand a profound understanding of the human, spiritual, psychological and moral complexities inherent in consecrated life (cf. *GFJP* 1)⁸.

This study endeavours to affirm all consecrated persons of God’s steadfast faithfulness and love, constituting the Bible’s fundamental and most comforting message and serving as the wellspring of consecrated fidelity. The challenges associated with maintaining fidelity and perseverance in consecrated life are profound and significant concerns within the Church and its membership. Pope Francis poignantly articulates this reality, describing it as

⁶ *Gaudete et Exultate (GE)*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the Call to Holiness in Today’s World (19 March 2018).

⁷ POPE FRANCIS, *The Strength of a Vocation. A Conversation with Fernando Prado*, Washington 2018, 39.

⁸ *The Gift of Fidelity and the Joy of Perseverance (GFJP)*, Guidelines promulgated by CICLSAL (2 February 2020).

a “haemorrhage”⁹ weakening both consecrated life and the broader Church community, expressing worry over the abandonment of consecrated vocations. It is incumbent upon all of us to contribute towards restoring and appreciating fidelity, as it is through faithfulness that true joy is cultivated and lived.

Drawing from my experience in the formation and my responsibilities as the coordinator of consecrated persons in my province, coupled with the multitude of requests from dioceses in Indonesia, I am inspired to investigate the current situation of consecrated life in that country. We aim to offer insights and solutions to enhance the preparation and organisational structure of consecrated individuals and religious institutions. We firmly believe that the formation process plays a pivotal role in nurturing candidates, fostering fidelity, and sustaining their commitment to their vocation, as it profoundly shapes individuals and facilitates the attainment of necessary maturity. Such an investigation holds profound significance as fidelity is of utmost importance for those who remain committed to consecrated life, far outweighing its relevance for those who have departed from this path.

Scope of the Study

Despite Christianity being a minority religion in Indonesia, there has been a consistent rise in the establishment of religious institutes and individuals embracing consecrated life. Consequently, delving into this realm has become imperative to bolster the quality of consecrated life and prevent members from forsaking their commitments or becoming disengaged. The scope of such a study is pivotal as it delves into the potential of how a consecrated life can uphold its prophetic mission and resonate with individuals both locally and globally. Thus, it must maintain the essence of novelty and freshness centred around Jesus, preserve the intrinsic allure of spirituality and mission, exemplify the beauty of following Christ, and radiate hope and joy¹⁰.

In every individual’s journey, there are inevitable influences, whether positive or negative, stemming from familial origins or psychological complexities. Faithful and dynamic consecrated individuals serve as the bedrock of both the Church and congregations. Recognising this significance, our study

⁹ POPE FRANCIS, “Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life” (28 January 2017).

¹⁰ POPE FRANCIS, “Address to the Plenary of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life” (28 January 2017).

will address fidelity in religious living within the context of Indonesian formation, aiming to aid consecrated individuals in their continuous growth throughout the formation process.

Motivation and Research Concerns

As a missionary in Indonesia, my focus on formation, spiritual direction, and animation compelled me to probe into the study of fidelity in consecrated living and the factors undermining perseverance. It seems fitting and urgent for me to contribute to enhancing fidelity and perseverance in consecrated life, particularly given the nascent stage of Christianity in the country and its need for rejuvenation and refinement through scholarly inquiry and practical recommendations. My sensitivity towards this theme grew from my experience and observations during my years of service in the country. Numerous candidates and religious individuals grapple with profound challenges in this vocation, occasionally departing from consecrated life without proper discernment or adherence to established procedures. Given Indonesia's abundant vocations and the youthfulness of the consecrated persons, both the Church and religious institutes must prioritise strengthening consecrated life and its members. This research study explores the present state of religious life and offers suggestions for its improvement and promising future.

Insufficient personal awareness and a lack of profound experience with God can diminish an individual's inner freedom and fidelity across all aspects of life. We aim to thoroughly examine this theme, facilitating the ongoing growth of consecrated individuals toward a robust and faithful disposition that fosters maturity, freedom, love, and fidelity. Such awareness fosters heightened spiritual, emotional, social, and intellectual maturity, fortifying fidelity within consecrated life. God's fidelity remains a perennial challenge for all those who lack fidelity in consecrated life.

Objectives of the Research Study

The primary aim of this research study is to scrutinise fidelity's origins within consecrated life seen through a theological lens. Given its interdisciplinary nature, it is imperative to closely analyse fidelity's essence, drawing insights from biblical exemplars and contemporary contexts. Recognising the intrinsic interconnection between faith and theology, this exploration endeavours to elucidate their reciprocal significance and mutual enrichment.

This research study also delves into the factors conducive to vocation and fidelity within consecrated life, focusing on the role of family and formation

in fostering perseverance and fidelity in one's vocation. Recognising the profound influence of family and formation on the lives of consecrated individuals, we aim to explore how these factors are shaped by and respond to the ever-evolving dynamics of the world in the context of Indonesian formation and culture.

Another crucial objective is to analyse why some individuals emerge as paragons of fidelity when faced with daunting challenges while others succumb easily. Personal awareness is pivotal in enabling consecrated individuals to respond wholeheartedly and responsibly to God's call. Thus, this endeavour seeks to shed light on why some individuals fail to uphold the commitments made during their profession, leading to lives marked by anguish and discontent.

Another aim of this research study is to gather first hand insights into the current circumstances of consecrated individuals within the Indonesian context, identifying positive and negative factors that impact fidelity and perseverance in consecrated life. This is done by an empirical study employing the qualitative research method of interviews with a sample population of 138 consecrated persons from 17 religious institutes in Indonesia. Given Indonesia's status as a fertile ground for vocations to consecrated life and its rich religious history, our findings, implications, suggestions, and recommendations hold the potential to offer substantial assistance to the Church and religious institutes.

The Methodology and Sources

The methodology used in this study is descriptive, analytical, phenomenological, interdisciplinary, and empirical. The first part concentrates more on analytical and descriptive methods, while the second and third parts focus on analytical, phenomenological, interdisciplinary and empirical methods. For the small empirical study, we used the qualitative research method of interviews with a sample population of consecrated persons.

The culmination of this study draws heavily upon relevant books, articles, and empirical research interviews concerning the themes of consecrated life and fidelity. Extensive utilisation of Church documents was warranted due to their originality and authoritative capacity for communication and instruction. Moreover, leveraging the growth and accessibility of media, we obtained direct access to renowned literature and articles on this subject. Internet sources further underscored this topic's current trends and significance within the Church and the broader global context. The inspiration for a detailed exploration of this topic was drawn from *The Gift of Fidelity, the Joy*

of Perseverance, Guidelines provided by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, as well as *Fidelity and Abandonment in Consecrated Life* by the Union of Superior Generals, Rome. Additionally, the *General Formation Plan of the Claretian Missionaries* and its *Constitutions* provided valuable support in gathering materials for a comprehensive and integrated formation program.

The Division of the Work

This dissertation consists of three parts divided according to the topics of the study and has seven chapters for better explanations and details.

Part One: The Concept of Fidelity in Consecrated Life: A Brief Exploration

The first part has four chapters, namely, a) Fidelity in Consecrated Life: Conceptual Clarifications; b) Elements Favouring Fidelity in Consecrated Life; c) Magisterial Teachings on Religious Formation Favouring Growth in Fidelity and d) The Contemporary Challenges Impacting Fidelity in Consecrated Life.

The first chapter, *Fidelity in Consecrated Life: Conceptual Clarifications*, is segmented into seven sections to enhance thematic clarity. This chapter elucidates the concepts of faith and fidelity, emphasising their significance within consecrated life. Furthermore, it elucidates consecrated life as the exemplar of covenantal fidelity, mirroring the enduring covenant God established with the chosen people of Israel.

This chapter further delves into fidelity as a central theme in scripture, emphasising its profound impact on religious commitment. Abraham, revered as the father of faith, is a paramount exemplar. Additionally, it examines Moses's unwavering fidelity, illustrating his steadfast dedication to God's mission despite encountering formidable challenges. Mary emerges as the epitome of faith and fidelity in the New Testament, while St. Joseph is the quintessential icon of steadfast devotion. Mary's life exemplifies fidelity through her profound relationship with God, while Joseph's silent commitment encompasses every aspect of fidelity.

This chapter also illuminates fidelity through the lives and teachings of significant figures in consecrated life, such as Antony the Great, revered as the father of fidelity and the pioneer of monasticism, and Francis of Assisi, renowned for his unwavering fidelity to Christ, especially in his devotion to the poor. In the modern era, St. Teresa of Kolkata's life exemplifies being wholly at God's disposal, embodying total fidelity akin to a secret fire that

envelops her. Additionally, the profound prayer of abandonment serves as the poignant expression of fidelity for St. Charles de Foucauld.

We conclude this chapter by delving into the Magisterium's definition and explanation of fidelity within consecrated life. This comprehensive exploration aims to illuminate fidelity from various perspectives and substantiate its centrality as the core principle of consecrated life.

The second chapter, *Elements Favouring Fidelity in Consecrated Life*, navigates through the myriad influences shaping the journey of a consecrated individual. It meticulously examines the pivotal role played by various formation agents, beginning with the family, recognised as the cradle of vocations and the foundation for initial growth. Sociological and cultural contexts are explored as crucial elements moulding character and intellectual framework, laying the groundwork for personal development. Moreover, the chapter delves into the transformative impact of educative and religious formation, sculpting beliefs and personality. Drawing inspiration from the multifaceted formation journey of Jesus Christ, encompassing human, intellectual, psychological, spiritual, and pastoral dimensions, it underscores the holistic curriculum for shaping consecrated lives. Emphasising the indispensable significance of initial and ongoing formation, the chapter illuminates how these elements support fidelity and enduring commitment in consecrated life.

The third chapter delves into the *Magisterial Teachings on Religious Formation Favouring Growth in Fidelity*. It begins by outlining the essential aspects of religious life, including consecration, community life, prayer, asceticism, public witness, and the Church's role. An examination of the document *Mutuae Relationes*¹¹ follows, emphasising the importance of women's participation in consecrated life, the sacramental nature of religious existence, and the spiritual dimension. This discussion focuses on guidelines for formation within religious institutes, highlighting recurring elements that are integral across all stages of formation. These elements encompass the role of culture, the concept of self-responsibility, the spirit of God, and the significance of the Virgin Mary. The Document *Religious and Human Promotion*¹² underscores the importance of dynamic fidelity, fostering dialogue between religious individuals and the Church, and meeting the necessary formation requirements.

¹¹ *Mutuae Relationes*, SCRSI on Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church (14 May 1978).

¹² *Religious and Human Promotion (RHP)*, Document from the Plenary of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes (12 August 1980).

The analysis of *Vita Consecrata*¹³ highlights the unavoidable duty of maturing in one's vocation, engaging in the Father's work, the communal nature of formation, the role of ratio institutions, and the importance of continuous formation with diverse dimensions. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the challenges faced by consecrated life, the necessity for innovative forms of formation, the value of adequately trained formators, and the essential role of ongoing formation in responding to the evolving needs of religious vocations in contemporary society.

The fourth chapter examines *the Contemporary Challenges Impacting Fidelity in Consecrated Life*. It begins by analysing the effects of modernity on living a faithful consecrated life, encompassing aspects such as the influence of the nuclear family, secularisation, urbanisation, modernisation, and globalisation. Subsequently, the chapter examines the selection process for consecrated life and explores the personal constraints encountered. These constraints include the challenges of leading moral hypocrisy and double life, the struggle to maintain excellence in loyalty and commitment, issues related to individuals who are entrenched in their comfort zones ("nesters"), the absence of compelling ideals in the ideal self, erosion of faith, identity crises, and a lack of direction in life.

This analysis further explores the influence of personality styles on fidelity within consecrated life, addressing the struggles in cultivating love and fidelity, the waning significance of positive role models, challenges stemming from perfectionism, and the repercussions of professionalism. Moreover, this study examines the effects of electronic and social media on the lives of those in consecrated life, alongside the hurdles posed by a "liquid society" that undermines steadfast commitment to the consecrated vocation. In summary, the chapter underscores the multifaceted nature of limitations on fidelity within consecrated life and highlights the importance of introspection and proactive measures to overcome these obstacles. Such efforts are essential to maintaining steadfast dedication amidst the complexities of the contemporary era.

Part Two: Fidelity in Religious Living in The Indonesian Church Context: A Historical and Empirical Assessment

The second part has just two chapters, chapter five, titled *Consecrated Life in Indonesia: Origins and Orientations* and chapter six, titled *An Empirical*

¹³ *Vita Consecrata* (VC), Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on the Consecrated Life, and Its Mission in the Church and the World (25 March 1996).

Study on Religious Formation Today in Indonesia. This part comprehensively examines the evolution and expansion of Christianity in Indonesia, with particular attention to the emergence and progression of consecrated life.

Chapter five provides a comprehensive exploration of the contemporary landscape of religious formation in Indonesia. It begins with a detailed historical analysis of Catholic mission and religion in the country, spanning from the Portuguese colonial era to the post-independence period. Furthermore, the chapter delves into the intricate interplay between culture and Christianity in Indonesia while offering an overview of the religious formation program designed for consecrated individuals.

The chapter further delves into the human and Christian dimensions of formation, discussing the significance of sexuality and asceticism. Following this, the subsequent section scrutinises the formative institutions established in Indonesia, encompassing ashramas, the “Come and See” initiative, aspirancy, postulancy, novitiate, and the formation of temporarily professed individuals.

A thorough analysis of ongoing formation is conducted, highlighting its crucial importance, various dimensions, and content. This encompasses an exploration of the Paschal Mystery, personal growth, the stability of values, and professional development. Additionally, this analysis scrutinises the strengths and weaknesses of Indonesian formation, explicitly focusing on factors such as rigorous candidate selection, skilled formators, cohesive group dynamics, collective responsibility, and challenges related to ethnicity, lineage, regionalism, and favouritism. In its concluding section, the chapter emphasises the importance of formative experiences, the adaptation of formation practices to the digital age, the encouragement of encounters, attentive listening, and discernment, as well as the crucial role of intercultural formation in preparing consecrated individuals for their roles within Indonesian society.

Chapter six, titled *An Empirical Study on Religious Formation Today in Indonesia*, undertakes a phenomenological empirical research inquiry into various dimensions of consecrated life, beginning with a detailed description of the methodology and key components of the conducted interviews. The research problem is clearly defined, and the methodology is clearly outlined, covering participant selection procedures and data collection processes. The study encompasses *four* distinct categories: *consecrated individuals at the Provincial or General Government Level, members of religious institutes,*

individuals who have left their congregation within the past five years, and formators.

The data undergoes analysis by categorising interview responses into specific groups, and the findings are presented through figures illustrating challenges encountered in consecrated life, reasons for departing from the order, obstacles in formation, fidelity within community dynamics, and familial fidelity concerns. Subsequently, the discussion delves into the implications of the gathered information, addressing a spectrum of aspects, including personal, familial, educational, authoritative, communal, spiritual, electronic, and media communication dimensions.

The chapter's concluding section outlines the limitations of the interview procedure, covering aspects related to the subject matter, participants, researcher, the minority status of Christianity, and language barriers. Taken as a whole, the empirical investigation sheds light on crucial aspects of consecrated life and provides invaluable insights into the obstacles and implications relevant to contemporary circumstances.

Part III: Towards a Creative Formation Paradigm for Consecrated Life

Chapter seven deals with Evaluations of the Findings and Proposed Recommendations. It delves into the evaluations of findings and proposed recommendations regarding various aspects of consecrated life. It covers topics such as understanding oneself in the image of God through family dynamics, reforming leadership structures, exploring various religious community models, bridging generational divides, addressing challenges of practical atheism, emphasising holistic formation, discussing accompaniment as a vital element, considering modern approaches to formation, utilising psychological insights, examining formation for love, and exploring the intersection of psychology and spirituality in discerning the call to consecrated life. These evaluations and recommendations aim to provide a comprehensive understanding and guidance for the formation process in consecrated life.

The Limitations of the Study

While earnestly endeavouring to fulfil the requirements of this study, it becomes evident that the scope and methodologies employed introduce inherent limitations. Foremost, the expansive nature of the chosen topic necessitated a judicious selection of focal points to maintain coherence and depth, potentially overlooking nuanced aspects. Despite drawing from a diverse array of scholarly resources, including books, documents, articles, and online

materials, the availability of literature explicitly addressing fidelity in consecrated life remains constrained, potentially impacting the comprehensiveness of the analysis. Furthermore, although efforts were made to enrich the empirical study through consultations with numerous religious individuals, involving detailed interviews with 138 participants across four distinct groups, the topic's inherently personal and subjective nature may have influenced responses, introducing a level of bias or variability dependent on individual circumstances. These limitations underscore the need for cautious interpretation and acknowledgement of the study's boundaries.

One main challenge I encountered as a researcher was sourcing materials on the growth of Indonesian Christianity and the development of consecrated life there, as some available records and sources needed extensive cross-checking due to potential biases from authors of different religions; furthermore, pioneering a study on consecrated life and its challenges in living with fidelity and commitment in the Indonesian context posed difficulties in eliciting open and detailed responses from study participants, crucial for the success of the empirical research. Exploring fidelity and perseverance among consecrated individuals in Indonesia presented a fresh and challenging topic devoid of prior reference materials for discussion or study. Nonetheless, drawing from my background in formation and administration within congregations and dioceses, the skilful mentoring of my moderator of the research study, coupled with insightful interviews conducted among religious insiders and outsiders alike and a wide reading of all available resource materials, I was able to glean valuable insights into the subject matter.

PART I

**THE CONCEPT OF FIDELITY IN CONSECRATED LIFE:
A BRIEF EXPLORATION**

CHAPTER I

Fidelity in Consecrated Life: Conceptual Clarification

INTRODUCTION

Fidelity is a term that encompasses all spheres of our life and environment. Human life is composed of innumerable fidelities, and from birth to death, his fidelity is the string that connects him to the outside world. The vocation to consecrated life is a merger of two fidelities where God expresses His fidelity to man by calling, and man responds to the invitation through his total surrender to God with total availability.

There are many examples of fidelity in Christian life, but Jesus serves as the model for fidelity, and the cross becomes the school to learn this virtue. For consecrated life in the Catholic Church, this virtue plays a pivotal role because consecrated life is a journey of faith and a gift from God that is to be accepted with gratitude and fostered with fidelity. Since the beginning of human history, God called men and women to His service, and they responded to it freely, spontaneously, consciously, and generously. Love and fidelity are the two virtues most closely associated with consecrated life, which immensely help men and women to maintain this lifelong journey. In this modern liquid world¹⁴ where commitment and fidelity are constantly under attack¹⁵, the real challenge is to be faithful forever and to fight against inconsistency and lack of commitment. Fidelity, a virtue that has fallen into

¹⁴ Zygmunt Bauman is a shrewd observer of modernity and is the mind behind the brilliant concept of “liquid society”, which accurately represents the current condition of our world, in which insecurity, uncertainty, and individualism are the dominant players: cf. Z. BAUMAN, *Liquid Times: Living in Age of Uncertainty*, Cambridge 2007, 85.

¹⁵ Strawman arguments refer to presenting a false image of someone or something (here, the consecrated life) and attacking it: cf. S. ATKINS – J. CASEY, *Strawman Argument: A Study in Fallacy Theory*, California 2022, 75.

disfavour in modern times, is deeply embedded in the identity of the vocation of consecrated persons. It concerns the significance of our lives regarding God and the church (cf. *GE* 170)¹⁶.

Consecrated life, which emphasises faithfulness, can sometimes be misinterpreted as restricting one's freedom of choice in a society that values unrestricted independence. However, to truly comprehend this unique vocation and life-long commitment, one must experience the transforming grace in the consecrated life. The world of fidelity is not colourless and soundless; it provides many opportunities to make a name for oneself¹⁷. This chapter explores the relationship between fidelity and the consecrated life in its ecclesial, theological, and scriptural contexts.

1. Consecrated Fidelity: Definitions and Implications

Dictionaries define fidelity differently, such as “faithfulness to a person, cause, or belief, demonstrated by continuing loyalty and support”¹⁸ and “the state of remaining loyal to someone and keeping the promises you made to that person”¹⁹. These are two definitions that can be applied well even to consecrated life. Fidelity, rooted in the Latin word “*fides*,” revolves around faithfulness, loyalty, and trustworthiness. In ancient Rome, “*fides*” was a fundamental concept encompassing trust, loyalty, and honesty in various interpersonal, societal, and contractual relationships. Therefore, “fidelity is the state of being faithful”²⁰.

What makes people remain committed and faithful to an unseen God and surrender their whole life to His service is a deeply personal experience of being loved immensely as a son or daughter of that heavenly Father. Fidelity to God implies strict faithfulness to an obligation, trust, or duty towards God, considered the supreme model in our life. Fidelity in religion means loyalty, devotion, or piety to a supernatural force that we believe in having the capacity to redeem the whole universe from all adversities in nature and our lives. It is also an allegiance or faithfulness to something to which a pledge

¹⁶ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* (*EG*), Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (24 November 2013).

¹⁷ Cf. *The Gift of Fidelity the Joy of Perseverance* by CICLSAL (2nd February 2020), 4.

¹⁸ MERRIAM WEBSTER, “Fidelity Definition and Meaning” [accessed: 10.03.2021], <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fidelity>

¹⁹ INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON CONSECRATED LIFE, *Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity*, Rome 2005, 121.

²⁰ MERRIAM WEBSTER, “Fidelity Definition and Meaning” [accessed: 10.03.2021], <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fidelity>

or duty binds one²¹. God is ever faithful and unchanging amidst all the changing circumstances²². God can never be a person against His nature²³ because God is eternal love and faithful to His covenant with his chosen people, Israel²⁴ and to everyone who believes in Him or not.

Catholics' devotion to Christ and his teachings and philosophies led to the development of the consecrated life. Due to the world's overwhelming negative influence, some Christians felt driven to forsake the world and stick closely to the ideals of the Christian way of life. The New Testament reminds us, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). How splendid is the holy vocation we have received from God! How privileged are we that, among many, He has chosen you and me to scale the heights as spouses of Jesus? God induces us with His unique gifts and fills us with inexplicable joy — a divine joy that the saints like St. Faustina, St. Theresa of Avila, St. Catherine of Siena, and many others have experienced. "Though they lived in the world, they were not of the world. The souls who have renounced the worldly pleasures can experience such sublime vibrations of love which will ensure our perseverance in the holy vocation"²⁵. Everyone who hears Jesus' call and accepts their choice is permanently chosen. He chooses them, shapes them according to his exemplary life, and instructs them excellently. Jesus's call is not temporary. Since a consecrated person's purpose is to serve God and the Church, fidelity is deeply ingrained in their vocation. Staying true to God helps us recognise and reclaim our true selves, which keeps us firmly planted in God's love. Faithfulness and consistency in a Christ-centred cause are not traits that can be developed quickly.

²¹ Cf. "Fidelity", *Online Etymology Dictionary* [accessed: 10.02.2024], <https://www.etymonline.com/word/fidelity>

²² Carla Corbella expresses her view in the book *Resistere o Andarsene* that unconditional faithfulness of God is the foundation for our fidelity. "Elemento principale di ogni esortazione è la riflessione sul fondamento della fedeltà umana che, per tutti, è la fedeltà di Dio. Egli, infatti, si mostra incondizionatamente fedele (PDV 36) alla sua promessa (PDV 2), alla chiamata per la missione (VC 37), alla vocazione che suscita in ciascuno": cf. C. CORBELLA, *Resistere o andarsene*, Rome 2009, 40.

²³ Cf. G. UKKEN, *You are Precious to Me*, Mumbai 2002, 122.

²⁴ Cf. S.S.M. GOMEZ, *Fidelity in Religious Life*, Mumbai 2006, 45.

²⁵ C. PANACKAL, "Religious Vocation: A Gratuitous Gift of God", *In Christo* 59/3 (2021) 255-260.

Many great saints of earlier times readily laid down their lives for Jesus. Men and women saints alike — St. Agnes, St. Agatha and so on had betrothed themselves to Jesus. We know how the apostles were martyred for their fidelity to the Lord. St. John Britto²⁶, St. Deva Sahayam Pillai²⁷ and many other martyrs underwent martyrdom for the love of Jesus.

If we do not guard ourselves firmly, the worldly influence, which is more potent than the pull of the divine, may drag us away from our spouse. Therefore, from time to time, we need to check ourselves genuinely and rectify our drawbacks. We need to grow daily in our *Abba* experience by attentively fixing our loving gaze upon Him and listening to His divine voice. Subsequently, we experience such peace and inner joy that no one can understand. How can anyone leave Him and go away?²⁸

The vocation of consecrated men and women is to seek the kingdom of God first. It is a call to complete conversion, self-denial, to live fully for the Lord so that God may be all in all. As years go by, consecrated life may experience changes in its historical forms, but there will be no change in the substance of a choice which finds expression in a radical gift of self for the love of the Lord Jesus. “Seeking God is a universal human quest. The consecrated life’s first and most essential purpose is to be committed God-seekers”²⁹. It is beautifully expressed by Joan Chittister when she says, “For the person who cannot find God here, staying here is a mistake. Leaving here is imperative for the person who does not seek God. For the person who can seek God better someplace else, leaving here is grace”³⁰.

Every consecrated person must recognise the quest for God at the centre of his heart. The seeking of God and establishing God’s reign mark a spiritual activity and a person as ‘consecrated’. Every consecrated person is called to bear prophetic witness to the presence of Christ to establish his kingdom of love, peace, and justice. They are called prophets, formed in spiritual, intellectual, communitarian and apostolic spirits by which faith is communicated. Therefore, consecrated fidelity is the story of unconditional devotion given to a God who became a model, mentor, and everything in his life forever. A

²⁶ St. John of Britto is a Portuguese Jesuit missionary who died as a martyr in Tamil Nadu, India, defending his faith in Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

²⁷ Deva Sahayam Pillai was the first Indian layman to be canonised. Born into a Hindu family in the 18th century and converted to Catholicism, he shed blood for Jesus and was martyred in Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, India.

²⁸ C. PANACKAL, “*Religious Vocation. A Gratuitous Gift of God*”, 258.

²⁹ F. JOSE, *Renewed Vision for Consecrated Life*, New Delhi 2016, 178.

³⁰ J. PATHRAPANKAL, “Religious Life as Radical Discipleship. Biblical and Indian perspective”, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 57/7 (1993) 389.

journey of fidelity and endurance necessitates living as committed individuals and keeping one's eyes open in facing challenges. Consecrated persons on a journey of authentic fidelity recognise and discern their own story while questioning fidelity born of love. No individual can be compelled to observe fidelity. Instead, it needs to happen from within, from the awareness of who and whose one is. Thus, as a consecrated person, one's mission, responsibility, and co-workers are of secondary importance; what is of essential concern is that we are consecrated without reservation³¹.

Many individuals might firmly commit to an organisation, but they could lack faith in the leadership and internal systems. On the other hand, some people who have devoted their lives to serving God may have trust in their beliefs but could be lacking in faithfulness and devotion to their calling. Therefore, the survival and growth of a consecrated person depend on their faith and loyalty, as these are the foundation of their spiritual existence that provides the strength to endure through every challenge³². To fully grasp the chapter's central concept, it is also necessary to define faith and fidelity at this juncture.

1.1 Clarifying the Term 'Faith'

Faith is a broad term that expresses a range of different concepts, and it can be defined commonly as "complete trust or confidence in someone or something".³³ It can also be understood as the firm belief in the doctrines of a religion based on spiritual conviction rather than proof. Ordinarily, we can explain faith as belief in God or the doctrine of any religion. In Christianity, "Faith is the divinely inspired human response to God's historical revelation through Jesus Christ"³⁴. It is also the confidence in what we hope for and the assurance that God is working, even though we cannot see it. Faith knows that no matter the situation, in our lives or someone else's, God works despite all odds. Generally, 'faith' means much the same as 'trust' in a person or a supernatural force which can support and deliver. Faith may be a state one is in or comes to be in; it may also involve something one does. "In the Christian context, faith is understood both as a gift of God and as requiring a human response of assent and trust, so that their faith is something concerning

³¹ Cf. D. HOFFMAN – B. COLE, *Consecrated Life: Contributions of Vatican II*, 32.

³² POPE FRANCIS, "To All Consecrated People", Apostolic Letter on the Year of Consecrated Life (21 November 2014).

³³ MERRIAM-WEBSTER, "Faith" [accessed: 10.06.2022], <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faith>

³⁴ M. ALBOM, *Have a Little Faith*, London 2009, 97.

which people are both receptive and active”³⁵. Criteria of faith differ according to the components³⁶ and models of faith we come across in our day-to-day life experiences.

It can be said that there is no word in religious language, whether theological or popular, more subject to misunderstandings, distortions, and questionable definitions than the word ‘faith’. It belongs to those terms that need to be sanitised before they can be used as a petition to heal the people. Today, “faith produces more harm than good health; it misleads, creates scepticism or fanaticism, intellectual resistance or sentimental abandonment, rejection of the religion proper or enslavement to its surrogates”³⁷. Different catholic traditions vary the term faith according to their focus and emphasis. Augustinian and Franciscan traditions explain faith as an act of love; Thomistic tradition, on the other hand, describes it as an act of intelligence and reason, and some magisterial interventions depict faith as trust in Thou of God (supreme power).³⁸ According to them, a religious person’s faith is not merely an intellectually scrupulous admission of the revealed data (translated into a strict practical observance) or a simple volitional disposition of openness to the Mystery (evidenced by an endless search without object) but rather the strange and robust force behind one’s total surrender to God with the three evangelical counsels.

Consequently, religious activity loses its significance and foundation without genuine faith, even if it can claim instrumental effectiveness. Ultimately, a religious person’s faith is a covenant proclaimed with existential hyperbole but never fully realised in the workplace or at the margins of history. Faith in a person is influenced by socio-cultural forces that stimulate

³⁵ J. BISHOP – D.J. MCKAUGHAN, “Faith”, *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* [accessed: 16.12.2021], <https://plato.stanford.edu/search/searcher.py?query=faith>

³⁶ John Bishop and Daniel J. McKaughan states that the components of faith (variously recognised and emphasised in different models of faith) fall into three broad categories: the affective, the cognitive and the practical. There are also evaluative components in faith — these may appear implicated in the affective and the cognitive components, according to one’s preferred meta-theory of value: J. BISHOP – D.J. MCKAUGHAN, “Faith”, *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* [accessed: 16.12.2021], <https://plato.stanford.edu/search/searcher.py?query=faith>

³⁷ G.F. SANZ, “Fede”, *Dizionario teologico della vita consacrata*, Milan 1992, 723. Explains faith as a term misunderstood by many on various occasions. “Oggi il termine “fede” produce piumale che salute. Confonde, fuorvia, crea scetticismo o fanatismo, resistenza intellettuale o abbandono sentimentale, rifiuto della religione vera e propria o asservimento ai suoi surrogati”.

³⁸ Cf. G.F. SANZ, “Fede”, *Dizionario teologico della vita consacrata*, 723.

and threaten, but the subject's internal dynamics process the notion of faith in him. Therefore, we receive "faith as a gift" from the Spirit and "faith as a choice"³⁹ from the free personal response.

1.2 Faith as a Gift and a Choice

The believer's faith is a limitless source of illumination because it is the only quality of his personality that he actively cultivates. Because God never takes away his gifts (cf. Rom 11:29), even when He subjects the believer to a passive purification, as the mystics teach, the believer's faith is a limitless source of illumination. Faith is resisted and stimulated in its experience as proximity or distance, conviction or doubt, light, or darkness. In conclusion, faith is a human act that contributes to the dynamism of intelligence and affectivity. On the other hand, the more aware he is of the hurdles he faces and the options available to him, the more effectively he can eliminate obstacles and initiate a generally responsible response. Consecrated life is based on an overwhelmingly oriented life toward God the Trinity (cf. VC 14)⁴⁰.

The religious person makes his faith in God, beyond any instrumental translation, the centre of his life. He does so not as if it were a matter of personal prestige but as feeling himself a symbol of the entire believing Church. Using the existential profession that their life requires, "religious consecrate themselves in a special way to the Lord, following the example of Christ. Thus, animated by the charity which the Holy Spirit instils in their hearts (cf. Rom 5:5), they live more for Christ and his body, which is the Church" (PC 1)⁴¹. For a religious, to believe is, at the same time, to find firmness in him and to say *amen*, to recognise God as the only foundation: "But if you do not believe, you will not have stability" (Is 7:9b). A Consecrated person accepts to live poor, chaste, and obedient because they know that "God alone is enough" because they want to make their life an *amen*, a permanent and stable life to the God whom they have discovered as "my rock, my fortress" (Ps 18:3).

Unconditional submission to the God who summons him, rather than acceptance of factual reality, is the reaction of the devout. A consecrated person might first assert, "I believe in you," which means "I trust you" or "I invest

³⁹ G.F. SANZ, "Fede", *Dizionario Teologico Della Vita Consacrata*, 724.

⁴⁰ *Vita Consecrata (VC)*, Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and the World (25 March 1996).

⁴¹ *Perfectae Caritatis (PC)*, Decree of Vatican Council II on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (28 October 1965).

my security in you,” before adding, “I believe that”, which means, “I recognise what you tell me.” For some, “the Theological concept of consecration is the one that best defines the very essence of religious life”.⁴² And this is how Vatican II expressly puts it: “By their vows, the faithful give themselves totally to God who is supremely loved, to be designated by a new and special title to the service and love of God” (*LG* 44)⁴³. Consecration implies living entirely by faith, knowing that God completes us, and our renunciation effectively shows how we are humanly legitimate and support God’s initiative. Faith, as a fundamental choice, is an experience of the covenant, which is given as a gift and response. Because of that, “man freely abandons himself entirely to God, extending the full obedience of intellect and will to God who reveals, and we voluntarily agree to the revelation he gave” (cf. *DV* 5)⁴⁴. When faith becomes a fundamental choice, the person’s attitude conforms to it, allowing him to achieve the most authentic life.

In the Christological dimension, faith appears as a journey, a personal commitment, and a profound allegiance. In the letters of Paul, faith is defined as trust or adherence to the principles of salvation, which bring people closer to God the Father. In the pastoral epistles, faith is described as accepting the apostolic message of Jesus Christ; in John’s writings, faith is characterised as the realisation of God’s love expressed in him. So, based on these interpretations of faith, we may conclude that the meaning of faith changes from person to person based on their relationship with the Supreme Being and requires a radical transformation to the point that the believer starts to view himself as a new creature (cf. Gal 6:15; 2Cor 5:17).

1.3 Faith: A Call to Greater Freedom

Religious life aspires to follow Christ with “greater freedom and to imitate him more closely” (*PC* 1). It wants to live the faith as a radical faith in their daily life and, “even if religious do not have the exclusivity of radicalism, they nevertheless have an interest in returning to it and rereading their lives in its light”⁴⁵. To live faith in the life of a consecrated person means “it embraces all aspects of his life in such a way that it does not obstruct the true development of the human person, but by its very nature is of great benefit

⁴² S.M. ALONSO, *La vida consagrada*, Madrid 1982, 165.

⁴³ *Lumen Gentium (LG)*, Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican Council II on the Church (21 November 1964).

⁴⁴ *Dei Verbum (DV)*, Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican Council II on Divine Revelation (18 November 1965).

⁴⁵ K. WAAIJMAN, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, Leuven 2002, 313.

to him” (*LG* 46). This radical faith and love for God develop in the consecrated persons “to be a new man in the measure of the new Adam” (*GS* 22)⁴⁶. A religious, insofar as he is baptised, he is invested with a specific charism, as the sanctuary of the Spirit (cf. 1Cor 6:19). So, he believes that his life is a symbol of God and a place of encounter (temple) in him. At the same time, he feels free because “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2Cor 3:17). Therefore, he may risk living by faith with as little human assistance as feasible. The adherence to the truth of the revealed mystery of God in Jesus Christ is more profound than a religious absolute devotion to faith. Spirit leads a religious person to recognise his divine imprint in him, even though it is impossible to comprehend it fully⁴⁷. In this view, the religious, as a spiritual man, must possess the gift of wisdom, which consists not in accumulating information but in the capacity to see and appreciate God’s things.

The individual and those whom he serves are harmed and destroyed by a religious life devoid of faith. Faith encourages a person to abandon all for Jesus, who beckons since it leads to fidelity. Occasionally, we could observe religious people displaying excellent fidelity to the congregation or organisation but lacking a solid faith in God. A journey of loyalty and endurance requires looking at life as devoted individuals without closing one’s eyes when issues or challenges come. These can be signs of precarious faithfulness or tendencies towards infidelity. Consecrated persons on a journey of authentic fidelity recognise and discern their own story while, above all, they question themselves about “fidelity born of love” (cf. *GE* 112)⁴⁸. Faith in the context of spirituality involves at least four aspects of human experience. They are: (a) ‘The faith’ to which a response is made is the core of beliefs that form the basis of describing a person’s beliefs; (b) the personal reaction in trust is the mark of the person with faith; (c) faith is recognised and expressed through action and (d) the consequences for the character of the believer. These four aspects of faith form unity. Christian faith involves an assertion of the truth of what is believed (the faith), a personal experience of that truth (trust in God), a kind of love which flows from it (faith in action)

⁴⁶ *Gaudium et Spes* (*GS*), Pastoral Constitution of Vatican Council II on the Church in the Modern World (December 7, 1965).

⁴⁷ Cf. *Sensus Fidei. In the Life of the Church* by International Theological Commission of Vatican (Vatican, 2014), 112.

⁴⁸ *Gravissimum Educationis* (*GE*), Declaration of Vatican Council II on Christian Education (October 28, 1965).

and constancy of approach (faithfulness)⁴⁹. This faith in action and ‘faithfulness’ become the source and substance of vocation to consecrated life.

2. Significance of Fidelity

With the help of our life experiences and education, we can define fidelity as showing unwavering commitment and support to a person, cause, or religion. It is the quality of being loyal and faithful. Humans have faith in God because God is known for being faithful, full of fidelity, and dependable (cf. Ex 34:6). His faithfulness guarantees the perpetuity of his love, expressed in creation, in the covenant and finally in the redemption in Christ, in whom he has defined his face by manifesting that God is love (1Jn 4:8)⁵⁰. Fidelity is the natural result of a consecrated person’s decision to dedicate their life to God. This choice ignites a passionate love for the Lord Jesus Christ, even sacrificing their life. Fidelity presents an opportunity to deepen and personalise their relationship with Jesus and His Kingdom. Amid cultural upheaval, it enables them to bear witness to God as the ultimate and unchanging value. Maintaining fidelity is difficult due to today’s culture’s constantly changing and diverse nature. Therefore, moving away from self-centeredness and towards Christ-like selflessness requires continuous personal and community support. Fidelity cannot remain merely on the theoretical level; it must be a living fidelity, a meeting with Christ, which absorbs the whole person and leads the consecrated person from fragmented experiences to the fundamental experience⁵¹.

Therefore, it might be considered a person’s reliability or trustworthiness in God and others. If belief in God is a blessing, then loyalty is the duty one must uphold to keep receiving that blessing⁵². Accordingly, a person’s devotion to God is the most crucial theological consideration. A consecrated

⁴⁹ R. CHAPMAN, “Faith”, G.S. WAKEFIELD, ed., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, Quezon City 1983, 144 -145.

⁵⁰ Su fidelidad garantiza la perpetuidad de su amor, expresado en la creación, en la alianza y, finalmente, en la redención en Cristo, en quien él ha definido el propio «rostro» manifestando que «Dios es amor»: cf. A. CATELLA, “Fidelidad”, in *Diccionario Enciclopédico: cristianismo. Historia, Teología, Confesiones, protagonistas, Biblia. Reformadores*, San Pablo, Madrid 2009, 405-406.

⁵¹ SALESIANS DON BOSCO, “Vocation and Formation: Gift and Task” [accessed: 12.11.2023], https://www.sdb.org/en/RM_Resources/Letters_AGC/Fr_Ch%C3%A1vez/Vocation_and_Formation

⁵² Cf. P. CHAVEZ, “Fidelity, Source of Life Fulfilled”, USG Bulletin, *Promoting Perseverance in Consecrated Life* 8/2 (2016).

person will often try to level the playing field in this interpersonal commitment by elevating himself to the same status as the other covenanting party, even if that other party is a tiny creature. “Therefore, the religious person’s gift of self tends to be total and definitive. Only in this way can he come close to the totality and indefectibility of God’s commitment and fidelity”⁵³. Fidelity expresses and manifests a believer’s trust in God in all circumstances. It exists in the abstract but always concerns another person or thing. If a body departs, its shadow also vanishes. We commit our fidelity to a person, a cause, or a principle rather than to oneself. Continually offering oneself to God, to whom one is drawn, brings about fidelity. The unfailing gift and promise of God’s love also reflect God’s commandment, which demands of man a faithful observance comprised of love for himself and the brethren. God remains faithful and loving regardless of man’s disloyalty (cf. 2Tim 2:13).

2.1 Fidelity and Commitment

As two sides of the same coin, commitment and fidelity complement and strengthen one another. Faithfulness follows dedication, whether in religion or another discipline. We try to keep our word, which involves honouring our commitments here and now and over the long haul until death does us part. Any time trust is broken, there will be a crisis of fidelity. Therefore, fidelity is a way of living life with love, and the opposite of love is infidelity. When two people are genuinely in love, they will never give up on each other regardless of their obstacles. A core willingness to suffer and give without reservation will always exist. Lacking genuine affection makes it impossible to be faithful to one another. Thus, fidelity is not a final state but a dynamic development process. Keeping our word calls for continual inspiration and the drive from concepts bigger than ourselves. We can save ourselves from being occupied, fall in love, and look forward to the future to maintain our strength and loyalty. It’s easy to cave into transient fashions and settle for a mundane existence when there are no role models to look up to. Both fidelity and the consecrated life necessitate a deep personal relationship with and dedication to the God who grants the calling. Otherwise, they would make a comfortable ‘nest’ in this life.

A consecrated person’s existence witnesses to their love for Christ as they walk the path proposed in the Gospel and, with deep joy, commit themselves to the same style of life that he chose for himself (cf. *LG* 44). This

⁵³ J.A. ROVIRA, “Fedelta”, *Dizionario teologico della vita consacrata*, Milano 1992, 738.

praiseworthy fidelity, while not seeking any other approval than that of the Lord, “also becomes a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word about the Father and to the brethren” (VC 87).

According to L.M. Rulla, “Possibly, some who leave religious life are ideal persons to be inside while some who should have left continue to enjoy life without fidelity and commitment”⁵⁴. A lack of fidelity in religious life can be likened to Peter the Apostle, who followed Jesus after the latter’s arrest (cf. Lk 22:54). He did not flee, unlike the other disciples, yet he was cautious enough not to follow Jesus too closely lest he should be quickly arrested.⁵⁵ Those who claim to be religious yet live lives that run counter to the ideals of self-sacrifice, complete devotion, and unwavering dedication do not live the life of a true devotee. Even many who, like Peter, have lost their love for religion have not abandoned Jesus, and many still practise their religion fervently. Still, they keep tabs on him, *albeit* from a safe distance. Recent research published in the Union of Superiors General’s Gathering informs that “emotional crisis is the predominant cause for the exits; it affects the highest percentage of abandonment occurrences.”⁵⁶

Jesus Christ is our true friend and constant companion, and it is in him that we find the steadfastness we desperately want. To transform from a weak fidelity into a creative one, one must direct one’s attention skyward. During their formation, a candidate for monastic life needs to nourish the germ of creative faithfulness so that the fire and love of God can instil in their tenacity and stability in vocation and life. Pope Francis cited *Vita Consecrata*’s address to underscore the “enduring reality of religious life is one of fidelity, joy, and hope” (VC 42). If the religious possess it, they have everything in their life. Bringing happiness and love to our current vocation as witnesses of God, religious fidelity, and endurance are inseparable duties.

2.2 Consecrated Life as a Covenantal Fidelity

The notion of covenant is one of the Bible’s most essential and pervasive means of describing the relationship between God and the community of

⁵⁴ This research demonstrates that a significant proportion of the consecrated are nesters. The nesters have constructed a cosy cocoon within the religious organisation and seek self-gratification: cf. L.M. RULLA – J. RIDDICK – F. IMODA, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation: Existential Confirmation*, Vol. II, Rome 1989, 97.

⁵⁵ Cf. B. SEBASTIAN, “Following Christ ‘at a distance’: Some Considerations on the Growing Phenomenon of Mediocrity in Fidelity and Commitment among the Consecrated”, *Claretianum ITVC* (2021) 239-258.

⁵⁶ USG, *Fidelity and Abandonment in Today’s Consecrated Life*, Rome, n. 8.

faith. Covenant derives from the Hebrew word *berith*, which means “a binding agreement or pact”⁵⁷. In the Christian tradition, faith is both a gift and a covenant, manifested in fidelity throughout various human situations. “Faith refers to a rich, multidimensional human stance inseparable from God’s gift and our deepest actualisation”⁵⁸. The God of Christianity is a God of covenant with His people, in that He will remain with them eternally regardless of the circumstances. God is always faithful to His covenant; however, humans are unfaithful to this agreement. Due to His love for them, God frequently reminded the faithful in the Old Testament of the necessity to keep the covenant “fidelity” and to be willing to renew the covenant with them. Therefore, when we discuss our relationship with God and our religious submission to God, we refer to our loyalty to the covenant. Thus, fidelity becomes a known and fundamental aspect of faith and covenant in the life of the faithful, particularly the religious.

There are two kinds of covenants: unilateral and bilateral. A bilateral covenant consists of two equal parties whose responsibilities may be materially distinct and have equivalent legal effects. A unilateral covenant is made between unequal parties, and a unilateral duty or oath binds the one who enters the covenant⁵⁹. The concept of God’s commitment to His people, commonly known as a covenant, is central to the religion and theology of the Old Testament. The Bible describes God’s unselfish love for his chosen people and the universe. This covenant-making comprises (a) a declaration of God’s identity and will, (b) a people’s consent to obey, and (c) a sacrifice as a sign of the covenant (Ex 20–24). The human side of the covenant is marred by failure (1Kings 19:10; Jer 11:3) but can be renewed by reiterated allegiance⁶⁰. His death makes the new covenant (1Cor 11:25, Mark 14:24, Mat 26:28), rising and ascending (Heb 12:24) and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:33) forever for those who believe. Through him, all peoples have access to (covenant-relationship with) God (Rom 5:2, Eph 2:18). The core of Christian faith and religious life is the unflinching fidelity to God and His teachings. Consecrated life manifests Jesus’ life through evangelical

⁵⁷ D. SENIOR, “Covenant”, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed., M. DOWNEY, Bangalore 1995, 237.

⁵⁸ M.A. FATULA, “Faith”, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 379.

⁵⁹ Cf. A. RODRIQUEZ, “Alianza” *Suplemento al Diccionario Teológico De La Vida Consagrada*, ed., A. APARICIO, Madrid 2005, 3.

⁶⁰ Cf. W. HINNEBUYSCH, “Dominican Spirituality”, G.S. WAKEFIELD, ed., *The Westminster: Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, Manila 1983, 120.

counsels and eternal fidelity to his life principles with love for the mission entrusted to us⁶¹.

Biblical authors probably used this covenant as a model for early Israel's history because it was made with Moses at Mount Sinai. After liberating Moses and Israel from Egyptian slavery, God created a covenant with them by giving them the Law, which contains the covenant's obligations. Yahweh selects Israel as His chosen nation and bestows upon them the land and the assurance of a happy future. They became God's offspring, and God acted as their father. Israel, in turn, was commanded to uphold the Law and pledge exclusive allegiance to God. This covenant of Yahweh is the covenant that the faithful continue to observe to this day, and religiosity and the consecrated life are the authentic echoes of that divine deed. We must discuss the importance of fidelity considering Israel's and its adherents' present-day infidelity. Religious life is an eternal covenant with God, with other people, and with a mission⁶². The place where a consecrated person can carry out his mission and have faith in the Lord is fidelity.

A consecrated individual is called to bear testimony to the resurrected Christ through a personal covenant with the Lord, the people, and the mission. The Greek word for covenant is *diathèkè*, which means "last will" or "testament." This etymology also relates to the New Testament understanding of the covenant, which identifies Jesus' death (and resurrection) as the new covenant of hope and trust⁶³. Jesus Christ is the source of a new covenant with God the Father, and the letter to the Hebrews explains both the new and the ancient covenants in detail. Comparison of the "old" and "new" covenants as a manner of seeing Jesus' death and exaltation as the definitive means of salvation, desired by Israel, promised by the covenant, but realised in Christ (cf. Heb 8–10).

The idea of a covenant conveys some of the essential biblical ideas about the relationship between God and the consecrated people: a relationship that is both communal and personal (like a husband and wife or parents and children) and binds a people together in the unity of faith. The strength of the covenant relationship is measured by the consecrated person's genuine love for God, commitment to social justice, and concern for all living things. Some of the most important aspects of a healthy Catholic spirituality and

⁶¹ Cf. J.P. DE CAUSSADE, *The Joy of Full Surrender*, Mumbai 2008, 122.

⁶² Cf. J.C.R. GARCIA PAREDES, *The Charismatic Consecration: Its Reason to be in the Context of New Ecclesial Forms of Charismatic Life*, 4.

⁶³ Cf. Z. HAYES, "Creation" in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 238.

consecrated life were embodied in the covenant. The term ‘covenant’⁶⁴ is the theological key that unifies the two Testaments. Covenant and the consecrated life share a fundamental connection: a relationship and a benefit. Covenant with God, as a phenomenon, is the fruit of a constant and mutual search on the parts of God, who seeks the human person, and the human being, who seeks God⁶⁵. During an encounter with God, there is a process of mutual transformation. In this process, God is personified, and the human being is elevated to a divine level. This transformation is a sacred process that applies to every aspect of reality, whether people or things. As free individuals, humans can welcome and respond to this sacred transformation⁶⁶.

The Holy Spirit is the stimulator and driving force of the covenant’s great communion, which later turned into *Missio Spiritus* or the “consecration of the whole world”⁶⁷. People and groups within the church who have been particularly “touched” by the God of the covenant may experience a prophetic exaggeration in witnessing the Spirit as a form of charismatic consecration. This became the basis for consecrated life and its motivation. The ways the covenant manifests in its individual and collective forms are call, mission, evangelical counsels, communal life, and spirituality. The consecrated life must be preserved or devoted to the Lord via loyalty to God, the source of our life and vocation, and the Holy Spirit, the motivator and driving force.

2.3 Importance of the Covenant in the Modern World

Keeping the covenant is always a commitment that requires stability and faithfulness. In modern times, the covenant between God and humanity has been weakened by the allure of false gods, ideologies, and temptations. Therefore, anti-idolatry can always be a vital reference point for adherence to the covenant and consecration. The human mind is an idol factory, where the worship of false gods is first rooted (Ezek 14:3). Having an affection for idols is akin to engaging in spiritual adultery. Putting your faith in false gods

⁶⁴ The word “covenant” appears only three times in *Vita Consecrata*: Two times in the quoted text and another time when talking about how fidelity is being tested: “a rediscovery of the meaning of the Covenant and which God originally established, and which he has no intention of breaking” (VC 70).

⁶⁵ God is the Divine philanthropist who created man in his image to give himself and to become a man, for the divinisation of man to respond to the humanisation of God: cf. A.J. HESCHEL, *Dio alla ricerca dell’uomo*, Torino 1969, 156-157.

⁶⁶ P.I. ROHRBACH, *Conversation with Christ*, Rockford 1980, 59.

⁶⁷ J.C.R. GARCIA PAREDES, *The Charismatic Consecration: Its Reason to be in the Context of New Ecclesial Forms of Charismatic Life*, 4.

is a sure way to betray the one true King and Lord by leading you down the path of adultery (cf. *VS* 70)⁶⁸.

Consecrated life emphasises loving God with all one's heart, soul, and assets to create a community with one heart, one soul, and all in common as a reflection of the first commandment. To live in fidelity to the covenant with the one God, most beloved, and in opposition to any idolatry — especially idolatry of power, sex, and money — requires a commitment to the three evangelical counsels: obedience to the voice of the covenant; prophetic celibacy for the kingdom of God; and evangelical poverty. And therefore, it becomes a sign of the covenant, vital for our time: In this way, the profession of the evangelical counsels is a sign (*tamquam signum apparet*) that can and should entice all Christians to live out their Christian calling with diligence and speed. It reveals to everyone the immeasurable scope of Christ the King's strength and the miraculous efficacy of the Holy Spirit at work within the church (cf. *LG* 44/3).

The consecration of the consecrated life stems from the consecration of baptism, yet the consecrated life itself is not a sacrament. When the sacraments are understood as a Eucharistic-centered sacramental system, it is more appropriate to locate the origin of consecrated life in the sacramental eco-system⁶⁹ and, above all, in the Eucharistic consecration of bread and wine and the consecration of the members of the Body of Christ — the faithful — through the Spirit and the Word. Participation in the covenant's sacramental system generates a *consecration continual* that responds to the narrative identity proper to the human being. It is this identity that gives unity to the whole of human life⁷⁰.

There are also moments of “consecration” that do not bear the liturgical imprint, but the seal of the Holy Spirit indwells in it. We find ourselves at an intermediate point in the case of monastic and religious life, secular institutes, societies of apostolic life, consecrated widows, and other new forms. There are liturgical celebrations and the charismatic consecration of the spirit, but it is not called a sacrament. Nevertheless, the charismatic

⁶⁸ *Veritatis Splendor* (*VS*), Encyclical of Pope John Paul II (6 August 1993).

⁶⁹ The increasing awareness of environmental and moral issues has led to the intersection of religion and the environment. Sacramental Commons presents a unique way of looking at this topic by relating the Christian word ‘sacrament’, suggesting that local natural settings and communities can be a source of respect and compassion: cf. J. HEART – L. BOFF – T. BERRY, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*, New York 2006, 172.

⁷⁰ Cf. J. JOHNSON, *The Power of Consecration. A Prophetic Word to the Church*, Florida 2019, 113.

consecration is rooted, connected, and nourished by the *consecratio continuata* offered by the system of Christian sacraments⁷¹.

For a Christian, the pinnacle of success is a life dedicated to serving Christ unreservedly. The pinnacle of a Christian's life is spent assisting the poor and the oppressed in the name of Jesus Christ, who gave his life on the cross for that purpose. Complete devotion to the sacrament and Christ's way of life is a heroic ideal for Christians. All these spiritual foods come together in religious life, and the spirit encourages the individual to answer the divine summons. "The consecrated life desires «to be counselled» by the Spirit of Jesus and not so much configured by laws, norms, and prescriptions. It can be said that the external Master (Jesus and his Gospel) and the inner Master (the Holy Spirit) directly draw the face of the consecrated life in each historical moment"⁷².

Those who choose a life of consecration do so because they believe their pursuit of holiness and divinity will benefit them in the next world. One would, therefore, prefer to keep their vow of a consecrated life both during this life and the next. "The evangelical counsels are based upon the words and examples of the Lord; they are a divine gift, which the Church has received from its Lord and which it always safeguards with the help of His grace" (*LG* 43). The prophetic and eschatological nature of consecrated life is unique and present in all its manifestations, from the earliest to the most recent. Jesus' choice of a sacrificial lifestyle as the starting point for his mission to redeem all creation is a masterpiece. And he uses liminal individuals as his instruments to rescue a fallen world. "The preaching of Jesus was impregnated with eschatology"⁷³. The essence of religious fidelity is remaining true to a life of consecration until death. Like the covenant God created with his chosen people, this reality of the covenant includes God's promise to strengthen and assist humanity in times of weakness.

Fidelity is a challenging virtue that requires the development of personal discernment and a faithful community that can nurture and cultivate it. This involves moving beyond superficiality, cultivating deep roots of fidelity, and renewing and recognising the charismatic fidelity that leads us forward. While fidelity is often viewed as a temporary commitment, it is essential to consider formation that prepares individuals to offer themselves entirely to

⁷¹ J.C.R. GARCIA PAREDES, *The Charismatic Consecration*, 6.

⁷² J.C.R. GARCIA PAREDES, *The Charismatic Consecration*, 11.

⁷³ J. RATZINGER, *Eschatology Death, and Eternal Life*, 66.

God for life⁷⁴. Some congregations debate the possibility of incorporating temporary commitments to consecrated life, but I believe the focus should be on developing the capacity for lifelong commitment.

Rethinking the consecrated life in the light of today's challenges and societal shifts is essential. As has happened so often in the history of the Church, religious life needs to realise all forms of Christian and charismatic existence. The door is now firmly ajar for novel expressions of the consecrated life. Religion has never been a theoretical construct but rather a lived reality characterised by modes and transformations⁷⁵. To be charismatically consecrated is to let the divine beauty within us shine. The divine beauty overwhelms us every day as we engage in the practice of "constant consecration." To be filled with the Holy Spirit is adorned with heavenly beauty and sealed for the day of cosmic redemption. The goal of Consecrated Life is to create a world that is flawless in every way. There is no narcissism involved. "God looked at everything, and he found it exceedingly beautiful" will also be spoken on the last day of consecrated life (Gen 1:31).

3. Image of God and Its Significance on Religious Fidelity

We understand our identity and purpose in the world hinge on believing we were made in God's likeness. Realising early on that we bear the divine resemblance gives us a firm foundation for believing in our value. As the culmination and perfection of God's creative efforts, we are reminded in Genesis that we were made in God's image and likeness. And God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and the animals and all the earth." And God made man in His image, in the likeness of God, creating him both male and female (Gen 1:26-28).

Our value stems from our maker. Since God has infinite value, it follows that people made in God's image have tremendous worth. As a result, the people we interact daily shape our conception of God. Because of their early and constant presence in our lives, parents often shape their children's conceptions of God more than anybody else. In his book *The Weight of Glory*, C.S. Lewis argues that extraordinary people surround us. "The people you see every day, even the ones to whom you give little regard, will live forever

⁷⁴ SALESIANS DON BOSCO, "Vocation and Formation: Gift and Task" [accessed: 12.11.2023], https://www.sdb.org/en/RM_Resources/Letters_AGC/Fr_Ch%C3%A1vez/Vocation_and_Formation

⁷⁵ Cf. J. WIKEN, *Religious Life Today*, Bangalore 1977, 120.

either under salvation or judgment. Even the most obscure person is not ordinary in God's eyes"⁷⁶. We are all created in God's image and given unique skills to bring honour to God through our work. Many Christians miss their calling because they lack a proper understanding of what it means to be created in God's image. Understanding our worth and destiny depends on the image of God. We can better appreciate our worth as God's creations when we reflect that we were formed in God's likeness. A person's vocation to the consecrated life is a response to the image of God they create in their mind due to their religious and social upbringing and geographical location. The personality and mission of Christ are the core of consecrated life, and *Vita Consecrata* reminds us that it is "deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord and is a gift of God the Father" (VC 1).

The image of an unseen God is not very clear to everyone. Still, we are sure that according to the 'iconographic'⁷⁷ images based on the Old Testament and the New Testament, He is all-powerful and the perfection of all good virtues. Because they are the individuals we see and believe daily, we often look to our parents to see the image of God. But more often than the positive aspects, the frailty of parental behaviour resembles our mistaken and unreal conception of God. This erroneous image affects our concept of God and our relationship with him⁷⁸. Consecrated life is our relationship with Christ and commitment to his way of life. Our commitment and fidelity to this life are closely related to the image of God inside us. As God restores us, our uniqueness will radiate with more brilliance, and our gifts will reach their full potential. We will likewise seem like Christ did.

The Epistle to the Romans reminds us that we are conforming to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). Jesus is the perfect representation of God's image, and we are being transformed into his image. Man's resemblance to God is not a characteristic he possesses; instead, it is a condition he lives in, a state of conflict established and sustained by the creator⁷⁹. The societal variables present at a specific period and place heavily influence God's image. The most fundamental sign of human dignity underlying the social teachings of

⁷⁶ C.S. LEWIS, "The Weight of Glory" [accessed: 12.08.2023], <https://www.wheelersburg.net/Downloads/Lewis%20Glory.pdf>

⁷⁷ A. NICHOLAS, "Iconography", *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. G.S. WAKEFIELD, Manila 1983, 204. Iconography is the Christian art form that arose from the natural consequences of Christian facts.

⁷⁸ Cf. J. MATTAM, *The Religious Life. Within a Christian Vision of Reality*, Ahmadabad 2007, 102.

⁷⁹ Cf. D. CAIRNS, *The Image of God in Man*, Glasgow 1973, 299.

the Roman Catholic Church is the image of God. Despite this, throughout history, the symbol's compelling past has been utilised to legitimise systems of gender dominance and subordination as well as human connections with the rest of creation. As humans born and raised in everyday sociological environments, our sociocultural background heavily influences our conceptions of religion, God, and everything else⁸⁰.

Reflecting on the responses to the interviews I conducted regarding the topic in Indonesia, I realised that the picture of God varies considerably. The influence of Islamic culture and family origins has frequently created a distorted view of God in the hearts of most of the population. Inadequate catechetical understanding and defective love for the divine contribute to forming flawed images. This impacts the quality of consecrated life and their relationship with Jesus, the basis of their vocation⁸¹. A lack of pure motivation and dedication might lead to boredom and abandonment of their primary responsibility. The false image of God impedes our fidelity in all spheres of life, particularly in consecrated life. In his general audience, Pope Francis urges:

Today, too, humanity constructs images of God that prevent us from appreciating His real presence. Some offer a 'do-it-yourself' faith that reduces God to the limited spaces of our desires and convictions. But this faith is not a revealed conversion to the Lord; on the contrary, it prevents us from challenging our lives and consciences. Others reduce God to a false idol, using His holy name to justify the pursuit of interests or even hatred and violence. For others, God is merely a psychological refuge for seeking reassurance under challenging moments, a faith wrapped up and impervious to the merciful love of Jesus that drives us towards our brothers. Others consider Christ a good teacher of ethics, among many in history. Finally, some suffocate faith in a purely intimate relationship with Jesus, annulling its missionary drive that can transform the world and history. The Christian believes in the God of Jesus Christ and wishes to grow in the living experience of His mystery of love⁸².

The distorted image of God in our conscious or unconscious mind plays a crucial role in our devotion and love for God, whom we see as everything in life. The strained or weird relationship between our parents, relatives, and

⁸⁰ Cf. C.J. IMES, *Being God's Image. Why Creation Still Matters*, Westmont 2023, 162.

⁸¹ Cf. M. LOPEZ, *Radical Witness of Christ*, 89.

⁸² POPE FRANCIS, "Mercy Drives Us to Transform the World and History" Summary of Bulletin (9 September 2016), [accessed: 01.1.2023] <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/09/07/160907a.html>

significant others also affects our conception of things, particularly our unknown conception of God.

4. Fidelity: The Core Theme of the Scriptures

Considering the Bible, faith is the foundation and focal point of all Christian religious life. People's faith prompts them to respond to God's plan over time⁸³. Faith can be seen as an activity; in its affective nature, it is a relationship of trust and confidence in a personal God. In the Bible, trust is expressed as loyalty, fidelity, love, and attachment⁸⁴. Faith is more than just belief; it values the mind, heart, and hands. A man of faith voluntarily gives himself to God (cf. *DV 27*)⁸⁵. Faith conquers an individual's entire personality and leads him to an unconditional "yes" to God. Faith is an imbued virtue, not one a person obtains by their abilities. It is a miraculous gift from God that facilitates participation in the blessed Trinity's personal life⁸⁶. A Christian's faith is the foundation upon which their entire existence rests since it is how they can come to know Jesus and the medium through which they can gain insight into the spiritual realm.

As the primary mode of expressing faith in the Old Testament, trust was central to the Israelites' conviction that God had acted to deliver them from oppression and lead them to safety. They consequently learn to dread, revere, and respect Him as the One who has always stood by them. Worship of this trustworthy God included honouring God as a relational being. It's a two-way street with God serving as creator, covenant partner, saviour, and guide⁸⁷. As the most genuine manifestation of religion, fidelity is synonymous with faith in the Old Testament and everyday life. Belief in a revealed truth or a reliable authority is an example of faith. Therefore, faith encompasses not only an intellectual but also an emotional aspect of a person. Fidelity, however, is the moral character exemplified by doing what is right even when no one is watching. These can be observed in the lives of important biblical figures, and the Christian way of life still appeals to many people today. Some biblical characters of fidelity who serve as sources and models for this distinctive way of life must be mentioned in any discussion

⁸³ X. LEON-DUFOUR, "Faith", *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, New York 1973, 158.

⁸⁴ Cf. T.H. GROOME, *Christian Religious Education*, 61.

⁸⁵ *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican Council II on Divine Revelation (18 November 1965).

⁸⁶ Cf. A. LONGPRE, "Faith and Conversion to Christ", *Donum Dei* 17 (1971) 55-56.

⁸⁷ Cf. C. STUHLMUELLER, *The Collegetown Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Minnesota 1996, 294.

of “Fidelity in Religious Living.” God’s fidelity births our fidelity to us in the past, and it is sustained by recalling God’s faith in us and the promise of our eventual realisation. The most concise biblical definition of faith is the Epistle to the Hebrews: “Faith is the substance of things not seen”⁸⁸, and fidelity is the matter we express daily.

One’s faith and dedication to the cause of that faith are the most visible signs of fidelity in consecrated living. Jesus’ famous words always follow the healing, “Your faith has healed you” (Lk 18:42). Jesus says, “For anyone who has faith, everything is possible.” A person with faith is given the same power as God (Mk 9:23). The power of faith is the power of goodness and truth, which is the power of God⁸⁹. The people depicted in the Bible had firm convictions and compelling examples of fidelity to God in times of trial and crisis. A covenant is essential to Christian belief. For those who have chosen a life of consecration, their sole purpose is to remain faithful to the evangelical counsels that formalise their commitment to God. Some biblical individuals are shining illustrations of the truth that unwavering fidelity to religion is the bedrock of one’s calling and the fuel that keeps one going.

In the Christian belief, fidelity is a two-way street; God shows His creatures fidelity at the outset, and humans return with their brand of steadfastness throughout their lives. God’s promises to Abraham, the patriarchs, Moses, David and others rest on His unwavering faithfulness. It is a *mantra*: “I am your God, and you are my people” (Jer 30:22). No matter what the people believe about God or do, God will always be their God, and they will always be God’s people. God always leads a person’s call to consecrated life and sacrifice⁹⁰. This bond may change from person to person, but it never breaks, and God is consistently praised for his constancy. “Praise the Lord, all your nations; glorify him, all you peoples. For steadfast is his kindness towards us, and the fidelity of the Lord endures forever” (Ps 117). The Son of God, Immanuel, demonstrates God’s love for us in a manner that reciprocates our faith and trust in God. God’s dedication to the people of Israel and His entire creation is expressed in the covenants He established with Noah, Abraham,

⁸⁸ D.L. JEFFERY, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, Michigan 1994, 265.

⁸⁹ Most of the time, faith is the compass that guides one’s life. A religious or a priest is a person who first, always, and everywhere, in whatever situations or circumstances, seeks God and God alone. Our entrusting ourselves to God includes willingly counting on God as our authoritative Lord in response to God’s redemptive intervention in our lives: cf. M.W. AUSTIN – R.D. GEIVETT, *Being Good, Christian Virtues for Everyday Life*, Michigan 2011, 22-23.

⁹⁰ Cf. P.G. VAN BREEMEN, *Called by Name*, New York 1976, 9.

and Moses. Consequently, we can conclude that God's fidelity is His devotion to the divine promises, even when God's chosen people are disloyal⁹¹. The prophets' message witnessed God's unending love and fidelity to the covenant with Israel (cf. Ez 16:36)⁹². God's eternal love and covenantal faithfulness are the only examples to which a religious in the consecrated life covenant should aspire. Even though most biblical figures are examples of their commitment to God in their life and purpose, we select a small number of figures for the precision of our study and the significance of our issue.

4.1 Faith and Fidelity of Abraham, the Father of Faith

The Book of Genesis recounts the life of Abraham from the moment the Lord crosses his path and radically changes how he lets God act in his life. Abraham, who is well known as the father of faith, is called to rely on God's faithfulness in the form of a promise in the face of many uncertainties and hopeless odds⁹³. Abraham encouraged a more unified and transcendent monotheism among the people, moving them away from a naturalistic and polytheistic outlook on religion. God promises to provide Abraham with a place to live and numerous descendants, but Abraham must first travel: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great so that you will be a blessing" (Gen 12:1-2). Abraham had complete faith in God, and during their encounter, neither of them asked any questions nor offered any responses. Later, God himself changes his name: "Your name shall no longer be Abram, but Abraham" (Gen 17:15) to suggest that he had given him "a new personality and a new role, as shown by the meaning of his new name: 'father of a multiplicity of nations'⁹⁴.

This new name clarified that the patriarch's unique role depended on his covenant with God and fidelity. The content of God's appeal was demanding, and the career of Abraham was thus definitely established as a departure from the static, familiar past and entrance into a dynamic, unknown future. Abraham listened to God's command and put it into effect without paying too much attention to what circumstances dictated. Abandoning the security

⁹¹ Cf. B. BAYNHAM, "Fidelity" in M. DOWNEY, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 406

⁹² Cf. S.M. GOMEZ, *Fidelity in Religious Life*, Nairobi 2006, 45.

⁹³ Cf. F.D. MACCHIA, "Faith" in W.A. DYRNESS – V. KÄRKKÄINEN, ed., *Global Dictionary of Theology*, Michigan 2008, 311.

⁹⁴ R.C. STEDMAN, *Friend of God: The Legacy of Abraham, Man of Faith*, Michigan 2010, 87.

of his homeland and expecting descendants when both he and his wife were already old was a true “leap into darkness”⁹⁵ experience. But Abraham trusted in God, in his omnipotence, wisdom and goodness. This attitude of complete trust made him a close and brave friend of God, even to enter arguments and bargaining with God. The episode of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gen 18–19) shows Abraham’s great familiarity with his Lord besides the gravity of sin that offends God and destroys human beings. God did not hide from him what he was about to do and accepted the holy patriarch’s prayer of intercession. The response of faith is based on trust, on a personal relationship with God.

The call to the consecrated life is to walk in faith toward a God we cannot see with our physical eyes but who has filled our hearts with His love and promises. Despite all that could have gone wrong, Abraham knew that God was loyal, and His love would remain forever⁹⁶. Living a consecrated life is like taking a giant leap into God’s unconditional love and unwavering protection, where nothing can shake your faith in God’s unbreakable commitment. There was nothing superficial about Abraham; his devotion to God and willingness to do whatever He wanted were the foundation of his character. Challenges are never the final word in life, no matter how bad they look. God never fails to deliver on what he’s promised. As a result, Abraham’s behaviour is consistent with this truth. Obeisance, trust, and fidelity are the three pillars upon which Abraham’s faith rests, making it exceptional⁹⁷.

4.1.1 Abraham’s Obedience of Faith

Over 4,000 years ago, God called upon Abraham to embark on a remarkable faith journey. Despite having previously worshipped idols, Abraham decided to abandon his home, family, and security to devote his life to God. Abraham primarily demonstrated his faith by obeying God’s commands. When we obey, it’s because we’ve listened well enough to understand what the other person wants from us, and then we’ve acted accordingly⁹⁸. The Bible teaches that fulfilling God’s will is more than merely doing what we’re

⁹⁵ Kierkegaard’s concept of leap points to a state in which a person is faced with a choice that cannot be justified rationally and must, therefore, leap into it. “Meaning of Kierkegaard’s leap of Faith Explained Simply” [accessed: 22.11.2023], <https://culturalstudiesnow.blogspot.com/2017/09/kierkegaards-leap-of-faith-explanation.html>

⁹⁶ Cf. J. SANKARATHIL, *Towards a Prophetic Spirituality of Religious Life*, 201.

⁹⁷ Cf. E. MACEDO, *The Faith of Abraham*, Rio de Janeiro 2018, 110.

⁹⁸ Cf. F.B. MEYER, *Abraham Or, the Obedience of Faith*, Atlanta 1995, 29.

told; instead, it's using our thoughts and hearts to react to God's revelation of himself and then acting on that commitment wholeheartedly⁹⁹. "When God calls him, Abraham goes forth 'as the Lord had told him (Gen 12:4); Abraham's heart is entirely submissive to the Word, so he obeys"¹⁰⁰. The evangelical counsels for the holy life include total submission to God's will and attentive silence as we listen for God's stillness and whispering. Faith-based obedience goes much beyond mere discipline, including, as it does, a free and voluntary consent to God's word and truth. This frequently happens when we can decide whether to follow God's will and accept his word. Faith's obedience results from hearing God's call to fellowship with him.

To obey (from the Latin *ob-audire*, to hear or listen to) in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth. Abraham is the model of such obedience offered to us by Sacred Scripture. The Virgin Mary is its perfect embodiment¹⁰¹.

When we examine Abraham's life, we observe faith permeating his existence and rising to the fore in times of darkness when human proof fails. Faith always entails a degree of obscurity, a living in the mystery, with the knowledge that we can never acquire a perfect explanation or comprehension, for if we did, faith would cease to exist. As the Letter to the Hebrews says, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). The lack of evidence in faith is superseded by the believer's trust in God. By faith, the patriarch set out without knowing where he was going. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, Abraham had to trust significantly in God to live "as a stranger and pilgrim in the Promised Land (145)" and to face the sacrifice of his son. "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Gen 22:2). Abraham's faith is at its most profound when he is willing to give up his son Isaac. The sacrifice of his son is a foreshadowing of Christ's self-sacrifice for the salvation of the world. It is so astonishing that no comment is necessary. But Abraham does not revolt against God. He does not question or doubt Him but instead has faith in Him. At the end of his journey on Mount Moriah, Jacob realises that God does not desire Isaac's blood to be sacrificed. "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now, I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. So, Abraham called the name of that place "The Lord

⁹⁹ Cf. G. RUGH, *By Faith Abraham*, Lincoln 1990, 98.

¹⁰⁰ CCC 122.

¹⁰¹ CCC 144.

will Provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided” (Gen 22:12-14). Abraham’s life was a voyage of trust through many doubts and challenges, yet he never faltered on his trip; he became a faithful person with unwavering faith in God. It is a model story that encourages consecrated individuals to abandon their egos and comfort zones so that God’s self and safety can become theirs¹⁰².

4.1.2 *Faith as the Concrete Expression of Fidelity*

As we delve more into his story, it will be fascinating to see how Abraham’s faith and fidelity developed and changed his life. Abraham’s walk with God began with a simple calculation, but we can see how his growing knowledge of God and appreciation for God’s worth transformed his life over time. Despite setbacks, he is committed to doing what God calls him. He bases his beliefs on Scripture, and as a result, his well-deliberated choices are final. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23). Abraham was subjected to a tremendous trial: having to sacrifice the person who was the fruit of the promise made to him. Because of the circumstances, the holy patriarch had to ‘judge’ the divine will and mistrust God’s faithfulness. He had to believe against all hope (cf. Rom 4:18), where Abraham’s temptation first arose. To be effective missionaries, even Christians may face situations where they are aware God is calling them to do something difficult, such as a more profound commitment to their faith or the abandonment of a deeply held belief or pattern of behaviour. The temptation might arise to silence that uneasiness, to make what we want to seem like God’s will: “The temptation to set God aside to put ourselves at the centre is always at the door”¹⁰³. Abraham may seem superhuman, but if we look more closely at some of the incidents in his life, we’ll see someone like the rest of us, with many frailties and weaknesses¹⁰⁴. He eventually became someone who “believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6).

Because of his trusting relationship with God, Abraham can negotiate with Yahweh to prevent a terrible event from happening in Genesis Chapter 18. Abraham is depicted as “standing before Yahweh,” pleading for Sodom, and

¹⁰² Cf. E. MACEDO, *The Faith of Abraham*, 120.

¹⁰³ POPE FRANCIS, “Catechesis”, General Audience on 10 April 2013” [accessed: 20.10.2023], https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130410_udienza-generale.html

¹⁰⁴ “The Torah: The Faith of Abraham” [accessed: 10.12.2021], <https://www.gci.org/articles/the-faith-of-abraham/>

afterwards receiving a promise from God to spare the city if Yahweh locates fifty righteous men. Forty-five, and so on down to the final promise: “I will not destroy it for the sake of ten” (Gen 18:32). Abraham has grown in concern for the people around him, and the lesson of Yahweh to him was the perseverance as the condition to develop in fidelity¹⁰⁵. Abraham was always ‘faithful’ even in difficult testing situations because he believed that God is a faithful God; God is true, sound, and trustworthy. As a father of faith, he is the prototype of what it means to have faith. Abraham is given divine instructions without explanations and is expected to fulfil these instructions unquestioningly. This he had done despite the enormous sacrifices he is asked to make, leaving his homeland, his family, and his inheritance to go to a place where he must trust that God will provide a new land, family, and inheritance. Fidelity was tested repeatedly, where God failed in all His tests, and Abraham became victorious not only as the ‘Father of Faith’ but as the ‘Father of Fidelity’.

4.1.3 *God’s Test of the Fidelity of Abraham*

Abraham faced many tests proving that his fidelity to God was more than everything in his life. The climax of Abraham’s career came when God commanded him to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac: “Take your son, Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a high mountain that I will point out to you” (Gen 22.2)¹⁰⁶. God had already asked Abraham to give up his past by leaving his homeland; now, God wanted him to give up his future. For Abraham, faith in God was his one sure thing. God would provide the lambs for the holocaust, Abraham assured his son Isaac, demonstrating his unwavering faith and devotion to the Almighty (Gen 22:8). He was declaring his total reliance on God’s protection. After Abraham’s true and steadfast response, God spared Isaac’s life and gave him a new lease on faith. His return from the mountain changed Abraham forever, and he became more devoted to God than ever before. To a great extent, Abraham’s personal growth results from his unwavering devotion.

Abraham’s relationship with God stemmed from his unwavering trust in God. Religion is also a voyage to an unknown goal with an invisible God. Faith and fidelity to the unchanging God are what we possess. Abraham accomplished remarkable things because of his faith. He built a nomadic

¹⁰⁵ Cf. P.V. BREEMEN, *Called by Name*, 15.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. C. STUHLMUELLER, *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 4.

lifestyle for himself and Sarah in the Canaanite wilderness, participated in conflict with desert monarchs, appealed to God on behalf of Sodom, showed a willingness to sacrifice even his beloved son, and left his home of Ur to travel to the undiscovered region. Abraham would have grounds to boast if anyone did. Despite the praiseworthiness of these efforts, they had no bearing on fulfilling God's promises. Abraham believed in God's integrity and was justified not by his works but by his faith. God was pleased with Abraham and stated, "Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, instructions, decrees, and regulations" (Gen 26:5).

4.2 Moses: A Man of Fidelity

Moses fought God with faith. Moses returned from Mount Sinai to find the people dancing before the golden calf they had made. Moses slammed down God's covenant tablets in anger, shattering them. "Be ready at dawn; at dawn, come up Mount Sinai and wait for me there at the top of the mountain," God instructed Moses as he cut two tablets of stone on which he would write the exact words as on the previous tablets (Ex 34:2). Moses waited on the mountain all by himself, in an attitude of complete silence and solitude¹⁰⁷. Moses' entire life is characterised by confidence in God's revelation and commitment to God. "By faith he left Egypt, not being terrified of the king's displeasure; for he endured as seeing him who is unseen," the Letter to the Hebrews states, "He kept Passover and sprinkled blood by faith to protect the firstborn from the destroyer. The Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry land by faith, but the Egyptians drowned" (Heb 11:27-29).

God invites us to believe by giving us Himself. Faith starts a journey toward God and a loving commitment. "God awaits you. So, wherever you are, you must commit to imitating and uniting yourself to him, cheerfully, lovingly, keenly, though circumstances may require you—even permanently—to go against the grain. God awaits you—and needs you to be faithful"¹⁰⁸. "Christian religion and calling affect our whole existence, not just portion. God requires entire self-giving. Faith provides us with a new perspective on

¹⁰⁷ Cf. P. BREEMEN, *The God Who Won't Let Go*, 15-17.

¹⁰⁸ J. ESCRIVÁ, *The Forge, Official Bulletin of Opus Dei* [accessed: 14.06.2022], <https://opusdei.org/en/article/the-forge/>, 51.

life in all its aspects”¹⁰⁹. Thus, faith “becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes man’s life” (*PF* 6)¹¹⁰.

Exodus 3:7-9 is the Bible’s fundamental tale of God’s first self-identification with Moses. God picked Moses to free Jacob’s descendants from Egypt and teach them the Torah¹¹¹. Moses’s calling is the culmination of providence. God appeared to him, revealed His identity and salvation plan, told him his task, and provided him with the means to complete it (Ex 3:1-15). God would be with him (3:12). In vain did he try to refuse the task: who am I? (3:11)¹¹². The humility which led him to hesitate at first in the face of so heavy a task (4:10-13) would eventually enable him to accomplish it with unequalled humility, despite the opposition of his people (Num 12:3-13). Even though his faith displayed some feebleness (20:10), God declared his servant faithful and dealt with him as a friend (Ex 33:11)¹¹³.

God’s invitation to represent Him through unique work is personal. God carefully chose Moses to liberate the enslaved. Even today, those God calls react the same. After realising what such a call involves, they are apprehensive¹¹⁴. The importance of God’s role in the lives of the called is highlighted in this context. He gives them the conviction and Spirit they need to do their work with integrity. In return, they devote their entire lives to serving the Lord. God’s call is very particular and has a special, unique purpose. Moses objects four times by insisting, “I cannot do that; I am unfit; I have a speech impediment, as you know; I have a thick tongue; why don’t you take my brother Aaron, who is much better and capable to fulfil such a task?” (Ex 4:10). But God’s answer is: “I want you, not your brother. If I had wanted him, I would have asked him. I just want you”¹¹⁵. Both the call and the mission from God are unique to the individual.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. ESCRIVA.ORG, “Christ is Passing By” [accessed: 15.06.2022], <https://escriva.org/en/es-cristo-que-pasa/>, 46.

¹¹⁰ *Porta Fidei (PF)*, Apostolic Letter “Motu Proprio Data” of Pope Benedict XVI for the Induction of the Year of Faith (11 October 2011).

¹¹¹ C. STUHLMULLER, “Moses”, *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 664.

¹¹² Cf. J.A. ANDERSON, *Will Somebody Please Tell Me Who I AM? A Search for Our True Identity*, California 2013, 90.

¹¹³ Cf. X.L. DUFOUR, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 368-369.

¹¹⁴ Cf. S.J. BINZ, *Abraham: Father of All Believers*, 105.

¹¹⁵ J. FUELLENBACH, *Throw Fire*, Manila 1998, 86.

4.2.1 *Living by the Light of Faith*

Pharaoh ordered the killing of all male Israelite babies at Moses' birth. Moses' parents hid him for three months through faith (Heb 11:23). This term implies that his parents' faith convinced them that the child's death was not God's will and gave them the strength to disobey the ruler. They may not have realised how much their actions mattered. Divine providence allowed them to witness their son adopted by an Egyptian princess and his mother to continue feeding and caring for him (Ex 2:1-12). Moses was educated in all Egyptian knowledge in Pharaoh's palace. His life altered dramatically. To defend an Israelite, he killed an Egyptian and became an outlaw. Moses opted to side with his Israelite brethren out of faith and a sense of belonging to the chosen nation. By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be named the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing to share ill-treatment with the people of God rather than enjoy the transient joys of sin. He valued Christ's suffering more than Egypt's treasures because of the payoff (Heb 11:24-26). By the light of faith, Moses saw that to take on himself the hate and ridicule faced by the Israelites had far more value than the temporal delights of Egypt that would lead to spiritual perdition. "I am going to tell you what man's treasures are on earth so that you will not despise them: hunger, thirst, heat, cold, suffering, dishonour, poverty, loneliness, betrayal, calumny, prison"¹¹⁶.

Men are neither the only nor even the main actors in world history. After Moses settled in his new nation and could have expected his life to continue normally, God came out to meet him and revealed his mission from birth. His 120-year lifespan has three forty-year phases. God raised him at Pharaoh's court for forty years to prepare him for Yahweh's service. Moses dwelt in the desert for forty years, learning about Yahweh and his methods. Moses knows God's plan for Israel and his role in implementing it. Finally, Moses serves God and his people for the third time. This is his highest honour for fidelity. God trusts in him, and he becomes an intimate person with God, a friend of God¹¹⁷.

"I will be with you," Moses is told (Ex 3:13). God informed Moses He would be with him, not just as a passenger. Thus. "You have access to all I AM," he assured Moses. We can experience God's fullness by involving Him in our daily lives. Consecrated people can apply Him to everyday life.

¹¹⁶ S. JOSEMARIA, "The Way": *Official Bulletin of Opus Dei* [accessed: 22.03.2022], <https://opusdei.org/en/article/the-forge/>, 194.

¹¹⁷ Cf. J. FUELLENBACH, *Throw Fire*, 86.

We can tap into His power, ability, wisdom, wealth, and everything else He is¹¹⁸. All that power is useless if we don't comprehend who God is and how much He wants to be engaged in our daily lives. Thus, our consecrated life experience invites us to know and invite God into our lives. God expects us to perform things with his strength. "God is a living God, who attends to human misery, speaks, acts, and intervenes, who liberates and redeems"¹¹⁹. We have found above the graciousness and fidelity of God in the life of Abraham and Moses.

4.2.2 *Faith and Fidelity toward God's Mission*

God's call brings the conviction that the vocation is no mere fantasy or figment of the imagination. Every divine calling includes this initiative of intimacy in which the Lord lets himself be known. Moses' vocation stresses this second aspect of a calling in showing how the Lord presents himself: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:6). We might find Moses' reaction surprising. Despite having witnessed the miracle of the burning bush and being certain of the situation, he begins to make excuses: "Who am I to go to Pharaoh?" (Ex 3:11). Aware of his inadequacies and the difficulty of the duty assigned to him, he attempts to evade what the Lord is requesting of him. His faith is still weak, but his fear does not lead him to turn away from God's presence. Moses talks to God straight, sets out his objections, and allows God to show his power and remedy his weakness. Moses is so open to the plan and strength of God that he could be strengthened to carry out the mission God entrusted to him. In other words, we can say that his faith and fidelity to God were the source and strength of his mission. Moses experienced God's power and began performing miracles for Pharaoh. Moses only had to play well.

Moses trusted in God's promise to lead the chosen people to the Promised Land, sure that he could conquer any obstacle with the Lord. He performed the paschal rite and sprinkled blood to protect Israel from the angel that killed the firstborn. In faith, they crossed the Red Sea as if it were dry land, while the Egyptians drowned (Heb 11:28-29). This confidence came from a simple, humble discussion with God, not a previous call. Faith makes God visible because it helps us understand the unseen. Faith in God leads to vocation

¹¹⁸ Cf. J.A. ANDERSON, *Will Somebody Please Tell Me Who I AM? A Search for Our True Identity*, 90-91.

¹¹⁹ Cf. W. KASPER, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, New York 2014, 46.

and its implications. Dialogue with God never ends because faith grows. Prayer strengthens faith and makes us conscious of our purpose. A life of faith develops, combining prayer with everyday things and encouraging us to devote ourselves to others and reveal our vocation in everyday life. Moses exemplifies faith, fidelity, and effectiveness. Moses is faithful and effective because the Lord is close to him, and the Lord is near because Moses is honest with God about his doubts, anxieties, and weaknesses. Moses prays for the saved people even when everything appears lost, and they create golden calves to worship. Their sin becomes a chance to start over, demonstrating God's mercy (Ex 33:1-17). God never tires of pardoning, but we sometimes tire of asking"¹²⁰.

Moses' life was defined by his mission: God called Moses to lead his people out of that land to a good and broad land with milk and honey (Ex 3:8). Moses liberated Israel, foreshadowing Christian redemption and genuine freedom. Christ's death and resurrection freed us from sin and led us to heaven, the promised land. Moses obeys God. He glimpsed the promised land before dying. Moses died believing God's promise could be trusted and others would inherit God's people's heritage¹²¹. God calls a devoted individual to serve others faithfully. In Abraham and Moses, God fights oppression to free his people.

4.3 *Mary: The Model of Faith and Fidelity Par Excellence*

Our mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, is history's best example of fidelity. We call her "the cause of our joy" and "our lady of sorrows". Mary was a perfect disciple of Jesus and witnessed the best moment of salvation history at Bethlehem and the saddest in Calvary. Her last words, "Do whatever He tells," pointed to Jesus the Messiah¹²². Mary, like Abraham, is the New Testament's ideal of absolute fidelity to God. "Mary consented in faith at the Annunciation and retained it without hesitation at the foot of the Cross"¹²³. Mary's faith and fidelity inspire all Christians, especially devout married to Christ. "Strengthened by Christ (cf. Mt 28:20), the Church journeys through time toward the consummation of the ages and meets the Lord who comes. She proceeds along the path already trodden by the Virgin Mary, who

¹²⁰ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, "Angelus" [accessed: 26.07.2022], https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2013/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20130317.html

¹²¹ Cf. A. MCGRATH, *The Journey: A Pilgrim in the Lands of the Spirit*, New York City 2000, 121-122.

¹²² T.M. DOLAN, *Priests for the Third Millennium*, Huntington 2000, 74.

¹²³ CCC 2674.

“advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally persevered in her union with her son unto the cross”¹²⁴. Mary’s “let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38) is an excellent example of how to answer God’s call in our life. Mary showed us faith and fidelity by saying yes to more than just carrying Jesus.

God asked Mary to be the lowly mother of Jesus and the wife of Joseph during her life on earth. Her faithfulness can inspire others to follow God. Mary follows God’s mysterious desire at the Annunciation. Her fidelity as wife and mother in the hidden existence of Nazareth exemplifies humility and poverty. Her intercession at the Cana wedding feast reveals self-forgetful love. Mary’s station at the foot of the cross tells us that being faithful to one’s mission takes us there to surrender everything to Mary, in unity with the suffering Jesus, to be fruitful for souls. Leaving family, especially one’s mother, is the hardest step toward monastic life. Her magnificent example of humility and entire abandonment of God’s purpose is a rich endowment, consolation to the fledgling, and lifelong security to the seasoned religious. Mary entered the unknown. She had nothing but the Word of God to guide her, like Abraham¹²⁵. Mary’s salvation was as unique as God’s creation.

4.3.1 *Fidelity: Surrender to God’s Plan*

Mary was entrusted with a unique responsibility by God. It is possible that her life was typical for a girl of her age. In a flash, everything shifted. She was divinely selected to be Jesus’ mother. She was thinking about it and finally asked. God stated that He could do what men could not. “May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38), she said, trusting God even though she didn’t know what would happen. Mary was still a simple young woman, but her resolute “YES” to God altered her life. As a result, Mary’s faith in life took on a more individual, consequential, and devoted character. She was willing to put everything on the line, even though she had no idea where the Word of God would take her¹²⁶. Like Abraham and Moses, we see a summon from God with no guarantees and only a promise. In her trust in God, Mary offered her whole being to him. Her decision in that moment of faith would profoundly affect the rest of her life, both personally and

¹²⁴ JOHN PAUL II, “At the End of the Via Crucis” [accessed: 22.11.2023], https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_10041998_viacrucis.html#:~:text=Of%20Mary%20the%20Second%20Vatcan,her%20Son%20u

¹²⁵ Cf. P.V. BREEMEN, *Called by Name*, 28.

¹²⁶ Cf. P.V. BREEMEN, *Called by Name*, 24.

professionally. She saw faith not as something theoretical or inward but as something that included everything life offered. Mary gave up her entire life for her son.

Every person has a unique role to play in God's plan. When we follow the Holy Spirit and walk in God's ways, we experience joy and contentment. However, doubts, concerns, and questions often arise when we feel God's unexplainable call to devote our lives to Him. Despite these doubts, God persistently calls the one who will fulfil His purpose. Eventually, overwhelmed by God's mercy and love, our hearts shout a resounding "Yes!" Despite many mysteries and uncertainties, we trust the Lord and learn to love like Mary. Saying "Yes" to God changes everything. Miracles are possible with God. Walls may crumble, new paths may become apparent, and the blind may gain sight. Our hearts speak to us, and we strive to understand the message (cf. *EG* 286)¹²⁷.

4.3.2 *Fidelity: Obedience to the Will of God*

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord," Mary exclaimed when the Angel Gabriel revealed God's magnificent plan for her (Lk 1:38). She showed absolute obedience to please God. "Mary gave herself wholeheartedly to her Son and His mission in perfect faith, love and obedience"¹²⁸. Her life was open to God's will, no matter how inexplicable. She had no idea what would happen, but she obeyed God and bore Him, who would change history. She would say "yes" many times, ending at the Cross. After returning to Nazareth, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph lived as a poor, working family. Mary cooked, cleaned, sewed, and drew water as a wife and mother, surrendering everything to God. Her spotless soul always obeyed God. Mary sometimes misunderstood the ways of Jesus. When she and Joseph found Him in the temple after the three days' loss, she asked, "Son, why have you done this?" (Lk 2:48) When Jesus gave his mysterious answer about his Father in Heaven, Mary pondered it in her Heart (*LG* 55). This pondering of the blessed Mother is perhaps one of the hallmarks of her earthly life. Although she did not understand, she accepted, pondered and prayed, drawing the episode into her pure Heart. Mary was graced with perfect freedom: the

¹²⁷ *Evangelii Gaudium (EG)*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (24 November 2013).

¹²⁸ P. HAFFNER, *The Mystery of Mary*, Chicago 2004, 20.

capacity for full self-realisation (cf. *RM* 16)¹²⁹ as being totally and exclusively turned towards God's Word in answering faith's obedience. "Then she ponders not merely in her mind but in her heart. Mary not merely as passively engaged by God, but as freely cooperating in the work of man's salvation through faith and obedience" (*LG* 56).

Simeon's prophecy is the second announcement to Mary because it shows how her son will fulfil his mission: in incomprehension and suffering. Such incidents in the life of Mary show, "on the one hand confirms her faith in the fulfilment of the divine promise of salvation, on the other, it also reveals that she must live her obedience of faith by suffering beside her suffering Saviour" (*RM* 16). She is so open since her lifelong faith has made her that way. All of this is capped off when God allows her to celebrate the victory of her raised son. As she had been the first in many other instances, "she is now the first to attain the last goal: filled in body, mind and soul by the life of resurrection, she is assumed into heaven where her faith is raised to total vision"¹³⁰. Mary's role in the Church is not to stand in the way of Christ; instead encourages obedience to His will by advising genteelly to us, "Do whatever He tells you" (*Jn* 2:6).

4.3.3 *Fidelity: A Personal Relationship with God*

Mary's profound and relentless prayer life nourished and sustained her inner unity with God and her dedication to His kingdom, as glimpsed in the gospels. Mary's devotion to God provides us with models of faith that might serve as model for our prayers. Mary submitted to God's will and embraced His plans for her. Daily prayer is a part of her routine. God was pleased by her holiness. Mary's Magnificat is a glorious song of gratitude that she sings with great delight and profound modesty. She quoted scripture to celebrate her meeting with Elizabeth. After the appearance of the risen Lord and his ascension, Mary joined the disciples in prayer in the upper room: "All these joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the mother of Jesus" (*Acts* 1:14). This is the final of more than forty references to Mary in the Bible, and it depicts her in a manner typical of her: as someone who inspired the early Christian community with her faith,

¹²⁹ *Redemptories Mater (RM)* on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the Pilgrim Church by Pope John Paul II (25 March 1987).

¹³⁰ Cf. P.V. BREEMEN, *Called by Name*, 31.

faithfulness, and prayer. She has never stopped being receptive to the Word of God, who took on flesh in her womb¹³¹.

St. Luke portrays Mary as the first faithful disciple because she “hears” God’s word and lives it. Mary is God’s handmaid. Mary’s consent allowed God to start a new era with humanity. This permission makes her the mother of God, Christ, and humanity. Like God’s “let there be light,” Mary’s “let it be done to me” begins the new second creation. God created both. Mary’s absolute self-surrender to God’s will made her the most blessed woman in God’s eyes. Mary is Jesus’ first faithful disciple if hearing and doing God’s Word is the standard (Lk 8:21). Mary becomes Jesus’ first disciple by her dedication and complete surrender to God’s Word. As a believing handmaid, she never demanded to know. She trusted, contemplated, and waited. She continued her pilgrimage of faith and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood following the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, associating herself with his sacrifice in her mother’s heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this Victim which was born of her (cf. *LG* 58). Between death and resurrection, Mary alone maintained faith. Her divine Son affirmed her purpose, “seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing close to her” at the cross. Mother, this is your son, Jesus said. “This is your mother,” he told the follower (Jn 19:25-27)¹³².

Mary’s life culminates with her son’s crucifixion. Despite her heartbreak, she stands at the Cross following the Father’s will. She shares His mystical crucifixion. She offers Jesus, herself, and the world via her pure, suffering heart, bearing bountiful fruit in men’s hearts, as a co-redeemer with her Son. She becomes Mother of the Church when Jesus gives her to the beloved disciple and he to her. Thus, her eternal motherhood of humanity starts.

The cross is something that everyone must face eventually. Next steps? Accepting or rejecting it will eventually reemerge in a different form. Due to her poverty and modesty, she could function in society while giving her worries to God. She was able to endure the pain of the cross and passionately invest in the souls of others due to her surrender to God’s will and the purity of her heart. Throughout her life, she contemplates parenting and points her kids toward the cross. In God’s loving embrace, true freedom awaits everyone who follows Mary’s example.

¹³¹ Cf. P.V. BREEMEN, *Called by Name*, 31-32.

¹³² Cf. P.V. BREEMEN, *Called by Name*, 31.

4.4 St. Joseph: An Icon of Fidelity

To most men, Saint Joseph was a mystery. His ancestry was high-class. His lineage might be traced back to David. However, God obscured his identity and stripped him of all noble qualities. After he retired, he started doing housework. A nobleman's estate steward is often an indispensable household staff member. He oversees the entire organisation because of his high ethics and sound judgment standards. St. Joseph was a member of the Holy Family. He gave his life for the Word incarnate and his blessed mother. These were his life's work of anxiety. He was not meant for male acclaim¹³³. As his two dear "wards" constant companions, imagine the memoirs he could have written if he could reveal every secretive moment of their thirty-year life together. Joseph is slandered when he takes Mary, pregnant by the Holy Spirit. He took a huge risk by bringing her inside (cf. Mt 1:24).

He takes on the proper role of a father who aids in childbirth, who takes the initiative to flee to Egypt, and who chooses the right moment to return; who, along with his wife, does that which all educating fathers did at the time concerning religious obligations; who worries when his son disappears. All these issues have more to do with the father, who is seriously engaged with his family, than with someone who is a mere protector and a zealous provider¹³⁴.

St. Joseph feels compelled to get involved if it has some inexplicable connection to God. He accepts his part in the story with shock and pain (cf. Mt 1:19), probably without fully grasping the ramifications. Like Mary, he kept everything to himself because he was a man who walked humbly with God, as any other just man in Israel (cf. Mt 1:20; Lk 2:51). One thing that sets him apart is his unwavering faith and fidelity. His fidelity and courage show each of us how to respond to our vocation as a disciple of Jesus and friend of God.

4.4.1 Fidelity of a Just Man

Neither the role of evangelist nor apostle was intended for St. Joseph. Our Lord had already completed his job before he began his public ministry. Moreover, he was not a martyr in the same sense as the Blessed Virgin Mary is recognised as the queen of martyrs because she suffered alongside our Lord at the foot of the cross. To sum up Joseph's character, St. Matthew says, "He was just" (Mt 1: 19). "There exists a true spirituality of the 'just', and to

¹³³ Cf. *St. Joseph Model of Fidelity*, London 2018, 15 (author is unknown).

¹³⁴ Cf. L. BOFF, *Saint Joseph: The Father of Jesus in a Fatherless Society*, 18.

understand this spirituality, we must combine two concepts: *saddiq* (just) and *hasid* (pious)”¹³⁵. A *hasid* devotes their entire existence to loving God, develops a deep and meaningful relationship with God, and attests to God’s intentions as they are enacted in the law. Here, the devout person fully immerses themselves in the spiritual tradition of the people by engaging in religious practice within the family, celebrating the religious holidays, and attending synagogue every week.

The person who possesses this trait (*saddiq*) serves as an example to the community’s younger members, wins over opponents by doing what is right, and earns the respect of onlookers, making them a valuable resource for the collection. They set the standard for faithfulness to God and honesty in religious practice. Our Lord spared him the pain of his Passion because he chose accountability over martyrdom. The saints’ love and suffering appear to have gone hand in hand. The time came when St. Joseph’s gentle spirit could no longer bear its double load. St. Joseph absorbed himself in peace. Even in death, he was remembered as the carpenter from Nazareth. Saint Joseph, writes Pope Francis, “had no unique charisms, nor did he appear special in the eyes of those who met him. He was not famous or noteworthy: the Gospels do not report even a single word of his. Still, through his ordinary life, he accomplished something extraordinary in the eyes of God”¹³⁶. According to popular belief, St. Joseph embodied numerous admirable qualities that are common to all of us. As a diligent dad and friendly neighbour, he is an excellent and just person who leads a life of simplicity and faithfulness to others.

In his Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*, Pope Francis writes, “St. Joseph was a carpenter who earned an honest living to provide for his family. Working persons, whatever their job may be, cooperate with God himself, and in some way become creators of the world around us” (*PCo* 1)¹³⁷. The unseen guy Joseph did what he could to make space for our Lord and take care of the woman he loved. He was a very modest individual. Joseph had to be a brave and confident man in his morality. He wed a pregnant young woman despite the possible fallout from such a union. He risked his life twice: once in

¹³⁵ L. BOFF, *Saint Joseph: The Father of Jesus in a Fatherless Society*, 22-23.

¹³⁶ POPE FRANCIS, “Saint Joseph is the Model for and Protector of Each Vocation”, 58th World Day of Prayer for Vocations” [accessed: 15.06.2022], https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/vocations/documents/papa-francesco_20210319_58-messaggio-giornata-mondiale-vocazioni.html

¹³⁷ *Patris Corde* (*PCo*), Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis on the 150th Anniversary of the Proclamation of Saint Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church. (8 December 2020).

Bethlehem, where he assisted Mary in giving birth to our Lord, and again when he sped Mary and the infant Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod's soldiers. Joseph's faithfulness is a model for the entire world and all sectors of society to improve the quality of human life and the effectiveness of human interactions. The Fidelity of Joseph could be the fire in the heart of a consecrated person if they are modest and willing to play a crucial role in the Church for Christ without seeking the limelight¹³⁸.

4.4.2 An All-inclusive Fidelity

Joseph opted to leave Mary because, as a social being with a strong attachment to the life and laws of society, he was obligated to uphold his cultural heritage and social standing. Since he was a virtuous guy, he became a responsible spouse and father after receiving God's message. Joseph desires to respect the law and human dignity. He is a man who is righteous before both the Torah and God¹³⁹. Because of his prophetically sensitive attitude toward God's message, he remains devoted to the divine projects. God asks him to rethink his plans to abandon Mary to challenge society's unjust norms and the law as it currently stands. God wanted him to learn from this experience that the law is subservient to God's Word and will, no matter how holy and rigid it may be. Regulations have made it crystal evident that Joseph, as a law-abiding citizen, must forsake her and have her publicly stoned to death. However, a just man like Joseph recognises God is beyond human comprehension. To fully comprehend His Spirit is beyond our comprehension. Joseph aspired to live a life devoted to God. Just as Joseph's life and actions were kept hidden while ensuring the safety and happiness of his family, consecrated individuals also remain unnoticed in the contemporary world, yet they inspire a movement towards greater faithfulness and justice in genuine relationships.

Again, Jesus and his blessed mother must buffet with the rough world and preserve an immaculate course of action under the most trying circumstances. Yet, their path is one of obedience, and they are to follow the guidance of a man. Who is that wise and faithful steward who will invariably give faultless direction? What responsibility was this, and what must have

¹³⁸ Cf. POPE BENEDICT XVI, *I mei santi: In compagnia dei giganti della fede*, Vatican 2023, 63.

¹³⁹ Cf. E. ASI, *The Human Face of God at Nazareth: A Spirituality of Nazareth*, 40.

been the estimation St. Joseph merited in the eyes of God to be put in such a place of trust?¹⁴⁰

Saint Joseph's unwavering loyalty: where did he learn it? God is the ultimate source of this assurance, as this trust and conviction in God's faithfulness is based on God's character and not on human performance. The two main themes of St. Joseph's life are conviction and relationship. Joseph stands out as the epitome of fidelity with his unwavering trust in God, even in the face of great adversity and sorrow.

4.4.3 Fidelity through His Hidden Life

The Almighty Father took on human form in Joseph of Nazareth, the skilled craftsman, husband of Mary, and father of Jesus.¹⁴¹ St. Joseph best exemplifies silence. Dreams are all Joseph has left us; he has not left us a single word. His statements are his commitments as a husband and father. Joseph's hidden life demonstrated that he was a responsible parent. As a father, Joseph had an undying faith in God and maintained a close relationship with Him. When God the Father entrusted the incarnate Word to him, He also gave him the role of teacher and protector. St. Matthew calls Joseph a "just man" (Mt 1:19), implying that he fulfilled his responsibilities excellently. His attitude reflects God the Parent's involvement in his roles as a husband, father, and worker.

Unlike Mary, Joseph did not have a heavenly visitor who spoke to him directly. God and the angel only spoke to Joseph in dreams, instructing him to stay with Mary during her pregnancy, to name the child, to flee to Egypt, to return home, and to settle in Nazareth (cf. Mt 1:20-21; 1:24; 2:13; 2:19-20). Throughout the Old Testament, dreams are means by which God communicates with his prophets (cf. Num 12:6; Dan 7:1; Joel 2:28) and a means by which God reveals himself to his prophets (cf. Gen 20:3; 28:12; 31:24; 1Kings 3:5).

Understanding dreams as part of the human psychic whole predated the current depth psychology pioneered by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. It is

¹⁴⁰ "Joseph was the wise and faithful steward of another, still a more precious treasure. The care of infancy, childhood, youth and the more significant portion of the manhood of the "Only begotten of the Father" was entrusted to him. Without any paternity claim, the Eternal Father gave him a parent's love. The life of the Infant Redeemer was sought even in infancy, and what shall secure that life except for the solicitude of a father's protecting care": THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF SAINT PAUL, "*St. Joseph: Model of Fidelity*" [accessed: 22.02.2020], <https://archive.org/details/stjosephmodeloff00pau>

¹⁴¹ Cf. L. BOFF, *Saint Joseph: The Father of Jesus in a Fatherless Society*, 132.

believed that the teachings included in what is known as “great” or “archetypal” dreams might serve as a person’s compass throughout their lifetime. Psychoanalysis cautions us to take dreams seriously, examine their significance, and allow them to develop naturally alongside our lives. To live a more complete and satisfying life beyond the confines of one’s waking awareness, one must accept the psychological completeness communicated through dreams. When God makes himself known, God comes into direct contact with human experience¹⁴². Words, ideas, and written information that can be understood or deciphered make up the conscious portion of human reality. In addition, it incorporates the unconscious region, with its wealth of symbolism revealed in the fantastic symbols and dreams. That is why we consider dreams to be a channel for the guidance of the gods. St. Joseph, as the father, represents the original archetype of the most profound mystery from which everything emerges, so perhaps it was fitting that God communicated with him in the language of the depths. Most significantly, Joseph interpreted his dream as a call to serve alongside Mary and the child. Through this method, how God communicates with Himself is of the utmost importance, and Joseph plays a role in this¹⁴³.

4.4.4 Fidelity through Great Silence

Saint Joseph handled his job as “Guardian of the Savior” flawlessly in silence. He was a silent communicator who talked volumes about Christian qualities and faith. John Paul II writes in *Redemptoris Custos*:

The aura of silence that envelops everything else about Joseph also surrounds his work as a carpenter in the house of Nazareth. It is, however, a silence that reveals the inner portrait of the man especially. The gospel speaks exclusively of what Joseph “did” Still, they allow us to discover in his “actions” shrouded in silence, they are an aura of deep contemplation that Joseph was in daily contact with the mystery “hidden from past ages, and which “dwelt” under his roof (25)¹⁴⁴.

Joseph has a lot to say, so he’s not quiet. As we saw, his deeds were more decency than his words. Joseph masters contemplation. His inarticulacy

¹⁴² Cf. J. SANTULLI, “St. Joseph: Master of The Interior Life”, [accessed: 10.11.2022], <https://www.theyoungcatholicwoman.com/archivescollection/st-joseph-master-of-the-interior-life>

¹⁴³ Cf. L. BOFF, *Saint Joseph: The Father of Jesus in a Fatherless Society*, 51-53.

¹⁴⁴ *Redemptoris Custos (RCu)*, Apostolic Exhortation by Pope John Paul II on the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph in the Life of Christ and of the Church (15 August 1989).

reveals a magnificence and holiness beyond words and pictures. Most individuals live unnoticed and silent, even when they desire to speak out against injustice. Joseph's silence shows the fruitfulness of doing nothing, being at the right place at the right moment, and acting appropriately¹⁴⁵.

Joseph's silence represents that of all labourers. Joseph was the most patient and conscientious worker¹⁴⁶. The speech of a labourer originates from his hands, not his tongue. We become silent when working, concentrating on what we are doing and the aim of our labour. Work is intrinsic to the human condition; via work, we shape ourselves, given that no one is born whole and must instead complete the work begun by creation and the Creator. We construct a universe via labour that would never have emerged through the force of evolution alone, which is incredibly sophisticated and inventive. The world's most vital objects were created through work, performed silently by the mind that conceived them and the hands that executed them.

Joseph's silence is the father's silence. St. Joseph personifies the divine Father, as father Joseph represents the heavenly Father. The Father, the central figure in the Trinity, stands for the unfathomable mystery that is the foundation of all things, their principle, and their source. The everlasting Father is the reason for silence, and as far as the eternal Father is concerned, the mouth is silent. He is quiet from which all words emerge. The spokesperson is the Word. The Father's stillness is concealed within every word and sound. The quiet exposes the divine Father's nature. Joseph, the actual and apparent shadow of the Father, could only exist and dwell in silence, as he was not the incarnation of the heavenly Father. In his person, he embodied the father's attributes of holiness and love, wisdom and discretion, mercy and compassion¹⁴⁷. His silence indicates who he is: the ever-present and active eternal Father who set the conditions for history to unfold as it did. Without Joseph, Mary would have been rejected, she would not have had a home, and the Word would not have entered a human family, been safeguarded when he was born in Bethlehem, or been defended when he was forced into exile. All these deeds were done in silence. Silence is the essence of Joseph and the nature of whom he personifies, the almighty Father¹⁴⁸. Only one saint is destined to symbolise God the Father, whereas many beings and numerous saints must portray Jesus Christ. When God chooses a person for a high job or significant task, he endows him with a correspondingly elevated mind and

¹⁴⁵ Cf. L. BOFF, *Saint Joseph: The Father of Jesus in a Fatherless Society*, 56.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. E.H. THOMPSON, *The Life and Glories of St. Joseph*, 149.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. A. DOZE, *Discovering Saint Joseph*, London 1999, 67.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. L. BOFF, *Saint Joseph: The Father of Jesus in a Fatherless Society*, 55-56.

a vast heart¹⁴⁹. God only slowly reveals the role He has entrusted to the carpenter of Nazareth as if this revelation were to be made with the most extraordinary precautions¹⁵⁰. The part of St. Joseph is a mystery of fidelity and trust in God, the father who trusted him with great responsibility.

4.4.5 Fidelity as the Mission

According to God's design, Joseph was as devoted to his mission as Jesus and Mary were to theirs. Joseph demonstrates the Almighty's tender care for His son by keeping an eye on him and protecting him when he is in danger. He is the one who, with great paternal care, exposes Jesus to work, to this abrupt confrontation with the tangible, to the realism that penetrates all of Nazareth¹⁵¹. The Apostles and St. Joseph are given a glimpse of Jesus in the Gospel. While the apostles told everyone about Jesus, Joseph stayed quiet and protected him from enemies. Mary's virginity and the Saviour's majesty are concealed under Joseph's mysterious veil. It follows that while Jesus is a word to be proclaimed for the apostles, for Joseph, he is a word to be kept secret. There is no more significant example of faith in the Bible than Joseph, who did exactly as the angel told him, regardless of the time or place. He completes his duty with absolute fidelity. In the Bible, the obstacles of a person called by God for a specific purpose are always described, but Saint Joseph is an exception. Joseph always believed without doubt, and this was not because the propositions to his faith were simple or because this great saint lacked an intellect capable of retaining the depth and complexities of the mystery revealed to him. Joseph possessed a sense of great capacities, which he fostered and maintained throughout his life by meditating on heavenly things¹⁵². In setting up St. Joseph before us as the model of the virtue of fidelity, the church wishes to encourage us to imitate him. She points to his heavenly virtues, built up in the very walks of life in which God has placed

¹⁴⁹ "We see how He dealt with Solomon to fit him to rule a great kingdom: 'God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceedingly much, and a largeness of heart as the sand on the shore' (2 Kings 4.29). So, He prepared Joseph to hold the place of the father to the Saviour. He must have bestowed on him a heart larger beyond measure than what He gave to the King of Israel that he might be able to love as a father the Son of God Himself, and this, according to the Abbot Rupert, is what the eternal Father did when He called Joseph to participation, not only of His dignity but of His love as a father": E.H. THOMPSON, *The Life and Glories of St. Joseph*, 362.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. A. DOZE, *Discovering Saint Joseph*, 66.

¹⁵¹ Cf. A. DOZE, *Discovering Saint Joseph*, 95.

¹⁵² Cf. E.H. THOMPSON, *The Life and Glories of St. Joseph*, 356.

us. Fidelity to grace in our state of life is that high road to perfection along which we all may walk.

Pope Francis recalled Saint Joseph in his meeting with seminarians and urged them to emulate his fidelity in their lives and missions:

Joseph is the “good man” (Mt 1:19) who perseveres daily in serving God and his purposes in silence. God initially told Joseph, “Do not be scared.” Like Saint Joseph, all who say yes to God with their lives by everyday fidelity repeat them. Joy lies in fidelity. Simple joy is experienced daily by those who care about what matters: authentic connectedness to God and neighbour. If only our seminaries, religious houses, and presbyteries had the same simple, brilliant, sombre, and hopeful environment. In a time of quick decisions and sentiments that don’t bring lasting joy, meeting wished and prayed that they would be able to share in the joy of my loving brothers and sisters who have selflessly made God the dream of their lives. They have served God through their brothers and sisters through fidelity, which is a powerful testimony to God. Saint Joseph, the vocation protector, bless you¹⁵³.

Pope John Paul II also recalled St. Joseph’s role in the Church, particularly in the “economy of salvation” and urged:

May St. Joseph become, for all of us, an exceptional teacher in the service of Christ’s saving mission. This mission is the responsibility of each member of the Church: husbands and wives, parents, those who live by the work of their hands or any other kind of work, those called to the contemplative life and those called to the apostolate. This just man bore within himself the entire heritage of the Old Covenant and was brought into the beginning of the New and Eternal Covenant in Jesus Christ. May he show us the paths of this saving Covenant as we stand at the threshold of the next millennium, in which there must be a continuation and further development of the fullness of time that belongs to the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation of the Word (*RCu* 32).

5. Fidelity in the Life and Writings of Two Crucial Figures in Consecrated Life

It was the early Christian hermits known as the desert fathers who, beginning in the third century, established the foundations for Christian monasticism through their practice of austerity in the Egyptian desert. These first monks took vows of poverty, service, and self-denial in imitation of Jesus and spent their days in prayer and labour. There was a common belief that

¹⁵³ “Saint Joseph: The Dream of Vocation”, *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 2021 World Day of Vocations* (25 April 2021).

Christians who chose the solitary lifestyle in the desert were responding to Christ's call to them: "Jesus answered to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your things, and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come, follow me' (Mt 19:21)"¹⁵⁴. The desert fathers had a significant influence on the development of Christianity. They advocated three main approaches to monasticism. One approach was the austere life of the hermit, as practised by Anthony and his followers in lower Egypt. Another approach was the cenobitic life, which involved communities of monks and nuns in upper Egypt formed by Pachomius. The third approach was a semi-hermitic lifestyle seen mostly in *Nitria*, *Kellia*, and *Scetis*, west of the Nile, which was begun by Saint Amun¹⁵⁵.

In ancient Egypt, Anthony and his adherents encouraged hermetism. Coenobites, who lived in the desert, were founded by Pachomius. Saint Amun founded a semi-hermit community west of the Nile at Nitria, Kellia, and Scetis. The latter were small communities of monks and nuns, usually two to six, who shared a spiritual elder and held more considerable services on Saturdays and Sundays. The *Apophthegmata Patrum* contains most sayings from this third style of monasticism (Sayings of the Desert Fathers). The desert fathers' unwavering devotion to God and desire to live solitary drew many followers. Due to the world's falseness and emptiness, people seek refuge in existence's ultimate perfection.

Hesychasm (Greek, "stillness, rest, quietness, silence") is a mystical tradition and movement that emerged with the desert fathers and was essential to their prayer practice. Hesychasm was essentially "internal quiet and continuous prayer" for the desert fathers. It wasn't until the fourteenth century, when Byzantine techniques for concentrated prayer were created, that it evolved into a systematic movement with unique rituals. It was associated more closely with the Prayer of the Heart or the "Jesus Prayer."

Interior stillness (*hesychia*) means remaining in one's cell with fear and knowledge of God, holding far off the remembrance of wrongs suffered and pride of spirit. Such interior peace brings forth all the virtues, preserves the monk from the burning darts of the enemy, and does not allow him to be wounded by them. "Yes, brother, acquire it. Remember your future death,

¹⁵⁴ M. PETRUZZELLO, ed., "Desert Fathers", in *Britannica* [accessed: 13.01.2022], <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Desert-Fathers>

¹⁵⁵ Cf. K. BEASLEY – TOPLIFFE, *Seeking a Purer Christian Life: Sayings and Stories of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, Vol. 1, California 2010, 47.

remembering that you do not know when the thief will come. Likewise, be watchful over your soul”¹⁵⁶.

When a monk asked *abba* Isaiah¹⁵⁷, “How should one practice *hesychia* in the cell?” To abandon the world, a monk in *hesychia* must prostrate oneself in the face of God and do everything possible to oppose every thought planted by the enemy. In another saying, he remarks that “one living in stillness needs three things: to fear God without ceasing, to pray with constancy, and never to one’s heart from the memory of God”¹⁵⁸. I will focus on two prominent desert fathers to highlight the relevance of faith and faithfulness in their lives due to their proximity to Jesus.

5.1 Antony the Great: Father of Fidelity and Father of All Monks

A native of Coma, lower Egypt, Antony was born to affluent landowner parents. His unwed sister raised him after his parents died when he was around 20. Soon after, he obeyed the gospel mandate, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell all you have and give to the needy, and you will have riches in heaven” (Mt 19:21). Antony distributed some of the family properties to his neighbours, sold the rest and distributed the proceeds to the needy. He left his sister in the care of a community of Christian virgins and embarked on an ascetic lifestyle¹⁵⁹. Some historians argue that Antony was the first monk and the pioneer of desert life¹⁶⁰ though it is debatable.

Antony ate ascetically. He never ate meat or wine after becoming a hermit. He ate once a day and fasted for two to four days. Antony never begged his parents for expensive and lavish cuisine, nor did he enjoy it. He was satisfied with what was served and made no further requests¹⁶¹. According to Athanasius, the devil afflicted Antony with boredom, idleness, and the phantoms of women, which he overcame through prayer, creating a motif for Christian art. He moved to a mausoleum near his hometown. The book, *Life of Antony* describes his unusual battles with demons disguised as wild monsters, who occasionally killed him. After fifteen years, at thirty-five, Antony decided to retire in isolation. He travelled to *Pispir* (now *Der-el-Memun*), a Nile

¹⁵⁶ W. HARMLESS, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, 228.

¹⁵⁷ Abba Isaiah was a Christian ascetic and monastic writer known from the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* and various Palestinian Miaphysite sources.

¹⁵⁸ W. HARMLESS, *Desert Christians*, 229.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. ATHANASIUS, *Life of Antony*, translated by C. White, London 1998, 10.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. W. HARMLESS, *Desert Christians*, 105.

¹⁶¹ Cf. ATHANASIUS, *Desert Christians*, 19.

Mountain opposite *Arsinoë* in the desert. He lived twenty years in an abandoned Roman fort. He received food over the wall. Despite his repeated warnings, several would-be disciples settled in the caves and huts around the mountain. Thus, a colony of ascetics asked Antony to guide them spiritually. He emerged from seclusion in 305 after accepting their relevance. His mental and physical fitness surprised them¹⁶².

Antony yearned for a more spartan, more spiritual existence, free from the influence of others. By deciding to live a life unburdened by material concerns, Antony believed he would be better able to discover his identity in God. This decision wasn't meant to be a statement against the world but rather a call to find one's true self in submission to God and through the practice of knowledge, love, and faithfulness. To be "exceptional" or regarded as such was not something Antony set out to do. They came to the desert to be themselves, their regular selves, and to forget a world that estranged them from themselves. Regarding the desert way, Thomas Merton writes: "There can be no other valid reason for seeking solitude or leaving the world. And thus, to leave the world is to help save it in saving oneself"¹⁶³.

5.1.1 *Temptation versus Fidelity*

Antony the Great became a recluse with a local hermit. He gradually reached the desert around fifty kilometres from Alexandria. Antony eventually settled in a grave near his childhood home. Antony fasted and practised solitude, meditation, and "unceasing prayer" alone. Henri Nouwen said that "unceasing prayer" means to "think, speak, and live in the presence of God"¹⁶⁴. Antony sought peace with God via prayer and self-imposed isolation.

During his time in the desert, Antony experienced many temptations that have served as an example to all consecrated persons and Christ-followers seeking holiness. St. Antony's perseverance through persecution and other challenging trials is a comforting example for all those who have struggled to live a holy life despite hardship. The legend shows that Antony was subjected to a barrage of supernatural temptations during his time in the desert. In his dreams, Paul of Thebes appeared to be a more competent recluse than

¹⁶² Cf. "St. Antony", *Catholic Encyclopaedia, New Advent* [accessed: 30.01.2022], <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01553d.htm>.

¹⁶³ T. MERTON, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, 22-23.

¹⁶⁴ H.J.M. NOUWEN, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*, 61.

Antony, so he ventured out into the desert to pursue him¹⁶⁵. Antony had been under the impression that he was the first person to ever dwell in the desert; however, due to the dream, Antony was called into the desert to find the ‘better’ desert inhabitant, Paul¹⁶⁶. On his way there, he ran into two creatures in the form of a centaur and a satyr¹⁶⁷. Antony asked the centaur for instructions in the desert. The monster gestured in unintelligible language before fleeing. It was a demon or desert creature trying to scare him¹⁶⁸. Antony asked the centaur for instructions in the desert. Centaurs were “half horse and half man.” The alien attempted to talk in an unfamiliar dialect but eventually indicated the desired route with his hand before disappearing. It was either a desert creature or a demon trying to scare him¹⁶⁹.

5.1.2 *A Man Full of God’s Grace*

Antony was tested in ways that seemed to contradict his Christian beliefs. The tension between his ideals and the practicalities of life on earth. Antony believes that holiness and fidelity are necessary for those who claim to follow Christ. Despite severe physical and psychological abuse, he remained loyal to God. Another well-known temptation that Antony the Great encountered on his journey through the desert was a tray of silver coins. As a result, he had a far more precise grasp of how to defend himself against the temptations and intrigues of the outside world. Antony escaped to a cave to escape his demons. The cave’s miniature demons murdered Antony’s servant. Hermits, who mourned Antony’s death, resurrected him. He asked his attendants to return him to the cave ravaged by monsters. When he arrived, he summoned demons, which returned as wild beasts to tear him apart. Following a dazzling flash, the demons fled. Antony realises the light is from God and asks where he was before the devils attacked. God replied, “I was here, but I would see and abide to see thy battle, and because thou hast mainly fought and well maintained thy battle, I shall make thy name to be spread through

¹⁶⁵ W. HARMLESS, *Desert Christians*, 100

¹⁶⁶ Cf. W. HARMLESS, *Desert Christians*, 105-107.

¹⁶⁷ Chroniclers sometimes postulated that they might have been living beings, but Western theology considers their demons. *Vitae Patrum*, Book 1a, collected from Jerome, ch. VI.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. N. ANDREW, “Black Demons in the Desert”, *American Benedictine Review* 49 (1998) 209-221.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. R.T. MEYER, *Athanasius: The Life of Saint Antony*, 34.

all the world”¹⁷⁰. He fought bravely to maintain his devotion to Jesus and live a pure life, favouring solitude and avoiding worldly distractions. The intrusion of the outside world into religious life and organisations makes it difficult to maintain one’s faith in the modern world.

5.2 *Francis of Assisi: Model of Fidelity to Christ the Poor*

Francis of Assisi was born in 1181 or 1182 to wealthy Italian silk merchant *Pietro di Bernardone dei Moriconi* and *Pica de Bourlemont*, a Provence noblewoman about whom little is known¹⁷¹. Pica nicknamed Francis “John”¹⁷² because Pietro was in France on business when he was born in Assisi. Before returning to Assisi, Pietro may have named his kid Francesco (‘Free man,’ ‘Frenchman’)¹⁷³. God led Francesco to Jesus through people and experiences.

Francis, a young man of privilege, had many profound spiritual experiences that changed his life. Francis’s parents let him indulge in extravagant pursuits that any well-off young man would enjoy. As a young man, Francesco became a fan of troubadours and was intrigued by the Transalpine region. He was dashing, charming, courteous, and enjoyed dressing to the nines. He squandered his resources¹⁷⁴. The “Story of the Beggar” reveals that Jesus’ statements of dissatisfaction with the culture around him occurred during his childhood, despite various hagiographers commenting on his flashy attire, wealthy friends, and love of pleasures. At the time, he was helping his father make a living by selling cloth and velvet in the town square. Francis dropped everything after making the bargain and chased after the beggar. When Francis found a man, he gave him all the money he had on him. His father yelled at him, and his friends teased him about his generosity¹⁷⁵.

He was imprisoned at *Collestrada* for a year after joining a 1202 military assault against Perugia¹⁷⁶. Sickness made him rethink his life. Francis resumed his carefree lifestyle in 1203, returning to Assisi. Francis joined Walter III, Count of Brienne’s army in Apulia, in 1205. A strange vision drove

¹⁷⁰ T. JONES, “The Golden Legend: The Life of Anthony of Egypt” [accessed: 15.02.24], <https://web.archive.org/web/20130123065522/http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/golden153.htm>

¹⁷¹ Cf. E. OMER. *The Lives of the Saints*, California 1995, 52.

¹⁷² Cf. G. MEKKARA, *The Poverello: St. Francis of Assisi*, Trivandrum 2018, 15.

¹⁷³ G. K. CHESTERTON, *St. Francis of Assisi*, New York 2020, 98.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. G.K. CHESTERTON, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 170.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. G.K. CHESTERTON, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 40-41.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. G. MEKKARA *The Poverello: St. Francis of Assisi*, 21.

him to Assisi and away from the world. He stopped attending his former coworkers' parties of games and feasts¹⁷⁷. Because of his devotion to Jesus Christ, the poor man, he chose to devote the rest of his life to poverty. He was dedicated to Jesus's work and vision because he had heard the voice of God within him and because Jesus the poor was his wife. A friend asked him whether he was considering marrying, to which he answered: "Yes, a fairer bride than any of you have ever seen", meaning his 'Lady Poverty'¹⁷⁸.

5.2.1 *Fidelity to Christ the Poor*

Despite his rich family history and financial stability, his father's love and mission burned bright in his heart. On a pilgrimage to Rome, he begged with the needy outside St. Peter's Basilica¹⁷⁹. He went off to pray and seek wisdom from the universe above. He said that he had a mystical vision of Jesus Christ in the forsaken country chapel of San Damiano, just outside Assisi, in which the Icon of Christ Crucified said to him, "Francis, Francis, go and repair My house which, as you can see, is falling into ruins"¹⁸⁰. To help the priest of the now-destroyed church, he sold some cloth from his father's shop. "When the priest refused to accept the ill-gotten gains, an indignant Francis threw the coins on the floor"¹⁸¹. Francis ran away from his vengeful father and hid in a cave in San Damiano for almost a month. When he returned to town, he was hungry and filthy, so his father beat him, chained him, and imprisoned him in a small storage closet.

Francis's mother freed him in Bernardone's absence, and he returned to San Damiano to stay with the priest. His father instantly reported him to the municipal consuls. San Damiano wanted to use restitution to force his son to give up his inheritance, not just retrieve the gold. Francis officially disowned his father and wealth before the bishop of Assisi. Some claim he stripped nude, and the bishop covered himself because of this sacrifice¹⁸². Francis, who loved Jesus' poverty beyond all else, gave up life's attachments to God. Francis spent months begging on the hillsides close to Assisi. He was a

¹⁷⁷ BONAVENTURE, "The Life of St. Francis of Assisi" in *The Legenda Sancti Francisci*, ed., C. MANNING, Rome 2020, 190.

¹⁷⁸ F.L. CROSS, "Francis of Assisi", in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, New York 2005, 56.

¹⁷⁹ F.L. CROSS, "Francis of Assisi" in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, New York 2005, 57.

¹⁸⁰ G.K. CHESTERTON, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 54–56.

¹⁸¹ HERBERMANN-CHARLES, "St. Francis of Assisi", *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 1233.

¹⁸² HERBERMANN-CHARLES, "St. Francis of Assisi", *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 1235.

monastic servant. Francis in Gubbio received the pilgrim's cloak, girdle, and staff from a friend. He begged for stones to rebuild St. Damiano's in Assisi. He meticulously reconstructed the ancient chapel with these¹⁸³.

5.2.2 *Call to Rebuild and Multiply with Fidelity*

Francis attended Mass at St. Mary of the Angels Chapel in February 1208. His home was nearby. Matthew's "Commissioning of the Twelve" story was read on that day. The disciples were to announce God's kingdom's arrival. Francis was drawn to austerity and simplicity. He bought a rough woollen tunic, characteristic of the poorest Umbrian peasants of the day, and tied it around his body with a knotted rope so he might preach repentance, brotherhood, and peace. Francis preached little because he was unlicensed. His leadership inspired his followers. Francis had eleven followers in a year. The brothers lived frugally in an abandoned Rivo Torto Lazar palace near Assisi. They travelled extensively in Umbria's hilly regions, where their fiery preaching had a lasting influence¹⁸⁴. His mission, as he saw it, was to replant churches and make more Christians for the sake of Christ's mission. His example energised and inspired those without one to speak for them or a societal position.

Francis wrote the "Primitive Rule" (*Regula Primitiva*) for his disciples (known as "friars") based on biblical principles. "Walk in the teachings and example of our Lord Jesus Christ" was the rule. Francis is reported to have gotten the stigmata in a vision while praying on Verna on September 13, 1224, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, during a forty-day fast for Michaelmas (29 September)¹⁸⁵. This event helped him relate Jesus' sadness and suffering to his society's poor and helplessness. Following Jesus, he committed his life to the fringes.

5.2.3 *Francis' Fidelity to Sacraments and Creation*

Francis modelled his life after Christ. He revered the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and its priest. In one of his sermons, Francis told the priests: "Your God is of your flesh; God lives in your nearest neighbour, in every man"¹⁸⁶. He wrote in *The Testament* that his devotion to Jesus the poor inspired him and his followers to make poverty a significant tenet of their

¹⁸³ HERBERMANN-CHARLES, "St. Francis of Assisi", 1235-1236.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. T. ROBINSON, *The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi*, 33.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. T. ROBINSON, *The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi*, 90.

¹⁸⁶ S. EIMERL, *The World of Giotto*, 15.

faith and a source of pride. His dedication to the Father God made him realise that everything in the natural world reflected the Creator. He called all creatures his ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’, even preached to the birds¹⁸⁷ and supposedly persuaded a wolf in Gubbio to stop attacking some locals if they agreed to feed the wolf. And he added, “he regarded himself no friend of Christ if he did not cherish those for whom Christ died.” His profound sense of brotherhood under God extended to others. Francis taught Christians to believe that God made the world good and lovely but needed redemption because of sin. As someone who saw God reflected in nature, “St. Francis was a great lover of God’s creation”¹⁸⁸. He expresses gratitude to God in the Cantic of the Sun for “Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Wind, Water, Fire, and Earth,” all of which, in his view, serve to glorify God. Francis’s love for God and neighbour was perfectly balanced, leading him to seek to exercise reasonable control over and protection for all of God’s creations. God’s creations are worthy of our loving care and respect because of his sacrifice, so his love became devoted.

The *Fioretti* collection of legends and folklore, compiled after Francis’ death, demonstrates his deep affection for animals and the natural world. One story has it that Francis and his travelling companions came onto a section of road where the trees on either side were overflowing with birds. Francis instructed his companions to wait for him while he preached to his bird sisters. The birds surrounded him, captivated by his voice’s strength; none fled. He is generally seen holding a bird in his hand¹⁸⁹. Pope Francis, on 19th September 2015, after he was elected supreme pontiff, said that St. Francis is “the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation.” He added wistfully and lovingly: “How I would like a church that is poor and for the poor”. St. Francis’ song “Cantic of the Creatures,” praising God for the beauty of nature, provides the title of the Encyclical – *Laudato Si*, meaning “praised be to you” in St. Francis’ native Umbrian¹⁹⁰.

St. Francis’ fidelity and familiarity with Christ made him a sincere disciple of Him, and his lifestyle, which inspired nearly 240 congregations and organisations under his patronage and spirituality, drew a lot of admirers. Francis did not seek to eradicate poverty; instead, he sought to sanctify it in his

¹⁸⁷ Cf. R.J. ARMSTRONG, *St Francis of Assisi: Writings for a Gospel Life*, 52.

¹⁸⁸ W. KEITH, “St. Francis: Patron of Ecology”, *U.S. Catholic* 75/4 (2010) 25.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. G. MEKKARA, *The Poverello: St. Francis of Assisi*, 84-85.

¹⁹⁰ K. WARNE, “Saint Francis of Assisi Inspired Pope Francis, and Me” [accessed: 16.02.2024], <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/150919-pope-francis-saint-assisi-namesake-appreciation>

and his followers' lives. When his friars encountered someone less fortunate than themselves, they would excitedly pull off a sleeve of their habit to offer to them. They worked for all of their needs and only begged when necessary. Francis was an active man. His simplicity extended to his thoughts and actions. Francis would take the simple route, no matter how tough it appeared. Francis is truly a requirement of the current era, in which invaders defile the earth and the other is slain without humanity or regard for the creation. Fidelity to hardship and destitution is a good treatment for the instantaneous world.

6. Some Models of Fidelity among the Modern Saints

The origin of the word "saint" is the Latin word "*Sanctus*", which means "holy"¹⁹¹. Saints are those who are holy because their lives reflect God's holiness. Holy people in the Judeo-Christian faith have direct communication with God. Since human holiness is always a partial manifestation of the holiness of God or Jesus Christ, sociocultural and theological variables influence the definition of holiness. As reflected in Vatican II documents, Christians are called to reach perfection in holiness and become saints. Each believer in Jesus Christ has a sacred duty to share the good news of God's unconditional love with the world (cf. *LG* 1, 5, 8). Assume that global transformation is central to contemporary Christian holiness. In this context, Christian holiness is characterised by action for justice, concern for the emancipation of all peoples, and identification with the world's people's joys, tragedies, struggles, and hopes.

The global community heeded God's invitation and became a shining example of Christlikeness and fidelity to the globe. Individuals who devoted themselves entirely to the betterment of others, disregarding their interests and enunciating all that is customary for mortals to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and His mission. "The saints in any age or circumstances are transparent in their pointing to the new creation in Christ. Grasped by the urgency of the kingdom of God, a saint inspires and evokes a response from others. The response may be positive or negative on the part of society and the part of the Church"¹⁹². Saints inspire consecrated people to live faithfully and find serenity in their hardships. Saints will dedicate their lives to

¹⁹¹ S. MADIGAN, "Saints, Communion of Saints", *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 846.

¹⁹² S. MADIGAN, "Saints, Communion of Saints", *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 850.

identifying and implementing remedies when the innocent's plight returns. At an age when Christians must choose life over death for the Gospel, the saints will boldly do so. The saints shall recognise the Spirit's freedom to offer gifts as the Spirit pleases, regardless of ecclesial restrictions on their usage. Today, examples matter. They inspire and guide God-servants. Saints provide hope and strength when religious morality is questioned.

6.1 *Saint Teresa of Calcutta: Fidelity to the Secret Fire*

Mother Mary Teresa Bojaxhiu was an Albanian-Indian Roman Catholic nun and missionary honoured as Saint Teresa of Calcutta in the Catholic Church¹⁹³. She was born in Skopje, which was then a part of the Ottoman Empire's Kosovo Vilayet but is now the capital of North Macedonia. She spent the first 18 years of her life in Skopje before relocating to Ireland and ultimately spending the rest of her life in India. Skopje, where she was born, was the location of her baptism. She later considered 27 August, the day she was baptised, her "true birthday"¹⁹⁴. When she was eight years old, her father, a political figure in the Albanian community in Ottoman Macedonia, passed away. Her mother may be from a small town not far from Gjakova.

As a young girl, Teresa was captivated by accounts of missionaries' work in Bengal, and by the time she was 12, she was sure she should devote her life to the church. Her determination was bolstered on August 15, 1928, during a trip to the Black Madonna of Vitina-Letnice¹⁹⁵. For her missionary training, Teresa left home at the age 18 to join the Loreto sisters in Loreto Abbey in Rathfarnham, Ireland, where English was the medium of instruction. Neither her mother nor her sister ever came into her life again. Before moving to Tirana in 1934, she and her family were long-time residents of Skopje¹⁹⁶. She first arrived in India in 1929, and after completing her novitiate, she began teaching at St. Teresa's School in the neighbourhood of her convent in Darjeeling, in the lower Himalayas. "Teresa took her first religious vows on 24 May 1931. She chose to be named after Thérèse de Lisieux, the patron saint of missionaries"¹⁹⁷. As a teacher at the Loreto convent school

¹⁹³ Cf. N. CHAWLA, *Mother Teresa*, 1.

¹⁹⁴ "Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910–1997)", Vatican News Service [accessed: 30.05.2020], https://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20031019_madre-teresa_en.html

¹⁹⁵ Cf. M. GREENE, *Mother Teresa: A Biography*, New York 2004, 11.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. R. ALLEGRI, *Conversations with Mother Teresa: A Personal Portrait of the Saint*, London 2011, 24.

¹⁹⁷ A. SEBBA, *Mother Teresa: Beyond the Image*, 35.

at *Entally*, east of Calcutta, Teresa made her solemn vows on May 14, 1937. Nearly twenty years later, in 1944, she was named headmistress¹⁹⁸. Teresa's heart was in the right place, but the poverty she saw daily in Calcutta broke her. Death and suffering came to the city during the Bengal famine of 1943, and Muslim-Hindu violence broke out in August 1946 with the Direct Action Day¹⁹⁹. She felt the tug of her moral compass on her train ride to Darjeeling. She thought she would be doing the poor a favour if she stayed with them. She had to get permission to leave the campus, which she was granted. She established "Missionaries of Charity" in 1950. With two saris with blue border and five rupees, she helped humanity²⁰⁰.

6.1.1 Mother Teresa's Fidelity to the Inner Call

Teresa experienced an inner call within her call to consecrated life to be with the poor and the oppressed. In prayer, apostolate, and every mission, she felt the call of God, and she termed it an "inner command"²⁰¹. One of her spiritual fathers, Fr. Van Exem, said that this inspiration did not come from a vision but a conversation. Ultimately, she knew she had to leave Loreto and get to work. Mother has never had any doubts. From the start, she knew this was her calling.

Most individuals feel that saints are nourished by their strong faith, which carries them through tribulations. In the example of Mother Teresa, despite letters exposing her "dark night of the soul," she toiled valiantly. It was difficult for Mother Teresa to decide, but her inner conflict was so great that she had to leave to care for God's closest relatives on the street. To maintain her faithfulness, she fought against the established system both within and without. Her encounter with Jesus took place through her regular practice of prayer. Personal prayer enabled Mother Teresa to rekindle her daily connection with God's yearning. Prayer was the spark that reignited the inner fire she concealed. The power of divine love and the practice of prayer were so

¹⁹⁸ Cf. J. CLUCAS, *Mother Teresa*, 32.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. K. SPINK, *Mother Teresa: A Complete Authorized Biography*, 18, 21-22.

²⁰⁰ Cf. M. MUGGERIDGE, *Something Beautiful for God*, 88.

²⁰¹ It was an inner command, she said, to renounce Loreto, where I was very happy, to go to serve the poor in the streets. She heard the call on 10 September 1946 on the train to Darjeeling to make her retreat. The; it continued in Darjeeling to make her retreat. The message was quite clear, she explained. It was an order. I was to leave the convent. I felt God wanted something more from me. He wanted me to be poor and to love Him in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor: cf. K. SPINK, *Mother Teresa: The Authorized Biography*, 19.

intertwined in Mother Teresa's experience that she could refer to them as a single mystery, or "secret," to explain how she gained and accomplished everything that she did. "My secret is simple. I pray"²⁰². She knew that everything stood or fell depending on the depth of one's prayer.

Our metamorphosis entirely depends on God and, thus, on our conscious interaction with Him. Mother was confident that the relationship with God enabled the consecrated and the laity to travel faithfully with God. Consequently, she taught her sisters that God is the source and power to endure life's trials and tribulations, and she said, "What could be more vital than prayer? If prayer is the key that opens the door to our encounter with God, faith is the key that opens the door to prayer"²⁰³. Even more so than her selfless acts of compassion, Mother Teresa was inspired by her unwavering faith. Her abnormally strong faith parted the seas of hardship, letting the mighty hand of God move through her life and bring her face-to-face with the one she had been seeking all along²⁰⁴. Her experience of prayer, being alone with Jesus, was an experience of reassuring their mutual love and care. She encourages those under her formation to find time to be alone with Jesus: I want to spend your time alone with Jesus. What does it mean to be alone with Jesus? It doesn't mean sitting alone with your thoughts. No, but even during the work and of people, you know His presence. It means that you know that He is close to you, that He loves you, that you are precious to Him, and that He is in love with you²⁰⁵.

Mother's life was a lesson on the value of silence: God speaks in the silence of the heart. Silence is required not only of the lips but also of the heart, intellect, eyes, and touch. The quality of their silence is crucial to their spiritual practice. Keep your attention on the Lord and the work he has called us to do. My mom always said that if I harbour resentment or grudge against someone, it will never be utterly silent inside of me²⁰⁶.

²⁰² J. LANGFORD, *Mother Teresa's Secret Fire*, 175.

²⁰³ Cf. MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY, *Mother Teresa's Instructions to the M.C. Sisters* [accessed: 16.02.2024], www.motherteresa.org

²⁰⁴ Examples of her unwavering, childlike faith abound. One day, a young novice came to inform Mother Teresa that there was no more food in the pantry of the sisters' kitchen in Calcutta. It was midmorning, and in a few hours, more than three hundred nuns would return home from all over Calcutta and find nothing to eat. Mother Teresa turned to the novice and said, "Sister, you are in charge of the kitchen?" "Yes, Mother," came the reply. With utter calm, Mother Teresa told her, "Then go into the chapel and tell Jesus we have no food".

²⁰⁵ B. KOLODIEJCHUK, ed., *Where there is Love, there is God: Mother Teresa*, 12-13.

²⁰⁶ Cf. B. KOLODIEJCHUK, ed., *Where there is Love, there is God: Mother Teresa*, 12-13.

Mother Teresa used to make a point of spending time with Jesus so that she might better hear and comprehend God's counsel and purposes. She faced extreme poverty and instability head-on because of her unwavering commitment to following Jesus, the master. She had time to think about his words, so she transformed into someone who genuinely loved and served others. This latent power enabled her to launch a new initiative for the powerless and the afflicted. For the sake of the forgotten, she dared to stand up to the authorities and the public. She felt that each call was unique and necessary., "What you are doing I cannot do, what I'm doing you cannot do, but together we are doing something beautiful for God, and this is the greatness of God's love for us"²⁰⁷.

6.1.2 *Fidelity that Conquers "Darkness."*

In her private writings, Saint Teresa mentions the darkness she experienced in her glorious life. She believed and considered that she was just a "pencil in God's hand and God is using her nothingness to show His greatness"²⁰⁸. She never claimed credit for her labour, instead directing praise toward God and "His work" among the world's destitute. Given her profound awe and gratitude for God and his activity in and through her, she insisted on this. She had a unique connection to Jesus but often talked about the awful darkness she experienced when ministering to the sick and dying.

Now, Father, since I was 49 or 50, I have had this terrible sense of loss, this untold darkness, this loneliness, this continual longing for God, which gives me that pain deep down in my heart. Darkness is such that I do not see either with my mind or reason. The place of God in my soul is blank. There is no God in me. When the pain of longing is so great, I long and long for God, and then I feel that He does not want me; he is not there. God does not wish to me. Sometimes, I hear my heart cry, "My God", and nothing else comes. The torture and pain I can't explain²⁰⁹.

²⁰⁷ Cf. B. KOLODIEJCHUK, ed., *Where there is Love, there is God: Mother Teresa*, 15.

²⁰⁸ "I often feel like a little pencil in God's hands. He does the writing, and he thinks he does the movement. I have only to be the pencil." Mother Teresa's speech in Rome, March 7, 1979. This speech can be accessed at: <https://faithmag.com/my-daughter-says-she-no-longer-believes-god>

²⁰⁹ Mother Teresa to Father Neuner, undated, but most probably written during the retreat of April 1961. This can be accessed at: <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2007/09/24/my-soul-long-dark-night-mother-teresa>

None of these obstacles could hide that she was about to face the biggest test of her life, and she knew that “darkness” would become an essential element of her mission. When leaving the congregation or institute for seemingly insignificant reasons is commonplace, the experiences of Mother Teresa can serve as a wake-up call for the consecrated. Due to her prior closeness to God, Mother Teresa found the transition into the darkness shocking and excruciating. Her vocation required her to live out this inner experience; it was the most crucial test of her mission and the pinnacle of her devotion to God and His poor. Despite her distress, she was a source of Christlike pleasure and love to the hopeless. Malcolm Muggeridge explains Mother Teresa’s unusual behaviour as a “luminosity”²¹⁰ she experienced in her relationship with God.

Interior darkness is nothing new in the tradition of Catholic Mysticism. Although the emptiness and absence of God are only apparent, they are a great source of suffering. Yet, suppose this state is the “night of the senses” and not the result of mediocrity, laziness, or illness²¹¹. In that case, one continues performing one’s duties faithfully and generously, without despair, self-concern, or emotional disturbance. Although the familiar comforts are gone, a definite hunger for God and greater love, humility, patience, and other traits appear. Mother Teresa’s life teaches us that we must submit to the Lord in everything, making him ours and ourselves his. Our firm faith and confidence in the Lord enable us to possess God and allow God to possess us in our daily lives and missions. “I for God and God for me. I live for God and give up myself, and in this way induce God to live for me. Therefore, to possess God, we must allow Him to possess our soul”²¹². The Calvary experience of “I thirst” shaped and inspired Mother Teresa to become a vibrant missionary on the streets of Calcutta. The primary motive for founding her Congregation (Missionaries of Charity) was to quench Jesus’ hunger. Jesus is God, so his love and thirst are boundless. We intend to satiate this man-made by God’s insatiable appetite²¹³.

Mother Theresa left Loreto to live among the poor to understand them. She was average, trustworthy, and unsure if she could complete such a crucial task. Yet Mother Teresa, passionately in love with Jesus, could not ignore His voice that kept insisting: Wilt thou refuse. Mother Teresa had the

²¹⁰ M. MUGGERIDGE, *Something Beautiful for God*, 18.

²¹¹ Cf. B. KOLODIEJCHUK, “Come be my Light”, New York 2009, 39.

²¹² Explanation of the original Constitution of the Missionaries of Charity, handwritten by Mother Teresa based on (GS 38, Gal 2:20),

²¹³ B. KOLODIEJCHUK, ed., *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, 41.

conviction to “burn oneself entirely for Him and souls, which gave her the strength to love and believe despite many obstacles²¹⁴. She cared deeply for the underprivileged and the native culture when she pleaded with her sisters to adopt traditional Indian dress and lifestyle.

6.1.3 *To Be at His Disposal: Expression of Total Fidelity*

A consecrated person is required to place his/her entire life at his disposal reliably and innovatively. Even in religious life, a new perspective on things in the contemporary world lacks solidity and endurance in its real dedication. Problems and challenges brought Mother Teresa closer to Jesus, such that she relied on his “light” instead of turning away from him. She believed and taught her sisters “not to refuse God anything and to offer their lives to God without reserve. True love is surrender. The more we love, the more we surrender”²¹⁵. Mother Teresa connected with God quietly, and His appeal, “Come be My Light,” echoed in her mind until her final breath. Today, commerce in apostolates and less profound spiritual affinity prevent the consecrated from hearing Jesus’ voice in their hearts’ stillness. “She was madly in love with God, and even more, she was a woman who understood that God was madly in love with her”²¹⁶. Because of how much He had loved her, she yearned to love God as never before. She insisted all her life that He must be real because she worked to show her devotion to God. For Mother, “holiness is joy, love, and compassion, especially humility. Accepting humiliations in your life will lead to holiness”²¹⁷. Considering that Jesus said, “Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you did to me,” Mother has always believed that our love for our community and persons is a gift for him (Mt 25:40). Her example shows us that knowing we are loved and accepting God’s love via prayer, as well as turning away from worldly wants and developing a hunger for God, is not sufficient. Instead, we must give back and share the love we have received in both happy and challenging times. After observing Mother’s life and work, I believe her fidelity to Christ is higher since she retains her faith and God close, even in her worst moments. She appreciated the suffering of darkness in her life because it enabled her to seek God with enthusiasm and tenacity, which are rare among modern dedicated

²¹⁴ Cf. F. PHILIPS, “Even Mother Teresa nearly rejected the divine call” [accessed: 10.03.2022], <https://catholicherald.co.uk/even-mother-teresa-nearly-rejected-the-divine-call/>

²¹⁵ Cf. B. KOLODIEJCHUK, ed., *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, 331.

²¹⁶ B. KOLODIEJCHUK, ed., *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, 335.

²¹⁷ B. KOLODIEJCHUK, ed., *Where There Is Love, There Is God: Mother Teresa*, 344.

individuals. Fidelity is an impetus and an endless journey with God, even in times of joy and sorrow. Her love towards Jesus made her strong in faith and fidelity.

6.2 Charles De Foucauld: Fidelity to Jesus, the Mentor

1858 saw the birth of Charles de Foucauld in Strasbourg, France. Grandfather reared him and his younger sister after they were orphaned²¹⁸ at age six. Foucauld²¹⁹ became an officer in the French army and was sent to Algeria in 1881 in this capacity. Having abandoned his faith as a teenager, he often had difficulty at school and in the military. He expressed the emptiness within and said, “I was in the dark. I no longer saw God or men: There was only me”²²⁰. On a military mission in southern Algeria, he finally showed himself to his superiors; after leaving the military, he acquired renown through his exploration of Morocco in 1883-84. At 28, moved by his experiences, he began to rethink his lack of faith and religion, which drove him to convert to Catholicism. He was fond of his grandfather and said, “I always admired the great intelligence of my grandfather, whose infinite tenderness enveloped my childhood and youth with an atmosphere of love, whose warmth I still can feel”²²¹.

In October 1873, whilst in a rhetoric class, he began to distance himself from the faith before becoming agnostic. He later affirmed: “The philosophers are all in discord. I spent twelve years not denying and believing anything, despairing of the truth, and not even believing in God. No proof to me seemed evident”²²². This loss of faith was accompanied by uneasiness: Charles found himself to be “all selfishness, all impiousness, all evil desire,

²¹⁸ J. J. ANTIER, *Charles de Foucauld*, San Francisco 1997, 22.

²¹⁹ Cf. P. HILLYER, *Charles de Foucauld*, Collegeville 1990, 142-144. For this thesis, I will drop the aristocratic particle ‘de’ when I refer to Charles de Foucauld by his last name. Foucauld dropped the particle himself for most of his life. He did not use his family name for many years but was addressed as “Father” or “Brother”.

²²⁰ J. FRANÇOIS – CHARLES DE FOUCAULD, *Autobiography of Charles de Foucauld*, Guilford, 2003, 17.

²²¹ Cf. G. GEORGES, *Biography of Charles de Foucauld*, [accessed: 10.05.2023] <https://www.charlesdefoucauld.org/docs/4-biography-of-charles-de-foucauld-with-notes.pdf>

²²² Letter from Charles de Foucauld to Henri de Castries on 14 August 1901, translated from French: “Les philosophes sont tous en désaccord. Je demeurai douze ans sans nier et sans rien croire, désespérant de la vérité, ne croyant même pas en Dieu. Aucune preuve ne me paraissait évidente” [accessed: 10.10.2022], https://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_7883_13.htm

I was as though distraught”²²³. Seeing the way Muslims expressed their faith questioned him. He began repeating, “My God, if you exist, let me come to know you.” Charles wrote in his letters: “Islam shook me to the core. The sight of such faith, of these people living in the continual presence of God, made me glimpse something greater, truer than worldly concerns”²²⁴. But nothing could erase the emptiness and sadness that dwelt in the depths of his heart. Many years later, he reflected on the vacuum and sadness he had then experienced in the light of his present faith. He saw in them the discrete manifestation of a God who had never turned away but patiently waited for him.

Foucauld described his conversion as occurring in stages. The first stage involved clearing away old debris to make way for new growth, which began in North Africa. This preparatory process was crucial as it shaped the trajectory of his later life and his future engagement with Islam. The second stage was one of silent sanctification. At this point, Foucauld rejects a conversion to Islam but develops his conversion into a reconversion to Catholicism²²⁵.

He was touched by his family’s warm welcome back to France, especially his cousin Marie de Bondy. Providence brought him Fr. Huvelin, his father and friend. He converted at 28 in October 1886. He found a loving father in God who was always there for his child. He spent his life contemplating how to respond to God’s infinite love²²⁶. This event altered his entire being, and he was finally prepared to give his everything to the impoverished Lord. “As soon as I believed that God existed, I understood that I could do nothing else but live for him alone”²²⁷.

6.2.1 Charles – A Seeker of God

Charles felt empty despite the widespread acclaim for his writings. When he was 28, he packed up and moved to Paris to be near his extended family. He became familiar with the Church through his connections to family and a few noble Christian friends, and he began to find inner inspiration there.

²²³ Letter from Charles de Foucauld to Marie de Castries on 17 April 1892, translated from French: " tout égoïsme, toute impiété, tout désir de mal, j'étais comme affolé" [accessed: 10.10.2022], https://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_7883_13.htm

²²⁴ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Members of the Charles De Foucauld Spiritual Family Association ” [accessed: 22.08.2021], <https://contemplativeinthemud.com/2023/08/08/pope-francis-walking-in-the-ways-of-charles-de-foucauld/>

²²⁵ J. FRANÇOIS – CHARLES DE FOUCAULD, *Autobiography of Charles de Foucauld*, 13.

²²⁶ Cf. A. LOUTH, *The Wilderness of God*, Nashville 1997, 1.

²²⁷ Cf. C. DE FOUCAULD, *Meditations of a Hermit*, London 1981, 25.

After spending six months with my family in Paris and seeing my travelogue about my time in Morocco published, I found myself in the company of knowledgeable, moral, and highly Christian people at the start of October 1886. Simultaneously, a strong grace from inside was driving me. As an atheist, I nevertheless decided to begin attending church regularly. It was the only haven I knew, and I would spend hours there reciting an odd prayer: “My God if you exist, allow me to know you!”²²⁸

He felt sorry for the moments he lived away from Christ and the Church. He writes:

“Oh! My God, how much your hand was upon me and yet how little I was aware of it! How good you are! How good you are! How you protected me! How you covered me with your wings when I did not even believe in your existence!”²²⁹. Because of this overwhelming affection, he felt compelled to learn more about God and religion to determine whether he should put his faith in them. He said “I could not do anything other than living for him. My religious vocation dates from the same moment as my faith”²³⁰.

One’s life can be profoundly changed by visiting the Holy Land, where one can follow in the footsteps of Jesus. In the years that followed, Foucauld spent in a Syrian monastery as a member of the Trappist order. However, he found that the typical monk’s lifestyle did not suit him. The fact that Jesus, the Son of God, had been a poor man and a labourer struck Foucauld as a profound realisation. Before proclaiming the Gospel in words, Jesus lived it as a carpenter in Nazareth, embodying its whole meaning in those humble beginnings. This realisation was crucial to his calling and understanding of the Gospel. He aspired to be like Jesus, who chose a life of poverty and devotion to the monastic order. At first, he took this advice literally and attempted to apply it. In Nazareth, where Jesus lived for the first 30 years, he worked as a servant at the monastery of Poor Clare for three years. The “unutterable, inexpressibly intense happiness” he felt while raking manure there is hard to describe. But he came to understand that Nazareth could be

²²⁸ Cf. J. FRANÇOIS – CHARLES DE FOUCAULD, *Autobiography of Charles de Foucauld*, 87.

²²⁹ R. ELLSBERG, “Who was Charles de Foucauld”, *America the Jesuit Review* 11 (2005), [accessed: 10.10.2021], <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2005/11/14/desert-monk-foucauld-poverty-147485>.

²³⁰ R. ELLSBERG, “Who was Charles de Foucauld”, [accessed: 12.01.2023] <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2005/11/14/desert-monk-foucauld-poverty-147485>

anywhere. So he went to seminary, then returned to Algeria and settled in the oasis town of Béni-Abbès, close to Morocco's border. He planned to establish a new religious order, with the Little Brothers serving and praying with the poor. In the *Constitutions* he devised for his planned order, Foucauld wrote, "The whole of our existence, the whole of our lives, should cry the Gospel from the rooftops...not by our words but by our lives"²³¹.

His direct encounter inspired Charles' life and mission with the God he had been seeking for so long. His inherited Christian faith took some time to take hold in his life. His faith strengthened as he aged and voiced his fidelity to God for the entire Christian world, thanks to his experience and familiarity with a Christian upbringing. The journey of the consecrated life is seeking God in the things we do and the people we encounter daily; otherwise, our existence becomes mechanical. To convert is to accept God into one's life. It is an action that involves two movements, one spiritual and one worldly, although it is difficult to separate the two as they are connected, and one determines the other. Conversion is the direction of the intellect and soul toward God and the deconstruction and reconstruction of identity necessitated by this spiritual journey. It is accepting God's presence and reorganising life, relationships, time, etc., to accommodate and progress this new reality. To convert "is to modify one's universe, to intentionally alter the fundamental assumptions upon which one understands oneself and others"²³².

6.2.2 *Prayer of Abandonment: An Expression of Fidelity*

The Prayer of Abandonment by Blessed Charles de Foucauld is among the most poignant expressions of Christian devotion. Most of his evenings were spent worshipping the Blessed Sacrament, while he spent his days cultivating the land and translating the gospels into Touareg²³³. On December 1, 1916, a band of dissident, anti-French tribal members murdered him. Due to his example, the Little Brothers and Little Sisters of Jesus have developed into separate religious communities. They want to replicate his life by aiding the needy and being silent Gospel witnesses via their love, prayer, and everyday labour. He inspired Jesus Caritas, an organisation of diocesan priests. His

²³¹ A. FREMANTE, *Desert Calling: The Life of Charles de Foucauld*, ed., HOLLIS – CARTER, London 1950, 324-326.

²³² A. BUCKSER. – S. D. GLAZIER, ed., "Preface", *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, Oxford 2003, xi.

²³³ Cf. A. J. PATEY, *The Life and Thought of Charles de Foucauld*, London 2012, 90.

“Prayer of Abandonment”²³⁴ is a profound statement of his spiritual life and has influenced many Christian clergy and laypeople. This prayer, which has since become a Christian devotional standard, illustrates his dedication to his vocation and the God who called him to it. Neither Jesus nor his name is mentioned once in this petition. It is the prayer Christ prays when he commits his will to the Father, as written by Charles de Foucauld (Lk 23:46). By praying it, we join ourselves to Christ, enter his inner world with the aid of the Holy Spirit, and give as he does.

Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all and accept all. Let only your will be done in me and all your creatures. I wish no more than this, O Lord. Into your hands I commend my soul; I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands, without reserve, and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father²³⁵.

After discovering that Jesus shared our humanity, Foucauld spent time in the Sahara practising the global fraternity that made him love Christ’s example. The Eucharist and Gospel were his priestly priorities. Blessed Charles de Foucauld was a lot like St. Therese of Lisieux, who died when he was in Nazareth. Both thought that we might find holiness in daily life’s seemingly little gestures that become great acts when inspired by love. This incantation faces death with love. It affirms a love that can trust itself in disaster. Charles de Foucauld sought to emulate Jesus, his “beloved brother and Lord,” daily. Like us, he battled his demons²³⁶. Charles never mentioned the “Prayer of Abandon.” However, his other works and life seem to have shown his essential attitude toward God, which carried him through his ups and downs, adversities, and sad death. There were life-and-death teachings. Charles portrays Jesus alone on Calvary. Jesus calls God “my Father” even if the “our Father” hasn’t intervened in the more significant sacrifice. Jesus is facing the ultimate loneliness that all inevitably experience. It is the threshold where we are each alone. Jesus is literally at the point of losing himself, and he loses himself in the Father. “For you are my father”²³⁷. It is the rejection of love. Perseverance and fidelity in consecrated life can teach a great deal from this outstanding individual. His relationship with God, which is primarily

²³⁴ C. FOUCAULD, “Prayer of Abandonment” [accessed: 16.02.24], www.jesuscarsita-susa.org

²³⁵ P. SOURISSEAU, *Charles de Foucauld 1858- 1916: Biografia*, London 2018, 230.

²³⁶ R. Bazin, *Charles De Foucauld: Hermit and Explorer*, Aigaiou 2020, 210.

²³⁷ C. FOUCAULD, *The Man Who Turned Religion into Love: St. Charles de Foucauld in His Words*, London 2021, 66.

centred on Jesus and is expressed in his faith and fidelity, is illustrated by this prayer.

Even though the mission carried out by Charles was very different, he was very confident in the power and care of Jesus, for whom he toiled day and night. This assurance helped him be patient and work tirelessly for his kingdom.

Tomorrow, it will be ten years that I have been saying Holy Mass in the hermitage in Tamanrasset and not a single conversion! It takes prayer, work, and patience. I am sure that what we need for the natives in our colonies is neither rapid assimilation, direct association, nor sincere union with us, but progress which will be very uneven and must be sought by what are often very different means. Progress must be intellectual, moral, and material²³⁸.

In Europe, the war had been raging for two years. Even the Sahara was feeling its effects. More than a thousand Senoussists, armed with a canon and rifles, have invaded the French fort of Djanet, located around 450 kilometres from here. The Senoussists now have a clear path here following their success. But God is the only thing that can stop them now. God did not intervene, nevertheless, and Charles was brutally murdered on December 1, 1916. “Unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest” (Jn 12:24). To live a consecrated life is to accept a vocation and a mission that must be carried out with complete faithfulness and perseverance. The individual must foster and maintain this honesty with the help of the one who called us²³⁹.

7. The Magisterium of the Church on Fidelity

To fulfil and require a mission within the Church itself, centred on the transmission of the Gospel based on the experience of fraternal life and the radical following of Christ with total fidelity, the Magisterium of the Church has given the topic of consecrated life significant weight and importance. Doctrinal papers have served as a means of guiding, revealing, comparing, and advocating certain realities. In addition to its theological significance, religious existence has a long and rich historical tradition. Today’s lived experience, like that of the past, is rich with nuance and deserves careful

²³⁸ Cf. C. FOUCAULD, *The Man Who Turned Religion into Love: St. Charles de Foucauld in His Words*, 106.

²³⁹ F. FERGUS, *The Sword, and the Cross: Two Men and an Empire of Sand*, New York 2004, 23.

consideration. Each element of the church adapts and evolves to reflect the needs of the modern era.

At the same time, experience is a criterion that must be examined for an institution's authorised constitutions, its Gospel basis, and the Magisterium of the Church. Reforms must improve the Church's worldview to encourage the faithful to deepen their commitment to the Church and its mission as they adapt to new circumstances. In this call, God says, you are significant to me; I love you; I depend on you. This is a message for each of us from Jesus! From that, joy springs forth! That incredible feeling of happiness when Jesus first looked at me. The key to our satisfaction is in grasping and hearing this. We know it is God calling us because we feel his love and sense that we are more than just a number in his eyes²⁴⁰. The Church regards some aspects as essential to religious life in this respect:

The call of God and consecration to him through the profession of the evangelical counsels by public vows; a stable form of community life; for institutes dedicated to apostolic works, a sharing in Christ's mission by a corporate apostolate faithful to a specific founding gift and sound tradition; personal and community prayer; asceticism; public witness; a particular relation to the Church; a life-long formation; and a form of government calling for religious authority based on faith. Historical and cultural changes bring about an evolution in lived reality. Still, the essential elements determine the development's forms and direction, without which religious life loses its identity (*EE 4*)²⁴¹.

In today's world of rapid change, these key aspects serve as the basis for our faith and fidelity. Perseverance in consecrated life is based only on a person's call and love for Christ, who lived, died, and rose for the people, as well as any other circumstances-related factors. The foundation of religious life and divine action is consecration. God calls an individual he has set apart for his devotion to himself. Simultaneously, he grants the grace to respond such that consecration is manifested on the human side through a profound and approachable self-surrender. The relationship that resulted is a beautiful gift. "It is a covenant of mutual love and fidelity, communion and mission, established for God's glory, the joy of the person consecrated, and the world's salvation" (*EE 5*). The result of a genuine consecration is total

²⁴⁰ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, "Meeting with Seminarians and Novices", *L'Osservatore Romano* CLIII (155) 2013, 6.

²⁴¹ *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life (EE)*, Document of the Holy See by SCRSI (31 May 1983).

fidelity, which is the continuation of the fundamental Christian consecration (cCf. *ET* 6)²⁴² and is the root of our existence.

7.1 Religious Life: Seeking God before All Else and Only Him

A religious gladly dedicates life to Christ “as necessary and seeking God before all else and only him” (*PC* 5). There are reasons for this total surrender: a desire to be free from hindrances that could prevent the person from loving God ardently and worshipping him perfectly (cf. *ET* 7). Another reason could be a desire to be consecrated in a whole way to the service of God (*LG* 44). The level of our religious consecration will depend on how we live and take our vows with sincerity. Communion is another facet in which a religious’ dedication and commitment are tested and acted out in the congregation. Community living includes sharing daily existence following specific constitutional structures and laws. Sharing prayer, work, meals, leisure, familiar spirit, “relationships of friendship, cooperation in the same apostolate, and mutual support in a community of life chosen for a better following of Christ, are so many valuable factors in daily progress” (*ET* 39). A community gathering enjoys his presence as a true family in the Lord’s name (cf. Mt 18:25). A religious vocation to a particular institute is distinguished by the aptitude to live community life with all its delights and restrictions. It is a significant element for evaluating a candidate’s suitability for developing fidelity and perseverance. When God consecrates a person, He gives a specific gift to help him accomplish His good purposes: He not only picks, sets apart and dedicates them to Himself but also employs them in His divine work. The mission is inevitably implied by consecration. According to *Religious and Human Promotion*, today’s religious life is influenced by several fidelities. “Fidelity to humanity and to our times; fidelity to Christ and the Gospel; fidelity to the Church and its mission in the world; fidelity to religious life and the institute’s charism” (*RHP* 13)²⁴³.

²⁴² By baptism, Jesus shares his life with each Christian. Each is sanctified in the son. Each is called to holiness. Each is sent to share the mission of Christ and is given the capacity to grow in the love and service of the Lord. This baptismal gift is the fundamental Christian consecration and is the root of all others. *Evangelica Testificatio (ET)*, Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI on the Renewal of the Religious Life According to the Teaching of the Vatican Council II (29 June 1971).

²⁴³ *Religious and Human Promotion (RHP)*, the Church Document by SCRSI (August 12, 1980).

7.1.1 *Religious Life: Call to Incarnate the Good News*

The call to the consecrated life is a summons to become the incarnate Word regarding the Father and the brothers and sisters; it is a call to follow Christ, the crucified and risen one. In a nutshell, it's an invitation to adopt his way of life, his inner attitude, his Spirit's invasion, his startling logic and his scale of values, his risks, and his dreams.

Be guided by the humble yet joyful certainty of those who have been found, touched, and transformed by the Truth who is Christ, ever to be proclaimed²⁴⁴. In consecrated life, one achieves and develops his fidelity through their imitation of Jesus in their daily life to the core of their personality, which will bind themselves to the Lord in a special way, following Christ, who, chaste and poor (cf. Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58), redeemed and sanctified men through obedience even to the death of the Cross (cf. Phil 2:8). Driven by love with which the Holy Spirit floods their hearts (cf. Rom 5:5) they live more and more for Christ and for His body which is the Church (cf. Col 1:24). The more fervently, then, they are joined to Christ by this total life-long gift of themselves, the richer the life of the Church becomes and the livelier and more successful its apostolate (*PC* 1).

The creativity and enthusiasm of one's vocation are entirely dependent on one's fidelity, and it will enable one to endure in one's calling, even if it disrupts modern society and daily life. *Perfectae Caritatis* reminds us that our prayer and community life must be adapted to the dynamics of the apostolate and the present world so that members might serve the world without subjugation²⁴⁵. Prayer and sacraments are the firm foundations of the consecrated life, enabling those the Lord has called to serve and love the people through their fidelity to him. First, read and meditate on the Holy Scripture regularly to grasp "the incomparable worth of knowing Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:8). As the Church wants, they should celebrate the sacred liturgy, especially the Mass, with their lips and hearts and nourish their spiritual life from these richest sources (cf. *PC* 6).

²⁴⁴ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, "Homily at the Holy Mass with Bishops, Priests, Religious and Seminarians on the XXVIII World Youth Day", in *L'Osservatore Romano* 173 (2013) 4.

²⁴⁵ The manner of living, praying, and working should be suitably adapted everywhere, but especially in mission territories, to the modern physical and psychological circumstances of the members and, as required by the nature of each institute, to the necessities of the apostolate, the demands of culture, and social and economic circumstances (cf. *PC* 3).

7.1.2 *Blessed Virgin Mary: Source and Substance of Our Vocation*

Given the centrality of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the church and, more specifically, the consecrated life, I feel compelled to once again emphasise her place as the inspiration and centre of our vocation and dedication. She shows that she is willing to follow Jesus to the end, no matter the cost of her own life. Known as the first true missionary, she devoted her life to following Jesus and introduced him to others by saying, “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5).

Vita Consecrate invokes the protection of the Most Holy Virgin Mary so that, through her intercession, those of us who have been called may attain fidelity to our consecration, following and witnessing the Lord Jesus with a transfigured existence that will allow us to live our consecration joyfully at the side of our brother religious and walk together towards our celestial land²⁴⁶.

In its “exodus” along the highways of history, consecrated life is a prophecy of good things for people. It is not afraid to face the uncertainty of the present, the fate of the future, or the loud demands and passionate desires of today’s humanity. This vigilant journey holds fast to the pursuit of God’s glory, walks as a follower of Christ, and submits to the leading of the Holy Spirit so that its love for God’s kingdom may be shown in acts of inventive faithfulness and eager diligence. It is intrinsic to who it is that it is a praying pilgrim standing at the edge of history²⁴⁷.

The concept of consecrated life developed because so many saints were committed to living totally for the redemption of others, just as Jesus did. The events and difficulties of human history, rather than some timeless ideal, developed, and shaped religious life. “The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all” (VC 72). The world’s influence stops religious people from approaching God and adopting His methods. When the fire of intimacy is absent from our relationship with God, everything becomes mechanical and usual, casting doubt on our fidelity and perseverance in answering this call.

²⁴⁶ This apostolic exhortation begins on the experience of the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mt Tabor, the episode that made manifest the communion of the Most Holy Trinity, where the expertise of the community gathered around the Lord was born (cf. VC 71).

²⁴⁷ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, “Message to the Participants in the Italian Conference of Secular Institute” [accessed: 03.02.22], <https://www.cmis-int.org/en/documents-2/magisterium-of-the-church/francis/#acceluited4d33676>

You are a leaven that can produce good bread for many, the Bread for which there is so much hunger: listening to people's needs, aspirations, disappointments, and hopes. Like those who have preceded you in your vocation, you can restore hope to young people, help the elderly, open roads to the future, and spread love everywhere and in every situation. If this does not happen if your ordinary life lacks witness and prophecy, then, I repeat to you, there is an urgent need for conversion!²⁴⁸.

Faith in Jesus Christ and being led by the Holy Spirit with complete devotion and fidelity are the bedrock on which a *vita consecrata* is built. When people recognise the Spirit-driven allure of religious life, rather than accepting it because they believe it to be a greater or higher state of life, I think that is when they make the wise decision. What happens in consecrated life is a gradual but inevitable awakening to the splendour of the world around you. Consecrated life does not just announce that there is more to the world than meets the eye or that there is life after this one; it proves it by being true to its sacred vows. There is a good possibility in religious life that human communities can be re-established and re-fashioned in the likeness of divine justice and mercy. A religious person prays about the big things hurting people need. A holy person should bear testimony to Christ in the most challenging circumstances of human life around us rather than letting those difficulties suffocate them. A consecrated person's spiritual identity is shaped primarily by prayerful contemplation of the Christ "who lives and suffers among the impoverished (cf. SAC 29)²⁴⁹.

The quest for divine beauty impels consecrated persons to care for the deformed image of God on the faces of their brothers and sisters, faces disfigured by hunger, faces disillusioned by political promises, faces humiliated by seeing their culture despised, faces frightened by constant and indiscriminate violence, the anguished faces of minors, the hurt and humiliated faces of women, the tired faces of migrants who are not given a warm welcome, the faces of the elderly who are without even the minimum conditions for a dignified life (VC 75).

²⁴⁸ POPE FRANCIS, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the participants in the General Assembly of the Italian Conference of Secular Institute" [accessed: 10.05.2023], https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco_20140510_conferenza-italiana-istituti-secolari.pdf

²⁴⁹ *Starting Afresh from Christ (SAC)* of CICALSAL Instruction on a Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium (19 May 2002).

7.1.3 *Consecrated Life: School of Spirit*

Like a school of the Spirit, consecrated life is where men and women learn to find God. But the knowledge they gain is not only for themselves. Their insight and the validation of their pioneering experience are for the Church. Therefore, the spiritual awareness of consecrated men and women must be rooted in fidelity to God and the most profound solidarity with those who hunger and thirst for justice and peace²⁵⁰. Specifically, religious men and women perceive the signs of the kingdom and living manifestations of humanity's incompleteness, its yearning for complete redemption, and its orientation toward a God who resides among his people. "The consecrated life not only represents a quest for fidelity and divine beauty, as the Pope puts it. There is a, even «special» form of evangelical beauty that emerges from within the lives of men and women who incarnate that consecration"²⁵¹.

The Church fully incorporates the Consecrated Life. Consecrated people maintain faith and fidelity in and through the Church and its institutions. They have the same mission and use the same Scriptures and sacraments. In addition, the document asserts that consecrated men and women must live in solidarity with Peter's successor and fidelity to the Magisterium. The text adds that a mind-and-heart commitment to the bishops' Magisterium is a distinguishing characteristic of ecclesial unity. "Faithful adherence to the directives of the Magisterium" and "ready obedience to the bishops and especially to the Roman Pontiff" are considered essential features of the consecrated life (cf. VC 46). Consecrated life should be a daily demonstration of the freedom, the profound emancipation of mind, heart, and imagination that results from an unqualified and unequivocal "yes" to the Holy Spirit.

7.1.4 *Consecrated Life: Openness to Ecumenism and Dialogue*

Today, ecumenism and conversation are required to maintain the spirit and power of fidelity in this vocation and calling. As a result of our exposure to the conditions and demands of the time, the openness of the Spirit reveals itself in multicultural and religious situations. "There is an urgent need for consecrated persons to give more space in their lives to ecumenical prayer and genuine evangelical witness so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, the walls of division and prejudice can be broken down" (VC 100). As

²⁵⁰ Cf. R. PERINO, *Call to Holiness: New Frontiers in Spirituality for Today's Religious*, Mumbai 1987, 108.

²⁵¹ A. PARDILLA, *Christ's Way of Life at the Center of Formation for Religious Life*, Roma 2005, 89.

consecrated men and women approach the frontiers or theological limits of their faith, they may find themselves in the unpleasant situation of being faced and challenged by the limitations that are inescapably present in all human understanding, especially regarding God's things. To meet this challenge, we must equip ourselves with profound fidelity to God and tenacity in our vocations as God's witnesses so that such circumstances never overcome us.

Significant obstacles to consecrated life are not rooted in the Gospel but in our time and position in history. The cultural influences of our world continuously influence and alter our understanding of what it is to be human. Until these factors are identified, comprehended, and appraised in light of the Gospel, consecrated life will endure the labour pangs of rebirth. "Let therefore all the religious, rooted in faith and filled with love for God and neighbour, a love for the cross, and the expectation of future glory, proclaim the Good News of Christ throughout the entire world, so that all and our heavenly Father may see their testimony and be glorified (cf. Mt 5:16)"²⁵².

CONCLUSION

This chapter defines and clarifies fidelity and its relevance from creation to the present day. God's fidelity shapes and sculpts the consecrated life and strives for Christian perfection. This chapter discusses the various consecrated life aspects closely related to faithfulness. A man of loyalty with the fire of God's love can be close enough to touch the other, his scars and expectations, his questions, and his needs, with the sensitivity that can convey concern and erase all distances, like the Samaritan who goes by, sees and offers assistance. This is the method to which religious people are obligated by their vocation: to pass by every man and become a neighbour to everyone they encounter. "Because your permanence in the world is not simply sociological, it is a theological reality that calls you to be aware, attentive, that can perceive, see and touch the flesh of his brother"²⁵³. Pope Francis recommends for us the restlessness of the search, as it was for Augustine of Hippo a restlessness in his heart which brought him to a personal encounter with Christ and brought him to understand that the God he was seeking was the

²⁵² POPE FRANCIS, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to participants in the General Assembly of the Italian Conference of Secular Institute" [accessed: 23.03.2023], https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco_20140510_conferenza-italiana-istituti-secolari.html

²⁵³ POPE FRANCIS, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to participants in the General Assembly of the Italian Conference of Secular Institute".

God who is close to every human being, the God close to our heart, who was more inward than our innermost self. This is an ongoing search:

Augustine did not stop, he did not give up, he did not withdraw into himself like those who have already arrived but continued his search. The restlessness of seeking the truth, of seeking God, became the restlessness to know him ever better and of coming out of himself to make others know him. It was precisely the restlessness of love²⁵⁴.

This chapter focuses on one of the challenges faced by those who have dedicated their lives to a religious calling, namely the crisis of fidelity. This crisis refers to a conscious commitment to a path that begins with mysterious origins and ends in a mysterious destination. It is possible that we are also experiencing a crisis of humanization, as we struggle to reconcile our various roles and responsibilities into a cohesive and faithful journey. This struggle is often compounded by the limitations of complete consistency and the difficulties we encounter in leading fully integrated lives. This daily journey, both personal and communal, marked by discontent and bitterness that encloses us in remorse, almost a permanent longing for unexplored paths and unfulfilled dreams, becomes a lonely road.

Our call to live in a relationship, in the fulfilment of love, can be transformed into an uninhabited wildness. There is a call to return to the core of one's being at every stage of life; it is there that the inspiration for one's existence as a student of the Master can be found. Faithfulness is the awareness of a love that points us towards the "Thou" of God and every other person constantly and dynamically when we experience within ourselves the life of the risen one. "Those who accept his offer of salvation are free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness" (*EG* 1)²⁵⁵.

Faithful discipleship is grace and love in action; it is the practice of sacrificial charity. "When we journey without the Cross, build without the Cross, profess Christ without the Cross, we are not disciples of the Lord; we are worldly. We may be bishops, priests, religious, cardinals, popes, but not disciples of the Lord"²⁵⁶. To persevere to Golgotha, to experience the lacerations of doubts and denial, to rejoice in the marvel and wonder of the Paschal event, up to the manifestation of Pentecost and the evangelisation of the

²⁵⁴ POPE FRANCIS, "Homily for the Opening of the General Chapter of the Order of St. Augustine", in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 30 August 2013, 8.

²⁵⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium (EG)*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (24 November 2013).

²⁵⁶ POPE FRANCIS, "Missa Pro Ecclesia with the Cardinal Electors" (14 March 2013).

peoples: these are milestones of joyful fidelity because they are about self-emptying, experienced throughout life, even in the sign of martyrdom, and sharing in the life of the risen Christ. And it is from the Cross, the supreme act of mercy and love, that we are reborn as a “new creation” (Gal 6:15).

CHAPTER II

Elements Favouring Fidelity in Consecrated Life

INTRODUCTION

Many factors play a role in shaping a person's personality and growth throughout their life. The situations and circumstances that one experiences while growing up significantly impact one's perspective and aspirations. The formative years are particularly vital as they help shape a person's vision, giving them direction and purpose, which ultimately benefits society and the world. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "formation" can be defined as "an act of giving form or shape to something or of taking form"²⁵⁷. According to Irenaeus of Lyons, the vocation of every human is to become fully human and become the glory of God. Though everyone is created with this capacity to become fully human, none can achieve this alone because humans are not made perfectly.

Any formation given or received is for unfolding a human person as a genuine and reliable human being²⁵⁸. Experience becomes a good teacher for us to mould our personality and character. It is crucial to consistently nurture ourselves with positive thoughts and cultivate genuine appreciation and affection for us. This can help us create a better future for our lives. The formation of oneself and human destiny is influenced by various factors such as family, society, religion, neighbours, education, teachers, and peers. In this chapter, I will delve into certain essential aspects that impact the development of an integrated personality and human destiny. The journey of

²⁵⁷ "Formation" in *Merriam Webster Dictionary* [accessed: 14.02.2022], <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/formation>

²⁵⁸ Cf. J. PARAPPALLY, "Jesus' Way of Formation: A Formation for Communion", *Asian Journal of Vocation and Formation* 45/1 (2019) 8.

fidelity in consecrated life is dynamic and continual, requiring continuous effort and support. It requires fidelity to evangelical counsels and a profound dedication to a life of service, prayer, and community.

1. Family Formation

A family can be a group of people affiliated either by consanguinity of people (recognised by birth), affinity (marriage or other relationship) or co-residence. According to the American anthropologist George Peter Murdock, a family “is a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction”²⁵⁹. Humans have formed families for social, emotional, and economic reasons for as long as there are records. Some consider it the driving force behind human existence and our essence. The initial formation of a human being occurs in the family which one is born into through the parents, siblings, relatives, and neighbours, later through the society and various agencies, especially the teachers, peer groups, and different leaders in the community, both religious and secular. Family and society training assist a person in becoming competent in the role one must play in society²⁶⁰.

Like an excellent tree produces good fruit, a good family helps to shape good human beings. On the other hand, the negative influence of a family during childhood can cause the development of antisocial tendencies in a person. Multiple studies indicate that children who experience changes in family structure perform worse than children growing up in stable family structures across various domains²⁶¹. The instability hypothesis is based on the family stress model and suggests that differences in children’s outcomes occur due to the stress caused by changes in family composition. This theory proposes that family disruptions often lead to alterations in parent-child roles and routines, which can cause fluctuating parental resources, declining parenting quality, and emotional insecurity. In short, family structure instability likely undermines processes of adequate socialisation by parents²⁶². Child development during early and middle childhood is of particular significance. Human development studies have demonstrated that infancy and adolescence are pivotal for moulding an individual’s character and habits. A child’s

²⁵⁹ G.P. MURDOCK, *Social Structure*, Michigan 2010, 92.

²⁶⁰ Cf. J. PARAPPALLY, “Jesus’ Way of Formation: A Formation for Communion”, 10.

²⁶¹ Cf. L.L WU, “Effects of Family Instability, Income, and Income Stability on the Risk of a Premarital Birth”, *American Sociological Review* 61/3 (1996) 388.

²⁶² Cf. M. COLEMAN – L. GANONG – M. FINE, “Reinvestigating Remarriage: Another Decade of Progress”, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62/4 (2000) 1290.

abilities and talents throughout this stage are often set in stone. It is crucial to consider elements like family transitions, instability, structure, and formation when assessing the well-being of both children and adults. Families play a crucial role in children's care and socialisation. They are the basic unit of consumption and a pillar of support for young adults. Additionally, families are the preferred carers for seniors. To evaluate the impact of families on well-being, it is necessary to comprehend who makes up the family, how its members are related, and how they spend their time and share resources. Within the family are joys and trials, deep love, and relationships, which, at times, can be wounded. The family is truly the "school of humanity" (*GS* 52),²⁶³ which is much needed today. The active presence of the father and mother in the family is significant and highly beneficial to their formation. Children should be so educated that as adults, they can follow their vocation, including a religious one, with a mature sense of responsibility and choose their state of life, whatever it may be. Parents need to allow their children to grow responsibly with due freedom in choosing their career and condition of life according to their taste.

By prudent advice, parents or guardians should guide their young concerning founding a family, and the young should listen gladly. At the same time, no direct or indirect pressure should be put on the young to make them enter marriage or choose a specific partner (*GS* 52).

Defending the freedom of parents to have and raise their children within their own homes is of utmost importance. Protecting parental rights is necessary to ensure children are brought up in a loving and nurturing environment. Parents play a crucial role in their children's lives and embody qualities and virtues like God's. The union of spouses, created in the image of the living God and possessing inherent human dignity, should be based on mutual love, respect, and the shared goal of spiritual growth (cf. *DR* 11)²⁶⁴. Thus, following Christ, who is the principle of life (cf. *GS* 8) by the sacrifices and joys of their vocation and through their faithful love, married people can become witnesses of the mystery of love that the Lord revealed to the world by his dying and rising to life again (cf. Phil 1:27). In society and the family, one gets to know himself and learns to communicate and love the other through interaction. Family is where one learns to work, reap the rewards,

²⁶³ "The family is like a school that teaches us to be better humans. However, to fully achieve its purpose and potential, it requires the harmonious exchange of ideas between spouses and the committed collaboration of parents in their children's education" (*GS* 2).

²⁶⁴ *Divini Redemptoris (DR)*, Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Atheistic Communism (19 March 1937).

love and forgive unconditionally, and put God first through prayer and sacrifice (cf. *GS* 8). The Gospel of the family sustains the germinating seeds and the withering trees that still need attention. Parents play a crucial role in raising their children because they reflect God's likeness to their offspring. Pope John Paul II said, "The ministry of evangelisation carried out by Christian parents is original and irreplaceable" (*FC* 52)²⁶⁵.

1.1 Marriage and Family: Most Precious Human Values

The profound and quick changes that have influenced society and culture have plagued the family in the modern world more than any other institution, if not more so. Many families are navigating this circumstance while remaining faithful to the principles that form the cornerstone of the institution of the family. Others have become uncertain and bewildered over their role or even doubtful and almost unaware of marital and family life's ultimate meaning and truth. When marriage and family suffer, societies and the person's values and strength are endangered. Various kinds of injustice and human violations are taking place in the families that directly hurt the fundamental rights and development of the persons.

Knowing that marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values, the Church wishes to speak and offer her help to those who are already aware of the importance of marriage and the family and seek to live it faithfully, to those who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth, and to those who are unjustly impeded from living their family lives freely. Supporting the first, illuminating the second and assisting the others, the Church offers her services to every person who wonders about the destiny of marriage and the family (cf. *FC* 1, *GS* 52).

The Church encourages young people to begin their journey towards marriage and family life to explore new horizons. They are helped to discover the beauty and grandeur of the vocation to love and the service of life. The family is a place where different generations come together to support each other in growing in human wisdom and harmonising individuals with the other demands of social life. Within the family, people learn socialising skills and fundamental lessons of faith and fidelity. Throughout history, the family has faced numerous challenges that aim to destroy or damage it. The family's current situation has both positive and negative aspects. On one hand, it is evidence of Christ's saving power in the world. On the other hand, it

²⁶⁵ *Familiaris Consortio* (*FC*), Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on the Role of the Christian Families in the Modern World (22 November 1981).

symbolises man's rejection of God's love. Today, people value their freedom and are less inclined to embrace religion and traditional institutions like marriage and family. Many couples prefer to live together without any commitment or sacraments²⁶⁶.

Freedom is one of the most fundamental human rights. However, in wealthy countries, an abundance of wealth can lead to a paradoxical consumer mindset that makes people fearful of the future and stingy with their charity, neither of which are helpful qualities when trying to start a family. The family and the larger society are essential in protecting and advancing people for the greater good. There is both good and evil in the family's past. Family and marriage are viewed differently in industrialised and developing nations, with the latter generally struggling to provide their children with basic requirements like food, jobs, shelter, and healthcare. Thus, life is often perceived not as a blessing but as a danger from which to defend oneself (cf. *FC* 6).

In his apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis stated that the joy experienced by families is also the joy of the Church (cf. *AL* 1)²⁶⁷. This means that the family dynamics are reflected in the life of the Church. When families experience joy creates a deep sense of love and harmony between people. This harmony comes from a spirit of togetherness, mutual support, and, most importantly, the presence of God's love. However, if there is a lack of God's love, the family may lose harmony, and self-centeredness may take over, causing joy to fade. When this happens, the Church also suffers²⁶⁸. The family finds its identity, purpose, and mission in the plan of God, who is the Creator and Redeemer. The role God calls the family to perform in history is derived from its essence and represents the dynamic and existential development of what it is. Every family receives a summons that it cannot ignore, which clarifies its dignity and responsibility. The call to every family is to "become what you are" (*FC* 17). "The family, founded and given life by love, is a community of persons: husband and wife, parents and children, relatives. Its first task is to live with fidelity the reality of communion in a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons" (*FC* 18).

²⁶⁶ Cf. R. BENIGNUS, *Finding Your Hidden Treasure. The Way of Silent Prayer*, London 2010, 66.

²⁶⁷ *Amoris Laetitia* (*AL*), Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Francis on Love in the Family (March 19, 2016).

²⁶⁸ Cf. E. LACANDULA, "The Christian Family. A seedbed of Vocation" [accessed: 12.12.2022], <https://stories.svdmissions.org/the-mission-post/the-christian-family-a-seedbed-of-vocations>

Living in an authentic community requires fidelity as its core principle to achieve its goal — love. Without love, a family cannot be considered a community of persons. Similarly, a family cannot prosper and improve itself as a community of persons without love. All family members have the grace and responsibility of building the communion of persons, each according to their gift. Daily mutual service achieves this by showing care and love for the little ones, the sick, and the aged. The family becomes a school of more profound humanity when goods, joys, and sorrow are shared (cf. *GS* 52).

1.2 Catechism: Fundamental Family Instruction

According to St. Arnold Janssen, “Vocations usually come from good families.” Indeed, the family is the most crucial institution responsible for fostering vocation²⁶⁹. An essential function of the Christian family is to help the children grow in the concept of God and religion. Let us not forget that Jesus himself was born into a modest family²⁷⁰. The scripture reads, “And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their city of Nazareth. And the child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him” (Lk 2:39-40). This passage presents Mary, Joseph, and Jesus as a faithful Jewish family who were pious and righteous before God. In a Christian family, parents should set good examples for their children with the hope of creating and nurturing a culture of vocations for consecrated life²⁷¹.

The pillars and basis of this salvific mission start with parents in their families. Parents’ fundamental obligation and responsibility is to take care of their children’s spiritual needs and help them grow in true faith and belief. This duty has become even more critical in today’s multicultural, secularist society, where the world tends towards a more secular and aesthetically inclined direction. Morality and behavioural principles are closely linked with the religion one practices. Therefore, individuals must have a strong foundation for personal growth in their early years. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI emphasises the family’s role in a person’s development:

Like the Church, the family must be a space in which the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. Therefore, in the intimacy of a family

²⁶⁹ E. LACANDULA, “The Christian Family. A seedbed of Vocation” [accessed: 12.12.2022], <https://stories.svdmissions.org/the-mission-post/the-christian-family-a-seedbed-of-vocations>

²⁷⁰ Cf. A. CENCINI, *Vocation Animation. A Sign of Renewal*, Mumbai 1995, 97.

²⁷¹ Cf. D.H. ROSEBERRY, *When the Lord is My Shepherd*, London 2020, 24.

aware of this mission, all the members evangelise and are evangelised. Parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children but can also receive the same intensely lived Gospel from them. Such a family becomes the evangeliser of many other families and the environment in which it is inserted (*EN 71*).

The parent's role in the children's spiritual life starts in a Christian tradition with the sacrament of Baptism and continues until the last breath of one's life. The parents must initiate faith and principles at the early stages of one's life in coordination with the religion in which one believes. For a Catholic believer, this apostolic mission of the family is rooted in baptism. It receives a new strength from the sacramental grace of marriage to transmit faith, to sanctify and transform today's society according to God's plan. Today, more than ever, the Christian family is called to bear witness to the Easter covenant of Christ by radiating the hope and love that comes from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. "The Christian family proclaims aloud the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life" (*LG 35*).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states,

Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelising their children. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the "first heralds" for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church. A wholesome family life can foster interior dispositions that are a genuine preparation for a living faith and remain a support for it throughout one's life²⁷².

Family catechesis, therefore, precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis. It is becoming increasingly common to see legislation and societal norms that discourage or prevent religious education. In these environments, where religious growth is difficult or impossible, the home becomes the primary place for children and young people to receive authentic religious instruction.

The current state of the world shows that the most critical factors for a happy family are a happy childhood, strong religious convictions, and a close relationship with parents. God is the sower of vocations. For vocations to flourish and the harvest to be plenty, the seedbed itself — the family — must be of rich, fertile, fine soil. The primary goal of Christian parenting is often to raise children who are grounded in faith, have strong moral values, and are equipped to serve others following Christian teachings. A well-rounded approach to raising children in Christian families would encompass spiritual,

²⁷² *CCC 2225*.

moral, emotional, and social development. This would involve teaching them about love, compassion, forgiveness, and service and providing them with opportunities to engage in acts of kindness and community service²⁷³.

The Catholic Church places the highest importance on the family unit in its teachings. Within the Church, the family provides a sense of unity, fellowship, sharing, and care and serves as the primary social structure for reproduction and child-rearing. Through the Feast of the Holy Family, the Church reminds us that the family is the most conducive environment for individuals to pursue personal growth and development. The Church, the universal body of believers, is called the family of God. The Second Vatican Council calls the family “a domestic church” (*LG* 11). where the individuals experience communion among persons, which reflects the mystery of the Holy Trinity of marriage as an indissoluble bond of unity and a sign of enduring faithfulness.

St. Arnold Janssen would say, “If the Church is to have more priests, more men ready for sacrifice and apostolic work, the good Lord must grant that Christian marriage becomes ever more holy”²⁷⁴. The family is an enduring icon of love and commitment. It is a place where we learn essential values such as perseverance, the joy of work, fraternal love, and forgiveness. We also learn the importance of divine worship through prayer and offering our lives. Families witness the beauty of fidelity and permanent commitment in a world where everything seems transient and temporary. Pope Francis says, “They bear witness to the beauty of marriage as indissoluble and perpetually faithful” (*AL* 86). The Church sees family as the locus where one profoundly experiences the values and virtues of the Christian life. The family, uniquely and singularly, contributes to the Church’s life.

1.3 Family in the Documents of the Church

The Second Vatican Council was committed to promoting the dignity of marriage and the family. According to the Vatican Council II, the person’s well-being and formation in human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, the Council says that family is

²⁷³ Cf. “Raising Children” [accessed: 06.07.2022], <https://www.coursesidekick.com/philosophy/3069420>

²⁷⁴ E. LACANDULA, “The Christian Family, A seedbed of Vocations”, [accessed: 20.12.2023] <https://stories.svdmissions.org/the-mission-post/the-christian-family-a-seedbed-of-vocations>

an outstanding school of the apostolate. The Christian family loudly proclaims the present virtues of the kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life. Thus, its example and witness accuse the world of sin and enlighten those who seek the truth. In the family, by their coexistence and interaction, they proclaim Christ through a living testimony and through the spoken word, which acquires an exceptional quality and a distinctive force because it is carried out in the traditional settings of the world (cf. *LG* 35).

The teaching of the Catholic Church on marriage and the family received a boost from Blessed Pope Paul VI. The connection between homes and churches was a focus of his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The document says, “The exercise of responsible parenthood requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities, recognise their duties towards God, themselves, their families and human society” (*EN* 10). But evangelisation would be incomplete if it did not consider the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and man’s concrete personal and social life.

Therefore, evangelisation involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realised, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development are hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice, and development — a message incredibly energetic today about liberation (*EN* 29).

The document emphasises the evangelic mission and action of the family, where the gospel is transmitted initially. Under no circumstances can this unwavering ministry of respectable Christian families and laypeople be neglected. Throughout the history of the Church and the Second Vatican Council, the family has merited the title “domestic church,” which is also an appreciation and recognition of responsible parenting²⁷⁵.

Saint Pope John Paul II devoted special attention to the family in his catechesis on human love. The Pope defined the family as ‘the way of the Church’ and ‘the Church of the home’ (*FC* 52)²⁷⁶. He also offered a general vision of the vocation of men and women to love and proposed basic

²⁷⁵ POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Gratissimam Sane*, Letter to Families in the Year of Families (2 February 1994).

²⁷⁶ “The family, like the Church, ought to be where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family conscious of this mission, all the members evangelise and are evangelised. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children, they can receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families and the neighbourhood it forms part of.” As the Synod repeated, taking up the appeal I launched at Puebla, the future of evangelisation depends significantly on the Church of the Home.

guidelines for the family's pastoral care and role in society. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope John Paul II said that the family is where the child receives the first elements of faith, where one discovers their vocation (cf. *CT* 68)²⁷⁷ and the first catechetical centre for the child (cf. *CT* 68). Pope Benedict XVI stressed that "marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes an icon of the relationship between God and His people and vice versa" (*DCE* 2)²⁷⁸. Thus, the Church documents emphasise that in the sanctifying work of the Church and the early education of the individual, the family plays a non-replaceable part. Pope Francis, in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* says, "The exclusive and indissoluble union between a man and a woman has a plenary role to play in society as a stable commitment that bears fruit in new life" (*AL* 52). The Pope continues that the weakening of the family threatens the mature growth of individuals, the cultivation of community values and the moral progress of cities and countries.

2.1.4 Family as the Birthplace and Seedbed of Vocations

The family plays a vital role in deciding a person's destiny: family shapes and moulds one's very essence of life. As the person grows, early experiences influence their decisions, especially regarding choosing one's future state²⁷⁹. Vocations are bred, nourished, and readied in the family. Pope Benedict spoke to the youth at St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers about vocation: "Families are indispensable for forming vocations to the priesthood, religious life and the married life"²⁸⁰. Pope Benedict emphasised the importance of honouring the vocation of matrimony as it is through families that vocations are given life. He also encouraged young people to follow the life of apostolic or contemplative service and highlighted the significance of the charisms of the Holy Spirit in forming religious orders. The Pope acknowledged that there is no perfect community, but it is essential to remain faithful

²⁷⁷ Cf. *Catechesi Tradendae* (*CT*), Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on Catechesis in Our Time (16 October 1979).

²⁷⁸ *Deus Caritas Est* (*DCE*), First Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI on Christian Love (25 December 2005).

²⁷⁹ Cf. R. ODENWALD, *Your Child's World*, New York 1963, 88.

²⁸⁰ POPE FRANCIS, "The Universal Call to Holiness", Retrieved from http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/1/1/19/pope_at_the_audience_the_universal_call_to_holiness, [accessed: on 11.11.22], Papal audience.

to a founding charism rather than to individuals when discerning the Lord's call²⁸¹.

A severe and sincere follower of Christ will never forget the gospel's call: "You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). The Vatican Council II, through *Lumen Gentium*, made a radical call to all the faithful towards a life of holiness (cf. *LG* 1). Through this invitation, the Church made it plain that holiness is available to everyone who believes, not just a select group. "Every state of life leads to holiness, always, but only if we are open to the grace of God's gift"²⁸². However, we also know that God calls some to follow him even more closely in a life of apostolic celibacy for the kingdom of God, whether as a priest, religious, or layperson. Call to a particular form of life in the person results from an inner spark resulting from the faith and love towards the supreme all-power that the parents and family introduce at the early stage of one's life.

Family is considered the excellent seedbed of vocations in the Christian tradition. St. Pope John Paul II encourages saying:

The family must educate the children for life so that each one may fully perform their role according to the vocation received from God. Indeed, the family that is open to transcendent values, that serves its brothers and sisters with joy, fulfils its duties with generous fidelity and is aware of its daily sharing in the mystery of the glorious Cross of Christ becomes the primary and most excellent seedbed of vocations to a life of consecration to the Kingdom of God (*FC* 53).

According to Pope John Paul II, families play a crucial role in nurturing individuals towards a priestly vocation and mission. They are the primary and excellent seedbeds of vocations to the kingdom of God. This means that the family is the area of the Church that is specifically prepared to plant the seeds of religious vocations. Above all else, the family must demonstrate a genuine commitment to creating and fostering a culture of vocation (cf. *FC* 3). This commitment to living out the Christian faith begins in the home and extends outward, impacting the various small communities in which families are involved such as parishes, clubs, and schools. The Christian family strives to live their faith fervently, remain open to a life of service and fulfil their duties to God and their neighbours. This creates a fertile ground for the young to choose unique life paths such as religious life and the priesthood. Christian families uniquely contribute to the Church's missionary work by encouraging missionary vocations among their sons and

²⁸¹ POPE FRANCIS, "The Universal Call to Holiness", 2.

²⁸² POPE FRANCIS, "The Universal Call to Holiness", 2.

daughters (cf. *FC* 53). Family is the sector of the Church uniquely suited for sowing the seeds of religious vocations. Family “forms the foundation of a priest’s vocation and mission” (*FC* 59).

The main goal of a family that is a seedbed of vocations is to wholeheartedly accept each person’s primary vocation, which is a sincere self-gift and an ardent love that leads to offering oneself to God and others. The role of the family in fostering vocations is significant, as priesthood and consecrated life are centred around serving others. To promote this, families must encourage each member to embrace their first vocation, which involves selflessness and a deep love for God and others. These qualities can create the ideal environment for the family to become the primary source of vocations. Yet this is no easy task, especially considering the various struggles faced by the family today, not least of which was recently noted by Pope Francis, who said that “the devil attacks the family so much. The demon does not love it and seeks to destroy it”²⁸³. As recounted in his autobiography, John Paul II’s first seminary, a sort of domestic seminary, was founded by his father’s witness to the faith in the face of great adversity and societal struggle. It seems likely that good priests come from decent families, particularly those who prioritise fostering a culture of vocation at home. The family plays an essential part in supporting and nourishing the seminarian’s or religious vocation choice. Pope John Paul says:

By being one with their son in his arms, the family can offer him an essential contribution to his mission. The plan of providence chose the priest’s family to be where his vocation was planted and nourished, an indispensable help for the growth and development of his vocation (*PDV* 79)²⁸⁴.

Even though the family is the critical factor for the vocation of the young ones, vocation is not only a gift of God to the person alone, but it is also a gift to the family. “I am so blessed to have my family because it is where I first learned to love, give, forgive, show compassion and concern for others, pray and call God as my Father in heaven”²⁸⁵.

The success of a vocation is dependent on the quality of the seedbed in which it is planted. In the same way, the family serves as a seedbed for a person’s vocation. If the family environment is poor, then the vocation may

²⁸³ POPE FRANCIS, “*The Universal Call to Holiness*”.

²⁸⁴ *Pastores Dabo Vobis (PDV)*, Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of Present day (15 March 1992).

²⁸⁵ JOHN PAUL II, “Vocation Boom” [accessed: 12.10.2022], [https:// www. Voca- tionboom.com/vocation-wisdom-from-pope-john-paul-ii](https://www.Vocationboom.com/vocation-wisdom-from-pope-john-paul-ii)

not flourish. On the other hand, if the family environment is rich and supportive, the vocation will be more likely to thrive. It is important to note that any issues with a person's vocation may stem from problems within the family. Therefore, the family must embrace its role as a domestic church and recognise God's guidance²⁸⁶. By doing so, the family can facilitate the ability to perceive and respond to God's call for total freedom. Pope Benedict XVI emphasised each family's vital role in fostering a culture that enables young people to hear and respond to the unique mission God calls each member to undertake. He stressed that Christian families should provide a happy and loving environment that allows young people to discern their calls to priesthood or religious life. The Pope conveyed this message in his "World Day of Prayers for Vocations" address:

Families are not only the privileged place for human and Christian formation; they can also be 'the primary and most excellent seedbed of vocations to a life of consecration to the Kingdom of God' by helping their members to see, precisely within the family, the beauty and the importance of the priesthood and the consecrated life²⁸⁷.

2. Sociological and Cultural Formation

Society and Culture are indispensable and inseparable parts of one's formation. The personality and behaviour of an individual depend significantly on their influence on the sociological and cultural framework of the society one lives in. For Georg Simmel,²⁸⁸ culture is "the cultivation of individuals through the agency of external forms objectified in history. Culture in the sociological field is analysed as the ways of thinking, describing, acting, and material objects that shape a group of people's way of life"²⁸⁹. Social transformations in the late modern world have radically changed the experience

²⁸⁶ Cf. POPE PAUL VI, "Fidelity to Christ and the Church", *The Pope Speaks* 1/6 (1978).

²⁸⁷ POPE BENEDICT XVI, "Message for the World Day of Prayers for Vocations" [accessed: 13.02.2022], <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/24295/loving-christian-family-is-best-soil-for-vocations-pope-writes>

²⁸⁸ Georg Simmel (1858-1918) was a German sociologist, philosopher, and cultural theorist who significantly contributed to sociology, philosophy, and aesthetics. He is known for his insightful analyses of social interactions, urban life, and the dynamics of modernity. Simmel's perspective emphasises the significance of culture in shaping and cultivating individuals within a society. Culture encompasses a variety of external forms and historical processes. Culture is both a result of historical evolution and a tool for developing and refining persons and civilisations.

²⁸⁹ G. SIMMEL, *Individuality and Social Forms*, Chicago 1971, 6.

of growing up and the circumstances under which children are socialised and develop self-identities. These shifts have resulted in a far more fluid and unpredictable social environment, from the vast expansion of communication media to the decline of family and community groupings to the increasing interconnectedness and employment changes brought by globalisation. When God calls human persons to become consecrated, He chooses them from human families belonging to different cultures. We cannot think of forming persons for religious life without considering their culture and world views. One cannot lose one's own cultural and personal identity during formation.

Ad Gentes, the Second Vatican Council's decree on missionary activity, while dealing with the guidelines for the training and actions of the missionaries, speaks about the need to maintain and safeguard the culture and sociological background of the candidates for a mature and free growth in their vocation (cf. AG 16). Therefore, religious formation should integrate cultural elements into its integral approach. Holy fathers' address to the members of the pontifical council for culture states that culture embraces all elements of life and that humans can achieve true humanity only by fostering and developing innate characteristics and values. Nature and culture are intertwined wherever humans live²⁹⁰. Forming a religious life is a complex process requiring attention to various aspects. One of the critical aspects is to be aware of the general culture of the candidates while understanding that culture is not limited to just intellectual knowledge. Another important aspect is to know how religions can successfully integrate their beliefs into the culture of their origin and to assist them in doing so. However, this should not be done at the expense of turning the formation process into a laboratory of inculturation.

Those responsible for the guidance of formation must not neglect inculturation as it is essential for the personal education of the candidates in their faith and its integration into their lives. They must understand that the Gospel reveals the ultimate truth of the values contained in a culture, and the culture itself initially expresses the Gospel and reveals new aspects of it (cf. GS 54). In a world where cultures are continually changing, how can we preserve the rich traditions of the past while welcoming new civilisations? This topic becomes increasingly severe as we try to integrate a society moulded by classical studies and varied traditions with one shaped by rapid scientific and technological breakthroughs. *Ad Gentes* and *Gaudium et Spes* believe that

²⁹⁰ Cf. Holy Father John Paul's Address to the members of the Pontifical Council for Culture, "The Church and Culture" (13 January 1983).

the formation process should be organised so the candidates can immerse themselves in the local sociological and cultural surroundings, enabling them to understand their faith and calling freely and openly (cf. AG 26; LG 7, 8).

Cultures and religion have a significant role in shaping an individual's growth. It profoundly impacts a person's overall personality, as the culture of a particular place influences them. As per George Simmel, culture is the process of developing individuals through external forms that have been objectified throughout history²⁹¹. Every culture is unique and has different mentalities and personalities. The social organisation of a culture is designed to divide members into smaller groups to meet the specific requirements of that culture. Social classes are ranked based on the culture's core values, such as money, job, education, family, religion, etc. Customs and traditions are enforced by the culture's ideas of right and wrong, and these rules of behaviour have become part of people's relationships and lives. Symbols are used to convey particular meanings that are recognised by people who share the same culture. Social norms are the rules and expectations that guide the behaviour of society's members²⁹².

In society, two types of norms shape the culture: *mores* and *folkways*. *Mores* are widely observed norms that hold great moral significance, while *folkways* refer to the norms that govern routine and casual interactions. Religion plays a crucial role in people's lives as it answers fundamental questions about the meaning of life and values. By invoking the power of supernatural forces, religion helps individuals to overcome their limitations and strive towards betterment²⁹³. Language is a crucial aspect of communication, providing a system of symbols that enables human interaction. The use of language is vital in a person's education. On the other hand, arts and literature are expressive products of human imagination, including music, literature, dance, and stories. They help develop a person's talents and abilities, whether derived from hereditary factors or acquired through learning and consistent practice.

Culture, like society, has existed since the beginning of humanity (humans being social and cultural). Society and culture co-exist because humans have social relations and meanings tied to those relations (e.g., brother, lover, friend). Culture is a super-phenomenon that has existed for as long as humans (*homo sapiens*) have been around. Therefore, the question of the origins of culture is irrelevant. It has always existed and will continue to exist

²⁹¹ Cf. G. SIMMEL, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, XIX.

²⁹² Cf. J.J. MACIONIS – L.M. GERBER, *Sociology*, Toronto 2011, 53-62.

²⁹³ Cf. G. SUMNER, *Social Darwinism*, New Jersey 1963, 122.

as long as we do. Based on my research from various sources, sociological and cultural formation during the early stages of development is crucial in shaping an individual's personality and determining their destiny. Despite being free to choose, societal and cultural influences often hijack our thought processes and decision-making abilities. One's vocation and perseverance, especially in religious life, can be heavily influenced and determined by the society and culture in which they live.

3. Educative Formation

Education is fundamental to development and growth. The human mind makes possible all development achievements, from health advances and agricultural innovations to efficient public administration and private sector growth. Holistic growth of the person spiritually, intellectually, and in all spheres of one's life happens only through good education. For countries and religions to reap these benefits fully, they need to unleash the human mind's potential. There is no better tool for doing so than education. First, foundational skills acquired early in childhood make possible a lifetime of learning. The traditional view of education as starting primary school takes up the challenge too late. The science of brain development shows that learning needs to be encouraged early and often, both inside and outside the formal schooling system. Prenatal health and early childhood development programs that include education and health are important to realise this potential. In the primary years, quality teaching is essential to give students the foundational literacy and numeracy on which lifelong learning depends. The concept of God and awe towards the supreme reality is sowed in the heart of the youngsters through education and proper accompaniment by parents, teachers, and peer groups. Adolescence is also a period of high potential for learning, but many teenagers leave school at this point, lured by the prospect of a job, the need to help their families, or turned away by the cost of schooling. Education investments must focus on quality and opportunity, with learning gains as the critical quality metric.

Education is the most vital institution in the social world, with economic, political, religious, and other elements as its component elements. An essential component of society's education is related to other institutions, including the religious and political systems²⁹⁴. The object of education is to

²⁹⁴ Cf. INDIAN INSTITUTE OF LEGAL STUDIES, "Education as an Aid to Personality Development" [accessed: 01.03.2022], <https://www.iilsindia.com/blogs/education-aid-personality-development/>

awaken and develop in the child those physical, intellectual, spiritual, and moral states required of him by his society and the milieu for which he is specially destined. Education aids in developing a person's personality, including their physical, mental, and emotional constitution, as well as their temperament and character. The education process assists the individual in becoming the sort of person who can stand on his own feet and make his own decisions. He acquires it by taking responsibility for others and bringing his individuality to the projects he must undertake in school and college life. Modern education methods pay great attention to this way of learning. A learner's personality is also developed indirectly when encouraged to form his attitudes and values by studying outstanding people in history, religions, and literature²⁹⁵. Moreover, the learner develops relations with God, men, and nature, influencing their outlook and attitude.

The Church respects and encourages education to all, especially as young, so they can grow responsible and intelligent to cope with the needs of society. Since they possess the dignity of a human being, men of every race, condition, and age have an inalienable right to an education that is consistent with their goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, as well as in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the promotion of genuine unity and peace on earth. Proper education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member and, in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share. Education helps people get closer to religion and God. Therefore, an invisible power always helps them in their daily strife. "Children and young people have a right to be motivated to appraise moral values with a right conscience, to embrace them with a personal adherence, together with a deeper knowledge and love of God" (*GE* 1). Parents are responsible for giving their children a good education so they can mature. Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most solemn obligation to educate their offspring and must be recognised as the primary and principal educators (cf. *DIM* 43)²⁹⁶. The role of education is crucial, and it can be challenging to provide it to those who lack it. Parents are responsible for creating a family environment that promotes love and respect for God and humanity. This nurturing atmosphere is essential for fostering children's overall personal and social growth.

²⁹⁵ Cf. INDIAN INSTITUTE OF LEGAL STUDIES, "Education as an Aid to Personality Development"

²⁹⁶ *Divini Illius Magistri (DIM)*, Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Christian Education (1 December 1929).

The family has the primary duty of imparting education, but they need the entire community's help. Civil society also has certain rights and duties to promote youth education and direct what is required for the common good. The role of civil society is to protect the rights and duties of parents and other members of society who share in education and provide them with aid when their own efforts are not sufficient, always respecting the principle of subsidiarity. Additionally, civil society should build schools and institutions to meet the reasonable everyday demands of the community (cf. *DIM* 44).

The Christian religion gives much importance to formal education. It has made available circumstances for the young and the youth to acquire knowledge for the development of the person and the nation. At the root of Catholic education is our Christian spiritual heritage, part of a constant dialogue with the cultural heritage and the conquests of science — Catholic educational communities where learning thrives on integrating research, thinking and life experience²⁹⁷. Through educational institutions, Catholics promote human values and authentic life so that the future generation is the hope of the family and the nation. Education at the earlier stage becomes the basis and foundation for the individual personality and future destiny.

Education in the early stages of life should instil respect for individual dignity and uniqueness. It should allow young people to explore and develop their abilities and talents. Early education should enable the youth to grow balanced across all areas of life, including cognitive, affective, social, professional, ethical, and spiritual aspects, which will help them become responsible and well-rounded citizens. Education must incorporate human and moral values, opening the individual to a broader perspective on life. Education encourages students to develop their talents in cooperation and solidarity. Early education aims to shape individuals into more humane and friendly people. Through early formal and informal education, individuals develop an open-minded and open-hearted approach to life, predisposing them to respect diverse ideas, engage in dialogue, and work collaboratively in a spirit of freedom and care²⁹⁸.

Students are more motivated to learn when they see the positive impact their schooling will have on their lives and the world at large. Therefore, parents, religious leaders, and educators are responsible for ensuring that their children are given opportunities to consider the relevance of their

²⁹⁷ Cf. CCE, *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion, Instrumentum laboris*, (2014), 2.

²⁹⁸ Cf. CCE, *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion*, 1.

studies to real-world issues. As a result, kids will better understand how their classroom knowledge applies to the real world and grow into responsible, engaged citizens. Faith in a higher power and the advice it can provide contribute to an individual's well-being. Diversity in all its forms — psychological, social, cultural, and religious — should not be shunned but celebrated. Students must learn to accept and celebrate differences while advocating for solidarity and collaboration across cultures. Those who are “in more difficulties,” “those who are poorer,” “those who are more vulnerable”, or “those who are more in need” should not be viewed as a burden or hindrance but as the most important persons, who should be at the centre of our attention and worries²⁹⁹.

Education requires a strong alliance between parents and educators to present a life that is good, rich in meaning, and open to God and others as well as the world; this alliance is even more necessary since education is a personal relationship. The journey reveals the supernatural elements of faith, family, Church, and ethics, highlighting their communal character. Education brings forth fanatic religious persons and patriots with love for all and lives for all. Education is not just knowledge but also experience that links knowledge and action; it works to achieve unity amongst different forms of knowledge and pursues consistency. It encompasses the affective and emotional domains and is endowed with an ethical dimension: knowing how to do things and what we want to do, daring to change society and the world, and serving the community. Education is based on participation, shared intelligence, and intelligence interdependence; dialogue, self-giving, example, cooperation and reciprocity are also equally essential elements³⁰⁰. The Church continually looks at education as the basis of human formation and the origin of all positive social communication. Church believes that in God's ultimate creation, human beings must undergo good educational shape to maintain and use God's creation in the best manner possible. Education entails gaining practical experience that bridges the gap between academic knowledge and its practical application. It seeks to build consistency and harmony among many forms of knowledge. In addition to addressing the cognitive domain, education also addresses the emotional and ethical dimensions. It teaches us how to complete duties properly and how to strive to have a beneficial effect on society and the planet. It also emphasises the significance of community service³⁰¹. Education has been repeatedly emphasized

²⁹⁹ CCE, *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion*, 5.

³⁰⁰ Cf. CCE, *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion*, 6.

³⁰¹ Cf. CCE, *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion*, 7.

by the Magisterium in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. It is considered a crucial aspect of today's educational emergency and has called upon the Christian community, families, and institutions to play their respective roles in this regard. Education centres and families must foster dialogue, mutual enrichment, and an inclusive living environment, with a focus on the common good. A holistic approach to education should be adopted at the earlier stages to enable the new generation to practice inclusiveness and openness without any external pressures and to respect the dignity of every human being. Additionally, it is necessary to respond to the needs of the economy and society.

On the other hand, we must also offer a holistic formation, developing a whole range of skills that enrich human beings: their imagination, their capacity to assume responsibility and to love the world; their ability to promote justice and compassion, and their capacity to design goals that can change the future. Within such a rapidly changing society, holistic education means reflecting continuously on how to renew this society, making it richer in quality, humanity, and mercy. Respecting others' ideas and being open to dialogue help develop a genuine capacity for discussion and cooperation in service to one's neighbour. This means investing not only in skills but also in human qualities.

Learning is not merely the assimilation of facts but offers various opportunities for self-education and dedication to self-improvement. This way, creativity is developed, and a desire for innovation within service learning is born. It should encourage dialogue, even when schools and universities start to feel the heavy burdens of spiritual poverty, self-referential exclusiveness, the harmful spread of ideological viewpoints, and an inevitable lowering of the general level of culture³⁰².

Youngsters develop religious affinity and interest through effective education in their families, schools, and catechetical centres. This approach lays a foundation of solid beliefs and deep faith in the younger generation. Commitment and fidelity can only be achieved through education. Notably, religiosity and spirituality profoundly impact the well-being of the individual and society.

³⁰² CCE, "World Congress: Educating Today and Tomorrow", 2.

4. Religious Formation

Young adulthood is amid a demographic revolution in all spheres of their life. Earlier religious beliefs and behaviour are fundamental in shaping their destiny and future. The role of religion in the post-teenage years, when youth are laying the foundations for their subsequent adult lives, is detrimental to their character and behaviour. Freedom to believe or not to believe is a fundamental right in many countries, and authorities must act in any manner to support and encourage the free transfer of faith and belief systems to their citizens. Religious communities enjoy the legal and administrative freedom to select, train, appoint, and transfer their ministers without government interference. They also could freely contact with foreign religious authorities and groups, create religious structures, and acquire and employ acceptable assets or property (cf. *DH* 4)³⁰³. The religious acts whereby men, private and public and out of a sense of personal conviction, direct their lives to God transcend the order of terrestrial and temporal affairs by their very nature.

Christian religion always prioritises its believers in education so they may give importance to values and moral principles in their society. Catechetical instructions from different religions make believers more lovable and attentive towards fellow beings and nature. Since all Christians have become new creatures through the rebirth of water and the Holy Spirit so that they should be called children of God, they have a right to Christian education³⁰⁴. A Christian education does not merely strive for the maturing of a human person as just now described, but has as its principal purpose this goal: that the baptized, while they are gradually introduced the knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become ever more aware of the gift of faith they have received, and that they learn in addition how to worship God the Father in spirit and truth (cf. Jn 4:23) especially in liturgical action, and be conformed in their personal lives according to the new man created in justice and holiness of truth (cf. Eph 4:22-24); also that they develop into perfect manhood, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph 4:13) and strive for the growth of the Mystical Body; moreover, that aware of their calling, they learn not only how to bear witness to the hope that is in them (cf. 1Pe 3:15) but also how to help in the Christian formation of the world that takes place when natural powers viewed in the full consideration of man redeemed by Christ contribute to the good of the whole society (cf. *LG* 36).

³⁰³ *Dignitatis Humanae (DH)*, Declaration on Religious Freedom by Pope Paul VI (7 December 1965).

³⁰⁴ Cf. J. ROSAMMA, "Formation to Emotional Maturity", *Kristu Jyoti* 24/1 (2008) 35.

All the councils and synods in the Catholic Church recall to pastors of souls their most solemn obligation to see that all the faithful, especially the youth who are the hope of the Church, enjoy this Christian education (cf. AA 12)³⁰⁵. The family is often regarded as the first and foremost institution that teaches social and moral values to its members. It is where siblings learn to cultivate strong relationships with one another and where religious beliefs and practices are passed down³⁰⁶. These positive influences can significantly benefit individuals throughout their lives.

Hence, the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs. It is mainly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and office of the sacrament of matrimony, that children should be taught from their early years to know God according to the faith received in Baptism, to worship Him, and to love their neighbour. They also find their first experience of a healthy human society and the Church. Finally, it is through the family that they are gradually led to companionship with their fellowmen and the people of God. Let parents, then, recognise the inestimable importance a truly Christian family has for the life and progress of God's people (*GEd 2*)³⁰⁷.

The Church carries the moral obligation to tend to the spiritual needs of its followers. It helps believers find a place in their hearts for God and their fellow beings. Moreover, the Church has a unique responsibility to educate, not only because it is recognised as a human society capable of educating but mainly because it is responsible for proclaiming the way of salvation to all people, communicating the life of Christ to those who believe, and, in its unfailing care, assisting individuals in achieving the fullness of this life (cf. *GEd 3*; *DIM 1*).

The Church is like a mother, imparts fundamental human values and opens the ground for universal love, which will help humanity to live in brotherhood and cooperation. "The Church is bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ and at the same time do all she can to promote for all peoples the complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human"³⁰⁸. Through

³⁰⁵ *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA), Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity by Pope Paul VI (18 November 1965).

³⁰⁶ Cf. A. GULLA, *Creating Values in Life*, Mumbai 2022, 35.

³⁰⁷ *Gravissimum Educationis* (*GEd*), Declaration of Vatican Council II on Christian Education (28 October 1965).

³⁰⁸ Cf. POPE PAUL VI'S allocution to the United Nations General Assembly, Oct. 4, 1965: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 6, 1965. The Church praises local, national, and

catechetical instruction, the Church tries to enlighten and strengthen the faith, nourishes life according to the spirit of Christ, leads to intelligent and active participation in the liturgical mystery and motivates apostolic activity. The Church esteems highly and seeks to penetrate and ennoble with her spirit also other aids which belong to the general heritage of man, and which are of significant influence in forming souls and moulding men, such as the media of communication (cf. *IM* 13, 14)³⁰⁹, various groups for mental and physical development, youth associations, and schools.

According to the Universal Law of the Catholic Church, every parish is to be appointed a pastor, and his role begins as stated here: It is your obligation as a pastor to ensure that the entire Bible is preached to everyone in your parish. “Pastors of souls have the duty of arranging everything so that all the faithful have a Catholic education”³¹⁰. To accomplish this, you must ensure that lay members of the Christian community are well-versed in the faith’s basics. This can be accomplished by preaching on Sundays and obligatory holy days and providing catechetical education.

Since proper education must strive for the complete formation of the human person who looks to his or her end as well as to the common good of societies, children and youth are to be nurtured in such a way that they can develop their physical, moral, and intellectual talents harmoniously, acquire a more perfect sense of responsibility and right use of freedom, and are formed to participate actively in social life³¹¹.

In addition, you should support activities that spread the message of the gospel, especially those related to social justice. You are also responsible for ensuring that the children and youth in your parish have access to a Catholic education. With the assistance of your congregation, you should make every effort to reach out to people who have ceased practising their religion or do not proclaim true faith in the gospel message. Pastors ensure that the Most Holy Eucharist is the focal element of parish gatherings. He is responsible for guaranteeing that the Christian faithful are spiritually nourished through

international civic authorities who, conscious of the urgent necessity in these times, expend all their energy so that all peoples may benefit from more education and human culture.

³⁰⁹ *Inter Mirifica (IM)*, Decree on the Media of Social Communications by Pope Paul VI (4 December 1963).

³¹⁰ *CIC* 794§ 2.

³¹¹ *CCC* 795.

the attentive and devout celebration of the sacraments, primarily through the regular receipt of the sacraments of the Most Holy Eucharist and penance³¹². Søren Kierkegaard, a renowned existential philosopher, explores the concept of the religious stage in his book *Either Or*. According to Kierkegaard, an individual's spiritual background or life is the highest plane of existence. He believes that very few people lead a genuinely religious life. His focus is on how to live an authentic religious life while being surrounded by people who are falsely religious. Kierkegaard asserts that one's relationship with God is personal and plays a significant role in the balanced growth of one's personality. In the spiritual stage of one's life, they are ruled by total faith in God. However, one can never be entirely free, leading to boredom, anxiety, and despair. True faith doesn't lead to freedom, but it relieves the psychological effects of human existence. Kierkegaard argues that embracing faith in God is the only way to make life worthwhile, but that faith necessarily involves embracing the absurd. One can have faith in God but cannot believe in God³¹³.

In life, we often encounter struggles such as boredom, anxiety, and despair. In such times, many people turn to God for comfort and strength. While there are ways to alleviate boredom and anxiety, the only way to truly escape despair is to have faith in God. This faith requires intense personal commitment, knowledge, and dedication to ongoing self-analysis. By cultivating this faith, we can strive for a better life in the future. "Faith requires uncertainty, and thus we can have faith in God because God is beyond logic, proof, and reason. There's no rational evidence for God, but this allows people to have faith in him"³¹⁴.

Declaration on religious freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* speaks about the need for liberty, especially in religion. It explains, "This demand for freedom in human society chiefly regards the quest for the values proper to the human spirit. It regards, in the first place, the free exercise of religion in society" (*DH* 1). This freedom means that all individuals are to be protected from coercion by other individuals or social groups and any form of human power. This means that no one should be compelled to act against their beliefs, whether in private or public, alone or in association with others, within

³¹² Cf. *CIC* 528, 1&2.

³¹³ Cf. Søren Kierkegaard explains that the three stages of life's way, or the three spheres of existence, are distinguished: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious: cf. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Soren-Kierkegaard/Stages-on-lifes-way> [accessed: 06.03.2022].

³¹⁴ S. KIERKEGAARD, *Either/or: A Fragment of Life*, 96.

reasonable limits. The freedom to practice religion without restrictions helps individuals mature and positively influences their behaviour. “Religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself” (*PT* 14)³¹⁵. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognised in the constitutional law whereby society is governed, and thus it is to become a civil right.

Human beings are social, and religion becomes a meeting and communication point to achieve humanity’s social nature. “The social nature of man, however, requires that he should give external expression to his internal acts of religion: that he should share with others in religious matters; that he should profess his religion in the community” (*DH* 3). Formation from the religions must create human fraternity and respect for the other which leads to a common brotherhood. Pope Francis calls our attention” “all persons who have faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together so that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings’ brothers and sisters”³¹⁶. Religious formation must lead the person to become a better person, not a fanatic or fundamentalist who destroys the social fabric of the creation of God. God lives through human beings, and if he turns to worse, he loses the rhythm of creation. Belief in God, reverence for God, and convincing all people about the existence of a God who rules this universe are the primary goals of religion. In His infinite prudence, He shaped us and gave us the gift of life so that we could guard it. It’s a blessing that nobody can take away from you or use against you if you don’t like it (cf. *FLC* 43)³¹⁷. Everyone is responsible for protecting life from its inception to its inevitable conclusion. Thus, we strongly oppose everything that threatens human life, including but not limited to genocide, terrorism, mass displacement, organ trafficking, abortion, and euthanasia. We also alter the policies that enable such behaviour³¹⁸.

³¹⁵ *Pacem in Terris* (*PT*), Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty (11 April 1963).

³¹⁶ POPE FRANCIS, A Document on “Human Fraternity”, Apostolic Journey to the United Arab Emirates, United Arab Emirates 2019, p. 2.

³¹⁷ *Fraternal Life in Community* (*FLC*), Document of the Holy See by CICLSAL on Community Life for Religious (February 2, 1994)

³¹⁸ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, A Document on “Human Fraternity”, Apostolic Journey to the United Arab Emirates, United Arab Emirates, p. 3.

Religious education during the early stages of life significantly impacts an individual's intellectual and overall development. Religion is a crucial aspect that garners attention during these formative years. What we observe, hear, and experience in our surroundings leaves a lasting impression on us. Therefore, let our religious education help us better understand God and foster a deep appreciation of God's creations. "Man must meet man, and the nation must meet nation, as brothers and sisters, as children of God. In this mutual understanding and friendship, in this sacred communion, we must also begin to work together to build the common future of humanity"³¹⁹. Having a strong faith passed down from the family can be very helpful for someone who has dedicated themselves to religious life. This faith serves as a foundation for their spiritual journey and helps them stay committed to their vocation. For those who are called to consecrated life, this journey is a continuation and fulfilment of the spiritual path that they have been on since the beginning of their life.

5. Formation and Its Various Levels in Consecrated Life

The formation of candidates, which has as its immediate end that of introducing them to religious life and making them aware of its specific character within the Church, will primarily aim at assisting men and women religious realise their unity of life in Christ through the Spirit, using the harmonious fusion of its spiritual, apostolic, doctrinal, and practical elements (cf. *PC* 18). Whenever we speak about religious life, we cannot but talk about formation because the formation of the members is the prime concern of every religious institute. The formation of candidates, which has as its immediate end that of introducing them to religious life³²⁰ and making them aware of its specific character within the Church, will primarily aim at assisting men and women religious realise their unity of life in Christ through the Spirit, using the harmonious fusion of its spiritual, apostolic, doctrinal, and practical elements (cf. *DFRI* 1)³²¹. Since our life is amid the world, every action reproduces reactions in religious life. Every global problem influences the Church at large and the consecrated life in a particular manner. Formation must be all-inclusive so that its fruit can withstand the world's hardships. Formation as

³¹⁹ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Message for the World Day of Peace Celebration*, Rome 2014. 3.

³²⁰ Cf. A. MALAVIARATCHI, *Initiation into the Religious Life*, Bangalore 1998, 97.

³²¹ *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes (DFRI)*, Document from CICLSAL (February 2, 1990).

a process of transformation will bear fruit only if it is animated by a profound spiritual renewal which brings joy and enthusiasm to the candidate³²².

All the consecrated persons are called to become prophetic witnesses to the joy of the Gospel; then, their formation should lead them to encounter their faithful master Jesus and experience the joy of it faithfully till the end of their life. This encounter should transform them into enlightened witnesses of new life and empower them to communicate this joy (cf. *EG* 1)³²³. Initially, this was the experience of the beloved disciple of Jesus that he could authentically proclaim: “The life made it known, we have seen eternal life, and we bear witness, and we are telling you of it. It was with the father, and he made himself known to us. So, we tell you what we have seen and heard that you may be in fellowship with us, with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. And we write this that you may have perfect joy” (1Jn 1:3-4). The formation is a process that enables the applicant to comprehend and love the master who called them and to undergo a similar transformation in their life and purpose (cf. *VC* 66). In the Johannine version of the Gospel, John (the son of Zebedee) becomes one of the “beloved disciples” by remaining with Jesus and creating room in his life for the master. The formation should serve as a way of self-emptying and transformation. Any religious experience should aim to instil a real thirst for knowledge, and the formation process should facilitate this.

5.1 The Human Dimension of Jesus’ Formation

Human formation is the basis and ground for all the other dimensions of formation. This essential dimension helps the candidate to come to terms with nature and grace. Formation in human maturity helps candidates rise above their imperfections and look at the world positively with hope and confidence. Pope John Paul II, in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, indicates that future priests must be balanced, strong, accessible, and capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities³²⁴. This specific call is applied to all consecrated persons whose formation should have the human side because they live and work among the people in the society.

³²² Cf. R. PERINO, *Call to Holiness*, Mumbai 1987, 27.

³²³ “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness”.

³²⁴ Cf. L. PINTO, “Priestly and Religious Formation”, *Asian Journal for Vocation and Formation* 30/1 (2011) 34.

Jesus sought to impart human formation to His disciples by giving importance to living by faith in everyday situations. Jesus was very concerned about their growth as an integrated people and wanted to focus on God's kingdom. They were confused, surprised, disappointed, defeated, disillusioned, and empowered often while they were with Jesus. These were genuinely human reactions to what affected them when they lived by faith³²⁵. They were confused because they could not fully grasp the implications of God's kingdom and its values. Very often, they were surprised by Jesus with his superbly practical ways of impressing upon them the kingdom values through parables and stories. Sometimes, they were disappointed with Jesus when he refused to change his vision according to their petty human desires, mainly regarding power and position. They felt defeated by the power of evil in the world whenever they tried to gain popularity, avoid pain, and embrace pleasures.

The power of God working in and through them made it impossible for them to adopt the ways and values of the world. They were utterly disillusioned with the new ideals of the kingdom. The dreams of a political Messiah they had so fondly cultivated ended abruptly at Jesus' death. It is in this brokenness that Jesus chose to empower them. He commissioned them to bring his Good News to the ends of the earth, knowing fully well that they would lay down their lives for the cause. Despite all their human frailty and failures, Jesus gave up on them. He imparted his personal touch to them without being biased by their background or capabilities. In three years, he developed their human potential and made them faithful and enduring messengers of the kingdom³²⁶.

Jesus comprehended the significance of embracing one's humanity without exception. He imparted the ability to reason during nerve-racking circumstances and equipped them with the necessary tools to make wise decisions (cf. Mk 9:18-19). In addition to urging them to accept their humanness, he instilled in them a desire to acquire knowledge and wisdom by encouraging them to develop their mental faculties.

5.1.1 Intellectual Dimension of Jesus' Formation

Jesus chose ordinary people with faults and failures to be messengers of the kingdom. The disciples he chose were not scholars or rabbis but simple

³²⁵ Cf. A. KOTTANALLOOR, *Consecrated Life: A Guide for Formators*, Cochin 2018, 240.

³²⁶ Cf. J. THOMAS, "Becoming Fishers of People: Christological Foundations of Formation", *Asian Journal of Vocation and Formation* 44/1 (2019) 44.

individuals with no extraordinary skills or knowledge. However, God selects ordinary people and uses them in an extraordinary way to carry out His exceptional plan. It was a challenging task to train them intellectually. Jesus wanted his messengers to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (cf. Mt 10:16) as he sent them out like sheep into the midst of wolves. Through the parables, stories, and teachings of Jesus, the disciples gained enlightenment. Whenever they did not understand the parables, Jesus explained them in private (cf. Mt 13:11). Jesus used Old Testament events and current scenes from daily life to instruct his disciples. He implored for their hearing and understanding (cf. Mt 15:10). However, he did not compel anyone to acquire information or comprehension (cf. Mt 11:15). He would advise them to observe the times and learn from their findings (cf. Lk 12:56). They were encouraged to use their intelligence (cf. Mt 21:28) and make prudent choices (cf. Jn 5:6). Jesus would debate with people and invariably amaze them with his wisdom (cf. Mt 23:46). Jesus knew how hard it was to teach them. Explaining the divine pedagogy, he would tell them that God teaches as much as they can learn and not more than that (cf. Mk 10:5).

The people who followed Jesus would mature in their understanding and morality. Jesus showed them the way by his actions. It was their accessibility, rather than their competence that he emphasised. Jesus focused on their attitudes, not so much on their positions. He counted on their loyalty and not so much on their intellectual capacity. Jesus knew that he had to train them psychologically as well³²⁷.

5.1.2 The Psychological Dimension of Jesus's Formation

Jesus is the greatest psychologist the world has ever seen. He knew how human minds worked and could see things beyond the realm of the mind. His healing miracles were holistic, consisting of body, mind, and soul. Jesus healed the mind to effect a cure on the body because many of the sicknesses of the people who approached Jesus was psychosomatic (cf. Mk 2:5). When he selected disciples, he looked beyond what met the eyes. He knew that he could strengthen their minds and transform ordinary men into evangelists, preachers, teachers, pillars of the Church, and even martyrs. Jesus opened their minds to know there is more to this world than just living daily. He taught them that his family is larger than the holy family of Nazareth (cf. Mk 3:35), that he had to be busy in his father's house (cf. Lk 2:49), that

³²⁷ Cf. J. THOMAS. "Becoming Fishers of People: Christological Foundations of Formation", 45.

Jesus had food to eat, that the disciples knew nothing about (cf. Jn 4:32), that Jesus had a mission to accomplish (cf. Lk 4:21), that they had to set their minds on divine things (cf. Mt 17:23), that he would be killed (cf. Mk 9:31). Jesus inspired them to think about themselves before they judged others (Jn 8:7). As he imparted psychological training, Jesus also showed a heroic way of being spiritual in relationships.

5.1.3 *The Spiritual Dimension of Jesus's Formation*

Christian spirituality is a life of Christ-centeredness and spirit-centeredness that energises men and women to realise the reality of God's kingdom, liberating, transforming, saving, and humanising³²⁸. Our spirituality is the reflection of the relationship of Jesus with his Father and people. Jesus had unbroken and intimate communion with his Father. Before every significant event, he spent time in prayer. Before Jesus began his public ministry, Jesus spent forty days in prayer in the desert. Before he chose the apostles, he spent the night in prayer. Before the crucial moments of the crucifixion, he sweated blood in Gethsemane. For Jesus, prayer is a means to experience God's power and its results in the lives of others. He wanted his disciples to be 'other-centred'. He chose to confront the conventional styles of spirituality that sought to sell God and appease human greed. He focused on the widow's mite (cf. Lk 21:3) and the withered hand (cf. Mk 3:3) and initiated a cleanliness drive of God's temple (cf. Mt 21:12). Wrong spirituality turns God's house into a den of robbers. Jesus wanted his disciples to walk away from illusions and feel genuine intimacy with God. He taught them how ineffective they would be without natural prayer life (cf. Mk 9:29). He spiritually trained them in the school of life's real situations. He taught them that the biological effect of prayer is seen in the harmonious relationship with all. Our communion with God must inspire us to be at the service of the people. He chose the disciples 'to be with him and sent out.' The 'sending out' part of the mission reveals the pastoral dimension of the formation process Jesus imparted to his disciples³²⁹. The spiritual development of Jesus was a complex and multidimensional process that included his Jewish upbringing, prayer practice, connection to God, teachings, moral growth, and mission to rescue humanity. His journey culminated with his crucifixion and

³²⁸ Cf. V. IMMANUEL, "Spirituality of Diocesan Priests", *Asian Journal of Vocation and Formation* 33/2 (1999) 44.

³²⁹ Cf. J. THOMAS, "Becoming Fishers of People: Christological Foundations of Formation", 47.

resurrection, which is often seen as the ultimate expression of his spiritual formation. By willingly enduring suffering, he sought to bring about the salvation of humanity.

5.1.4 The Pastoral Dimension of Jesus's Formation

Jesus' life and ministry centred on shepherding and caring for people, both physically and spiritually, and this is what we mean when we talk about the pastoral dimension of his formation. This aspect of Jesus' character and mission is essential because it highlights his role as the Good Shepherd and his concern for humanity. Jesus aimed to equip his disciples to serve alongside him and his fellow followers as his primary objective. To become efficient in pastoral ministry, one must understand the local geography and culture well. The future clergy will be expected to work not only within a Christian community but also with other non-Christian groups. This pastoral side of formation was taken seriously by Jesus while he trained the disciples³³⁰. Jesus was an outdoorsman who cherished spending quality time with people. He valued teamwork and cooperated with humans in choosing his mission. He loved everyone who joined him on his field trips, announcing good news as he travelled through cities and villages with men and women (cf. Lk 8:1-2). Jesus considered the importance of family life, beginning his ministry with a wedding scene in Cana. He taught his disciples pastoral ministry by taking them with him on his travels, sharing stories, miracles, and instructions. Jesus sent them to villages to spread the good news, cure diseases, and announce the arrival of God's kingdom (Lk 9:6). The disciples witnessed his miracles and often played an active role in them. When Jesus sent out the disciples, he paired them up (cf. Lk 10:1).

Jesus instructed his disciples to trust in providence of God and spend their time visiting villages, communities, and families. When they returned from their visits full of enthusiasm, Jesus reminded them that their happiness should not be based on their ability to perform miracles but on the fact that their names were recorded in the book of life. Jesus believed connecting with people was crucial, so he made himself approachable. He encouraged his followers to set an example of honesty and loyalty to God, their Father. Using the powerful image of the Good Shepherd, who sacrificed his life for the sheep, Jesus called on his disciples to dedicate their lives to helping others. Jesus's example of doing what he preached inspired his followers to follow

³³⁰ Cf. J. REAPSOME, *Ten Minutes a Day with Jesus*, Mumbai 2010, 22.

in his footsteps. Jesus promoted preferential options for the poor by leaving the ninety-nine sheep to search for the one straying sheep (cf. Lk 15:3).

He did not discriminate against anyone based on their wealth, gender, ethnicity, or profession. Jesus' inclusive ministry encouraged his disciples to move from the centre to the margins, leaving their comfort zones. Jesus was the central figure in the training and formation of religious leaders. He used various effective training methods to shape his followers into competent messengers of the Good News.

5.1.5 Jesus: the Model Formator of His Messengers

Jesus was a model formator who transformed ordinary men into extraordinary ambassadors of his kingdom and its message. He welcomed those who answered his call to follow him and gradually moulded them into disciples. He put them through an intense formation experience by transforming their attitudes, belief systems, mindsets, and behaviour patterns. We see him accompanying them in their journey and empowering them with his words and deeds. He challenged them to live according to the kingdom's values of justice, love, service, peace, and reconciliation. Having been exposed to the social, political, and religious realities of their time, the people of that era developed a robust ability to resist worldly temptations. Jesus teaches us that we do not have a right to claim a religious vocation or priesthood. Instead, it is a gracious gift from God, as he said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you (Jn 15:16)." What I find remarkable about Jesus' calling is that he enters people's lives and invites them to follow Him. The first disciples were called from the shore of the sea of Galilee (cf. Mt 4:18). He called with such urgency that it demanded immediate and unconditional response and acceptance. They had to leave their profession, home, and possessions and follow him right then and there (cf. Mt 4:20). He made no rosy promises to allure people to follow him. Jesus wanted them to 'fish' for people, and they were 'fishing' for things instead of people³³¹.

Jesus made it very clear to the "would-be disciples" that he had nowhere to lay his head, while foxes and birds had their places (cf. Mt 8:20). Jesus was a model formator who taught them to reject worldly ambitions for power, position, or possessions through his style of life. Jesus saw the possibilities in people, ignoring who they were but focusing on what they could be. The kindness of Jesus is evident in his calling of Matthew, the tax

³³¹ Cf. J. THOMAS, "Becoming Fishers of People: Christological Foundations of Formation", 49.

collector, and Judas, the would-be traitor. He placed complete trust in their fundamental goodness and potential. While talking to Nathanael, Jesus said, “Here is genuinely an Israelite in whom there is no deceit” (Jn 1:47). To become one of Jesus’ disciples, one must have personal experience with him, as he said to Andrew and another disciple, “Come and see” (Jn 1:39). Jesus changed Simon’s name to Cephas, or Peter, and chose him to play a significant role in the kingdom, despite his many shortcomings.

Over the centuries, various styles and formation models have been tried at different levels. However, the most essential style to be shared with followers is “Jesus’ style” of formation, which is holistic. In today’s world, teaching candidates about real prayer life and intimacy with God, the author of our life and vocation, is crucial³³². Unfortunately, influenced by the modern world’s tendencies and a wrong understanding of religion and spirituality, candidates may fall into mediocrity and atheism. Therefore, the formation must develop in candidates the eagerness to draw and drink from the spiritual well of Jesus and train them to handle life’s situations practically³³³. Jesus is considered the archetype and mentor of his messengers in Christianity because of his exemplary life, teachings, and deeds. Influenced by his example, his followers carried on his mission by spreading his message of love, redemption, and hope worldwide. This tradition of Jesus as the ultimate model continues to inform the beliefs and practices of Christians and their leaders today.

5.2 *Initial Formation*

Jesus formed his disciples by inviting them to follow him and then sending them out to preach the gospel and cast out demons in his name (cf. Mk 3:14). They travelled together to various places to proclaim the Good News (cf. Lk 10:1; Mk 6:7). By being a part of Jesus’ public life, witnessing his suffering and death on the cross, and experiencing his invisible presence as the Risen Lord while being sent on missions throughout the world, the disciples came to understand God’s love for them and for all of humanity.

The early Church endured difficult times of persecution by walking in the Spirit that the Lord had sent to them as the protagonist of every charism and creativity in the Church. Those who enter religious life have experienced a

³³² Cf. L.L. GRAYBEAL, – J.L. ROLLER, *Learning from Jesus: A Spiritual Formation Guide*, Texas 2006, 103.

³³³ Cf. A. CENCINI, *Psychology and Formation. Structure and Dynamics*, Bombay 1985, 66.

divine call that leads to a path of following Jesus more radically. Being with Jesus and being sent out on a mission are the two essential poles of vocation to consecrated life³³⁴. The three pillars of missionary life — prayer, study, and apostolic work — need to be carefully cultivated in the formation processes as mutually enriching sources of our religious vocation and vitality.

In our changed context, formation needs to train the missionaries to care for the gift of their vocation, support one another to persevere in fidelity and be audacious in proclaiming the joy of the Gospel to our fellow humans in a credible way. On our part, the openness of the heart, the head, and the hands for the work of the Spirit is the key to unlocking our treasures and sharing them with others in the community and ministry³³⁵.

Religious life formation is an undivided process of progressive conformity with Christ and joyful sharing in his mission, a journey of life that lasts until a consecrated person's last breath. For clarity, we may divide the formation period into two main parts, and each element is further divided into progressive stages. Thus, the first part of initial formation consists of pre-novitiate, novitiate, and post-novitiate stages. In contrast, the second part is an ongoing formation that includes quinquennium, middle age, third age, and even a fourth age for those gifted with longevity. Initial formation is for laying a solid foundation for the continued journey towards greater integrity of missionary life, characterised by responsibility, accountability, and transparency³³⁶. While an exemplary process of initial formation prepares young religious to commit themselves to different pastoral avenues and service positions in the future, a culture of integrity and excellence in the phase of ongoing formation, in turn, acts as a catalyst for the transformative dynamism of initial formation.

What is happening in the life of a religious person through the programmes presented at each stage, and how the religious person incorporates them into their life project, is the emphasis of transformative formation. Essential facets of religious formation include what is taught, how it is taught, how it is applied in real life and the operation of grace inside the individual. In the long run, the person's holiness matters because God calls each one to holiness (cf. *LG* 10). The purity of life is “nothing other than charity lived to the

³³⁴ Cf. F. JOSE, *Renewed Vision for Consecrated Life. Mystics, Prophets and Jesus Christ*, New Delhi 2016, 110.

³³⁵ *General Plan of Formation (GPF)*, Detailed Formation Programme of the Claretian Missionaries, Rome 2020, n. 9.

³³⁶ Cf. P. MOLINARI, *Formation to the Religious Life. Initial and Continual Renewal*, Kampala 2006, 78.

full”³³⁷. The transformation process involves a candidate moving from a self-centred perspective to a Christ-centred one, achieved through inclusion and transcendence, resulting in wholeness and holiness.

The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in working alongside the individual. Throughout the journey, the individual must become increasingly aware of their reality and the gifts they have received from God. They must also confront and come to terms with their past to develop their human and spiritual potential (cf. *GF* 26). The complete development of a candidate includes a balanced growth of all aspects of their personality. The formation process should also focus on practical skills, such as sharing the Gospel through their actions. An effective formation program must encourage age-appropriate behaviour, including sincerity, communication skills, emotional development, community living, friendship, responsibility, creativity, initiative, freedom, and a willingness to pray and intimacy with Christ³³⁸. Let us see the different stages and areas in the initial formation³³⁹.

5.2.1 Aspirancy

Religious institutes use the aspirancy stage of formation to guide potential candidates in their discernment process. Signs must be discernible through their essential capability to live a life of faith, religious sensibility, and an initial will to follow Christ in the institute. At this stage, the human dimension of development is essential to offer them tools for the harmonious development of their physical, psycho-emotional, intellectual, and moral conditions corresponding to their age³⁴⁰.

In the *Christian dimension*, formation helps the aspirant to strengthen the gift of faith received in baptism, consolidating its theoretical and experiential Christian formation so that the aspirant is disposed to understand and respond to God’s call. *Human Dimension* in aspirancy offers an opportunity to gain a good knowledge of himself and his family history to live in the

³³⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *General Audience* on 13 April 2011 [accessed: 12.05.2040], https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20110413.html

³³⁸ Cf. I. MABHEKA, *Ministerial Journey, Unveiling the Joys and Challenges of Religious Life Today*, Mumbai 2011, 92.

³³⁹ My research into Church Law, Magisterial doctrines, and formational programmes has prepared me to outline the stages of formation. Because of its comprehensive and balanced development style, I have also used the Claretian missionaries’ “General Plan of Formation” as a foundation for developing this theme.

³⁴⁰ Cf. *GPF* 312.

community flexibly and guarantee perseverance in his vocation. This stage places essential input on order, discipline, civility, openness to dialogue, solidarity, co-responsibility, and a spirit of service³⁴¹. Formative structures at this stage try to create a community that encourages brotherhood, honesty, and accountability. Formators want to help aspirants learn to responsibly manage their developing emotions and sexuality with the guidance of experts. Considering the aspirant's situation and background, formators will provide a solid intellectual foundation to achieve this goal³⁴².

In the *Christian Dimension*, adequate and solid formation is given to the aspirant to live his Christian faith on a deep and personal level and will lead him to an experience of encounter with God. This will enhance the aspirant to value the experience of faith that has moved him to explore a missionary vocation while respecting other Christian and non-Christian faith communities. Formation at this stage fosters the understanding of prayer and holiness in aspirants through assiduous contact with the Word of God, liturgical initiation, and other practices of piety. Formators are called to encourage the aspirant to progressively practice and live the sacraments of the eucharist and reconciliation. It implants in the aspirants the practice of spiritual direction as an indispensable part of this unique way of life and an essential tool of discernment. Formation at this stage initiates the apostolic formation according to the aspirant's maturation process so that he may learn to live his Christian condition as a self-gift to others without seeking prominence³⁴³.

5.2.2 Postulancy

The postulancy stage of formation is immediate preparation for novitiate. It aims to provide the candidates with adequate preparation for their initiation into missionary life³⁴⁴ and to give the institutes the scope to form a well-pondered judgment on the guarantees that the candidates seem to offer. Candidate for postulancy must demonstrate good vocation via his essential personal aptitudes, upright intention, consistent human and Christian behaviour, and eagerness to follow Christ in the community he is already a member. At this stage in the human dimension, the candidate must acquire the degree of

³⁴¹ Cf. P. PUTHANANGADI, *Chosen for the World*, Bangalore 2003, 37.

³⁴² Cf. *GPF* 318.

³⁴³ Cf. *GPF* 319.

³⁴⁴ Cf. *CIC* 597 § 2.

human maturity required to live the novice experience profitably (cf. *PI* 43)³⁴⁵.

In the *Christian dimension*, the candidate is called upon to deepen, doctrinally and experientially, his Christian initiation and the knowledge of his vocation in the Church (cf. *PI* 43). During the human formation stage, the goal is to discover and enhance personal maturity traits that form the foundation for the novitiate experience. Postulants are expected to develop and live out specific faculties like boldness, intelligence, willpower, and sensibility for mature growth and pay close attention to cultivating affective and sexual maturity. Developing the capacity for interpersonal relationships and community life is critical for persevering in the religious vocation. This stage calls for greater introspection and critical thinking skills to help postulants understand themselves, others, and the world around them. Formation at this stage gives importance to the person's personal development through psychological assessment of the candidate through different psychological tools and professional help³⁴⁶. It should also provide mental and bodily health through manual work and sports. Opportunities should be available to the candidate to assume responsibility, creativity, and solidarity. It creates habits of hard work, self-discipline, discernment, constancy of judgment and the ability to make choices in keeping with higher values.

In the *Christian dimension*, the candidate progressively loves and discovers Jesus Christ as a friend and creates the conditions that prepare one for a personal encounter with him. Formation must help the candidate to cultivate a life of prayer, love for the sacraments, evangelical values and the various experiences and callings of the Spirit within one's personal, family, social and ecclesial reality. Eagerness to practice Christian virtues, especially those significantly impacting our vocation: availability for fraternal service, chastity, capacity for self-surrender and sacrifice³⁴⁷. Formation should help the candidate contemplate God in nature, events, and one's life so that there is no dichotomy in living this unique way of life. The relevant authorities must apprise the person in charge of this stage, who must be an experienced religious with adequate psycho-pedagogical and spiritual preparation for this task and aptitudes that enable him/her to connect with young men and women and adequate pastoral experience.

³⁴⁵ *Potissimum Institutioni (PI)* of CICLSAL on Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes (February 2, 1990).

³⁴⁶ CCE, *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for Priesthood*, Rome 2015, 10-15.

³⁴⁷ Cf. *GPF* 333.

5.2.3 *Pre-Novitiate Period*

The general criteria of discernment during the pre-novitiate period allow both the candidates and the religious institutes to verify whether the candidates show any positive signs of a genuine vocation³⁴⁸. The criteria indicated by the Church and the religious institutes: There are specific considerations to consider when pursuing religious life. Firstly, one must have a genuine desire and appropriate vocational motivations and interests. Secondly, it is essential to have the freedom to choose this path and to abide by the legal age requirements of the chosen religious community. Thirdly, one should possess the right temperament, character, and personality to live in a community, work in a team, and serve others. Fourthly, to live a religious life and fulfil the mission of the Church, one must possess good physical and mental health, sufficient intelligence, maturity, and emotional stability that are appropriate for their age, as well as adequate human, moral, and spiritual qualities (cf. *RFIS* 19). and lastly, in the strict sense, the absence of vocational counter-indications and other personality traits that hinder the person from living up to the demands of a religious vocation³⁴⁹. The care and direction we show in selecting and forming candidates “should not be reduced to excluding problematic persons, but rather to guarantee a balanced path of formation for suitable candidates, oriented to holiness, and in which the virtue of chastity is contemplated”³⁵⁰. It is always appropriate and vital to assess the candidate’s familiarity with his or her family, including its members’ physical and mental health, socioeconomic status, interrelationships, lifestyle, religion, and the values transmitted from generation to generation.

5.2.4 *Novitiate*

³⁴⁸ Cf. G. ALONSO, *Claretians in Formation*, Circular Letter on Formation, Rome 1990.

³⁴⁹ Cf. *CIC*, 1983, n. 642; see also *CMF Directory* (2011), n. 175.

³⁵⁰ POPE FRANCIS, “The Protection of Minors in the Church”, Address at the Closing of Congress on Combatting Sexual Abuse (2019) n. 4 [accessed: 10.08.2022] https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/february/documents/papa-francesco_20190224_incontro-protezioneminori-chiusura.html

It is a time of integral initiation into following Christ the evangelizer, according to the charism of the congregations, with a view to incorporation into the congregations through the religious profession (cf. *PI* 45).

It is aimed at enabling the novices to have a better knowledge of the call of God as outlined in the Congregations, to experience its way of life, and to conform their minds and hearts to its evangelising spirit so that they can mature in their fundamental option for Christ and the Congregations, and at the same time test their intention and fitness for it³⁵¹.

Postulants who completed the canonical age are only admitted to novitiate. The human dimension of formation helps the candidate advance in the maturation process that will allow the candidate consciously and freely to make an option for the religious vocation and to assume from the outset the demands that derive from that life. Formation in the *Christian dimension* lays the groundwork for a life of union with Christ who became incarnate of the Virgin Mary through the work of the Holy Spirit.

During the novitiate stage, the human aspect provides a conducive environment for breaking away from one's past lifestyle. This stage is considered a 'desert experience' of silence that fosters a 'new openness' to the values of missionary life. Novitiate provides an opportunity to develop various components of one's personality by critically examining oneself and reality. Novices must cultivate virtues such as hard work, self-respect, respect for others, joy, self-sacrifice, availability, friendliness, simplicity, constancy, steadfastness of will, and keeping one's word. They should also learn to maintain personal dignity in their conduct and speech, essential qualities of a disciple of Christ. Novices must integrate and develop their affectivity and sexuality, giving due attention to the wounds and ruptures of the past that are not yet integrated (cf. *RFIS* 202-204). They must foster a sense of responsibility and freedom in making personal decisions to free their call from all attachments.

At this juncture in one's spiritual development, the Christian dimension places a premium on developing a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ as the focal point of one's spiritual journey. After all, Christ disposes us to do the Father's will and grow submissive to the Holy Spirit. They need to use their spiritual discernment to embrace the gospel's standard of living and internalise its message via Mary's life. The Christian life's biblical, theological, and spiritual underpinnings will help the novices accomplish the tasks of the novice and fulfil their calling. They were to grow deeper in

³⁵¹ *CIC* 646.

personal prayer. A daily celebration of the Eucharist and Liturgy of the Hours and frequent celebrations of Reconciliation³⁵² helps the novices to situate themselves in the journey of following Christ radically and closely. The novitiate must last for a minimum of 12 months; it may last for a maximum of two years³⁵³.

The legal authorities must designate the novice master/mistress as perpetually professed and endowed with the human, religious and apostolic qualities that will allow him/her to accomplish the mission fully. Besides having unified apostolic experience, they should have a great love for the institute, pedagogical aptitudes and the necessary endowments of maturity, kindness, prudence and solid teaching regarding the nature and mission of the institute in the Church³⁵⁴. Due to the great importance of formation and accompaniment in the novitiate, the novice master may devote himself entirely to a task of such great importance; he must be free of all obligations and charges that might prevent him from doing so.

5.2.5 *Post Novitiate Stage*

This stage of student development and consolidation refers to the period from their first profession to the perpetual profession (in the case of brothers) or until ordination (in the case of priests). During this period, candidates experience contrast and realism, often accompanied by crises and difficulties. The proposals presented to individuals during their formative period must closely relate to their natural life process. This will ensure that the temporary vows period becomes a step-by-step itinerary for gradual development and consolidation in their religious life.

When a candidate makes the first profession and subsequent temporary renewals, it is a preparation for making a perpetual profession. If, during the temporary vows period, a candidate realises, after proper discernment, that they are not called to the missionary life, they are free to leave the institute once the time of their profession is completed³⁵⁵. Currently, the main emphasis is on cultivating the human and spiritual principles-based comprehensive maturity necessary for all individuals making decisions. Along with this, we are encouraged to develop a profound spiritual life that ultimately brings us closer to Jesus Christ.

³⁵² Cf. *Constitutions of the Claretian Missionaries (CMFC)*, Rome 1986. n. 61.

³⁵³ Cf. *CIC* 648.

³⁵⁴ Cf. *CMFC* 3.

³⁵⁵ Cf. *CIC* 688 § 1.

Candidate in the human dimension is invited to achieve an adequate personal balance by caring for their physical and mental health and by developing the qualities that contribute to creating an accessible and sturdy personality for the mission: a sense of responsibility and fidelity to the world they have given, a capacity for solitude and silence, self-discipline, austerity and hard work, a spirit of sacrifice, moral rectitude, a power for coping with frustrations and conflicts, as well as a hope-filled vision of reality³⁵⁶. Formation requires internalisation of the process so that the candidate develops a gradual intimacy with God and detachment from anything contrary to the call and the vows.

The goal is for individuals to achieve emotional and sexual maturity by learning how to live with the consequences of choosing to remain celibate in their new lifestyles. They should approach this task with honesty and careful consideration. Additionally, they should focus on building a solid intellectual foundation through personal study habits, utilising effective techniques, and developing cultural sensitivity to better prepare themselves for evangelising missions worldwide.

The post-novitiate formation will help the candidates improve their interpersonal skills, including active listening, generosity, acceptance, appreciation, respect, understanding, and the ability to forgive and console others³⁵⁷. This stage emphasises the importance of language proficiency and encourages the use of critical and responsible communication and information media.

Establishing a personal relationship with God the Father through prayer is a central tenet of the Christian faith today. This connection enriches our lives with significance and helps us make sense of everything, even in the darkest of circumstances. In a world where everything changes, staying close to Christ is more important than ever. Doing so can help one better incorporate the various facets of the formation into a unified whole. One must be receptive to the Holy Spirit's guidance, able to discern events, and willing to act on His inspirations if they are to navigate the trials of life successfully. One of the pivotal points of the formation process is becoming familiar with the Word of God, converting it into daily spiritual nourishment and allowing himself to be questioned³⁵⁸. Encountering Jesus through daily Mass and

³⁵⁶ J. FABER, "Content and Human Development" [accessed: 12.09.2022], [https:// www.theway.org.uk/back/s071Faber.pdf](https://www.theway.org.uk/back/s071Faber.pdf)

³⁵⁷ Cf. *CIC* 43.

³⁵⁸ Cf. *Servants of the Word*, XXI General Chapter Document of the Claretian Missionaries, Rome 1991, n. 21/2.

visits to the Blessed Sacrament is made possible by the eucharistic experience. The Holy Family embarked on an extraordinary faith journey in honour of Mary, the mother of the Church, who was the primary educator of the twelve apostles and the prototypical disciple. During this period, candidates can rely on prayer, study, community life, apostolic experience, and personal accompaniment as their primary energy sources³⁵⁹. Participating in these activities with sincerity, love, and dedication will help the candidate preserve faithfulness and originality in their spiritual journey.

5.2.6 *Perpetual Profession*

A religious in temporary vows is definitively incorporated by perpetual profession into the institute and, in this way, comes to share in its mission among the people of God. The perpetual profession is normally carried out after six months of immediate preparation. During this period, they will intensify their prayer, times of silence, and discernment. They will renew the theoretical and experiential foundations of their religious life. They will evaluate the missionary life in a sharper dialogue with their formator³⁶⁰. It is recommended that the candidates be freed to dedicate themselves to this prolonged period entirely, in the style of a second novitiate³⁶¹. Moral certainty is a must for the candidate to be admitted to the perpetual profession. The requirements of universal law and the particular law of the institutes must be met for the permanent profession to be lawful. Perpetual profession shall be carried out with the desired solemnity and in the presence of the people and due witness³⁶².

5.2.7 *Specific Formation*

While each institute in the Church has a shared vocation and mission, there is also diversity and complementarity in how they carry it out³⁶³. The content of this chapter pertains to the preparation of missionary brothers and missionaries who are called to ordained ministries. It is assumed that the

³⁵⁹ Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Rome 2005, 59.

³⁶⁰ Cf. *CMFC*, n. 71. See also *CMF Directory*, n. 241.

³⁶¹ Second novitiate refers to one to two months of exclusive preparation and prayer.

³⁶² Cf. *Ordo Professionis Religiosorum* of Ordine Ospedaliero Di San Giovanni Di Dio, (1970) n. 5; see also *PI* 56.

³⁶³ Cf. *The Claretians in the Process of Congregational Renewal*, XX General Chapter Document of the Claretian Missionaries (1985) n. 31.

individuals have undergone progressive maturation through various formative stages, fundamental to their service. The individual's freedom and ability are crucial factors in their decision to pursue a vocation. "In the way of living personal vocation and carrying out the mission, we must take into account personal gifts; qualities for exercising a concrete ministry; the needs of the Church, of the Congregation and the world; availability for universal service; the ability to work in collaboration with others"³⁶⁴.

a) Missionary Brothers

To fully embrace their lay vocation, the aspect of forming brothers must be integrated within both initial and ongoing training. Through the process of formation, the trainee seeks to find and point towards God in various secular realities, including culture, science, human health, the professional world, and in the care of the weak and disadvantaged³⁶⁵. To develop and mature their unique calling, the brothers must consider the following aspects of formation. Firstly, a solid humanistic formation will enable them to be in touch with today's culture and sensitive to the world of work, education, economy, art, social communication, and human relations. Secondly, a biblical, theological, and pastoral formation will provide a solid foundation to be faithful and creative in their apostolic mission. Finally, if possible, they should also seek a professional, specialized formation to a degree that would equip them to carry out qualified services in the community and offer a witnessing presence in other temporal situations. All these aspects of formation will help the brothers in formation seek God and point to His fellowship within the context of the secular realities of culture, science, human health and welfare, the world of work, and compassion for the poor and disadvantaged³⁶⁶.

The brothers can be better equipped to face the challenges of their mission and the realities of their respective communities with the help of their sociopolitical formation. A formation that allows him to share in the realities of secular and human life in a search to restore work's dignity and positive value makes him a neighbour to his simplest brothers and sisters and self-identify with Jesus, brother, and worker³⁶⁷. Brothers can exercise various

³⁶⁴ *GPF* 430.

³⁶⁵ Cf. *GPF* 429.

³⁶⁶ Cf. *GPF* 30.

³⁶⁷ Cf. *GPF* 31.

non-ordained ministries proper to their lay condition, non-installed³⁶⁸ or installed³⁶⁹, for which they must receive adequate preparation. To advance to these ministries, the candidate must have reached the age and maturity required for his present formation stage.

b) Missionary Priest

Formation for the priesthood ministry is aimed at preparing candidate to become fitting priests, mainly devoted to the service of the Word, as witnesses and messengers of the joy of the Gospel. From a formational standpoint, this preparation must be made step-by-step and in progression, beginning with ordination and continuing with ordination as a lector and acolyte and reception into the Order of Diaconate³⁷⁰.

A diaconate precedes ordination to the priesthood to allow the recipient to exercise its proper ministry for a prudent period to mature specifically in priestly aspects. In this sense, its aim (spiritual, ascetical, liturgical, and pastoral) is predominantly pedagogical, with a view to priestly ordination. Ordained ministries are a gift of the Spirit for the Church (cf. *PO* 2)³⁷¹, not a right or possession of the one who receives it. Hence, the formation of this ministry must underscore its necessary connection with the Church and its manner of understanding it and living it as a ministry. Through the sacrament of hand imposition, a priest conformed to Christ the Priest for the edification of his body, and the Church participates in the apostolic mission delegated to bishops. Hence, he feels that he is their collaborator, especially in raising and consolidating communities of believers through the ministry of the word in an evangelical and prophetic lifestyle according to the Church's spirit and apostolic fraternity.

The prophetic exercise of the ministry of the Word implies proclaiming the Kingdom in the concrete circumstances of our time, denouncing sin and injustice, and accepting the risks that this entails³⁷². The pastoral care mission of the communities that grew out of the Word reflects Christ the shepherd's example, who came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many, not to

³⁶⁸ Services directly related to the missionary service of the Word: catechesis, liturgical animation, Christian education, teaching the ecclesiastical sciences, coordinating basic Christian communities, and animating associations of Christian and apostolic life.

³⁶⁹ Installed ministries are Lector and Acolyte.

³⁷⁰ Cf. *CIC* 1032 § 2, 1035.

³⁷¹ *Presbyterorum Ordinis (PO)*, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests by Pope Paul VI (7 December 1965).

³⁷² Cf. *CMFC*, 6, 46, 47, 50, 82, 85.

be served (cf. Mk 10:45). The priest represents Christ the sanctifier in the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Confession, in the ministry of worship. When the priestly ministry is lived with honesty, offering bread for the people of God, its intrinsic link with the proclamation of the Word and the Eucharistic Celebration is demonstrated. Priestly duties originate from the Church and draw their significance from the service of the entire world. Therefore, the sacrifice of his life is an offering not only on the altar but also in and for the world. In the exercise of his ministry, he must be mindful of what he does, imitate what he commemorates, and conform his life to the mystery of the Lord's cross³⁷³.

Formation for the priesthood should involve a comprehensive understanding of Christ as a prophet, priest, and shepherd. The candidates should become partakers in his death and life. The candidate must possess a thorough knowledge of the nature of the ministry of the priesthood, as well as its relation to other charisms and ministries. Religious priests should progressively integrate both the ministerial and religious dimensions. This kind of charity leads them to pray daily for the Church and the world, to lay down their life for their brothers and sisters, commit themselves to the poor whom they serve, and be pastorally concerned for the sick and marginalised³⁷⁴. The liturgical and pastoral initiation will allow them to perform their ministerial functions competently and their ministry as service, avoiding clericalism and spiritual worldliness (cf. *GE* 93-97). The purpose of immediate preparation for the order of presbyterate is for the candidate to grow in the attitudes that join him most intimately with Christ, the priest, following his vocation, and always to be willing to act in his name and as a spokesperson of the Church.

5.3 Process of Ongoing Formation

Ongoing formation process is intrinsic to our vocation (cf. *VC* 69). It is an all-embracing process of renewal that covers all aspects of the consecrated persons and the institute as a whole. It reveals the profound nature of our vocation as fidelity to the mission and as a process of continual conversion. Ongoing formation is a lifelong process that has no closing date³⁷⁵. As consecrated individuals dedicated to God and consecrated by Him, our lives are

³⁷³ Cf. *Rite of Orders: Ordination of Priests* by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse, (1968), n. 26.

³⁷⁴ Cf. *Rite of Orders: Ordination of Priests*, n. 83.

³⁷⁵ Cf. *CIC* 661.

a continuous formation process. As disciples, we are always listening and open to the surprises of the Word and the Spirit.

This formation encompasses every aspect of our being and is essential for human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, and charismatic growth (cf. *PI* 66, 68). Ongoing formation is a must for every consecrated person. Through this process, persons achieve personal fulfilment by developing their potential in relationships with other human beings and nature within our shared setting in the history and reality of people. The gift of vocation is dynamic. God continually calls out to us. And in fidelity, we should answer this invitation (cf. *VC* 69-70, *PI* 67). Our vocational charism, the advantages of nature, and the grace we have received are dynamic forces that make us grow as persons and develop our life projects.

The role of the Spirit in our vocation is vital. The Spirit's action demands a continual conversion to give new vigour to the prophetic dimension of our vocation (cf. *SAC* 1). Therefore, we must respond, personally and communally, to our need for ongoing formation, especially at critical moments in our lives, to prepare ourselves adequately to become fitting ministers of the Word. Ongoing formation requires us to pay particular attention to the signs of the Spirit in our time to respond appropriately. It also spurs us to integrate creativity in fidelity (cf. *PI* 67). "Following Christ means setting ourselves on the march, freeing ourselves from sclerosis and atrophy to offer a living and true witness of the Kingdom of God in this world" (*PI* 67).

To maintain an apostolic focus on evangelism as a ministry, we must always endeavour to grow in understanding as part of our continuing formation. To reach spiritual maturity and complete the work we have been called to, we must also remember the importance of being open to the Spirit's transforming work. In order, then, to live and be faithful witnesses of the reign of God, we acknowledge the need for the renewing action of the Spirit in our lives in such a way that the Spirit of the Risen Lord may, through ongoing formation, continue to restore the joy of our youth³⁷⁶. Renewal of the persons through ongoing construction helps the community and the mission to vigour the spirit and dynamism of Christ. To achieve perfect loyalty to God and us, we must be both a community that has been evangelised and one that actively spreads the gospel. Ongoing formation is not just for us alone. We need to attend to the signs of our time and adapt to new situations as they arise to help us, as missionaries, tackle the ever-new urgencies of evangelisation. "We must keep in step with history," (*PDV* 70) so we are all

³⁷⁶ Cf. K. O'SULLIVAN, "Collect for the Third Sunday of Easter" [accessed: 11.11.2022], <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/calendar/day.cfm>

called to live a solidly rooted spirituality capable of assimilating changes and developments in the world and the Church in continual obedience to the Spirit. We need to acquire a deep and living knowledge of the human and religious situation of the people and the world we intend to evangelise.

Adapting to the world's new reality, the Church, and the institute is a crucial task for consecrated individuals. They must devote themselves wholeheartedly and methodically to ongoing education to meet the day's demands. This education involves deepening their understanding of the Scriptures, refreshing their theological and pastoral knowledge, familiarising themselves with their time's philosophical thought and ideologies, and situating themselves effectively in the various realities in which they must exercise their apostolic ministry. Consecrated people must draw nearer to God, deepen their understanding of Him, and commune with Him daily. At the same time, they must remain creatively and innovatively faithful to their apostolic vocation, becoming an ever more effective tool for the redemption of all people. A well-prepared personal plan and love for the library can be highly effective in our formation journey. Only consecrated persons who "welcome the gift of God, listen to the signs of the times and allow itself to be constantly rejuvenated, can realise the proclamation of the Gospel credibly and attractively"³⁷⁷.

Since ongoing formation is a charismatic re-initiation, it must be set in the person's perspective because ongoing formation would not be possible without the collaboration and active participation of the person, beginning with the conviction that it is indispensable for consecrated life. Ongoing formation prolongs the initial formation process, and one must view it from the outset as being involved in a never-ending cycle.

A personally developed project of formation or personal growth program must be done in contact with the superiors to address the holistic development of the consecrated person in the spiritual, physical, psychological, intellectual, and apostolic-ministerial dimensions of his life. It can consider such diverse matters as physical exercise and sports, diet, the balanced distribution of the day's activity, the type and frequency of reading and study, and the means and dynamism of the spiritual and apostolic life³⁷⁸.

There are also some memorable moments or stages in the ongoing formation for better effectiveness and function. Although it is a lifelong task, it

³⁷⁷ *GPF* 34.

³⁷⁸ *Claretians in the Congregational Renewal Process*, XX General Chapter Document of the Claretian Missionaries, 1985, n. 67.

takes on a particular intensity in certain given moments (cf. *PI* 70; *RFIS* 80-87) during the onward journey of a missionary. Such moments call for special attention and accompaniment from all those implied in the formation process. Four ongoing formation moments require special consideration: the quinquennium, middle age, third age, and fourth age.

5.3.1 *The Quinquennium*

The quinquennium is the stage of the first years of total involvement in the apostolate immediately following initial formation. It marks the passage from a supervised life to full responsibility for one's work (cf. *VC* 70; *CIC* 279; *PI* 70). Therefore, it is essential to assist and guide young, devoted individuals so that they can fully embrace their youthful love and zeal for Christ. During this phase, with the assistance of their community or mission, individuals must find a fresh method to remain faithful to God and respond successfully to any problems that arise in their living situation. During this stage, a holistic renewal process that embraces all parts of the individual, including their spiritual life in harmony with their activities, is paramount. Pastoral accompaniment is vital to guarantee that the young religious continue to combine their ministerial preparation with their personal experiences. It requires updating and applying what was learnt during initial formation and maintaining a balance between community life and pastoral work. In addition, creating healthy behaviours appropriate to their new circumstances is crucial for supporting balanced development at all levels³⁷⁹. Suitable accompaniment programs should also be offered to missionary priests during the first five years of their ministry and missionary brothers during the first five years following their perpetual profession to help them consolidate their life and ministry integration.

5.3.2 *The Middle Age*

The period of human adulthood that precedes old age can vary from person to person, but it is generally considered to be between the ages of 40 and 60, also known as "middle age." During this time, a missionary's spiritual fatherhood bears mature fruits as they are seasoned with learning and experience. This stage of life introduces individuals to the "second half" of life, where they search for what is truly essential. For many, it is a time of

³⁷⁹ Cf. *GPF* 511.

discovering their true worth and identity when external sources fail to provide meaning to life.

The maturity gained during this stage helps individuals recover the ardour of their missionary vocation and renew their gift of self to God with more extraordinary generosity, serenity, and wisdom, extending it to others. However, the mature fruits of middle age come with costs. In the second half of life, individuals experience a gradual decline in physical abilities and the early signs of illnesses. They become aware of their mortality as they realise that they have lived more years than they have left. His mind easily ruminates on past achievements rather than on prospects for the future.

A missionary at this stage may experience the so-called “middle-age crisis” as he moves to the second half of his life. Different persons live out the tension of ‘breaking and building’ at this stage differently. Some live in the middle age period with exaggerated activism, exhaustion, a systematic approach to ministry, and the consequent loss of enthusiasm (*PI* 70). Some get used to an individualistic style of life and do ministry alone. However, an unexamined personal type of handling difficulties and failures may result in resigned disillusionment. There is also the risk of dealing with the tension by escaping alcohol, sexual affairs, and various addictions³⁸⁰. Trials and difficulties of this period are privileged moments to discover the necessity of suffering and purification following Christ’s crucified (cf. Lk 9:22, 24:26).

Since middle age is a complex and problematic period, it is crucial to adopt suitable self-care practices to keep your body, mind, and spirit alive and active. These practices should be integrated into the rhythm of one’s everyday life. In times of difficulty, seeking the help of a mentor, spiritual director, or an expert is advisable instead of trying to fix by oneself. Channelling the energy into creative pursuits such as writing, composing, and engaging in generous service in the community and society can make this period very productive. Creating a respectful environment in the community or mission by attending programs on middle-age and growth-related issues and celebrating ageing as a regular part of human life can also be beneficial. It may be helpful to take a break from the routine life to attend renewal programs at least once during this period.

5.3.3 *The Third Age*

The third age refers to the period of life from retirement until one’s withdrawal from active life due to advanced age and the deterioration of physical

³⁸⁰ Cf. *GPF* 516.

and mental faculties. This phase aims to reassure retired individuals that they can still fulfil their mission, help them understand what the Lord requires of them in this new phase of life, and provide assistance in maintaining a calm and hopeful perspective in light of their particular circumstances, as viewed through the lens of faith and the Word of God. As we approach the end of our earthly life, accepting and integrating this reality with Christian joy and hope is important. Our consumerist culture often avoids and fears old age as an unwelcome part of life. However, the word of God esteems long life as a sign of divine favour (cf. Gen 11:10-32). Throughout history, God has chosen elderly individuals for new initiatives and to convey his messages. Examples include Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Elizabeth and Zachariah, and Simeon and Anna. “Life is a gift, and when it is long, it is a privilege for oneself and others”³⁸¹.

The elderly are essential members of our religious community who remind us that life, at all stages and in all conditions, is a precious gift from God. They can know, love and serve God and share God’s love with others. Thanks to better living conditions and advanced medical care, many people now live longer and healthier lives, resulting in a more significant number of seniors in our institutes. Having experienced missionaries in our community is a blessing. They can share their wisdom and expertise with other members, especially with candidates, novices and students. The presence of the elderly brings a wealth of knowledge and insight from years of experience. The energy and optimism of the younger generation, with their fresh ideas, also enrich our congregation and our work. The elderly members of our congregation strengthen our community with their experience, memory and wisdom. The renewed hope and new paths the young represent also contribute to our mission. The authentic and selfless lives of the elders serve as an example for the younger generation to grow in their faith and be active in their own lives and missions.

Those who have chosen a life of consecration should embrace their role in imparting the memory and wisdom of their mission while reflecting the beauty of a steadfast missionary life at this point. They live consecrated lives by praying, making sacrifices, and setting an excellent example for others. In addition, they assist the Church’s mission and their congregation through ministerial activities. In addition, they can learn how to live their remaining

³⁸¹ POPE FRANCIS, Address to the Participants in the International Congress “The Richness of Many Years of Life” on 31 January 2020 [accessed: 20.08. 2023], https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2020/january/documents/papa-francesco_20200131_congresso-pastoraleanziani.html

years by reading the biographies of saints and other Christians who sacrificed their lives. At this point, religious folks must address their physiological and psychological needs and build a genuine spirituality. This requires profound reflection, a more concentrated commitment to apostolic prayer, and the sacrifice of their lives for the benefit of their mission and congregation.

5.3.4 *The Fourth Age*

The fourth age³⁸² refers to the last years of adulthood, characterised by age-related physical and cognitive decline leading to the final *fiat* of life. It is the stage in which productive efforts cease; strength declines, signs of illness, vulnerability, and the need for assistance and care become essential. The configuration of Christ's agony and death takes a very personal and unique imprint on the suffering of the missionary. It is the time to imitate Jesus, who knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father and having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end (cf. Jn 13:1). Thus, "when the moment finally comes for uniting himself to the supreme hour of the Lord's Passion, the consecrated person knows that the Father is now bringing to completion the mysterious process of formation which began many years before" (VC 70). A missionary awaits and prepares for his death as the supreme act of love and self-offering.

The focus of this stage is to provide appropriate care and support to individuals who have dedicated their lives to consecrated life, especially during the final years and days of their earthly existence. It is essential to help them experience the paschal mystery in their daily lives and prepare themselves for the coming of the Lord. During this stage, it is crucial for these individuals to humbly accept their weaknesses and illnesses while remaining grateful for all the great things that God has accomplished in their lives. The fourth and final stage may lead them towards transfiguration with Christ, where their sufferings, losses, and frailties can become opportunities for transformation through the grace of the paschal mystery.

In this stage, they can be accompanied and cared for by their fellow brothers and sisters, enabling them to accept life's journey peacefully and serenely. Like Peter, they must apply the Lord's words: "When you are old,

³⁸² The fourth age is better defined by functional decline, necessitating external assistance to care for the person's normal functioning. However, chronologically, the fourth age is generally considered above age 85. However, cultural, social, and economic factors significantly impact longevity (GPF 532).

you stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish”³⁸³. With the advancements in medicine and treatment, people often spend a more extended period of their lives suffering from illness. However, we should remember that life is not the ultimate reality. God calls us to a life that goes beyond earthly existence and is shared with Him. This divine calling highlights the temporary nature of our earthly lives. Therefore, we must carefully consider the appropriateness of treatments and avoid excessive measures that merely prolong life without acknowledging the mystery of what comes after. We should strive to form our minds and discern the appropriate course of action in critical moments.

An openness to others and the concept of time is crucial for ongoing formation to sustain and grow in fidelity. At this stage, people can recognise the value of time and use it wisely rather than submit to it. Those at this stage understand time as a gift and learn to work with the various rhythms of life, including days, weeks, months and years in a way that’s harmonious with God’s timeless and unchanging will. Through their devotion to the liturgical year, consecrated individuals can relive the mysteries of Christ’s life and death each day, allowing themselves to be continually moulded and transformed by the grace of God to be more faithful and committed (cf. *SFC* 15).

5.3.5 *Particular Situations in Ongoing Formation*

The Holy Spirit and consecrated persons share a unique bond of vitality and dynamism. Therefore, those who have dedicated themselves to consecrated life must always keep themselves receptive to the Creator Spirit, who carries out the will of the Father. They should remain grateful for the grace bestowed upon them through the beloved Son (cf. *SFC* 10). Fidelity and crisis among the consecrated persons are closely related. A well-managed personal crisis can strengthen one’s fidelity. As humans, consecrated persons may go through a crisis at any moment. All human development including spiritual involves concerns, and educating the capacity to face life’s problems with resilience is necessary. Sometimes crises do not occur, and they must be provoked with a formative intent to awaken the person from his spiritual slumber and promote his growth.

Given the trend in modern religious life, it’s crucial to address fidelity and perseverance, considering some individuals leave vowed life for various reasons.—Many individuals who have left consecrated life, including those known as “nesters,” as well as those significantly affected by spiritual

³⁸³ *GPF* 535.

apostasy, are currently experiencing a crisis and require formative help, as well as expert support. Personal issues, including spiritual aridity, temptations faced by pastoral agents, physical or mental illness, loneliness, struggles with love, faith, and hope, priestly or religious identity, among others, can contribute to these periods of crisis³⁸⁴.

A vocational crisis can temporarily disrupt the balance of religious life and lead to severe consequences if not positively addressed as a moment of grace and growth. A crisis does not have to weaken one's vocation but can serve as a classroom for personal and spiritual growth. Like the disciples' encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35), a crisis can ignite a fresh wave of missionary zeal. As part of ongoing formation, religious individuals should be adequately prepared to recognise and manage crises as they arise during their journey. Healthy spiritual and community life, timely fraternal correction, daily examination of conscience, spiritual direction, responsible use of media, and mutual accompaniment are crucial in positively dealing with crises.

Experiencing a crisis during the early stages of formation may be linked to a failure to internalise the initial formation process and the values of consecrated Life. After completing initial formation, a young religious may find it challenging to remain centred on Christ and focused on the mission of their community³⁸⁵. This can happen if their vocation is not grounded in a personal encounter with the Risen Lord and lacks regular spiritual practices, nourishment from the sacraments, and a disciplined life. This can be especially difficult given the newfound freedom that comes with ministry and life as a religious. When we make choices based solely on our likes and dislikes, without examining them through the lens of the Spirit, it can lead to crises in which we may struggle to keep our vows, develop alcoholism, face ongoing issues in community life, or lose enthusiasm for our mission. During these times, we commonly act defensively by avoiding the problem, downplaying it, and hoping it will disappear. Communication may break down, and we may be tempted to retreat into self-pity, addiction, angry outbursts, or questioning our missionary identity because a missionary vocation requires a solid foundation. Times of crisis demand that we recognise and explore the roots of the situation and willingly devote ourselves to Christ (Mt 7:26).

³⁸⁴ Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Young People, The Faith and Vocational Discernment*, Vatican 2018, 2.

³⁸⁵ Cf. F. CEREDA, "Vocational Fragility: Initiating Reflection and Suggesting Action" [accessed: 22.10.2023], https://www.sdb.org/en/Council_Resources/Formation/Documents/Vocational_fragility

Though crises can happen at any stage of life, certain moments call for attention. A consecrated person may lose his passion for mission and zeal for the Lord when the initial enthusiasm for ministry gives way to the monotony of routine and a sense of loneliness, which often has to do with the conflict of intimacy-isolation³⁸⁶ of adult life. Another moment is the well-known “middle age crisis”, during which a religious may struggle with the desire for generativity and the fear of stagnation³⁸⁷. Often, the temptation in such developmental crises is to avoid the conflict by resorting to quick-fix solutions such as taking refuge in affective entanglements or looking for a diocesan form of life. The problems of modern times call for genuine discernment of the spirits driving the demand for change.

CONCLUSION

Humans endure several alterations during their entire lives, from their first to their final birth. The many types of formation they undergo play a vital function between birth and death. The parental, cultural, educational, and religious formation an individual receives determines his or her life’s quality and tenacity. Formation of one’s spiritual hunger and values leads to the vocation to a religious life. According to numerous significant literatures, the purpose of formation for a consecrated person is to fully instill the sentiments of Jesus in the individual’s heart. Thus, a person’s perseverance and vocation result from personal formation, which requires a deep relationship with Jesus Christ, the master of our vocation. Even while encountering the Lord during formation is a life-altering experience, it is all too easy for that encounter to be buried behind the weight of material goods, anxiety, sin, and worldly concerns. In the following chapter, we review the vital Magisterial teachings of the Church on religious formation that aid in sustaining and preserving religious vocation.

³⁸⁶ It is the 6th stage of Erikson’s psychosocial development model. In religious life, this is a period of consolidation of a healthy spirituality of consecrated life in the person of Christ.

³⁸⁷ This period marks the 7th stage of psychosocial development model of Erikson, which covers between the age of 40 to the mid-60s.

CHAPTER III

Magisterial Teachings on Religious Formation

INTRODUCTION

The previous two chapters focused on various aspects of consecrated life and how it aids the person living with fidelity to God and oneself. The Church must adapt to the changing world and the needs of the time, and consecrated life plays a crucial role in this. The Church infuses religious training with life and significance through its magisterial teachings, making consecrated life and its formation worthwhile and relevant. In Catholic theology, magisterium³⁸⁸ refers to the official teachings announced by catholic bishops, most notably by the Roman Pontiff as the head of their assembly. What the faithful are expected to believe is laid out in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, and this teaching seeks to make that belief clear and accessible. The authority of documents issued by the catholic Church's highest authorities varies. The most important are the teachings proclaimed by Ecumenical Councils and the dogmatic declarations — usually very few — explicitly set forth by the Roman Pontiff. Also, encyclicals, letters, and speeches delivered by the Bishop of Rome have a special significance because of his role in guaranteeing the unity of the whole Church³⁸⁹.

The magisterium and theologians are responsible for working together for the good of the people and helping shape their growing faith. The existence

³⁸⁸ “Magisterium” in *British Dictionary Definitions* [accessed: 20.12.2023], <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/magisterium>. It means the teaching authority or function of the Roman Catholic Church, from the Latin root *magistry*.

³⁸⁹ Cf. G. TANZELLA-NITTI, “Magisterium of Catholic Church”, *Interdisciplinary Encyclopaedia of Religion and Science* [accessed: 03.04.2022], <https://inters.org/magisterium-catholic-church>

of religion is rooted in both history and theology. It has always been crucial that the lived experience be diverse, and this remains true now. At the same time, experience is a dimension that needs to be tested about the Gospel foundation, the Church's magisterium, and the approved constitutions of an institute (cf. *EE* 4). Some of the magisterial teachings on religious formation, which are crucial to the Church's existence and purpose, will be presented in this chapter. While formation is mindful of the past, it is also thoroughly grounded in the present and hopeful for the future. The Church places great value on the life of a consecrated person and wants nothing more than to see this precious gift to the Church and humanity flourish.

1. Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life

This magisterial teaching, issued in 1983, clearly states that certain elements are essential for religious life. Historical and cultural changes bring about an evolution in lived reality. Still, vital factors determine the development's forms and direction, without which religious life loses its identity. The Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes endeavours to assist these institutes in comprehending the Church's amended provision for them and situating it within its doctrinal framework through the composition of this statement, sanctioned by the Holy Father.

The call of God and consecration to him through the profession of the evangelical counsels by public vows; a stable form of community life; for institutes dedicated to apostolic works, a sharing in Christ's mission by a corporate apostolate faithful to a specific founding gift and sound tradition; personal and community prayer; asceticism; public witness; a particular relation to the Church; a life-long formation; and a form of government calling for religious authority based on faith (*EE* 5).

The centrality of consecration to the religious life is emphasised throughout the document. Because consecration is always a divine action, the Church insists and teaches that religious life primarily emphasises God's initiative and the transformative relationship with him. An individual whom God has singled out for extraordinary devotion to himself receives a call from God. On the human side, consecration is expressed through a deep and free self-surrender, to which God simultaneously grants the grace to respond. "The resulting relationship is a pure gift. It is a covenant of mutual love and fidelity, communion, and mission, established for God's glory, the joy of the

person consecrated, and the world's salvation"³⁹⁰. According to the Scriptures, Jesus Christ encapsulates all the consecrations of the ancient law. He is the one God the Father sanctified and sent as the highest example. "Can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, "I am God's Son"? (Jn 10:36). By means of baptism, Jesus imparts his existence to every Christian and sanctifies them in the Son. A consecration is an act of divine intervention in which God selects and prepares an individual with the explicit intention of wholeheartedly devoting oneself to Him. Concurrently, God grants the individual the grace necessary to respond with a complete and willing relinquishment of oneself. The outcome of this relationship is a pure gift, a covenant of mutual love, faithfulness, and partnership, established for the glory of God, the happiness of the person consecrated, and the salvation of the world (cf. *PC* 5).

1.1 Characteristics of Religious Life: Consecration

Every person has been allowed to develop his/her very personal love and service for the Lord, as well as his/her sense of calling to holiness, and has been uniquely sent forth into the world to share the Gospel. The foundation for all later consecration is laid by the Christian's initial and fundamental consecration, offered at baptism. Like all Christians, Jesus exemplified what it means to be fully dedicated to God as God's Son by placing God first in his life and always putting God's will before his own. Professing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience is the response to God's gift of love, which He works in the person He has chosen. The public profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, as mediated by the Church, is a grace from God that brings some people closer to Christ in his poverty, chastity, and obedience. In imitation of Christ, this profession manifests a particular consecration "rooted in that of baptism and is a fuller expression of it" (*LG* 44). This is the power of the divine person of the Word over the human nature he took on, and it calls for a response like that of Jesus: giving oneself to God in a way that only he can make possible, which shows how holy and perfect he is. Such a consecration is a gift of God: a grace freely given. When consecration by profession of the counsels is affirmed as a definitive response to God in a public commitment taken before the Church, it belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. The Church authenticates the gift and mediates the consecration (cf. *EE* 8). Pius XII

³⁹⁰ "Essential Elements of Religious Life" Church Document by SCRSI [accessed: 22.12.2022], <https://www.sistersmdg.org/vocation/essential-elements>

defines the vocation of the secular institutes as “consecrated to God and others” in the world and “using the world”³⁹¹.

Individuals whose profession of evangelical counsels has religiously hallowed them are set apart from the general populace as public witnesses for Christ and the Church. The promises the Church receives from the faithful give religious professions their validity and sanctity (cf. *PC* 2e). The visible expression of the covenant and fellowship that religious life reflects is the stable form of community life in an organisation canonically formed by the appropriate ecclesiastical authority³⁹². When a person enters the novitiate, choosing to live apart from friends and family and their usual routine, they demonstrate their belief in God’s absoluteness. This starts a new and deeper relationship with the family left behind through Christ. A further aspect of the public nature of religious consecration is that the apostolate of religious is, in some sense, always corporate. Religious presence is visible, affecting ways of acting, attire, and style of life (cf. *EE* 11).

Our religious consecration is always practised legitimately within a specific institution and following laws that the Church acknowledges and authorises, acting through her authority. So, consecration is a way of life based on rules that show and deepen a unique identity. The identity derives from that action of the Holy Spirit, which is the institute’s founding gift and creates a particular type of spirituality, life, apostolate, and tradition (cf. *MR* 11)³⁹³. Consecration of religious people must be done in full cooperation with the Church as a pure act of devotion to God, and they must be ready to be sent. Their vocation implies the proclamation of the Gospel through “works of charity entrusted to the institute by the Church and performed in her name” (*PC* 8). The invitation to a consecrated life is an unquestionable gift from God, manifested in the Church’s vows through the profession of the evangelical counsels. The vows symbolise a triple confirmation of dedication to a solitary partnership characterised by absolute reliance. They uniquely symbolise submitting oneself to the divine (cf. *LG* 44). It is an invitation for the religious who gladly dedicate their whole life to God’s service “as the one thing necessary and seeking God before all else and only him” (*PC* 5). A two-way dedication is necessary for religious consecration to be more stable, firm, and perfect: first, a desire to be free from obstacles that could prevent the person from loving God passionately and worshipping

³⁹¹ Cf. *CCC* 999, 763.

³⁹² Cf. C. SALDANHA, *Living Consecrated Life Fully*, Bangalore 2019, 52.

³⁹³ *Mutuae Relationes (MR)*, SCRSI on Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church (14 May 1978).

him properly (cf. *ET* 7), and second, a willingness to be fully committed to the service of God (cf. *LG* 44).

According to the contents of the vows, the religious commit to living a radical and constant life of conversion as demanded by the Gospel. By taking a vow of poverty, a religious person commits to living frugally, giving up control over their possessions, and treating all money received as communal property³⁹⁴. Religious men and women commit to consecrated celibacy for the sake of God's kingdom by professing the evangelical counsel of chastity. This requires them to forsake all activities, relationships, and leisure time that contradict their vow of chastity. "The religious is pledged to obey the directives of lawful superiors according to the constitutions of the institute and further accepts a particular obedience to the Holy Father in virtue of the vow of obedience" (*EE* 16).

Religious poverty, chastity, and obedience can speak eloquently and unambiguously to a contemporary world afflicted by consumerism and discrimination, eroticism and hatred, violence and oppression. Religious consecration is an invitation and paradigm for living in this modern society when the majority lacks life's needs, and discrimination exists on multiple levels. Consecration among religious individuals fosters a unique communication between religious and God and, via him, between members of the same institute, which is the crucial aspect of an institute's unity³⁹⁵. A shared tradition, common works, well-considered structures, pooled resources, common constitutions, and a single spirit can all help build unity (cf. *EE* 18). Community life is integral to religious life, and communion in Christ is expressed stably and visibly through community life. So "every religious, whatever his or her apostolic work, is bound to it by the fact of the profession and must normally live under the authority of a local superior in a community of the institute to which he or she belongs" (*EE* 19).

1.2 Communion in Community

Religious consecration creates a particular communion between the religious and God and, in Him, between members of the same institute. To preserve the grace of consecration, communities where the religious stay makes religious values clear through various spiritual activities such as daily Eucharist, in which as many community members as possible take part and

³⁹⁴ Cf. M. FRANCIS, *Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience: Recovering the Vision for the Renewal of Religious Life*, Chicago 1967, 122.

³⁹⁵ Cf. W. HUMPHREY, *Elements of Religious Life*, London 1895, 120.

which takes place in the chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is preserved (cf. *ET* 48). Notably, the liturgy of the hours gave a structure for communal prayer rooted in God's Word and joined with the Church's prayer. Communities of consecrated life should develop a rhythm of fervent prayer via their weekly and monthly programming, culminating in an annual retreat. In addition to the personal aspect of God's forgiveness and his renewed love for the individual, the sacrament's power of reconciliation develops community. It demonstrates a unique relationship with the Church. To have an intimate relationship with the master, a religious person must engage in personal prayer and spiritual reading. Religious life encourages the deepening of devotions personally and collectively to Mary, the mother of God and St. Joseph, the heavenly patron who becomes the strength and solace in our journey (cf. *EE* 20).

The Church gives importance to the quality of community life in religious life, which is affected positively or negatively through its diversity of members and works. Even though this diversity is a variety of gifts to enrich one reality, building unity will be the criterion for accepting (cf. *MR* 12) such a situation. The practical question is: do God's gifts in this person, project, or group make for unity and deepen communion? If they do, they can be welcomed. If they do not, no matter how good the gifts may seem in themselves or how desirable they may appear to some members, they are not for this institute (cf. *EE* 22). When God consecrates a person to religious life, He gives a special gift to achieve the primary purpose of reconciliation and salvation of humans. He chooses, sets apart, dedicates the person to himself and engages him/her in his divine work. Consecration inevitably implies two facets of one reality. The choice of a person by God is for the sake of others: the consecrated person is sent to do the work of God in the power of God (cf. *EE* 3).

1.3 Prayer

Religious life cannot be perpetuated without profound prayer life and liturgical life. The religious who adopt a life of entire consecration are called to have a warm, intimate knowledge of the resurrected Lord and to know him as one with whom they are in communion. "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them" (Jn 17:13). It is a profound thrill to live with Christ, unaccompanied by any rational explanations. "You did not see him, yet you love him, and still without seeing him you are already filled with a joy so glorious that it cannot be described" (1Pt 1:8). This deep relationship

is possible only through individual and community encounter with God in prayer. Pope Paul VI reminded us that religious prayer is a personal turning in love for God and a community response of adoration, intercession, praise, and thanksgiving that needs to be provided for stably (cf. *ET* 43). In the life of Jesus, prayer as a distinct act held an important and essential place in life, so the religious need to pray as a deepening of union with God (cf. Lk 5:16) and a necessary condition for proclaiming the Gospel (cf. Mk 1:35-38). All important decisions and events in the life of Jesus were followed by prayer (cf. Lk 6:12-13), so the habit of prayer is necessary if the religious is to have that contemplative vision of things by which God is revealed in faith in the ordinary events of life. This is the contemplative dimension that the Church and the world have the right to expect of consecrated persons by their consecration. Pope Paul VI insisted: "Faithfulness to daily prayer always remains necessary for each religion. Prayer must have a primary place in your constitutions and your lives" (*ET* 45). Each religious has the right to be aided by the presence and example of other community members during prayer.

1.4 Asceticism

Another essential aspect of the consecration by the vows of religious requires a certain asceticism of life, "embracing the whole being" (*ET* 46). These ascetic beliefs drove Jesus to the solitude of the desert, the agony of contradiction, and the crucifixion. The consecration of the religious expresses' solidarity with Jesus, the Saviour, and fills it through self-denial. Religious life calls for leaving all things and taking up one's cross to follow Christ. This involves the asceticism necessary to live in poverty of spirit and fact, to love as Christ loves, and to give up one's own will for God's sake to the will of another who represents him, with all human limitations. Religious life reminds us of self-giving, without which living a good community life or a fruitful mission is impossible (cf. *EE* 31). Through the public aspect of their profession, religious demonstrate unity with Jesus' assertion that a grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die to bear fruit. Life in the modern world encourages the religious to include "joyful, well-balanced austerity" (*ET* 30) and carefully determine renunciations in their lives; otherwise, they risk losing the spiritual freedom required for fulfilling the evangelical counsels. Their consecration can be accomplished without such austerity and sacrifice. This is because there cannot be a public witness to Christ's poor, chaste, and obedient life without asceticism. Moreover, by professing the counsels by vows, religious undertake to do all that is necessary to deepen

and foster what they have vowed, and this means a free choice of the cross, that it may be “as it was for Christ, proof of the greatest love” (*ET* 29).

1.5 Public Witness

Through its very nature, religious life is a public witness that should manifest the importance of the love of God and its strength derived from the Holy Spirit (cf. *ET* 1). “In Jesus’ life, he bore witness to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Lk 4:14) by his living, dying, rising, and continuing the faithful witness eternally. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus dispatched his apostles to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and throughout Judea and Samaria. Pope John Paul II urges: “What counts most is not what religious do, but what they are as persons consecrated to the Lord” (*EE* 33). To ensure this public witness, religious freely accept a life pattern that is not permissive but is predominately prescribed for their lives³⁹⁶. Values, attitudes, and lifestyle eloquently demonstrate the centrality of Christ in one’s life, and the prominence of this witness necessitates the sacrifice of otherwise valid norms of comfort and convenience. It demands moderation in recreation and amusement (cf. *CD* 33-35)³⁹⁷.

As a component of public witness, the religious attire, a garment that marks them as consecrated persons and a place of habitation, the common law and constitutions rightly establish their institute. Travel and social interactions must be consistent with the ethos and personality of their institute and with religious observance. The document specifies that the duties or works must serve as a model for the public to observe. What is done and how it is done should reveal Christ to the impoverished, not pursuing their fulfilment and satisfaction. Religious join one with the poor and helpless in a particular way, as Christ did in his Passion, to stand in need before God, love as Jesus does, and work according to God’s purpose and terms. In addition, in fidelity to religious dedication, they practise the institute’s tangible arrangements for fostering these attitudes (cf. *EE* 35). The God of the covenant also bestows perseverance in one’s vocation and holy life. It is the unspoken but eloquent testimony of the religious to the unending love of the faithful God.

³⁹⁶ Cf. J. CUCCIARDI, *Consecrated Life: A Witness to Communion*, Malta 2004, 62.

³⁹⁷ *Christus Dominus (CD)*, Decree of Pope Paul VI on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church (October 28, 1965). See also *ES* 1, 2.

1.6 Relation to the Church

Religious life has its place in the divine and hierarchical structure of the Church. It is not an intermediate way between clerical state and lay conditions but comes from both as a special gift for the entire Church (cf. *LG* 43). Religious life participates in the sacramental essence of God's people as both a mystery and a social reality since it is a unique, essential element of the Church. It is impossible without both components. The twofold aspect of "visible social organism and invisible divine presence intimately united" (*MR* 3) gives the Church "her special sacramental nature by which she is the visible sacrament of saving unity" (*LG* 9). Her very nature makes her "universal sacrament of salvation" (*LG* 48) at once: a visible sign of the mystery of God and hierarchical reality, a concrete divine provision by which that sign can be authenticated and made productive. The Church accompanies, guides, corrects, and supports its adherence to its originating gift, as it is a vital component of her own life and development. She accepts the vows made in the institute as religious vows with ecclesiastical ramifications, which involve a consecration by God through her mediation. She shares her mission with the institute concretely and corporately (cf. *LG* 17; see also *AG* 40). In Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, religious life finds its most profound understanding of itself and its most certain indication of hope. She was conceived without sin because she was chosen from among the people of God to bear God most intimately and to give him to the world. The presence of the Holy Spirit completely consecrated her (cf. *LG* 68). Mary exemplified throughout her life the principles that are the focus of religious commitment. As the mother of the one who was consecrated and sent, she is the mother of the consecrated. She realises in her fiat and Magnificat the completeness of a religious surrender to God and the excitement of one's joy in God's act of consecration³⁹⁸.

1.7 Formation

The formation is an essential component of religious life. It supports progress in the life of dedication to the Lord until its conclusion at death when the religious finally meets the Lord. Formation and accompaniment aid the religious in making the right decisions and strengthening their devotion to the Lord in complete faithfulness and submission. The process of maturing in oneness with and conformity to Christ as a disciple is known as

³⁹⁸ Cf. "How is Mary the Model of Consecrated Life?" [accessed: 10.10.2022], <https://www.ctsbooks.org/mary-model-consecrated-life/>

“formation.” It involves adopting more of Christ’s perspective, sharing his self-gift to the Father and his brotherly service to the human family, and following the founding gift that serves as the vehicle through which the Gospel is communicated to the adherents of a particular religious institution (cf. *LG* 45). This process requires a genuine conversion with an attitude of emptying ourselves to “putting on Jesus Christ” (cf. Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:24) and implies the stripping off selfishness and egoism (cf. Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). The very fact of “walking henceforth according to the Spirit” means giving up “the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16).

In this way, formation serves as a boon to the community and a fount of vitality for the apostolate. The Holy Spirit is the first and principal agent in the formation of the religious, acting through the Word and sacraments, through the prayer of the liturgy, through the magisterium of the Church, and more immediately through those who are called to obedience to help the formation of their brothers and sisters in a more lasting way (cf. *EE* 47). Rejoicing in the unique and unknowable outcomes of their responses to God’s grace and guidance, religious people accept this responsibility out of love. A community that prays and works together toward a common goal is an ideal setting for growth and development³⁹⁹.

1.8 Government

Apostolic religious governments are founded upon the consecrated response of individuals to God via community service and mission. These persons are members of Christian institutions organised by the hierarchical structure established by Christ. They willingly elect to lead a life of sworn adherence, necessitating a system of governance that mirrors their religious authority and beliefs. The Church bestows this authority, unique to religious establishments, upon them at their inception and constitution ratification. This authority is bestowed on local, intermediate, or general superiors for the duration of their term of service (cf. *EE* 49). In a spirit of service, it is to be exercised following the standards of common and proper law, with each religious person revered as a child of God, with cooperation encouraged for the benefit of the institute, and with the ultimate right to discern and decide what is to be done always reserved for the superior (cf. *PC* 14; see also *ET* 25). They must be understood and implemented to fulfil the purpose of religious government: the building of a united community in Christ in which God is sought and loved before all things and the mission of Christ is

³⁹⁹ Cf. E. DURKHEIM, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, North Carolina 2012, 98.

generously accomplished. Individual members of the institute should be encouraged and strengthened in their vocation by superiors or those legally in a position of authority to increase their fidelity and perseverance in the consecrated life. Each individual should experience a sense that their superiors or those in positions of authority are constantly present and encouraging, both during times of joy and adversity.

2. The Church Document *Mutuae Relationes*

In 1978, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes came out with *Mutuae relationes*, which addresses the theme, “Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Catholic Church”. Every Church member has been given a dual calling “to holiness” and “to apostolate” in the world. Pastors, laypeople, and religious all contribute to the sacramental character of the Church in their ways. Likewise, according to his proper role, each must be a sign and instrument of union with God and the world’s salvation (cf. *MR* 4). Recognising the common vocation of all people to union with God for the world’s salvation as vital, the document stresses the need for solidarity among us despite the diversity of our gifts and our commitment. The religious state is a gift to the Church that does not exist independently of the clerical and lay orders; instead, it combines the two (cf. *LG* 43). The Church acknowledges the importance and essence of consecrated life and invites them to participate actively in its mission. It has two main parts. The first deals with relevant doctrine on bishops and religious vocation, which should form the basis of their relationship. The second part outlines the practical norms and directives for a proper working relationship⁴⁰⁰.

The following of Christ is done by publicly professing the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience and by assuming the commitment of removing all obstacles that could detract from the enthusiasm of charity and the perfection of divine worship. A religious, in fact, “dedicates himself wholly to God, his supreme love. In a new and special way, he makes himself over to God, to serve and honour Him;” this unites the religious “to the Church and her mystery in a special way” and urges such a one to work with undivided dedication for the good of the entire Body (*LG* 44).

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. A. DELANEY, “Bishops and Religious. The Document *Mutuae Relationes*” [accessed: 22.10.2022], <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27677620>

2.1 Religious Life: Participation in the Sacramental Nature

Religious life is a unique way of participating in the sacramental nature of the people of God. The consecration of those professing religious vows is specially ordained to this purpose, namely of offering to the world a visible proof of the unfathomable mystery of Christ, since in themselves they present “Christ in contemplation on the mountain, or proclaiming the kingdom of God to the multitudes, or healing the sick and maimed and converting sinners to a good life, or blessing children and doing good to all men, always in obedience to the will of the Father who sent Him” (*LG* 46). Religious institutes vary from one another according to their true character and the work of the Spirit in outstanding men and women who later turn out to be founders and foundresses. To strengthen the relationship between bishops and superiors, it is essential to show mutual respect for their respective institutions. This will help religious individuals demonstrate their willingness to obey their superiors and the magisterium. It is also crucial to work together in a way that does not exceed the limits of each other’s authority. Doing so will result in more fruitful outcomes for everyone involved.

Charisms of the founders are a gift from the spirit to the Church and to the whole of humanity (cf. *PC* 7-10; see also *LG* 45), authentically approved by the sacred hierarchy. The founders’ “experience of the Spirit” was transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened, and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the body of Christ continually in the growth process. “It is for this reason that the Church preserves and fosters the distinctive character of various religious institutes” (*LG* 44). This individuality is a blessing and an invaluable contribution to humanity because it brings a fresh perspective to the practices of sanctification and evangelisation. Through this document, the Church guides religious communities to conduct themselves consistently with their unique identity⁴⁰¹. Any authentic charism will provide something new and different to the Church’s spiritual life.

The specific charismatic note of any institute demands, both of the founder and of his disciples, a continual examination regarding fidelity to the Lord, docility to his Spirit, intelligent attention to circumstances, and an outlook cautiously directed to the signs of the times; the will to be part of the Church; the awareness of subordination to the sacred hierarchy; boldness

⁴⁰¹ Cf. I.A. KANU, *Consecrated Persons, and Mutual Relations: The Dynamics of Collaboration within the Ecology of Mission*, Abuja 2017, 29.

of initiatives; constancy in the giving of self; humility in bearing with adversities (*MR* 12).

2.1.1 *Religious Life: Spirit-Filled Life*

Individual religious people who possess personal gifts, which usually come from the spirit, are intended for the enrichment, development, and rejuvenation of the institute's life, in the unity of the community, and in giving proof of renewal⁴⁰². The service and leadership authority of the superiors in the religious community proceeds from the Spirit of the Lord through the sacred hierarchy, which has granted canonical erection to the institute and authentically approved its specific mission (cf. *MR* 12). Religious institutes function with internal organisation and autonomy, even though they can never become independent of the Church (cf. *MR* 13; see also *CD* 35# 3, 4).

Pope Paul VI, on 28th October 1996, in his sermon, called the religious “specialists in prayer” and “should seek and love above all else God” and “in all circumstances, they should take care to foster a life hidden with Christ in God (cf. Col 3:3) which is the source and stimulus of love of neighbour” (*MR* 16; see also *PC* 5). Religious institutes are rich in their creative initiative and very charismatic in their mission in the Church. Holy Father Pope Paul VI himself affirmed this:

Thanks to their religious consecration, [religious] are free and can spontaneously leave everything and announce the Gospel even to the ends of the earth. They are prompt in acting, and their apostolate frequently excels because of the ingeniousness of their projects and undertakings, which evoke admiration in all who observe them (*EN* 69).

It is the responsibility of the leaders of religious communities to ensure that their members receive a good education and an appropriate entrance into their chosen profession. Consistent with the institution's unique mission, it is necessary to modernise cultural norms and develop a range of specialised expertise (cf. *GEd* 2). Renewing the witness of poverty and service to the neediest must be emphasised in the continued formation of the religious. Communities must be transformed into symbols of brotherly love and unity through a renewed commitment to obedience and chastity (cf. *MR* 27). As an authentic teacher and guide, the local bishop strives for the perfection of all members, especially encouraging the religious to maintain fidelity to the

⁴⁰² Cf. “Meaning of Spiritual Gifts: Abilities or Talents!” [accessed: 01.02.2024], https://spiritualask.com/meaning-of-spiritual-gifts/#google_vignette

religious vocation in the spirit of each institute (cf. *MR 28*). The document also calls the attention of the local ordinaries and the religious to work together for the Church and the good of the faithful.

In carrying out this pastoral obligation, bishops in open communion of doctrine and intent with the Supreme Pontiff and the offices of the Holy See, and with the other bishops and local Ordinaries, should strive to promote relations with superiors to whom the religious are subject in the spirit of faith (*PC14*).

Bishops and their local clergy can staunch supporters of the consecrated life, protect religious communities, promote vocations, and be guardians of the unique identity of each religious family in the spiritual and apostolic realms. The declaration calls upon bishops and ecclesiastical superiors to promote knowledge and brotherly discussion within their areas of expertise to improve the Church's mission (cf. *VC 2*). The religious and the diocesan clergy need to understand one another during their training to effectively recommend one another and work together in the apostolate and mission.

Bishops should see that the diocesan clergy understand the current problems of religious life and the urgent missionary needs and that certain chosen priests be prepared to help religious in their spiritual progress (cf. *OT 10; AG 39*)⁴⁰³, though generally, this task should be entrusted to prudently chosen religious priests. Great importance should be placed on all those means, even though simple and informal, to increase mutual trust, apostolic solidarity, and fraternal harmony (cf. *MR 37; ES 28*)⁴⁰⁴. This will help people develop a deep and abiding love for the human and ecclesial community they find themselves in, viewing it almost as the fatherland of their vocation, and will strengthen their knowledge of the local Church. Along with the spiritual skills and capacities of the people who make up their organisation, major superiors must know the apostolic requirements of the dioceses they serve.

2.1.2 *Role of Women in Religious Life*

Women have been given a new and essential role in the Church's enormous pastoral area, notably through women religious. Women should contribute their apostolic activity today in the ecclesial community, realising faithfully the mystery of their created and revealed identity (cf. Gen 2; Eph 5; 1Tim 3) and taking notice of their growing influence in civil society, just

⁴⁰³ *Optatam Totius (OT)*, Decree on Priestly Training Proclaimed by Pope Paul VI (28 October 1965); *Ad Gentes (AG)*, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church by Second Vatican Council (11 October 1962).

⁴⁰⁴ *Ecclesiae Sanctae (ES)*, Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI (6 August 1966).

as they did in the New Testament (cf. Acts 18:26; Rom 16:1). Religious life should look for and offer new apostolic forms of service in response to the Church's and the world's specific needs through the very presence of religious women who are faithful to their vocation and in harmony with their unique characteristics as women⁴⁰⁵. After the example of Mary, who in the Church holds the highest place of charity among believers and is animated by that incomparably human trait of sensitivity and concern which is so characteristic of them⁴⁰⁶ in the light of a long history offering outstanding witness to their undertakings in the development of the apostolic activity, women religious will be able more and more to be and to be seen as a radiant sign of the Church, faithful, zealous and fruitful in her preaching of the kingdom⁴⁰⁷.

Significantly of their importance in the life of the Church, authorities do their utmost to see that the principle of their more excellent ecclesial promotion be put into effect, lest the people of God remain deprived of that special assistance, which they alone, by the gifts conferred on them by God in their quality of woman, can offer. Special attention is to be given to those religious women held in high esteem, justly, and deservedly appreciated primarily for their witnessing as consecrated women and their valuable and generous services (*MR* 50).

The Holy Spirit works through other people at different times and in diverse ways to initiate people into the Consecrated life and other religious groups. The Magisterial teachings of the Church foster the Church's growth, the maturation of the members' faith, and sanctification. Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church by *SCRSI*⁴⁰⁸ give proper acknowledgement and support for the consecrated persons to be part of the mission of Christ in the Church with excellent fidelity and perseverance.

3. Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes

This document detailing the teaching required by the Canon Law no. 34, as well as the provisions and directions approved by the Holy Father, was published by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. CICLSAL, *Final Report on the Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States of America*, (8 September 2014) 3.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. PAUL VI, "Discourse to the National Congress of the Centro Italiano femminile", *L'Osservatore Romano* (7 December 1976).

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (29 June 2004), 3.

⁴⁰⁸ Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes.

Societies of Apostolic Life on February 2, 1990. It points out that the formation of individual members is the most critical factor in revitalising any religious organisation. Religious life brings together disciples of Christ who should be assisted in accepting “this gift of God which the Church has received from her Lord and which by his grace she always safeguards” (*LG* 43). The Church also thinks that true transformation occurs when a person has a profound spiritual renewal and a renewed devotion for their adaptations to bear fruit (cf. *DFRI* 23). The primary goal of the formation of candidates is to help them realise their unity of life in Christ through the spirit, through the harmonious fusion of its spiritual, apostolic, doctrinal, and practical elements, with the immediate goal of introducing them to religious life and making them aware of its specific character within the Church (cf. *PC* 18).

This document is addressed to major superiors of religious institutes and their brothers and sisters concerned with the formation, including monks and nuns. This is in keeping with the organisation’s stated goal of serving as a resource for other establishments. This can help them elaborate their formation programs, as they are obliged to do by the general law of the Church⁴⁰⁹. The text has been refined by the many lessons learned since the Second Vatican Council, and it addresses the concerns of high-ranking Church officials. It intends to aid institutions that are just getting started or have limited access to other education and knowledge (cf. *DFRI* 4). The document is concerned only with religious institutes and strives to give helpful directions for religious life. The formation is the foundation for any vocation to live meaningfully and usefully. “The primary end of formation is to permit candidates to the religious life, and young professed, first, to discover and, later, to assimilate and deepen that in which religious identity consists of” (*DFRI* 6). Under these conditions, the person dedicated to God will be inserted into the world as a significant, influential, and faithful witness⁴¹⁰.

According to the doctrine of the Church, Consecrated Life and Religious Life [...] as a consecration of the whole person, manifests in the Church as a beautiful marriage brought about by God, a sign of the future age. Thus, religious people bring their most significant gift to perfection as a sacrifice offered to

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. *CIC* 659/2-3.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, “Address to the Participants in the Thirty-First International Institute for the Prevention and Treatment of Alcoholism” to UISG [accessed: 12.11.2023], https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1984/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19840622_conf-int-alcoolismo.html

God, by which their whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in love (*DFRI* 7).

By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons achieve a tangible way of life by following Christ more closely under the influence of the Holy Spirit; they are devoted to God, who is most adored and have dedicated themselves to his glory, the edification of the Church. They strive for the perfection of charity in service to the kingdom of God, and, having become a significant symbol in the Church via their formation and life, they can foresee the celestial splendour⁴¹¹. God calls the simple, fragile, and weak human beings to be with Him and continue His mission. This call “embraces the whole person, soul and body, whether man or woman, in that person’s unique and unrepeatable personal ‘I’” (cf. *RD* 3)⁴¹². It “assumes, in the soul of the person called, the actual form of the profession of the evangelical counsels” (*RD* 8). Divine grace and formation help the person to teach the spirit of vocation and the transformation needed for this unique way of life. Under this form, those whom God calls give a response of love in their turn to Christ, their redeemer: a love which is offered entirely and without reserve and which loses itself in the offering of the whole person as “a loving sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God” (Rom 12:1).

Only this love, which is nuptial and engages all the affectivity of one’s person, can motivate and support the privations and trials which one who wishes “to lose his life” necessarily encounters for Christ and the Gospel (cf. Mk 8:35; see also *RD* 8). This personal response is an integrating part of religious formation and consecration.

3.1 Aspects Common to all Stages of Religious Formation

DFRI clearly explains the typical stages of formation in all religious institutes. Various essential and crucial agents exist for developing the formation process in the consecrated life. The call to consecrated life occurs in a prevalent setting for ordinary people who must adopt the manner of Jesus to live a genuine life. So many elements aid those on this pilgrimage in remaining committed forever⁴¹³. Different agents and circumstances assist the individual in becoming His coworker. Incorporating these elements into a holistic

⁴¹¹ Cf. *CIC* 607, 573/1; also confer *LG* 44 and *PC* 1, 5-6.

⁴¹² *Redemptionis Donum (RD)*, Apostolic Exhortation by Pope John Paul II to Men and Women Religious on their Consecration in the Light of the Mystery of the Redemption (25 March 1984).

⁴¹³ Cf. J.K. MORSE, “Mary: The Prototype of Religious Life,” *Sanyasa* 8/2 (2013) 88.

formation enables individuals to persevere in their vocation and remain faithful to God, who initiated this tremendous effort. A relationship with God is the key to opening ourselves up to the reality of our submission and mission. Each person will be responsible for determining the extent to which their acts are drawn from their oneness with God and for concurrently reinforcing and strengthening this union. “The proof of a unity of life will be opportunely made in terms of the four great fidelities: fidelity to Christ and the Gospel, fidelity to the Church and its mission in the world, fidelity to religious life and the charism of one’s institute, and fidelity to humanity and to our times” (*RD* 18; *RHP* 13-21). The document *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes* deals with important agents and the formation environment. They are:

3.1.1 *The Spirit of God*

The Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples at Pentecost to fulfil the promise that Jesus made of sending a new Paraclete (cf. Jn 14:16). It is in this role today that He is engaged in regenerating, sanctifying, assuring, equipping, empowering, gifting, and mediating the presence of Jesus to every believer. An individual is appointed to a consecrated life within the Church by God Himself. God is the proactive deity who maintains devotion throughout one’s religious lifetime. Like how Jesus gathered his followers and diligently instructed them throughout his public ministry, he continued to guide them towards the completeness of truth by his Spirit after his resurrection (cf. *DFRI* 19). A person who enters consecrated life in the Church receives a call from God in a particular manner. The work of the Holy Spirit in a committed person’s life takes place subtly at the centre of each of us, beyond the comprehension of contemporary science and history, yet working through them, and manifests itself in tangible ways only after the fact⁴¹⁴. The Spirit, who is the truth, is referred to as the “teacher,” “reminder,” and “guide” (cf. Jn 14:26; 16:12). His anointing is the source of desire, admiration, judgement, and free will (cf. 1Jn 2:20–27).

The spirit is our comforting ally who nourishes us, gives us a filial spirit, and “comes to support us in our weakness” (cf. Rom 8:15-26). A consecrated person must possess two critical dispositions to effectively deal with the strong presence of the Holy Spirit of God: humility, which forces one to submit to God’s wisdom, and spiritual discernment, knowledge, and practice.

⁴¹⁴ Cf. P.J. GRIFFIN, “Documents of the Church for Consecrated Life”, *Vincentiana* 6/2 (2012) 215.

Recognising the spirit's influence on all facets of life and history and how humans influence our daily actions is crucial. A religious must be receptive to spiritual guidance because it is motivated by the desire to know oneself explicitly and the willingness to allow oneself to be guided and counselled to understand God's intention accurately (cf. *VS* 12)⁴¹⁵. Religious should seek to be filled and affected by the spirit, just as Jesus, a person filled with the spirit, was moving around doing good. Their environment and formation must support their ongoing search for and knowledge of the spirit. During the formation, Jesus' spirit helps the candidate transform themselves into a faithful and persistent oblation.

3.1.2 *The Virgin Mary*

The work of the Holy Spirit has always been closely associated with the Virgin Mary, who is not only the mother of God but also the mother of all members of the people of God. As the mother of God and God's people, the Virgin Mary is inextricably linked to the Holy Spirit's work in the consecrated (cf. *DFRI* 20). Through the spirit, she conceived the Word of God in her womb; it was for the spirit that she awaited with the Apostles, persevering in prayer (cf. *LG* 52, 59) following the Ascension of the Lord. Consequently, religious women and men meet the Virgin Mary throughout their formation. Mother Mary became an instrument for the Spirit to work in the consecrated persons. She became the formator of par excellence for the consecrated persons through her example of listening and suffering for Jesus (cf. *MC* 25)⁴¹⁶. When someone hears Jesus saying, "Follow me," they are committing to follow in his footsteps and devote their lives to furthering God's kingdom. As a public declaration of their dedication to God, religious people take a "vow" of obedience, chastity, and poverty. Mary is the ideal teacher, role model, and source of inspiration for those who have taken the religious threefold vow. Being wholly God's and devoted, Mary is the epitome of what it means to be consecrated. Honouring Mary sincerely is crucial to maturing in one's faith in Jesus⁴¹⁷.

Both men and women consecrated to the Church have looked to the Virgin Mary for direction and inspiration. She has always been an exceptional role

⁴¹⁵ *Veritatis Splendor (VS)*, Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II (6 August 1993).

⁴¹⁶ *Marialis Cultus (MC)*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI for the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary (2 February 1974).

⁴¹⁷ Cf. M. MIRAVALLE, *Mariology: A Guide for Priests, Deacons, Seminarians and Consecrated Person*, Pennsylvania 2013, 556.

model for the pious pursuits of the religiously devoted⁴¹⁸. By praying and engaging in apostolic service, consecrated people follow Mary's lead and advance God's kingdom on earth. We, the consecrated, are called to imitate Mary's pure nature and cultivate her traits of obedience and faith. When things look the darkest, we, like Mary, must still follow Jesus. Once we reach the afterlife, God will reward us with the crown of glory. Mary, who remained a virgin until her death, was anointed by the Holy Spirit so that she might testify to God's gracious love⁴¹⁹. We, too, are tasked with helping Jesus come into the world by testifying to him.

When seeking ways to follow Jesus properly, we can concentrate on Mary. She is the benchmark. She is the epitome of perfect discipleship and rose to the educator position via her outstanding teaching and role modelling. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciples he loved, he said, "Woman, behold your son." The disciple was then told, "Here is your mother" (Jn 19:26-27). Mary, the mother of Jesus, offers herself as a mother to all of humanity at the foot of the cross. Mary raises the entire human race. According to the New Testament, Mary was a woman of unshakeable faith, perfect obedience, and humility who faithfully followed Jesus. Jesus was always at the centre of her being. She is the obedient handmaid of God who gave herself entirely into God's hands. Without considering her fate, Mary replied "yes" to God.

Mary was the first person who was unconditionally devoted to God. She is our model and will remain a unique formator for all who desire to become disciples of Jesus⁴²⁰. A religious encounters Mary, not only under the title of an exemplar but also under that of a mother. "She is the mother of religious in being Mother of him who was consecrated and sent, and in her fiat and Magnificat religious life finds the totality of its surrender to and the thrill of its joy in the consecratory action of God" (*EE* 53; see also *LG* 53). Each religious is invited "to your religious consecration according to the model of the consecration of the very Mother of God" (*RD* 17).

3.1.3 *The Church and the "Sense of Church"*

The document also stresses the need for the religious to have a close relationship with the Church. Consecrated persons participate in the sacramental

⁴¹⁸ Cf. F. STOCKIL, *Mary, Model and Mother of Consecrated Life*, Manila 2003, 99.

⁴¹⁹ Cf. M.R. AWITI, *The Process of Formation of Religious Members in the Church*, New York 2019, 122.

⁴²⁰ Cf. J. JOSEPH, "Mary is the Model of Christian Discipleship", Theology Graduate Thesis [accessed: 09.042022], https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/theology_graduate_theses/4/

nature of the Church, which makes their bond unique and central to religious life (cf. *DFRI* 21; see also *LG* 44). Religious vocation is a unique gift that unites individuals with the Church and its mystery, requiring their undivided dedication in service to the Church (cf. *MR* 10)⁴²¹. Through participating in the various activities offered by the Church, religious can nourish their baptismal life and religious commitment. One of the Church's sacraments, the Eucharist, involves receiving the bread of life from the Word of God and the Body of Christ. The Church is not simply a formational institution for consecrated persons but also a source of inspiration and experience. In the Church, reading the Word of God, accompanied by prayer, establishes the dialogue between God and the religious (cf. *DV* 25), encouraging them to achieve high aspirations and necessary renunciations. The Church associates the offerings that religious make of their own life with the Eucharistic Sacrifice of Christ (cf. *LG* 45). It is through the sacrament of reconciliation, frequently celebrated, that they receive, from the mercy of God, pardon for their sins and are reconciled with the Church and their community, which their sins have wounded (cf. *LG* 11). The Church's liturgy should thus be for them, the summit to which a community is tending and the source from which flows its evangelical strength (cf. *SC* 2, 10)⁴²².

The training process for consecrated individuals occurs in conjunction with the Church, of which the religious are members. As Origen stated, the Church is a global community based on love and dependence on its source, the Holy Trinity⁴²³. It is from her that we receive the Gospel, which she helps us understand, thanks to her tradition and the authentic interpretation of the magisterium (cf. *DV* 10). It is, therefore, necessary to develop among religious "a manner of thinking" not only "with" but, as St. Ignatius of Loyola says, "within" the Church⁴²⁴. Participation of the consecrated persons in the Church's affairs reminds us of their feeling for ecclesial communion. In virtue of the affinity which exists between religious life and the mystery of a Church, "whose unity [...] in communion and service" (*LG* 4) is assured by the Holy Spirit, religious, as "experts in communion," are "called to be an ecclesial community in the Church and the world, witnesses and architects

⁴²¹ Also confer *LG* 44 and *CIC* 678.

⁴²² *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (*SC*) Second Vatican Council Constitution by Pope Paul VI on the Sacred Liturgy (4 December 1963).

⁴²³ Cf. J.P. MIGNE, ed., *Patrologia Graeca*, Paris 1857-1866, 12/1265. The *Patrologia Graeca* is an edited collection of writings in the Greek language by the Christian Church Fathers and various secular writers.

⁴²⁴ Cf. E. GANSS, *The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, New York 1991, 96.

of the plan for communion which is the crowning point of human history in God's design" (*RHP* 24). This is brought about through the profession of the evangelical counsels, which frees the fervour of charity from every impediment and causes religious to become a prophetic sign of intimate communion with God loved above all else; it is also affected through the daily experience of the communion of life, prayer, and apostolate, essential and distinctive constituents of their form of consecrated life, which makes them signs of fraternal communion (cf. *RHP* 24). So, especially during initial formation, "life in common, seen especially as an experience and witness of communion" (*RHP* 33)⁴²⁵ will be deemed an indispensable milieu and a preeminent means of formation.

3.1.4 *The Community*

Community life plays a privileged position in formation at every level and is highly dependent on the quality of the relationship of the members. This characteristic is determined by the general climate and lifestyle of the members following the institute's distinctive character and spirit. This means that a community will be what its members make it, has its requirements and that before it can be used as a means of formation, it deserves to be lived and loved for what it is in the religious life, as the Church conceives it (cf. *DFRI* 26). The first Christian community is the primary inspiration for all religious communities. A sense of modest realism and faith should guide the efforts made throughout the formation of fraternal life (cf. Acts 2:42)⁴²⁶. The structure of the community and the members working together to achieve its proper aim are equally crucial for its success.

The community is established and endures, not because its members find they are happy together due to an affinity in thought, character, or options, but because the Lord has brought them together and unites them by a joint consecration and for a joint mission within the Church. All adhere to the particular mediation exercised by the superior in obedience to the faith⁴²⁷.

The fruit of death can only achieve paschal peace and joy of a community to self and its members' reception of the gift of the spirit. A community is formative to the extent that it permits each one of its numbers to grow in fidelity (cf. *DFRI* 50) to the Lord according to its institute's charism. The foundation upon which formation can transform a person and bring many

⁴²⁵ Also confer *CIC* 602.

⁴²⁶ Also confer *PC* 15; *CIC* 602; *EE* 18-22.

⁴²⁷ *CIC* 601, 618-619, *PC* 14.

fruits is fidelity. To attain fidelity, members must comprehend the purpose of the community and its fundamental objectives. With faith and compassion as their foundation, interpersonal relationships should be marked by straightforwardness and confidence. Therefore, the community must be disposed to be perpetually reformed and energised by the Holy Spirit, submitting to the Word of God for judgement and conversion, engaging in penance to purify itself, constructing itself through the Eucharist, and nourishing the liturgical year⁴²⁸. This will foster unity among the members via generous mutual aid and a continuous interchange of material and spiritual commodities in a spirit of poverty and with the assistance of genuine friendship and reciprocal communication. Everyone believes in their offices and obligations to serve others and the community's mission. Superiors will consider it their office to seek to build a community of brothers or sisters in Christ⁴²⁹. It will help the members become aware that their responsibility within the community is moving to grow for themselves and the good of all (cf. *ET* 32-34).

Individuals undergoing religious formation should have the opportunity to experience a spiritual atmosphere, a simple lifestyle, and a fervent dedication to spreading the teachings of Christ within their community. This type of environment encourages their commitment to a radical way of life. The formation process should occur in a free and appropriate setting, where the individual is provided with a comprehensive education to prepare them for their mission and future life⁴³⁰. It is therefore always indispensable to keep drawing from the pedagogical experience of the Church that can assist and enrich formation, in a community suitable to the individuals and their religious, and some cases, priestly vocation. This document stresses the need to insert the religious formation community in a poor milieu. Significant expression of "the preferential option for the poor," since it is not enough to work for the poor, but there is also the question of living with them and, as far as possible, liking them (cf. *DFRI* 28). As a rule, it is essential to prioritise the need for formation over certain apostolic benefits gained from being placed in a poor environment. During the initial stages of formation,

⁴²⁸ Cf. B. SECONDIN, "To Live in the Gift of the Spirit of Communion", *Consecration & Service* 46/2 (1998) 5-17.

⁴²⁹ Cf. *CIC* 619.

⁴³⁰ It is fitting to recall here the words of Pope John Paul II's message to Brazil's religious: "It will therefore be good that the young, during the period of formation, reside in formative communities where there should be no lack of the conditions required for a complete formation: spiritual, intellectual, cultural, liturgical, communitarian, and pastoral; conditions which are rarely found together in small communities" (*DFRI* 27).

achieving and maintaining solitude and silence is crucial. Furthermore, it is recommended that training should include periods of apostolic activities, during which this dimension of religious life can be expressed. However, the small groups that are inserted into these activities must adhere to specified standards that ensure their religious authenticity.

That they offer the possibility of living a genuinely religious life in accord with the ends of the institute; that, in these communities, the life of communal and personal prayer and, consequently, times and places of silence can be maintained; that the motives for the presence of the religious be first of all, evangelical; that these communities always be ready to respond to the needs of the superiors of the institute; that their apostolic activity not be primarily a response to a personal choice, but to a selection of the institute, in harmony with the pastoral work of the diocese, for which the bishop is primarily responsible (cf. *DFRI* 28).

3.1.5 Self-Responsibility Formation

The document suggests that individuals who have received a religious calling are responsible for accepting the consequences that come with it. This is not merely an intellectual matter but involves the whole person. Therefore, those who have received a religious calling are accountable for their personal growth and development. Since God's call and actions are always new and unique, those called must constantly respond attentively, responsively, and individually (cf. *DFRI* 29). The life journey of the religious will resemble that of God's people in Exodus, as well as the development of the disciples, who were "slow to believe" (Lk 24:25) but became ablaze with zeal when the risen Christ revealed himself to them (Lk 24:32). It is the responsibility of the candidates to make a journey with God so that they might fit their life and mission to the life of Jesus. Formation of a religious should be personalised so that they internalise not only the values of religious life but also the role of life proposed by the formation director so that they discover within themselves the justification for their practical choices and their fundamental dynamism in the Holy Spirit (cf. *DFRI* 29). Balance must be maintained between the group and personal formation to help the individual enter the rhythm of each stage.

3.1.6 Persons Responsible for the Formation

The Holy Spirit is actively present in the Church through various mediations. Traditions of the Church, particularly in religious circles, place a

premium on the role of teachers for the effectiveness of formation activity (cf. *SC* 2). In the early formation phase, teachers can aid the candidate in recognising the integrity of the call to religious life and guide the religious toward a fruitful personal dialogue with God while discovering how God wants them to progress. Teachers are God's instruments to help individuals in formation select the best path in life and demonstrate the Lord's methods via direct and consistent communication (cf. Tob 5:10, 17, 22).

Formators should also offer solid doctrinal and practical religious nourishment in keeping with each formation stage. Finally, they should progressively examine and evaluate the progress made by those in charge, considering the fruits of the spirit. They must decide whether the individual called has the capacities required by the Church and the institute at this time (cf. *DFRI* 30).

The work of formation is the fruit of the collaboration between those responsible for the formation and their disciples. Suppose it remains true that the disciples assume a large part of the responsibility for their formation. In that case, this responsibility can only be exercised within a specific tradition, that of the institute, for which those responsible for formation are the witnesses and immediate exponents. Formation helps the candidate grow in fidelity and develop an intense relationship with the Lord who called.

3.1.7 *Role of Culture in Religious Formation*

Culture is an essential factor in developing the personality and the personal vocation. Culture is "all those factors by which man refines and unfolds the manifold spiritual and physical qualities that enable him to master his condition and destiny" (cf. *DFRI* 90; see also *GS* 53-62). Culture may be "that through which the human person becomes more human" and "it is always situated in an essential and necessary relationship with what the human person is"⁴³¹. Even though there is an affinity between religious life and culture, the profession of evangelical counsel involves the renunciation of goods that undoubtedly deserve to be highly valued, including one's own culture and traditions. Jesus Christ and his Gospel transcend all cultures, even if entirely penetrated by the risen Christ's presence and his spirit⁴³².

⁴³¹ Address by Pope John Paul II on the occasion of his visit to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) headquarters on 2nd June 1980 [accessed: 10.07.2023], <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366755>, no. 6, 7.

⁴³² Cf. J. MATTAM, "An Inculturated Servant Church", *Jana Deep Vidyapeeth* 3 (2003) 203-224.

On the other hand, every culture should be evangelised, purified, and healed of the wounds of sin. At the same time, the wisdom it contains has been surpassed, enriched, and perfected by the wisdom of the cross (cf. *FI* 6)⁴³³. Inculturation should not aim to transform a house of formation for religious life into a kind of laboratory of inculturation (cf. *DFRI* 91). Since it is a question of personal education in their faith and of it taking root in the life of the whole person, they cannot forget that the Gospel frees the ultimate truth of the values contained in a culture and that the culture itself initially expresses the Gospel and reveals new aspects of it⁴³⁴. At the same time, the Church promotes and upholds the culture and tries to assimilate the local culture's values without losing its originality and the aim for which it is instituted. "Religious institutes, working to plant the Church, and thoroughly imbued with mystic treasures with which the Church's religious tradition is adorned, should strive to express them and hand them on, according to each nation's nature and genius" (*AG* 18).

As we have seen, the immediate purpose of religious formation is to initiate candidates into religious life and assist them in becoming conscious of their identity as persons consecrated by their profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience in a religious order. It is a lifetime endeavour that requires everyone's cooperation. The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of formation because religious formation, in terms of its origins and goals, is fundamentally a theological endeavour. Candidate and formator must collaborate for the Holy Spirit to instruct the formator, uniquely suited for this monumental task. This work is a privileged exercise of individual and communal responsibility because of the primary function of the religious and their communities.

Church documents especially remind all the "superiors, instructors, formators, and religious, the grace of fidelity to their vocation, following the example, and under the protection, of the Virgin Mary" (*RM* 2)⁴³⁵ because the Church "proceeds along the path already trodden by the Virgin Mary, who 'advanced in her pilgrimage of faith and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross'" (*RM* 4). The time of formation helps a religious

⁴³³ *Faith And Inculturation (FI)*, International Theological Commission on the relationship between faith and culture (8 December 1988).

⁴³⁴ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Faith and Inculturation* (1989). The International Theological Commission (*ITC*) is a body of the Roman Curia of the Catholic Church; it advises the Church's *magisterium*, n. 4/2.

⁴³⁵ *Redemptories Mater (RM)* on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the Pilgrim Church by Pope John Paul II (25 March 1987).

make this journey considering the mystery of Christ, and Mary is present at the birth and formation of a religious vocation. She is intimately involved in the whole process of growth in the Holy Spirit. She fulfilled the mission in the service of Jesus for the benefit of his Body, which is the Church, and every Christian, especially those who strive to follow Jesus Christ “more closely” (*LG* 42). Therefore, a Marian orientation, sustained by sound theology, will give the formation of religious authenticity, solidity, and the joy without which their mission in the world cannot be fully accomplished.

4. Religious and Human Promotion (RHP)

In response to the Plenary of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, which occurred from 25-28 April 1978, Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, Prefect and Archbishop, and Augustin Mayer, Secretary, issued this document on August 12, 1980. It discusses the significance and need for religious participation in integral human promotion. To find an impetus for renewal in the “signs of the times”, the Church must carefully examine the growing phenomena that characterise our times and the evangelical demands of religious life as part of its mission to contemporary society. The teaching of the magisterium, in fact, increasingly clarifies the profound links between the Gospel requirements of the Church’s mission and the widespread commitment to advancing people and creating a decent society (cf. *RHP*).

Reading the signs of the time and the need of the Church, recent documents of the magisterium want to make necessary improvements in the formation system of the religious and wish to integrate evangelisation and human promotion adequately, stressing how fruitful the relationship between evangelisation and religious life is for the common mission of the Church (cf. *EN* 69) and the extent to which the work of religious has contributed in every age to the human and spiritual promotion of humanity (cf. *PP* 12)⁴³⁶. It also calls for a radical change of mentality and attitudes (cf. *ET* 17; see also *GS* 63 and *ET* 52) needed to apply an evangelical commitment to human promotion’s concrete and often disturbing problems. The manifesto also trains religious men and women for greater solidarity with their contemporaries, particularly the impoverished and disadvantaged, and for deeper involvement, sometimes even in the working world and politics. This calls for creating a new culture and mindset to live a life of fidelity.

⁴³⁶ *Populorum Progressio (PP)*, Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Development of Peoples (26 March 1967).

4.1 *Dynamic Fidelity: Need of the Time*

In its development, the document speaks about “dynamic fidelity”, which is the need of the time and gives better orientation in formation so that the former is open enough to respond to the need of time according to the plan of the Church. “It is a question of a dynamic fidelity which is open to the impulse of the Spirit, who speaks through ecclesial events, the signs of the times, and through the constant exhortation of the Magisterium” (*ET* 17). Religious communities are better able to discern the actual signs of God’s presence and designs in the happenings and expectations that they share with the other members of the Church if they are formed and modelled after a vigilance that is informed by a knowledge of the needs of modern humanity, its problems, searching, and hopes. Religious communities, of their nature, are built on faith; they preserve and radiate that light, which helps the whole people of God to identify the intentions of the Lord regarding the integral human vocation and to discover fully human solutions to all problems (cf. *RHP* 30)⁴³⁷. It requires a holistic renewal that is faithful enough to bring back the fire the founders felt when they first got their inspiration from the Holy Spirit and apply it to each institution’s present-day life and mission (cf. *FLC* 7). To meet the Church’s needs and be faithful to the charism of the Congregations, the statement advocates for a mature style of formation based on a personal relationship with Christ as the mentor.

In an ever-renewed fidelity to the charism of the founders, congregations should strive to be responsive to the Church’s expectations, to the commitments the Church and its pastors consider the most urgent at this time, to implement a mission which has so much need of well-prepared workers⁴³⁸.

The Pope reaffirms his hopes for a religious life faithful to these principles, which make it “an immense fund of generosity” without which “the Church would not be fully herself” (*RHP* 31).

⁴³⁷ The document puts before us this burning question, which *Evangelica Testificatio* (*ET*) 52 makes the apex of the apostolic exhortation on the renewal of religious life, rises like a cry from the heart, in which Paul VI expressed his intense pastoral concern, his great love for humanity and today’s world and the confidence he placed in religious men and women.

⁴³⁸ POPE JOHN PAUL II, “Address to the Members of the International Union of Superior Generals” [accessed: 10.08.2023], https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19781116_superiore-general.html

4.2 Formation Requirements

The integrated or comprehensive formation could respond dynamically to the Church's needs. Renewal of the Religious life to achieve harmony between evangelism and human advancement will impact the formation level. It requires reevaluating formation methods and programmes during the initial, subsequent phases, and ongoing formation. It will demonstrate that it is not simply a matter of adapting exterior forms (cf. *DFRI* 3). A profound education in attitude and way of life enables one to remain faithful to oneself even in the face of new kinds of presence. This presence will always be as consecrated persons who seek the complete conversion of people and society to the ways of the Gospel through witness and services (cf. *MR* 12). The document invites special attention to some aspects of formation so that the religious find it suitable to the mission and needs of the Church.

Creating awareness about religious life's significant aspects and fundamental nature is essential. This includes actively participating in the mission of the Church community in today's world. To achieve this, providing continuous and relevant education is crucial to help individuals develop their commitment to the organisation's values. This training should also encourage creative involvement in the Church's efforts towards revival (cf. *RHP* 33). Within the contemporary religious landscape, the vocation of evangelical counselling may necessitate the adoption of fresh perspectives that emphasise the significance of prophetic signals. These indications have the potential to significantly influence and reform the world, its mentality, and its interpersonal connections (cf. *ET* 13, 29)⁴³⁹. Formation must help the consecrated persons become a sign in the modern world where confusion and anarchy are the world's order. Life in common, seen primarily as an experience and witness of communion, develops the capacity for adaptation (cf. *PC* 3, 15), permitting a response to different forms of activity. These do not undermine fraternal relationships and contribute to the institute's ecclesiastical duty. These relationships might be strengthened if this mentality prevailed. Community is for the mission, and the document makes it quite apparent that the mission cannot exist without the community. This necessitates spiritual and human preparation through religious life formation programmes, which can assist consecrated individuals in attaining a mature presence capable of reestablishing relationships both within and beyond their communities. Involvement in the Church's life and mission, in an attitude of

⁴³⁹ It is also seen in *RHP*, 33, "Our social behaviour is an integral part of our following of Christ."

co-responsibility and complementarity, implies an up-to-date knowledge of its projects and the goals it hopes to attain (cf. *RHP* 33).

4.3 Dialogue between the Religious and the Church

Mutual dialogue and trust among the religious and the Church universally and at the local level will improve commitment and service. A new program of formation and renewal in religious institutes would not be adequate and complete unless it considered the Church's thinking in this matter because the Church is the primary source of evangelisation. After all, the religious can reawaken the consciences (cf. *ET* 18) in forming other Christians, particularly the laity, so they will assume their proper role in this joint mission of evangelisation and human promotion with competence and security (cf. *RHP* 33)⁴⁴⁰. Since the missionary dimension of the Church depends mainly on the generous availability of religious (cf. *RHP* 33; see also *EN* 69), the formation of those called to this excellent form of evangelisation and human promotion will need to be genuinely adaptable to the cultures, sensibilities, and specific problems of the localities (cf. *AG* 18).

Chapters and general administration of the congregations play a significant role in the programming and animation for this spirit and history honouring update and renewal. All of this is done to encourage a more enticing and accurate discovery of the consecration and mission principles necessary for a conscious and joyful membership and involvement in one's institute with faithfulness and originality.

5. Vita Consecrata

The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, known as *Vita Consecrata* by Pope John Paul II, is addressed to all the Bishops, Religious orders, Congregations, societies of Apostolic life, Secular Institutes, and all the faithful. It deals with the importance of consecrated life and its mission in the Church and the world. The document defines consecrated life as deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, and it is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. Through their profession of evangelical counsels, consecrated persons imitate the distinctive characteristics of Jesus — the one who is chaste, poor, and obedient — and the eyes of the faithful

⁴⁴⁰ This document on Justice in the World (Synod 1971: AAS 1971, pp. 935-937), together with a synthesis of the Church's principal doctrinal statements, also give directives for a commitment to an "education for justice."

are drawn to the mystery of the kingdom of God already at work in history, even as its full realisation awaits in heaven (cf. *VC* 1).

Consecrated life is a unique way of following Christ by devoting themselves to God with an “undivided” heart (cf. 1Cor 7:34) in the style of apostles. They, too, have left everything behind to be with Christ and put themselves, as he did, at the service of God and their brothers and sisters. The document insists on the genuine sustainability of this call and its role in maintaining it. It is a spiritual and apostolic life bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit for the renewal of society and to make the mystery and mission of the Church shine forth. Pope John Paul II mentions that “the consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission since it ‘manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling’ and the striving of the whole Church as Bride towards union with her one Spouse” (*VC* 3). To realise the fulfilment of the religious vocation and the well-being of God’s people, the Church’s primary concern is always the comprehensive and integrated growth of the consecrated life.

5.1 Maturing in One’s Vocation: Inescapable Duty

The Synod emphasises the need for formation for those who desire to dedicate themselves to the Lord. The formation process should prepare individuals for absolute dedication to God in following Christ in service to the purpose of the Church (cf. *DFRI* 6). The fundamental objective and central issue must be addressed during formation. All who have been called are obligated to respond positively to the Lord’s call by accepting personal responsibility for progressing in their vocation.

One’s whole life must be open to the action of the Holy Spirit, travelling the road of formation with generosity and accepting in faith the means of grace offered by the Lord and the Church. Formation should, therefore, profoundly affect individuals so that their every attitude and action, at critical moments and in the ordinary events of life, will show that they belong entirely and joyfully to God. Since the very purpose of consecrated life is conformity to the Lord Jesus in his total self-giving, this must also be the principal objective of formation (cf. *VC* 65).

If this is the goal of the consecrated life, then preparation for it must include and demonstrate the quality of wholeness. Formation should encompass the entire individual, including all aspects of personality, behaviour, and objectives. It is a steady alteration of the whole individual from birth to

death⁴⁴¹. Giving members opportunities to deepen their commitment to the charism and mission of the institute is consequently the responsibility of the institute or the Church. Formation should include all aspects of the Christian life, including human, cultural, spiritual, and pastoral development. Appropriate time should be set for initial formation, which should be seen as a process of maturation that encompasses every level of personal growth, from the psychological and spiritual to the theological and pastoral (cf. VC 6).

5.2 Formation: Sharing in The Work of the Father

Through the unending gifts of Christ and the Holy Spirit, God the Father is an educator *par excellence* to those consecrated to Him. Life is open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and God's instruments. God utilises human agents to position more mature brothers and sisters by the side of those He summons, given that those who receive His call are humans⁴⁴². As formation is a participation in the activity of the Father, who, through the Holy Spirit, shapes the interior attitudes of the Son within the hearts of young men and women, so is God's accompaniment through various people and events. To join people on this journey, those responsible for formation must know the road to seeking God. Formators must be tuned to the action of grace to identify those impediments that are less obvious. Formators must demonstrate the beauty of following Christ and the importance of the charism through which their example and support accomplish this. They will mix the illumination of spiritual understanding with the light provided by human methods, which will aid in discerning the call and shaping the new individual until they are truly liberated. The chief instrument of formation is personal dialogue, a practice of irreplaceable and commendable effectiveness that should occur regularly and with a specific frequency (cf. VC 66).

Training qualified directors of formation, who will carry out their duties in a spirit of communion with the entire Church, is another important topic covered by the synod. The document argues that the formator's involvement is crucial because the formation process involves delicate responsibilities. The institute and the Church's criteria and noble and pious personalities must be followed in selecting the formators. It will be helpful to establish appropriate structures for training those responsible for the formation, preferably where they can contact the culture in which their pastoral service will be

⁴⁴¹ Cf. L. PIANO, *Consecrated Life in the Light of Second Vatican Council*, Cochin 2015, 122.

⁴⁴² Cf. D.J. CHANDLER, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Formation*, London 2016, 89.

carried out. In formation, the more solidly established institutes should help those of more recent foundations by contributing some of their best members (cf. VC 66).

5.3 Communal Dimension on Formation

Document number 67 stresses the importance of the communal dimension of formation and the role of communities in forming the candidates in the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Community is the cradle of formation where initiation to hardships and the joy of living together occurs. Through their life in a fraternity, individuals learn to live harmoniously with those whom God has placed alongside them. They accept the positive traits, differences, and limitations of others. Since “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,” members of the community understand the importance of sharing their unique gifts for the benefit of all (1Cor 12:7). Communities serve as both a safe place to live and a classroom where the fundamental missionary aspect of consecration is revealed. The community’s culture of faith, trust, love, and respect encourages the candidate to be receptive to the formators’ and the Spirit’s promptings.

Thus, during the period of initial formation, institutes of consecrated life do well to provide practical experiences which are prudently followed by the one responsible for the formation, enabling candidates to test, in the context of the local culture, their skills for the apostolate, their ability to adapt and their spirit of initiative (cf. VC 67).

The consecrated persons must gradually develop a critical judgement about the positive and bad qualities of their culture and the culture in which they will eventually labour, based on the Gospel, with the aid of the formation process. Assimilation of what is more beneficial for their development and quality of life will help them reject what is not on their path to perfection. They must also learn that prayer is the soul of the apostolate but also that the apostolate animates and inspires prayer. On the other hand, they must be schooled in the complex skill of interior harmony, of the connection between the love of God and the love of one’s brothers and sisters (cf. VC 67). Formation helps the candidate to tune the rhythm of the melody in their daily life.

5.4 Formation: Ratio Institutions

A specific time of formation that lasts until the final profession is advised for all institutes of men and women, including religious brothers (cf. VC 67).

All communities of consecrated life, even those cloistered, must put up appropriate programmes to provide an authentic introduction to the contemplative life and its unique role in the Church. According to the Christocentric theological component, which directs and inspires the Church's apostolic mission, the Church seeks to ensure better service. In this fast-paced world, the Church is a universal reality that crosses all cultures and age groups. The Church stands out as a symbol of hope and the future in a society that is a myth of opposing excellent and bad energy. The Synod Fathers earnestly asked all Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to draw up as soon as possible a *ratio institutionis* (cf. VC 68)⁴⁴³. Considering the demands of the changing world and the aspirations of this generation, *ratio institutions show* how to pass on the institute's spirit so that it will be lived in its integrity by future generations in different cultures and geographical regions. It explains to consecrated persons how to live that spirit in the various stages of life on the way to full maturity of faith in Christ.

While it is true that the renewal of the consecrated life depends primarily on formation, it is equally sure that this training is, in turn, linked to the ability to establish a method characterised by spiritual and pedagogical wisdom, which will gradually lead those wishing to consecrate themselves to put on the mind of Christ the Lord (cf. VC 68).

People are converted to God's Word in their innermost selves through the dynamic process of formation, which also teaches them to recognise God's signals in the world. Positive and negative influences from the outside world on all aspects of human existence, notably the chaste life. There is a decline in moral and religious standards; external pressures, such as religion and relationships, restrict personal liberty. All aspects of human life are preserved with the highest precision. Due to this development plan, consecrated individuals will not only continue to "see" God with the eyes of faith in a world that denies His existence, but they will also be able to make His presence "perceptible" in some way via the witness of their charism (cf. VC 68).

5.5 Continuing Formation: A Constant Search for Faithfulness

The document reiterates the significance of continual formation so that faithfulness and vocation might be rekindled throughout one's lifetime. All forms of consecrated life necessitate ongoing formation, a fundamental

⁴⁴³ It is a formation programme inspired by their particular charism, clearly presenting in all its stages the course to be followed to fully assimilate the respective Institute's spirituality.

requirement for religious consecration. The formation process extends beyond the initial stage. Due to human limits, the consecrated person can never claim to have brought the “new creature” to life, reflecting Christ’s mind in every life circumstance (cf. VC 69). There should be a close connection between the initial and ongoing formation so that there will be an openness to forming themselves every day of their lives. It is essential and demanding for every institute to provide, as part of its *ratio institutionis*, a precise and systematic description of its plan of continuing formation. Formation must be an ongoing process that includes the individual’s entire life, without exception. In the same way that there is no age at which a person has fully attained adulthood, there is never a time when people can feel so safe and devoted that they do not need to pay careful attention to ensuring their loyalty endures. Any reluctance or aversion to continued formation must be addressed by a sober assessment of the current situation of one’s life. The continuous formation encourages us to become more human and religious in our mission and daily lives.

At every stage of life, with the youthfulness of spirit, a person seeks and finds a new task to fulfil, a particular way of being, serving and loving, which lasts throughout life. The first years (cf. VC 70)⁴⁴⁴ of involvement in the apostolate in a consecrated life must be supported and accompanied by a brother or sister who helps them live to the complete freshness of their love and enthusiasm for Christ. Middle-aged consecrated individuals are frequently dissatisfied with the results of their apostolate. Considering the Gospel and their institute’s charism, they must be assisted in reaffirming their original commitment and not conflating it with the degree of their success. In this era of searching for necessities, individuals must have new impulses and reasons for their decisions⁴⁴⁵. The document also cautions against this stage of maturity even though it brings personal growth. It also brings the danger of a confident individualism, accompanied by a fear of not being in line with the time, inflexibility, self-centredness, or diminished enthusiasm (cf. VC 70).

The purpose of ongoing formation is to restore a higher degree of spiritual and apostolic life and uncover the distinctive qualities of this period of life. At this stage, consecrated individuals are tasked with refining aspects of their personality to make it an honest and generous gift to God and others. This moment of more tranquillity and knowledge, full of grace and simplicity,

⁴⁴⁴ It is a critical stage, marked by the passage from a supervised life to a situation of full responsibility for one’s work.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. J.C.R. PAREDES, *Consecrated Life as a Parable of the Kingdom*, Vol.1, 122.

evolves into a spiritual fatherhood and motherhood experience. The progressive withdrawal from activity resulting from illness or forced immobility might be a formative experience associated with old age. In the situation of advanced age, solid spiritual support and often a period of suffering provide elderly consecrated individuals with the opportunity to be transformed by the paschal experience by conforming to the crucified Christ. He accomplishes the Father's desire and surrenders himself to the Father, even giving up his spirit (cf. VC 70). Old age and the grace of God within the consecrated individual will foster an environment favourable to accepting the truth of being shaped by the father's hand and daily touched by the presence of God and the power of the cross⁴⁴⁶.

5.6 *Dimensions of Ongoing Formation*

Vita Consecrata illustrates the many facets of Ongoing formation quite well. "If the subject of formation is the individual at every stage of life, then the object of formation is the full person, asked to seek and love God. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (cf. Dt 6:5) and "one's neighbour as oneself" (cf. Lev 19:18; Mt 22:37-39). Any stage of a person's development must be holistic and comprehensive. God's and the brethren's love is a potent force that can incessantly stimulate growth and faithfulness. Spiritual life is of the utmost importance. Living in the spirit, consecrated individuals develop their own identity and find inner peace; they become more attuned to the everyday challenges of God's message and allow themselves to be guided by the original inspiration of their institute. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they steadfastly observe times of prayer, silence, and solitude, and they never cease to petition God for the gift of discernment in their daily problems (cf. Wis 9:10). In consecrated life, formation provides sustenance and happiness. The consciousness of personal limitations and self-awareness should aid in the human and fraternal components of the consecrated life's vocation to perfect freedom.

In present-day circumstances, particular importance must be given to the interior freedom of consecrated persons, their affective maturity, their ability to communicate with others, especially in their community, their serenity of spirit, their compassion for those who are suffering, their love for the truth, and consistency between their actions and their words (cf. VC 71).

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. G. KAITHOLIL, *Consecrated Life. Challenges and Opportunities*, Bandra 2014, 89.

Love of Christ urges (cf. 2Cor 5:14) the consecrated persons to open their hearts and minds to be active and vigilant in the apostolate. This love of Christ urges them to maintain their fidelity to the spirit. It aims for the founder or foundress in the changing historical and cultural conditions at the general and local levels where the apostolate is carried out. Consecrated persons must, therefore, keep themselves as intellectually open and adaptable as possible so that the apostolate will be envisaged and carried out according to the needs of their own time, using the means provided by cultural progress.

6. New Wine in New Wineskins

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life held the Plenary session of the Dicastery from November 27-30, 2014, on the theme “New Wine in New Wineskins. Consecrated Life 50 years after *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis*”. It focused on the consecrated life’s journey in the post-conciliar period while summarising its ongoing challenges. Guidelines are a product of what emerged in the plenary session and subsequent reflection and were created following the many encounters held during the “Year of Consecrated Life” that brought consecrated men and women from all over the world together in Rome at the See of Peter. The magisterium of the Church has also continuously accompanied the lives of consecrated people since the Second Vatican Council by giving directions and guidelines in their formation and the field of their service. Those Guidelines are “an exercise in evangelical discernment, wherein we strive to recognise — in the light of the spirit — a call God causes to resound in the historical situation itself. In this situation, and through it, God calls us” (EG 154) the consecrated men and women of our time, because “all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our comfort zone to reach all the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel” (EG 20). A call to renew our fidelity through formative and spiritual renewal for better grace-filled life and good service.

6.1 *Problems and Challenges of Consecrated Life*

New guidelines also address specific challenges that directly impact consecrated life and the issues associated with fidelity in this unique form of vocation. According to evaluations and in-depth investigations, an emotional crisis is one of the challenges consecrated individuals confront. A minor dissatisfaction with inauthentic community life frequently precipitates these

emotional crises⁴⁴⁷. The disparities between values and the realities of life might result in a crisis of faith. Excess of urgent and pressing activities may impede an entire spiritual life that develops and supports the desire for faithfulness. In certain instances, the isolation of younger members of mostly old groups who struggle to adopt the style of spirituality, prayer, and pastoral work demanded by the new evangelisation threatens to diminish their hope for a genuine promise of life. This can sometimes make abandonment seem the only way to avoid giving in (cf. *NWNW* 12). Because consecrated life is an ancient phenomenon, it runs the risk of missing the innermost desires of young people, which creates a gap in generational exchange and makes intergenerational discussion difficult.

Congregations' transition from monocultural to multicultural contexts due to establishing new foundations in young churches, represents a second problem this guideline highlights. The discovery of international communities led to a departure from their geographical and cultural boundaries. In the emerging multireligious contexts, communities are placed in hostile, potentially violent environments. This one-of-a-kind circumstance resulted in substantial cultural and spiritual shifts within religious families, which inevitably caused challenges for the conventional formative structure unsuited to new vocations and restrictions. This new style can be a great asset but also a source of tension which reaches the breaking point, especially in congregations with less missionary experience (cf. *NWNW* 7). The guideline also speaks about the modern evolution of society and cultures, which are undergoing rapid and extensive unexpected and chaotic changes and have exposed consecrated life to the continual challenges of adjusting. This continually necessitates fresh reactions and a shift in formative styles and structures from standard management to a unique circumstance in receptivity to new conditions and prudent action. As Pope Francis continues to remind us, it is insufficient to focus on survival techniques merely; we must also have the flexibility to initiate processes. A leadership ministry that can inspire genuine syndonality through cultivating synergy's vitality is becoming even more essential. Managing the shift with patience, intelligence, and foresight will only be feasible if all parties share the same goals. The condition of the moment necessitates that the formative plans be redesigned. The fast change threatens to entangle the devoted life, compelling it to rely on crises rather than vistas. At times, the consecrated life appears almost entirely of day-to-day management and survival.

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. M. ANATHARACKAL, *Psycho/Spiritual Dimensions of Formation for Priests and Religious*, Bangalore 2001, 133.

In many cases, a fear of the future debilitates and devitalises that prophetic ministry — which Pope Francis insists that consecrated life is called to exercise in the Church for the good of all humanity (cf. *NW7*). It is not only for the Church's needs but also for the sanctification and perfection of those consecrated. The document also criticises the present formative system and the programme as follows.

There is the impression that the formation process is more informative than it is performative. The result is that people maintain a certain fragility, both in their existential convictions and faith journey. This leads to minimal psychological and spiritual endurance and the subsequent inability to live one's mission with openness and courage regarding dialogue with culture and social and ecclesial integration (*NW12*).

6.2 *New Styles of Formation and the Need for Prepared Formators*

The document also suggests the modern formation style and considers the initiatives of various national and international Conferences of Major Superiors. Discussions and evaluations found that there is still little integration between theological and anthropological points of view regarding formation, the formative model and educational pedagogy. There should be good interaction and dialogue between two essential and indispensable components of our growth journey: the spiritual and human dimensions. Enhancing self-awareness, emotional development, personal and societal consciousness, and competencies, including conflict resolution, leadership, and adopting a healthy way of life, comprise the human dimension process. Those experiencing challenges within their personal lives or familial units can receive attentive and confidential support from formators who can also direct them to beneficial services, such as psychological counselling, if necessary. Significant emphasis is placed on fostering leadership abilities, cultivating self-awareness, and establishing healthy routines as part of the formation process. This establishment serves as the cornerstone for an optimistic and prosperous future⁴⁴⁸.

Spiritual formation focuses on nourishing and cultivating a personal relationship with Christ in the power of the Spirit, which manifests in generous love toward others. This relationship is formed by the candidates through their daily participation in the Eucharist, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, adoration, silent prayer and reading of Scripture, and regular spiritual

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. L. CADA – *al.*, *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life*, Whitinsville 1985, 188.

direction that includes the Sacrament of Reconciliation and recollection, small group formation based on class year, and an annual retreat⁴⁴⁹.

With different cultures' specific anthropologies and the sensibility of new generations, there should be balanced growth between the spiritual and human dimensions with particular emphasis on life's new contexts. Only then can the formation of consecrated life touch the heart of new generations, which prevents the danger of settling for only superficial, even trendy adhesion, and where it seems that the search for outward signs gives the security of identity (cf. SAC 19). Guidelines also discuss the formative process, which is often improvised and belittled because of the urgency of their work taking priority over a fruitful, systematic, and organic formative journey. In this perspective, one should avoid consistent attendance of theological courses and exclusive attendance of classes for professional degrees, thereby protecting the balance of formation to the consecrated life. One of the risks is that each person creates a world that is jealously closed off from being shared. This way, soon, we will not only have young, consecrated people who hold academic titles but who are also taught about the life of *sequela Christi* in identification with the values (cf. NWNW 15).

The solid formation of trustworthy formators with remote and continuous preparation mentioned in this document must provide the youngest members with authentic and promising accompaniment. For formation to be effective, it must be based on a strictly personal pedagogy and not limited to just one solution for all values, spiritualities, times, styles, and ways. We face the challenge of personalising formation, where the initiatory model is recovered. Initiation requires contact between the master and the disciple. They walked in trust and hope (cf. NWNW 16). A dynamic, complex modern world creates difficult conditions and situations in human beings that need personal attention and accompaniment. Those selected diligently to become formators should be very familiar with seeking God. They must be able to convey to the candidate "the beauty of following Christ and the value of the Charism by which this is accomplished" (VC 66).

The formation is collaborative work between the community and members with the formator. Through fraternal life, one learns to accept others as a gift from God, accepting their positive traits, differences, and limitations. Through fraternal life, one learns to share the gifts received for the building up of all. Through fraternal life, one learns the missionary dimension of consecration. So, are not only the theoretical courses on theology and spirituality

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. "Dimensions of Formation" [accessed: 10.11.2022], <https://theologicalcollege.catholic.edu/formation/dimensions/index.html>

necessary but also a permanent formation where we can review and verify the actual lived experience within the community, which will be an opportunity for reflection and revision? Celebrations of milestone anniversaries like a jubilee need to be treated with the seriousness they deserve to effectively demonstrate the vitality of fidelity across one's lifetime. The formation has recently drastically changed its methods, languages, dynamics, values, goals, and stages. Pope Francis insisted that formation must be people-oriented. He said, "We must not form administrators, managers, but fathers, brothers, travelling companions, and formation is a work of art, not a police action"⁴⁵⁰. The formation is the fundamental source and the future of the consecrated life.

6.3 Importance of Continuous Formation

Pope Francis calls the Superior Generals' attention to the need for special care in continuing formation. It is crucial and necessary to strengthen one's position in the Church in service to humanity. The continuing formations also aid in crisis or inactivity due to illness or old age (cf. VC 70). Without a lifelong formation, a partial and reductionist mentality would develop, resulting in insufficient awareness of its significance and minimal individual involvement. Consecrated life must find concrete forms for persons and groups that transform instructional procedures into a true growth journey in creative integrity with profound and long-lasting effects in the actual world. Formation becomes continuous when it is routine and carried out following the realities of everyday life. Everyone is called to let themselves be touched, educated, provoked, and enlightened by life and history, by what they proclaim and celebrate, the poor and excluded, and those near and far (cf. NWNW 35).

This document clarifies that initial formation should not be confined to educating the young about customs and traditions. Still, it must teach them to be free hearts to learn from each day's story throughout life in the style of Christ to be served to all. Continuous formation must create forms and structures that support each consecrated person's journey towards the progressive conformation to the sentiments and life of Jesus. Openness and fraternal accompaniment in the community also occur where eminent continuous formation occurs. In the present multicultural formation contexts, not only suitable structures but the formation of the formators must be done in a manner

⁴⁵⁰ POPE FRANCIS, "Wake up the World! Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religions Life", *La Civiltà Cattolica* 165/1 (2014) 11.

of outstanding professionalism (cf. *SS* 25). “Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression, but the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root” (*EG* 116).

CONCLUSION

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church’s magisterium has continuously accompanied the consecrated people’s lives. Its teachings on the formation of the consecrated persons remind us that we must bear witness to the truth that consecrated life makes us spiritually and humanly joyful maturely. Signs of an actual formed consecrated life persons are: a) a simple way of life; b) a heart expanded in love for everybody, starting from the last ones and c) a deep trust in God, that is, living a rich life of prayer and faith. The life of a consecrated person is called to be a way of love, forgiveness, trust in God (despite all our struggles, longings, and difficulties), simplicity and inner freedom, and indeed human and spiritual joy and happiness. Formation must be an all-inclusive process where the development of the candidate is not only of any one area but a whole-sided transformation. It must open the way for a personal and deep relationship with Christ, the source of our fidelity. Recent studies suggest that formation is neither traditional nor progressive, but it must be realistic and balance these two. It is essential to remember and give importance to the development of faithfulness to the Gospel as transmitted by the Church and the sense of fidelity to the charisms of the congregations to which we belong. At the same time, the formation must be ready to express its openness to the signs of the times, to the evolution of society and culture, to the situation of the world and the local church, to the problem of today’s consecrated life and the new expressions of the apostolate⁴⁵¹.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. USG, *Fidelity and Abandonment in Today’s Consecrated Life*, Rome 2017, 79.

CHAPTER IV

Constraints on Fidelity in Consecrated Life Today

INTRODUCTION

Living a life of fidelity and faith is a dynamic process that continues to develop until death⁴⁵². If we are sensitive to grace, the Holy Spirit will aid us in growing in faithfulness and maturity. The vocation to the consecrated life is an invitation to be obedient to simple things with the Lord. If we are receptive to the graces, the Holy Spirit will help us grow in faithfulness and maturity in the consecrated life. Human frailty and limitations might periodically hinder the aspiration of every consecrated person to become closer to God and be more loyal. Even though every consecrated person desires to become more intimate and more committed to God, this aspiration is periodically hampered by human frailty and limitations. We have tried to understand the basis of consecrated loyalty, which states that every consecrated person seeks to deepen their relationship with God and their faithfulness to Him by measuring themselves against the standard of divine love. Unfortunately, time and again, human frailty and the limits of love prevent this from happening.

In this chapter, titled *Constraints on Fidelity in Consecrated Life Today*, I will discuss some challenges the consecrated persons face and numerous elements that could affect fidelity throughout a lifetime. Particular attention is paid to the outside factors that hurt fidelity in consecrated life. As grace builds on and perfects nature⁴⁵³, the consecrated person will need healthy human development and surroundings to live the Gospel values with love, freedom, and fidelity. Those who have decided to devote their life to God

⁴⁵² Cf. F.F. CARVAL, *Overcoming Lukewarmness*, California 2011, 27.

⁴⁵³ Cf. L.M. RULLA, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, Rome 2004, 74.

must remain in this world, and they will be protected from the evils it contains.

As Giuseppe Crea argues in his book *Gli altri e la formazione di sé*, human and Christian maturity cannot be separated. Still, they are part of a common path that involves each person in his process of personal growth. He underlines this assumption and shows how everyone who grows in his human capacity also increases in his faith. A person's character and development as a loyal follower of God's call are profoundly influenced by their upbringing and surroundings. In his book, Crea examines how healthy maturation leads the person to rediscover the meaning and the depths of his relational existence as a child of God. It was also emphasised that, from this vantage point, the recommended education and training are not a goal but a step toward acknowledging God's role in human history and making room so that everyone might work together on the creation that God is still weaving⁴⁵⁴.

This chapter also discusses the potential reasons for abandoning consecrated life and the barriers that can prevent individuals from total commitment. The hostile environments that the individuals may have experienced during their childhood can have a lasting impact on their ability to embrace a consecrated life. Such impact can make them vulnerable and limit their capacity to respond wholeheartedly to God's call. To be true to themselves and to dedicate themselves entirely to God, they must recognise their self-worth and competence. Indeed, the love, care, affection, respect, and trust experienced by the significant persons in one's life constitute the core of love and fidelity in an individual, but not all are so fortunate.

We are imperfect; we all have faults, failings, and flaws⁴⁵⁵. Often, individuals grow up in unhealthy circumstances and experience rejection, affective deprivation, emotional and physical abuse, distrust, and disrespect which significantly harm the development of fidelity, love, and self-respect. Negative personal experiences can have a significant impact on an individual's mental health. These experiences can create immense psychological pressures that lead to excessive fear, anxiety, depression, and intense emotional needs. In some cases, individuals may turn to sexual acting out or develop narcissistic or antisocial personality traits. These issues can cause low self-esteem, anxiety, sadness, and social isolation⁴⁵⁶. How a person's character

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. G. CREA, *Gli altri e la formazione di sé*, Rome 2005, 11.

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. M. KELLY, *The Seven Levels of Intimacy*, New York 2007, 29.

⁴⁵⁶ C.M. MACOVEI – S. BUMBUC – F. MARTINESCU-BĂDĂLAN, "The Role of Personality Traits in Mediating the Relation between Fear of Negative Evaluation and Social

develops depends on how much adversity weakens their psychological foundation.

Limitations can diminish the power and positive vibe of the call in a consecrated person. Therefore, solutions to problems and emotional hurts help people achieve greater fidelity and more substantial commitment. People try wrong means to fulfil the longing for love, acceptance, and affection by using alcohol, drugs, sex, food, power, money, or bizarre things to fill the void. This led to addiction and other behavioural problems⁴⁵⁷. Christian holiness always finds its fulfilment in “loving faith and faithful love”⁴⁵⁸. Infidelity is a grave sickness of love that can develop at any stage of consecrated life, even if one has had a vivid experience of God⁴⁵⁹. At this point, it is essential to see that the religious vocation, once accepted, leads to surrendering oneself entirely to God, who consecrates us to Himself⁴⁶⁰. While this is happening, we also witness a significant shift in attitudes undermining fundamental ethical and ecological norms. The twenty-first-century youth is impacted by pessimism and scepticism in the face of the world’s reality and future. As a result, they find it hard to accept life-long commitments and is afraid of taking up responsibilities.

Consequently, they become entirely immersed in the culture of the vast vacuum, which is devoid of values, ideas, and ideologies and leads to inefficient cognition. In turn, this produces ethics of pure coexistence and keen moral relativism; the collapse of stable values is an invitation to live life *à la carte* and to transform a dominant culture into fleetingly fashionable bondage after the erosion of the foundations of faith by reason, people are living with a great deal of confusion: this is the culture of the fragment, in which “grand narratives” are meaningless. Here, there is no horizon other than the present now. As Pope Francis expressed, this is the “closing into the

Interaction Anxiety” [accessed: 10.10.2022], <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1268052/full>

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. S. ROSSETTI, *The Joy of Priesthood*, Notre Dame 2005, 209.

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. P. RODRIGUEZ, *Fe y vida de fe (Faith and Life of Faith)*, Pamplona 1974, 141.

⁴⁵⁹ “An unfaithful religious is in retreat, worn out and disillusioned by the struggle to make progress - a soul that is lost or is on the verge of losing Christ as the focal point of his life. Infidelity always supposes a crisis of hope, losing heart, faith, and love. For the unfaithful person, Christ is a vague, insubstantial figure with poorly defined features”: CARVL, *Overcoming Lukewarmness*, 19.

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. VILLANUEVA, *Witness of Living God*, Bangalore 2012, 243.

immanent” that prevents us from living in solidarity with others and committing ourselves to building a better society⁴⁶¹.

1. Modern World and Its Challenges on Fidelity in Consecrated Living

The modern notions of urbanisation, modernisation, and globalisation are frequently employed to describe the complicated state of the contemporary world. Modern society has advanced in science, technology, thinking, and worldview. This indicates that as civilisations flatten and one social model is offered, globalisation is homogenising people, especially the young⁴⁶². The rise of a new humanism, of a culturally different man, of a society guided by divergent “norms” and “values,” of a world more dominated by business and technology, according to Pope Francis, is not a period of alterations but a fundamental transformation in generations. Humans have made great strides in thinking and finding but have also fallen behind in religious belief and practice. These circumstances, especially regarding religion, influenced social and structural changes throughout all spheres of life (cf. *LS* 11). Thought and discovery have advanced much in human development, but religious beliefs and practices have lagged. These conditions impacted social and structural changes in many areas of life, notably concerning religion.

The intertwining of politics and organised religion has led to a decreased priority on family life and individual human life. Economic growth and industrial investment are given significant attention under globalisation, focusing on benefiting the nation’s inhabitants⁴⁶³. However, the adverse effects of modernity, urbanisation, and globalisation already impact family and religious beliefs. The instant culture of modern economic society prioritises work and money over family and faith, with a dynamic character that influences its functioning. The parent’s lack of availability and responsibility also impacts the children’s spiritual, emotional, and psychological well-being. The decision to enter consecrated life can result from thoughtful parental guidance in the family, support for religion, and catechetical instruction.

⁴⁶¹ Cf. P. CHÁVEZ, “The Young and Consecrated Life Today: Experiences and Reflections on Young People’s Challenges and Difficulties, with and in Religious Life Today” [accessed: 01.01.2022], <https://www.camilliani.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/THE-YOUNG-AND-CONSECRATED-LIFE-TODAY.pdf>

⁴⁶² Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “Fidelity to the Christian Vocation”, *The Pope Speaks* 33/1 (1988) 210.

⁴⁶³ Cf. M.A. THOMPSON, “Empire and Globalisation: from ‘High Imperialism’ to Decolonisation”, *The International History Review* 36/1 (2014) 152.

The vocation to consecrated life is the unique testimony of God's presence with people who are open to the Holy Spirit⁴⁶⁴. This can be achieved only through deep family and religious support and experience. They embody the gospel in their lives, bringing anew to their times the living presence of Jesus, the consecrated *par excellence*, the one sent by the Father. Consecrated persons must have a solid foundation in their early life to be images of Christ the Lord, fostering through prayer a profound communion with him in their consecrated life (Phil 2:5-11) so that the apostolic enthusiasm and commitment may influence their whole lives.

1.1 Nuclear Family

The Catholic Church states that the natural form of the family is a nuclear family composed of a sacramentally married mother and father with their children (cf. *AL* 8). The modern world concept of the family also supports small and economic families for the betterment of the members and the state. The fast-paced and constantly evolving world we live in and economic progress have made people less in touch with their inner selves and personal fulfilment. This is because there is a greater emphasis on scientific and logical thinking, reducing religion's and faith's role in people's lives. The modern emphasis on individual freedom and minimised responsibility has also affected the traditional family and parental care dynamics. The Second Vatican Council calls the family a domestic Church, *ecclesia domestica* (cf. *LG* 11), because of its role in shaping the spiritual life of the children. The family is invited to engage in the Church's existence through its overtly religious and everyday activities to carry on the faith. Parents must encourage their kids' vocations, particularly religious ones (cf. *LG* 4). The parents' and the entire family's role in evangelisation is to bridge the two primary duties. The family is responsible for spreading the gospel, and parents are responsible for bringing up their children in the ways of the faith. In this sense, evangelisation and education are related (cf. *PCFE* 43)⁴⁶⁵.

Due to the husband and wife's busy work schedules, the children lack parental affection and care, which hurts their development in all facets of life. On the other hand, parents may give them more freedom and passion if a child is the only child. Understanding, committing to, and living out the

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. C. SAJU, ed., *Consecrated Life for a Transformed World: Formation for Proclamation in the Modern World*, 596.

⁴⁶⁵ *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization (PCFE)*, Church document by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, Vatican City 2014.

monastic life's obligations is complex for those with such a calling. In today's culture, absolute self-surrender and dedication are meaningless ideals, and religion is an unwelcome intrusion⁴⁶⁶. The family's moral life is always necessary in all respects and is founded on its religious mission and ecclesial purpose. The domestic church is always church. As a distinct way of life, this profession permeates the family's endeavours and connections. Before the industrial revolution, the home served many practical purposes. It was where people taught children, cared for the ill and old, conducted family businesses, serviced customers and the community, and generated a surplus for the benefit of the poor. The household stretched out to society. Mutual communication and social interactions are not as valued now since individuality and ego, which are crucial to this age, have taken their place. Pope Francis tells us that the family is a more extensive network than we may imagine. It is something our love builds beyond our immediate blood relatives to create larger societies of mutual support. Too many people seek security in small units or by focusing only on themselves: this little life must be broadened, and we must build our families to include our relatives, neighbours, and friends⁴⁶⁷. Consecrated persons benefit in their day-to-day lives from an expanded conception of relationships and an openness towards the reality of their world. The way of life in today's contemporary society is becoming more and more centred on the individual, and the social character of human beings is on the verge of extinction; this trend is also seen among those who have dedicated their lives to God⁴⁶⁸. In the life of a dedicated person, apathy toward God and apathy toward religion can lead to desertion and lethargy.

1.2 *Secularization*

Secularisation is the process through which a society shifts away from a deep identification and connection with religious values and institutions in favour of non-religious ideals and secular institutions. Through secularisation, a society gradually drifts further away from its religious foundations. The belief that religion gradually loses influence over all aspects of social life and family management as societies and families grow, primarily via

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. J. KAGAN, "The Child in the Family" [accessed: 12.10.2022], <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20024475>, 40.

⁴⁶⁷ "Catholic Voices Comment" [accessed: 10.05.2022], <https://cvcomment.org/2016/04/22/how-amoris-laetitia-moves-us-beyond-the-nuclear-family/>

⁴⁶⁸ Cf. R. ALVES, *Tomorrow's Child*, New York 1972, 33.

modernity and rationality, is meant by the term “secularisation”. It refers to the historical process through which religion loses significance in culture and society⁴⁶⁹. Therefore, “secularisation” relates to the idea that religion gradually loses influence over all spheres of social life and family management as societies and families develop, primarily via modernisation and rationalisation. It alludes to the historical process through which religion loses its importance in society and culture. The function of religion in contemporary households is constrained because of secularisation. Secularised families lack the cultural influence of organised religion and its impact on the family. In today’s secularised atmosphere, the family is going through much turbulence, and increasing secularism prevents the family from developing genuine religiousness. Lack of a solid spiritual foundation and encouragement from parents and catechism teachers throughout one’s early years affects how committed one is to one’s faith and religion. Society is currently experiencing a wave of social secularism, which challenges the family’s ability to give children and teens a genuine catechesis. In a secularised culture, it is challenging for pastors and other religious leaders to devote all their attention to the family’s spiritual and moral development. Cultivating the proper disposition for consecrated and priestly life in family members, especially young people, is essential⁴⁷⁰.

Vocations from this background sometimes lack the depth and stability necessary for consecrated life. Today, secularism is prevalent and has convinced young people to renounce their belief in the providential God who calls us to a high moral standard. Secularisation theory focuses on the “demand” for religion and predicts that religion will decline as societies develop (cf. *VC* 87). Within the individual, there is frequently an imbalance between contemporary intelligence in practical problems and a theoretical system of thinking that cannot grasp the totality of its thoughts nor organise them in a helpful synthesis. Similarly, an imbalance develops between a desire for pragmatism and efficiency and the need for moral conscience, and frequently between social life conditions, individual thinking requirements, and reflection. At length, an imbalance between a specialised and a comprehensive view of reality develops (cf. *GE* 8). Young people nowadays are characterised by a low tolerance for frustration, a penchant for instant satisfaction, and a lack of patience because of the uncertain nature of the times in which they

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. V. ERTIT, “Secularization: The Decline of the Supernatural Realm” [accessed: 20.05.2022], <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/9/4/92>

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. J. OMOREGBE, *The Continued Relevance of the Religious Life in the Secularized World*, Saarbrücken 2011, 113.

live. Life-long fidelity and commitment are against the modern lifestyle and thinking.

1.3 Urbanization, Modernisation, and Globalisation

We live in a post-modern era characterised by complexity; life has turned into a jungle with no clear path, transition with rapid changes, and globalisation of everything and everyone. Concepts of urbanisation, modernisation, and globalisation are the main processes influencing societal structure today. These contemporary developments have changed social networks and construction. Industrial investment and economic growth are the main focuses of globalisation and industrialisation. Urbanisation, modernisation, and globalisation have many negative repercussions and impacts that affect families in many ways⁴⁷¹.

The transformation of the joint family into a nuclear family is one of the results of urbanisation, modernisation, and globalisation. Profit-making and economic growth is the main agenda of life where religion and the concept of God hinder it. Since the aim is to earn, a more economical concept of parental care and catechetical training in the family is lacking due to time constraints⁴⁷². Along with migration, cultural transmission, the complexity of society, secondary relationships, etc., have been affecting the family. Globalisation has led to marginalisation. The consequences of globalisation include the concentration of wealth, class structure, poverty, and inequality. Modern generations live different lifestyles and hold different religious views than their forebears due to all these influences. These concepts leave out self-surrender, service, caring, and love for others from their language since they impact religion and God in one's everyday life⁴⁷³.

The family is affected by the change in technological communication. The use of mobile devices and other technology has peaked. The electronic media have covered even rural and tribal communities. Consecrated life impacts all facets of life and service, favourably and poorly. Sometimes, the world and market impact more significantly than its promises and Jesus, its tutor. Due to the usage of modern technological devices, fidelity to God and this magnificent existence are badly impacted. Due to the prevalence of technology

⁴⁷¹ Cf. A. PORUTHUR, *Issues and Challenges in Religious Life*, Bombay 2014, 135.

⁴⁷² Cf. A. MAKINWA, *Challenges of Disintegrating Family Life to Youth Ministry*, Stellenbosch 2020, 88.

⁴⁷³ Cf. C.H. SAMUEL, *Wake Up the World. Religious Life as a Prophetic Presence in the Church and the World*, Quezon City 2015, 179.

today, family and religious life can no longer be lived in privacy. The arrival of the sexual revolution undermines the covenantal character of marriage and the dignity of individuals. In a world that is dominated by a relativistic and trivialised view of human sexuality, Pope Francis is calling for our attention. He encourages us to rediscover “the beauty of human sexuality by turning to the great book of nature. This involves learning to respect the value of the body and the generation of life, to experience authentic conjugal love”⁴⁷⁴.

Migration is an additional issue arising from this development in the current context. People move away from their families or relocate to cities to improve their financial circumstances and quality of life⁴⁷⁵. Because of this relocation, the family’s natural and religious life conditions will differ. This may cause new generations to have less affinity for their family tree and foster the growth of new atheistic environments⁴⁷⁶. Vocations to consecrated life from these new situations lack depth and enduring capacity in fidelity and call. Traditional culture and civilisation gave way to fashion and fads. Global forces have affected the family and social structures where small families and heterogeneous groups emerged. Money, power, and prestige have become the centre of the family⁴⁷⁷. The effects of globalisation are the generation gap, secondary relationships, etc. The human person, however, is given a significant helping hand in responding to his fate by participating in social life. Even when considering the religious aspects of this phenomenon, it is impossible to deny that people are frequently dissuaded from doing good and compelled toward and by the social circumstances in which they live and are immersed from birth.

The disturbances frequently occurring in the social order result partly from the natural tensions of economic, political, and social forms. But at a deeper level, they flow from man’s pride and selfishness, contaminating even the social sphere. When the structure of affairs is flawed by the consequences of sin, man, already born with a bent toward evil, finds new inducements to sin, which cannot be overcome without strenuous efforts and the assistance of grace (*GS* 25).

⁴⁷⁴ POPE FRANCIS, “New Sexual Revolution’ that Respects Life and Marital Love” [accessed: 12.5.2023], <https://www.catholicsun.org/2023/05/01/pope-calls-for-new-sexual-revolution-that-respects-life-and-marital-love/>

⁴⁷⁵ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE, *Migration and the Social Doctrine of the Church* (22 October 1983), 1a.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. F. FABIO, “Theology of Migration” in *A Resource Guide for the Migrant Ministry in Asia*, Exodus Series, Quezon City 2005.

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. M. LOCATELLI, “Formation in Consecrated Life: Problems, Challenges and Prospects” [accessed: 12.03.2023], <https://www.camilliani.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/locatelli-ieng.pdf>

The divorce rate in today's modern culture is steadily rising, negatively impacting the current generation's quality of life, individually and collectively. The good aspects that contribute to forming a person's personality and the relationships within their family include reverence for God and devotion to religious practice. A profound and personal faith in God inspires reverence and awe for the Supreme Being. Other significant issues threatening today's social fabric and peaceful coexistence include child bonded labour, exploitation, denial of human rights, etc. Maybe we can say that children got down on the wrong side because of the family's lack of social and religious bonding. Media has power, but sometimes it can also divert the energies of the family and society and create problems and disharmony⁴⁷⁸. The modern world's imbalances are related to a more fundamental imbalance based on the human heart. As a result, within the man himself, several aspects contend. Thus, on the one hand, he experiences his many limitations as a creature, but on the other, he feels limitless in his desires and calls to a higher life⁴⁷⁹.

As we deal with the external factors that affect vocation and fidelity in this chapter, it is also fitting to give importance to starting with a strong foundation in families⁴⁸⁰. Many who feel called to the consecrated life point to the influence of their catholic upbringing. Priests, seminarians, and religious often state that they were raised catholic, leading them to pursue a vocation in the church. Parents and families should back efforts to foster a vocation culture in their homes. Daily prayer and Holy Eucharist participation foster a spiritual culture in the family. Families that regularly have supper together also tend to be closer as a group in the community and are more accepting of those in the consecrated life⁴⁸¹. According to the research undertaken in this study, as we shall see in later chapters, a solid family is rooted in devotion to one another, and religion produces stability and faithfulness in religious life. They can positively create an image of God as the source of their vocation and vows. Catholic parents who want to produce vocations for the Church must be ready to be heroically counter-cultural. The general culture,

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. E. MARCHETTO, *The Catholic Church, and the Phenomenon of Migration*, New York 1989, 16.

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. *Samaritanus Bonus*, Letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) on the Care of Persons in the Critical and Terminal Phases of Life (14 July 2020).

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. G. KALLAMPALLY, "Family as the Cradle of Vocations", *Asian Journal of Vocation and Formation* 38 /3 (2017) 38.

⁴⁸¹ Cf. A. SIGA, "Challenges of Contemporary Mission", *Indian Journal of Theology* 43/2 (2001) 5.

the educational system, and the family environment are the three powerful influences on young people today⁴⁸². These elements have a beneficial role in creating an atmosphere where young men and women are encouraged to dedicate their lives to God.

On the one hand, a more critical ability to distinguish religion from a magical view of the world and the superstitions that still circulate purifies it. It exacts day by day a more personal and explicit adherence to faith. As a result, many people achieve a more vivid sense of God. On the other hand, growing numbers of people are abandoning religion in practice. Unlike the former days, denying God or religion, or their abandonment, are no longer unusual and individual occurrences (*GS* 7).

The modern man has become more self-aware and assertive and has begun to stand up for his rights. While the Church explains who God is and why we should care about him, it also reveals the reason for man's existence or the most fundamental truth about ourselves. Only God, whom the Church serves, can truly satisfy the most profound human longings, which are never entirely satisfied by what this world has to offer. Religion can provide certain things that the world is unable to⁴⁸³. The world could be terrible without God, but it can also be a source of blessing when He is there.

2. Process of Selection to the Consecrated Life

Young people are “the hope of the Church”⁴⁸⁴. As we have stated earlier, consecrated life is the heart of the Church, and new vocations to it are a real boost for the mission and service of the Church. External forces of the modern world negatively influence the vocation to consecrated life. Youth are more interested in the new lifestyle offered by the world under the pretext of secularism. The degree to which they have been influenced by what is conveniently called “modernity” changed youngsters’ religious and spiritual concepts today.

The sensitivity of young people profoundly affects their perception of the values of justice, non-violence, and peace. Their hearts are disposed to fellowship, friendship, and solidarity. They are greatly moved by causes related to the quality of life and the conservation of nature (*EG* 87).

⁴⁸² Cf. G. KALLAMPALLY, “Family as the Cradle of Vocations”, 38.

⁴⁸³ Cf. S. ARUL SAMY, *Religion for a New Society*, New Delhi 2000, 59.

⁴⁸⁴ POPE JOHN PAUL II, “Young People to be the “Hope” of the Church” [accessed: 10.10.2021], <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Pope-urges-young-people-to-be-the-%E2%80%9Chope%E2%80%9D-of-the-Church-as-John-Paul-II-taught-14898.html>

Young people are less interested in committing to God and more in following the world's passions. There may be some young people whose lives are defined by deep religious devotion, but this sentiment must be evangelised. Finally, some are not necessarily in the minority. They lead a sufficiently exemplary Christian life and are courageously engaged in the apostolate, already experiencing what it means to "follow Jesus Christ more closely"⁴⁸⁵. The Church and the institutes must find suitable and worthy candidates for consecrated life through transparent and stipulated guidelines from the Church. There is frequently a gap between the level of their secular knowledge, which can be highly specialised at times, and their psychological growth and Christian life. They learn much through images; the present education system sometimes encourages this, but they read less⁴⁸⁶.

They have not been spared by consumerism, with the deceptions that it spawns. Some people succumbed to the allure of violence, drugs, and sensuality while struggling, at times, to find their place in the world. It is becoming increasingly rare to see young people among the candidates for religious life who have had unhappy experiences in this last domain (cf. *DFRI* 88). Because it impacts a person's life and quality of life, vocation scarcity would lower the quality of applicants for consecrated life. The richness and diversity of human backgrounds complicate efforts to promote and establish vocations. The institutes should conduct a thorough screening, and the candidate must demonstrate sound judgment.

Above all, in certain countries, some candidates for religious life present themselves because of a conscious search for social gain and future security; others consider religious life an ideal place for an ideological struggle for justice. Finally, others of a more conservative nature consider religious life a place to save their faith in a world they regard as hostile and corrupt. These motives represent the reverse side of several values but must be corrected and purified (*DFRI* 89).

The formation should support the candidate refining their purpose to facilitate a simple search for life's ultimate actuality and truth. Given the state of the world and the preferences of the younger generation, it is necessary to promote a human and spiritual equilibrium based on fidelity, renunciation, patience, steady generosity, sincere joy, and love. This curriculum is

⁴⁸⁵ Cf. A. AGU, *Responding to the Divine Call*, Bombay 2009, 122.

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. M.C. AZEVEDO, "Formation for Religious Life in the Context of Modern Contemporary Culture", *USG Bulletin* 69 (1985) 29.

challenging yet vital for consecrated persons in vocation promotion and growth (cf. *FTu* 5)⁴⁸⁷.

Candidates from single-parent or divorced families must pass a stringent selection procedure and get the required counselling and other support to take advantage of the new, unique life they begin. According to Canon Law, a candidate must be in good health and of legal age to comprehend the criteria for the consecrated life. “With vigilant care, superiors are only to admit those who, besides the required age, have the health, suitable character, and sufficient maturity to embrace the proper life of the institute”⁴⁸⁸. In some cases, excessive family pressure also becomes the cause of vocation.

Frequently such religious claim undue influence from parents and members of their family since they were born into a large or low-income family and thus were advised either by their parents or by other relatives to leave the paternal home and go to the seminary as a happy solution of family difficulties and were even at times pressured by request, persuasion, or even disguised threats, into embracing the life of perfection and the priestly life and continuing in it. As a result, they allege that their repugnance or reluctance to accept the religious clerical state, which they had an aversion to, was broken down (Cf. *RI* 6)⁴⁸⁹.

Some people blame their religious leaders, formators and spiritual advisors for their problems. However, they had noticed in them no happiness in the religious clerical life, no spirit of piety, and no zeal as they grew older; nevertheless did not hesitate to urge them on, either because they hoped the subjects would do better in the future or because they were more interested in the number than in the quality of vocations, or because, blinded by a false sense of kindness toward the candidates, they threatened them with the danger of loss of eternal salvation if they left the religious clerical state. First, although vocations to the state of evangelical perfection and the priesthood are to be promoted by every means, care must still be taken lest an immoderate desire to increase numbers should interfere with quality and selection⁴⁹⁰.

The Apostolic Constitution, *Sedes Sapientiae* insists that only those candidates who are free of any canonical impediment and who, at the same time,

⁴⁸⁷ *Fratelli Tutti* (*FTu*), Encyclical letter of the Holy Father Francis on Fraternity and Social Friendship (October 3, 2020).

⁴⁸⁸ *CIC* 642.

⁴⁸⁹ *Religiosorum Instituti* (*RI*), Document from the Sacred Congregation for Religious, Instruction on the careful selection and training of candidates for the states of perfection and sacred orders (2 February 1961).

⁴⁹⁰ POPE PAUL VI, “A Time for Fidelity and Hope”, *The Pope Speaks* 21/3 (1976) 262.

show positive signs of a divine vocation can be admitted (cf. *SSa* 2)⁴⁹¹. “A call from God to enter the religious or the sacerdotal state is so necessary that, if this is lacking, the foundation on which the whole edifice rests is wanting. For whom God has not called, His grace does not move nor assist” (*SSa* 12-13)⁴⁹². Candidate must possess all prerequisites and, according to age variations, all the physical, intellectual, and moral characteristics, either of nature or of grace, by which a young man is adequately prepared for the honourable acceptance and execution of religious and priestly duties. Religious seminaries and convents will only admit candidates after conducting a thorough background check and gathering pertinent information. In seminaries and novitiates, the necessary proofs and investigations are to be repeated with faithful observance of the General Statutes of the Apostolic Constitution *Sedes Sapientiae* (cf. *SSa* 31-34)⁴⁹³. Suppose there is a doubt regarding the candidate’s worthiness for entering the consecrated life or for the ministry of holy orders. In that case, Canon Law should provide a trial period before acquiring moral certainty⁴⁹⁴. Those congregations and those in charge of formation should follow all the rules and regulations regarding the formation and inform the higher authorities about the worthiness of the candidates without any favour or external force.

All those engaged in deciding vocations apply to themselves the canonical prescriptions whereby the bishop is warned “that he should confer Sacred Orders on no one unless he is morally certain, by positive arguments, of the candidate’s canonical fitness; otherwise, he not only sins most grievously himself but exposes himself to the danger of sharing in the sins of others⁴⁹⁵.”

Consequently, it is forbidden to move further if there is any doubt about the suitability, as there is something on which the welfare of the Church and the redemption of souls depend mainly. Therefore, more conservative advice should always be taken. Because they serve the Church and society, we should exercise the utmost care and prudence if there is any reason to doubt

⁴⁹¹ *Sedes Sapientiae* (*SSa*), Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pious XII, gives the principles and proves the general statutes by which the king should be informed of those who are called to embrace the state of acquiring religious perfection and their educators (31 May 1956).

⁴⁹² This is also seen in *Canon Law Digest* n. 4, 173.

⁴⁹³ Doubtful fitness is not enough, but “as often as there remains some prudent doubt as to the fitness of a candidate, it is wrong to permit him to contract obligations (can. 571/2), especially if they be definitive (*CIC*, 575, 637).

⁴⁹⁴ Cf. *CIC* 571; 574.

⁴⁹⁵ *CIC* 973.

the candidate's suitability. The selection and training of a religious candidate is a step toward sacred ordination. In the ordination of religious, as Pius XI wisely warns, the bishop "always places full confidence in the judgment of their superiors" (ACS 71,76)⁴⁹⁶. Those in authority should always follow safer opinions in case of doubt as to fitness, as it is certainly unlawful to proceed further, for there is something on which the welfare of the Church and the salvation of souls depends mainly. "This safer opinion in the question now before us does more to protect the best interests of ecclesiastical candidates since it turns them aside from a road on which they might be led to eternal ruin" (ACS 71, 76)⁴⁹⁷. In the interview we discuss in the sixth chapter, we could see that those doubtful or problematic in their formative period are more vulnerable to a crisis in fidelity and possibly abandonment of consecrated life. In these cases, the most significant responsibility lies on the major superiors to organise and direct this entire activity, to be acquainted thoroughly with the norms set down by the Apostolic See, and to ensure they are faithfully carried out⁴⁹⁸.

The formation is a collaborative effort, even though the in-charges bear a great deal of responsibility; all who oversee the selection and training of candidates should engage in practical cooperation, whether superiors and directors in the external forum or confessors and spiritual prefects, each within the limits of his office. Superiors may recognise the presence or absence of a divine vocation based on the activity in the external forum⁴⁹⁹. Others, on the other hand, since they pertain more to the world of the intellect and conscience, are frequently only recognised by confessors and spiritual directors. All these people accept a weight of conscience in the selection of priests and religious, as well as in their admission to the profession and ordination. Through their ignorance or negligence, they may have a share in the sins of others⁵⁰⁰. These duties are discharged in different manners. Spiritual directors do their duty according to the norms of the ordinary laws. At the same time, the confessors are bound by "the inviolable sacramental seal." In the stricter sense, spiritual directors are likewise bound to secrecy "by the

⁴⁹⁶ *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii (ACS)*, Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on the Catholic Priesthood (20 December 1935). It is also seen in AAS 28 (1936) 513.

⁴⁹⁷ It is also seen in AAS 28, n. 367; p. 511.

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. SCR, *Careful Selection and Training of Candidates for the States of Perfection and Sacred Orders*, n. 27.

⁴⁹⁹ Cf. J. ALMEIDA, *Focus on the Person in Formation*, New Delhi 2022, 34.

⁵⁰⁰ Cf. SCR, *Careful Selection and Training of Candidates for the States of Perfection and Sacred Orders*, n. 17.

religious office they have accepted” (*RI* 28). They should strive only in the internal forum to see that those not called by God or who have become unworthy should not go further. The formation is a joint programme where all should use the same principles in testing vocations and taking appropriate precautions so young men may be prudently admitted to the profession and orders.

It is of the highest significance that the candidates be encouraged to participate wisely in the formation to make an informed decision about their vocation. Treachery that leads to the abandonment of a calling from God is extremely risky. Still, things would be more complicated if people who aren't called or aren't worthy mindlessly assumed priestly or religious responsibilities. Congregations can attract qualified vocations when proper screening and enquiries are made through the appropriate channel. The family, social, and religious backgrounds also help mature and genuine disciplines grow in the appropriate direction. The *Code of Canon Law* and *Statuta Generalia* gives guidelines regarding accepting candidates with specific psychological and other illnesses.

In addition, special attention must be paid to those who give evidence of neuro psychosis and who are described by psychiatrists as neurotics or psychopaths, especially those who are scrupulous, abulic, hysterical, or who suffer from some form of mental disease (schizophrenia, paranoia, etc.). The same is true of those with a delicate constitution, those who suffer from weakness of the nervous system or protracted psychic melancholia, anxiety, or epilepsy, or who are afflicted with obsessions⁵⁰¹.

Similarly, precautions are needed in examining the children of alcoholics or those tainted with some hereditary weakness, especially in the mental order. Finally, those young men who manifest exaggerated attachment to the comforts of life and worldly pleasures need special attention⁵⁰². To determine whether a person can carry the burden of religious and priestly life, especially celibacy, those in charge of vocation promotion and formation should carefully examine all these types and subject them to a thorough examination by a prudent and expert Catholic psychiatrist. One's upbringing and familial environment mostly determined how seriously one took one's vocation and lived the monastic life. Having an open heart, being willing to make sacrifices, and being available for others are more critical in the consecrated life

⁵⁰¹ *CIC* 984.3 E.

⁵⁰² Cf. M. MCGUE, “A Behavioral-Genetic Perspective on Children of Alcoholics”, *Alcohol Health Res World* 21/3 (1997) 215.

than having professional competence or social status. Several external factors can influence the nature of one's profession and the level of enthusiasm with which they pursue it.

3. Limitations at a Personal Level

It's not uncommon for stories of disbelief and outrage to circulate in Christian religious circles if a prominent figure is exposed as having engaged in sexual misconduct, severe financial wrongdoing, or other unethical or immoral behaviour. Among the authorities in the Church and consecrated life, some people disguisedly live a double life without causing significant scandals⁵⁰³. It's always perplexing when individuals we admire and hold in high regard act in a manner that contradicts their public persona. For instance, some consecrated persons live in two opposing worlds, with one set of moral and religious values for their public life and a separate set for their private life. In this context, I aim to explore how they can achieve inner harmony, leading to a more fulfilling and holistic existence. It would be helpful if we could discuss and find ways to help them integrate these two aspects of their lives.

3.1 *Problem of Double Life*

According to the Collins English dictionary, the problem of double life can be explained as persons who "lead two separate and very different lives, and they appear to be a different person in each"⁵⁰⁴. There are also biblical references to this effect to show that double life needs personal attention and care for a possible cure. "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick, who can understand it" (Jer 17:9). When a straightforward, conventional, and single existence is changed into a double life that many close friends and family members find improbable when revealed, it is typically because once-simple secrets have grown more sophisticated. The prospective repercussions have been more challenging to face. The guilt makes embarrassment, and fear of revealing a secret makes it challenging to live a double life.

⁵⁰³ B. SEBASTIAN, "Following Christ at a Distance: Some Considerations on the Growing Mediocrity in Fidelity and Commitment Among the Consecrated", *Sanyasa* 16/2 (2021) 205.

⁵⁰⁴ COLLINS ENGLISH DICTIONARY, "Double Life definition and Meaning" [accessed: 20.05.2022], <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/double-life>.

The compounding of those simple secrets to eventually complicated and desperate situations that they become creates a metaphorical prison for its creators. Keeping those secrets becomes a lifestyle that, with time, is increasingly demanding of its keeper's time and energy. It is stressful, frustrating, and exhausting, with sometimes devastating outcomes. It is easy to wonder, "Why would anyone want to put themselves through such torture? Why not just confess and move on?!"⁵⁰⁵

Those who have dedicated their lives to serving God risk developing the psychodynamic problem of a "split" in their personalities if they struggle with a lack of inner harmony and integration. Due to the split personalities⁵⁰⁶ among some of the consecrated persons, we often hear scandalous stories from religious circles. This internal conflict can be reflected by a portion of oneself that directly contradicts one's desired self-representation. This will lead to a lack of character integrity and the discrepancy between the public and private self, resulting in controversy and confusion. These individuals are preoccupied with how their actions are perceived by others. This inner revolt of the self is characterised by ethically inconsistent behaviour and a strong desire to eradicate the wayward portion of the self. Human beings are made up of their lives with "two minds"⁵⁰⁷ regarding issues with coexisting feelings. This can lead them to disavowal or denial, becoming part of their daily living. This experience of inner division occurs due to the lack of clarity regarding goals and programmes in life. This situation may lead to yielding to the moment's pleasure or staying committed to one's long-term goals. The temporary split in us is resolved by the winning side claiming victory over the entire self and the losing side taking a backseat. It becomes a problem when neither side of the self is willing to lose⁵⁰⁸.

This split or inner divide in the individual happens at varying degrees and intensities. Some consecrated individuals may exhibit a social life that is morally superior, revered, and appreciated by all. They may have difficulty projecting an extraordinary private life while being twisted, corrupt, obsessive, and less likeable. Some parts of their self-function oppose the other,

⁵⁰⁵ K.H. MCGIBBON, "The Psychology of a Double Life" [accessed: 20.05.2022], <https://www.drkaymc.com/post/the-psychology-of-a-double-life>

⁵⁰⁶ A. GOLDBERG, *Being of Two Minds: The Vertical Split in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy*, New Jersey 2014, 3.

⁵⁰⁷ A. GOLDBERG, *Being of Two Minds: The Vertical Split in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy*, 341.

⁵⁰⁸ Cf. A. GOLDBERG, *Being of Two Minds: The Vertical Split in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy*, 341.

which is the more appealing portion. This problem of inner division worsens when they succeed in separating their two selves from one another and the view of their cohabitants. Maintaining the internal separation will require much cognitive work so that the two worlds do not collide. This may frequently lead to issues in their key relationships, occupations, and careers and a profound sense of spiritual exhaustion⁵⁰⁹. A consecrated person with a psyche of inner division moves back and forth in their commitment to the Lord and fidelity. This will lead the person to let him live in two worlds, either simultaneously or sequentially, with total confusion and a lack of enthusiasm.

Split experience in the individual's mind can be of two types, the horizontal split⁵¹⁰ and the vertical split⁵¹¹. In a horizontal split through the defence mechanism of repression, psychological contents or materials of the unconscious activity are withheld from consciousness. "As a result, the contents of the unconscious are normally not accessible to the conscious mind, and the unconscious communicates and connects with the conscious in dreams, slips of tongue and transference"⁵¹². In the instance of a vertical split in personality, which falls under behaviour disorders, a single individual exhibits seemingly conflicting behaviour.

The morally upright teacher who occasionally steals books he may never read, the faithful husband who regularly visits prostitutes and has sex with them, the highly respected and virtuous religious priest who sexually abuses minors in his parish, the married heterosexual woman who engages in furtive lesbian affairs are all examples of individuals who live the vertical split in their personality where two or more selves live side by side engaging in behaviours that are morally incongruent with each other⁵¹³.

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. A. GOLDBERG, *Being of Two Minds*, 342.

⁵¹⁰ The notion of a horizontal split in the psyche derives from Freudian psychoanalysis, which proposes that there is a mental region in addition to the conscious that is not only not conscious but also has greater control of the psyche and conducts its affairs according to a different set of rules, existing in a split off manner from the conscious part of the psyche: cf. H. KOHUT, *The Analysis of the Self*, New York 1971, 79.

⁵¹¹ The notion of a vertical split in the mind was first proposed by psychoanalyst and self-psychologist Heinz Kohut in 1971 in his analysis of narcissistic personality disorders. According to Kohut, in the case of a vertical split in the psyche, we notice a "side-by-side, conscious existence of otherwise incompatible psychological attitudes in depth": H. KOHUT, *The Analysis of the Self*, 177.

⁵¹² B. SEBASTIAN, "Being in Truth and Untruth: A Psychodynamic Reading on the Divided Lives of the Consecrated", *Claretianum ITVC* 7/56 (2016) 343.

⁵¹³ B. SEBASTIAN, "Being in Truth and Untruth", 343.

Those who suffer a split in their personality develop an attitude of negative, tolerant, or positive valence towards the emergence and maintenance of a vertical split in their personality⁵¹⁴. This personality dichotomy impacts the individual's condition and vocation to consecrated life, which may be based on a misleading picture of the individual. Changes in the behaviour of individuals with split personalities are unexpected and irregular. A person with a vertical split is the victim of an unholy alliance between the positive and negative aspects of the self. Division of the self-destroys an individual's individuality and authentic personality, forcing him to wear a mask. This person's divided self cannot comprehend or explain his nonsensical behaviour, which permits the usual self to survive with the deviant. The only time those impacted by deviant behaviour confess or display shame and remorse is when their actions are exposed to public attention.

As a result, any shame or guilt that may be demonstrated upon public exposure of his deviant behaviour is not related to any honest acknowledgement of responsibility for inappropriate behaviour, such as abuse of minors, financial irregularities, other acts of infidelity to vowed life in a religious, but because of the narcissistic injury to the self and due to the embarrassment of being exposed⁵¹⁵.

The search for the origins of the split personality in the persons, especially in the consecrated persons, may be traced back to the child's formative years when they are pressured to suppress or repress feelings that go against parental or societal expectations. Many of the strong feelings in these situations stem from desires or behaviours, primarily self-indulgent or obsessive, sexual interests or fantasies, and so on, that the caretakers may find objectionable and choose to disaffirm. A double life is possible if this dread leads to the establishment of a false front. Individuals with this disorder develop a distinct subset of their personalities, characterised by the emergence of aberrant behaviour, the adoption of novel forms of relief seeking, and the adoption of alternative values and objectives. It compels a readjustment of fundamental ideals, making a place to pursue the comfort and pleasure essential to daily existence carefully⁵¹⁶. We frequently hear tales of people having two faces, particularly among the consecrated persons, which shocks and bewilders the faithful. This double-life scenario might result in laziness and a

⁵¹⁴ Cf. E.D. BLAND, "The Divided Self: Courage and Grace as Agents of Change", *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 28/4 (2009) 328.

⁵¹⁵ B. SEBASTIAN, "Being in Truth and Untruth", 346.

⁵¹⁶ Cf. B. SEBASTIAN, "Being in Truth and Untruth", 347.

lukewarm outlook, directly influencing a person's commitment to their vows and consecrated life. The term "disavowal," which has a similar meaning to the word "denial," is often used to describe the psychological impact of living a double or split existence⁵¹⁷. This circumstance enables people to deliberately inhabit their "good self" and expel their "evil self." Disavowal eliminates the distress caused by the clash of value systems about pleasure goals and religious beliefs⁵¹⁸. This is the outcome of a narcissistic defence mechanism in which the subject intentionally chooses to keep unpleasant emotional experiences connected to a certain self-experience out of consciousness, leaving them with a split self-state. This might be an ego-splitting phase in the self-defence process⁵¹⁹.

This condition of the split self impacts the credibility of the person and his dealings with a consecrated person because they are skilled manipulators who make everyone believe their version of the events. The consecrated persons may also become morally hypocritical and dishonest due to this. To be ethically hypocritical is to have two moral convictions that are inherently at odds with one another without experiencing inner struggle or pain⁵²⁰. Religious, social, and cultural conditionings reward outward appearance and social standing among the consecrated. Consequently, they became hypocritical in their religious practices, social attitudes, and cultural practices. Most give in to the pressure of upholding the widespread view of him as a prototypical pastor, priest, and community leader. The consequence of leading a split self or double life helps people in this position cope with the inner turmoil they face. They have a problem with disloyalty to vocation and commitment because of their lack of integrity and sincerity⁵²¹.

⁵¹⁷ "Disavowal" from Encyclopaedia.com [accessed: 30.05.2022], <https://www.encyclopedia.com/psychology/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/disavowal>.

⁵¹⁸ Cf. ROSETTI, "Pastoral Counselling with Those with Sexual Addictions" in R.J. WICKS – R.D. PARSONS – D. CAPPS, ed., *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counselling*, Vol. 3, New York 2003, 215.

⁵¹⁹ Cf. S. FREUD, in his works "A Short Account of Psychoanalysis" (1940a [1938]) and "The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Défense" (1940e [1938]), sought to anchor the specificity of disavowal by situating it within the particular topography of the split ego. [accessed: 10.10.2023]. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1745-8315.2012.00647.x>

⁵²⁰ Cf. R.C. NASO, "Immoral Action in Otherwise Moral Individuals. Interrogating the Structure and Meaning of Moral Hypocrisy", *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 23 (2006) 475-479.

⁵²¹ Cf. A. KADAPLACKAL, "Fidelity in the Religious Life", *In Christo* 49/02 (2011) 95.

3.2 *Mediocrity in Fidelity and Commitment*

The pervasive influence of mediocrity in all spheres of life is a second significant issue facing the community of consecrated people today. Infidelity in the consecrated life might result in this disorder. Simultaneously, mediocrity might be the leading source of betrayal among religious. A recent document by the dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on fidelity and perseverance expresses its anguish at the growing tendency for members who choose to remain in the institute to live a mediocre lifestyle. This, in turn, becomes the root cause of the difficulties they experience with fidelity, commitment, and perseverance (cf. *GFJP* 25)⁵²².

Although they appear to be content being the way they are, settled down to a life of comfort and compromises, without passion for excellence, integrity, and commitment yet, at a much deeper level, they do experience dissatisfaction, frustration, and an overwhelming sense of spiritual depletion and inner emptiness⁵²³.

After spending many years gaining familiarity with the formation field and serving as a spiritual director for many consecrated people, I believe that many factors contribute to the deterioration of integrity and mediocrity among those who are consecrated. Consecrated people don't cultivate a solid personal or religious identity, even though they undergo a lot of formation and various forms of animation during their lives. Formation primarily assists individuals in improving their outward appearance but does not contribute to their internalisation, especially regarding the principles and goals of their vocation and life. The secularisation of the modern world has weakened the religious and spiritual aspects, directly affecting the motivation and conscience of consecrated persons. To increase loyalty and perseverance in consecrated life, we must study the causes and find solutions to the problem of mediocrity so that the consecrated persons might dedicate themselves to the Lord with more conviction and enthusiasm.

3.3 *Consecrated Life and 'Nesters'*

⁵²² *The Gift of Fidelity and the Joy of Perseverance (GFJP)*, Guidelines promulgated by CICLSAL (2 February 2020).

⁵²³ B. SEBASTIAN, "Following Christ 'at a Distance'", 239.

L.M. Rulla, with his colleagues, conducted extensive research that found that “those who persevere in their vocation but who are less favourably disposed to internalising vocational values and to progressing in their vocational commitment”⁵²⁴ continue their life as mere ‘nesters’. These nesters build a cocoon culture within religious organisations and seek comfort and fulfilment for their emotional dependence, sexual gratification, an exhibition for harm avoidance, and shame avoidance, all of which come under the area of vocationally diverse demands. According to reports from several congregations of consecrated life and the Vatican, the number of casualties of lack of loyalty and desertion of religious life is rising, as many scandals and mediocre lives damage the existence and structure of the individuals and the institutions. The future of the consecrated life is uncertain since the number of vocations is falling at an alarming pace. This is largely down to the mediocre life testimony of many consecrated individuals, who cannot inspire and persuade young people to consider entering consecrated life.

Regrettably, some who choose to leave the religious institutes are ideal persons who should have remained. In contrast, those who should have gone for the good of the Institute and the Church continue to enjoy a life composed of compromised integrity and mediocrity. Those who do not leave but choose to stay on have made themselves comfortable in religious life without the cost of integrity and commitment⁵²⁵.

A consecrated, mediocre life attracts more people looking for a “safe zone,” which allows them to settle down to a life of comfort, compromise, and mediocrity in their religious vocation rather than making sacrifices and committing themselves fully for the rest of their lives. Nesters enjoy a sense of contentment in knowing they have not turned their backs on Jesus or the devoted life since whatever they do only exists at a safe and comfortable distance.

3.4 Lack of Motivating Ideals

Modern persons are easily influenced by others and often imitate others blindly. Solid ideas and persuasive propaganda can shape how people live

⁵²⁴ Cf. L.M. RULLA – J. RIDICK – F. IMODA, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation: Existential Confirmation*, Vol. II, Rome 1989. 206.

⁵²⁵ B. SEBASTIAN, “Following Christ ‘at a Distance’”, 240-241

and think. Strong ideals may encourage a person to take risks, put up with the utmost difficulty, and commit for the long term to achieve a treasured ambition. Even when the goal is demanding and daring, the person can still be motivated. A large percentage of people today is not ready to make a long-term commitment to anything, whether it be a family or a religious vocation. Current generations always weigh the unknowns and risks of starting a new business because they lack solid and exciting concepts they can believe.

The perception that any sense of permanent belonging to anyone or even to an institution curtails human freedom has led to liquid and non-permanent fidelity, where one does not feel committed to anyone or anything forever. Regrettably, some consecrated persons are not excited or passionate about anything anymore.⁵²⁶

Individuals inclined towards mediocrity tend to feel that life no longer holds the same excitement and spark that it once did. They prefer to remain within their comfort zones. However, in this modern world, especially for consecrated people, it is crucial to have great ideals and examples to ignite their passion. They need motivation and encouragement to take risks, sacrifice, and dedicate their lives to a noble cause. A lack of personal values can significantly affect the individual and lead to a timid mindset, where they try to protect their interests, space, and worries without taking risks. An aimless and bored consecrated person may become a settler or nester without any great expectations and be content with the bare minimum for a mediocre life.

The mediocre religious is a person whose heart love has become spent, and there is little left to rekindle the individual to feel passionate and motivated about anything. It is as if the person experiences a state of existential paralysis⁵²⁷.

Pope Francis warned priests and consecrated people to always be on guard against the influence of Satan. The fruit of the demonic spirit in humans is the cultivation of sloth and mediocrity as a defence mechanism against the light and life God has placed inside them. “Finding their happiness in the Lord, they are not content with a life of mediocrity, but burn with the desire to bear witness and reach out to others,” he said. “Rather than just getting by, they rejoice to evangelise”⁵²⁸. Consecrated life has both a life-giving impetus and the potential to bear witness and self-sacrifice to the point of

⁵²⁶ B. SEBASTIAN, “Following Christ ‘at a Distance’”, 242.

⁵²⁷ B. SEBASTIAN, “Following Christ ‘at a Distance’”, 242-243.

⁵²⁸ POPE FRANCIS, During the celebration of Mass at the St. John Paul II shrine in Krakow, Poland, July 30, 2016. It can be accessed at: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/34284/pope-to-priests-and-religious-dont-be-content-with-mediocrity>.

martyrdom. However, it also faces the subtle but pervasive dangers of spiritual mediocrity, the gradual adoption of middle-class ideals, and a consumer mindset. There is a danger that the new social needs and standards of the State and the temptations posed by efficiency and activity may lead to the uniqueness of the Gospel being obscured and the spiritual impulses behind it being weakened because of the complicated administration of works. All members of the Church and individuals from all walks of life and religion suffer the same struggle as consecrated people do between secularism and the real life of faith, between the fragility of humanity itself and the power of grace (cf. *SFC* 46).

A person who is dedicated to their faith may face difficulties in fully committing to their vows. There are two possible outcomes: they either accept the challenges enthusiastically and rely on God's grace or their willpower and become disheartened by frequent lapses. Choosing a life of average dedication is an easier path that avoids the stress and suffering of renouncing certain things. Mediocre personalities love themselves and lack sensitivity toward mission and life because little love for others is left in their hearts. A lack of love for anything causes loneliness, especially among the devoted, who see no value and importance in sacrificing one's life⁵²⁹.

3.5 Mediocrity and Decline of Faith

Long-term employment in a meritocratic setting can hurt a consecrated person's personal life of faith, leading to dissatisfaction with one's current circumstances. They lose heart and find themselves spiritually exhausted and despairing just when they need to lean heavily on the Lord, their life mentor. When consecrated persons are spiritually and psychologically weak, it can cause friction in their relationships with superiors and peers and problems carrying out their duties. This puts the religious in danger of facing a crisis that might cause them to make a hasty and rash choice, like abandoning their vocation altogether⁵³⁰. Such peril might leave a person feeling emotionally empty, manifesting as apathy and inertia. Pope Francis calls it "mediocrity" and "spiritual discomfort."

There is a dangerous kind of sleep: the slumber of mediocrity. It comes when we forget our first love and grow satisfied with indifference, concerned only for an untroubled existence. We become mediocre, lukewarm, and worldly without trying to love God daily and awaiting the newness he constantly brings. And

⁵²⁹ Cf. M. BUBER, *I am Thou*, New York 1958, 79.

⁵³⁰ Cf. B. SEBASTIAN, "Following Christ 'at a Distance'", 246.

this slowly eats away at our faith, for faith is the very opposite of mediocrity: it is an ardent desire for God, a bold effort to change, the courage to love, and constant progress. Faith is not water that extinguishes flames; it is a fire that burns; it is not a tranquilliser for people under stress; it is a love story for people in love! That is why Jesus, above all else, detests lukewarmness (cf. Rev 3:16). God disdains the lukewarm⁵³¹.

This mediocrity generates a significant identity crisis, impacting one's vocation and life.

3.6 *Mediocrity and Identity Crisis*

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines identity as the unique set of characteristics or traits that make an individual distinguishable from others⁵³². The subjective sense of one's cohesion stems from the individual's experience of the stability and integration of both self and the world around them. A solid understanding of the self requires enduring the unavoidable ambivalence of optimistic and destructive features in the self and others. On the other side, disturbances in the perceived sense of identity result in an unstable perception of self and others, where one does not experience a unified sense of self⁵³³. Because of this, the individual cannot break out of their own extraordinarily positive or negative way of interpreting the world and the people in it.

The inability to concentrate on the job, school, or other activities directly results from identity disruptions. Defects in the development of a healthy superego (moral and ethical values/conscience), the absence of good ideas to motivate and regulate behaviour, the use of primitive defence mechanisms, and the presence of rigidity in the adaptation process are also factors that contribute to an individual's inability to control self and the experience of others, which is not stable and integrated, where one's ability to understand and assess others in depth apart from their transitory behaviour is compromised⁵³⁴. As a result, these factors weaken a person's sense of self, the potential for

⁵³¹ POPE FRANCIS, "Homily from the Eucharistic Concelebration with the New Cardinals", (29 November 2020).

⁵³² Cf. "Identity" in *Merriam Webster Dictionary* [accessed: 2012.2023], <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identity>

⁵³³ Cf. H. KOHUT – E.S. WOLF, "The Disorders of the Self and Their Treatment: An Outline", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 59 (1978) 420.

⁵³⁴ Cf. V. LINGIARDI – N. McWILLIAMS, ed., *Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual* (PDM – 2), 89.

good interpersonal relationships, and their resolve to stick to pledges and long-term objectives.

The problem of faithfulness and pervasive mediocrity in consecrated life are likewise linked to identity and belonging institutional crises. A misunderstanding of personal freedom that relativises a feeling of rule-based bonding has undercut the function of institutions and norms as mediators and elevated a sense of individual liberty defined by immediacy and spontaneity. The mediating role of institutions and the regulations of consecrated life inspire us to view ourselves as brothers and sisters led by the tie of fraternity and to work for the common good by shared laws (cf. *GFPJ* 16). Aside from the subject of a stable and robust personal identity, it is also essential to develop a solid religious identity as a priest and consecrated. Those who have problems constructing a robust personal identity may also have difficulty making a solid religious identity in which one has assimilated vocational principles and values and seeks to live them each day to the best of their ability. Vulnerabilities in forming one's personal and religious identities might impede the long-term commitment and productivity of even consecrated persons.

3.7 Lifestyles that Lack Focus and Concentration

The history of Christianity and consecrated life shows that a person's ability to be wholly centred on Christ is the only way to achieve the completeness of the Christian life and fidelity. The flames of the Holy Spirit and the style of life that Christ set an example for his disciples overcame them. They decided to remain in that place of complete centring, experiencing the richness of the centre and constructing their lives around it.⁵³⁵ The fidelity in consecrated life can be gauged by how closely and intently a person is focused on Christ. Those who settle for a mediocre life are preoccupied with less important matters and have allowed themselves to be debased. They have no sense of direction since they have not established a core value or belief system to create their professional and spiritual identities. Therefore, they are easily swayed by whatever comes their way. They don't appear to have Christ at the centre of their lives but rather themselves; they flit from one self-absorbed pursuit to the next in a life devoid of meaning and direction.

⁵³⁵ Cf. A. NICOLAS, "Dalla distrazione alla dedizione: Un invito al centro", *La civiltà Cattolica* 29 (2020).

There is a danger that religious life may be seen more as something to be done than a part of who one is (cf. *CV* 37)⁵³⁶.

Failure to develop a robust religious identity within the religious vocation might lead to over-identifying with one's function and work. If that function or duty is eliminated at some point, the individual has nothing to cling to. To persist in fidelity, one must appreciate the beauty of being chosen by God. This demands a fundamental openness of his conscience to theocentric values and goals and an essential degree of human maturation. If individuals do not fall in love with God and his mission, making God their primary option becomes difficult.

When one can make the essential choice for God, it aids in being faithful. It becomes the fulcrum around which his decisions, actions, and ambitions revolve. It is equivalent to stating, "I know what I want (intellect); I believe it is beneficial for me (heart), and I choose to pursue it" (will). It will, therefore, possess a monopolising influence over other lesser motives that may exist in the human heart. Numerous religious have not yet made the essential choice for God, nor have they fallen in love with God and their vocation. This may cause individuals to settle for a life of mediocre dedication, with occasional lapses in some circumstances and more regular and significant lapses in others⁵³⁷.

3.8 Lack of Affiliation with the Vocational Programme

A mediocre lifestyle influences personality in many ways, especially the quality of fidelity of a consecrated person. A person's capacity to love, offer oneself, and remain consistent and passionate about one's life and mission in a consecrated vocation is the quality and degree of his identification with the vocational project. Individuals living mediocre lives have not yet identified with their profession and life goals. Perhaps they are so afraid of the expenses, dangers, and sacrifices associated with the commitment that they settle for a life of half-hearted dedication and compromise. Many consecrated individuals are unaware of the actual and prospective ramifications of each vow they declare when they make it. Some quickly get discouraged by failures, rejections, grief, and sacrifice. One of two things can happen to those who choose to persevere after realising the difficulties of living each vow fully: either they accept the challenges with enthusiasm and remain

⁵³⁶ *Christus Vivit (CV)*, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis to Young People and the Entire People of God (2 April 2019).

⁵³⁷ Cf. B. SEBASTIAN, "Following Christ 'at a Distance'", 246.

open to God's grace and help, or they rely on the strength of their own will and, in trying to face the overwhelming struggle involved in staying genuinely committed, they become disheartened by frequent lapses. Choosing a life of average dedication is a way to avoid the stress, difficulty, and suffering of renunciations.

Individuals with a mediocre commitment often tend to focus their concentration and attention on mundane activities and trivial interests, such as entertainment, art, creating monuments, sports, emotional adventures, power-hunger, excessive socializing, internet, and social media addiction, etc. While the internet and social media can serve as a convenient refuge for those in stressful communal living conditions, they also pose inherent dangers. It is easy to get caught up in the digital world and lose the ability to reason clearly and objectively. The vast amount of information available can lead one to hear only what they want to hear and see only what the digital world has to offer. The internet not only increases the chances of developing a dependence on its content but also provides opportunities for forming unhealthy or superficial virtual relationships. This can lead to a sense of emptiness, disconnection, and a tendency to avoid facing problems, compromising one's integrity, and losing motivation to change and grow⁵³⁸. The average religious person tends to dislike situations that involve sacrifice, renunciation, hardship, and sorrow. They are usually too attached to their comforts and pleasures that the mere thought of suffering or making sacrifices scares them. As a result, they tend to avoid any obligations or positions that require high levels of accountability, time, and sacrificing resources.

The goal of avoiding pain, suffering, and sacrifices at all costs is self-preservation. In the Gospel, Jesus describes a seed that refuses to die and produces fruit. When Jesus uses the image of the seed, he is not referring to the actual death of the individual; instead, he is referring to the death of the false self with which people sometimes associate. The false self is concerned with self-preservation and is self-centred. It is distinct from God's love and a distorted representation of one's true self, born and nourished by divine love⁵³⁹. One of the things that makes it difficult for consecrated people to sustain and deepen their fidelity to God and dedication to their everyday lives is mediocrity. Individuals who live a life of mediocre devotion to their vocation sometimes view it as a form of bartering, in which they will receive benefits in exchange for their sacrifices.

⁵³⁸ Cf. B. SEBASTIAN, "Following Christ 'at a Distance'", 247.

⁵³⁹ Cf. B. SEBASTIAN, "Following Christ 'at a Distance'", 251.

4. Personality Styles and Fidelity in Consecrated Life

The inability to bear the tension of living the inconsistency continuously can cause the person to live a double life and eventually exit from the vocational journey due to the lack of vocational values or the weakness of those values. When contemplating a consecrated lifestyle, it is essential to remember that the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience entail significant sacrifices. Lacking strong moral and religious beliefs and ideals in his ideal self to support his choice to renounce each time a need to fulfil what has been rejected shows itself, the individual can only rely on the strength of his willpower to resist the demand⁵⁴⁰. Every time he refuses to give in to the craving, he increases the tension of irritation, which, after some time, might spiral out of control and lead to a breakdown in dedication. But if the person has internalised, deeply held moral and religious values and ideals, then in a similar situation of renunciation, in addition to the force of his willpower, he has the aid of the world of ideas to support his choice to say no and stay in it even despite the tension of renunciation that is tolerable.

The true motivation of the individual in choosing a consecrated life is another crucial area under psychodynamics. Without sufficient personal motivation, the individual makes a fundamental life choice without having discovered the actual value or beauty of that choice. So, he cannot renounce his vocationally varying needs in favour of this choice, creating a disequilibrium in the psyche between frustration and gratification⁵⁴¹. Some people opt to leave for the sake of their mental health if their drive is insufficient or if it is not compatible with their chosen profession, while others prefer to stay and settle for a life of mediocrity. It is possible for a person's integrity to be compromised and mediocrity to result from a lack of conviction about the worth of their decision to resign, even if they recognise it as a religious obligation to remain a consecrated person.

4.1 *Struggling for Love and Fidelity*

During his talk to priests and religious in Poland, Pope Francis emphasised the importance of tangible love, defining it as a love characterised by service and availability. He said that the lives of the disciples closest to Jesus were shaped by this kind of love, which enabled them to develop deeper intimacy

⁵⁴⁰ Cf. POPE PAUL VI, "Fidelity to the Religious Vocation", *The Pope Speaks* 17/03 (1972) 202.

⁵⁴¹ Cf. A. VAN KAAM, *Formative Spirituality: Fundamental Formation*, Vol. 1, 98.

and fidelity to God. To avoid becoming lonely and gloomy, confined behind the small walls of joyless and desperate self-centeredness, the disciples do not give up evangelism for the world's comforts, nor do they squander time arranging a secure future. Because their joy is found in the Lord, they are not happy with a mundane existence but are consumed by a passion for sharing the gospel with others⁵⁴².

The Bible is replete with repeated themes of God's steadfast fidelity and his people's persistent unfaithfulness to him; grace also has the power to mend the ruptured tie between God and humanity. Christ truly embodies the consistency of God. An individual's devotion is infused with vitality via direct interaction with the Lord and by submitting their thoughts, desires, emotions, and inner being to Him. To maintain one's faithfulness in the likeness of Christ demands endurance in addition to patience. Belief is the most genuine manifestation of love for Christ. It is necessary to remember one's encounter with the Lord to maintain persistence. The term "fidelity" encompasses a wide range of meanings and entities, such as the commitment demonstrated by partners during their matrimonial union, a faithful representation or recollection of an individual, a devoted member of a religious community, a devoted canine companion, and the condition of being loyal to God, one's nation, the law, oneself, customs, and ideals, among others⁵⁴³.

Consequently, loyalty is an all-encompassing and flexible concept that functions conceptually yet invariably within the framework of an affiliation with an individual or entity. It exhibits a silhouette reminiscent of a human body. In its absence, the body is devoid of any shadow. It is a state of mind that persists throughout time in connection to something else⁵⁴⁴. Being loyal is not the goal because being faithful is only the result of our efforts to continue living by our commitment. We devote ourselves not to faithfulness but to a person, a cause, or a principle. For loyalty to exist, we must continue to offer ourselves consistently. What is the link between faithfulness and commitment? We can state that commitment comes before loyalty. We make every effort to honour our agreements. Fidelity to a commitment implies that

⁵⁴² Cf. Pope Francis, Address to priests and Religious of Poland [accessed: 10.01.2022], http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents_papa-francesco_20160730_omelia-polonia-santuario-gpii.html

⁵⁴³ Cf. POPE PAUL VI, "Fidelity, Courage, and Confidence in the Faith", *The Pope Speaks* 21/3 (1976) 58.

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. DEVDAT, "Religious Formation in Biblical Perspective" *In Christo* 49/02 (2011) 44.

the commitment will continue to exist throughout time, creating fidelity. However, we might equally state that commitment requires fidelity⁵⁴⁵.

Self-division and other personality characteristics significantly impact the formation and development of fidelity in a consecrated individual. To grow and flourish, Fidelity always seeks free and spontaneous environments. Genuine love in the person creates inspiration and awe to follow a person or ideology, even at the cost of their life. There is always a crisis of fidelity in every life that exhibits degraded integrity and mediocrity⁵⁴⁶. Infidelity is the absence of affection and the act of betraying one's partner. Without true love, there cannot be genuine fidelity. When there is love, one remains true regardless of temptations, tribulations, and problems. There is a willingness to endure suffering and sacrifice without compromising. Emotional freedom signifies and defines that freedom is not presented in terms of autonomy but love. Man is free not since he is not dependent on anything or anybody but insofar as he depends on what he loves and is called to love⁵⁴⁷.

Love is a necessary quality which one must improve to develop any desire in a person. Everyone desires to be loved, and the inability can cause intense emotional distress. Therefore, love is an innate necessity that underpins our essential being, even before it is recognised as a virtue. It is the basis from which all other values are derived. Love is a crucial prerequisite for fidelity and should be driven by our aspirations rather than our thoughts or idealisations⁵⁴⁸. Without solid principles to guide our actions, we may be swayed by passing trends and settle for a dull existence. We need a sense of purpose, a romantic interest, and a future to anticipate moving forward. Often, people act impulsively without a plan, depending on whatever catches their attention now.

A person who is dedicated and committed leads a purposeful life. Absolute commitment shows a desire and willingness to fulfil a promise. To develop steadfast perseverance, one must have an inner sensitivity to respond to God's gift and exercise it. This requires an open mind and perseverance in uncertain situations. We must stay motivated and driven by our aspirations, not our thoughts or idealisations. Without solid principles to guide our actions, we risk being swayed by fleeting trends and settling for a mediocre

⁵⁴⁵ Cf. B. SEBASTIAN, "Following Christ 'at a Distance'", 216.

⁵⁴⁶ Cf. K. PATHIL, "Challenges to Consecrated Life", *Jeeva Dhara* 4 (2011) 262.

⁵⁴⁷ Cf. A. CENCINI, *Vita Consacrata. Itinerario formativo lungo la via di Emmaus*, Milano 1994, 103.

⁵⁴⁸ Cf. K. WOJTYLA, *Love and Responsibility*, Boston 2013, 223.

existence⁵⁴⁹. We need a purpose, a love interest, and a future to look forward to and keep going. A consecrated person's love for God and genuine, profound relationship with him are the driving forces behind his fidelity and perseverance.

4.2 Decline of Good Examples in Consecrated Life

The history of consecrated life and the Church gives us instances of people willing to forsake their lives, careers, and fortunes for their trust in Jesus and his mission. Even their essence was captivated and transformed by love and faith in Jesus for the sake of Christ and humanity. Many consecrated persons maintained an extremely austere existence to accomplish Christian life's and calling's perfection. From the beginnings of monasticism to the "new communities" of our own time, every form of consecrated life has been born of the Spirit's call to follow Jesus as the Gospel teaches (cf *PC* 2). Their lives and actions reflected the union with Jesus, the master they had attained through prayer and meditation. Availability to one another and a communal lifestyle are reminiscent of the first Christian groups. Every consecrated person follows the example of Jesus the Master and Mary the Mother of all Christians by cultivating humility and other virtues⁵⁵⁰.

As with everything else in today's world, the circumstances and tempo of the consecrated life are constantly shifting. Religious sacrifice and piety are seen as meaningless because they do not result in material gain and social standing. Religion has failed to win over the hearts of the younger generation because it cannot account for the complexities of modern life. In contrast, science and reasoning have risen to prominence due to globalisation. While social and electronic media have made the consecrated life and service of the Church more vibrant, they have also taken away the desire of the consecrated persons to be linked with Jesus, their spiritual guide⁵⁵¹. Everyone determines the morality and ethics of society according to their preferences. Expressions of sorrow or empathy are limited to social media and technical channels. One of the areas adversely affected by new-generation changes is consecrated life, and personal sacrifice and self-emptying for their worthy and noble goal become utopian realities. In a society where people are increasingly insular

⁵⁴⁹ Cf. B. SEBASTIAN, "Following Christ 'at a Distance'", 217.

⁵⁵⁰ Cf. USG, *Consecrated Life Today: Charisms in the Church for the World*, London 1994, 77.

⁵⁵¹ Cf. P.J. BERKERY, *Is Religious Possible?* New Jersey 1969, 188.

and self-absorbed, they can't develop empathy for others or get insight into the plight of their fellow man or the injustices they face daily⁵⁵².

Pope Francis invites today's religious with these words: "Don't be closed in on yourselves, don't be stifled by petty squabbles, don't remain a hostage to your problems. These will be resolved if you help others resolve their problems and proclaim the Good News. You will find life by giving life, hope, and love by giving love" (*TC* 4)⁵⁵³. Religion and consecrated life are desert oases that are pleasant to observe but not to experience directly. One of the essential components of the religious life, community life, becomes challenging for the members when they exhibit negative personality characteristics not addressed favourably during formation or spiritual exercises. Community life is called to be the prior experience of eschatological community, which is called the "mystique of living together", which makes our life "a sacred pilgrimage" (*EV* 87)⁵⁵⁴.

Pope Francis, concerned about modern religious communities, called for "experts in communion" among the consecrated to demonstrate to the public how division based on skin colour and national origin undermines brotherhood and sisterhood:

In a polarised society, where different cultures experience difficulty in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, and where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community which, by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective gifts, makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters (*TC* 2).

Consecrated life has relied heavily on role models throughout history as a means by which Christians might attain sanctification. Throughout history, numerous church leaders and holy people provided outstanding conversion models by becoming Christ's most effective tools. Over the years, the consecrated life has thrived due to the blood and martyrdom of the Church's and consecrated life's significant figures⁵⁵⁵. These saints serve as examples of commitment and faith for all Christians, especially those who have chosen the consecrated life. Numerous departed and living persons are beautiful

⁵⁵² Cf. M. CAMASSA, *On the Power and Limits of Empathy*, Lucerne 2019, 43.

⁵⁵³ *A tutti i consecrati (TC)*, Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis on the year of consecrated life (21 November 2014).

⁵⁵⁴ *Evangelium Vitae (EV)*, Encyclicals by Pope John Paul II on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life (25 March 1995).

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. R. MARTIN, *Called to Holiness. What It Means to Encounter the Living God*, Mumbai 2001, 78.

examples of an honourable profession and way of life, which is declining among the younger generation. Pope Francis says:

Contemporary religious individuals often struggle with a lack of role models who can inspire and comfort them during difficult times. For many founders and foundresses, the Gospel was the ultimate guide, and all other laws were meant to reflect the Gospel and a way of living it to the fullest. Christ was their goal; they aspired to be inwardly joined with him so that they may declare with Saint Paul, “For to me, to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21). The purpose of their vows was to concretise their ardent love. Considering these seeming contradictions, we would do well to think whether the Gospel serves as the “manual” by which we are to live and make decisions. The Gospel calls for a radical and authentic way of life, and that’s not easy to come by. Although reading and studying Scripture is crucial, they are insufficient on their own (cf. *TC* 2).

4.3 *Perfectionism*

The trait of pursuing excellence is a very desirable trait that everyone frequently advocates. Like the rest of the contemporary world, consecrated living in some corners places a premium on academic achievement at the expense of all other aspects of a person’s development. For a mature and creative individual to take on the future mission with integrity and fidelity, applicants for the consecrated life must grow and develop holistically. Perfectionism is the inclination “to value and pursue perfection, to set and adhere firmly to exceedingly high standards, and to analyse outcomes with a highly judgmental and critical eye”⁵⁵⁶. It’s possible to interpret this as the yearning for perfection coupled with a paralysing dread of failure, the identification of mistakes with defects in one’s character, and the firm belief that attaining this level of excellence is the only way to be loved and accepted for who one truly is. Perfectionism is a desire to be perfect. Anything less than perfect may be necessary at times, but it is never acceptable⁵⁵⁷.

It’s easy for perfectionists to be drawn to the priesthood and monastic life because of these paths’ high goals and standards of behaviour. Their self-centeredness is so great that even when they strive for perfection in virtues or holy living, they do it not for God’s honour but to make themselves feel superior. This makes one think of the prayer of the self-righteous Pharisee in the synagogue, who looks down on the publican because he doesn’t practise

⁵⁵⁶ A. E. CRADDOCK – *al.*, “Family of Origin Qualities as Predictors of Religious Dysfunctional Perfectionism”, *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38/3 (2010) 205.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. T.S. GREENSPON, “Making Sense of Error: A View of the Origins and Treatment of Perfectionism”, *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 62/3 (2008) 265.

the same level of religion⁵⁵⁸. This dubious motive never brings a consecrated person closer to Jesus, the source of his unique calling; instead, it bears a false witness. Len Sperry, M.D. points out that these people might have an erroneous idea about God, which can lead to problems in their spiritual lives. For them, God is someone they must satisfy by not sinning; God is a taskmaster, police officer, or judge. Since they are so careful, they spend much of their time in prayer, dwelling on their shortcomings and asking for mercy. They are left with a smattering of phoney devotion to God at most. The pursuit of perfection by the perfectionist religious has a more narcissistic and practical purpose than an evangelistic one. They are trying to protect a fragile sense of self from the guilt of admitting flaws and limits⁵⁵⁹.

Consecrated persons who have dedicated their lives to something might use perfectionism in numerous ways. The word “profession” had religious connotations since it referred to a “calling” that people answered. Public professions of faith and service are made inside the church’s sacramental structures. Pastors functioned as the hub of Christian culture and the preeminent “professionals” within that culture in the early years of Christendom when the established church was effectively in command of society. The pastors responded to the people’s immediate needs for education, legal rights, healthcare, and salvation by reaching out to them. Perfectionists may place undue pressure on their candidates to always pursue excellence while failing to provide them with the empathy they need to comprehend their difficulties. It’s possible that this won’t have as harmful an effect on applicants who don’t have a natural bent toward perfectionism as it would on those predisposed to perfectionism due to their upbringing. Candidates with perfectionism may not receive the healing they need from perfectionist formators who fail to grasp their predicament.

On the other hand, candidates with a perfectionist orientation aim to satisfy the formator by compliant behaviour, doing everything flawlessly down to the last detail, without giving any thought to the value orientation of their behaviour. It undermines the fundamental goal of formation: to help people become more Christlike and internalise Kingdom ideals. If applicants’ emotional needs aren’t met in a formation programme, perfectionist tendencies might flourish. This is because perfectionists prefer to avoid expressing their emotions for fear of seeming weak. They become cold and heartless robots,

⁵⁵⁸ Cf. B. SEBASTIAN, “Perfectionism in Religious Living: Some Psychological Considerations”, *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life* 7/1 (2012) 90.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. L. SPERRY., “Neurotic Personalities in Religious Settings”, *Human Development* 12/3 (1991) 15.

notwithstanding their initial efficiency⁵⁶⁰. Suppose a consecrated person's drive for perfection isn't channelled toward furthering their development and advancing their mission. In that case, they may believe that they are superior to everyone and everything other than what their vocation to monastic life requires. A. Mallinger explains this situation as:

I can (and must) always perform with flawless competence, make the right choice or decision, excel in everything that counts, and never find anything wrong. I can be, and should be, above criticism in every important personal attribute, including my values, attitudes and opinions. Thus, I can guarantee myself fail-safe protection against failure, criticism, rejection and humiliation, any of which would be unbearable⁵⁶¹.

The tendency of the perfectionist candidate to contest every suggestion and assert their view, their unwillingness to commit themselves to anything immediately, and resistance to being controlled may provoke frustration and anger in the formator. It may lead to emotional distancing and defensiveness that do not help the candidate handle their predicament. Regarding formation, it's crucial to avoid sending the applicants the idea that their value is performance-based. This is especially clear when formators with perfectionism regard the best performers more favourably. Rather than basing their self-worth on superficial characteristics or abilities, the applicants need assistance building a solid sense of self based on their belief in who they are. By validating the candidates' identities and encouraging them to engage in closer interpersonal closeness in the community, a formator with empathetic sensitivity can reduce their anxiety related to attachment and dependence difficulties.

Good formation and environment enable the applicant to develop holistically by confronting their personal and behavioural issues. There will always be those who strive for perfection. The question is whether we are willing to accept people for who they are rather than evaluate them by their performance and whether we are eager to enter their fragile emotional world to help them rather than add to the stress they already have felt. Ordinary communal life may be a lot more pleasant if there is enough trust and mutual affirmation of each other's value as people. A "courage to be imperfect"⁵⁶²

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. C. EZEANI, "Cultivating Mature Relationships in Religious Formation", *Review for Religious* 68/4 (2009) 382.

⁵⁶¹ A. MALLINGER, "The Myth of Perfection: Perfectionism in the Obsessive Personality", *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 63/2 (2009) 109.

⁵⁶² Cf. T.S. GREENSPON, "Making Sense of Error: A View of the Origins and Treatment of Perfectionism", *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 62/3 (2008) 269.

attitude will assist the perfectionist in growing and developing their religious nature to become a person of fidelity and commitment.

4.5 Professionalism is a Bane or a Blessing for Consecrated Fidelity

Professionalism is a crucial element in various occupations and vocations. However, pastoral ministry lacks the same level of professionalism as other professions. Despite this, pastoral ministry was traditionally one of the four primary vocations. Since church ministry is primarily based on the principle of service, it is also considered a profession⁵⁶³. A profession may be described as a trade structured to execute a specific function. It consists of specially trained volunteers who follow regulations to impose specific standards that protect its members and improve public service⁵⁶⁴.

God has equipped each member of the church for service. To enable “all God’s people to fulfil their unique ministry” (Eph 4:11-12). God calls a set of individuals to serve Him in ministry. The term “profession” contained a religious allusion to a “calling” in which men and women pursued a vocation. Members make religious declarations of the Church’s holy orders, expressing their belief in God and dedication to serving him. Pastors acted as the focal point of Christian culture in the early centuries of Christendom, and the established church effectively ruled society. By becoming the dominating group of “professionals” inside that culture, the pastors responded to the people’s immediate needs for education, legal rights, healthcare, and salvation by reaching out to them. In the late Middle Ages, however, via secularisation and the structuring of business organisations into guilds, non-religious organisations began to perform what was previously performed by the professed religious⁵⁶⁵. Professionalism still played a vital part in Christian ministry because even though the term professional no longer applied only to the religious, it continued to carry the connotation of being motivated by love to commit oneself to acquire expert knowledge and skill to serve human needs with good moral character⁵⁶⁶.

We are not just professionals in the worldly sense, but we also must do our duty as Christ did in His day, for the world moves swiftly even into the ministry, orders of the church, and consecrated life today. A religious

⁵⁶³ Cf. M. ADDERHOLDT, – J. GOLDBERG, *Perfectionism: What’s Bad about Being Too Good?* Minneapolis 1999, 203.

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. W.L. SPERRY, *The Call to the Ministry*, 218.

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. R.M. GULA, *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers*, New York 2010, 31.

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. R.M. GULA, *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers*, 31.

vocation is a special calling from God to serve him and his people. It is a holy service providing healing and care to the human soul⁵⁶⁷. Today, professionalism is identified with making money and seeking privilege or a position. But our service persuades ministers to recognise that the ministry is unique as a vocation because it cannot be compared to other professions because of its spiritual, transcendent dimension.

The Formation of the consecrated person focuses not only on professionalism in service and appearance but also on the spiritual and emotional development of the individual, resulting in a complete growth in vocation, fidelity, and commitment. Consistent with the modern trend, the consecrated life places less value on spiritual and committed development and more on intellectual and performance enhancement. With time, many believers in professionalism lose trust in their vocation and touch with Jesus, causing them to either give up on this unique way of life or resign themselves to a faithfulness-free existence devoid of originality. Professionalism at the expense of the communal aspects of religious life and shared brotherhood makes the consecrated feel less significant in these areas, making them less participatory and more selfish in their behaviour⁵⁶⁸.

Our work as ministers in the Church or other forms of consecrated life is both a “vocation” and a “profession”. Since a call to ministry is a religious vocation, there must be tremendous respect and commitment for the responsibilities that come with it, thus making it professional. The danger of not including professional requirements to the religious vocation could cause the consecrated to hide behind a religious calling and avoid fulfilling the rules and expectations that come with this calling. The Church acknowledges both the divine calling of a person to pastoral ministry and that person’s dedication to answering that call. As part of the answer, you’re promising to do everything you can to prepare adequately.

Training consecrated persons aims to serve God’s people well and meet their spiritual needs. Ultimately, success is not determined by reaching one’s career goals as much as by doing God’s will in all things⁵⁶⁹. Religious can’t rely on their skills to get the job done; they must instead turn to God in prayer for guidance. They must rely on the Holy Spirit to work for the Church of Jesus Christ. Consecrated persons can strive for quality and professionalism

⁵⁶⁷ Cf. W.L. SPERRY, *The Call to the Ministry*, 224-225.

⁵⁶⁸ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004, 36.

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. “Perfectionism in the Church” [accessed: 12.12.2023], <https://www.catholic-revivalministries.com/blog/perfectionism-in-the-church>

in a service not primarily concerned with their fulfilment, survival, or glorification. This can only be accomplished if consecrated firmly grasp who they are in Christ and their calling to the ministry. Then, they may put their energy into learning what they need to know to carry out their vocation correctly⁵⁷⁰. To gain the trust and confidence of the people religious serve, we must recognise that God had called us to work in that area and gain professional knowledge and practice to serve people in that area better.

Education is crucial to a complete formation in the consecrated life since it increases one's ability to do one's given task. The training they receive should instil in them a strong feeling of duty and a dedication to their work beyond anything they've ever felt. Professionalism has benefits that much outweigh the work and self-control it requires. After completing their initial training, the blessing of professionalism occurs when religious leaders continue to learn and grow in their religious vocation through continued education, discussion, and supervision on professional practice issues in ministry and the understanding that they are collaborators with other religions⁵⁷¹. When God calls individuals to become ministers, they must display professionalism and religious devotion. This means that they should adhere to the moral obligations that come with being a minister and the societal norms of professionalism in God's work. However, professionalism should only be seen as one aspect of a religious holistic formation. This will ensure that the world has access to religious leaders who are faithful and professional in their service.

5. Electronic and Social Media in the Lives of the Consecrated

Humanity is currently living in a crucial moment due to the pandemic and the overwhelming amount of information being dispersed and broadcast constantly, known as the "infodemic". Technology has completely transformed religious practices and beliefs. Writers who acknowledge the automation of religious practices and changes in contemporary religious life and imagination affirm that social networks and digital interactions have modified religious ideology. However, a question arises: Is it necessary to be present in

⁵⁷⁰ Cf. J.D. JAGO, "To Protect the Public: Professionalism vs Competence in Dentistry", *Social Science and Medicine* 19/2 (1984) 122.

⁵⁷¹ Cf. T.H. GROOM, *Christian Religious Education*, San Francisco 1981, 108.

these new scenarios and are social networks and the internet the best resources to grow spiritually?⁵⁷².

Electronic and social media significantly impact all aspects of contemporary life. Media has an all-encompassing performance that encompasses all human existence and needs. This platform discusses and exchanges topics ranging from the giant globe to the smallest town, from schools to kitchens, and from scientific facts to trivial concerns. Pope Francis calls it a “gift from God” if it is used wisely to build a society which is healthy and open to sharing. Communication, wherever and however it takes place, has opened broader horizons for many people. This is a gift of God which involves a great responsibility. Communication is a powerful tool that can unite people and promote inclusivity, enriching society. It is beautiful when individuals care about their choice of words and actions, aiming to prevent misunderstandings, heal emotional wounds, and build peace and harmony⁵⁷³. Words can create bridges between individuals, families, social groups, and even entire communities in the physical and digital worlds.

I like to refer to this power of communication as “closeness”. The encounter between communication and mercy will be fruitful to the degree that it generates a closeness which cares, comforts, heals, accompanies, and celebrates. In a broken, fragmented, and polarised world, to communicate with mercy means to help create a healthy, accessible and fraternal closeness between the children of God and all our brothers and sisters in the one human family⁵⁷⁴.

This digital invasion significantly altered both the global landscape and religious life. Considering the current environment, every aspect of the viewpoint, formation, and mission must be reassessed.

As we know, the culture of our day is digital, and religious life must deal with this fact to reap its benefits and master the threats it brings [...]. There is little doubt that the massive transformations we see today alter how we practise our faith. “We are sometimes being changed even without our conscious

⁵⁷² Cf. “Religious Life and Social Networks” by Capuchin Tertiary Sisters of the Holy Family, [accessed: 22.10.2023], <https://www.terciariascapuchinas.org/en/religious-life-and-social-networks/>

⁵⁷³ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, “Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter”, Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 50th World Communications Day (January 24, 2016).

⁵⁷⁴ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, “Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter”.

knowledge. How we live our religious life, express our faith, engage in ministry, interact with each other, etc., has changed in a few decades⁵⁷⁵.

Religious should think seriously about this reality of digital culture and how it can enhance the life of fidelity and creative mission for the betterment of the needy. In a world where media mismanagement and a lack of moral and ethical norms have led to widespread harm, the consecrated must foster a culture of responsible media consumption. Bishop Paul Tighe, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, urges that it is essential for people in the Church to recognise how the digital environment functions and to see it as a new continent for evangelisation. “We need to be first and foremost people who can be there credibly and with a certain respect for other people, and only then will there be credibility about our presence as believers”⁵⁷⁶.

Bishop Tighe, who served as a formator for many years, thinks that the formation and other settings of the candidates of this century need to be structured correctly in today’s context so that they don’t feel like foreigners in the formation and live meaninglessly rest of their lives. People entering consecrated life today are highly digitalised; people will continue to be tied to their past lives, employment, and ideas. We should not oppose this but rather welcome it. To understand how social media are evolving humanly, we need to speak with individuals about their social media usage and engagement. Training and inputs should be provided during their initial and ongoing formation to encourage proper, responsible, and purposeful media utilisation. Internet’s vast knowledge and input can also help with spiritual development. “To be spiritual does not necessarily mean to come offline. There are resources that build peoples’ spirituality through an online presence”⁵⁷⁷.

As the consecrated life becomes more integrated with the digital society, we can categorise individuals into three distinct groups. The first group consists of people born before the era of exponential technological advancements and are now trying to catch up with the changes, especially in the digital realm. The second group comprises those born during considerable change and have learned to adapt to it. These individuals are known as digital

⁵⁷⁵ “Religious Life and the Digital Sphere” by Conference of Religious England and Wales, [accessed: 24.10.2023], <https://www.corew.org/news-events-blog/2018/7/30/religious-life-and-the-digital-sphere>

⁵⁷⁶ Cf. “Religious Life and the Digital Sphere” by Conference of Religious England and Wales.

⁵⁷⁷ Cf. “Religious Life and the Digital Sphere” by Conference of Religious England and Wales.

immigrants. The third and final group includes people born into the digital culture, skilled with technology and media, and called digital natives⁵⁷⁸. It is crucial for the healthy growth of fidelity and commitment in our vocation that we have a constructive fusion of all these groups, which are an integral part of our daily lives in consecrated life. It is undeniable that the significant changes happening today are having a profound impact on our religious practices. Sometimes, these changes are happening without us even realising it. Over the past few decades, the way we live out our faith, how we express our beliefs, how we engage in ministry, and how we interact with one another have all been transformed. Pope Francis has expressed his belief that the digital world can create a space for human connections and interactions beyond just being a network of wires. The responsibility lies with the Church to come together and brainstorm how to use media to reach out to the most neglected and underprivileged sections of society amidst rapidly evolving technology and communication channels⁵⁷⁹.

Most of the samples in my interview, which I will present in the sixth chapter, believed that unrestricted use of social media negatively impacts their relationship with God and one another in the community. Many choose to be “alone” in the middle of “crowds” in the community since the current mass media has stolen the quality of prayer and brotherhood. Members would rather hide out in a virtual community than put into practice the wonderful message of forgiveness and understanding, which reflects the difficulties inherent in real-world communities. The rise of religion over the past few centuries was a reaction to the overwhelming allure of secular culture and the allure of martyrdom, both of which have now fallen prey to the seductive allure of modern technology and media. Through its exhortation, Church reminds us, “The Internet is not merely a medium of entertainment and consumer gratification. It is a tool for accomplishing useful work; the young must learn to see and use it. In cyberspace, at least as much as anywhere else, they may be called on to go against the tide, practice counter-culturalism, even suffer persecution for the sake of what is true and good”⁵⁸⁰.

⁵⁷⁸ Cf. B. MADATHIKUNNEL “Digital Culture and Religious Life” [accessed: 24.10.2023], <https://www.cssr.news/2018/07/digital-culture-and-religious-life/>

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. B. MADATHIKUNNEL “Digital Culture and Religious Life”.

⁵⁸⁰ *The Church and Internet* by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications (22 February 2002) 12.

6. Liquid Society Against Lifelong Fidelity in Consecrated Life

Change is constant in today's globe and culture. Everything we think we know about the world is constantly changing, from its concepts to its institutions. This phenomenon adds complexity to our understanding of religion and good and evil. Change is constant in today's globe and culture. The things we believe about the world constantly change, including our ideas and the institutions we create. This can make it more difficult to understand concepts like religion, good, and evil. People dedicated to religious life often face a culture that promotes indulgence and fleeting emotions, making it challenging to remain faithful. But fidelity is essential to freedom, allowing us to search for truth and goodness with clarity and purpose (cf. *GFJP* 15).

Instability becomes the norm of the day, affecting institutions such as family life and religious life, directly impacting the quality and standards of life in society. Stability in the family life and complete faithfulness in consecrated life are both called into question, as are long-term commitments among married couples and lifelong attachments to Jesus' way of living.

Bauman observed that the general trait of the individualistic modern man is to flow through his life like a tourist, changing places, jobs, spouses, values and even sexual orientation and gender. Bauman said the modern tendency is to exclude oneself from traditional networks of support while at the same time freeing oneself from the restrictions or requirements those networks impose⁵⁸¹.

This individualism created in society a feeling that everything is unstable and changeable. Bauman⁵⁸² thinks that it is becoming accepted that "change" is the "only permanent thing" and that "uncertainty" has become the "only certainty"⁵⁸³. This new behaviour of humanity afflicted the area of religion. The believer is now disturbed that even the Catholic Church — an age-old example of stability — seems to want to become 'liquid' as well. With the modern tendency to liquefy the Gospel to adapt according to times, needs and people, we must rediscover and apply the ancient and beautiful motto, "The Cross is steady while the world turns"⁵⁸⁴.

Religion and faith hold intrinsic value as they motivate and direct people's lives. They also give people a sense of meaningfulness and community and

⁵⁸¹ V. MESSORI, "Pope Francis is Creating a 'Liquid Society' Church", *National Catholic Register* [accessed: 10.10.23], <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/messori-pope-francis-is-creating-a-liquid-society-church>

⁵⁸² Zygmunt Bauman is a sociologist born in Poland.

⁵⁸³ V. MESSORI, "Pope Francis is Creating a 'Liquid Society' Church".

⁵⁸⁴ V. MESSORI, "Pope Francis is Creating a 'Liquid Society' Church".

help them construct their identity. However, both faith and deep relationships face challenges in modern society. In today's world, where freedom, self-determination, self-realisation, sexuality, pleasure, and wealth are worshipped as actual objects, it becomes difficult for people, especially the young, to view obedience, chastity and poverty as values and a lifestyle choice. Few think we cannot maintain a permanent commitment to the consecrated life because we cannot decide for the future considering life's fluidity and changeability⁵⁸⁵.

Religious life implies the unique choice of a particular commitment. At the same time, the young are always ready to go from one thing to another, with social and ideal mobility unknown in the past. The religious come from a culture that sees history as a plan oriented toward a goal, and for them, the present only has significance as an instrumental passing point. This contrasts with secular cultures, which consider the present as having meaning in and of itself⁵⁸⁶. In a reasonably counterintuitive way, the here and now is extremely valuable to young people. It makes little difference if history was written with the ultimate goals in mind; what is essential is the present moment. Being so dedicated to a lifetime decision is a model that extends beyond their horizon.

Consecrated persons should grow in their extraordinary lives through fidelity and feel that life is a gift lived through their self-giving. This will be possible if they discover that God is not a threat to their happiness but that He alone can satisfy their deepest longings, fill their lives with energy, and give them the capacity to be happy and good⁵⁸⁷. This will be possible if they feel motivated to dream big, not to waste their powers, to commit themselves to their formation and in the transformation of society, to have life plans, and to become people for others because only through love can a man reach his full stature and overcome death.

CONCLUSION TO PART I

This chapter presents contemporary issues related to consecrated life and its fundamental aspect of fidelity. Life is an experiment, and nothing is permanent in this ever-changing world. Despite the modern world's

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. E.H. COUSINS, *Christ of the 21st Century*, Rockport 1992, 7.

⁵⁸⁶ Cf. D. O'MURCHU, *Religious Life in the 21st Century. The Prospect of Refounding*, New York 2018, 212.

⁵⁸⁷ Cf. J. ROVIRA, "L'amicizia spirituale secondo Aelredo di Rievaulx" [accessed: 20.12.2023], https://www.vitanostra-nuovaciteaux.it/wp-content/uploads/2007_Rovira_amicia.pdf

disagreement with the importance of God and religion in human lives, they are closely associated with peace and pleasure. The instant and fluid culture of today's world affects all sections of society, giving the impression that nothing is permanent or absolute. Consecrated Life, the fruit of the Christian faith, also feels the tremors and winds of this change. Understanding human existence can be complex, especially in today's world. It requires proper guidance and support to thrive with stability and clarity. Our personal and societal contexts can significantly impact our ability to pursue a fulfilling life. When all these factors align, we can conclude that an individual's calling is holistic and inspired by fidelity to the ultimate reality. In the next part of this research, I will examine the current formation system in Indonesia and its impact on fidelity and perseverance in the consecrated life.

PART II

**FIDELITY IN RELIGIOUS LIVING
IN THE INDONESIAN CHURCH CONTEXT:
A HISTORICAL AND EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT**

CHAPTER V

Consecrated Life in Indonesia: Origins and Orientations

INTRODUCTION

In the first part of our exploration, we looked into the idea of fidelity in consecrated life and its theological roots and importance. We discussed various formative elements essential to nurture fidelity, including family, culture, and education. Additionally, we examined the Church's teachings on religious formation and emphasised the significance of fidelity as outlined in key documents. However, we also discussed the challenges and obstacles individuals face in maintaining fidelity, such as societal complexities and the influence of electronic media. Despite these challenges, our exploration provided valuable insights into the nature of fidelity within the context of consecrated life and its formation in Indonesia.

Part II of this study aims to expand the discussion on fidelity among consecrated individuals in Indonesia and examine its strengths and weaknesses through empirical research. Indonesia is the largest country in Southeast Asia, with a maximum dimension from east to west of about 3,200 miles (5,100 km) and an extent from north to south of 1,100 miles (1,800 km). According to a 2022 estimation, its population is 275,400,000. The country consists of five major islands and about 30 smaller groups. There are 17,508 islands, of which about 6000 are inhabited. It is the fourth most populous country in the world. Indonesia is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual island country ruled by various local Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms and tribal empires before the arrival of Islam in the 15th century and the colonisation by the Dutch in the 19th century. There are more than 1,300 recognised ethnic groups in

Indonesia, and hundreds of languages are spoken⁵⁸⁸. According to the 2010 census, approximately 87% of the population is Muslim, 10% Christians (7% Protestants, 3% Roman Catholics), and 1.5% Hindu. Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population, and the first principle of Indonesia's philosophical foundation, *Pancasila*⁵⁸⁹, requires its citizens to "believe in the almighty God." Consequently, atheists in Indonesia experience official discrimination when registering births and marriages and issuing identity cards⁵⁹⁰.

The history of Indonesia clarifies that traditional animism was the underlying faith of all. The community was safeguarded by ancestral spirits or the living dead. Forests that housed wild spirits and required sacrifices to appease them were located outside the settlement and its agricultural fields⁵⁹¹. Only in the direst of emergencies were prayers made to *Dewa*, the God of the sky. He was revered as the supreme male deity in the area, with Mother Earth serving as his female equivalent. It was beneath the dignity of the moon and the stars. Spirits were blamed for everything from bad luck to illness. All around the islands, people started paying respects to their ancestors. The concept of a human soul that survives physical death was widely held⁵⁹². This may be an ethnic religion, a form of animism with no central authority, codified dogma, and widely diverse local beliefs. The inhabitants revered the sun, the moon, the stars, the sky and the land, and artefacts shown in their ghost homes (*ureu*) and (*pemalis*) sacred stones.

Today, despite constitutionally guaranteeing freedom of religion, the government recognises only six religions: Islam, Christianity (Protestantism, under the label of *Kristen* and Roman Catholicism as *Katholik*), Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Indonesia recognises Catholicism and Protestantism as separate religions rather than denominations of Christianity. This is because Indonesia was a former colony of the Netherlands, which fought some pretty nasty wars over the right to be Protestant. The Community of Churches leads Protestants. The Bishops Council of Indonesia leads

⁵⁸⁸ Cf. "Indonesia, A Country Profile" [accessed: 28.09.2022], <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/indonesia.htm>.

⁵⁸⁹ *Pancasila* is Indonesia's official foundational philosophical theory. The name is derived from two words initially derived from Sanskrit: *panca* (five) and *silla* (principles): cf. K. ANDITO, *Atas Nama Agama: Wacana Agama dalam Dialog Bebas Konflik*, Bandung 1998, 62.

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. K. ANDITO, *Atas Nama Agama: Wacana Agama dalam Dialog Bebas Konflik*, 70.

⁵⁹¹ Cf. P. BYRNE, *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralisme*, London 1995, 97.

⁵⁹² Cf. J.S. ARITONANG – K. STEENBRINK, ed., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, Jakarta 2008, 73.

Catholics⁵⁹³. According to a 2017 decision of the Constitutional Court of Indonesia, “the branches/flows of beliefs ethnic” religions with new religious movements — must be recognised and included in an Indonesian identity card (KTP), and there are about 245 unofficial religions in Indonesia. The local people were not the passive receiving side of the process of religious change but are seen here as the acting and deciding party that took up the opportunity of the presence of a new religious system of meaning. More emphasis has been given to the origins and the first deciding decades in founding Christian communities than to later institutional development.

1. History of Religion in Indonesia

Until the beginning of CE, the peoples of Indonesia followed the local tribal Austronesian and Papuan ethnic religions and traditions. Historically, immigration from the Indian subcontinent, mainland China, Portugal, the Arab world, and the Netherlands has significantly contributed to the diversity of religion and culture within the archipelago. However, these aspects have changed due to modifications made to suit the Indonesian culture. Before the arrival of the Abrahamic religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, the prevalent religions in the region were thoroughly influenced by Dharmic religious philosophy through Hinduism and Buddhism. They were brought to the archipelago around the second and fourth centuries, respectively, when Indian traders arrived on the islands of Sumatra, Java and Sulawesi and got their religion. Islam was introduced to the archipelago in the thirteenth century. Coming from Gujarat, India (some scholars also propose the Arabian and Persian theories), Islam spread through the west coast of Sumatra and then developed to the east in Java. By the end of the fifteenth century, Islam-based kingdoms had been established, reflecting the domination of Islam in Indonesia⁵⁹⁴.

The Portuguese introduced Catholicism in the 16th century, notably to the island of Flores and what was to become East Timor. The Dutch introduced Protestantism in the 16th century with Calvinist and Lutheran influences. For the Dutch, economic benefit rather than religious conversion was paramount, and missionary efforts avoided predominantly Muslim areas such as Java. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) regulated missionary work to serve its interests. It focused on the eastern animist part of the archipelago,

⁵⁹³ Cf. J.S. ARITONANG – K. STEENBRINK, ed., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 80.

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. A. JOSAFAT, “Early Muslim Traders in South-East Asia”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8/2 (1957) 35.

including Maluku, North Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, Papua and Kalimantan. Christianity later spread from the coastal ports of Kalimantan, and missionaries arrived among the Torajans on Sulawesi. Parts of Sumatra were also targeted, most notably the Batak people, who are predominantly Protestant today. The Sukarno era made it mandatory to have a religion to do away with communism and atheism. As a result, citizens were required to carry personal identification cards indicating their religion⁵⁹⁵. The policy resulted in a mass conversion, with most to Protestantism and Catholicism. Chinese Indonesians, who were mostly Confucianists, also faced similar circumstances. Because Confucianism was not one of the state-recognised religions, many converted to Christianity.

The government recognises Indonesia's two main Christian divisions, Protestantism and Catholic Church, as separate religions. Christianity — Roman Catholicism and Protestantism — is Indonesia's most rapidly growing religion. Although Christians are modest in number compared to adherents to Islam, Christians have traditionally been well-educated and influential. Protestants form a significant minority in some parts of the country⁵⁹⁶. Statistically, 7.6% of the total population declared themselves Protestant in a 2018 census. Seventeen per cent of the people in Sulawesi are Protestants, particularly in the Tana Toraja regency in South Sulawesi province and Central Sulawesi.

Furthermore, up to 65% of the ethnic *Torajans* are Protestants. The *Batak* people from North Sumatra are also one of the major Protestant groups in Indonesia, comprising around 50% of the ethnic population. Christianity was brought by German Lutheran missionary Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen, who is known as the apostle to the Batak people and started the Batak Christian Protestant Church (HKBP)⁵⁹⁷. "The Dutch invasion in Indonesia sought to avoid European-style conflict between Protestants and Catholics by assigning regions for conversion by each of them. Thus, today, the Batak of Sumatra, the Dayak of Kalimantan, the Toraja and Menadonese of Sulawesi, and the Ambonese of Maluku are Protestant; the peoples of Flores and the Tetun of West Timor are Catholic. Many Indonesian Chinese are Christians. Christians made up about 9.6 per cent of the population in 1990. There are almost twice as many Protestants as Catholics.

⁵⁹⁵ Cf. A. HEUKEN, *Be My Witness on the Ends of the Earth!': the Catholic Church in Indonesia before the 19th Century*, Jakarta 2002, 47.

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. P. BYRNE, *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralisme*, 102.

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. J.S. ARITONANG – K. STEENBRINK, ed., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 98.

Many Indonesian Christians were animists before conversion, and many traditional beliefs merged with Christianity. Catholicism arrived in the archipelago during the Portuguese arrival, spice-trading over the 14th and 15th centuries. Many Portuguese aimed to spread Roman Catholicism, starting with the Maluku Islands in 1534. Between 1546 and 1547, the pioneer Christian missionary Saint Francis Xavier visited the islands and baptised several thousand locals. During the United East India or VOC era, the number of Roman Catholic practitioners fell significantly due to the VOC policy banning religion. The hostility of the Dutch toward Catholicism is due to its history, where the Protestant Dutch gained their independence after the Eighty Years War against Catholic Spain's rule. The most significant result was on the island of Flores and East Timor, where VOC concentrated.

Moreover, Roman Catholic priests were sent to prisons or punished and replaced by Protestant clergy from the Netherlands⁵⁹⁸. One Roman Catholic priest was executed for celebrating Mass in prison during Jan Pieterszoon Coen's tenure as Governor General of the Dutch East Indies. After the VOC collapsed and the legalisation of Catholicism in the Netherlands started around 1800, Dutch Catholic clergy predominated until after Indonesia's independence. In present-day Flores, the royal house of *Larantuka* formed the only native Catholic kingdom in Southeast Asia around the 16th century, with the first king named Lorenzo⁵⁹⁹. Other than Flores, Central Java also has significant numbers of Catholics. Catholicism started to spread in Central Java when Frans van Lith, a priest from the Netherlands, came to *Muntilan* in 1896. Initially, his effort was not satisfying until 1904, when four Javanese chiefs from the *Kalibawang* region asked him to educate them in the religion. On 15 December 1904, a group of 178 Javanese were baptised at *Semagung*, *Muntilan*, district *Magelang*, Central Java, near the border of Yogyakarta.

Christianity is Indonesia's second-largest religion after Islam. Indonesia also has the second-largest Christian population in Southeast Asia after the Philippines, the largest Protestant population in Southeast Asia, and the fourth-largest Christian population after the Philippines, China and India. Indonesia's 28.6 million Christians constituted 10.72% of the country's population in 2018, with 7.60% Protestant (20.25 million) and 3.12% Catholic (8.33 million). Some provinces in Indonesia are predominantly Christian

⁵⁹⁸ Cf. J.C. ENGLAND, "The Earliest Christian Communities in South-East and North-East Asia; An Outline of the Evidence Available in Seven Countries before 1500 A.D", *Asia Journal of Theology* 4/1 (1988) 180.

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. A. CAMNAHAS, "The Catholic Mission in the Lesser Sunda Islands – Indonesia under the Society of the Divine Word", *Analecta SVD* 99/1 (2020) 48.

(Protestant or Catholic). Catholicism in Indonesia began with the arrival of the Portuguese in search of the Spice Islands in the 16th century⁶⁰⁰. East Nusa Tenggara is the only province in Indonesia where Catholicism is the majority, around 55% of its population. There is also a significant Catholic population in North Sumatra, West Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, Maluku, and Central Java, especially in and around Muntilan. Catholic Church in Indonesia consists of 10 archdioceses and 27 dioceses. Christians generally avoided national politics. The Christian focus on modern education has led to a disproportionate number of Christians holding prominent civic, military, intellectual, and commercial posts. Yet, they lack the mass organisations or leaders of the Muslim world. Children of the elite (Christians and non-Christians) have often been sent to Christian secondary schools and colleges, and both the *Kompas* and *Suara Pembaruan* newspapers trace their roots back to Christian denominations. These facts irk some Muslims, who view Christians as historically tainted due to their associations with the Dutch and foreign missionaries and the fact that Chinese Indonesians are significant Christians⁶⁰¹.

2. History of the Catholic Mission in Indonesia

Religion was not simply a private matter in late colonial Indonesia. Gender and ethnicity were the main divisions within society, but religion came third in statistics⁶⁰². Catholic mission for the first time reached Indonesia in the 14th century, led by an Italian friar, *Mattiussi*, and the Pope sent him to launch a mission into the Asian interiors. Between 1318 and 1330, according to his travelogue, *Travels of Friar Odoric of Pordenone*, he visited Sumatra, Java, and Banjarmasin in Borneo. In 1318, Mattiussi departed from Padua and crossed the Black Sea into Persia, Calcutta, Madras, and Sri Lanka. Before visiting Java and Banjarmasin, he headed to Nicobar Island and Sumatra. He returned to Italy by land through Vietnam, China, and the silk road to Europe in 1330. His chronicle mentions *Majapahit*, the Hindu-Buddhist Javanese empire, even though the Catholic Church had not yet developed. A large portion of the population practised both religions⁶⁰³.

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. R. ROBERTSON, *Agama dalam Analisis dan Interpretasi Sosiologis*, Jakarta 1988, 67.

⁶⁰¹ Cf. A. CAMNAHAS, "The Catholic Mission in the Lesser Sunda Islands – Indonesia under the Society of the Divine Word", 50.

⁶⁰² Cf. K. STEENBRINK, *Catholics in Indonesia: A Documented History*, Leiden 2007, 421.

⁶⁰³ Cf. A. WOODS, *Medium or Message: The Indonesian Church*, Bristol 2004, 107.

In the 16th century, the Portuguese sailed east to Asia and captured Malacca. They came for the spice, but Catholic missionaries soon arrived in the region, notably Francis Xavier, who worked in *Ambon*, *Ternate* and *Morotai* (Halmahera) in 1546-1547. Dominican missionaries also converted many from Solor. Following Portugal's expulsion from Ternate in 1574, many Catholics in the northern Moluccas were killed or converted to Islam. The Dutch East India Company overran and seized Ambon in 1605. Dutch then coerced the Catholics into becoming Protestants. The same happened in Manado and the islands of *Sangihe-Talaud*. In 1613 Solor also fell to the Dutch, and Catholic mission activities declined in Flores and Timor, even though these were still under Portuguese administration. It was not until 1808, under H.W. Daendels as governor-general, that Catholics were given freedom of worship in the Dutch Indies. However, this measure was mainly intended for European Catholics since Daendels ruled under the authority of Napoleonic France. Thomas Raffles consolidated this freedom. Beginning in 1835, the Dutch colonial state and the Catholic Ecclesiastical joined forces; the colonial government paid clergy salaries and had the authority to refuse church appointments. Conflicts over policy forced the Dutch government to deport all but one of the colony's Catholic pastors in 1846. There were just four Catholic churches throughout out in 1848. In the latter part of the 19th century, active mission work was revived and centred in a few places⁶⁰⁴.

A contract signed in 1859 between Portugal and Indonesia that resolved competing territorial claims in the area made *Larantuka* on *Flores* a particularly significant missionary base for the Jesuits. The islands south of New Guinea, Bengkulu, Bangka, West Borneo, and Bangka, were also important. Catholic mission activities were forbidden in other areas. During this period, many Batak people in North Sumatra's interior converted to Catholicism despite government restrictions on Catholic missionaries in different regions of the province. A mission effort also started in *Muntilan* in 1898, although the first priest of Javanese descent was not sent there until 1926. In 19th century colonialism, the religious factor became weaker politically but was respected for law and order. For this reason, some regions remained closed to missionary activities until the end of the colonial period⁶⁰⁵.

Colonialism played a significant role in shaping Indonesian society and culture. The colonisers' culture affected the indigenous people's religious beliefs as well. Due to political instability, Indonesia was colonised by

⁶⁰⁴ Cf. J. TITELEY, *Religious di Aliinea Tiga: Pluralisme, Nasionalisme dan Transformasi Agama – Agama*, Salatiga 2013, 104.

⁶⁰⁵ Cf. T. SUMARTANA, *Dialog, Kritik dan Identitas Agama*, Jakarta 1996, 172.

several nations throughout its lengthy history. The history of Christianity, especially Catholicism, has its place and roots in colonisation. Indonesia is composed of almost 17000 islands with access from the sea. It was easy for foreigners to come in search of the species, eventually leading to colonisation⁶⁰⁶. Even though religion and what they share with Indonesians are the same, it varies according to the country's culture and situation.

2.1 The Portuguese Era

In 1534, Portuguese explorers came to the Maluku Islands to convert the people to Catholicism and acquire the region's prized spices. Francis Xavier, a co-founder of the Jesuit Order, operated in the islands between 1546 and 1547, building the groundwork for a permanent mission on Ambon, Ternate, and Morotai (or Moro).

At this crucial moment, Francis Xavier arrived in Ternate from Ambon, where he had instructed and strengthened the native Christians in their villages. Xavier converted many islanders in Moro and some nobles of Ternate, but Hairun could not be convinced. He answered Xavier, "Muslims and Christians venerate the same God. There will be a time when both become one religion." A few months later, Xavier returned to Malacca and Goa. He sent Jesuits to Ambon, Ternate and Moro. This was the beginning of an organised evangelisation that continued for a few decades⁶⁰⁷.

In 1511, the Portuguese seized Malacca, in what is now Malaysia, and set sail towards the easternmost of the Malay Archipelago, where they would discover the coveted spice islands of the Moluccas, held by the Sultanate of Ternate. The Portuguese founded a tiny colony at this location. At first, trade was a unifying factor in the relationship between Ternate's Muslim population and the Catholic Portuguese. Portuguese missionaries, in 1534, actively sought out natives to convert to Catholicism; by the close of the 16th century, around 20% of the population of the Southern Moluccas identified as Catholic. *Larantuka* (on the island of Flores) and Dili (also in eastern Indonesia) were two more places where the Portuguese built minor Catholic colonies (on the island of Timor). The Portuguese were formerly dominant in the Moluccas, but a disagreement with the *Ternateese* — about the *Ternateese*'s ambition to establish a monopoly on the spice trade — significantly reduced

⁶⁰⁶ Cf. G.R. WIBOWANTO, "Challenging Islamist Populism in Indonesia through Catholic Youth Activism", *Religions* (2021) [accessed: 20.12.2022], <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/6/395>

⁶⁰⁷ J.S. ARITONANG – K. STEENBRINK, ed., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 28.

their influence. The Portuguese introduced Catholicism to various islands in the 16th century, but the Dutch invasion of the archipelago in 1605 hindered the religion's spread. Catholicism brought development in various ways in the people's and society's lives⁶⁰⁸.

2.2 Dutch East India Company (VOC) Era

A Dutch merchant seaman, Cornelis de Houtman, led the first Dutch trip to the East Indies in 1602, the same year the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was established. Even though there were many Catholics in the Netherlands at the time, they had little influence since, like the British government, the Dutch government was fiercely Protestant. In 1605, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) invaded and ruled Ambon, and as part of their authority, they compelled the island's Catholics to convert to Protestantism. This occurred not only on the islands of *Sangihe-Talaud* but also in *Manado*. As a result of the Dutch conquest of Solor in 1613, Catholic missionary activity in neighbouring Flores and Timor, which were still under Portuguese rule, declined⁶⁰⁹. Protestant pastors from the Netherlands have replaced Catholic priests. Throughout the period, several Christians converted to Protestantism. Catholic priests detected residing on VOC territory were threatened with the death penalty. In 1624, Father Egidius d'Abreu, SJ, was executed in *Batavia* for celebrating Mass in captivity under the administration of Governor-General *Jan Pieterszoon Coen*. Father Alexander de Rhodes, a French Jesuit who established the Westernised Vietnamese alphabet system, was forced to observe the burning of his cross and Mass accessories beneath where two convicted thieves had just been put to death. In 1646, De Rhodes was banished from VOC territory. At the close of the 18th century, France, Great Britain, and their respective allies engaged in severe conflict across Western Europe. The people of the Netherlands had conflicting loyalties, resulting in the loss of their independence. In 1799, the VOC declared bankruptcy and disbanded. Napoleon appointed his Catholic brother Louis Bonaparte to the throne of the Netherlands in 1806⁶¹⁰.

The change in politics in the Netherlands, mainly because of the accession of Louis Bonaparte, a fervent Catholic, brought a positive effect. The government recognised religious freedom. On 8 May 1807, the Pope in Rome

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. J.S. ARITONANG – K. STEENBRINK, ed., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 23.

⁶⁰⁹ Cf. M.C. RICKLEFS, *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c.1300*, London 1993², 27.

⁶¹⁰ Cf. A. CAMNAHAS, "The Catholic Mission in the Lesser Sunda Islands – Indonesia under the Society of the Divine Word", 53.

permitted King Louis to establish an Apostolic Prefecture of East Indies in Batavia. On 4 April 1808, two Dutch priests, Fr. Jacobus Nelissen and Fr. Lambertus Prinsen, arrived in Batavia. Fr. Nelissen became the first Apostolic Prefect when the Apostolic Prefecture of Batavia was created in 1826. Governor-General *Daendels* (1808–1811) replaced VOC with the government of the Dutch East Indies. Religious freedom was then practised, although Catholicism was still problematic⁶¹¹. The Protestants hindered the establishment and extension of the Catholic Church in Indonesia, resulting in a hybrid culture of Catholics and Protestants.

2.3 *The Van Lith Era*

In 1896, when Fr. Frans van Lith from the Netherlands arrived in *Muntilan*, Central Java, Catholicism began to grow under the Dutch East India Company. Before 1904, when four chiefs (town leaders) from the *Kalibawang* region insisted that he catechised them, he made little headway in his efforts. On 15 December 1904, 178 Javanese were baptised between two trees named “Sono” in *Semagung*. This location is currently known as *Sendangsono in Muntilan*, district *Magelang*, Central Java, close to the boundary with DI Yogyakarta. Van Lith was essential in establishing several educational institutions under the authority of Yayasan *Kanisius*, the institution that formed Indonesia’s first priests and bishops. In the twentieth century, the Catholic Church expanded rapidly. During World War II and the War of Independence of Indonesia, the Catholics were some of the most notable Indonesian national heroes.

2.4 *The Post-independence Era*

The era after World War II and the War of Independence is known as the “post-independent” period. Countless clergy, missionaries, and laypeople have laid down their lives to advance Christianity and the Church. Several of Indonesia’s most celebrated historical figures — including *Agustinus Adisoetjipto* (1947), after whom the *Adisoejipto* Airport in *Yogyakarta* is named, *Ignatius Slamet Riyadi* (1945), and *Yos Soedarso* (1913) — are identified as Catholic (1961). After *Sukarno* was deposed in 1965, a widespread purge was conducted across Indonesia, notably on the islands of Java and Bali, targeting communists and suspected communists. As a result of the chaos, hundreds of innocent citizens were slain by the army and vigilantes.

⁶¹¹ Cf. J. SUPRIANTO, *Merentang Sejarah Memaknai Kemandirian*, Jakarta 2009, 67.

All Indonesian people were required to convert to one of the five state-sanctioned faiths since atheism was considered fundamental to communism⁶¹².

Minority religions, including Catholicism, have seen remarkable growth in areas with a significant population of Chinese Indonesians and ethnic Javanese. For instance, in Jakarta alone, there were 301,084 Catholics in 2000, compared to only 26,955 in 1960. This means that the Catholic population has increased elevenfold while the population of Jakarta has only tripled during the same period, from 2,800,000 to 8,347,000. The growth in Jakarta's population can be attributed to the increased migration from Christian parts of Indonesia to the capital. In 1960, fewer people from these regions resided in Jakarta than today. Indonesia declared independence just before Japan's surrender to the Allies. Before the Netherlands ceded sovereignty in 1949, it took four years of often brutal combat, intermittent discussions, and UN mediation⁶¹³.

The rapid increase in Catholics and Christians has led to antagonism and unfounded charges of "Christianization." Factors such as colonisation by foreign nations and fights among Christians, primarily Protestants and Catholics, also influenced the quality of religion and faith. Between 1945 and 2000, three concerns dominated Christian denominations; these issues were likely of far greater importance to urban Christians than rural Christians⁶¹⁴.

From 1945 to 1965, the focus was on consolidating Christianity in Indonesia. This was done to show that Christianity was not just the religion of the colonizers and oppressors, but a vibrant faith for authentic Indonesians as well. The period from 1965 to 1985 was marked by contributions to development efforts. During this time, Europe began providing development aid to Indonesia. Although churches were supposed to be independent during this period, there was a flow of money that went against this principle⁶¹⁵. Germany and the Netherlands have begun to sponsor church-led development programmes. Inculturation or contextualisation also rose to prominence during this period making attempts to blend in with Indonesian native traditions. Thirdly, between 1985 and 2000, there was a growing separation from actual politics; development organisations became autonomous from churches and non-governmental organisations. Evangelical and Pentecostal churches have gained prominence, particularly in Java's urban centres. In the larger Chinese cities, the charismatic movement gained traction among

⁶¹² Cf. A. WOODS, *Medium or Message, The Indonesian Church*, 110.

⁶¹³ Cf. D. MARKUS, *Colonisation and Growth of Christianity*, Jakarta 2011, 108.

⁶¹⁴ Cf. J.S. ARITONANG – K. STEENBRINK, ed., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 50.

⁶¹⁵ Cf. P. YUSGIANTORO, *Contributions and Growth of Religion*, Yogyakarta 2002, 92.

Catholics. The devotion to Mary in pilgrimage sites modelled after European locations such as Lourdes and Medjugorje became more effective than the inculturation movement⁶¹⁶.

Everywhere in Indonesia, Christians, particularly Catholics, faced persecution for their faith and sustenance. Persecution and martyrdom bolstered the Christians' resolve and esteem. Even if not all of Indonesia's colonisers sought the same ends by spreading Christianity, doing so nonetheless provided the locals cause for renewed hope, optimism, and vigour. Because of this, people could expand their horizons and make strides in many walks of life. Religion became more organised and humane as superstitious beliefs and rituals gradually faded. Observance of the core values shared by Indonesia's many faiths contributed to the country's relatively harmonious coexistence of religions (cf. *UR 7*)⁶¹⁷. Under different conquerors, different religions gained mutual knowledge about one another, but none of them gained sufficient depth in the hearts and minds of the people. Each religion attempted to exterminate the existence of the others because each one believed their religion as superior to others.

Colonisers used gifts and money to convince people to join a specific religion without proper catechism. Indigenous Indonesians were animistic and highly traditional; therefore, the colonisers had to adapt native ceremonies and practices to introduce them to new religions. Although members of a religious group may find more pleasure in their faith due to inculturation, they may be less inclined to strictly adhere to the faith's regulations and principles. In Indonesia, Catholic rituals may vary from one island to another as a sign of respect to local customs and traditions. Nevertheless, they always strive to uphold the faith and comply with the Church's hierarchical structure and canons.

3. Culture and Christianity

Adopting Christianity did not result in the complete abandonment of traditional faith. It coexisted with Christianity throughout society. In most cases, new Christians will reject any outward signs of their pagan roots. Even if the missionaries had no objections, using indigenous architectural style in a church building, indigenous songs in liturgy, etc., would be frowned upon by converts. The younger generation appears to have lost touch with its

⁶¹⁶ Cf. J.S. ARITONANG – K. STEENBRINK, ed., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 30.

⁶¹⁷ Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio (UR)*, Decree on Ecumenism by Second Vatican Council (21 November 1964).

heritage. The third generation, however, saw a revival of the custom (mostly only far into the twentieth century)⁶¹⁸. For instance, younger ministers rarely included folk songs and dances in Christian services. Burial rituals, an integral part of traditional society, were revived much more. The Christians within the group have substituted the pagan deities and spirits with God. However, the initial objective of the ceremonies, which is to show respect to the deceased and their bereaved loved ones, and prepare them for the after-life, has remained unchanged. Despite the replacement of pagan deities with Jesus Christ, the fundamental purpose of funerals and memorials has remained the same⁶¹⁹.

Traditional culture, which centred on the concept that the ancestors significantly influenced the community's well-being, was not successfully transformed by the mission and Church due to their individualistic approach. One striking fact is that Christians in Indonesia have traditionally and do today assign greater weight to violations of customary law than they do to those of the Church's canonical teachings⁶²⁰. Even fully Christianized populations turned to their ancestors during collective catastrophes, such as the disease in the *Minahasa* in 1884, earthquakes, or attacks by neighbouring villages. It appears that the brand of Christianity propagated by the missionaries did not adequately address the concerns of the general populace. The Christian faith-maintained ties to traditional religion and culture from the beginning. People heard the Gospel, but they had preconceived notions about what it meant. The Christians in Indonesia practised their faith in their unique methods, which were necessarily at odds with that of the western missionary⁶²¹. Typically, the Gospel was understood through the lens of traditional magical and legendary beliefs.

Consequently, religious perspectives are altered. To rely on God was to place one's trust in His capacity to protect one from harm rather than in His compassion for sinners. Satan was the conqueror like Jesus was the Saviour, not from sin and shame but from the oppressive dominion of evil powers. Thus, miracles in the sense of supernatural interventions to save the faithful from the tragedy were not a thing of the biblical past but rather a part of everyday life. In addition, Christians tended to view the Gospel as a new

⁶¹⁸ Cf. D. HENDROPUSPITO, *Sosiologi Agama*, Yogyakarta 1998, 112.

⁶¹⁹ Cf. J.S. ARITONANG – K. STEENBRINK, ed., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 140.

⁶²⁰ Cf. A.B. SINAGA., *Dari Imamat Parmalim Ke Imamat Katolik*, Jakarta 2009, 129.

⁶²¹ Cf. J.S. ARITONANG – K. STEENBRINK, ed., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 151.

*adat*⁶²², a law whose precepts were to be observed as carefully as the ancient law. Sin was not so much an interruption of the believers' relationship with God as it violated some rules. As a result of this shift, missionaries drew out "Christian *adat* rules" that detailed what should and should not be done regarding church attendance, weddings, funerals, traditional practices, etc. The sacraments were often interpreted in a magical sense.

Missionaries who had made a significant impression on the populace were viewed and remembered as mythological figures who had vanquished opposition to the Gospel through heroic exploits, such as rescuing the town from peril. The Indonesian Christians failed to understand the individual approach of European missionaries, as evidenced by their inability to comprehend the missionaries and the government's refusal to use force in converting the public to Christianity⁶²³. Christianity was presented as the light in contrast to the darkness and wickedness of paganism. The emphasis was on Jesus Christ, and the audience was invited to trust him as their Savior. This is the standard format employed by co-preachers in Indonesia. However, the few surviving sermons reveal that some preachers could effectively communicate Christianity's fundamental teachings and practises to their audiences⁶²⁴.

By incorporating inculturation and Christian *adat* norms, Christian missionaries enacted a religion welcoming all people. The missionaries could integrate into many groups and civilisations with inculturation. Although inculturation has greatly aided the expansion of the Catholic mission in Indonesia, it can also make it more difficult for Christians to have a personal, authentic connection to the foundations of their faith. Different clans have distinct customs and traditions that follow parallel paths following the new religion they adopted. Individuals prefer to prioritise customs and traditions in a dispute between customs and church doctrine⁶²⁵. These practices and traditions later played a crucial role in the teachings and sacraments of the Church. These situations positively and negatively affect the call to the consecrated life. Only personal contact with the one true God and faith in the Holy Trinity can provide the strength necessary to live a life of fidelity (cf. VC 17). Any outside interference can badly affect a religious person's path to fidelity. More important than any biological or social connection is a love

⁶²² Cf. *Adat* lay at the core of indigeneity, and they, as members of the local ruling elite, had the most excellent command over *adat*: "Adat and indigeneity in Indonesia" [accessed: 22.11.2022], <https://books.openedition.org/gup/179?lang=en>

⁶²³ Cf. A. HEUKEN, *Be My Witness on the Ends of the Earth*, 87.

⁶²⁴ Cf. J.S. ARITONANG–K. STEENBRINK, ed., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 153.

⁶²⁵ Cf. P. BYRNE, *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralisme*, 133.

for God and a desire to live consecrated lives. It's a declaration of devotion and submission to a higher spiritual truth.

4. Religious Formation Programme in Indonesia for the Consecrated

The religious formation programme in Indonesia is very much in line with the universal formation programme of the consecrated in the Universal Church. The primary goal of religious formation for both men and women is to help them realise their unity in Christ through the harmonious fusion of their spiritual, apostolic, doctrinal, and practical elements, with the immediate goal of introducing them to religious life and making them aware of its specific character within the Church (cf. *PC* 18). Due to the relative newness of Christianity and the Catholic faith in the country, the Church and the educational system have worked to better adapt the entire formation cycle to the perspectives of today's youth and the realities of modern life while also meeting the needs of the apostolate as it exists currently. In general, the Indonesian formative system of the religious seeks to align with the pastoral precepts of the local and universal churches and to facilitate the combining of "interiority and activity" in the lives of religious men and women committed to the apostolate⁶²⁶. As St. John Paul II envisages it, activity "for the Lord" will thus not fail to lead them to the Lord, the "source of all activity"⁶²⁷. Formation becomes effective and fruitful when the entire programme helps the candidate discover and assimilate to deepen the religious identity. Then, only a consecrated person is inserted into the world as a significant, influential, and faithful witness⁶²⁸. Religious life is a beautiful commitment that involves dedicating oneself entirely to God. It is like a marriage between the religious and God, a symbol of the future. Through their sacrifice, religious perfect their greatest gift, offering their entire existence as continuous worship of God in love. The young Indonesian church encourages the candidates to "become an exceptional sign in the Church which brings forth the celestial Glory" through the formation (cf. *DFRI* 7). It is a special call to live a stable life for Christ, following him more closely through the guidance of the Holy Spirit with a complete dedication to God, who is loved most of all.

⁶²⁶ Cf. E. DURKHEIM, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, London 1979, 188.

⁶²⁷ St. JOHN PAUL II, "Catholic education" meeting with the representatives of catholic elementary and secondary schools and leaders in religious education, [accessed: 10.10.2023], https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1987/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19870912_scuole-cattoliche.html

⁶²⁸ Cf. *CIC* 606.

4.1 Formation: To Strengthen the Divine Vocation

Consecrated life is the result of a call from God, which emerges from the love He bears for the person He calls. This gratuitous, personal, and unique love embraces the person to the extent that one no longer pertains to oneself but to Christ (1Cor 6:19). This gift invites the person whom God calls to follow Christ through the practice and profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. The Church has received this “as a gift from God, and by God’s mercy she guards it always” (*LG* 43). This is why “the end norm of the religious life” will be “the following of Christ as presented before us in the Gospel” (*PC* 2; *LG* 39). Primarily, the Church and the congregation must help the candidate understand and grow in this gift for the salvation of the Church and personal sanctification. Formation structures strive for all possible means to create a conducive atmosphere for the candidate to grow maturely in this call. The colonisation of Indonesia opened the door for several nations to start missions to promote the Gospel of Christianity. The relevance of Christianization in its development and maturation differs across the various missions. According to the missions in the different Indonesian islands, Christian teachings and beliefs ranged in intensity and usefulness. The pre-eminence of traditions and customs over faith and religion influenced both the development of consecrated life and the feature of fidelity to upholding the divine call. The formation process should constantly help the candidate strengthen their vocation and fidelity to Christ who calls. The Indonesian formative system always considers that “the final norm of the religious life” will be “the following of Christ as it is put before us in the Gospel” (*PC* 2).

4.2 Strong Personality is the Object of Formation

Christ’s call always manifests his redemptive love, which encompasses the whole individual, soul, and body, regardless of gender, in that person’s unique and unrepeatable personal “I” (*RD* 3). In the case of a consecrated person, very life becomes the primary form of the profession of the evangelical counsels. Those whom God calls give a response of love in their turn to Christ their Redeemer: a love offered entirely and without reserve and which loses itself in the offering of the whole person as “a loving sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God” (Rom 12:1). One who desires to “sacrifice his life” for Christ and the Gospel must inevitably face privations and tribulations, and proper formation should provide the candidate with the emotional resources

to tackle these appropriately (cf. Mk 8:35). This personal response is an integrating part of religious consecration (cf. *LG* 44).

Formation should encourage the development of individual accountability, with the goal of a person's willingness to identify with their new vocation and service to Christ and the Church. A religious profession is an official act of the Church in which a religious person consecrates himself and joins the life of the Church. The formation programmes of the various congregations in Indonesia aim to aid the candidate in comprehending and experiencing vows and their impact on the religious and their fidelity to this distinctive way of life⁶²⁹. Religious education in Indonesia aims to help young people develop closer contact with Jesus Christ, the inspiration for every vocation, and then to help them dedicate their lives through a vocation that includes them in a specific religious congregation through the profession. Religious are urged to "live a life in common as brothers and sisters"⁶³⁰. The formative era also emphasises the importance of community life and enables the members, despite their differences, to live together peacefully and cheerfully. For the consecrated to become an effective instrument in the hands of the Lord, the formation also helps them develop a healthy detachment from the world. The fact that religious belongs to an organisation enables them to give Christ and the Church a public witness of separation from "the spirit of the world" (1Cor 2:12) and the behaviour it entails, as well as a presence in the world consistent with the "knowledge of God" (1Cor 2:7).

In formation, formators assist the candidate in favourably responding to the demands of evangelical counsels. The counsels practised as authentically as possible have significant value for everyone, as each pledge provides a specific response to the great temptations of our day. Through them, the Church continues to demonstrate the path to its transformation into God's kingdom (cf. *LG* 39, 42, 43). The counsels are, as it were, the direct support of religious life since they express in a significant and complete way the evangelical radicalism which characterises it. In effect, through the profession of the evangelical counsels made in the Church, the religious wishes "to be set free from hindrances that could hold him back from loving God ardently and worshipping him perfectly and consecrate himself in a more thoroughgoing way to the service of God" (*LG* 44).

⁶²⁹ Cf. A. JOB, "Vocation in Asia: Formation to Radicality", *Religious Life in Asia* 44 (2004) 100.

⁶³⁰ *CIC* 607/2.

4.3 *Formation: Common Aspects*

Formation in Indonesia likewise adheres closely to the rules provided by the Church on several occasions, addressing the formation of candidates for consecrated life. Directives on formation in religious establishments define crucial formation programmes that will aid the candidate in maturing in faithfulness and wisdom. Consecrated life in Indonesia tries to present suitable agents and environments of formation for its candidates for a holistic and all-inclusive formation programme.

(a) Understanding how to identify and follow the guidance of the *Holy Spirit* is crucial for the spiritual growth of consecrated persons (cf. *VC* 19). Our reliance on Jesus, our supreme leader and mentor, has shaped us fundamentally. After his resurrection, Jesus continued to guide his disciples to the truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13), just as he had done throughout his earthly mission. The Holy Spirit imparts a filial spirit and comes to our support in our weaknesses, serving as a comforting advocate (cf. *Rom* 8:15-26). The manifestation of the Holy Spirit requires humility and spiritual discernment. It is essential to acknowledge the presence of the spiritual entity in every aspect of life and history and human mediation. Due to their past beliefs, the need to be receptive to spiritual guidance is emphasised in Indonesian formation. This receptivity arises from a desire to gain a clear understanding of oneself and an openness to receiving counsel and direction to discern God's will correctly (cf. *DFRI* 19).

(b) *The Formatress Mary*: The Blessed Virgin Mary is seen as the ideal preceptor for individuals who have been consecrated. As the mother of God and the mother of God's chosen people, the Virgin Mary is an apt representation of the mission of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God was conceived in her womb, and she eagerly awaited the return of the Holy Spirit with the Apostles following Christ's ascension⁶³¹. As a result, devout individuals encounter the Virgin Mary at the outset and throughout their entire formation (cf. *LG* 52, 59). The consecration of the Blessed Virgin Mary is held up as a model by the Indonesian church and religious formation, as it is by the rest of the church. Each religious is encouraged to "make your religious consecration patterned after the consecration of the actual Mother of God" (*RD* 17). A religious views Mary not only as an exemplar or mentor but also as a mother. Because she is the mother of one who was consecrated and sent,

⁶³¹ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, "The Virgin Mary, Prayerful Woman", General audience on 18 November 2020 [accessed: 5.5.2023], https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201118_udienza-generale.html

Mary is the mother of religious. “Her fiat and Magnificat religious life discover the utmost of its devotion and delight in the consecration of God.” (EE 53). The Indonesian formation system considers Mother Mary the perfect example of the formator where candidates become closer to Jesus as Mary did in her life.

(c) The consecrated undergoes formation to develop an understanding of the *significance and essence of the Church*. The Blessed Virgin Mary represents solace and optimism for the Church until the Lord’s Day (cf. LG 53, 63, 68). A particular tie connects religious life to the mystery of the Church. It is related to its vitality and sanctity (cf. LG 44). It “is a special way of participating in the sacramental nature of the People of God” (MR 10). One’s complete gift to God “unites the religious ‘to the Church and her mystery in a special way’ and urges such a one to work with undivided dedication for the good of the entire Body” (MR 10). The Church, through the ministry of its pastors, “besides giving legal sanction to the religious form of life and thus raising it to the dignity of a canonical state, sets it forth liturgically also as a state of consecration to God” (LG 45). The Church is indispensable to consecrated life because it nourishes both the baptised life and religious consecration. At this table, they get the bread of life from the Word of God and the Body of Christ. St. Anthony, considered to be the father of monasticism, heard the living and effective word at a liturgical celebration, which prompted him to abandon everything to follow Christ (cf. DV 25). In the Church, reading the Word of God, accompanied by prayer, establishes the dialogue between God and the religious, encouraging them to have high aspirations and necessary renunciations. The Church associates the offerings that religious make of their own life with the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ (cf. LG 45). It is through the sacrament of reconciliation frequently celebrated, finally, that they receive, from the mercy of God, pardon for their sins and are reconciled with the Church and their community, which their sins have wounded (cf. LG 11). As a result, for them, the Church’s liturgy ought to serve as both the community’s goal and the foundation from which its evangelistic life springs (cf. SC 2, 10). The religious are members of the Church, and as such, they must carry out the formation process in close contact with the Church. It is, therefore, necessary to develop among religious “a manner of thinking” not only “with” but, as St. Ignatius of Loyola also says, “within” the Church⁶³².

⁶³² Cf. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Exercitia spiritualia* [accessed: 10.08.2023], <https://www.monasterovirtuale.it/s-ignazio-di-loyola/s-ignazio-di-loyola-esercizi-spirituali.html>

(d) *Community*: In Indonesia, consecrated life highly value community life at every formation stage, reflecting the Church's centrality and devotion to the Virgin Mary⁶³³. Members of this group are profoundly shaped by their cohesion. This is because of the members' environment and way of life, which complement the institute's personality and spirit. The Lord has called them together and united them by a joint consecration and for a shared mission within the Church; therefore, the community flourishes and remains stable not because its members find that they are happy together due to an affinity in thought, character, or options; instead, it has unique requirements and, by the Church's teachings on the holy life, it must first be experienced in its natural state before it can be used as a tool for growth.

A community is formative to the degree that it promotes Christ-likeness growth in each member following their order's charism. To this purpose, the community submits itself to the judging and converting power of God's Word, the cleansing power of penance, the building power of the Eucharist, and the life-giving action of celebrating the liturgical year each day. Religious in formation should be able to find a spiritual atmosphere, an austerity of life, and an apostolic enthusiasm within their community, which are conducive to their following Christ according to the radicalism of their consecration (cf. *DFRI* 27). It is fitting to recall here the words of Pope John Paul II's message to the religious of Brazil:

It will therefore be good that the young, during the period of formation, reside in formative communities where there should be no lack of the conditions required for a complete formation: spiritual, intellectual, cultural, liturgical, communitarian, and pastoral; conditions which are rarely found together in small communities. It is therefore always indispensable to keep drawing from the pedagogical experience of the Church that can assist and enrich formation in a community suitable to the individuals and their religious, and in some cases, priestly vocation (*DFRI* 27).

The Indonesian formation system for religious individuals prioritises maintaining high formation standards even when placed in a disadvantaged environment. In these communities, the community's way of life and individual prayer, including times and places of silence, are highly valued. Apostolic activities during formation ensure that the trainees can live a genuine

⁶³³ Cf. I. ABONYI, "Blessed Virgin Mary as True Model for Consecrated Life" [accessed: 10.08.2023], <https://www.frinnocentabonyi.org/2018/12/09/blessed-virgin-mary-as-a-true-model-for-consecrated-life/>

religious life based on the institute's goals while maintaining silence. Achieving and sustaining solitude and stillness during the initial formation period is essential. Since Indonesia values culture and hospitality, the formation communities are encouraged to maintain their autonomy and independence as far as possible when hosting guests. This is unquestionably more difficult to achieve in small religious communities, but it should always be considered when a community establishes plans for its communal life (cf. *DFRI* 28).

4.4 Formation: Personal Responsibility

The individual religious is primarily responsible for embracing the consequences of saying "yes" to the received call; this is not mainly a matter of intellect but of the entirety of life. Like His love, God's call and actions are constantly novel; historical circumstances never recur. The one called is continually encouraged to provide a thoughtful, original, and responsible response. Each religious journey will remember God's people in Exodus and the disciples of Jesus, who were initially "slow to believe" but ultimately consumed with zeal when the risen Lord revealed himself to them (cf. Lk 24:25-32). Individuals must appeal to their conscience and feelings of personal accountability to facilitate wholehearted acceptance of the religious life's tenets and the advisor's recommended role. By doing so, they can internally justify their everyday decisions and receive guidance from the Holy Spirit.

5. The Human and Christian Dimensions of Formation

The Second Vatican Council declared the goals and methods of all genuine education to be in the service of humanity. Since the first criterion of religious formation is the ability to identify a human and Christian foundation with a specific person, it is crucial to keep these in mind during the reception and formation of candidates for religious life. Many religious failures can be related to deficiencies in this area. A person entering religious life must have a human and Christian foundation and undergo effective modifications during formation based on the evolution of individuals and circumstances. The integral formation of a person has a physical, moral, intellectual, and spiritual dimension. Formation in Indonesia is taken care of by the criteria applied to the candidate for religious and priestly ministry. These criteria are drawn in different documents of the Second Vatican Council like *Gaudium et spes* (12-22, 61), a declaration on Christian education,

Gravissimum Educationis (1, 2) decree on the formation of priests *Optatam totius* (11). It enables one to judge the level of human maturity required in candidates for priestly ministry. The selection of candidates for religious life is governed by the *Perfectae Caritatis* (5) standards, which stipulate that only those candidates who are already living all their baptismal vows in a manner commensurate with their age are admitted to the novitiate. “The principal purpose of formation at its various stages, initial and ongoing, is to immerse religious in the experience of God and to help them perfect it gradually in their lives” (*CDRL* 17)⁶³⁴.

5.1 Asceticism

“Following in the footsteps of Christ leads to sharing ever more consciously and concretely in the mystery of his passion, death, and resurrection. The Paschal mystery should be, as it were, the heart of the formation programs insofar as it is a font of life and maturity. It is on this foundation that the new person is formed, the religious and the apostle”⁶³⁵. Pascal mysteries are regarded as the *magna carta* of the formation system in Indonesia. This prompts us to recall the necessity of asceticism in religious formation and life. In a culture characterised by sensuality, materialism, and various forms of power abuse, there is a need for witnesses of the Paschal mystery of Christ, the initial step of which one must pass via the cross.

This section involves the incorporation of a daily, personal asceticism into a comprehensive formation programme; these leads aspirants, novices, and professed to practise the virtues of faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude (cf. *DFRI* 36). This programme is timeless, always modern and needed. Without asceticism, one can’t live one’s baptism or be faithful to a religious vocation. This approach will be pursued more actively if it is driven by the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and joy in serving him. Christians need trainers to run the “royal route of the Holy Cross.” They need witnesses who forsake “the world,” “its lusts,” and “this world,” created and kept by God’s love and some of its ideals. The Kingdom of God, whereby religious life “surpasses all things below” (*LG* 44), is not of this world. Witnesses are needed. Formation implies contemplation on the Christian meaning of asceticism and sound convictions about God and his connection with the world he made. Asceticism is a human necessity because it helps us grow

⁶³⁴ *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life (CDRL)*, Plenary of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (7 March 1980).

⁶³⁵ JOHN PAUL II, “Speech to the Religious of Brazil” on 11 July 1986, 5.

and develop our inner selves, which is just as important as our physical growth for a consecrated person⁶³⁶.

Before becoming a Christian, resisting one's primal, innate urges is an anthropological necessity. Asceticism is an integral part of Indonesia's formation programmes since it equips the candidate with the tools they need to deal with the psychological and physiological challenges they'll inevitably face. Psychologists argue that for young people to grow into their adult selves, they must encounter obstacles. This is true for everyone because no one ever stops growing and changing. Methods to shape children's religious beliefs should motivate them to do their best in school. The formation system in Indonesia prioritises formation standards even when insertion into a disadvantaged context offers specific apostolic advantages. In these communities, community life, individual prayer, and times and places of silence might be preserved. During formation, apostolic activities safeguard their religious authenticity, allowing them to live religiously following the institute's purposes. Being alone can help one find peace of mind, which can help maintain quiet outside. The message of God, spiritual growth, and genuine brotherhood in Christ can all benefit from periods of solitude and stillness, not just in formation houses (cf. *RC* 5). Forming someone is more than just imparting knowledge; it also involves inspiring them to appreciate and explore the natural world God created and making them feel like they have a place in it.

5.2 *Sexuality and Formation*

In Indonesian formation, the sexual integration of the candidate into their vocation is another area of emphasis. Every religious being is sexual. This means that each one possesses feelings connected with sexual attraction and the psychological and social connotations of sex and is either male or female. Sexuality is a divinely endowed force for generating life and experiencing altruistic joy in another's life⁶³⁷. Sexuality is a fundamental human desire

⁶³⁶ Cf. E. BIANCHI, "Asceticism" [accessed: 20.05.2022], file:///C:/Users/39327/Downloads/Monastero%20di%20Bose%20-%20Asceticism%20(1).pdf

⁶³⁷ "Sexuality is one of the fundamental drives behind everyone's feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. It defines the means of biological reproduction, describes psychological and sociological representations of self, and orients a person's attraction to others. Further, it shapes the brain and body to be pleasure-seeking. Yet, as important as sexuality is to being human, it is often viewed as a taboo topic for personal or scientific inquiry": D. LUCAS – J. FOX, "The Psychology of Human Sexuality" in *An Introduction to Social Psychology* [accessed: 12.10.2022], <https://pressbooks.pub/introsocialpsychology/chapter/the-psychology-of-human-sexuality/>

that is rooted in the need for companionship and empathy. It is the natural energy that brings individuals together to enrich and create life. It arises from the basic human need to overcome isolation and find a connection with others. This desire for connection and completion begins from the moment of our birth, as we feel a sense of separation and loss. It will continue to accompany us throughout our lives until our last breath.

Sexuality is a powerful force that drives us to find partners who complement and complete us. This force helps us endure the pain of separation and loneliness. Unfortunately, it's becoming increasingly rare for boys and girls to grow up in equally integrated environments, which means they may not learn to recognize and appreciate their strengths and weaknesses. This is a crucial area of development, especially given the growing number of inter-faith relationships, the increasing collaboration between religious women and men, and the ever-changing cultural landscape. The formation of mature relationships between the sexes cannot be assumed based solely on early desegregation or regular close contact (cf. *EG* 82).

Consequently, steps must be taken to encourage and fortify this level of development so that individuals are better equipped to develop the character traits necessary to maintain a life of perfect chastity. In addition, everyone has to understand their role in God's grand scheme of things and how they might best contribute to the salvation effort. Therefore, religious institutions must provide opportunities for their members to think critically about sexuality within the context of the divine purpose for creation and salvation. Consecrated life necessitates a comprehensive comprehension and awareness of sexuality and the vow of chastity within the context of the local culture and the relationships among the local people.

Consecrated persons in formation must be given a clear explanation and comprehension of sexuality to overcome their homosexual tendencies. Those who believe it is possible to live "in an uncertain situation between celibacy and marriage"⁶³⁸ must be expelled from the holy life. God did not create a world devoid of distinction. Having created man in his image and likeness (cf. Gen 2:26-27), as a rational and free being capable of knowing and loving him, God never intended for him to live alone but in partnership with another person, the woman (cf. Gen 2:18). The two create a mutual relationship: man to woman and woman to man (cf. *MD* 7). Sexuality is a powerful energy that can bring ecstatic joy but can also be the source of great human suffering.

⁶³⁸ "Final Document of the Special Synod of Bishops of the Low Countries," *L'Osservatore Romano* (2 February 1980).

For this reason, mature sexuality is central to a healthy consecrated life. Sexuality is the desire for love, communion, friendship, family, affection, wholeness, culmination, creativity, self-perpetuation, immortality, pleasure, amusement, and self-transcendence. It permeates every facet of human endeavour. Sexuality is the force that permits us to recognise and appreciate others by looking beyond ourselves. Sexuality is something good and essential for human life. God imbues every human being with sexuality, and the consecrated life is fulfilled in God, who created it. Formation in Indonesia assists the candidate in comprehending sexuality beyond its genitivity aspect and offers warmth and joy for God and his mission.

“The woman is an additional ‘I’ within a shared humanity” (*MD* 6). This is why “man and woman are called from the beginning to exist not only side-by-side’ or ‘together,’ but also ‘one for the other’ (*MD* 7). It is simple to understand the relevance of these anthropological principles, considering that it is a matter of generating men and women who have voluntarily declared absolute chastity for the benefit of the Kingdom of Heaven through a special gift. Indonesian formation system places a high importance on the role of Mary as the formator *par excellence*. By looking at Mary, the religious find the secret of living their femininity with dignity and achieving their true advancement. In the light of Mary, the Church sees in the face of women the reflection of a beauty which mirrors the loftiest sentiments of which the human heart is capable: “the self-offering totality of love, the strength that is capable of bearing the greatest sorrows; limitless fidelity and tireless devotion to working; the ability to combine penetrating intuition with words of support and encouragement” (*RM* 45).

Education about sexuality is essential for those who have chosen to live a celibate lifestyle to dispel common misconceptions and to learn to appreciate and enjoy sexual activity out of a more profound love for Christ (cf. *EGHL* 14)⁶³⁹. It is not a central tenet of celibacy that being single is preferable. It doesn’t try to pass itself off as superior to marriage. There is no need to feel guilty about choosing celibacy; it is not a renunciation of libido. It’s how we choose to express our sexuality in daily life. The celibate’s heart nevertheless yearns for love with another person and God. Choosing to forego marriage in favour of furthering God’s kingdom is what we mean when discussing celibacy. Giving up the gratification of sexual closeness and committed partnerships is a crucial component. A celibate person is a sexual being who chooses not to engage in sexual activity. Celibacy for the sake of

⁶³⁹ *Educational Guidance in Human Love (EGHL)*, Outlines for Sex Education given by Congregation for Catholic Education (1 November 1983); also seen in *GE* 1.

the Kingdom of God is one way of becoming a fully alive human being. It is not a rejection of human nature or the human body⁶⁴⁰. Formation in consecrated life carefully observes how the candidate behaves sexually, which is significant in the development. Awareness of sexual arousal, making decisions about expressing sexual feelings, and occasional sexual encounters may be part of normal sexual development. Promiscuous sexual behaviour and obsessive sexual behaviour, either with others or by ourselves, are signs of mismanagement of our sexuality⁶⁴¹.

Indonesian religious formation aims to equip its members with the information they need to make good choices in all aspects of their lives. Chastity encompasses more than just celibacy and is related to Jesus' call for "purity of heart" in the beatitudes. The commitment extends beyond celibacy to influence one's outlook on life. Respect and awe are a lot like chastity. Chastity is engaging with the world (including other people, places, forms of entertainment, and the various stages of one's life) in a manner that does not dishonour or harm anyone, including oneself. Chastity entails treating the world with respect in the hopes that we might improve it and ourselves via our interactions. A good formation process helps the person to grow in self-awareness and self-knowledge⁶⁴². He accepts his strengths and weaknesses, knows his needs for companionship, acceptance, affection, etc. and can integrate these into a peaceful religious commitment. He is not anxious about sexual feelings of attraction and desire. He develops healthy ways of attending to these needs. He is open and able to talk about these areas of his life. The formation will include an honest and realistic treatment of all aspects of sexuality and celibacy.

6. Formative Structures

As part of my research, I have interviewed seventeen religious institutes of men and women, including secular institutes and brotherhoods in Indonesia. They all adhere to the Church in formation concerns, particularly their specific congregational rules. Although Indonesia was under foreign authority for many years, the Church and religious congregations are currently governed by Indonesians. Many local religious institutes of men and women

⁶⁴⁰ Cf. "Sexuality and the Religious Life" [accessed: 05.05.2022], <https://www.passiochristi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SEX-AND-THE-RELIGIOUS-LIFE.pdf>

⁶⁴¹ Cf. I.W. SAPUTRA, *Ongoing Formation-Pergulatan Menjadi Seperti Yesus*, Jakarta 2006, 77.

⁶⁴² Cf. D. RANSON, *Across the Great Divide: Bridging Spirituality and Religion Today*, Strathfield 2002, 17.

originated in different parts of Indonesia. Colonisers contributed significantly to the development of the country, particularly the spread of Christianity. Missionaries started schools and other educational facilities to help society and youth. The formative system in Indonesia gives importance to youths who are interested and want to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, the master.

Every vocation is born of that gaze of love with which the Lord came to meet us, perhaps even when the storm was battering our boat. More than our choice, vocation is a response to the Lord's unmerited call. We will succeed in discovering and embracing our vocation once we open our hearts in gratitude and perceive God's presence in our lives⁶⁴³.

6.1 *Ashramas*

Ashramas are elementary and secondary schools established by missionaries for youngsters in rural areas. Boarding and study facilities are available to children with strong moral character and good family backgrounds. Like minor institutions, these *Ashramas* provide discipline and catechetical teaching to prepare youth for admittance into various diocesan seminaries and monastic orders. Many priests and religious people from the earlier generation were formed in these *Ashramas*; after secondary school, students could go out for further studies or join any orders or congregations. Many of the intellectuals and politicians are the product of these *Ashramas*. The word for culture in Indonesian is "*budaya*", which is composed of two words - *buddhi* and *hridaya*. *Buddhi* refers to intelligence and a refined mind, while *hridaya* pertains to refined emotions. Therefore, *budaya* or culture is a process that involves refining both the mind and heart. The *Ashram* culture helps facilitate this process effectively⁶⁴⁴.

6.2 *Come and See Programme*

Students who join convents and seminaries after secondary school frequently go through the *come and see* the programme. It allows the applicant to experience and comprehend religious life and its responsibilities. The duration of this curriculum varies for every congregation, ranging from three to six months. It also allows the individual to spend time away from home

⁶⁴³ POPE FRANCIS, "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 2020 World Day of Vocations," (3 May 2020).

⁶⁴⁴ Cf. A. KRISHNA, "Ashram Culture" [accessed: 12.10.2023] <https://ubudashram.org/ashram-culture/>

and family while making decisions about their future. It also allows the individual to spend time away from home and family while making decisions about their future. It also allows the individual to spend time away from home and family while making decisions about their future⁶⁴⁵.

6.3 Aspirancy

Candidates who have made the correct choice to enter consecrated life become candidates and begin to live the essential qualities of consecrated life. This moment of discernment is designed to assist young men and women determine God's will for their lives. The fundamental objective of this stage is to train young men and women who exhibit evidence of a religious vocation to follow Christ with a compassionate spirit and pure motives. When young men and women sense that God is calling them, they can complete their academic education according to state regulations if they have not already done so (cf. *CL* 58)⁶⁴⁶. As a disciplinary, formative, and educational process, they are taught the value of silence, study, labour, relaxation, etc.

They are monitored to ensure that they observe these with good intention and accuracy and consider these values desirable. They are encouraged to develop their complete human and Christian abilities to help them recognise and act upon their calling. Aspirancy in the Indonesian formative system allows one to tap into the level of motivation and their ability to resist discouragement, generate enthusiasm for generous service of others, especially with those less well off, and sustain interest in spiritual matters. This formation stage becomes part of the development of sensitive listening, mutual trust, and openness that continues the formation process and may lead to the growth of the embryonic desire for membership in a religious congregation.

Aspirancy helps the candidate accept responsibility for self and choices, critical ability, and signs of maturity, even for the young adult. This is so important to be able to be free and fearless. When the disciples see Jesus walking towards them on the sea, they first think he is a ghost and are filled with fear. Jesus immediately reassures them with words that should accompany our lives and vocational journey: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear" (Mt 14:27). Others set up pre-postulancy programmes which provide the

⁶⁴⁵ Cf. DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES, "Come and See" [accessed: 10.12.2022], <https://www.svdvocations.org/discernment-formation/come-and-see>

⁶⁴⁶ *Christifideles Laici (CL)*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World (30 December 1988).

candidates opportunities to work with people of a community in their ordinary day-to-day activities. This allows the candidate to test the flavour of the community's mode of life and the community to see the person in relationship with them, their work, and those they minister to⁶⁴⁷. Aspirancy is building a personal relationship with Jesus and God through prayer, reflection, and understanding of their understanding of religion and faith development.

6.4 Postulancy

Postulancy is a year of preparation to enter the canonical year of novitiate, during which the candidate is helped to discern his vocation. Postulancy is also a time for ascertaining the degree of their human, spiritual and religious formation and, if necessary, upgrading it to prepare them sufficiently for the novitiate. postulancy is primarily aimed at the gradual introduction into religious life, complementing and extending the scope of their religious knowledge, forming them in the culture of community life following sound principles of education and manners, developing the practice of natural virtues, and allowing the postulant a closer look at the life and apostolate of the congregation⁶⁴⁸.

A postulant lives and prays together in the community under the guidance of a formator and may take classes or assist in the community's apostolates while continuing to discern God's will. A "postulant" is someone who, together with all other formative circumstances and experiences, seeks God's plan for their lives. In the Indonesian religious formation system, the postulant must assume *greater personal responsibility* for their decision to become religious at this stage. Accepting responsibility for ourselves and our choices is a critical ability and sign of maturity, even for young adults⁶⁴⁹.

A second sign is to be able to be *self-reflective*. This requires examining different aspects we have been aware of, recognising our gifts and abilities and identifying them, and being aware of our problem and the need for ongoing conversion to overcome our challenges. A third sign is an ability to become aware of what gives *meaning to my life*, what things are important to me, what I am trying to achieve in my life, how it helps me to be the best person I can be, and what gives me a sense of purpose. This is often the first

⁶⁴⁷ Cf. E. WOODWARD, *Poets, Prophets and Pragmatists: A New Challenge to Religious Life*, Notre Dame 1987, 200.

⁶⁴⁸ Cf. CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES, *Claretian Formative Programme Indonesia-Timor Leste*, Kupang 2015, 45.

⁶⁴⁹ Cf. E. KRISTIYANTO, *Sahabat-Sahabat Tuhan-Asal-Usul Dan Perkembangan Awal Tarekat Hidup Bakti*, Yogyakarta 2001, 88.

sign where formal religion enters the spirituality equation. It is often concerned with the call to group worship and how we do it. A fourth sign is a *consistency between intention and behaviour*, the ability to match intention and action. The desire to serve God as a religious is insufficient to gain acceptance into a congregation. God also supplies the appropriate gifts and capacities to fulfil the calling when God extends the invitation. All formators assist a person in discovering the truth of what God desires and make them aware of the qualities and signals necessary to determine whether a call to religious life exists. The median duration of this time frame is between six and nineteen months. Several religious groups offer *Immersion experiences* in local communities and through their apostolates to introduce people to their chosen vocation⁶⁵⁰.

6.5 Novitiate

In Indonesia's religious formational system, the novitiate formation, which is essential and canonical for consecrated life, is prioritised. The novitiate, which marks the beginning of life in an institute, is structured so that novices better comprehend their divine vocation, which is unique to the institute, experience the institute's way of life, mould their mind and heart in its spirit, and have their intent and appropriateness evaluated⁶⁵¹. They are to be prepared to cultivate the worship of God in the sacred liturgy; they are to learn a manner of leading a consecrated life to God and humanity in Christ through the evangelical counsels; they are to be taught to contemplate the mystery of salvation and to read and meditate on the sacred scriptures; they are to be prepared to cultivate human and Christian virtues; they are to be led to developing human and Christian virtues; they are to be introduced to a fulsome life⁶⁵². The time of the novitiate mentioned is to be devoted solely to the formation task.

Consequently, novices are not to be occupied with studies and functions which do not directly serve this formation. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) established that no one could be admitted to religious life without a predetermined and carefully planned preparation that would last a year. After Trent Council incorporation into religious life would be obligatorily tied to the profession of the evangelical counsels after completing a year of

⁶⁵⁰ Cf. I.A. KANU, ed., *The Consecrated Life: The Past, the Present, the Future and the Constant Demand for Renewal*, Abuja 2015, 62.

⁶⁵¹ Cf. *CIC* 646.

⁶⁵² Cf. *CIC* 652 § 2.

predetermined preparation. In this way, the novitiate was officially institutionalised throughout the world⁶⁵³.

The formational system in Indonesia recognises that the foundations for missionary life are to be established at the novitiate. The novitiate is a time of integral initiation into the following of Christ the evangelizer for the future life and mission. It is a matter of beginning life to “lay the foundations for a missionary life” and to come to know “its main elements” so that the person can keep developing in his later religious life⁶⁵⁴. Christological and charismatic references in the formation clarify that the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, will be the centre of all formation and, in a unique way, of this period of the novitiate. The lives of the novices must revolve around an appreciation for his divine person and the kind of life he took on and offered in the Gospel. The light that the novices must accommodate themselves to shine directly from the person and life of the Savior, and nothing else can dim that glow. Canonical novitiate periods can last anywhere from one to two years, with an additional year dedicated to immersion; however, the exact breakdown varies by the congregation. The novices must alter their entire self, including their ideas and feelings, to embody the congregation’s ethos. Studying our religious community’s past and present events is not enough to demonstrate full conformity to this spirit. It is a matter of heartfelt assimilation of the essential contents of the charism. Without this, the novices will never fully embrace the spirit of the Founder that the congregation has been entrusted with. Even if they learn a few things about our school, they won’t be able to claim they’ve lived here. All congregations have placed great value and taken meticulous care with this formation stage (cf. *RC 4*) aware that it would not be able to count on members well prepared for the apostolate if they had not been shaped in the forge and on the anvil of a severe formation. The best missionaries are developed in the novitiate, where they are taught the fundamentals of missionary living, instructed in the evangelical counsels, and given enough chance to put these teachings into practice following the objectives of our founders and congregation.

Novitiate in Indonesian religious formation aids novices in recognising their divine vocation and one which is also appropriate to the institute; they experience the institute’s way of life; they are moulded in mind and heart by

⁶⁵³ Cf. “The Novitiate in the History of Religious Life” [accessed: 05.12.2022], <https://www.claretianformation.com/library/initiation-into-the-missionary-life-manual-for-the-claretian-novice/what-is-the-novitiate/>

⁶⁵⁴ *Constitutions* of the Congregation of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CMF), n. 25.

its spirit, and their intent and fitness be examined⁶⁵⁵. Considering the wide variety of charisms and institutes, the completion of the novitiate could be understood as a complete introduction to the way of life that the Son of God accepted and that he recommends to us in the Gospel (cf. *LG* 45) under one or more elements of his service or one or more of his mysteries (cf. *LG* 48). At the end of the novitiate, novices make their first profession and become members of the institutes and consecrated persons.

6.6 Formation of the Temporarily Professed

The Indonesian formative system, which includes the Church's teachings, mandates that every member of an institution should continue their education and formation after making their first profession so they can participate completely in the institute's legitimate life and fulfil its mission. Consequently, the programme of this formation and its duration must be defined by the proper laws of the institutes, considering the requirements of the Church and the circumstances of human individuals and periods to the extent that the purpose and character of the institute require this⁶⁵⁶. During this formative stage, one should be able to handle the process without being saddled with excessive responsibility least one become distracted from the process itself.

The formation is to be systematic, adapted to the capacity of the members, spiritual and apostolic, doctrinal and at the same time practical, and when it seems reasonable, leading to appropriate degrees both ecclesiastical and civil. During this formation, members will not be assigned duties and jobs that would impede the formation⁶⁵⁷.

Formation in Indonesia specifies the significance and requirements of this stage. For the religious, it is a matter of reaping the fruits of the preceding stages and pursuing their own human and spiritual growth through the courageous execution of their responsibilities. Transitioning to a more open lifestyle and demanding activities often risks disorientation and aridity. It is critical that those in apostolic institutes can maintain the spiritual enthusiasm offered by the previous stage. Therefore, the pedagogy of this stage will seek to enable young religious to achieve meaningful development through their experiences following a unity of viewpoint and life that of their vocation, at this time in their existence, with a view toward the perpetual profession. Congregations are responsible for providing for the organisation and

⁶⁵⁵ Cf. *CIC* 646.

⁶⁵⁶ Cf. *CIC* 659 § 1-2.

⁶⁵⁷ Cf. *CIC* 660 § 1-2.

duration of this formation period and furnishing the young religious with favourable conditions for a natural increase in their donation to the Lord. It will put qualified educators in their path and introduce them to a thriving formational community.

Contrary to what was said about the novitiate a larger community with ample resources for forming competent leaders is preferable to a smaller one lacking such resources. Respecting others' differences and feeling personally responsible within the same community are ongoing themes throughout a consecrated person's lifetime, as is coming to terms with the realities of communal life as it relates to the vocation specific to one's institute⁶⁵⁸. Superiors must find a suitable formator responsible for temporarily professed students' formation, which should last for at least three years. Religious who are under training for the priesthood find this time to complete their ecclesiastical requirements. In the program of studies, special attention should be given to biblical, dogmatic, spiritual, and pastoral theology to deepen a doctrinal understanding of consecrated life and the institute's charism (cf. *DFRI* 61). At this stage in their formation, religious leaders must commit to the apostolate and actively engage in pastoral and social experiences consistent with their institute's charism while considering everyone's specific skills and ambitions. When this happens, religious people should remember that their vocation is not solely pastoral; they are still and not fully formed. Their commitment to ecclesial and exceptional social service must be subject to discernment criteria. These provisions, primarily intended for this stage of religious formation, should continue for the rest of their lives. In religious communities, above all that large and especially where the temporarily professed are living, there must be at least one officially designated religious person to assist their brothers and sisters with spiritual advice (cf. *DFRI* 63).

Formation in Indonesia commonly focuses on the transfigured Christ image, which serves as a role model and source of spiritual inspiration for the vowed life. To find the evangelical foundation for the consecrated life, one must go to the unique bond Jesus forged during his time on earth with a select group of his followers. He urged his followers to abandon all that did not serve the Kingdom of God, to follow his example carefully, and to forsake all that was not essential to the mission (cf. *VC* 14). Jesus' transfiguration is the revelation of Christ's glory and preparation for facing Christ's cross. It involves "going up the mountain" and "coming down the mountain" (*VC* 14). Through their development, consecrated people are encouraged to

⁶⁵⁸ Cf. CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES, *Claretian Formative Programme Indonesia-Timor Leste*, Kupang 2015, 50.

boldly offer the pioneering initiative, creativity, and holiness of their founders and foundresses afresh in response to the signs of the times appearing in today's world, as envisioned in *Vita Consecrata*.

In the face of daily life's physical and metaphysical challenges, this invitation is, first and foremost, a call to steadfastness on the path to holiness. But it is also a call to seek excellence in one's work and to cultivate a dynamic fidelity to one's vocation, adjusting forms as necessary to meet the changing circumstances and needs, in total receptivity to God's inspiration and the Church's discernment (cf. VC 35). Institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life are under strict Church mandate to place a premium on the social character of formation. In the community, one is "thrown into the deep end" of life, both the challenges and the delights. Through fraternal life, everyone develops the ability to accept the good and the bad in the people God has placed in their lives. During the initial formation, community life must disclose the essential missionary dimension of consecration. Therefore, it is advantageous for institutes of consecrated life to offer practical experiences during the period of initial formation, which is carefully followed by the person in charge of formation, allowing candidates to test their apostolic skills, adaptability, and spirit of initiative in the context of the local culture (cf. VC 67).

The formation system in Indonesia adheres to the call of synod fathers through *Vita Consecrata* to draw up as soon as possible ratio institutions, that is, a formation programme inspired by their particular charism, presenting clearly and in all of its stages the course to be followed to assimilate the spirituality of the respective institute in its entirety. The ratio addresses a vital requirement of the present. On the one hand, it demonstrates how to transmit the spirit of the institute so that it will be lived in its entirety by future generations in various cultures and geographic regions; on the other hand, it explains to consecrated persons how to live that spirit in different stages of life on the path to full maturity in Christ. While it is true that the renewal of consecrated life depends primarily on formation, it is also true that this training is, in turn, dependent on the ability to establish a method characterised by spiritual and pedagogical wisdom, which will gradually lead those desiring consecration to assume the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ. The formation is a dynamic process by which persons are converted to the Word of God in the depths of their being and simultaneously learn how to recognise God's signs in earthly reality. When religious values are increasingly ignored by society, this formation plan is doubly essential. As a result, consecrated persons will not only continue to "see" God with the eyes of

faith in a world that ignores his presence, but they will also be effective in making his presence “perceptible” in some way through the witness of their charism (cf. VC 68).

7. Ongoing Formation

The ongoing formation of consecrated persons is the constant personalisation or interiorisation of Christ’s life. Consequently, it is a learning process involving change, growth, and the person’s transformation⁶⁵⁹. Due to human limits, the consecrated individual can never claim to have created the “new creature” (VC 69) who represents Christ’s mind in every life scenario. Therefore, the initial formation should be intimately tied to the ongoing formation. Therefore, everyone is willing to allow themselves to be formed every day. As a result, each institute will be required to offer a precise and systematic statement of its plan of ongoing formation as part of its formation programme. At no stage of life can people feel so secure and committed that they do not need to give careful attention to ensuring perseverance in faithfulness, just as there is no age at which a person has wholly achieved maturity⁶⁶⁰.

In the consecrated life, the first years of involvement in the apostolate are crucial, distinguished by the transition from a monitored life to a condition of complete responsibility for one’s work. Young, consecrated persons must be encouraged and accompanied by a brother or sister who helps them express their zeal for Christ. Ongoing formation is necessary to prevent being despondent with results too often. Consecrated people in their midlife should be encouraged to reflect on the Gospel and their institute’s charism to rededicate themselves to their vocation and not equate the depth of their commitment with the quality of their outcomes (cf. SAC 8). This will allow them to offer their decision a fresh impetus and new motives. Now is the time to seek out what is indispensable. Life in this consecrated stage can also bring the danger of a confident individualism, accompanied either by a fear of not being in line with the times or by forms of inflexibility, self-centredness, or diminished enthusiasm. At this point, the goal of continuing formation is to assist in restoring a higher degree of spiritual and apostolic life and learn the unique traits of this period of life. According to *Canon Law*,

⁶⁵⁹ Cf. H. GRAY, “Integrating Human Needs in Religious Formation”, *Review for Religious* 53 (1994) 134.

⁶⁶⁰ Cf. A. WILKIE, “The Teaching of Spirituality in the Formation Programme of Religious Orders”, *The Way Supplement* 84 (1995) 55.

perpetual profession, [is] the point of arrival, and at the same time the point of departure in religious life integrally and progressively lived in the institute and calls for the continual deepening of formation by responding to ever-new necessities, thereby making the religious capable of dynamic fidelity to God's design in ever-changing circumstances and needs of the Church and world.⁶⁶¹

7.1 Dimensions of Ongoing Formation in Indonesia

The goal of continuing formation is to shape a person who will seek and love God “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (cf. Dt 6:5) and love their neighbour as oneself (cf. Lev 19:18; Mt 22:37-39). God and brotherly love are potent motivators for spiritual development and fidelity. In addition to emphasising the relevance of the *human and fraternal components of the consecrated life* in ongoing development, the Indonesian formative system also highlights the significance of these qualities. It requires self-awareness and an understanding of one's limitations to give its members the motivation and support necessary to attain absolute freedom. Emphasis must be placed on the interior freedom of consecrated persons, their affective maturity, their ability to communicate with others, especially within their community, their serenity of spirit, their compassion for the suffering, their love for the truth, and the unity of their actions and words in the contemporary context⁶⁶².

The *apostolic component* enlightens the consecrated and prepares them for continued apostolate as proof that Christ's love pulls them forward (cf. 2Cor 5:14). In practice, this includes updating the methods and objectives of apostolic activities in faithfulness to the founder or foundress and new traditions while paying constant attention to changing historical and cultural situations at the global, national, and local levels where the apostolate is conducted. Continuous updating and a specific interest in the numerous areas each charism serves are necessary for the *cultural and professional components*, grounded on a solid theological education that promotes informed judgment⁶⁶³. So that the apostolate can be conceived of and carried out following the needs of its period, making use of the resources offered by cultural progress, consecrated individuals must maintain as open and flexible

⁶⁶¹ E. GAMBARI, *Religious Life. According to Vatican II and the New Code of Canon Law*, Boston 1986, 250.

⁶⁶² Cf. Cf. CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES, *Claretian Formative Programme Indonesia-Timor Leste*, Kupang 2015, 110.

⁶⁶³ Cf. BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF INDONESIA, *Religious Formation Programme*, Jakarta 2012, 77.

a mind as possible. Ongoing formation in Indonesia culminates in the *dimension of the charism*, a constant deepening of one's special consecration in all its aspects, both apostolic, ascetical, and mystical. Each member should diligently study the spirit, history, and mission to advance the personal and communal assimilation of its charism (cf. *VC* 71).

The Indonesian formation system is best understood as a continuous process that begins at the very outset of a person's religious upbringing and continues through several stages of education, each geared toward a specific end as the individual gains expertise in a particular area⁶⁶⁴. These factors combine to form a complete human being by providing the right environment at the right time and input for spiritual growth. The entire action of formation is a process where the individual becomes more and more of a disciple of Christ⁶⁶⁵. In this way, the formation becomes a continuous conversion and transformation process. Ongoing formation thus facilitates the continuing growth of the whole person to promote a more profound and fuller commitment to the person and mission of Christ. It helps the person to believe more in oneself, to believe more in life, and to believe more in Christ. This demands a continuing conversion as a person moves forward in growth towards a complete realisation of the fullness of the person of Christ within oneself⁶⁶⁶.

7.2 *Need for the Ongoing Formation of Religious*

The energy of our existence is where we undergo continuous development. Since initial formation is a directed experience, ongoing formation is the same experience but lived with more independence within the regular context of the congregation's life and mission. There are three main reasons why continuous formation is so essential in Indonesian religious life. The *most significant reason* for ongoing religious formation is the obstacles that current culture and society provide to one's unwavering adherence to their religious vocation⁶⁶⁷. We live in a profound and rapid cultural change, necessitating an ever-evolving approach to cultural needs. The constantly changing times also call for new and fresh ways of reading, discerning and interpreting the signs of the times. This is the *second reason* that justifies the need for such an ongoing formation, where the religious is faithfully updated

⁶⁶⁴ Cf. BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF INDONESIA, *Religious Formation Programme*, 85.

⁶⁶⁵ Cf. D.F. O'CONNOR, *Witness and Service. Questions about Religious Life Today*, New York 1990, 61.

⁶⁶⁶ Cf. K. MCALPIN, "Conversion. A Summons from the Word of God," *Review for Religious* 61/1 (2002) 49.

⁶⁶⁷ Cf. BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF INDONESIA, *Religious Formation Programme*, 107.

with reading, discerning, and interpreting these signs. Finally, the new components that become a part of one's experience must be accommodated within the overall perception and living out of one's vocation as one grows and progresses in human and spiritual life. It requires a shift in perspective on the meaning of one's religious calling and life goals. Continuous improvement realised via persistent moulding is essential for this *third and last reason*. In the opinion of St. John Paul II, religious formation is not the prerogative of any age group. Still, because of human frailness and limitations, no consecrated person can claim to be wholly formed for that way of life. Through religious consecration, the individual is expected to bring to life the "new creature," which reflects the very mind of Christ in every circumstance of life. This lifetime project requires a basic disposition and readiness on the part of the individual to be formed every day of one's life (cf. VC 69).

7.3 Ongoing Formation: A Three-fold Fidelity

Consider that a consecrated life is a progressive adoption of Christ's attitude. In this scenario, it seems evident that such a journey must last a lifetime and involve the complete person — heart, mind, and body — transforming the individual into the image of the Son, who sacrifices himself for the sake of humanity. St. Bisignano believed that humans never finished growing up; instead, they were always amid maturation. The dedicated individual is no exception to this rule. Ongoing religious formation is best understood because all the components of religious life are subject to a dynamic development process. Neither can a religious person's development be confined to brief, concentrated periods in their lifetime, nor can it be tied to a particular moment when a formative service is rendered, like a spiritual retreat, an updating course, a professional training program, etc.⁶⁶⁸ However, ongoing religious formation is intimately connected with the expected growth process of the consecrated person at every moment of their existence. The life of a consecrated consists of various aspects (interior, apostolic, affective, interpersonal relationship, intimacy with God, etc.). Each of these components, and all of them together, should expand as they develop into adulthood. Incorporating evangelical ideals, prayer, studying God's Word, and full participation in the sacraments will lead to holistic development.

⁶⁶⁸ Cf. B. MARINELLI, "Contributions Towards the Integrated Formation of the Person" in J. COTTON, ed., *Growing Together in Christ. Personal Development in the Religious Life*, Dublin 1988, 123.

Three touchstones must manifest themselves as one's consecration develops and strengthens. The first and foremost condition for consecration is a commitment to following Christ in all aspects of life, including striving to be as poor, chaste, and obedient as he was. The second need is that candidates demonstrate a commitment to and acceptance of the central tenets of the Gospel in their daily lives. Third, one must be dedicated to the ecclesial mission by serving others⁶⁶⁹. These three fidelities become reference points of the maturation process of the religious: fidelity to Christ, fidelity to humanity, and fidelity to the Church.

7.4 Ongoing Formation as Transformation

Indonesia's young church prioritises continual formation in response to the world's evolving needs. The ongoing formation of religion is frequently viewed as a "consolidating" effort through which the individual's initial response to the vocation call is, via several phases of formation, clarified, deepened, and continually made mature. As the individual begins to respond to the religious call, they become aware of and gradually comprehend the more fundamental implications of this call and the resulting response. Thus, there is a gradual deepening and continual growth of the initial reaction towards the fullness of the imitation of Christ and a slow and steady increase in becoming perfect, just as the heavenly Father is perfect⁶⁷⁰. All this comprises the consolidating dimension of ongoing religious formation.

Ongoing formation invites the person to transformational learning and has far-reaching consequences on personality more than any other kind of learning. It is a learning experience that shapes the learner and produces a significant impact to the point of affecting the learner's subsequent experiences⁶⁷¹. It calls for change in the meaning perspective, which is passively formed right through one's life experience in childhood, during the youthful years and young adulthood. These elements serve as a filter for perceiving the present reality and determining how to organise and interpret one's current experiences. Through the ongoing formation, the religious should acquire self-knowledge and, by rational discourse and critical reflection, explore the depth and meaning of the elements that make up one's worldview to produce

⁶⁶⁹ Cf. A. BEGHETTO, *Crescere insieme in Cristo. La formazione permanente del religioso*, Rome 1989, 79.

⁶⁷⁰ Cf. BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF INDONESIA, *Religious Formation Programme*, 120.

⁶⁷¹ Cf. J. GIALLANZA, "Continuing Formation. Perspectives from *Vita Consecrata*," *Review for Religious* 66 (1997) 474.

a more inclusive worldview. The development of more personal autonomy, which also defines adulthood, is used to assess the outcome's success.

“The full development of religious values and fidelity in a soul is inconceivable if a man does not start with a healthy mind, balanced in its activities”⁶⁷². This affirmation seems to imply that any deficiency in mental health would be an obstacle to full spiritual development. It further assumes that psychological growth and spiritual growth are interrelated. The greater the psychological maturity acquired, the greater the possibilities for spiritual development and self-transformation. A spiritual person has decided to respond to God's call, which they have experienced, and then strives to make that call the centre of activity and choice. In other words, the call becomes the integrating factor for that person. Hence, the truth that spiritual life becomes a lifetime's work can be reemphasized⁶⁷³.

7.5 The Content of Ongoing Formation

Indonesian religious formation system gives importance to selecting the content of ongoing formation. Acquiring and updating information regularly is essential to consecrated life in the modern world, characterised by an avalanche of information and knowledge. Those not currently on this information are left behind and isolated in the modern world. Seminars, courses, and lessons enable religious to become aware of social and cultural difficulties and prepare them to tackle them. In addition, continual formation touches on all religious aspects; thus, the text should refer to every part of the human person. Therefore, content is considered all-encompassing, as it should follow every stage and every moment of a religious person's life.

7.5.1 The Paschal Mystery

The Paschal Mystery is an essential aspect of religious life. It should be the heart of the ongoing formation program because the paschal mystery is the font of life and maturity of religion⁶⁷⁴. The significance of religious life and the substance of religious life's spirituality are tied to this close relationship with Christ. In proportion to the degree of intimacy a religious can

⁶⁷² M.J. O'BRIEN – R.J. STEIMEL, *Psychological Aspects of Spiritual Development*, Washington 1965, 23.

⁶⁷³ Cf. B. BAYNHAM, “Transformation” in M. DOWNEY, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Collegeville 1993, 967.

⁶⁷⁴ Cf. A. PARDILLA, “Biblical Aspects of Formation in Religious Life”, *International Union of Superiors General* 3/4 (1997) 38.

establish with Christ, that religious' personality will grow more like Christ's, and they will acquire the aims of the consecrated vocation and the spirituality of religious life. By celebrating the Eucharist, the religious participate closely in the paschal mystery. Through that same celebration, they also receive the strength and the help to become intimate with Christ and thus join with him in his paschal mystery (cf. *EEa* 3)⁶⁷⁵.

7.5.2 *Personal Maturity*

Personal maturity is another important content of the ongoing formation in Indonesia. It is the full development of one's potentiality, control of emotions, a realistic understanding and assessment of self, an ability to form interpersonal relationships, the capacity to resolve problems and pragmatic self-confidence⁶⁷⁶. In interpersonal relationships, a mature person is receptive to criticism, ready to receive others' insights, and willing to be corrected by others. Additionally, the adult individual may make judgments with a sense of responsibility. Developing one's maturity takes time and work. First, one must be aware of the necessity of maturing, and one should value this objective so highly that no amount of hardship, conflict, or trouble can derail one from achieving it. Second, development into adulthood must be holistic, encompassing the intellectual, spiritual, and human dimensions of one's being. Third, the only way to guarantee a person's proper development is to take a holistic approach to maturation. Change to maturity should also adhere to graduality, which entails remaining steady and consistent⁶⁷⁷.

7.5.3 *Stability of Values*

A person's values are what they hold dear and deem essential in the context of the outcomes they hope to attain; as such, they are crucially important. Both long-term values (or terminal values) and instrumental values (or values that serve as tactics or ways of behaving to attain long-term values) are essential. The former suggests a life ideal and the purpose of one's existence. So, the "imitation of Christ" is a terminal value for a consecrated person. At the same time, the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and fraternal love in the community and the apostolate are instrumental values because they

⁶⁷⁵ Cf. *Ecclesia De Eucharistia (EEa)*, Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II on the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church (17 April 2002).

⁶⁷⁶ Cf. T. PUTHIADAM, *Religious and Maturity*, Bangalore 1989, 135.

⁶⁷⁷ Cf. R.A. COUTURE, "Facing the Challenge of Continuing Education", *Review for Religious* 32/6 (1973) 1333.

are a means to an end — namely, the professed person's goal of becoming more like Christ⁶⁷⁸. As a person develops into adulthood, they must incorporate these ideals to become stable and established. One should move from an academic knowledge of these concepts to an emotional embrace of them and then to a daily application. Through constant value learning and acquisition, the consecrated person becomes more and more like Christ, which is also the goal of religious consecration. Only when one becomes mature can one understand the importance of the stability of these values in life. Thus, the acquisition and stability of the correct values help the consecrated person to become a more authentic religious.

7.5.4 *Professional Qualification*

One must live a professional life in addition to a consecrated life, whether in the apostolate or the community. This professional element of a consecrated person begins with selecting one's professional vocation, typically determined by one's interests, views, values, a sense of purpose in life, and competence. The continual formation of religious regarding professional qualification would comprise a sufficient level and degree of education, acceptable training possibilities, and the appropriate methods to attain the necessary competence for a prosperous professional career. Professional qualification requires knowledge as a prerequisite. In addition to the knowledge, extensive exercise and practice are necessary to build expertise and competence. Developing competence in one's professional life cannot be limited only to periods of study and training. As in every career and profession, it should include the whole life. It is, so to say, as though one's life is like a school, in which there are continuous occasions and opportunities to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities and, by doing all that, slowly become proficient in that field⁶⁷⁹.

8. Indonesian Formation and Its Strengths and Weaknesses

One could make an analogy between religious formation and the process of planting a tree or constructing a house. Just as every part of a tree's growth is crucial to the process, so are the various stages of its formation. For a tree to grow and bear fruit, it is essential to start with a high-quality seed, plant it appropriately, provide adequate water, and shield it from harm. Finding

⁶⁷⁸ Cf. L.M. RULLA, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, I. Interdisciplinary Bases, Rome 1986, 338.

⁶⁷⁹ Cf. C.O. HOULE, *Continuing Learning in the Profession*, San Francisco 1996, 34.

one's true calling and encouraging its development is a similar obligation. The actual process of formation within a religious group is crucial to the longevity and genuineness of such an Institute. When resources are allocated toward the formation programme, nothing is wasted. What one learns in education stays with them forever.

God has bestowed an abundance of vocations to consecrated life and various ways of following Christ, the Saviour, in Indonesia, notably its embryonic Catholic Church. Many colonists influenced Indonesia's religious development in various regions. Christianity was introduced to a different part of this island nation by colonists from predominantly Christian nations. Today, the country boasts a Catholic population of over 4% and a solid and thriving community⁶⁸⁰. The introduction of Christianity is generally seen as a positive legacy of colonisation, enriching the cultural tapestry of the world's most populous Muslim country. Christian Missionaries significantly contributed to the spread of formal education and catechetical instruction, constituting the foundation of consecrated life in Indonesia⁶⁸¹.

In contrast to other Muslim nations, schooling expanded the brains of young people. Many were drawn to the distinctive Catholic way of life and prepared to join the consecrated life. In Indonesia, numerous circumstances encourage vocations to consecrated life. Indeed, religious traditions and faith played a significant role, but social and economic factors also influenced consecrated life⁶⁸². With fewer people deciding to become consecrated persons in the West, Indonesia has become one of the prime locations for religious groups to recruit new members and rebalance their efforts. Sociologists and analysts assert that sociological and economic backwardness contributes to many vocations. The formation system in Indonesia should emphasise the discernment of vocations by both the candidate and the formator and assist them in maturing in their vocation and fidelity.

8.1 Proper Screening for the Candidates

I learned from my interviews with seventeen congregations of various types that they all employ a thorough and rigorous recruitment process. Some congregations described how they began to improve their careers in their senior year of high school. The decision was made to visit the candidate's

⁶⁸⁰ Cf. D. HENDROPUSPITO, *Sosiologi Agama*, Yogyakarta 1988, 77.

⁶⁸¹ Cf. J. GRAYSON – D. MAXWELL, ed, *Studies in Christian Mission*, Leiden 2015, 128.

⁶⁸² Cf. R. ROBERTSON, *Agama: Dalam Analisis dan Interpretasi Sosiologis*, Jakarta 1997, 132.

family, those in charge of vocations in various congregations, to observe and learn more about the family's other essential histories. The religious community is the second experience of community life after the family. As a second family, the religious community is called upon to appreciate the total value of all the positive things in the person's original family (cf. *FC* 1). Still, at the same time, it needs to heal and correct all the negative things and make provisions for all the deficiencies which may be carried in candidates' hearts, and which may spill over into affective relations and community life (cf. *PDV* 42).

To create a thorough assessment of the applicant and support their formation, they also gather data from parish priests, catechetical instructors, and school teachers. Religious institutes also run the come-and-see programme for the candidate to remain together for days or weeks and to conduct classes and examinations to determine the candidate's interests and abilities. Since it is frequently held in religious houses, the candidate is also exposed to the aroma of religious and community life. Today's discernment must include the development of an in-depth profile of a discerner, aimed at identifying those areas of a candidate's background that will need more attention and discussion. The screening programme should examine various areas of the applicant's life to identify issues that require planning, accommodation, or even those that disqualify a candidate⁶⁸³. Working through the applicant's profile will also prompt essential conversations that can help the applicant's discernment and that of the community. It will also be an opportunity to identify issues that may arise as the applicant proceeds through the formation program. Discussing and resolving these issues before the entrance is generally better; they do not become obstacles later⁶⁸⁴. In addition, the candidate must be appropriately screened without any consideration of nepotism or regionalism, which could pose problems in the future.

The growth of new congregations makes it challenging to discover candidates, resulting in the admittance of unqualified individuals, despite Indonesia's stringent screening criteria. Since Europe has become a desert for vocations to consecrated life, numerous foreign groups anxiously seek individuals to carry on their legacy and mission. Multiple new congregations and fewer vocations frequently necessitate sacrificing candidate quality. Vocation promoters cannot visit the candidates' homes or surrounding areas to

⁶⁸³ Cf. A. HEREFORD, "Screening Candidates for Religious Life" [accessed: 05.05.2023], <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/screening-candidates-religious-life-amy-hereford>

⁶⁸⁴ Cf. F.J. KOBLER, "Screening Applicants for Religious Life", *Journal of Religion and Health* 3/2 (1964) 165.

accurately assess their qualifications because many candidates are from rural areas. In some rural regions, poor schooling facilities and early malnutrition result in low-quality vocations that are less adaptable to the increasing demands of the profession. Many people in developing countries, seeking refuge from their precarious economic situations and lack of infrastructure, are interested in joining religious communities. Those careers sometimes ended up being quite rewarding in the long run. Since Indonesia is multireligious, its diverse religious traditions have contributed to developing its unique culture. The practises and beliefs of minority religions have an impact on those of the majority as well. Therefore, the consecrated life requires a suitable screening mechanism and enough formation for better results.

8.2 *Qualified Formators*

Indonesian formative system is considered an essential yet delicate aspect of ministry formation. Congregations require capable formators to welcome and accompany those God correctly sends to us. They represent the congregation, share its values, and welcome new members. Not everyone is cut out for this kind of ministry, which requires a lot of expertise and attention. The formator is not a lone ranger but benefits from the participation of the forming group and additional expert partners in the process. Formators must be (a) spiritually and psychologically mature; (b) solidly grounded in sound doctrine; (c) Suitably experienced in pastoral work and (d) Well-versed in the spirituality and history of their respective congregations⁶⁸⁵. The skills and knowledge of the formator as a person who is developing following the individuals, he is responsible for (i.e., humanly, and spiritually). The formator collaborates with both the Spirit and the young man or woman. At times they will have their ear tuned to the promptings of the Spirit urging the young person to trust, be open, and respond. At other times, he will have a compassionate ear for the struggles, doubts, and questions of those in formation.

A person tasked with raising the young candidates must have both a father's strength and courage and a mother's compassion. He must provide a brother's or sister's support, a teacher's wisdom, and a trainer's discipline. He must possess these characteristics, as they cannot be merely one of them. Formators need to develop a sense of solidarity with the people they are in charge of to face problematic scenarios and come out on top in the candidate's life.

⁶⁸⁵ Cf. E. EFFENDY, *Situasi Formator di Indonesia*, Surabaya 2019, 98.

Blessed are those formators who can hold in their hearts the sufferings of the young people if you can look at them with total empathy, allowing them to pour some of their pain into your hearts and to welcome their pain with tenderness and mercy of the Father. Blessed are those formators who cry for the disappointments and failures they will inevitably face. Rest assured that the Lord will console you: who wipes away every tear and will make your service fruitful⁶⁸⁶.

Formators should also offer solid doctrinal and practical religious nourishment in keeping with each one's formation stage. Finally, they should progressively examine and evaluate the progress made by those in charge, considering the fruits of the Spirit. They must decide whether the individual called has the capacities required by the Church and the institute at this time.

The Indonesian formation system finds it challenging to recruit qualified formators. Many members of the congregation are in their infancy. It is challenging to locate competent and qualified formators. Newly emerged congregations outside Indonesia continue to employ foreign missionaries, which is both a benefit and a challenge because many of them cannot assimilate Indonesian culture. Blending the formator's and the candidate's cultures produces uncertainty during formation, which is not always conducive to positive outcomes. Many formators handling the role are unhappy and pressured to continue this job. Lack of collaboration among the formators also creates difficulty in imparting comprehensive formation to the candidates. Many formators feel burned out because the job is monotonous compared to other apostolates.

8.3 Group Formation

Many of the congregations I spoke with and those I know concur that they have many vocations and that their formation houses are at capacity. In addition, there is a trend for overseas congregations to accept more people because vocations in Europe and Latin America have nearly ceased. These circumstances need group formation with one formator and several candidates. Individual accompaniment is almost tricky, as the formator can only give group attention. The quality of group formation depends on the maturity of the group and the formator's organisational skills. Formation in consecrated

⁶⁸⁶ CICLSAL, "Year of Consecrated Life", Congresso Internazionale, Roma (11 April 2015).

life must draw upon people in their innermost depths and totality. According to Pope Francis, formation is craft work, not police work⁶⁸⁷.

Consequently, the greatest challenge is to train men and women who are complete, mature, and capable of receiving their vocations as a gift and a service to the Church and to the people of God, who become signs of hope in the world. Personal attention and accompaniment are essential for mature formative development because “we live immersed in the so-called culture of fragmentation, of the provisional”⁶⁸⁸ a culture that acts directly on our understanding of the Church, consecrated life, and the world, as well as on how the world perceives and understands us. Thus, throughout the formation, it is essential to understand the difference between having a vocation and living with a vocation because those who live as men constantly feel called by God, experiencing Him in history and becoming contemplative in action⁶⁸⁹. The role of the formator and personal accompaniment help the person understand the vocation’s meaning and reality (cf. *DFRI* 30).

8.4 Formation: Co-responsibility of Everyone

Another significant challenge is to overcome the idea that the responsibility for formation falls only on a formator or a team. Everybody must participate in this ‘duty utilizing our witness, prayer and evangelisation’. Formation is the responsibility of everyone because there cannot be communities that provide formation, as has already been pointed out, without a broader structure that bears witness based upon the values of consecrated life (cf. *EG* 119). Perhaps this is why there are difficulties in finding a religious who will take on this mission. The challenge, therefore, is to think about the process in a broader way, considering the co-responsibility of everyone.

8.5 Problems in Formation Due to Ethnicity, Clan, Regionalism and Favouritism

The formation period has paramount importance in the life of a religious in Indonesia. Being consciously involved in the formation programme,

⁶⁸⁷ POPE FRANCIS, Address to the meeting participants for formators of consecrated men and women sponsored by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (11 April 2015).

⁶⁸⁸ POPE FRANCIS, Address to the members of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (28 January 2017).

⁶⁸⁹ Cf. R. ZACHARIAS, *Fragilidade vocacional e institucional: da crise de credibilidade à fidelidade na fragilidade*, Roma 2020, 83.

identifying various dimensions of challenges, and maturely handling them are all part of the process. A significant number of negative behaviours can also harm the unity and development of the candidates during the formation process, such as a lack of openness to perceive things from a global perspective and a limited, self-centred mindset⁶⁹⁰. The formation is for transparency, and all the individuals engaged in, and the surrounding environment must help the candidate to all these opportunities for more significant vocational development. Indonesia has thousands of islands and is home to countless ethnic groups and subcultures.

The central premise of a unified country is unity in diversity which has been realised in many ways, including the pre-eminence of a single language and a robust federal government. The fact that the government supports and encourages various tribes and clans to maintain their customs is also something to be proud of. Consecrated life, at least in certain situations, structures the domination of some groups or tribes, can be unsettling. So that candidates from throughout Indonesia feel welcome and at home in the congregations they join, they require a comprehensive formation programme with formators who are open to all kinds of backgrounds and perspectives⁶⁹¹. There is always a tendency to be my formator-self is going against my normal person in the world-self. Formation centres and the formators must be open to the spirit's promptings to cultivate an atmosphere of openness and friendship without discrimination and nepotism.

8.6 Providing Formative Moments

The Indonesian formation system also prioritises providing candidates with formative experiences. Constant learning and growth in understanding the requirements of the consecrated profession necessitates access to accurate and up-to-date material. Therefore, seminars, conferences, and study sessions should be held to provide abundant and up-to-date input on diverse issues, including biblical, liturgical, spiritual, charismatic, psychological, and apostolic. The members will leave these meetings more equipped and eager to use their everyday experiences in the apostolate and the community (cf. *FLC* 7). As they continue their religious development and answer their religious call with psychological and spiritual transformation, they will get closer to complete consecration because of these pivotal times.

⁶⁹⁰ Cf. E. EFFENDY, *Situasi Formator di Indonesia*, 119.

⁶⁹¹ Cf. P. BYRNE, *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralisme*, London 1995, 109.

Religious superiors and formators must be aware and prepared for the changes and implications of a fast-changing world to improve their lives and those entrusted to them (cf. *DFRI* 19). The formative system in Indonesia supports and believes that local, provincial, and international communities have a significant duty and service for the religious formation of their members, fostering in them the desire to be continually transformed and to conform their lives more closely to Christ. Each community (local, provincial, and worldwide) has a vital role to play in this regard through careful planning and implementation. They are also responsible for the continual religious formation of their members.

8.7 Consecrated Life Formation for the Digital Age

The digital space has already been accepted by about three billion people (60% of the world population)⁶⁹² as an appropriate environment to express the human need to communicate to create community. This anthropologically relevant space is “an atmosphere, an environment in which we are immersed, that surrounds us and penetrates us from every side”⁶⁹³. The new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are already unavoidably embedded in our daily life. Any attempt to ignore them would be unrealistic and unreasonable. Besides, it is practically impossible to prevent their use because of their ubiquity and portability. Thus, the real dilemma does not consist in deciding whether to use them or not but rather in using them responsibly so that they may become a humanisation factor⁶⁹⁴.

The use of mobile phones and digital gadgets is very high among Indonesians without any distinction of cities or villages. Therefore, consecrated persons must discern how to inhabit the new digital environment with the most coherent style for their religious life and mission. “They influence our perception of self, others and the world”⁶⁹⁵. Therefore, consecrated persons must inhabit the new digital environment with the style that best fits their religious life and mission. Instead of putting barriers, we must discern the best way of settling it, discerning the ideals and values at stake. When it is used correctly

⁶⁹² “Statistics of Number of Internet Users” [accessed: 01.03.2023], <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

⁶⁹³ M.C. NUNEZ, “Digital Age Challenges and Consecrated Life”, *Studia Moralia* 53/2 (2015) 269.

⁶⁹⁴ Cf. BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF INDONESIA, *Religious Formation Programme*, 115.

⁶⁹⁵ C.M. MARTINI, “Information about Digital Age Challenges and Consecrated Life”, *Studia Moralia* 53/2 (2015) 122.

and for the glory of God, it is considered a gift from God⁶⁹⁶. The Holy Father always highlights the need for and importance of modern gadgets and their responsible use. In a message for the World Day of Communications, Pope Francis said:

The internet can be used wisely to build a society which is healthy and open to sharing. Communication, wherever and however it takes place, has opened broader horizons for many people. This is a gift of God which involves a great responsibility. I like to refer to this power of communication as “closeness”. The encounter between communication and mercy will be fruitful to the degree that it generates a closeness which cares, comforts, heals, accompanies, and celebrates. In a broken, fragmented, and polarised world, to communicate with mercy means to help create a healthy, free and fraternal closeness between the children of God and all our brothers and sisters in the one human family⁶⁹⁷.

As is well-known, the culture of our time is digital, and religious life must adapt to this reality to use its benefits and master the obstacles it offers. Undoubtedly, the significant changes we are currently experiencing are changing our religious existence. Occasionally, we are altered without our conscious consciousness. In a couple of decades, how we live our religious lives, proclaim our faith, engage in ministry, communicate with one another, etc., has altered. Today’s youth are digitalised and will continue to be connected to former lifestyles, previous professions, and earlier concepts. We should not oppose this but rather welcome it. Formation in Indonesia tries to provide responsible usage of communication instruments, which may help them acquire knowledge and have a compelling mission. Formation aims to encourage a person’s fidelity and growth in their life and religious vocation via experiencing the difficulties and tribulations of an ever-changing world.

8.8 Formation: Encounter, Listening, and Discerning

The formation is a place to encounter Jesus, the mentor of our life. Our encounter with Christ will help us in all our meetings in the future. Jesus’ life was full of journeys and encounters. A confident, rich man came up to

⁶⁹⁶ POPE FRANCIS, “Religious Life and the Digital Sphere”, Conference of Religious – England – Wales [accessed: 17.12.2022], <https://www.corew.org/news/2018/7/30/religious-life-and-the-digital-sphere>

⁶⁹⁷ POPE FRANCIS, “Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter”, Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 50th World Communications Day (24 January 2016).

Jesus “as he was setting out on his journey” (Mk 10:17). Let us look at Jesus. First, he encounters the rich man on the road, listens to his questions, and finally, helps him discern what he must do to inherit eternal life. The formation is a journey with Jesus full of encounters. He walks alongside people and listens to the questions and concerns lurking in their hearts. Formation in Indonesia helps the candidate journey through life’s realities and encounter Jesus. We, too, are called to become experts in the art of encounter. Every encounter — as we know — calls for openness, courage, and a willingness to let ourselves be challenged by the presence and the stories of others. Everything changes once we are capable of genuine encounters with him and one another, without formalism or pretence, but simply as we are.

Genuine encounter arises only from listening. A good formation always helps to listen to God, nature, and others faithfully and sympathetically. Formation must allow us to listen to others with our hearts, not just our ears. Listening is never easy. Many times, it is easier to play deaf. Listening means paying attention, wanting to understand, value, respect and ponder what the other person says⁶⁹⁸. Trying to emulate Moses in front of the burning bush necessitates some martyrdom or self-sacrifice: we must take off our shoes when standing on the “holy ground” of our relationship with the person speaking to us (cf. Ex 3:5). The ability to listen is a tremendous gift that consecrated people must beg for and exercise with all their might. Pope Francis calls the attention of the formators and candidate to grow and form in the apostolate “of the ear”⁶⁹⁹, listening carefully and accompanying the other. If we learn to listen, we can hear the voice of creation, the source and substance of our call and perpetual commitment. In listening and the silence of our hearts, the person’s formation occurs, and surrendering happens.

Formation must finally take us to discern. In formation, Jesus calls us to empty ourselves, free ourselves from worldly, including our inward-looking and outworn pastoral models, and ask ourselves what God wants to say in this calling. And the direction in which he wants to lead us. Discernment is about sifting through the “noise” of everyday life and the often harmful and contrary distractions that come with it to find the gentle invitation from God, His call. Discernment is a life-long process of constant and consistent

⁶⁹⁸ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, “Listening with the Ear of the Heart”, Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 56th World Day of Social Communications (24 January 2022) [accessed: 10.10 2023], <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20220124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html>

⁶⁹⁹ POPE FRANCIS, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants of a Meeting for Formators of Consecrated Men and Women” (11 April 2015).

connection with our Lord. It is a personal and spiritual journey with many twists and turns. Through thoughtful prayer, a dedicated spiritual life and trust in God, discernment help guide us in the right direction to discover and respond to God's will. Religious formation is a program for those who feel God may call them to a unique way of life. Indonesian formative system helps you to understand what a religious vocation is all about and to gain insight into unique aspects of a religious community. The ability to discern and accompany are two sides of the same coin. If you remove one, the other will not work. The accompaniment's intensity and depth enable a keen perception. The two primary touchstones of discernment are: an initial step toward this goal is developing a genuine relationship with God via studying His Word and secondly, an ongoing connection with the one who walks with us in the name of God⁷⁰⁰. The focus of the Indonesian formation is to help candidates to experience vocational discernment with openness, transparency, and responsibility so that in each step of formation, they can make a mature decision to continue with the journey or to interrupt it.

9. Intercultural Formation

Nowadays, consecrated people all around the world embrace an intercultural life. Intercultural living became the norm once missionaries relocated to other nations and continents to recruit new members for their church. Due to Indonesia's history as a colonised nation, numerous overseas realm congregations have begun working there and recruiting locals to join their ranks. Conversely, Congregations previously firmly established in Europe and other affluent countries are now struggling to attract new members, and their elders are passing away. They moved to Asia and Africa for new opportunities for their congregations and missions. Many religious organisations send formators overseas or conduct their foreign formation programmes there. Various nations and cultures within the congregation may assimilate at different rates. At its most basic, internationalisation entails passively accepting cultural differences without genuine attempts to learn from or embrace them. We still need to get over the tolerant stage. Interculturality,⁷⁰¹ the process of mutual understanding and appreciation between people of diverse cultural

⁷⁰⁰ J.C.P. WONG, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation Symposium for Formation Teams for Canada* [accessed: 22.12.22], <http://www.clerus.va/content/dam/clerus/Dox/Incontri/Canada%202019/3.%20Acompaniment%20and%20Discernment.pdf>.

⁷⁰¹ Cf. A. J. GITTINS, *Living Mission Interculturally. Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis*, Minnesota 2015, 88.

backgrounds through contact, is a step above the first level of integration. Integration of differences for mutual enrichment is possible at this stage⁷⁰². In the current missiology reflection, a new missionary paradigm is emerging, the so-called *inter-gentes*. It advocates the replacement of the *ad gentes* model. At a cultural level, this new paradigm upholds interculturality in terms of tremendous respect for local cultures, overcoming the sense of superiority of the Western/Christian culture⁷⁰³.

This new paradigm, on the one hand, takes a positive view of the work of the Spirit in any culture and promotes a way of doing a loving, humble, and respectful mission. To properly prepare the candidate to be receptive to new cultural experiences, the new formative scenario in Indonesia must address this issue. Likewise, the host country's beneficial cultural norms and practices are shared with the visiting foreign formators. On the other hand, it bears the risk of a naïve idealization of local cultures by overlooking the prophetic duty to challenge the negative elements inherent to any cultural setting: e.g., violation of human rights, misogyny, exaggerated prestige of the traditional priest (source of clericalism), ambiguous relationship with the spiritual world. We cannot endorse proselytism (cf. *EG* 14) but at the same time, we must respectfully proclaim the Gospel and Jesus Christ to those who have never heard about it⁷⁰⁴.

Due to these new dynamics in formation, the candidate should be able to live more interculturally, with room for the flowering of each member's cultural values. Harmony in the cemetery requires that individuals get along without harming one another and that these differences be celebrated and fostered as a natural outgrowth of genuine community. Every community member is responsible for ensuring that the positive aspects of his culture are reflected in the group's daily operations. We hope that working together makes everyone feel welcome here, regardless of their country of origin⁷⁰⁵. The relatively young Church and consecrated life situation in Indonesia necessitate the presence of foreign formators with superior experience and understanding of the congregation, as most congregations in the country are of

⁷⁰² Cf. M.R. TARUK, *Towards an Intercultural Formation for Mission. Reflection on the Formation Journey of the Xaverian Missionaries While Responding to the Challenge of Internationality of the Institute*. Tesi di Licenza in Teologia Spirituale. Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma 2017, 40.

⁷⁰³ Cf. A. PERNIA, *The State of Mission Today, From "Missio Ad Gentes" to "Missio Inter Gentes"*, Part II, Tagaytay 2018, 45.

⁷⁰⁴ Cf. S.B. BEVANS – R. P. SHROEDER, *Prophetic Dialogue. Reflections on Christian Mission Today*, Manila 2012, 40-55.

⁷⁰⁵ Cf. A.J. GITTINS, *Living Mission Interculturally*, 14.

foreign origin. Interculturality and inculturation are the current phenomena of consecrated life around the world. In living interculturality, we have a model, the Holy Trinity. Trinity is not only unity but also distinction and, I believe, true diversity. The three are consubstantial, but it is necessary to think that the Father is not the Son and vice versa. St. Thomas Aquinas explains this idea in the following manner. There are two unities in [God]: the divine nature and the Spirit of Love. We must replicate the unity that exists in God. Therefore, it is not sufficient that we all share the same divine existence by grace, which makes us a portion of the divine nature. We must also be joined in love with God and one another through the Holy Spirit's intimate affection⁷⁰⁶. Openness to interculturality in formation is necessary for the candidate to find the tranquillity needed for personalization and internal growth. Matured growth and formation process bring fidelity and stability in the vocation to consecrated life.

CONCLUSION

The fifth chapter, an analysis of the religious formation in Indonesia now, focuses on the origin of different religions in Indonesia, particularly Christianity. Indonesia has faced various traumas at the hands of colonisers and other pressures to emerge as a tolerant and religiously diverse nation today. Consecrated life is a component of Christianity that emerged from a difficult beginning to become a thriving and optimistic religious institution for Christians and society. The young church and the consecrated life develop and mature in the formation process. Even while the presence of foreign missionaries and formators offered direction and growth, particularly in formation, as time progressed, Indonesia produced native formators and training for locals to become formators and administrators. The time has come to review the strengths and flaws of the formative system and to go forward with a system that can improve the vocational fidelity and sustainability.

For a Christian, the way of living human values ought to be positive and attractive since the Gospel is always humanising and not mortifying. The challenge between a holy life and a happy life is offered to all, but especially to consecrated persons, imposing upon them a courageous, theoretical and practical re-reading of the way of understanding sacrifice, renunciation and fulfilment. All feel the need to see people satisfied/happy doing what they choose to do, also in their vocation, and not men and women sacrificed to ideals greater than self, unable to love themselves and therefore to truly love

⁷⁰⁶ Cf. T. AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, New York 1998, 25.

God and others. The life of the Church, with its different ministries and charisms, is called to fulfil at every moment of history and in every circumstance the dual faithfulness to God and man: faithfulness to God and his living Word, which is always fruitful anew, faithful to man in the concrete, to whom the Word is addressed, calling him in his life situation to an obedience of faith.

CHAPTER VI

An Empirical Study on Religious Formation Today in Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

In our study of *Fidelity in Religious Living* and the role of formation in promoting commitment and fidelity in the vocation to consecrated life, we covered several existing facets of fidelity in the context of Christian faith. As is customary, research usually looks back at the current fund of knowledge in each field and looks forward to what is yet to be explored. To bridge this “gap” in understanding, we have been asking the right questions and using the right approach to come up with fresh interpretations. In the preceding chapters, we discussed the concepts and individuals who served as living models of fidelity and sources of inspiration in the world of consecrated life. The discussion pointed out that one’s intimate relationship with Christ is the fundamental essence of consecrated life, the source and substance of consecrated fidelity. In today’s world, fidelity and commitment are lacking in many areas, including in consecrated life. Fidelity is the quality that inspires and motivates an individual to be faithful to a person or ideal under any circumstance of life. Fidelity matters in the family and consecrated life, society, or workplace, even if its intensity varies.

The purpose of the research project titled *Fidelity in Religious Living: An Evaluative and Empirical Study on Religious Formation Today in Indonesia* is to identify the factors that contribute to the attrition of Indonesian consecrated religious commitment to living the evangelical counsels and to propose solutions for improving this situation. An empirical study was conducted involving seventeen religious institutes of international and local origins under four major divisions. To protect the confidential nature of the disclosed information, the identifying elements relating to the participants have been removed from the discussion of the findings. All the four

categories involved priests, nuns, and permanent brothers. The four categories of persons involved in the study are the following:

- a) Consecrated Persons at the General or Provincial Government Level
- b) Members of Religious Institutes of Both Men and Women
- c) Those who abandoned consecrated life within the past years after their final vows
- d) Formators

1. Procedure and Components of the Interview

Samples

All participants in this study are perpetually professed members of various religious institutes who have undergone the required preparation, including, in some cases, advanced studies to become consecrated persons. The average age of the participants is between 30 and 45.

Date

The interviews were conducted twice, first between May 15, 2021, and July 25, 2021, and again in July 2023.

Place of Interview

Due to my experience as a formator there and the more prominent presence of Catholics and religious institutes, I conducted interviews in the Archdioceses of Kupang and Medan in Indonesia.

Number and Categories of the Participating Groups

The total number of religious institutes that participated in the study is 17. They consist of a) religious congregations of pontifical rite, both of men and women (active and contemplative); b) religious congregations of diocesan rite, both of men and women; c) religious congregations of brotherhood and d) the laity (those religious who are secularised).

Number and Age of the Participants

The number and age of the participants (samples) according to the categories that participated in the interview:

- a. Consecrated Persons at the General or Provincial Government Level

The participants were 17 (male 7 and female 10). The age of the participants was 4 between 30 and 40, 6 between 40 and 55, and 7 above 55.

b. Members of Religious Institutes of Both Men and Women

There were 75 participants (25 males and 50 females). The participants' ages were as follows: 25 were between 28 and 35, 25 were between 35 and 50, and 25 were above 50.

c. Those who abandoned consecrated life within the past five years after their final vows

Participants: 23 (male 8 and female 15); the age of the participants: 17 are between 30 to 50, and 6 are above 50.

d. Formators

Participants 23 (male 10 and female 13); age of the participants: 8 are between 30 to 40; 8 are 10 are between 40 to 50 and 5 are above 50.

2. Statement of the Research Problem

Consecrated life is an age-old charismatic lifestyle that finds its specific forms in the Catholic Church. Over several centuries, devoted and God-inspired individuals left the world to dedicate themselves to living like Jesus, their mentor. As time passes and the world becomes fascinating, the quality and original intent of consecrated existence seem to have suffered a significant setback in the lives of many. Although secularisation appears to reduce the importance of a life dedicated to others and the Lord in some cultures, there are still societies where the values of unity and brotherhood hold great significance. Today, the consecrated life in Europe is on the decline. Continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America have become the new source of vocations, but not without their share of difficulties⁷⁰⁷. Over the years, the quality of consecrated life has suffered several setbacks, including the haemorrhage of vocations⁷⁰⁸, mediocrity that creeps up its ugly head in the lives

⁷⁰⁷ According to the statistics from 31st December 2021 of the Vatican (*Agenzia Delle Pontificie Opere Missionarie*), even this year, there is an overall decrease in the number of religious women by 10.588. The increase was registered in Africa (+2.275), Asia (+366), Europe (-7.804), America (-5.185) and Oceania (-240). This information is available at https://www.fides.org/en/news/72956-VATICAN_Catholic_Church_Statistics_2022

⁷⁰⁸ “We are facing a ‘haemorrhage’ that is weakening consecrated life and the Church’s very life. The abandonment of consecrated life worries us. Some indeed leave it as an act

of many religious and interpersonal conflicts, scandals of various nature, stress and raised levels of unhappiness in community life⁷⁰⁹.

Indonesia, among the Asian nations, has become, over the years, a constant source of new vocations to consecrate life for many religious institutes. While this remains a fact, it must also be acknowledged that several challenges and questions relate to the quality and quantity of the booming number of new vocations and abandonments. What might be the primary reason behind such a phenomenon? This research is a humble attempt to uncover the reasons behind the cases of abandonment of religious vocations, mediocrity, scandals of various natures and other difficulties with fidelity and commitment to consecrated living among religious priests, brothers, and sisters in Indonesia by using data from personal interviews involving a reasonably large sample group.

3. The Questions for the Empirical Study

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, my samples are grouped into four categories to understand the problem and its impact on today's consecrated life in the context of the Indonesian Church: a) Consecrated Persons at the General or Provincial Government Level (Priests, Nuns, Brothers); b) Members of Religious Congregations of Both Men and Women (Priests, Nuns, Brothers); c) Those Who Abandoned Consecrated Life within the Past Five Years after Their Final Vows (Priests, Nuns, Brothers) and d) Formators (Priests, Nuns, Brothers). Each group member was given a separate set of questions during the personal interview.

Group A: Consecrated Persons at the General or Provincial Government Level (the data collected under this category has only a perceptive value as they refer to personal opinions regarding one's institute and its members)

a) How do you feel about the members of your congregation in general? Are they joyful and committed religious?

of coherence because they recognise, after serious discernment, that they never had this vocation. However, others become less faithful with time, often only a few years after professing perpetual vows" (*GFJP 2*).

⁷⁰⁹ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, "Address to the Participants in the General Chapter of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians" (22 October 2021) [accessed: 12.01.2024], <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/october/documents/20211022-suore-maria-ausiliatrice.html>

- b) Do you think your congregation's programme is good enough for the candidates to grow in fidelity to their vocation and mission?
- c) What are your opinions about the ongoing formation and special programmes your religious institute offers its members?
- d) How do you implement psycho-spiritual formation for the members in your formation programme?
- e) How effective is the vocation promotion in your religious institute? How favourable is the situation right now?
- f) How many members have left the congregation after their perpetual profession within the past five years?
- g) What, in your opinion, could be the reason why they left the consecrated life?
- h) What kind of relationship does your institute maintain with those who have left it?
- i) Do you think that consecrated persons' use of electronic and social media affects their ability to live in perseverance and fidelity?

Group B: Members of Religious Institutes of Both Men and Women

- a) Are you a happy religious? If not, why/ if yes, why?
- b) Are your family, friends, and relatives happy that you are a religious?
- c) What is your opinion regarding your religious institute's initial and ongoing formation?
- d) Does the spiritual and community life offered in your religious institute help you to be a faithful and happy religious?
- e) How do you evaluate your personal and community prayer life? Does it help you to be in closer communion with the Lord who called you?
- f) What are the major obstacles or challenges to living a life of fidelity and joyful perseverance, in your opinion?
- g) What are the priorities to be maintained for the upbringing of faithful and committed religious people, according to you?
- h) How did the electronic and social media influence you to live faithfully and persevere in your consecrated life?
- i) What changes do you propose in your religious institute's formation programme to encourage the members to be more faithful and joyful in their commitment?

Group C: Members who abandoned consecrated life after the final vows within the past five years

- a) How long has it been since you left the congregation?
- b) Are you happy and content about your life now?
- c) What are the main reasons you left the congregation?
- d) Were you happy with the formation you received, and the community structures you lived in at the religious institute?
- e) Do you think the formation and other community dynamics you underwent helped you properly discern your life now?
- f) What suggestions do you have from your life experience for the consecrated persons to be faithful and joyful in their lives?
- g) Did the electronic and social media influence your decision to leave the religious order?
- h) While you were a member of the institute, did you experience relational difficulties?
- i) How is your relationship now with the religious institute you left? Do you get any assistance from them?

Group D: Formators (Priests, Nuns, Brothers)

- a) Are you happy and satisfied with your role as a formator?
- b) What are the major struggles you encounter in your position as a formator?
- c) Have you received any specialised training or undergone a specific programme to be a formator?
- d) What are the main challenges of the contemporary formation scenario?
- e) Do you believe that the formation process assists candidates in maintaining fidelity and perseverance in consecrated life?
- g) What are the primary qualifications or requirements needed for someone to be an effective formator?
- h) What are the important elements needed for formation to be effective?
- i) What are the main reasons people leave consecrated life in the present situation, according to you?
- j) What do you propose to make the formation of candidates better than the present situation?

4. Methodology and Procedure

Perseverance, like fidelity, is an individual trait that can be affected by environmental and psychological factors. Since the answers might differ

significantly from one person to another and from one set of circumstances to another, it isn't easy to provide a generally applicable solution. We are attempting to compile qualitative feedback and offer it in percentile form. This is done purely to learn what factors affect the fidelity and perseverance of those living the consecrated life so that improvements might be made in the future. We have tried to apply descriptive, phenomenological, and psychological methods to collect the answers from the samples. Phenomenology's primary objective is to enlarge and deepen the range of our immediate experience⁷¹⁰. This interview and subsequent interpretation were grounded in the respondent's lived experience as a member of a religious institute and his or her present life situation. We researched the matter extensively to learn more about the factors that significantly impact the perseverance and fidelity of those who choose a consecrated lifestyle.

4.1 Procedure: Selection of Participants

Number

For various reasons, the "subjects" in a phenomenological study are often designated as participants, co-researchers, research partners, and the like. To avoid conceptual overload, we refer to them as "samples" or "participants" in the present study. The optimal number of participants cannot be predetermined but is determined by several variables, including the level of "saturation" of the data the researcher experiences as the interview progresses. I interviewed approximately 138 participants in four groups and gathered pertinent data for the current study.

Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria

The participants were selected based on specific criteria:

a) Participants must be perpetually professed members of a religious institute at present and those who left consecrated life within the past five years after their final vows. Participants from the group of perpetually professed

⁷¹⁰ "Phenomenological research is the study of lived or experiential meaning. It attempts to describe and interpret these meanings as they emerge. It is shaped by consciousness, language, our cognitive and noncognitive sensibilities, and our preunderstandings and presuppositions": cf. C. ADAMS – V. MANEN, "Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method", in L.M. GIVEN, ed., *The Sage Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods* Vol.2, California 2003, 614-619.

members are more likely to provide more knowledgeable responses due to their extensive lived experience in the consecrated life.

b) Participants will be chosen from those engaged in various apostolates and ministries within their institutes so that their varied experiences might enrich our study's objectives.

c) Samples were selected randomly from among the members, including those with specialisation and those with the basic requirements for their ministry, so that various responses about perseverance and fidelity in consecrated life could be investigated further.

d) We have not selected samples based on people's ethnic, tribal, or geographic backgrounds to prevent any biases from showing up in their responses.

e) This interview features people with positive and negative experiences, so the answers will be more well-rounded and creative.

f) The participants shall not have any current diagnosis of psychoses, as per the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders⁷¹¹.

g) The participants shall be above 25 years of age, perpetually professed, reasonably articulate in their experience, and have at least average linguistic ability.

4.2 Selection Process

Before contacting potential participants, we sought and gained agreement from the religious institute's superiors, described the purpose and method of conducting the interviews, and guaranteed the participants' and the institute's confidentiality. We solicited referrals for potential participants by contacting the following sources and notifying them of the selection criteria: Claretian confreres in Indonesia and the forum of the religious conference in the archdioceses of Medan and Kupang. A total of 250 religious were identified through the above sources, forming the initial pool. Further, we contacted them either by telephone or e-mail to assess.

(a) the genuineness of their motivations for participation in the study;

(b) their ability to understand and articulate the questions and

(c) information on any psychiatric illness.

Based on these processes, 138 participants were selected as the final sample for the study. Those selected for the interview and their superiors were

⁷¹¹ Cf. AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION, *DSM-5 TR, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Washington DC 2022.

informed officially and asked for their mutually convenient date and place for the interview and dialogue. We sent a formal letter (cf. Appendix – D) thanking them for their availability, informing them of the purpose of the interview without prejudice to the research integrity, limits of confidentiality, and seeking their informed consent. To those not selected for the final pool, I thanked them for their availability and told them of their non-selection with empathy and sensitivity.

4.3 Participant Profile

Because the number of women's congregations was more than that of men's congregations, the final participant pool in all four groups comprised a more significant proportion of women than men. Their ages ranged from 30 to 60, with a median age of 40. Their respective superiors and authorities referred most of the participants. They were actively involved in their missions and community activities during the research. Most of them were ready to discuss their lived experience in consecrated life and their opinions on its current situation. To maintain strict privacy and confidentiality, we don't reveal any information regarding the identities of participants and participating religious institutes.

4.4 Bracketing Bias (Procedure)

Considering the significance of *epochè*, we adopted the following attitudinal and behavioural steps during the data gathering and analysing stages.

- a) Before the interview and on the days of the data analysis, spend at least 20 minutes in centring prayer or mindfulness meditations on fostering internal reflection and awakening lucid awareness for being present during the interview process and data analysis.
- b) Reviewing the interview protocol and timetable in advance will help the interview flow.
- c) Being fully present to the participant during the interview process.
- d) Observing the participant's para verbal and nonverbal cues during the interview so that the data can be further contextualised to enhance its richness.
- e) Keeping a journal wherein the transference reactions to the phenomenon under study were discerned and acknowledged.

4.5 Gathering Data (Procedure)

An interview is a process that can be considered a guided conversation with a specific goal in mind. It is an essential tool in qualitative research. All research interviews should include a reflective component and a performative purpose. It is crucial to remember that the interviews must occur inside the phenomenological reduction and continue to be genuinely descriptive rather than testing hypotheses⁷¹².

In an interview conversation, the researcher listens to what people talk about their lived world, hears them express their views and opinions in their own words, and learns about their views on their work situation and family life, their dreams and hopes. The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, and uncover their lived world before scientific explanations⁷¹³.

An interviewer needs to maintain a balanced, appreciative, and pragmatic perspective. Despite its essentially appreciative and receptive nature, its ultimate pragmatic goal is pinpointing the experience's underlying framework. The interviews lasted between forty and ninety minutes, except for a few individuals with negative experiences in community life. Before the interview began, I informed the participants of the nature and purpose of the interview, the limits of confidentiality, and other terms and conditions, and clarified any questions they had. Afterwards, the subject signed the informed permission (see Appendix – H). The interview began with a discussion on the current state of consecrated life. I employed exploratory questioning, following the ebb and flow of the dialogue. I also took a few observational notes on the para-verbal and nonverbal elements accompanying the conversational content. The interview concluded with a verbal expression of gratitude to the participant for sharing the experience.

4.6 Follow-up Interview

The participants were informed of the prospect of a follow-up interview, should it be necessary. In my opinion, the initial interviews were adequately

⁷¹² A. GIORGI – P. GIORGI, “The Descriptive Phenomenological Method” in PAUL M. C. – al., ed., *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding Perspectives in Methodology and Design*, Washington DC 2003, 243-274.

⁷¹³ S. KVALE, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, California 1996, 1.

in-depth, and only in a few instances was a 20-minute follow-up interview conducted to examine a few points raised further.

4.7 Transcription

Transcription improves the “visual stability” of the data. Every interview was transcribed to do this. Most of the interviews were transcribed by me, with the remaining delegated to a transcriber with no conflict of interest with me or the research. I briefed the transcriber on the purpose of the research, the nature of his assignment and the conditions of confidentiality. He signed a transcription contract (see Appendix – G) and compensated him at the mutually agreed-upon rate for his services. I manually examined and modified the contracted transcriber’s transcripts to ensure they accurately reflected the interview. In addition, the matching participant was supplied the cache transcript for review of its legitimacy. On verification of their eligibility, each participant completed an interview transcription approval form (see Appendix – I). A few of the suggested fixes and amendments by the participants were appropriately incorporated into the transcript.

5. Data Analysis

While this study’s primary goal was to examine how formation can assist consecrated individuals in commitment and fidelity, it also sought to identify other key factors that harm their commitment. I transcribed and translated all the responses as the interview was conducted in Indonesian. In addition, I enlisted a professional’s aid, following the interview’s rules and etiquette.

5.1 Group A: Consecrated Persons at the General or Provincial Government Level

a) How do you feel about the members of your congregation in general? Are they joyful and committed religious?

Even though the participants from the administrative level expressed positivity in their answers relating to the joyful living of consecration by most members, they were also worried about a small number of members finding it hard to stay committed and joyful in their consecrated living. Participants shared marvellous examples of religious people who became fire and energy sources in consecrated living and tried to achieve the perfection of the Christian life as the Catholic theological tradition envisages it. 13 participants (75%) believed that a lack of profound relationship with Jesus and ineffective formation leads to passionless and sad religious life. According to this

group of interview participants, 65 per cent of consecrated persons in their institute are enthusiastic about serving others in the style of Jesus and are devoted to the cause of their lives.

b) Do you think your congregation's programme is good enough for the candidates to grow in fidelity to their vocation and mission?

Participants in the interview acknowledged that their congregations' formation plans and structures are revised and evaluated following the Church's needs and the exigencies of the contemporary world. 13 of the participants mentioned the difficulty that they face of a scarcity of trained formators who are willing to work in the field of formation. Another important factor mentioned by the group was the lack of religious role models and creativity among the formators, giving rise to real challenges in the formative process and affecting its quality. Furthermore, mediocrity and lack of passion among the new generation make formation difficult and less effective. The interview responses also revealed that a sizeable number of formators work diligently in the field and provide real-world examples of committed consecrated living.

c) What are your opinions about the ongoing formation and special programmes your religious institute offers its members?

i) Participants unanimously agreed that the continuing formation programme and renewal courses are highly effective and increase the Spirit and zeal of the organisation's members. Thirteen congregations of the participants recognised that they had previously implemented a programme for ongoing formation, both independently and in collaboration with other organisations that develop human resources.

ii) Participants also revealed that an average of 70% of members in their congregations are content and excited to participate in ongoing or unique programmes to reaffirm and deepen their vocation and mission. The remaining few believe such a program is unnecessary and seek other reasons to avoid such opportunities.

iii) Participants also noted that it is challenging to actively participate in the ongoing formation programme due to the members' demanding apostolate schedules and complex workloads⁷¹⁴. It is frequently challenging to replace them with eager and skilled subject-matter specialists.

⁷¹⁴ Healthcare and education professionals struggle to take leave and miss training due to work responsibilities.

iv) Four participants suggested that an ongoing formation programme be implemented following each participant's area of specialisation or apostolate so that each feels useful and effective in their life and mission⁷¹⁵.

d) How do you implement psycho-spiritual formation for the members in your formation programme?

Even though all the interview participants agreed that psycho-spiritual formation is good for the formation programme, only five said their religious institutes care about training the formators. While three congregations hire experts to help the candidates, others have yet to start such initiatives. Psychological support is required and beneficial in the earliest formation to heal from childhood wounds and undesirable worries and create a holistic and accessible environment. The scarcity of qualified formators has greatly hampered holistic formation.

e) How effective is the vocation promotion in your religious institute? How favourable is the situation right now?

Most participants believed that innovative methods and modern technology should be utilised to promote vocations. All participants were concerned about the declining number of those entering consecrated life. They believe that socioeconomic shifts in the contemporary world, with all their allure, impact these phenomena. The modern social fabric and growing atheistic attitude influence the minds and lives of the new generations.

f) How many members have left the congregation after their perpetual profession within the Past five years?

After reviewing their institutes' records, seventeen interview samples revealed that 32 people, 12 men and 20 women, had left the consecrated life from the participants' institutes within the last five years. Already, twenty new members have requested laicisation. Even though these numbers are not exceptionally high, they compel all participants and institutes to evaluate the challenges and search for appropriate solutions. Participants also expressed concern over the increase in dropout rates among male and female students in formation and training.

⁷¹⁵ Uniting individuals who work as college professors, parish priests, and healthcare professionals for courses in ongoing formation irrelevant to their specific ministries or apostolates may not yield the anticipated effectiveness in an ongoing formation program.

g) What, in your opinion, could be why they left the consecrated life?

The participants in the interview expressed that religious individuals often abandon their vocation due to a culmination of issues without proper guidance or spiritual assistance. Some of the reasons explained by this group after pooling together answers from their respective institutes are:

- Family problems: (30%)
- Problems with authority: (26%)
- Emotional problems: (45%)
- Lack of effective formation: (40%)
- Difficulty in living and adjusting in the community: (30%)
- lack of openness and transparency (25%)
- Lack of inculturation (65%)
- Health-related problems (10%)
- Loss of relevance of religious life in the modern fascinating world: (6%)
- Difficulty in long-term commitment: (6%)
- Spiritual atheism and dryness in the community dynamics: (51%)
- Economic problems in the family (5%)
- Influence of social media and modern communication (22%)

h) What kind of relationship does your institute maintain with those who have left it?

Most participants expressed that their institutes maintain positive relationships with former members. Some participants believed their former religious institute did not treat the ones who left fairly. However, only a few of those who left remain on friendly terms with their congregations and continue to participate in some of the common programs of the congregation. These individuals are still active in the apostolate and mission of the churches. In addition to the financial help they provided at departure, five participating major superiors retained that their congregation should have a contingency plan to address these circumstances. In addition, participants agreed that it is their spiritual and moral duty to accompany people who have left their fraternity for various reasons.

i) Do you think that consecrated persons' use of electronic and social media affects their ability to live in perseverance and fidelity?

While most participants see the potential of social media and modern forms of communication for the growth of the mission and the individual, they are concerned about the individual's lack of maturity and responsibility

to use them. Even though it provides access to a wealth of information and improves all aspects of life, the Internet often fosters immorality and emotional exploitation. Participants believed that rather than prohibiting these means of communication, one should educate members on using them properly and responsibly. Social media and other forms of communication are also very beneficial to the Church's biblical apostolate and catechetical ministry compared to the shifting norms of the modern world. According to the results of surveys, despite the numerous positive effects of social media, it has a detrimental influence on the quality and fidelity of its religious members. Problems associated with affectivity and pornography are on the rise, even among consecrated individuals who are connected to the internet and modern media.

5.2 Group B: Members of Religious Institutes of Both Men and Women

The interview sample population is diverse in gender, age, ministry, and area of expertise. The following questions were asked to collect data for our study:

a) Are you a happy religious? If not, why/ if yes, why?

Of the participants, 68% (51 samples) reported feeling happy about their current life and expressed gratitude towards God for their vocation and personal growth through His grace. They acknowledged that their family, friends, and well-wishers give them the steadfast support they need to remain alive and engaged in their consecrated life. In addition, they noted that the congregation, formators, well-wishers, and numerous other supportive conditions significantly influenced their development in this unique way of life. 23 participants (31%) felt that they are unhappy with their current circumstances. They believed that, among other factors, a lack of identification with the vocational project lies at the root of this unfortunate situation. There was a lack of desire and fervour for the consecrated life because personal initiative and formational dynamisms were not properly blended at the personal level. Participants believe that in addition to family issues, their personality's emotional and affective aspects were not well guided and supported during their formation. Participants admit they do not have a personal, meaningful relationship with God. They desire a more effective early formation approach incorporating psycho-spiritual integration to alter their outlook on life.

b) Are your family, friends, and relatives happy that you are religious?

Among the 75 participants, 52 respondents (70%) answered that their families, friends, and relatives were happy and supportive of their decision to join religious life. 23 participants (30%) showed that their families and relatives do not support their decision and pursuing them to abandon this life. Economic difficulty in the family, eagerness to see new siblings, and the fear of extinction of the family tree are reasons their families are against their choices. The situation is unsuitable for developing a vocation in a Muslim-dominated country like Indonesia with different customs and traditions.

c) What is your opinion regarding your institute's initial and ongoing formation?

All Participants stated they have an ongoing formation plan even though numerous areas need correction and improvement. Despite the ever-changing and dynamic global context, they admired the institutes' efforts to provide ongoing formation and other suitable environments for the younger religious. 43 participants (57%) stated that the formation programme must be revised to meet the present world's problems and foster a profound and loving relationship with God, their vocation's source. 55 participants (60%) feel that a lack of interested and trained formators significantly impacts formation, the candidate's future life and mission. According to all the participants, the formation programme must emphasise holistic and psycho-spiritual formation, particularly in the beginning years, so that the candidate can overcome life's challenges and obstacles.

Only 11 out of 17 religious institute samples have a well-defined formation plan for the ongoing formation programme, while the rest have just sporadically organised seminars and discussions. 100 percent of participants, however, believe that continual training is vital because the global situation and innovations rapidly alter living situations. Some members require additional motivation to participate in continuous programmes, while others believe they do not meet their expectations or educational level.

d) Does the spiritual and community life offered by your religious institute help you be a faithful and happy religious person?

Although individual indifferences exist, all participants (100%) agreed that religious institutes' spiritual and fraternal life is generally positive, with considerable room for improvement. Quality of the personal spiritual life and the fraternal community dynamics help consecrated persons keep up their

spirit and strength of vocation. Tendencies of mediocrity and passivity in spiritual and community life affect ordinary life and kill the spark of vocation within. 45 participants (60%) feel that the spiritual dryness and a lukewarm attitude in consecrated life must be treated seriously. The increasing inclination to reduce community to a place of residence and boarding makes meaningful contact and cohesion quite challenging. All participants also appreciated the outstanding examples of consecrated individuals serving as models and inspirations for other members. For the benefit of members and the community's mission, 35% of respondents (26 persons) believed that superiors could exert additional effort to prevent the widening generational disparity between young and old members. The community members' sense of openness and camaraderie is eroded by favouritism and nepotism.

e) How do you evaluate your personal and community prayer life? Does it help you to be in closer communion with the Lord who called you?

55 Participants (60%) in the interview affirmed that a lack of creativity and a routine spiritual life accelerate the crisis of fidelity and stability in vocation for the consecrated person. Only twenty-six of the 75 participants (35%) said they devote extra care and attention to personal prayer and are engaged and creative in community prayer. 49 interview participants (65%) considered prayer as a routine activity and solely adhered to the daily schedule. They felt they appreciated the apostolate entrusted to them and were uninterested in anything that would diminish its effectiveness. This more significant proportion seems to indicate the religious who become workaholics and feel their relationship with God, their life's guide, is dry and uninspiring. Three participants have already submitted their laicisation petition to higher authorities.

f) What are the major obstacles or challenges to living a life of fidelity and joyful perseverance, in your opinion?

While the participants' specific answers varied, they did agree that a solid upbringing in the family and a solid formation in the religious life were necessary for a joyful and loyal religious life. I want to highlight a few difficulties repeatedly mentioned during the interviews.

- lack of genuine motivation for a religious vocation⁷¹⁶ (39 participants)
- lack of support and early faith formation from the family and the Christian community setting⁷¹⁷ (30 participants)
- lack of a good and welcoming atmosphere in the communities and religious institutes⁷¹⁸ (26 participants)
- Lack of good formators and formation programmes⁷¹⁹
- Lack of personal responsibility to grow spiritually and mature understanding of religious vows⁷²⁰ (33 participants)
- The development of the modern world and mass media also influenced consecrated persons in many ways, especially the uncontrolled and less responsible use of mobile phones and social media platforms⁷²¹ (44 participants)

g) What are the priorities to be maintained for the upbringing of faithful and committed religious people, according to you?

All Participants agreed that adequate screening and a more effective discernment process would help a person make the right decisions about entering consecrated life. Vocation promoters can visit the candidate's family and other responsible individuals in the candidate's life to collect information

⁷¹⁶ Some believe that challenging life circumstances led them to choose this way of life; therefore, their religious vocation is not authentic or freely chosen. They could not purify their motivation during formation and continue to feel that they are not at home in their religious vocation.

⁷¹⁷ Early formation and religious instruction within the family are vital for developing a person's religious faith. Faith and the image of God transmitted to children by their parents are frequently confusing and inappropriate.

⁷¹⁸ In many congregations and communities, the relational atmosphere is hostile, and members feel stifled and miserable. Favouritism, nepotism, and regionalism erode the members' sense of brotherhood and community.

⁷¹⁹ Participants believe that a quality formation programme and well-trained, well-balanced formators are essential for the growth of those in formation. Specialisation in a particular field should not become an impediment to a formator's focus on the holistic development of the candidate.

⁷²⁰ Participants stated that an increasing trend of mediocrity and laziness among devoted individuals required intervention. A parasitic tendency is forming among the religious, which is detrimental to individuals and the congregation.

⁷²¹ Through the invasion of modern mass media and communication, the religious' attention is diverted from their daily lives, and worldly concerns become more significant and prominent. The foundational tenets of the consecrated life — quality of life and apostolate — are forsaken in favour of a propensity to live following modern trends.

that can significantly aid the candidate's formation. The following answers are some of the repeated answers during the interview:

- The fact that many consecrated persons today are unaware of who they are, what they do, and why they do is a sign of what is wrong with the consecrated life. They should be able to comprehend and respond to these issues from their training and personal formation during the formative years. The opportunity must be provided for students to fully understand Church teachings and the magisterium of the Church during their time in formation. A significant aspect of this time is spent fostering a strong personal desire to live by those principles and forge a close relationship with Jesus.
- The formative process can improve commitment and responsibility towards vocation and mission by helping the candidate develop as a better human and spiritual being.
- Encourage healthy and responsible interactions with others, your family, and modern communication tools. Adhering to the formation standards the Church and the religious institutions set is always preferable to local or foreign customs and traditions.
- The candidates may progress and grow stronger in their vocation with a balanced and inclusive formation.
- Those in authority can provide an atmosphere of fraternity and brotherhood by avoiding favouritism, nepotism, and regionalism,
- Transparency in every aspect of life is required for a religious to develop in his commitment and vocation.
- Foreign formators and congregations must demonstrate openness to inculturation, embracing the local culture and surroundings.

h) How did the electronic and social media influence you to live faithfully and persevere in your consecrated life?

All participants unanimously acknowledged the significance of electronic mass media and contemporary communications in the modern world. Its presence is sensed everywhere and without distinction. Despite their many personal and pastoral advantages, one must be cautious and prudent in using and promoting current communication technologies. In their apostolate and activities, missionaries can reach people from all walks of life with modern media and communications. Contemporary media is popular among young people and a significant population, and it is simple, quick, and engaging. The Church, particularly consecrated life, does not shy away from its

practical use but promotes it to develop the individual and the mission. 53 Participants (70%) also expressed concern with the growing prevalence of pornography and sexually exploitative materials among consecrated individuals, which impede their commitment and fidelity. 60 participants (80%) thought using media carelessly interfered with their vocation, purpose, and commitment to their vows. Electronic or media addiction causes religious people to become lazy, sluggish, and sin-oblivious, which results in an anaesthetic existence. 68 participants (90%) believe that overusing media and communication tools without personal responsibility diminishes the quality of community life and the mission assigned to individuals.

i) What changes do you propose in your religious institute's formation programme to encourage the members to be more faithful and joyful in their commitment?

- All participants reached a consensus that Provincial or General chapters of religious institutes ought to be able to discern the indications of the times and, through the Holy Spirit's inspiration, rejuvenate the charisms following the contemporary demands of the Church and the populace.
- The initial and ongoing formation may provide an opportunity to increase devotion to and understanding of Jesus and the consecrated life, thereby imbuing years of formation with purpose and efficacy.
- Formation in the initial and ongoing stages is crucial in the contemporary world to interact effectively and responsibly without succumbing to its allure.
- The administration should arrange for training for formators, which is of the utmost importance.

5.3 Group C: Members Who Left the Congregation after the Final Vows within the Past Five Years

We had difficulty obtaining samples for this group for the interview. Some believe they have nothing to do with religion and avoid relationships with any group or religious institutes. Some of them found it difficult to answer specific questions.

a) How long has it been since you left the congregation?

Among the 23 participants, ten are already in the fifth year of secularisation, five have completed four years, four have completed three years, and the rest are in the second year.

b) Are you happy and content about your life now?

14 participants (58%) reported being happy and satisfied with their lives since they could make the correct choice despite it happening late. 9 individuals (40%) regretted their hurried and emotionally driven decision to leave the consecrated life. They all agreed that life after leaving the congregation was challenging, yet they felt God's divine providence more than ever. They think that life outside is challenging and demanding.

c) What are the main reasons you left the congregation?

- Some participants remained silent because they were not yet ready to disclose the circumstances surrounding their decision to quit the congregation.
- Six participants discussed how it is challenging to grasp and uphold the world of affection, which makes vows difficult to maintain, particularly the vow of chastity.
- Seven participants demonstrated how challenging community life can be, particularly when blending in and communicating clearly with the authorities.
- Ten participants lacked a genuine vocation and struggled to be faithful to God and the congregation. They all expressed their inability to maintain a remarkable spiritual life with a deep relationship with Jesus, the source of their vocation. Weakness in any critical parts of the consecrated life will result in lethargy and problems in all other areas.

d) Were you happy with the formation you received and the community structures you lived in at the religious institute?

Participants valued the formation programme well but did not utilise the opportunity for meaningful personal development in all facets of life.

- Twenty-three participants (100%) emphasised the need for well-trained and well-balanced formators to benefit the candidate and their career path.
- All participants recommend revising the formative curriculum to fit the current global situation and prepare the candidate better for the problems and challenges of the present.
- The candidate needs expert spiritual and psychological help to combat the spiritually numbing and dry life that extinguishes the inner spark of vocation.

- Five respondents believed that the community dynamics were not conducive to the growth of fraternal affection and loyalty; instead, they were toxic.
- Ten participants stated that, although formative programmes and plans were beneficial, they could not comprehend them due to inner conflict.
- All participants expressed their wish that formation and communities must be free of favouritism, nepotism, and regionalism because they hinder the maturation and advancement of vocations.

e) Do you think the formation and other community dynamics you underwent helped you properly discern your life now?

Everyone among the participants unanimously agreed that their time at the religious institute was intellectually, personally, and spiritually enriching and that their instruction there was similarly beneficial. These experiences in consecrated life have equipped them to confront challenges beyond the convents and communities. Years of cultivating discipline and punctuality have contributed to their good health and social standing. A balanced existence after secularisation results from a more developed comprehension of society and the world around us, fostered during their time in the institutes. The participants believe that their current life choices and objectives are accurately perceived and implemented promptly and efficiently due to their previous life experience in the consecrated life. Despite facing adversity, earlier experiences of community dynamics enable them to organise their lives with mutual regard and understanding.

f) What suggestions do you have from your life experience for the consecrated persons to be faithful and joyful in their lives?

All the participants in the group unanimously believed that:

- those in consecrated life should always try to live in sincerity and openness, which can significantly help one grow in one's relationship with God and others.
- They believed formation is for transformation, and anything that hinders that process must be eliminated drastically.
- The candidate's training and formation goals should be a strong relationship with the Lord and a mature understanding of oneself, including strengths and weaknesses. The issues are to be solved spiritually and sensibly so that the candidate can live in an atmosphere of freedom rather than as a slave to the problems.

- Five participants suggest that it is essential to maintain a balance in all aspects of an individual's life and development during their formative years. Emphasising only intellectual abilities and professional skills can lead to neglect of one's spiritual growth and vocation. This may result in a lack of time and attention to the spiritual aspect of life.
- Foreign formators and cultural representatives should be open to adapting to local contexts and endeavour to understand the perspectives of local candidates.

g) Did the electronic and social media influence your decision to leave the religious order?

Sixty percent (14 participants) agreed that electronic and social media directly or indirectly influenced their life and decisions. Some of the reasons they put forward are:

- Those addicted to social media and electronic devices experience a more significant spiritual distance from the source of their vocation.
- Unrestricted access to social and electronic media can engender a sense of estrangement among community members, including within the realm of apostolate, which subsequently becomes a mundane occurrence.
- Social and electronic media provide a consecrated person, who is called to exist in the world but not of it, with an expansive window into the world.

Every participant agreed that the consecrated person must be instructed on using electronic and social media effectively and responsibly in their life and mission, even though their use is essential in the current era. 80% of the participants (18 individuals) believed that responsible oversight of electronic and social media usage should be implemented during one's formative years and beyond.

h) While you were a member of the institute, did you experience relational difficulties?

Twelve participants (50%) agreed they experienced internal and external relational challenges. Situations involving interpersonal conflicts within one's immediate community or with authorities may occasionally impact an individual's perspective towards individuals external to them. Additionally, participants agreed that relationships are vital among consecrated individuals due to the relational nature of the call they received. Challenges such as regionalism, groupism, and nepotism undermine the environment conducive

to open communication and harmonious relationships among members of a religious institution or community.

i) How is your relationship now with the religious institute you left? Do you get any assistance from them?

Most respondents (75%) have a favourable perception of the religious institute from which they separated some years ago. They felt the institute treated them reasonably and gave them sufficient time to address the matter. 12 participants (50%) expressed gratitude for the opportunity to continue working with them in their mission and apostolate. They further stated that they are honoured to be invited to participate in special events and programmes.

7 individuals (23 percent) who departed from the congregation did so without intending to reestablish ties with it. The institute's approach to addressing their issues was deemed unsuitable and deficient in principles of fairness. Some individuals among the participants believe that the authorities are the actual antagonists and that this is the cause of their departure and professional decline.

Eight participants admitted that their former institute had provided them with financial and spiritual support when they encountered challenges acclimating to their new lives and societal responsibilities.

j) Do you have other common suggestions for improving consecrated life and its future?⁷²²

The participants' reactions to this inquiry were diverse and, at times, glaringly contradictory, contingent upon their backgrounds. Four of the samples regarded the potential establishment of international formation institutes favourably. The candidate would gain exposure to other cultures and people, thereby mitigating the issues of favouritism, regionalism, and nepotism. According to 7 interviewees, the ability of local formators to adequately comprehend the candidates and their culture enables them to conduct the formation locally⁷²³. Thus, candidates may develop sincerity and candour, but greater emphasis must be placed on personal autonomy and accountability.

⁷²² An additional question was asked to this group because of its peculiarity of living inside and outside of consecrated life, which may help in our formative system.

⁷²³ Certain participants assert that formators hailing from foreign nations are occasionally unable to adequately comprehend the candidates, which can harm their vocational journey.

In one voice, participants suggested that formation needs to be done in an atmosphere of freedom and brotherhood rather than fear and control. They indicated that a formator should not be a multitasker and busy individual, as such individuals fail to know and guide their candidates maturely and helpfully.

The interviewees unanimously agreed that superiors and leaders should be kind and understanding towards their subordinates, helping them through tough times without making things worse.

5.4 Group D: Formators

The formators in Group D are comprised of priests, sisters, and brothers from various religious institutes. They are divided into two samples based on their experience as formators. Sample A includes those with more than ten years of experience, while Sample B includes those with less than ten years of experience. This division helps identify differences in opinions according to service and experience. Sample A had 8 participants, while sample B had 15.

a) Are you happy and satisfied with your role as a formator?

Six participants from Sample A (85%) responded positively, while the two others (15%) stated they would continue until a replacement became available.

Seven members of the sample B group (45%) expressed their happiness and joy in serving as formators. The remaining 8 participants (55%) feel they were forced into this job and want to be relieved as soon as possible.

b) What are the primary challenges you encounter in your position as a formator?

All sample A participants who have served as formators for over ten years expressed feeling exhausted and burnt out. They also found it challenging to handle the problems faced by the new-generation candidates. All of them feel that the generation gap is very significant.

All participants in sample B shared that being a role model for their candidates in the challenging world is tough. It demands a continuous commitment throughout the day, leaving them with little rest and no scope for refreshing activities. The group stressed the significance of choosing only those willing and available to provide this crucial service as formators.

c) Have you received any specialised training or undergone a specific programme to be a formator?

Only 3 participants from the sample A (31%) group had formal training to become formators, while the rest (63%) gained experience through life situations.

Nine out of fifteen participants (60%) in the sample B group underwent formal training to become formators, while the remaining six (40%) were assigned to learn from senior members.

d) What are the main challenges of the contemporary formation scenario?

Participants in sample A answers:

- According to the participants, the screening process for new candidates to institutes is unclear and lacks strictness, resulting in unmotivated and non-committed candidates being admitted⁷²⁴.
- It has become challenging for the younger generation to commit to a long-term, consecrated life due to the fast-paced and globalised culture prioritising instant results and flexibility.
- Digital media and social networking have disrupted individuals' peaceful and focused natures, preventing them from being closer to Jesus the Master⁷²⁵.
- Formation becomes particularly challenging because it is a 24/7 job, and there is no space for the formator to take time off for himself when necessary.

Participants of Sample B expressed their opinions regarding this question.

- All participants in group B believe that many new candidates lack clarity and perseverance in their lives and careers, which makes the formation process difficult for both the candidate and the formator.
- They believe that the uncontrolled influence of materialistic desires and the influence of the media in the lives of new-generation candidates hinder their progress and success in this unique way of life.

⁷²⁴ Currently, there is a shortage of young people interested in joining seminaries and convents. As a result, some institutes prioritise quantity over quality of candidates.

⁷²⁵ Formators commented that their biggest challenge in candidate formation is to make them aware of responsible and effective use of technology and means of communication.

- The contemporary emphasis on personal freedom and autonomy among the new generation poses a significant challenge in maintaining openness to God and the formation process.

e) Do you believe that the formation process assists candidates in maintaining fidelity and perseverance in consecrated life?

All the participants of sample A agreed that,

- Formation plays a crucial role in the growth of candidates' fidelity and perseverance.
- Together with formation, emphasize the significance of personal discernment and motivation, which can be supported by the environments where they live and grow.
- They also stated that the formation process can be effective only if the candidate is helped to feel passionate about the ideals, values, and attitudes of Christ and the Kingdom and desires to configure himself or herself with them.

All the sample B participants believe that,

- Candidates' openness and enthusiasm for the formative process and the inspiration of the Spirit are crucial to their growth in fidelity and perseverance.
- Participants believe that the interest, passion for God and the Kingdom, and resolute determination of candidates can foster an effective and conducive atmosphere during the formation process.

f) What are the primary qualifications or requirements needed for someone to be an effective formator?

All participants of sample A believe that,

- The formation process greatly depends on the individual's willingness and availability to serve as a formator.
- Formators should be positive role models and set a good example through instruction and daily life.
- They should genuinely love and care for the candidates, supporting them through life's ups and downs.
- Moreover, it is imperative for formators to undergo comprehensive training and remain abreast of current developments to guide and mentor candidates effectively.

Sample B participants agree with most of Sample A's opinions. However, they emphasise the importance of providing proper personal training in psycho-spiritual formation. This will help the formator better understand the candidate's life and growth and offer more effective solutions.

g) What are the important elements needed for formation to be effective?

According to the participants of sample A,

- A good and supportive community environment is essential for a candidate's complete growth and formation process⁷²⁶.
- The formation community should exemplify a joyful and brotherly life while offering a space for meaningful practice of evangelical counsel.

The participants belonging to Sample B strongly believe that,

- A conducive formation process relies on collaborative efforts among the community, general administration, and those overseeing formation.
- Formators should have opportunities for ongoing education and remain updated on the current state of consecrated life and worldly affairs to enhance their effectiveness in guiding and accompanying candidates.
- A comprehensive and holistic formation plan is crucial for designing the formative curriculum.

h) What are the main reasons people leave consecrated life in the present situation, according to you?

I combined samples A and B to get a coherent and inclusive answer. According to formators, these are the critical reasons.

- Lack of clarity in vocation
- The discernment process is not properly done.
- Lack of support from family, friends, and well-wishers
- Lack of personal responsibility in maintaining spiritual life and activities
- Relational problems both inside and outside
- Emotional problems
- Affective problems
- Family problems
- Lack of transparency and openness
- Difficulty with community and its dynamics

⁷²⁶ In some instances, the non-cooperative mentality of other members present in the formation community negatively influences the candidates.

- Difficulty in maintaining long-term commitment.
- Uncontrolled use of media, both electronic and social
- Difficulty in living the evangelical counsel.
- Formative processes were not seriously taken during the formative years.
- Practical atheism among the members
- Lack of interest from the foreign formators or the religious institutes for inculturation

i) What do you propose to make the formation of candidates better than the present situation?

Both Sample A and Sample B expressed that current formation practices are often viewed as time-bound, with candidates progressing to the next stage upon completion of each phase, barring significant errors or glaring signs of immaturity⁷²⁷. Introducing a mandatory requirement for attaining a certain level of maturity across various dimensions could mitigate this issue. This maturity assessment ought not to solely focus on intellectual capacity but should also encompass spiritual, relational, psychosexual, moral, and pastoral dimensions.

6. Discussion on the Data Collected from Interviews and Dialogue

We have reviewed the data from interviews conducted with selected participants at a specific location and institution. As part of this review, we also considered the evolution of the conversation among consecrated individuals, including religious authority figures, formators, members, and ex-members from consecrated life. I understand that the central theme of my research is *Fidelity and perseverance in Consecrated Life*. This sensitive construct varies from individual to individual based on their circumstances and mental state. Through interviews and subsequent conversations, I aim to determine the factors that influence the fidelity and commitment of consecrated individuals. My approach to interviewing is qualitative, and I seek to obtain open-ended responses.

⁷²⁷ Candidates must be given sufficient time and accompaniment to move to the next stage. Often due to the academic pressure candidates don't get sufficient time and opportunity to grow personally to the demands of the stage.

Challenges in Consecrated Life

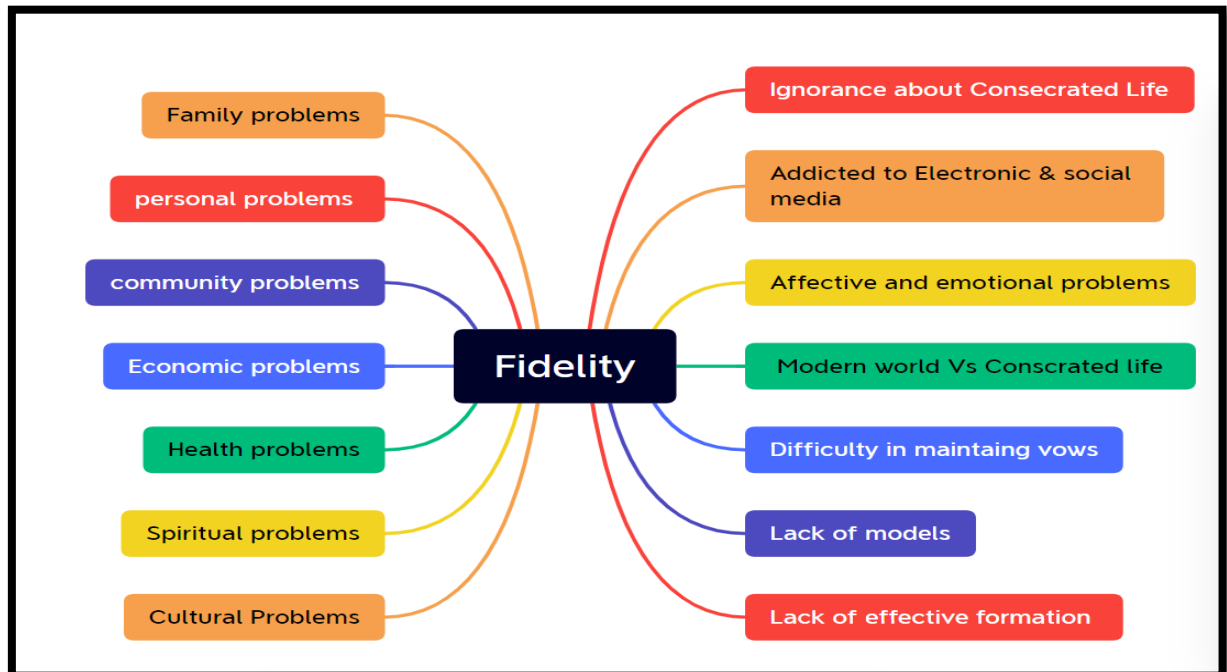


Figure 1

6.1 Challenges in Consecrated Life

Figure 1 above demonstrates that consecrated individuals face challenges relating to their ability to live in fidelity and commitment like those living outside religious life. Members frequently leave the consecrated life due to both personal and situational factors. This research demonstrates that individual, family, formational, cultural, and community factors impede the growth of a person's commitment and fidelity to living the consecrated life joyfully. The struggle for fidelity and the lack of strength to persevere are experiences that have belonged to the history of religious and consecrated life since its beginnings (cf. *GFJP* 3). According to the participants, personal initiative and holistic formation are the keys for consecrated individuals to grow in faithfulness and Christian perfection. True fidelity and perseverance in one's life and vocation arise from the happiness and well-being they experience. Sr. Grace⁷²⁸, one of the participants, shared that "I am 100% happy and content in this life because God is everything to me".

⁷²⁸ Interview notes line 13. To maintain the secrecy of personal identity, all the names used here are fictitious. Care has been taken to maintain the confidentiality of the participants in all the mentioned personal dialogues and experiences.

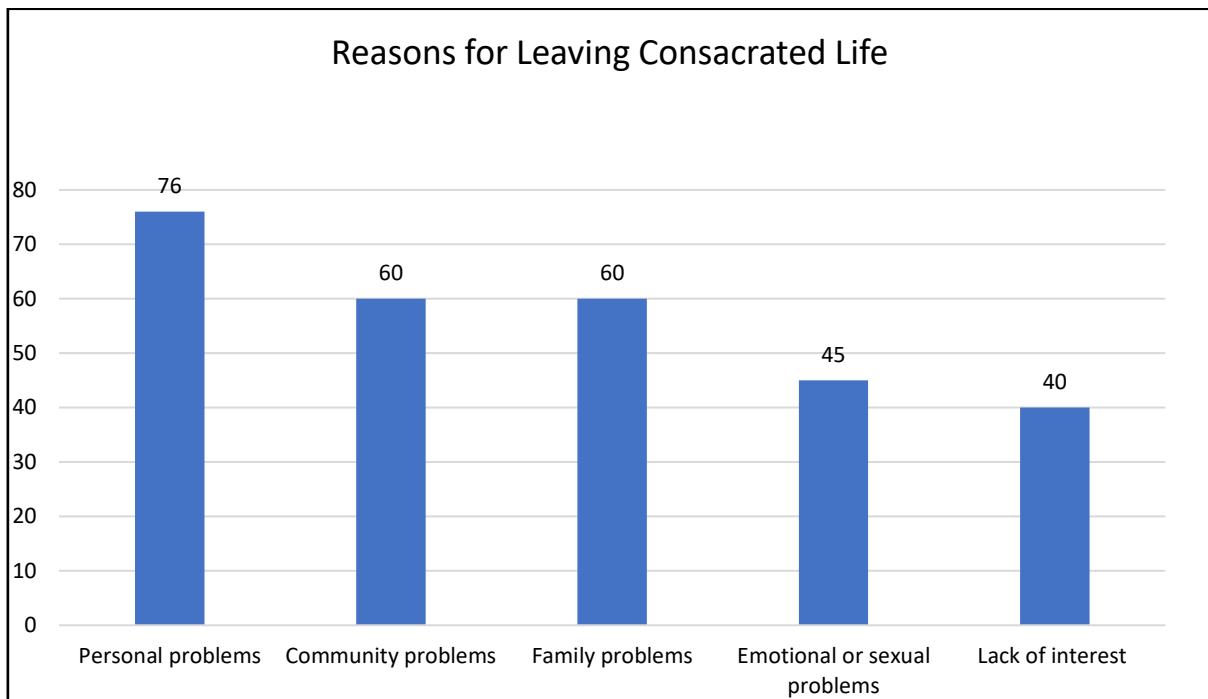


Figure 2

6.2 *Reasons for Leaving the Consecrated Life*

76% (as seen in Figure 2) of the total number of participants interviewed assert that failure to address personal issues during or after formation can make it difficult to maintain fidelity and commitment in consecrated life. Many participants believed that people *lack freedom and openness* because childhood traumas weren't adequately addressed or healed during formation, as seen in the following revelation during one of the interviews:

I harbour an intense antipathy and malice towards all males due to the sexual exploitation I suffered at a young age at the hands of a close relative. I have concealed the incident from my parents, teachers, friends, and even formators out of fear. Suppressing my emotions out of apprehension of familial and clan repercussions caused a wound in my conscience that persists even today⁷²⁹.

Some of the trauma victims learn and adapt to living a passive, routine life untouched by personal authenticity and commitment.

Mediocrity and the practice of practical atheism extinguish the flame of vocation, leading to a life of routine, passivity, and boredom. Spiritual aridity

⁷²⁹ Sr. Gertrude in personal dialogue during the meeting for the interview, *Interview notes*, line 63.

and a relationship with God untouched by love, passion or intimacy contribute to feelings of inner emptiness, a sense of failure in the life project and an overwhelming sense of alienation from anything genuine and authentic about oneself. The pervasive presence of practical atheism is an alarming finding among many of the interviewees (72 participants or 52%). 50% of participants retained that *psycho-spiritual formation during the earliest formation periods* could aid the candidate in understanding the self and in seeking appropriate measures for one's holistic development. According to 80% of respondents, a growing trend toward *individualism among consecrated individuals* is another obstacle to the growth of fidelity and commitment in consecrated life.

60% believe that *financial constraints within the family* constitute an additional barrier for consecrated persons. Religious hailing from middle—or lower-income homes tend to worry more about their relatives' poverty and suffering, and some feel obligated to address such issues. In many developing nations, and Indonesia mainly, all family members, with the consecrated being no exception, are breadwinners for the family. At least in a few cases, Families in Indonesia force consecrated individuals to make financial contributions or leave the consecrated life to provide for their families and younger siblings.

As a former religious priest who departed from the priesthood and consecrated life three years ago, I've been witnessing the distressing condition of my family, particularly my ailing parents and my two younger sisters. Faced with their dire circumstances, I found myself compelled to make the difficult decision to leave my sacred calling. It felt as though my family was desperate, and I felt compelled to act. While uncertainty lingers regarding the correctness of my choice, I find solace in knowing that I was able to intervene and preserve the well-being of my family⁷³⁰.

As shown in Figure 2, 50% of respondents (66 persons) believe that consecrated individuals are affected by various family troubles. A country like Indonesia, which is predominantly Islamic, also imparts its culture and traditions to its inhabitants. Families with members adhering to multiple religious faiths and a culture of easily obtained divorces do not contribute to the growth of *stronger family relationships and bonding among its members*. Three participants from Group C in the interview hail from families with divorced parents. Conflicts and divisions within a family or community potentially instil conflicting sentiments within its members' consciousness.

⁷³⁰ Agustinus, in his dialogue during the interview, Interview notes lines 99.

Families also feel that *perpetuating the family tree through descendants is crucial for the parents' salvation and the family's honour*⁷³¹. Parents may be compelled to ask their sons or daughters to quit the consecrated life in these circumstances to maintain the family's continuity across generations. Lack of solid religious faith practice among parents and family members and the widely *prevalent practice of black magic and other superstitious rituals* lead to children developing a distorted image of God, which influences their understanding of religious vocation and their ability to live with fidelity and commitment.

Until I entered seminary, I, too, along with my family, participated in black magic and other superstitious rituals aimed at securing well-being and power for our family and eliminating enemies without hesitation. Within our clan, there exists a belief that power is synonymous with combativeness⁷³².

Figure 2 also demonstrates that 45% of participant responses testify to the existence of a struggle with *emotional and sexual problems* that disturb their lives and their commitment to the Lord. There are rare instances even of *abuse of online electronic media* involving consecrated persons engaging in sexually inappropriate behaviour online using platforms such as WhatsApp video calling and Facebook Messenger video calling. Another issue which emerged in the context of personal interviews is that of *lesbian relationships* involving religious women. Although a rarely occurring phenomenon, it seems to have had a deleterious impact on the formation environment in the congregation. Proper assistance at an appropriate time helps people face problems and overcome these difficulties. An atmosphere of freedom and openness from the person and other community members also helps to sort out problems.

I feel a sense of fear and shame when it comes to sharing my feelings with others, particularly regarding experiences of sexual deviation. Each encounter of this nature exacerbates my feelings of insecurity and fear, which in turn hinders my ability to take on new responsibilities or engage freely with individuals of the opposite sex⁷³³.

45% also feel that the radical following of Christ with evangelical counsels is complicated and has no meaning in the eyes of the world. 40% of respondents also say that consecrated life is losing relevance and no longer

⁷³¹ Sumatra Island in Indonesia is very close to India, and an earlier Hindu dynasty spread to Sumatra Island. The Batak communities in Sumatra, too, believe that to obtain *moksha* (salvation) for parents, they should have children and grandchildren.

⁷³² Sharing of a participant during the interview, Interview note lines, 92.

⁷³³ Personal sharing of Adolfin during the interview, Interview notes lines 108.

fascinating. The modern generation finds happiness in the ease of accessibility, rapid communication opportunities, and attractive job prospects available to them.

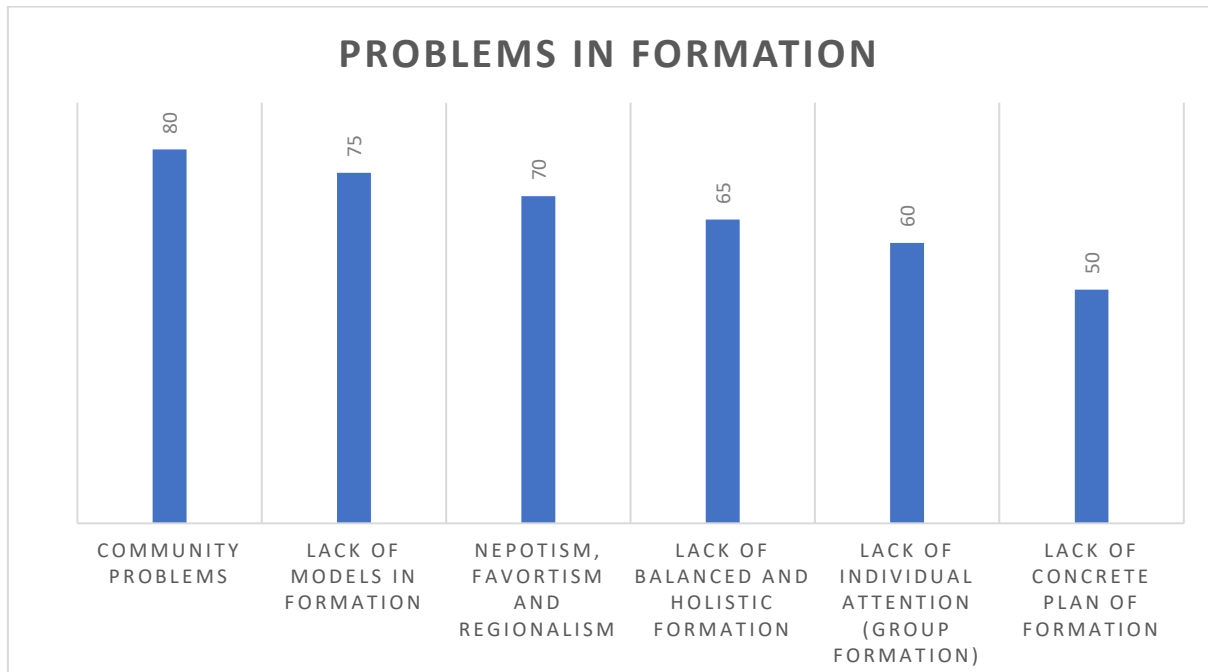


Figure 3

6.3 Problems in Formation

We discuss the issues relating to formation as emerging from the interview findings in Figure 3. The formation of consecrated people requires a lot of dedication and responsibility. The consecrated men and women of today face a variety of obstacles. Among these is the formation issue, particularly for young candidates who aspire to become consecrated individuals. Instilling in young people strong convictions regarding the significance of their calling, forming them into a genuine religious discipline, instilling in them a culture of prayer life consistent with their daily actions, and instilling in them the capacity to accept one another despite their differences remain the primary concerns of formation today. It has been stated numerous times that the present and future of religious life and ministry are contingent on the formation one receives and provides.

As seen in Figure 3, 80% share the opinion that there is a scarcity of trained and willing formators in the formation field. Many of them are randomly selected without training or experience for this position. Due to the arduous formation mission, many are unwilling to work in formation. Due to the urgency and lack of available individuals, formators are frequently

chosen among the members without the necessary preparation or competencies. These circumstances must be adequately studied since they affect the candidate's life, growth, and quality of future congregational members. If formation is necessary, then the formation of the formators is essential.

Being asked to serve as a formator immediately after taking my final vows weighed heavily on me despite my lack of interest, experience, or specialised training. I felt incapable of providing the guidance and support those candidates deserved, which left me grappling with a sense of inadequacy and concern that I might be doing them a disservice by not offering the inspiring advice they needed⁷³⁴.

It is imperative in religious institutes with many young candidates. Preparing candidates for consecrated life is an investment for the individual and the Church. In the interview, 27% of the participants working in formation expressed that it was not their preferred mission and felt coerced. *The presence of untrained and unwilling formators in the formation process can potentially lead to more harm than good, as they may lack the necessary skills and motivation to guide and nurture those under their care effectively.*

The interviews highlighted the importance of the *lack of role models or examples among formators and elders*. In Figure 3, 75% of respondents (99 persons) felt an alarming absence of models or examples of consecrated life worth emulating among the formators, elders, and those in power. There is a lack of consistency and clarity between what they preach and what they do. The Church requires formators to embody Christ and transformation and to share this compassion with those for whom they are responsible.

When asked about the essential qualities of a formator, the participants responded that they possess,

- integrity of character and behaviour, truthfulness
- a deep life of prayer, empathy, and love
- discipline, commitment and good hygiene.

In Figure 3, 97 participants (70%) answered that *nepotism, regionalism, and favouritism exist among the formators*, which kill the spirit of unity and fraternity in the formation. Many genuine vocations become the victims of this problem. It plants the seeds of hostility and competition in the candidates' minds, which will persist throughout their lives. Fragmented mindsets and lifestyles make it hard to live together and accomplish the purpose of a team. 89 participants (65%) in the research believe *formation needs to be*

⁷³⁴ Sr. Carolin shares her experience as a formator. Interview notes lines, 33.

holistic and well-balanced so that candidates for consecrated life grow in maturity and stability. The candidate can fully understand consecrated life and its requirements if they undergo an integral formation. The participants felt that the *current formation scenario needed to be reviewed*, and essential steps needed to be implemented to encourage *holistic formation*. Religious formation isn't just about training the brain; it has to do with the development of a person spiritually, physically, mentally, pastorally, and socially.

Figure 3 also depicts those 83 persons (60%) of the sample who also observed that, in Indonesia, formation is typically carried out in large groups. Rather than individual formation, *group formation* is emphasised because of the many vocations in male and female congregations. Group formation is sometimes ineffective since the applicants come from various backgrounds and environments. For healthy maturation and fidelity, *personal accompaniment* and attention are beneficial. Individual initiative is the fundamental agent in one's formation, but the Spirit's indwelling conforms the candidate to God's will. The one called is, therefore, invited unceasingly to give an attentive, new, and responsible reply.

Figure 3 also demonstrates that the *lack of a clear formation plan and structures conducive to formation* is another hindrance for the candidate. Sixty-nine participants (50%) acknowledged the superiors' lack of seriousness in formulating a good formation plan and making all other surroundings suitable for an integrated formation for their members. In the consecrated life, fidelity and commitment are closely related to the formation and foundation they establish from the beginning of their lives.

Another significant topic deliberated by the majority of the four groups (65%) pertained to the challenge of inculturation. Among the interview participants representing 17 religious institutes, 13 are of foreign origin, including the formators. Within some of these congregations, there exists a tendency to compel local candidates to conform to the cultural norms of the congregation or the formators' place of origin. This imposition extends to spiritual practices, attire⁷³⁵, dietary habits⁷³⁶, and communal interactions that are foreign to the local culture and, therefore, incompatible. Consequently, candidates struggling to assimilate into these foreign customs risk being

⁷³⁵ Due to its tropical climate, Indonesia experiences high temperatures up to 40 degrees. Foreign religious institutes from colder climates expect members to maintain the same habits, which is neither healthy nor reasonable.

⁷³⁶ One of the participants explained that in their congregation, members are asked to have breakfast similar to their country of origin, which is totally confusing to the candidates and against their food habits.

stigmatised as resistant to cultural diversity or as hindrances to the missionary endeavour.

The community setting plays a pivotal role in providing a foundation for members to live out their evangelical lives, complementing the importance of formation. A meticulously designed formation program, passionate formators, and the unwavering support of superiors and the community collectively contribute to guiding candidates in their journey of formation and dedication to the service of the Lord.

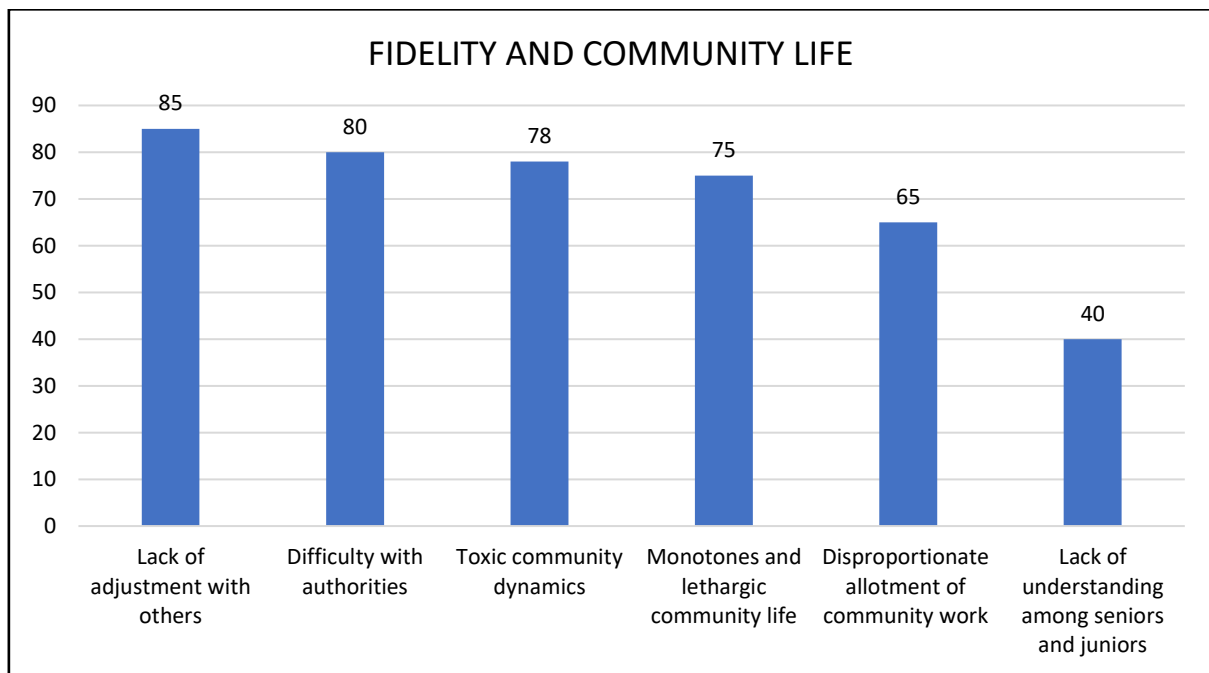


Figure 4

6.4 Fidelity and Community Life

Figure 4 illustrates a few potential community life factors that could have a negative impact on a consecrated person's fidelity and commitment.

Figure 4 demonstrates that *community life* is one of the challenges consecrated individuals' encounter. Even though the community is regarded as one of the most beautiful places to live, the members make it a nightmare due to their problems. A significant majority of the participants (117 individuals, constituting 85%) perceive the challenge of adapting to fellow community members within community life. Frequently, egocentric attitudes and developmental deficiencies underlie this difficulty. Implementing psycho-spiritual formation during the initial stages may aid candidates in surmounting these barriers. Participants believe that authorities and superiors must pay

adequate attention to the community's dynamics and structure, so everyone feels like they belong.

As a young member from a specific region, I often find myself excluded from crucial decision-making processes and significant community activities. The passive demeanour of certain community members has led me to feel that consecrated life presents considerable challenges for someone like me⁷³⁷.

A significant majority of participants (110 individuals, comprising 80%) expressed difficulty in their relationships with authorities, adversely affecting the quality of their vocation and fidelity. This situation directly impinges upon the freedom and spiritual well-being of the members. They believe fostering open fraternal dialogue, frequent visits and seeking expert assistance can help them overcome these challenges. Participants propose that rather than erecting boundaries in such situations, they advocate building bridges to take an extra step towards one another.

Due to my differing opinions from those of my provincial government, I find myself excluded from their attention. They neglect to acknowledge significant occasions such as my birthday or other important events. This leaves me feeling like an orphan within my congregation despite being part of a larger family⁷³⁸.

21 participants (15%) also highlighted the superiors' *autocratic leadership* style, which undermines the sense of community and family. They assert that this approach contradicts the essence of consecrated life, as true perfection in Christian living requires everyone to collaborate; otherwise, it goes against the fundamental principles of consecrated life.

Moreover, participants underscored the presence of *toxic community dynamics* in specific living environments. As depicted in Figure 4, a staggering 78% of respondents (103 individuals out of 132) indicated that the community culture is deemed 'toxic', detrimental to the growth of a consecrated individual's faithfulness and relationships with God and others. Toxicity within community relationships may manifest through behaviours that induce misery, such as contempt, dishonesty, controlling tendencies, or a dearth of support for each other's personal and spiritual well-being. Toxic relations within a community often signify a deficiency in respect and cohesion among its members. When a toxic atmosphere takes root, it tends to

⁷³⁷ Irenus, a recently ordained missionary, shared during the interview, Interview notes lines 103.

⁷³⁸ Fr. Stephen. from the Interview notes lines, 120

overshadow positive moments, inundating the community with unpleasant experiences.

Despite my efforts within the community or my apostolate, I seldom receive support or encouragement from other members. Instead, I encounter suspicion and discouragement regarding any creative endeavours. I feel pressured to conform to the opinions and ideas of individuals rather than feeling refreshed by the community atmosphere. This environment has become toxic for me⁷³⁹.

75% of interview respondents (104 participants) believe that consecrated religious individuals are destined to unhappiness due to the monotony and lethargy inherent in their vowed life. They argue that a dry spiritual life ensues from a dearth of creativity and passive community relationships, reverberating throughout a consecrated person's life. The activities of consecrated individuals, such as spiritual practices, community engagements, and apostolic work, often appear repetitive.

90 participants (65%) also indicated that *assigning community duties or responsibilities disproportionately* to members creates an unease and a lack of confidence in some members' abilities. Rejection and fear make the members feel they can no longer uphold the vocation bestowed upon them by the Lord. Feeling alone amidst the community's indifference is often felt, and feeling alien to one's community makes life difficult. *Members from specific regions or nationalities are regarded as cleverer and more pragmatic, assuming all crucial community and congregational responsibilities and producing discomfort within the communities and religious institutes.*

For the past five years, I have served as a finally professed member, yet neither the institute nor the community has entrusted me with significant apostolic duties. Senior members perceive younger individuals, such as me, as lacking the capability and accountability required for substantial responsibilities. Instead, my assignments have consistently revolved around kitchen duties. Regrettably, I frequently overhear disparaging remarks suggesting that individuals from certain regions are only suited for domestic tasks⁷⁴⁰.

Figure 4 also demonstrates the participants' views on the *co-existence of seniors and younger members* in a congregation and the community. 55 participants (40%) mention the difficulty of adjusting between the senior and junior members. Senior members frequently comment that the younger generation takes all elements of consecrated life very lightly and cannot appreciate the perspectives of others. The youngsters, according to them, dilute

⁷³⁹ Sr. Selvi, from my Interview notes lines 130.

⁷⁴⁰ Sr. Joyce, from the Interview notes lines 137.

the substance and values of religious life by following the world and its values. The younger generation believes that the older generation wants to dominate the congregation or community and make themselves the focal point. Seniors are fanatic about the lifestyle and norms of consecrated life, and the juniors complain about the lack of freedom in the mission and community. Participants believe that in certain circumstances, this type of battle causes people to abandon their consecrated life in favour of a different course in life.

Having been ordained as a priest last year, I am currently assigned to live within a community of senior members to gain experience and learning. However, today, I feel exhausted as I perceive myself to be consistently wrong in my actions, with accusations of lacking depth in both my formation and spiritual life. The noticeable generation gap among us adds to my feelings of discouragement, leading me to contemplate how I will navigate similar challenges when I am older⁷⁴¹.

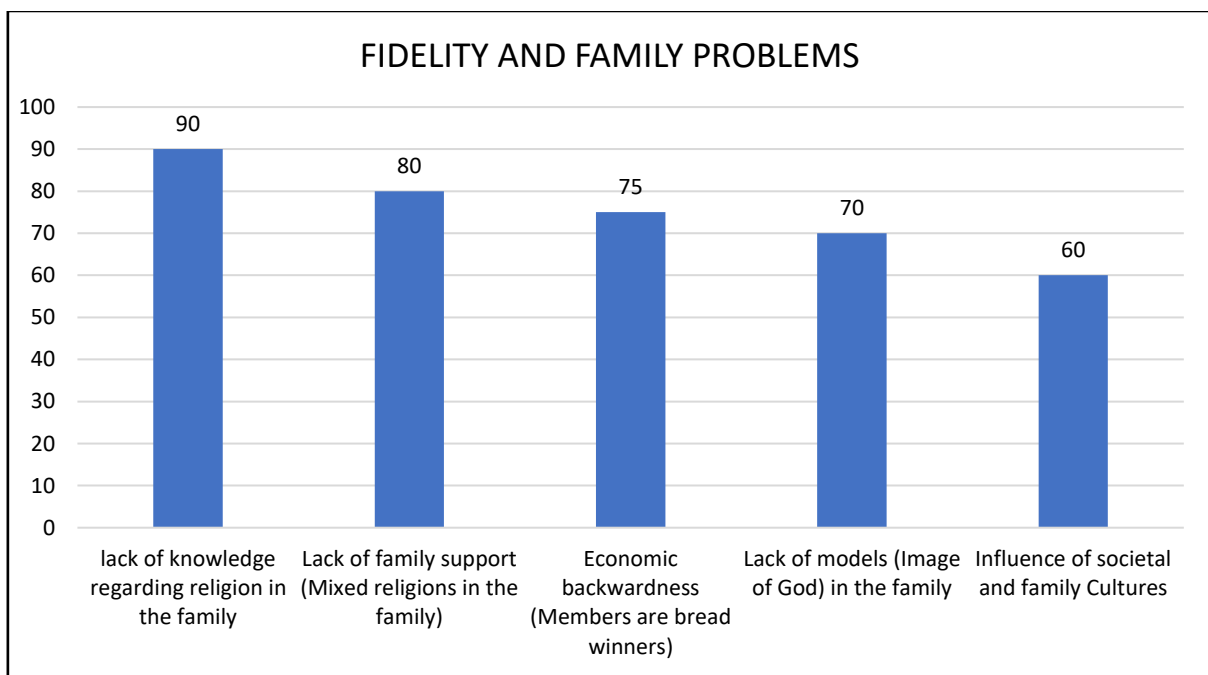


Figure 5

6.5 Fidelity and Family Problems

The challenges to consecrated living brought on by *family issues* have also been uncovered in the interview findings. The problems that the consecrated

⁷⁴¹ Fr. Kristian, from the Interview notes lines 150.

person encounters in their family, society, and culture are shown in Figure 5. Participants emphasised the importance of the family in leading a successful, healthy, consecrated life. The parents or relatives of a consecrated person help them in their childhood with experiences of God and faith. Even in old age, it is difficult to erase the image of God and the concept of faith ingrained in us since childhood. According to the research, a strong experience of God and faith in the family enables the consecrated to grow in fidelity and commitment. The Church and congregations recognise the importance of a Christian family in a consecrated person's spiritual and social formation. Therefore, the family acts as the child's first domestic Church and micro-society in which the child's rights must be respected and upheld.

I departed from the religious institute two years ago. Raised in a Catholic household with five siblings, my earliest memories are tainted by the treatment my father, a ranking figure, displayed towards my mother and us children. I, too, became a victim of his outbursts and punishments numerous times. Throughout my childhood, neither I nor other children experienced love or affection from our parents. The concept of Jesus's loving and merciful nature was inconceivable to me, as my parents instilled terror in us instead. Even within the convent, the image of a loving and merciful God eluded me, as I couldn't help but see my father's furious visage reflected in the cross⁷⁴².

The interaction between parents and their children is the most attractive, helpful, and necessary evangelisation. A young person is inspired to give their entire self in service to the Lord and the Church after witnessing such acts of faith in action. 124 participants (90%) answered that a lack of a *strong foundation of religion and a false image of God in their family from childhood affects their commitment as consecrated and their relationship with God*. Since Islam predominates as the major religion in Indonesia and Christianity is a more recent religion, its minority position impacts every aspect of local culture and life. Twenty-three participants who had left the consecrated life were interviewed. Eighteen admitted (80%) that their *weak Christian foundation and unclear image of God* were caused by their parents' ignorance or family issues. They could not enjoy the consecrated life or have a strong relationship with the Lord who graced them with vocation.

110 respondents (80%) of all groups said that many consecrated people struggle because their families do not provide enough spiritual and moral support to their vocation. Sometimes, members of the same family

⁷⁴² Br. Antonio, from the Interview notes, line 153.

professing multiple religions and faiths cannot understand the importance of consecrated life and its nuances⁷⁴³. Families, particularly the parents, do not support consecrated persons because of the influence of local tribal culture and customs. Most of the time, lack of family support happens due to ignorance about foreign religions like Christianity in traditional and village surroundings. The lack of role models in the family and the incorrect perception of God that their parents gave them in their childhood due to their circumstances were two other significant issues that members of the family of consecrated persons faced.

Figure 5 of this study demonstrates that 83 respondents (60%) feel that family and society cultures impair a consecrated person's commitment and fidelity. In certain societies, family trees and descendants offer the parents and family good fortune. I've encountered at least two situations of consecrated religious leaving their vocations with heavy hearts because their parents wish to have a generational continuation in the family. Some traditions and practises in certain localities hinder a person from being religious even if they have a genuine vocation. The history of Indonesia clarifies that early religion was a blend of animism and ancestor worship, and Christianity has recently entered as a foreign religion. Due to a lack of Christian spiritual background and a solid cultural attachment, the family makes decisions that are not in the best interests of the children's independence or their spiritual development. Participants argue that faith does not go deep enough, rooted solely in people's heads and not their hearts.

7. Findings and Their Implications for Consecrated Life in Indonesia

After reviewing the interview data, we aim to better categorise the findings into different headings to understand their implications for consecrated life in Indonesia. The total number of participants in the interview was 138, divided into four groups. Here, we explore the more frequently repeated answers from the participants and discuss them under various headings.

7.1 Personal Difficulties in Living a Life of Fidelity and Commitment

The personal difficulties which emerged in this study were:

- Lack of proper personal discernment

⁷⁴³ In some families, the consecrated persons come from situations of mixed faith, and members of the same family believe in different religions. It is difficult to make them understand and to get support in such families.

- Pervasive mediocrity and love of comfort
- Lack of clarity in vocation and life after the commitment
- Difficulty and indecision for long-term commitment
- Faith and religion are becoming ornamental and less profound and personal.
- Contemporary world of freedom and its influence in all spheres of their life
- Parenting styles that encourage too much freedom and the absence of faith witnessing.
- Lack of strong ideals and values in one's conscience
- Lack of inspiring models in consecrated life
- Scandalous life witness of many religious and priests who live a double life
- Addiction and abuse of electronic media

7.2 Difficulties Involving One's Family in Living a Life of Fidelity and Commitment

Another vital area under our study is family. Organisation and leadership in the family play an essential role in the life of a consecrated person. Family is the seedbed of vocations.

- Lack of responsible parenting received as a growing child
- Lack of atmosphere of love and healthy family dynamics
- Instability and lack of perseverance in the marriage relationship among the parents often lead to divorce.
- Lax style of parenting and deficient teaching of religious and moral values
- Lack of good models in the family
- Lack of support and encouragement from the family
- Severe punishments received in the family
- Ignorance of the parents
- Multi-faith family atmosphere (Muslim- Christian or interdenominational)
- Poor economic condition of the family
- Superstitious practices in the family come from the local Islamic and animistic traditions.

7.3 Difficulties Relating to Formation in Living a Life of Fidelity and Commitment

Formation holds significant importance in the life of a consecrated individual, as it is integral and encompasses all aspects of their development.

- Formation programme that does not include measures to address the modern challenges today's youth face.
- Ignorance on the part of formators about the candidate and their family situations.
- Lack of coordination and contact between the religious institute and the candidate's family of origin.
- Lack of facilities and atmosphere needed for the candidate to understand the value of silence and discipline.
- Ignorance about the demands of the consecrated life and its implications for life.
- Formation must help the candidate fall in love with Jesus and develop a deep relationship that leads to lifelong commitment.
- Psycho-spiritual formation is needed for the candidates to better understand themselves and improve their lives according to this understanding. It is deficient in many religious institutes in the country as they do not have enough trained personnel.
- A formation environment that helps the candidate grow in sincerity and transparency, improve emotionally, and become mature and responsible is needed.
- The formation lacks a fear-free, family atmosphere, which helps the candidate be open and friendly.
- The lack of willingness to adapt to local customs by foreign formators or religious institutes makes the formation process alienating and unconvincing in the local setting.

7.4 Difficulties Involving Formators in Living a Life of Fidelity and Commitment

Another pivotal aspect of the formation process is the role of the formator. The formator imparts lessons and inspiration to the candidate, serving as a living example of fidelity and commitment. Below are some of the recurring findings from the interviews regarding this aspect.

- Lack of love for the mission of formation and its service.
- Lack of willingness and commitment to the service.

- Lack of necessary discipline and integrity of character
- Specialisation and training are needed to help the candidates.
- Inability to respect and work with others in the field of formation.
- Inability to listen to others patiently and be ready to accompany them even in difficult moments.
- Inability to work as part of a team with others.
- Emotional imbalance and immaturity.
- Partiality, nepotism, regionalism, favouritism.
- Lack of willingness to learn and be updated.

7.5 Difficulties Involving Authority Figures in Living a Life of Fidelity and Commitment

Another area of importance is the authority figures, who can decide the fate of the consecrated person. All participants agree that they want their authorities to listen to them and work without partiality for the betterment of all persons under their care.

- There is a shortage of authority figures who can listen and empathise with others.
- There is a deficit of authority figures with the capacity and maturity to address problems rather than exacerbate them effectively.
- There is a scarcity of authority figures who impartially and justly address the issues faced by members of their institute.
- Only a select few authority figures possess the educational qualifications, integrity, and grace of character required for their roles.
- There is a pressing need for additional authority figures who serve as exemplary life models and demonstrate profound emotional and spiritual maturity.
- Authority figures must make timely and effective decisions, consult appropriately, and consider the signs of the times and the needs of their institute and the church.
- In the church, particularly within the consecrated life, authority is meant to be exercised in service, living alongside members through their moments of joy and adversity, rather than being utilised as a platform for authoritarianism or a display of power.

7.6 Difficulties Involving the Community in Living a Life of Fidelity and Commitment

Participants of the interview believe that the role of the community is essential in the life of a consecrated person and helps them to grow in their commitment and fidelity. The community can inspire or destroy the spirit of the consecrated person. Members of the interview also mentioned the difficulties they face in the religious communities.

- Lack of positive models of spiritual energies in the communities.
- Difficult to experience fraternity and collaboration among the members of the community.
- In some instances, members perceive unequal treatment stemming from distinctions in nationality, clan affiliation, or seniority, creating a sense of disparity.
- The absence of mutual collaboration and individual contributions undermines the community's cohesion and effectiveness.
- The lack of unity among the diverse members adversely impacts the mission and dynamics of the community.
- Rather than offering valuable experience and serving as role models, the presence of seniors and juniors in the community can sometimes lead to tension and difficulties for both parties, undermining the intended joy and happiness of the consecrated life.
- Instead of fostering an environment of genuine appreciation and constructive feedback, the community sometimes devolves into a space characterised by gossip and slander, albeit in isolated instances.

7.7 Difficulties Spirituality in Living a Life of Fidelity and Commitment

Participants believe that spirituality serves as the wellspring of energy and defines the essence of a consecrated individual. The significant difficulties they faced, as seen in the interview data, are the following:

- Lack of a healthy spiritual life personally and in the community.
- Spiritual practices and direction are not arranged regularly or orderly in the members' personal lives.
- Lack of frequent and prepared participation in the sacrament of reconciliation
- Refreshing the consecrated life through monthly recollections and annual retreats could help one grow spiritually.

- Holy silence and meditation are spiritual means for deeper union with God, the origin of our lives and call. This area requires urgent attention.
- Spirituality is how God communicates with a consecrated person and how he or she communicates God to other people. Particular attention should be given to creating a free and transparent atmosphere for mutual communication.

7.8 Electronic and Media Communication

Electronic and media communication stands as the most advanced and widely embraced innovations of the modern era. Their influence permeates every sphere of life, including the consecrated life. As individuals dedicated to living in the world but not being of it, consecrated persons are called not to shy away from these realities but to embrace them responsibly.

- Lack of clarity regarding one's choices and commitment while engaging with modern communication media.
- Need of an Open, responsible, and transparent use of modern media and the internet.
- Numerous participants also highlighted the peril of becoming addicted to various forms of media and entertainment, noting that such habits detract from the quality of personal spiritual life and hinder active participation in community activities.
- Participants also assert that the pervasive influence of electronic and social media in the lives of consecrated individuals is increasingly compromising the maintenance of privacy and adherence to the restrictions of consecrated life, posing a threat to the sanctity of consecrated life itself.
- The unbridled consumption of media and the allure of worldly topics discussed therein compromise the cherished virtues of consecrated individuals, including the quality of their personal readings, reflections, and sacred silence.

8. Limitations of the Interview

Addressing the constraints of this interview will enhance its authenticity and align it more closely with its intended purpose and impact. Throughout this study, it became evident that 'no pain, no gain' applies. I diligently tried to adhere to the procedures, recognising this as a forward-looking study involving sample participants. Fidelity is inherently personal. Thus, variations in responses are to be expected as they are contingent upon each participant's circumstances and experiences. Due to the topic's sensitive nature, it was not

easy to recruit participants. However, with some earnest effort, we finally managed to find 138 participants in all four groups. Although the sample size is reasonably high and involves all categories of religion, the fact that we decided to recruit priests, brothers and nuns in the group resulted in a huge quantity of data to sift through and analyse for our study purposes. Due to page limit constraints, we could not bring all of the data into the analysis. However, we have tried to bring the most critical and relevant data for our study and analysis of the research topic. The study's findings refer to Indonesia's context and may not readily apply to other cultural or socio-geographic contexts.

8.1 Subject of the Study

Fidelity in religious living has emerged as a prominent contemporary theme within the consecrated life and the universal Church. Despite statistical data from the Catholic Church in 2023⁷⁴⁴ indicating very good growth in the global Catholic population, there has been a concerning decline in the number of consecrated individuals. Religious institutes and the universal Church express profound concern over escalating abandonment rates among consecrated individuals, the diminishing quality of members, and the myriad challenges confronting them. *During interviews, it became apparent that many members and religious institutes were reticent in disclosing the actual state of their personal lives and the condition of their respective institutions.*

8.2 Participants

Despite the challenges, I managed to recruit a substantial number of participants for the interview, adhering to proper procedures. Given the deeply personal nature of fidelity and the participants' religious backgrounds, many displayed hesitance in the opening. *This reluctance could stem from concerns about interview confidentiality or apprehensions about repercussions from their superiors and respective institutes.*

8.3 Researcher

As a researcher, I thank the major superiors and certain bishops for their invaluable support in taking this subject for my research study. My extensive

⁷⁴⁴ "Catholic Church Statistics" [accessed: 25.03.24], [https://www.fides.org/en/stats#:~:text=The%20total%20number%20of%20Bishops,decreased%20to%20407%2C872%20\(%2D2%2C347\)](https://www.fides.org/en/stats#:~:text=The%20total%20number%20of%20Bishops,decreased%20to%20407%2C872%20(%2D2%2C347))

experience as a missionary in the formation field in Indonesia, coupled with my role as the Vicar General for religious within the diocese, facilitated engaging with participants and conducting interviews. *At times, I sensed a concern among participants regarding my nationality and cultural background, particularly in conducting research within the Indonesian context.*

8.4 Christianity, a Minority Religion

Indonesia has emerged as the most populous Islamic nation, where Christianity holds a minority position as a foreign religion with a history of approximately 125 years. These prevailing circumstances likely influenced the interview participants' responses, *making it challenging to discern whether their answers reflect global perspectives or are predominantly influenced by local dynamics.*

8.5 Language

Despite the multitude of local languages in Indonesia, Bahasa Indonesia serves as the official language for all interviews, meetings, and discussions. However, the translation of these materials, whether undertaken by me or with the assistance of a transcriber, *may inadvertently compromise the accuracy and richness of expression despite our diligent efforts.*

8.6 Focus of the Research on the Problems and not on the Positive Aspects of Consecrated Life

A consecrated life is a blessing for the individual and all people, including their religious institute and family. Many joyful and holy individuals embrace this life, serving it with grace. However, our discussion in this study focuses on the challenges of remaining faithful and committed in consecrated life, which sometimes cast shadows on its inherent beauty. The influence of the contemporary world, the demands of evangelical councils, and the difficulty of adjusting to community living make life more complex and less appealing⁷⁴⁵. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the profound contributions of numerous holy and committed consecrated persons who serve as the salt and light of our lives.

⁷⁴⁵ Cf. G. PINE, "Religious Life as a State of Perfection", *Nova et Vetera* 19/4 (2021) 1181-2214.

9. CONCLUSION TO PART II

In Part II of our exploration, we delved into the manifestation of fidelity in the specific context of religious living in Indonesia. Chapter 5 provided a historical and cultural background, tracing the origins of religion and Catholicism in Indonesia and examining the interplay between culture and Christianity. We explored the religious formation programs designed for the consecrated in Indonesia, emphasising both the human and Christian aspects of formation, along with the structures and processes involved in ongoing formation. By analysing the strengths and weaknesses of Indonesian formation, as well as the challenges and opportunities presented by intercultural dynamics, we gained valuable insights into the shaping of loyalty within the Indonesian Church context.

In Chapter 6, an empirical study was presented, which aimed to provide a deeper understanding of fidelity in religious living through an evaluative study on religious formation in Indonesia. The research methodology was outlined, including the procedure, interview components, and the research problem statement. Through interviews and dialogue, data was collected, and a thorough analysis was conducted, leading to discussions on the findings and their implications for consecrated life in Indonesia. While acknowledging the limitations of the interview process, this empirical study provided valuable insights into the lived experiences and challenges of fostering fidelity within the Indonesian Church context.

In conclusion, Part II has provided valuable insights into fidelity dynamics within religious life in Indonesia. From the historical and cultural foundations to contemporary empirical studies, we have gained a deeper understanding of how fidelity is nurtured, experienced, and challenged within the unique context of the Indonesian Church. As we continue our exploration, we will further refine our understanding and engagement with fidelity in religious life, seeking to strengthen the commitment of consecrated individuals to their vocation amidst the complexities and opportunities of the Indonesian context. As we conclude this part, we intend to propose suggestions in the next part based on the insights gained from our study to create an environment that will foster the emergence of committed and faithful consecrated individuals who will continue to enrich the fabric of religious life in Indonesia and beyond.

PART III

TOWARDS A CREATIVE FORMATION PARADIGM FOR CL

CHAPTER VII

Evaluation of the Findings and the Proposed Recommendations

INTRODUCTION

The first part of our study examined the concept of fidelity in religious life. It began by explaining the concept and exploring the factors contributing to fidelity. The study also discussed the teachings of the magisterium on religious formation and how they help promote fidelity. However, it also pointed out the difficulties one might encounter in maintaining a life of fidelity in modern religious settings. Part II of the study directed the attention towards the Church in Indonesia and explicitly analysed the topic of consecrated life in the country. It shed light on the region's historical origins and orientations of consecrated life. The thesis presented an empirical study which provided an evaluative perspective on religious formation and fidelity within the context of consecrated life in Indonesia. Part III of this study attempts to evaluate the results and proposes recommendations for consecrated life and its formation process.

Since fidelity and commitment are rarely discussed topics in Indonesian consecrated life, it is essential to engage in open dialogue to obtain genuine answers and materials regarding the state of consecrated life and the challenges related to abandonment. Fortunately, participants in the empirical study were very collaborative, and the data gathered could be organised under various headings such as discernment, family, formation, spirituality, and community. Even religious and spiritual domains, such as consecrated life, which governs human existence, are not immune to the unforeseen shifts of the modern age. Consecrated life, rooted in response to the Gospel, calls upon men and women to embody the essence of the Gospel within the

Church⁷⁴⁶. This commitment involves a total transformation, igniting a fervent passion to align all existence with God's kingdom. Regrettably, as seen from the interview results, many religious communities witness the fading of their initial zeal over time, succumbing to an identity crisis. Despite the growth of Catholicism in Indonesia, modern trends and cultural influences have weakened religious practice. In what follows, we shall examine some proposals to further improve the quality of religious formation in consecrated life in Indonesia based on the findings from our empirical study and the foregoing discussion.

1. Family and the Image of God

This research brings to light the significant role that parents and family play in the survival and resilience of the consecrated persons. A person's upbringing and familial influence can shape their character and values, and this is particularly important for those living a religious life, which aims to reflect the self-sacrificing love of Christ. However, navigating familial complexities can sometimes pose challenges different from those encountered on one's spiritual journey. *Negative family dynamics* can hinder the development of authentic love and reverence for God, as early family experiences deeply influence a person's perceptions of the divine. Parents are the primary models for a child's understanding of spirituality, and negative attitudes may leave lasting emotional impacts. In such cases, it may be necessary to reevaluate one's beliefs to cultivate a healthier perception of spirituality and God. Through interviews with individuals both inside and outside consecrated life, many revealed troubling early family experiences, including instances of sexual exploitation, which left them feeling isolated and compelled to navigate their destinies independently. Such circumstances often hindered the development of a close relationship with the Lord or acknowledging Jesus as their life's guide. Facing decisions without the discernment channels available to consecrated individuals, they lacked crucial guidance during difficult times. Recognising the diversity of spiritual journeys and healing from past traumas necessitates patience, forgiveness, and a redefinition of beliefs

⁷⁴⁶ The theology of religion has not ceased in its effort to define the identity of consecrated life since the phenomena of religious life in its multiple manifestations: hermits, cenobites, monks, friars, brothers, sisters, religious, consecrated, etc. All these terms are partial and limited: cf. J. LOZANO, *Life as a Parable: Reinterpreting the Religious Life*, Quezon City 1987, 3.

and relationships with the divine, emphasising a compassionate understanding of God.

The concept of consecrated life finds its origin in the Bible. Individuals choose this path to embody the radical teachings of the Gospel. Rooted in the ideal of Christ as the epitome of love, *those in consecrated life may struggle to perceive a kind and merciful God amidst familial conflicts, alcoholism, or abuse. Thus, it becomes the responsibility of parents and family members to foster a comforting understanding of God.* They should guide their siblings towards a fulfilling life in the present and the afterlife by embracing religion and understanding its practices. The Bible serves as the cornerstone of faith.

Consecrated individuals often face challenges in navigating life when their parents or *family members hold superstitious⁷⁴⁷ or animistic⁷⁴⁸ beliefs and are illiterate.* A nurturing family environment is crucial for those pursuing a spiritual or consecrated path, and conflicts arising from differing religious beliefs between parents can hinder spiritual growth. Seeking guidance from mentors, spiritual leaders, or religious communities and engaging in self-study and group discussions can provide moral and spiritual nourishment outside one's immediate family. Persistence, dedication to one's beliefs and values, and external support are vital to finding meaning and fulfilment in one's unique spiritual journey.

Interview participants recount incidents where cultural myths and traditional beliefs obstruct the consecrated individual, sometimes leading to pressure to abandon their consecrated life for *familial interests or lineage continuation.*⁷⁴⁹ Congregations should conduct comprehensive assessments of applicants and their families in conjunction with local churches and schools to offer targeted support. Facilitating parental and familial understanding of the significance of religious vocations and their role in nurturing those who pursue them requires clear communication and guidance from the community, encouraging them to become supportive and constructive influences.

⁷⁴⁷ Consecrated persons families with members believing in different faiths often lead to superstitious beliefs and engage in practises for pleasing their deity for many reasons.

⁷⁴⁸ Animism or animistic belief systems are a religious or spiritual belief that attributes a distinct spiritual essence or awareness to diverse natural components, such as animals, plants, rivers, mountains, and other aspects of the natural world. In these belief systems, animals are frequently seen as possessing spiritual value and as sacred beings.

⁷⁴⁹ There is a belief in certain Indonesian islands that for parents to attain heaven or *moksha*, they must have grandchildren. Consequently, parents often request their consecrated children to abandon their holy vocation.

2. The Need to Reform Leadership Dynamics within Consecrated Life: Challenges and Conflicts

During the interview, several individuals expressed disappointment with pursuing or leaving a consecrated life. They attributed their decisions to the instability and *breakdown in communication* among their congregational, provincial, and community leadership. The New Testament presents “servant” (*diakonis*) as a model for Christian leaders, especially those aspiring to lead consecrated lives. This echoes Jesus’ teaching: “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). Furthermore, the Bible emphasises the role of “shepherd” as a metaphor for Christian leadership. In religious communities, leaders are seen as divine partners who embody selflessness and unwavering commitment to nurturing and sustaining the community. However, over time, the biblical concept of leadership has been distorted and influenced by various factors, including the *secularisation of leadership*. These negative influences challenge effective leadership practices within religious communities.

Communities of consecrated individuals have a unique perspective on leadership compared to secular contexts. However, religious life can still have negative connotations of political and domineering authority. In a conversation with Pilate, Jesus emphasised that leadership is a responsibility granted by divine authority within consecrated life, stating, “You would have no authority over me unless it had been given you from above” (Jn 19:11). The narrative of Moses also illustrates this divine mandate; despite his initial reluctance, God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex 3:10). A true leader, as exemplified by Moses, is not one who eagerly seeks authority but one who embraces it with divine guidance. Moses’s consistent communion with God, symbolised by the burning bush, exemplifies his reliance on divine counsel and willingness to fulfil his leadership role faithfully (Ex 3:1–4:17). Throughout his trials, Moses sought solace and guidance from his mentor, demonstrating unwavering trust in divine wisdom.

Some leaders in consecrated life, assuming absolute control, may mismanage their duties, forsaking their obligations to God and their community. Those exhibiting divisive behaviours — such as racism, regionalism, caste discrimination, and bias — *foster partiality and animosity among members*. Christian leaders must acknowledge their call to serve and rely on divine assistance; failing to do so constitutes a dereliction of duty. Even esteemed leaders face challenges when their sincerity goes unrecognised by those they lead, sometimes facing unjust accusations and harmful behaviours like uncharitable gossip, character assassination, and baseless accusations.

Those devoted to consecrated life may feel undervalued while pursuing their community's goals. Effective leaders aim to delegate responsibilities sincerely, recognising that *shouldering all tasks alone can breed arrogance and dictatorship*. Leadership, especially in religious life, demands an ethos of shared responsibility akin to “omega leaders”⁷⁵⁰ like Moses and Jesus, trusting and involving others in the mission. Viewing their work as an act of faith, leaders cherish their fellow consecrated persons as divine gifts deserving of utmost care and attention. Authentic leadership lies in serving others, not seeking personal glory, fostering trust, and finding fulfilment in selfless dedication, traits expected of all religious leaders. As consecrated individuals, we collectively bear the responsibility for our vocation, with those in authority nurturing the growth of their members.

The exemplary attitude and examples of some biblical figures like Moses⁷⁵¹ (cf. Ex 17: 8-13) should challenge every consecrated person, specifically those in authority. Authority leaders must comprehend the *significance of grooming successors* so that the transition of authority and responsibility occurs without difficulty or confusion. “Religious leaders shall not look at their conferrers as threats, but rather as brothers or sisters, esteemed family members sharing the same mission and vision”⁷⁵². Religious living and perseverance are enhanced through effective communication and broad community participation among all segments. A leader plays a crucial role as a source of guidance and positivity for their family or community. They are like salt and light, enhancing the flavour and brightness of those around them (cf. Mt 5:13-14). Those in positions of authority should never insult those under their care⁷⁵³ by calling them “fools” and should strive to control their temper and avoid unnecessary anger (cf. 5: 21-22). “Leaders can never win the battle by counterargument or retaliation”⁷⁵⁴. Jesus taught that a genuine leader must never react and lose vitality. “The secret of success in leadership

⁷⁵⁰ Cf. L.B. JONES, *Jesus C E O: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership*, New York 1996, XIII. “Omega leadership” typically refers to a style of leadership that emphasises leading with compassion, wisdom, and a long-term perspective. It is frequently related to servant leadership, a leadership concept in which the leader's primary objective is to serve others and prioritise their well-being.

⁷⁵¹ Moses prepares Joshua as the successor and smoothly transfers the role of the leader.

⁷⁵² A.J. R. MUTHIAH, “Leadership in the Bible: The Paradigms of Moses and Jesus”, *Sanyasa* 3/1(2008) 17.

⁷⁵³ An incident of an Archbishop beating publicly a priest for not respecting him.

⁷⁵⁴ D. CARNEGIE, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Meerut 2004, 117.

consists in not having enemies but maintaining a loving relationship with all”⁷⁵⁵.

The attitude of the many leaders in the church and consecrated life is like the disciples of Jesus’ “over-inflated ego balloons”⁷⁵⁶ who wanted to know “who was the greatest among them” (Mk 9: 33-37) when it comes to power and authority. For Jesus, greatness is not domination but humble service. Many religious leaders may still hold attitudes of pride, arrogance, dominance, envy, and exclusivism, which directly oppose the Bible’s teachings regarding leadership. Those in positions of authority must be humble, tolerant, and receptive. Leaders love and support their followers wholeheartedly, understand them, and are willing to forgive their faults. It is a common fact that people crave recognition, love, and care — even those who are consecrated. “The most valuable thing a person has a sense of worth. One is afraid most of all discovering that one is useless. People are more afraid to be found useless, they say, than to be found bad”⁷⁵⁷. *Experienced leaders in consecrated life support and nurture less experienced ones*. They should create opportunities for growth and foster appreciation and purpose. Leaders can yield long-term benefits that surpass any setbacks by encouraging individuals to explore their talents and abilities and being patient with their mistakes.

The strength and richness of a consecrated life rely on the individual’s *readiness to embrace the community’s values and objectives*. An exceptional leader supports their followers and shields them from blame and shame. Public condemnation and disloyalty from a leader can cause immense hurt and distress. “Criticism is futile because it puts a person on the defensive and usually makes him strive to justify himself. Criticism is dangerous because it wounds a person’s precious pride, hurts his sense of importance, and arouses resentment”⁷⁵⁸. During my interview, I discovered that having authority and leadership skills is crucial for individuals who want to grow in peace and harmony. Religious institutions advise finding and appointing capable leaders to handle the world’s problems and challenges. In today’s post-modern world, *leaders need qualities like positivism and creativity*, which indicate a move towards a more relational and transformative approach. Promoting a supportive atmosphere and focusing on collective accountability in religious life is crucial, with the overarching goal of building God’s kingdom being emphasised.

⁷⁵⁵ A.J. R. MUTHIAH, “Leadership in the Bible: The Paradigms of Moses and Jesus”, 18.

⁷⁵⁶ S. SUKH, *Ego: The Worst Enemy and Best Friend*, Mumbai 2002, 78.

⁷⁵⁷ T. MENAMPARAMPIL, “Leadership in Religious Communities” *Sanyasa* 3/1 (2008) 53.

⁷⁵⁸ D. CARNEGIE, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, 5.

3. Religious Community: The Foundation of Communion and Perseverance

In my interviews with individuals who have spent many years in consecrated life, for both those who remain and those who have left, I found that community dynamics have been essential to their religious experience. A *positive and supportive community fosters happiness* and helps individuals mature and stay committed to their faith. *Vita Consecrata* affirms that the fraternal life, understood as a life shared in love, is an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion. It is practised with special care in religious institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life, where community living acquires special significance (cf. VC 42). Since the root of vocation and the charism are identical, a community or congregation's familial atmosphere and fraternal affection produce ties stronger than blood.

Perfectae Caritatis emphasises that a religious community embodies a true family gathered in the Lord's name, experiencing his presence through the love of God (cf. PC 15). The *Codex Iuris Canonici* defines consecrated life as a society where members publicly vow and *live a fraternal life in common*. Central to this concept is "fraternal life in common," essential for unity in religious communities, blending external union with visible community living⁷⁵⁹. A religious community embodies individuals united around a common goal, living out gospel values in fraternity and unity akin to the church's soul. Each member is vital, contributing to community improvement amidst challenges and fostering an atmosphere of tranquillity and harmony. They witness unity and love through mutual understanding, prayerful support, and shared responsibility, building miniature churches worldwide⁷⁶⁰.

Community dynamics support individual members in nurturing their vocation and commitment, encouraging a life of witness and mutual responsibility. *Perfectae Caritatis* underscores the significance of community in sustaining religious vocation, with the Magisterium outlining both vertical and horizontal aspects of community life. Those who make the profession of the evangelical counsels are called to seek and love God above all else, as He has loved us first (cf. 1Jn 4:10). This love of God should ignite and energise our love for our neighbours, which contributes to the salvation of the world and the building up of the Church. *Perfectae Caritatis presents community*

⁷⁵⁹ Cf. CIC 607.

⁷⁶⁰ Cf. T. PURAYIDOM, "Religious/Consecrated Community: Intense Sign of the Ecclesial Communion", *Sanyasa* 1/1 (2010) 67.

life as essential to consecrated life. The common life is fashioned after the early Church, where the believers were united in heart and soul (cf. Acts 4:32). As members of Christ living together as brothers, religious should give pride of place in esteem to each other (cf. Rom 12:10) and bear each other's burdens (cf. Gal 6:2). The *Codex Iuris Canonici* emphasises that *all members of an institute are united as a unique family in Christ.* This unity should support each member in fulfilling their vocational callings. Communion of brothers and sisters is rooted and founded in a charity where members are to be an example of universal reconciliation in Christ⁷⁶¹.

Religious communities are constituted by a divine vocation and attraction from God, not by personal attraction, human causes, or the will of the flesh, according to the document *Fraternal Life in Community* (cf. Jn 1:13). These communities serve as a tangible illustration of the significance of God in our lives as well as the love of God and neighbour that Jesus Christ preached and practised (cf. *FLC* 1). It is impossible to comprehend without acknowledging that the religious community is a divine gift, a mystery deeply ingrained in the holy and sanctifying Trinity's heart. It is God's will and a part of the church's mystery for the world's well-being (cf. *FLC* 8). Every member of the consecrated life should welcome religious communities with faith and contemplation, as they are a theological reality and a mystery.

When we lose sight of this theological and mystical component, community life loses purpose and effectiveness. The document reminds us that *our vocation is "con-vocation" and is called with others (FLC 44)*, not individual personal vocation. *It is "a schola amoria which helps one grow in love for God and one's brothers and sisters" (FLC 35).* *Vita Consecrata* discusses a spirituality of communion and highlights the essential role of fraternal life in the spiritual growth of consecrated individuals. This fraternal life plays a crucial part in their constant renewal and complete fulfilment of their mission in the world (cf. *VC* 45). The document *Starting Afresh from Christ* calls our attention to see other members in the congregation or my community as part of me. It is the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity, dwelling within us and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the faces of the brothers and sisters around us. It also calls forth an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body (cf. *SAC* 29).

⁷⁶¹ Cf. *CIC* 602.

3.1 *Trinitarian Model*

The concept of *koinonia*, or community, is integral to religious communities and centred around the Trinity's unity. Through community unity, religious life mirrors the Trinity, emphasising the importance of communion with God and fellow believers. Christian communities, especially religious ones, serve as *platforms for embodying the life of the triune God*. Consecrated life finds its roots in the mystery of the Trinity. *Lumen Gentium* chapter 6 states that Religious Life is "that precious gift of divine grace given to some by Father" (LG 42). The Trinity's presence increases the Church's holiness, magnifying the undivided Trinity's glory. Our community life is built on the foundation of our connection with the Father, Son, and Spirit, which is rooted in the holiness that stems from the dynamic unity of the Trinity (LG 47).

3.2 *Apostolic Community Model*

Jesus' call to discipleship forms the foundation of the apostolic community, as he invites individuals to follow him (cf. Mk 1:17), shaping them through his teachings and actions. However, some who have left or remain within consecrated life express concerns about *toxic environments lacking inspirational models*. Despite challenges, Jesus remains central to religious communities, urging renunciation for the Gospel's sake (cf. Mk 8:35; 10:29). Yet, respondents note a shortage of positive role models, often attributing issues to mishandling generational differences within the community.

The community of apostles was composed of individuals with different personalities and tendencies. It was remarkable how Jesus, their leader, united and prepared them for an essential mission without labelling or rejecting anyone. This was evident in several instances, such as when the Sons of Zebedee asked to be seated on the right and left-hand sides (cf. Mk 10:35-45), when they argued about who was the greatest among them (cf. Mk 9:34), and when asked how often one should forgive (cf. Mt 19:21). Jesus was patient and tolerant of their weaknesses as he taught them. Apostolic communities serve as models and inspire religious groups to shape their lives and communities.

Let's discuss some fundamental characteristics of apostolic communities.

a) It is a community of people who can be summoned, not of those who have organised themselves. "You did not select me, but I selected you" (Jn 15:16). The requirements for membership in religious communities also include the grace of God (calling) and the individual's free will.

b) Apostolic Communities are groupings of individuals who accept and embrace the teachings of the Bible based on faith and obedience. Our religious communities are *centred on the Word*, which guides their members to profound faith and submission.

c) Apostolic communities follow Jesus' example in their dedication to the Kingdom's cause. Jesus is the model and way of life for all consecrated people in their *endeavour to spread God's kingdom*.

d) An apostolic community is modelled after a genuine family revolving around Jesus. In a religious community, members are *joined by the call* and live in brotherhood and availability as a family.

e) It is highly valued in apostolic communities that all brothers and sisters *be treated equally*. The idea of equality and eliminating caste, colour, and regional distinctions includes religious communities.

f) In apostolic communities, service is the authority, and the first is expected to assume the position of the last. Religious communities are required to prioritise assistance to God and others. In consecrated life, *humility and service* become the hallmarks.

g) Reconciliation and forgiveness are the operating principles of apostolic communities (cf. Lk 17:3-4). Consecrated life groups generate a heavenly atmosphere on earth through *forgiveness and reconciliation* among their members.

h) The Apostolic community always expresses confidence in the Father through their prayers. Through prayer and other spiritual practices, religious communities maintain a relationship with the source of their existence.

i) By sharing one cup and one loaf of bread, the apostolic community becomes Eucharistic. Through breaking the bread and sharing the cup, religious congregations become *members of the Eucharistic community* with God and the people.

j) The rule of love governs the apostolic community. "Love one another as I have loved you," Jesus said. This is how the world will know you are my disciples (cf. Jn 13:34-35). Religious communities *governed by love* and brotherhood principles bear witness as Christ's disciples.

k) Lastly, the apostolic community is a group sent to work for the kingdom of God. Religious Communities are formed for the mission under different charisms.

There are indicators of breakdown and erosion of values in religious communities today, although the ideals that established religious and apostolic groups are identical. The apostolic society fell apart after Jesus' arrest (cf. Mk 14:51). The apostolic community's initial movement of leaving

everything and following Jesus turned into a move in the opposite direction, abandoning Jesus and running away for physical safety, as described in Fabio Ciardi's book *Koinonia*⁷⁶². Peter followed him at a distance (cf. Mk 14:54), thinking of the danger and difficulties of following Christ and His call⁷⁶³. Under the influence of global trends and personal struggles, communities can serve as havens and places to stay for people fleeing their circumstances.

3.3 *Jerusalem Community Model*

The first community in Jerusalem was defined by its unity, where *koinonia*, the breaking of bread, and prayer laid the groundwork. Mirroring the ethos of many contemporary religious communities, they shared everything, exemplified by selling their possessions and distributing them to those in need (cf. Acts 2:44-47). What set the Jerusalem community apart was not merely physical togetherness but a profound interior union. However, many today perceive unity as superficial, lacking depth. Genuine community relationships should radiate warmth and care, fostering an environment where individuals feel embraced and supported, ultimately nurturing personal vocation and dedication⁷⁶⁴.

Creativity in the community's celebration of God's word, Eucharist, and liturgical prayers can serve as a source of nourishment for this togetherness and brotherhood. Spiritual activities in contemporary religious communities have become routines, and members no longer experience the warmth and blessings of this call and togetherness. In *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II encourages "Consecrated men and women to commit themselves to strengthen their fraternal life, following the example of the first Christians in Jerusalem" (VC 45). When the hearts and souls of consecrated individuals are in harmony, their community becomes a model of care, charity, and prayer, resembling Jerusalem.

A religious community is unique because it is born from God's love, which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts. This love is the grace and blessing of a

⁷⁶² Cf. F. CIARDI, *Koinonia: Spirituality and Theology of the Growth of Religious Community*, Quezon City 1998, 30.

⁷⁶³ True followers of Jesus should share his life and destiny completely, even to the point of death. To become the servant of all, to be willing to deny oneself, to love to the point of sacrifice, and to set oneself last. These principles may and must continue to inspire the Christian and Religious communities.

⁷⁶⁴ Cf. T. PURAYIDOM, "Religious/Consecrated Community: Intense Sign of the Ecclesial Communion", *Sanyasa* 1/1 (2010) 68.

divine summons. The community is constructed as a true family, uniting in the name of the Lord (cf. *FLC* 8). The founder's charisma shapes our communities and calls each member to assimilate it personally and in community (cf. *VC* 71). The modern trend to depart from the common charisma and the personal fight to impose one's *own charisma*⁷⁶⁵ divides the community and its members. The importance of evangelical counsel is seen in the fact that it fosters the perfection of the love of God and the love of neighbour in an outstanding manner (cf. *LG* 45). Religious vows are personal gifts and must be lived and experienced in the community. Our ultimate commitment to the Lord grows and matures in our vocation as we live harmoniously as a community or congregation.

The unique gift of unity that we have today can significantly enhance the growth of religious life by reviving the sense of community and unlocking the potential of its calling. This gift of unity can bring new sensitivity and values to religious life and foster an appreciation for each member's diverse abilities, values, and calling⁷⁶⁶. Renewal of life in a community is crucial for religious individuals to uphold their vocation and commitment. The focus on community is not just a trend but at the heart of the Christian message, which emphasises mutual love expressed through trinitarian *koinonia*.

4. Addressing the Generation Gap: Bridging Divides between the Young and the Old

According to interviews with 75% of participants, differences in life challenges shared among members of a congregation or community can worsen age disparities, leading to mutual unhappiness and a loss of life's grace and joy. Members of a consecrated life are profoundly influenced by their community environment, which can impact both their happiness and anxiety levels. Younger members may be required to take on responsibilities previously held by their senior counterparts, which can lead to feelings of injustice. To promote reciprocity, the older generation must consider the perspectives of the younger generation. The congregation and formative system should help candidates align their lives with the church's charism and the congregation's requirements while also facilitating *intergenerational learning*.

⁷⁶⁵ Modern religious individuals tend to follow their own charisma, which is later forced to be recognised by institutions.

⁷⁶⁶ Cf. F. CIARDI, *Koinonia: Spirituality and Theology of the Growth of Religious Community*, 7.

Many young religious people feel burdened by complex tasks and responsibilities, lacking the focus on evangelisation and the flexibility to address new pastoral needs. They recognise the issues at hand but perceive a disconnect between their needs and the congregation's established structures, primarily led by the older generation. This gap creates a sense of displacement and a growing disconnect between generations. Without restructuring and adapting to current challenges, there's little hope for the future, stifling creativity and hindering young religious from assuming mission responsibility, fostering pessimism in the interim.

Young members of religious communities attribute the decrease in enthusiasm for religious life to external factors, including the prevailing culture. Consecrated life has undoubtedly suffered a loss of appeal and credibility outside of institutions due to a few individuals' dishonest behaviour and attitudes within congregations, orders, institutes, and communities. These encompass several issues, such as instances of competent authorities managing sexual assault against minors, mediocrity, bourgeoisification, individualism, a decline in spiritual vitality, and a dearth of missionary zeal, among other concerns. Their appeal and credibility originate from the profound and jubilant experience with God in Christ, which evokes joy in our beings, the gratification that brotherhood bestows, and the highest level of fulfilment that arises from altruistic selflessness⁷⁶⁷. The old and young are called to embrace the challenges of consecrated life as a divine call to improve their vocational commitment. "The difficulties and the questioning which religious life is experiencing today can give rise to a new *Kairos*, a time of grace. In these challenges lies hidden an authentic call of the Holy Spirit to rediscover the wealth and potentialities of this form of life" (SAC 13). An exemplary mode of communication and engagement distinguishes members of a mature religious community. Due to their religious and familial upbringing, the community members have developed a refined character and a mature demeanour. This encounter is devoid of any sense of apprehension or malice.

5. Challenges of Practical Atheism in Consecrated Life: Exploring Solutions and Spiritual Resilience

During the interviews, the topic concerning the *alarming growth of practical atheism among consecrated members* came to light. It can be likened to the thorny weeds which germinate among the good seeds, which not only

⁷⁶⁷ Cf. P. CHAVEZ, "The Young and Consecrated Life Today" [accessed: 03.11.2023], <https://www.camilliani.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/>

hinder the growth of the good seeds but also steal the essential nutrients and positive environment needed for the seeds to grow and flourish. Practical atheism refers to the behaviour of a religious person who does not honestly believe in the power of prayer and its practical benefits. It pertains to the demeanour of individuals who are formally and socially recognised as “believers,” “religious,” members of a religious organisation, or “professionals of religion.” However, they conduct themselves and exist as genuine atheists, i.e., in a permanent, vital disconnection from God in their most profound beings. Their offerings consist solely of lip service, not heartfelt devotion (cf. Is 29:13).

Negation of God and religious indifference are significantly increasing among practical atheists. Pope Benedict on the opinion: “the practical atheism of those who say they are Christian but live as if God does not exist is a more significant threat than actual atheism”⁷⁶⁸. Practical atheism within religious communities not only extinguishes the fire of the Spirit in individuals but also dampens the community’s mission. Practical atheism leads to “indifference towards faith and the question of God”⁷⁶⁹. Even the holiest individuals, enticed by the allure of material possessions, succumb to the fallacy of practical atheism in an attempt to lead a more fulfilling existence that suits their preferences and desires. The current circumstances make it challenging to comprehend freedom. Instead of liberating individuals, it confines them to materialistic and entertainment-based pursuits. Meanwhile, religious vocations and commitments lose their value.

Practical atheism can lead to insensitivity towards prayer and its effectiveness. Pope Francis exhorts that prayer is the centre of life and continues: “The worst service someone can give God, and others as well, is to pray tiredly, by rote. To pray like parrots. No, one prays with the heart”⁷⁷⁰. In practical atheism, even if one professes trust in God, he or she can maintain, without any qualm of conscience, a practical distance from others and permit oneself to harbour hatred for them. This situation of the soul is dangerous to the self and others in the religious communities. Religious individuals are encouraged to address and resolve this matter, as their profession and

⁷⁶⁸ POPE BENEDICT XVI “Message on Faith”, Catechism Address in the Pope Paul VI Hall, (14 November 2012).

⁷⁶⁹ “Where is your god? Responding to the Challenge of Unbelief and Religious Indifference Today” [accessed: 01.01.2024], https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_cultr_doc_20040313_where-is-your-god_en.html

⁷⁷⁰ POPE FRANCIS, “Practical Atheism” in General Audience, Pope Paul VI Hall, (21 October 2020).

devotion to God and others provide them with purpose. “If consecrated men and women lack words that bless God and other people, if they lack joy, if their enthusiasm fails, if their fraternal life is only a chore, it is not the fault of someone or something else. Our arms no longer embrace Jesus”⁷⁷¹.

Formation in religious life should be directed toward the building up of “the inner man with inner faith” (*DFRI* 36). Its practice assumes that persons consecrated by the vows of evangelical counsels transform themselves to become living witnesses for Christ. It is not enough to build a spiritual connection solely through the reciting of sanctioned prayers; for example, certain psalms may use patriarchal language to entreat a violent God. On the contrary, it is preferable to strive for transparency in our relationship with the Holy Spirit, who intercedes within us (cf. Rom 8:26-27), prompting us to achieve levels of insight that were before undiscovered. Like Jesus, there are times when we need to seek solitude in the mountains — not to build tents for our comfort like Peter did on the Mount of the Transfiguration, but to prepare ourselves to face the hardships that others in the city and valley experience, such as the epileptic (cf. Mt 17:14).

Consecrated Life continues to lack an integrated theology, which is essential for addressing the difficulties of the twenty-first century. We require an empowering spirituality that motivates us to participate in life instead of an ascetical one that promotes retreat. In the latter half of the twenty-first century, it will be difficult to confront these difficulties creatively without such an enlightened spirituality. Only a formation that aims at helping the candidates develop and nurture a vital relationship of passionate love with the person of Christ can address this threat to the development and practice of practical atheism.

6. Holistic Formation: A Vital Imperative for the Present Times

The notion of lifelong formation arises from inherent human limitations, encompasses growth across various life domains, and is grounded in the belief that humans remain receptive to God, others, and the world around them. This ongoing journey entails personal transformation aimed at transcending limitations⁷⁷². Drawing from both interview responses and my personal experiences as a consecrated individual, it is evident that formation is crucial

⁷⁷¹ POPE FRANCIS, “Pope at Mass: Cultivate a renewed vision of consecrated life”, St. Peter’s Basilica (2 February 2022).

⁷⁷² Cf. CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES, *Missionarii Sumus: Witnesses and Messengers of the Joy of the Gospel*, General Chapter Document, Rome 2015, 31. Hereafter *MS*.

in guiding individuals towards maturity and fidelity in their chosen path. This process demands candidates to heighten their self-awareness, acknowledge the gifts bestowed by God, and embrace their past to unleash their complete potential. Integral formation for a consecrated person encompasses the harmonious development of various facets of personality, encompassing their identity as a human being, a Christian, a religious, a priest, and an apostle⁷⁷³. Drawing from extensive years of experience, the Church affirms that the formation method should encompass all facets of the candidate's being. A simplified method of formation often results in the detriment of a consecrated individual in both their personal life and ministry. The integrity of our life renders the proclaimed word more credible and our vowed life more joyful. Becoming an authentic religious is intended to be a transformational experience. Nevertheless, acquiring information and developing abilities throughout one's religious life is futile if that person fails to embody the joy of the Gospel as a trustworthy testimony (cf. *GPF* 5)⁷⁷⁴.

In pursuing a life dedicated to consecrated formation, candidates are inherently curious about the extraordinary journey ahead. They seek answers to their inquiries about the path they aspire to and the myriad possibilities awaiting them. Formators and the institutional framework must facilitate this quest for understanding. Yet, some candidates, as revealed in my interviews, struggle due to limitations within the system or the capacity of their mentors. In the era of rapid technological advancement, it is our duty to equip candidates with the skills to navigate these changes responsibly, ensuring that their maturity and commitment positively influence their religious calling and mission. Formation should instil in the religious a deep reverence for their vocation, foster mutual support for unwavering fidelity, and embolden them to authentically share the joy of the gospel with credibility in today's world⁷⁷⁵. St. Anthony Mary Claret, the founder of Claretian missionaries, recognised the negative impact of poorly trained religious and apostolic workers in the church. Claret wrote books and instructions for the seminarians and formators to help them grow mature and wise.

If I can have good students now, I'll have good priests and pastors later. Students need to be continually nourished spiritually during their studies; otherwise, they will grow up to be proud, which is the worst they can bring upon themselves, and pride is the source of all sin. I would rather have them know a

⁷⁷³ Cf. *The Mission of the Claretian Today*, XIX General Chapter Document of the Claretian Missionaries, Rome 1979, 132. Hereafter *MCT*.

⁷⁷⁴ Cf. *GPF* 5

⁷⁷⁵ Cf. *GPF* 5.

little less and be pious than know a great deal with little or no piety and be puffed up with the wind of vanity⁷⁷⁶.

6.1 *The Purpose of the Formation*

The encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* states: “the primary aim of the formation process is to prepare people for total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church’s mission” (VC 65). The period of initial and ongoing formation is crucial in the life of a consecrated person. It yields invaluable returns, and likening religious formation to the growth of a tree or the construction of a house underscores its profound importance. Every aspect of formation is indispensable, just as every facet of a tree’s growth is. Ensuring optimal growth and fruition requires selecting high-quality seeds, planting them in fertile ground, nurturing them diligently, and shielding them from threats. Similarly, recognising and fostering a genuine vocation bears great responsibility. The vitality and authenticity of a religious community hinge significantly on the quality of its formation process. Investing in the formation of our time, energy, and resources is never a waste. The knowledge and skills acquired through proper formation endure indefinitely, enriching individuals perpetually.

Formation in the modern period presents several difficulties. From the document *New Wine in New Wineskins* of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the following issues can be identified: Formation tends to be more instructive than performative, and the spiritual and human dimensions are not sufficiently integrated. Additionally, young religious tend to prioritise professional degrees over theological courses (cf. *NWNW 12, 14*). According to the document, ongoing formation often involves only *religious tourism*, visiting exciting places, attending some theological courses, and a lack of serious reflection and revision (cf. *NWNW 16*). As mentioned above in the book and my interviews with consecrated persons of all categories, the findings need immediate attention in the formation and all associated processes to safeguard this unique way of life envisioned by God from nesters and inner atheists.

Formation poses myriad challenges, commencing with the subjective hurdles a candidate encounters internally. These obstacles encompass attitudes, aptitudes, desires, dreams, and visions. Skilfully manoeuvring through these subjective challenges can unveil avenues for personal development. Nonetheless, success hinges on the candidate’s adeptness in managing them.

⁷⁷⁶ Cf. ANTHONY MARY CLARET, *Autobiography*, Rome 2009, 92.

Neglecting to do so may result in excessive conditioning, impeding one's authentic growth within the confirmation journey towards embodying the teachings of Jesus Christ. This can emerge as the paramount challenge for an individual in formation, falling within the realm of '*existential schizophrenia*'⁷⁷⁷. Since a lack of basic disposition in a religious, especially a candidate under formation, is a significant difficulty, external challenges take a back seat to internal or subjective ones. Specific candidates replace their innate inclinations with human impulses during the formation phase. This internal conflict between the embraced human motives and the professed ideals precipitates a profound crisis within the candidate. In interviews with most of the consecrated individuals cited the insufficiencies in the formation process in addressing internal and external personal challenges. These difficulties engendered discomfort and, in some cases, prompted individuals to forsake their vocation.

During the interview, ninety participants (65%) actively engaged in a critical discussion about the negative aspects involving the inadequate implementation of the process of inculturation within their religious institutes and among their members. Seventeen congregations took part, 12 of which were foreign religious institutes, and most had formators, superiors, and major superiors from other countries. Examples were cited where members felt pressured to adopt unfamiliar cultural practices regarding spirituality, diet, attire, and community dynamics, often imposed by foreign superiors or institutes, contrasting with the local traditions. Some members raised concerns about these impositions, risking their ability to uphold their vocation and commitment authentically and being unfairly labelled as resistant to cultural diversity or lacking a genuine missionary calling.

During the formation phase, it is essential to acknowledge and address negative attitudes that can hinder personal growth. Holding on to these attitudes can worsen the situation, leading to feelings of inferiority or superiority, unpleasant behaviour towards others, and constant criticism of authority figures. Individuals must identify and overcome these negative mindsets to foster personal and professional development. Failure to do so can obstruct an individual's intended guidance and shaping. One's aptitude plays a significant role in their journey, aiding or hindering progress. Candidates should intentionally develop abilities that provide strength and vitality for their chosen path. However, excessive attachment to specific abilities can drain

⁷⁷⁷ It is worthwhile to remember the words of Pope Francis when he spoke about 'existential schizophrenia' in the life of a follower of Jesus, which means to be in a position which adopts a double life. This will be very dangerous for him/her and others.

energy and time, leading to neglect of genuine aptitudes. Addressing these challenges promptly is crucial, as improper aptitudes driven by the pleasure principle can derail personal development. Self-awareness and intensive training are essential for breaking free from these detrimental mindsets and fostering genuine growth within family, community, or religious institutions. Aligning one's life with Jesus' teachings is challenging for those who strive to balance self-centred desires and gospel values in a consecrated life.

One must also remember that when freedom tends to become arbitrariness and the autonomy of the person, independence from the Creator and relationships with others, one finds oneself before forms of idolatry that do not increase freedom but rather slavery⁷⁷⁸.

Integral formation entails nurturing members' innate abilities through acquiring information and wisdom, achieved by studying fundamental truths⁷⁷⁹ of the Church and understanding human culture. As the *Code of Canon Law* emphasises, religious formation should encompass knowledge of the nation's culture, traditions, and faiths to instil confidence and competence (cf. *VC* 80). Religious institutes' rejuvenation hinges primarily on their members' formation and education. *The effective rejuvenation of religious institutes primarily relies on the formation and education of their members*. The religious life brings together followers of Christ who must receive support in embracing "this divine blessing bestowed upon the Church by the Lord, and which she always preserves by his grace" (*LG* 43). To ensure the effectiveness of optimal adaption strategies, a substantial spiritual regeneration is required.

6.2 Formation: Recognise and Conform

The primary purpose of formation is to help those considering entering religious life and young religious who have just started their journey to understand and later embrace and deepen their religious identity. Its principal objective is to aid devout men and women in attaining a unified life in Christ using the Holy Spirit. This objective will need the seamless integration of spiritual, apostolic, theological, and practical components (cf. *PC* 18). Only under these circumstances can a person dedicated to God become a significant, influential, faithful witness. "Formation is a sharing at the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions the inner attitudes of the Son in the

⁷⁷⁸ CICLSAL, *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, Rome 2008, 2.

⁷⁷⁹ Cf. S. KUTHODIPUTHENPURAYIL, *Formation of Religious Priests*, Bangalore 2009, 79

hearts of young men and women” (VC 65). Integral formation is a process that involves both the candidate and the formator. It is guided by God’s grace and the inspiration of the Spirit, and it aims to nurture a vocation to consecrated life within the Church. Screening and selecting candidates and formators are crucial, as the formator’s role profoundly impacts future generations. In today’s world, formation should help individuals navigate contemporary culture while instilling a passion for God. Formators must be well-trained, and candidates should be treated as mature adults, providing ongoing support and guidance throughout their spiritual journey⁷⁸⁰.

Candidates and those currently in consecrated life must ‘recognise and conform’ (VC 65) to the sacred call daily since it is unique and beyond the scope of ordinary life. An integrated formation process is required because it assists candidates in their real road to humanisation⁷⁸¹, much like Jesus Christ himself. In religious life, crises may lead to brokenness from various sources, including losses, charism conflicts, or chosen renunciations. These crises serve as growth experiences, navigated healthily through a cycle of confusion, pain, and mature love. Holistic formation prepares candidates to face such challenges, serving as a stepping stone for their future.

We need to reevaluate the current formation methods from the viewpoints of the candidate, the formator, and the Institute. The candidate plays a pivotal role in the formation process and must be able to exercise autonomy and responsibility⁷⁸². In pursuing a religious vocation, one’s openness and honesty before God, oneself, and others are vital. Like nurturing a tree for fruitful growth, religious formation demands careful attention, ensuring every aspect contributes to success. Just as a tree requires quality seeds, proper planting, watering, and protection, identifying and nurturing a genuine religious calling is essential. The stability and authenticity of a religious congregation hinge on the quality of its formation process, making investment in time, energy, and resources invaluable. The knowledge and skills gained through proper formation endure for a lifetime. The formation environment must support candidates in maintaining their passion for Christ and humanity. The formator’s responsibility is to nurture and strengthen this passion, sustained through the formation process with the candidate’s active participation. This fanning and tending are done through the process of accompaniment. The

⁷⁸⁰ Cf. J. MANNATH, *A Radical Love, a Path of Light. The Beauty and Burden of Religious Life*, Bangalore 2013, 69-70.

⁷⁸¹ Cf. *GPF* 29.

⁷⁸² Cf. J. MANNATH, *A Radical Love, a Path of Light. The Beauty and Burden*, 70.

following image from the life of Jesus would enlighten us to understand this process of accompaniment.

7. Unified Symphony: Where Accompaniment Sets the Formation's Rhythm

The formator accompanies the young person in formation, sharing the journey and sustenance, just as Jesus did with his disciples on the road to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13, 22). The aim is to help young people lighten their hearts and recognise Christ. This mutual journey towards revelation and communion is a symbol for both, requiring openness to share the complexities within oneself, including ambitions, fears, and wounds. Integral formation highlights the crucial role of accompaniment by formators, spiritual mentors, and senior members in transmitting Christ's mission to younger generations. Amidst a complex and consumeristic society, educating consecrated individuals faces challenges exacerbated by atheism, materialism, digital culture, and cultural tensions. Fundamentalism and limited interaction with marginalised groups hinder seminarians' understanding of their calling and solidarity with the disadvantaged.

Additionally, some clergy and scholars' inadequate guidance in resolving conflicts in intimate relationships and adopting a comfortable lifestyle pose further obstacles to formation⁷⁸³. Continuous exposure to society's values can inadvertently influence individuals, including seminarians, whom the behaviours of priests, religious figures, and formators may negatively impact. Lack of guidance, particularly in navigating intimate relationships, and the adoption of carefree lifestyles by some clergy may further blur ethical boundaries. Meaningful dialogue and qualitative accompaniment during formation help candidates understand their vocation and its demands clearly.

Formation's essence lies in the intimate bond between formator and candidate, mirroring Jesus' mentoring of his disciples. Just as Jesus urged the disciples at Emmaus to open up about their struggles, effective formation necessitates the candidate's honest disclosure of their soul's state, fostering understanding and growth. Accompaniment operates on divine, personal, and community levels, offering temporary support in establishing a lasting connection with the Divine throughout the formation journey.

⁷⁸³ Cf. S.G. KOCHUTHARA – V.P. DEVASSY – T.T.KATTAMPALLY, ed., *Human Formation in Major Seminaries*, Bangalore 2017, 8.

7.1 Divine Accompaniment

We see in the pages of the OT how God accompanied His chosen people with the assistance of His devoted companions, including prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Moses, Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph, among others. Jesus gathered his followers in the NT and walked with them while interceding for them with his Father's prayers (cf. Jn 17). The disciples prayed, preached, lived, and moved together. Jesus was walking with his disciples and with all sorts of people. The quality of companionship is well-developed in Luke's account of the disappointed pair of disciples dragging their feet down from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They saw a companion in the risen Jesus but could not recognise him initially (cf. Lk 24:13-32). The story exemplifies the essence of friendship: offering support, listening with compassion, providing perspective, and respecting autonomy. Sharing a meal signifies camaraderie and freedom. Formators and spiritual mentors, besides their instructional roles, can embody friendship and guidance, aiding individuals in achieving goals and navigating challenges with patience and availability⁷⁸⁴.

7.2 Personal Accompaniment

The Congregation for the Clergy emphasises the importance of personal accompaniment in forming individuals in their 2017 document, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation (RFIS)*. To follow Christ, one must go through a process of vocational discernment, which involves personal accompaniment. The candidate must first have a firm understanding of who they are and be able to communicate this understanding to their mentors. The goal of this process, which includes personal accompaniment, is to help individuals become more receptive to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Frequent and regular conversations between formators and candidates are crucial in the formation process. Personal accompaniment should assist individuals in discovering and cultivating their true identities, including being open to dialogue, willing to listen, and possessing other relevant attributes. Formators should create a peaceful atmosphere characterised by trust and confidence. This accompaniment should be present throughout all stages of the formation process (cf. *RFIS* 17).

The formator accompanies the young person to a precise point of arrival: discovering the project of God and choosing it, in freedom and responsibility, as a revelation of his or her own identity. Therefore, accompaniment is

⁷⁸⁴ Cf. M.M. VALLIPALAM, *Priestly and Religious Formation. A Twofold Essential Accompaniment*, Bangaluru 2023, 16.

not the function of programmes or institutions. It aims to create an obedient availability concerning the divine vocational plan⁷⁸⁵. It is crucial to have a personal accompaniment to fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of candidates and help them love God, themselves, and others. Accompaniers should help candidates develop self-awareness and self-worth, promote self-acceptance, assist in healing past wounds and emotional conflicts, and enable them to find healthy ways of meeting their needs. They should also help candidates improve communication and relationships with others, achieve greater emotional and psycho-sexual maturity for a consecrated and celibate way of living, and find God's will in daily life. Accompaniers should assist in integrating prayer, life, and activities and, if needed, purify vocational motivation. These tasks are connected to candidates' past, present, and future lives⁷⁸⁶. The interviewees explicitly state that a considerable percentage fall prey to group formation due to the abundance of candidates and the dearth of formators. The formator directs, supports, helps to purify motivations and to free the heart, brightens up and gives assurance. Still, he abstains from every form of authoritarian voluntarism and from everything that would decide for obedience in faith less autonomous and personal, and therefore less believing⁷⁸⁷.

7.3 *Community Accompaniment*

The Gift of the Priestly Vocation emphasises the crucial role of community support in forming priests. With the help of a supportive community, individuals undergo a transformative journey where they refine their goals, mould their behaviours, and solidify their vocations. This process is enriched by interpersonal connections, dialogue, and interaction, highlighting community life's significance in fostering relationships and personal growth. A positive relationship between formators and students, as well as among peers, cultivates an environment of brotherhood and camaraderie within the seminary community, like a familial bond (cf. *RFIS* 52). The quality of community support directly impacts formation, reflecting the character and spirit of the institute (cf. *PI* 26). The Church prioritises the experience and appreciation of community life in religious practice, as it plays a significant role in formation. On the other hand, the absence of community support, coupled with modern interpretations of freedom, poses obstacles to vocation

⁷⁸⁵ Cf. A. CENCINI, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, Abuja 1998, 185-187.

⁷⁸⁶ Cf. M.M. VALLIPALAM, *Priestly and Religious Formation. A Twofold Essential*, 18.

⁷⁸⁷ Cf. A. CENCINI, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, 188-189.

development and fulfilment. Community support is a formative catalyst, enabling individuals to deepen their fidelity to the Lord within the framework of their institute's charism (cf. *PI 27*).

To effectively accompany community members, it is essential to prioritise establishing positive connections based on trust, simplicity, faith, and generosity. Daily unity is crucial and guided by the Holy Spirit, leading to a commitment to listening to God's Word, purifying through penance, and strengthening through the Eucharist. Celebrating together throughout the liturgical year reinforces community bonds. The spirit of poverty, friendship, and dialogue underlies mutual support and the exchange of material and spiritual resources. Accompaniment involves a heightened level of dialogue and guidance, facilitated through regular interviews and personal counselling, helping individuals discern God's presence and growth opportunities. In today's context, accompaniment holds significant value for religious formation and individuals from diverse backgrounds, promoting optimal decision-making and personal development.

8. Exploring Modern Approaches to Formation: A Dual Perspective

Contemporary religious circles grapple with opposing forces: restorationist fundamentalism and strictly progressive perspectives. This clash obscures crucial aspects of religious formation and challenges the survival of religious orders. While many communities are not imminently threatened, addressing these issues calmly and thoughtfully is essential to preserving missions and vocations without allowing them to divert valuable time and energy. Four observable factors have an impact on us. The initial one is *sociological*⁷⁸⁸. The ageing of members necessitates increased provision of care, increased expenditures, and reduced personnel available for apostolic service. To maintain balance in such situations, congregations compromise on candidate selection for quantity over quality. An essential aspect of the social component is *demographics*⁷⁸⁹. Birth rates in urban and metropolitan areas of both first and third world countries have declined, resulting in a smaller population of individuals who may choose to follow consecrated life. Additionally, the population of metropolitan areas is increasing at a faster rate than that of rural areas, particularly in developing nations.

⁷⁸⁸ Cf. M. AZEVEDO, *The Consecrated Life. Crossroads and Directions*, New York 1995, 66.

⁷⁸⁹ Cf. M. AZEVEDO, *The Consecrated Life: Crossroads and Directions*, 119.

Thirdly, there is a *pedagogical and pastoral*⁷⁹⁰ component. As has been previously emphasised, the effects of Western modernity profoundly impact households, educational institutions, and communities, making them hostile environments for encouraging religious vocations or devotion. This problem also has *symbolic*⁷⁹¹ significance. On the one hand, consecrated life has lost much of its visibility, intelligibility, and attractiveness in the context of the family, the classroom, society, and culture in which we currently find ourselves. We rely heavily on the media for our news and information. Still, we rarely see anything about religion, and when we do, it's usually presented in a way that doesn't do it justice. However, consecrated individuals are often perplexed and unable to offer solutions to their difficulties. This phenomenon results in diminished self-awareness and confidence, potentially causing our identities to be influenced to some extent by antiquated notions. When we are unsure of our own identities, we might be hesitant to recruit new members to a way of life that we admire but are concerned about its survival. These facts give rise to a multitude of concerns and inquiries.

It is crucial to consider all the factors contributing to improved and cohesive formation and their corresponding solutions. Additionally, social concerns should also be considered. While the universe presents observable realities, religion proposes abstract realities based on faith that are neither tangible nor visible. Therefore, it is necessary to instil confidence and faith in candidates during their training to remain steadfast in their calling and commitment to serve Christ and not be swayed by trivial issues. Creative fidelity can assist us in discerning a religious existence that is both founded in and cognizant of its past while remaining attuned to the needs of the present. Presently, the most significant obstacle is to transcend analytical consciousness and attain existential and emotional satisfaction with the matters deliberated in our own lives and the apostolic endeavours of our organisations. Our ambitions are assured and pledged to be realised by the power of God, which resides within us through the Holy Spirit's gift, and by our collective response in solidarity to that gift⁷⁹².

8.1 A Journey of Formation Leading to Transformation

Forming a religious commitment is complex and cannot be easily defined. It is often referred to as “personal development within society.” However,

⁷⁹⁰ Cf. M. AZEVEDO, *The Consecrated Life: Crossroads and Directions*, 120.

⁷⁹¹ Cf. M. AZEVEDO, *The Consecrated Life: Crossroads and Directions*, 125.

⁷⁹² Cf. M. AZEVEDO, *The Consecrated Life: Crossroads and Directions*, 130.

when an individual feels called to a religious institution, there are many uncertainties for both the person and the congregation. *Religious consecration begins with a divine call, not a human choice, which serves as the foundation of the journey* (cf. Jn 15:16). This journey involves cultivating a daily connection with the divine, embracing imperfections, and experiencing God's grace. It encompasses personal growth and the freedom to abide in the Son of God⁷⁹³.

It is essential to have formators, spiritual advisers, and co-religious individuals to guide candidates in discovering their religious calling, understanding their abilities, and following God's message. This is achieved through one-on-one communication and spiritual activities like prayer and Scripture reading. Candidates deepen their relationship with God and become more open towards others. Formation is a continuous process that becomes more important over time. It focuses on four dimensions: human, intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral, emphasising autonomy and accountability⁷⁹⁴. By being attentive to the guidance of the Spirit, candidates can appropriately respond to the signs of the times as they journey towards discipleship. This genuine engagement in the process leads to personal growth and a better quality of life.

Individuals consecrated and wishing to continue growing in their religious and apostolic roles must remain informed about these matters, even as society changes. This involves ongoing development in doctrinal and professional areas, such as studying magisterial documents, understanding local cultures, and acquiring new skills. Ongoing formation is essential to inject creativity and enthusiasm into daily life, which is crucial for overcoming challenges. Answering Christ's call requires a leap of faith and a deep relationship with God, leading to personal transformation. Living the consecrated life in the present is vital to avoid feeling outdated amidst evolving landscapes. The renewed impetus in the mission also helps to prevent religious from succumbing to the dangerous 'temptation of survival'⁷⁹⁵, which can lead to consecrated life becoming sterile. Clinging to survival can transform religious into fearful, reactionary disciples and deprive charisms of

⁷⁹³ Cf. C. SERRAO, *Discernment of Religious Vocation: Formation Towards Transformation*, Mysore 2004, xv.

⁷⁹⁴ Cf. C. SERRAO, *Discernment of Religious Vocation: Formation Towards Transformation*, xvi.

⁷⁹⁵ POPE FRANCIS, "Homily for the XXI World Day of Consecrated Life" (2 February 2017).

their creative force, leading them to defend spaces, buildings, or structures instead of enabling new processes.

Pope Francis calls the attention of all the religious to walk in the path of formational transformation; otherwise, we give ourselves to ‘the spiritual euthanasia of a consecrated heart’⁷⁹⁶. Chronic fatigue, internal divisions, seeking power and privileges, and unwise governance are symptoms of counter-testimony. Instead, religious people must walk in the Lord, fix their gaze on him, and embrace the future with hope⁷⁹⁷. During the interview, it is stressed that the formation stage is a critical period in the candidate’s life. A candidate’s earnest and meaningful effort can contribute in their mature growth toward their vocation as a religious person. A consecrated person’s sincerity and excitement can help them build a stronger relationship with Christ, which is vital for the stability of their vocation and consecrated life.

8.2 *Contributions of Candidates to the Formation Process*

For formation to occur, the active cooperation of the Spirit, the candidate, and the formator is required. Nevertheless, the candidate’s position is essential in determining their future potential and mature development. Numerous interviewees remarked that, due to the formation process’s time-sensitive nature, many applicants proceed through each stage without attaining the maturity and development appropriate to that level. A consecrated life is a personal response to a call from God. Formation establishes and maintains a personal relationship between the individual and God. Prioritising personal prayer is of the utmost importance for a candidate, extending beyond acquiring prayer techniques or approaches. Engaging in personal prayer is dedicating time to commune with God and attentively receiving His plan. To do this, one must engage in comparable practices such as retreat, seclusion, and silence⁷⁹⁸. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus consistently participated in solitary prayer. He would depart the house before dawn each morning and proceed to a secluded location to pray (cf. Mk 1:35; Mt 14:23; Lk 5:16). The candidate must be made aware that prayer is a relationship with God, as

⁷⁹⁶ POPE FRANCIS, “Address to Participants in the Conference Organized by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life” (4 May 2018).

⁷⁹⁷ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People on the Year of Consecrated Life* (21 November 2014).

⁷⁹⁸ Cf. C. DEVDAT, “Religious Formation in Biblical Perspective”, *In Christo* 49/02 (2011) 49.

observed by Paul the Apostle⁷⁹⁹. A life of self-discipline fosters personal prayer and rapport with the Lord.

Formation is a collaborative effort involving the Spirit, the candidate, and the formator. The candidate's attitude plays a crucial role in their growth and maturity. Despite this, many applicants advance through stages without reaching full development. A consecrated life is a personal response to God's call, shaped through formation. Personal prayer is central, transcending mere techniques to connect with God and seek His guidance. Jesus' solitary prayer underscores its significance, echoed by Paul the Apostle, who emphasised prayer as a relationship with God. Self-discipline cultivates personal prayer and deepens intimacy with the Lord.

9. Psychological Insights as a Guide to the Formation of Consecrated Life: Nurturing Spiritual Journeys through the Lens of Psychology

Psychological assessments are crucial for evaluating candidates for priesthood or religious life. They ensure that candidates have a solid spiritual foundation and emotional maturity, essential for effective collaboration within the church⁸⁰⁰. Psychologists play a critical role in discernment, addressing any uncertainties and psychological wounds that candidates may have. As Vatican writings and national bishops' conferences emphasised, formators require specialised skills to support candidates effectively. Integrating sociology and psychology in the discernment process helps foster a stable spirituality suitable for ministry. Pope John Paul II's vision of priestly and religious formation, outlined in *Pastores dabo vobis* and *Vita Consecrata*, builds on the principles of the Second Vatican Council. It emphasises the holistic preparation of candidates to live out their vocations authentically in service to the church. These documents' approach to priestly and religious formation is dynamic, integrative, and holistic. First, formation is dynamic because its essential framework is relational and developmental. Every vocation is rooted in a relationship between God and the individual God calls.

In the formation process of religious vocation, *precision is crucial* for both the good of the Church and the candidate. As a gift from God practised within

⁷⁹⁹ Cf. "And as well as this, the Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness, for when we do not know how to pray correctly, then the Spirit personally makes our petitions for us in groans that cannot be put into words; and he who can see into all hearts knows what the Spirit means because the prayers that the Spirit makes for God's holy people are always following the mind of God" (Rom 8:26-27).

⁸⁰⁰ Cf. M.M. VALLIPALAM, *Priestly and Religious Formation: A Twofold Accompaniment*, 45.

the Church, there is no opposition between the two; instead, they converge⁸⁰¹. The Church, “begetter and formator of vocations” (*PDV* 35), has the duty of discerning a vocation and the suitability of candidates for the priestly ministry. According to *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, the human dimension is the foundation of all formation (cf. *PDV* 45). It lists a series of human virtues and relational abilities required of the priests and religious so that their personality may be “a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of humanity” (cf. *PDV* 43). The decision to join a consecrated life or the church’s ordained ministry is a gift from God and is not solely determined by psychology. However, in some instances, seeking help from experts in psychology can be beneficial. It can aid in evaluating the mental state of the candidate, assessing their human disposition in response to God’s calling and providing additional support for their personal growth⁸⁰². These experts can also give the formators their opinion on diagnosing and treating psychological issues. Moreover, suggesting ways to favour a more accessible vocational response can help support the development of the human (primarily relational) qualities required to exercise the ministry (cf. *OT* 11).

Formation for the priesthood or consecrated life must address imbalances within the human heart (cf. *GS* 10) in contradictions between a candidate’s aspiration to serve selflessly and their lived experiences. Psychological wounds from the past may hinder moral development. Priestly or consecrated life demands a unique equilibrium between spiritual and human aspects, necessitating deliberate discernment tailored to individual needs⁸⁰³. Overcoming shortcomings requires persistent progress in both dimensions. The Church and congregations must effectively integrate the human dimension alongside the spiritual, offering support for candidates’ holistic development. The goal is to bring forth individuals called to this vocation who are fully committed to Christ’s mission with conscious and free adherence (cf. *PDV* 35).

The New *Code of Canon Law* mandates psychological evaluations for candidates in priesthood or religious life, focusing on health, soundness, and deficiencies. The Congregation of the Clergy advocates for using psychological sciences in vocational discernment, enabling tailored formation to

⁸⁰¹ Cf. CCE, *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, Rome 2008, 1.

⁸⁰² Cf. CCE, *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation*, 5.

⁸⁰³ Cf. CCE, *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation*, 2.

individual needs⁸⁰⁴. Behavioural sciences, notably psychology and sociology, play a crucial role in addressing candidates' mental, emotional, and personal challenges, aiding in wise decision-making. Candidate screening facilitates the evaluation of internalisation of values, enhancing the discernment process.

The preparation of formators is another very important area in the formation field. The formator should possess sufficient training and know how to deal with the candidate maturely, understanding the candidate's personality with its strengths and weaknesses. "Every formator should have a good knowledge of the human person: his rhythms of growth; his potentials and weaknesses; and his way of living his relationship with God"⁸⁰⁵. Formators must possess enough preparation to evaluate a candidate's suitability for admission to the seminary or the house of formation for the religious clergy. Additionally, they ought to be able to ascertain whether a candidate's unsuitability necessitates dismissal from the seminary or institution of formation. In addition, the discernment process ought to guide the candidate in cultivating the essential moral and theological characteristics that would empower them to lead a life characterised by unity, autonomy, and unwavering commitment to the communion of the Church (cf. *PDV* 16).

A proper and appropriate discernment by the formator regarding the candidate is called in the *Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*. Errors in discerning vocations are not rare, and in all too many cases, psychological defects, sometimes of a pathological kind, reveal themselves only after ordination to the priesthood. Detecting defects earlier would help avoid many tragic experiences⁸⁰⁶. The significance of formators possessing the requisite "psychological readiness and sensitivity" (cf. *PDV* 66) to discern the underlying motivations of candidates, identify obstacles impeding their human and Christian development, and detect any psychopathic disturbances they may be harbouring is underscored by the Church⁸⁰⁷. A better psyche leads to a better person; a better person is always a good religious.

⁸⁰⁴ Cf. M.M. VALLIPALAM, *Priestly and Religious Formation: A Twofold Accompaniment*, 47.

⁸⁰⁵ CCE, *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation*, 3.

⁸⁰⁶ Cf. CCE, *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*, presented by José Saraiva Martins Titular Archbishop of Turbomeca Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education, Rome 1974, 38.

⁸⁰⁷ "The formator must accurately and prudently evaluate the candidate's history. Nevertheless, this history alone cannot constitute the decisive criterion for admitting or dismissing the candidate from the formation. The formator must know how to evaluate the person in his totality, not forgetting the gradual nature of development. He must see the

10. Formation for Love for God and Human Beings

The purpose of the formation process in consecrated life is to help individuals develop a deep love for God and humanity. However, candidates may face inner insecurities, fears, and an inferiority complex that can hinder their progress towards this objective. These hindrances may stem from experiences of brokenness, personality traits like narcissism, historical baggage, and dependency tendencies. Even psychological needs themselves may impede the attainment of their primary goal. In such cases, formation should help individuals become more self-aware and overcome their innate inclinations. The formation process should focus on fostering *genuine love* among candidates, which is emphasised by 80% of interview participants.

The statement “My vocation is love” by St. Theresa of Lisieux perfectly captures the essence of every call to a consecrated life: an *invitation to embrace love*. No matter what life brings, the measure of human maturity can always be found in the amount of love we give. Every missionary effort should be born from a deep devotion to God and a compassionate regard for all humanity. St. Anthony Mary Claret, the founder of the Congregation of Missionaries Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Blessed Virgin Mary (CMF), commonly known as Claretian Missionaries, discovered the source of his mission when he declared, “love of God impels me” (cf. 2Cor 5:14), echoing St. Paul’s words. Those who live out their faith fervently are called to demonstrate radical love and communion, showing unconditional compassion to everyone. This radical expression of Gospel values is the cornerstone of a faithful mission. Therefore, religious training is essential for shaping candidates into people who deeply love God and humanity.

Formation needs to be centred on developing one’s capacity for love. A religious community needs to be a *schola amoris* for young people and adults — a school where all learn to love God and the brothers and sisters with whom they live (cf. *FLC* 1). The formative community’s specific task is to help candidates expand their potential for love during their years of formation. According to the interview participants, the community’s main issue is the challenge of genuinely and sincerely loving others. We need to evaluate the quality of our formation based on the achievement of this goal. One

candidate’s strong and weak points, as well as the level of awareness that the candidate has of his problems. Lastly, the formator must discern the candidate’s capacity for controlling his behaviour regarding responsibility and freedom”: cf. CCE, *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission*, 4.

thing that Jesus required and ensured from Peter before entrusting the work of pasturing his flock was his love for the master. Assurance of the love for the master is also an assurance of love for his flock.

10.1 Formation for Love and Challenges

In the contemporary formation scenario of the consecrated life, there is a strong emphasis on professionalism and performance, often prioritising efficiency over effectiveness when it comes to missionary work. However, this approach may overlook the essential aspect of developing a deep love for God through prayer and genuine compassion for others by stepping out of one's comfort zone to help them. Candidates must realise the importance of sacrificing personal ambition to benefit the vulnerable and embracing humility by allowing others to take the lead. Unhealthy competition can be a destructive force that extinguishes the flame of authentic love within oneself, diverting from the true essence of missionary service. The paramount challenge in formation lies in establishing love as the ultimate measure for assessing the authenticity of all actions. When seniors fail to provide credible examples of ongoing growth in love, the attention can shift towards merely managing such individuals rather than fostering a culture of genuine love and growth.

10.2 Formation for Love and Limitations from within

As candidates pursue their calling towards a life of priesthood and religious service, they may initially possess a strong desire for commitment and generosity. However, their ability to love may be limited by insecurities and fears about their capabilities, leading to feelings of inferiority and self-doubt. As a result, they may feel resigned to mediocrity and retreat into their comfort zones. Despite their initial aspiration to love God and serve humanity, they may struggle to achieve the inner freedom necessary to give themselves in love wholeheartedly. Several factors contribute to this limitation.

10.2.1 Developmental Problems

The journey towards fully realising one's capacity to love others occurs through various growth and development stages. Erik Erikson's model of human development suggests that before reaching the pinnacle of integrity, a mature adult must navigate through the stages of identity, intimacy, and generativity. Intimacy is characterised by the ability to comfortably connect with others, while generativity is demonstrated through contributing to the

welfare of others. These are inherent expressions of love within human nature. The divine call to love God and others unconditionally aligns with the level of maturity achieved in these developmental stages. However, the capacity for intimacy and generativity is profoundly influenced by how individuals have progressed through the stages of trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, and industry versus inferiority, thereby forming a solid identity.

Individuals who do not have enough opportunities to progress through each stage of development may face limitations in their ability to love. It is rare for someone to experience an environment that provides optimal growth throughout every stage of development. Many people who pursue careers come from backgrounds with limited opportunities for smooth and consistent growth in their ability to love. Therefore, it becomes increasingly challenging and complex for formators to revisit these developmental phases with candidates and guide them through reformulation.

10.2.2 Historical Burdens

One of the significant barriers to experiencing love entirely is the emotional weight we carry from past traumas and hardships, often referred to as *the baggage of the past*. These wounds, whether stemming from parental mistreatment, personal traumas, or unfulfilled needs for love and care, can hinder our ability to grow and love fully. For instance, children who grow up witnessing domestic violence or parental addiction often internalise deep-seated anger, insecurity, and fear, which can impact their emotional well-being and relationships later in life. In the interview, 97 participants (70%) expressed feeling like living examples of carrying past burdens, with many still grappling with vivid memories of sexual exploitation and gender inequality, affecting their capacity to love and trust other people genuinely.

Children who have experienced physical and sexual abuse often carry profound feelings of unworthiness, self-hatred, and guilt. Some may exhibit symptoms such as nightmares, flashbacks, or obsessive-compulsive behaviours, while others may adopt altruistic roles as a defence mechanism. However, even seemingly selfless acts of service can stem from a subconscious need for validation. For example, a person who felt undervalued compared to their twin brother found solace in helping marginalised individuals, viewing it as a form of self-validation. Nevertheless, genuine acts of compassion stem from a place of self-love and acceptance. Those who haven't developed a strong sense of self may struggle to prioritise the needs of others over their self-preservation.

10.2.3 Love and Personality Styles

Our personality styles play a significant role in determining our capacity for love. For example, individuals with narcissistic tendencies tend to be self-absorbed and view the world solely through their own needs and desires, which makes it difficult for them to empathise with others and sacrifice their own needs for others. Similarly, those with a histrionic personality style seek constant attention and may engage in manipulative relationships, lacking depth in their emotions and genuine capacity for love. Individuals with an obsessive-compulsive personality style may excel in their work and strictly adhere to rules and regulations. Still, they may struggle to show understanding, care, and compassion towards others due to their focus on external orderliness and rigidity. During the interviews, participants shared that many face personality style problems that are not appropriately handled during formation.

Individuals with *dependent personality* styles may find it hard to love others non-possessively and without attachment. This is especially true if they rely heavily on surrogate parental figures for their sense of security. Similarly, people who have passive-aggressive tendencies may withhold their total effort in service and may struggle to collaborate due to underlying resentment and withdrawal tendencies. Paranoia can lead to suspicion and uncharitable comments, making it difficult for individuals to trust the intentions of others. During the interview, formators shared the difficulties they face in formation while dealing with people who have personality style problems.

Understanding and addressing our personality traits is essential for promoting unconditional love and personal development, regardless of whether they are innate or learned. Consecrated persons are aware of these tendencies and consciously try to overcome them by aligning their actions with their values. Achieving self-transcendence requires intentional effort and awareness.

10.2.4 Love and Personal Dynamics

As individuals start their careers, they are often guided by their values and goals. However, their inner self plays a more significant role in shaping their motivations as time passes. Even though people may consciously follow certain religious principles, unconscious psychological factors also influence their actions. Fr. Luigi Rulla, S.J. and other researchers have conducted pioneering studies on the formation of religious and priests. Their research

shows that psychological needs like aggression, avoidance of failure, exhibition, sexual gratification, succorance, and harm avoidance significantly impact an individual's ability to internalise kingdom values and stay faithful to their calling. Participants in the interview also mentioned that the consecrated person's lack of strong Christian values and personal dynamics often hinder their ability to experience joy and fidelity.

Individuals who struggle with excessive needs such as abasement, aggression, exhibition, and succorance may find it difficult to fully commit to serving the kingdom of God. Those with a dominant need for abasement may struggle with insecurity, preventing them from freely embracing opportunities for kingdom work. Similarly, individuals with a dominant need for aggression may find it challenging to show God's mercy and compassion transparently. Those who need exhibition may prioritise showcasing their abilities over serving God's kingdom. In contrast, those who excessively seek succorance may focus more on receiving love for themselves rather than giving it generously to others. Although these psychological needs are not pathological, they can hinder one's ability to serve the kingdom wholeheartedly. Therefore, the formation task involves increasing self-awareness and creating space for evangelical values to flourish and guide one's actions⁸⁰⁸.

10.2.5 Enhancing Formators' Capacity for Loving Accompaniment

We expect our formators to shape true disciples from the individuals entrusted. However, some formators fail to appreciate the complexities of the candidates and expect them to be perfect from the start. To be an effective formator, one must possess kindness, compassion, and a deep commitment to shaping candidates' lives. This means accompanying them in their journey of self-discovery and helping them transform into loving and compassionate disciples of Jesus.

Effective accompaniment on the growth journey requires formators to undergo their transformation, becoming authentic guides for those they mentor. Like a recovered addict can empathise with and advise someone in recovery, formators who have addressed their inconsistencies become better mentors for candidates striving to achieve consistency in their vocational lives. Personal formation is crucial, as the example set by formators wields more influence than their teachings. Addressing their inconsistencies prevents issues such as transferences and double messages, ensuring practical guidance. One

⁸⁰⁸ Cf. J. KANNANTHANAM, "Formation for Love in Religious Life", *Sanyasa* 1/1 (2006) 87.

of the main concerns of the interview participants (80%) is the formators' lack of preparation and transformation. The limitations of the formators often lead the candidate to become prey to their ignorance.

Formators must prepare themselves with personal development and knowledge of human dynamics, such as psychology, and various aspects of formation. Counselling and communication skills are necessary for practical guidance. Understanding human behaviour enables formators to provide qualified support to the candidates, helping them overcome limitations and resistance to grace. With adequate preparation, formators can offer individualised support to candidates through vocational growth sessions, facilitating profound transformation and maturity in both parties.

10.2.6 Love and Role Models

To promote compassion and love among candidates, their formators must exhibit exemplary behaviour. When formators display qualities, such as understanding, forgiveness, and kindness, candidates are more likely to absorb these virtues and feel comfortable confiding in them. However, a challenge arises when formators approach interactions with candidates in a judgmental and inflexible manner. Many formators, especially in religious settings, tend to be rigid taskmasters, focused solely on meeting expectations without considering the individuality of each candidate and their circumstances. By embracing candidates' unique backgrounds and experiences, formators can apply rules and expectations flexibly and empathetically, encouraging candidates to be more compassionate and understanding towards others. Just as victims can turn into victimisers, recipients of compassion are inclined to extend compassion to others. If only all formators could embody the role models of compassion, the transformative impact on candidates would be profound⁸⁰⁹.

11. Psychology and Spirituality

Spirituality and psychology are integral to religious formation, profoundly influencing individual beliefs and principles. While spirituality holds prominence in the East, psychology is widely recognised in the West, prompting many Westerners to journey Eastward annually to nurture their spiritual development. These disciplines infuse depth and vitality into the church's formation process, enriching it with theological significance. Without their

⁸⁰⁹ Cf. J. KANNANTHANAM, "Formation for Love in Religious Life", 87.

integration, formation remains abstract, merely a concept achievable through personal choice⁸¹⁰. Yet, when devoid of human affection and divine spirit, formation devolves into a morally focused endeavour, emphasising reason and will. Thus, it becomes imperative to prioritise the emotional dimensions of human nature and the supernatural guidance of the Spirit for a holistic and comprehensive formation experience. Psychology explores the intricacies of human cognition and behaviour, aiming to improve societal welfare through understanding broad principles and individual experiences. In contrast, spirituality from a Christian standpoint involves discipleship and apostleship, learning from the Lord and sharing the Good News with others.

The Second Vatican Council emphasises the connection between wholeness and holiness (cf. VC 1). It recognises that human functioning is interconnected across physical, psychological, spiritual, intellectual, and social realms⁸¹¹. Psychological immaturity can negatively impact overall well-being, highlighting the importance of integrated spiritual and psychological development. True spirituality goes beyond intellectualism or self-improvement and instead focuses on interpersonal connections and the bond between humanity, the divine, and the natural world⁸¹².

It is important to note that a psychologically mature individual is also spiritually mature. Those who lack spiritual maturity often have difficulty forming relationships due to psychological issues. Therefore, to help others achieve psychological maturity, we must first obtain our own psychological balance. This is particularly important for religious leaders, and formators who must focus on their own psychological development to effectively encourage healthy behaviour in others. During the interview, the participants unanimously recommended providing special training to formators and people in authority to assist others in becoming more mature and committed. As previously mentioned in this chapter, the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) strongly recommends incorporating psychology into vocational discernment during training. This is because it is the responsibility of the Church to evaluate the aptitude of potential candidates for priesthood and

⁸¹⁰ Cf. M.M. VALLIPALAM, *Priestly and Religious Formation: A Two-Fold Accompaniment*, 48.

⁸¹¹ Cf. M.M. VALLIPALAM, *Priestly and Religious Formation: A Two-Fold Accompaniment*, 49.

⁸¹² Cf. W. VIAL, *Psychology of a Vocation*, Illinois 2020. 2.

religious life⁸¹³. Therefore, the following areas of candidates are to be checked and corrected, namely:

1) self-awareness, which is the knowledge that neither overestimates nor underestimates; 2) self-disclosure, which means gut-level sharing, i.e., revealing how one feels about events and persons; 3) self-image, which is the mental picture of how about ourselves; 4) self-acceptance, accepting with all the positives and negatives; and finally, 5) self-direction, a person acts because he/she freely chooses to do certain things from a motive⁸¹⁴.

Individuals who wish to enter the seminary should aim to be devout and pious and should undertake a gradual refinement of their internal disposition. To determine their suitability, they may undergo psychological assessments with informed consent as part of the evaluation process. These assessments aim to consider personal experiences that may impact their journey and identify potential obstacles, such as emotional dependencies or trust issues, which may be crucial for successful formation. Those who have significant psychological issues may require psychotherapeutic intervention, and if improvement is lacking, it may be recommended that they leave the seminary.

11.1 The Scope of Psychological Screening

When considering a religious vocation, psychological screening can help identify the presence of the right intention, degree of interior freedom and suitability of the candidate⁸¹⁵. The field of psychology is comprehensive, examining fundamental aspects of human behaviour such as cognition, emotions, self-awareness, and social and interpersonal connections⁸¹⁶. However, it is essential to note that divine calling cannot be determined solely by human disciplines. The human sciences can only identify natural inclinations and sociocultural factors that may affect an individual's suitability for a particular lifestyle. Therefore, psychology can be a helpful tool in selecting and training individuals for religious life.

⁸¹³ Cf. CCE, *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood* (29 June 2008) 1. Church has two concerns: safeguarding the good of her mission and ministry and enriching the good of the candidates. Both are supporting each other.

⁸¹⁴ M.M. VALLIPALAM, *Priestly and Religious Formation: A Two-Fold Accompaniment*, 50.

⁸¹⁵ *OT*, 2, 5; cf. CCE, *Directives concerning the Preparation of Seminary Formators* (4 November 1993), 36; 57-59.

⁸¹⁶ Cf. C. SERRAO, *Discernment of Religious Vocation: Formation*, xii.

Today, mass media often undermines spiritual values, making young people susceptible to making independent judgments. Psycho-pedagogy advocates for redirecting internal energies towards self-realisation, requiring a holistic approach to formation that encompasses spiritual, human, and social dimensions. This process aims to shape individuals into the likeness of Christ, with community involvement⁸¹⁷ and psychological insight being essential components. While psychology can aid in understanding a candidate's qualities, determining their religious vocation remains divine. Integrating psychology into formation processes is crucial, but a spiritually guided approach is necessary to prevent undue pressure on candidates and ensure their vocational fulfilment.

11.2 Beginning a Sacred Journey: Discerning the Call to CL

Navigating the complexities of today's world can be challenging, especially when choosing a stable career path — especially for those committed to following Jesus Christ. In such cases, seeking proper guidance and surrendering to divine plans is essential, even amidst societal pressures for personal success. Pope Francis emphasises the crucial role of ongoing discernment in consecrated life, which involves active listening and selfless service, as well as aligning one's will with God's, even in the face of challenges⁸¹⁸. By following this process, individuals can authentically embody their vocation, making decisions that are in harmony with their faith and life circumstances (cf. *GE* 169).

The Church is actively exploring ways to assist individuals, particularly young people, discern God's will. This is especially important for those considering a life of consecrated service. The Church recognises the significance of guiding young people towards a life of complete love and fulfilment. It emphasises the need for careful planning and thoughtful consideration of choices, considering the potential consequences of those choices. The call to love manifests in everyday decisions, whether consciously or unconsciously, and vocational discernment seeks to transform these choices into steps towards the ultimate joy we are all called to experience.

In today's fast-paced world, providing vocational guidance to young people is crucial. This guidance helps them to connect with their inner selves and make ethical and spiritual decisions (cf. *LS* 1). It is essential to encourage

⁸¹⁷ Cf. C. SERRAO, *Discernment of Religious Vocation: Formation*, xii.

⁸¹⁸ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *The Strength of a Vocation: Consecrated Life Today*, Madrid 2018, 52.

a reflective approach to decision-making, as many young individuals are hesitant to commit and prefer a flexible mentality as the saying going: “Today I choose this, tomorrow we’ll see”. This mindset reflects a broader cultural trend of valuing access to endless opportunities over definitive choices⁸¹⁹. Pope Francis emphasises the importance of embracing risk and stability to navigate life’s journey with courage and purpose amidst this fluidity⁸²⁰.

In times of uncertainty and inner conflict, the ability to discern becomes highly important. It means interpreting the signs of the present time to identify the presence and actions of the Spirit within oneself. Spiritual discernment helps us to avoid taking easy paths that may not lead to true fulfilment⁸²¹. This process is especially crucial for individuals pursuing consecrated lives, as it requires maturity and a positive, Spirit-driven inner energy. Proper formation and prayer are essential for candidates to develop the ability to discern accurately and align with their vocation. “Freedom of choice allows us to plan our lives and make the most of ourselves. Yet if this freedom lacks noble goals or personal discipline, it degenerates into an inability to give oneself generously to others” (*AL* 33).

The heart of vocational discernment lies in understanding how to approach God and discern His intended path for us rather than receiving direct instructions. It involves recognising if God has a specific calling for us and aligning our lives accordingly. By positioning ourselves in God’s presence and discerning His desires, we can take the necessary steps to fulfil His plan. Let us embrace Ignatius of Loyola’s discernment methods as *we seek to find God in all our lives*.

11.2.1 *Spiritual and Moral Discernment*

Spiritual discernment can guide individuals in making important life decisions by freeing them from uncertainty and temporary solutions. It emphasizes focusing on God, personal growth, and embodying values in daily life. As Cardinal Newman suggests, “To grow is to change and to be perfect is to

⁸¹⁹ Many participants in the interview felt that the decision to join consecrated life may not be final due to the abundance of choices available for the younger generation.

⁸²⁰ “How can we reawaken the greatness and the courage of comprehensive choices, of the impulses of the heart to face academic and emotional challenges?”. The phrase I use very often is take a risk! Take a risk. Whoever does not risk do not walk. ‘But what if I make a mistake?’. Blessed be the Lord! You will make more mistakes if you remain still”: cf. POPE FRANCIS, “Visit to Villa Nazareth”. Address of His Holiness Pope Francis (8 December 2016).

⁸²¹ Cf. W. VIAL, *Psychology of a Vocation*, California 2023, 23.

have changed often”⁸²² Choosing a religious vocation requires deepening bonds with God, Christ, and others through faith and renunciation. Candidates must be prepared to embrace a lifestyle of relinquishing personal belongings, obedience, and chastity. This commitment is considered a profound communication with God and a sign of dedication to others. Ultimately, pursuing consecrated life is a dialogue between the individual and God. This decision leads to the fulfilment of divine purpose through service to others⁸²³.

11.2.2 Psychological and Cultural Discernment

Individuals searching for vocational discernment may find it helpful to seek psychological insight from competent specialists. These professionals can aid in understanding one’s path by uncovering both conscious and unconscious motivations behind choices. While psychological processes complement traditional discernment methods, they do not directly determine religious vocation. However, psychological assessments can help identify emotional disorders and potential issues that may arise under stress, guiding the selection process by evaluating candidates’ behaviour, strengths, weaknesses, and areas of difficulty⁸²⁴. This holistic approach, which incorporates psychological, intellectual, and cultural discernment, facilitates a deeper understanding of oneself and one’s calling.

An individual’s life quality depends on their ability to discern effectively. The stability and passion of those dedicated to a consecrated life are directly linked to their discernment skills. However, many people face challenges in discerning their calling during formation. True discernment involves identifying divine calls that may not align with our internal inclinations. To live an authentic consecrated life, one must be open to spiritual guidance and practice discernment in various situations. Discernment should bring clarity, not confusion. It may indicate a lack of receptivity to divine guidance if we feel uncertain.

⁸²² J.H. NEWMAN, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, Bridgetown 1909, 32. John Henry Newman was the Catholic Church’s 19th century theologian, poet, and cardinal. The quote is often cited as expressing the idea that personal and spiritual growth involves embracing change and transformation.

⁸²³ Cf. C. SERRAO, *Discernment of Religious Vocation: Formation*, 19.

⁸²⁴ Cf. C. SERRAO, *Discernment of Religious Vocation: Formation*, 20.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have discussed various topics that are essential to the development of individuals in consecrated life and help them live a life of fidelity and commitment. These themes contribute to the multifaceted tapestry of spiritual growth and community flourishing. We began by exploring the foundational influences of family and the image of God, recognising their significant impact on individual vocations. Later, we discussed the need for reform in leadership dynamics, acknowledging the challenges and conflicts that do not help individuals live a life of fidelity and commitment to their calling.

Having identified some hindrances to living a life of fidelity and commitment emerging from the context of toxic community dynamics, we delved into the fundamental beliefs of the religious community, discussing various models such as the Trinitarian, Apostolic, and Jerusalem. Each of these models provided distinct perspectives on communion and perseverance. We also highlighted the importance of bridging the generational gap and promoting reconciliation and understanding between the younger and older members of the community so that consecrated persons can live a life of joy, fidelity, and commitment.

Accompaniment emerged as a pivotal theme amidst this symphony of formation, with divine, personal, and community forms harmoniously playing to set the growth rhythm. Modern approaches to formation were explored, highlighting the transformative potential of the journey and the candidates' invaluable contributions. We also discussed the relationship between psychology and spirituality and how psychological screening can help individuals find their divine calling. We also acknowledged the importance of formation for love but recognised that challenges and internal limitations could hinder its realisation. In conclusion, we reflected on the significance of this intersection between psychology and spirituality. Through the delicate interplay of psychology and spirituality, we have discovered the threads that bind these two disciplines together, creating a beautiful tapestry of sacred journeying and transformative growth. By combining introspection and collective wisdom, we aim to support and nurture the spiritual journeys of those who feel called to a consecrated life so that they can live their commitment to the Lord in joy and fidelity.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This research study was an attempt to examine the notions of fidelity and commitment in consecrated life and then more closely in the context of the Church in Indonesia. As has been pointed out in the study, both fidelity and commitment are quintessential aspects of religious living. These concepts have gained currency in the contemporary discourse because of an evident increase in the number of consecrated persons who either abandon their religious vocation or settle down to live it like ‘nesters’ engaging in an existence characterized by mediocrity and compromised integrity and commitment. Several hypotheses have been raised about what could be the driving force behind such a phenomenon. This research endeavour undertook to examine the factors contributing to this phenomenon and aimed at offering actionable recommendations for reviving and sustaining religious formation in such a way that consecrated persons are able to live their life of commitment with joy, enthusiasm and fidelity to their vocation.

For the purposes of organization, the study was divided into three parts. The study in part I is divided into four chapters exploring the concept of fidelity in consecrated life and examining its various dimensions. The first chapter examines the concept of fidelity, while the second chapter focuses on the elements that promote fidelity in the consecrated life. The third chapter explores the magisterial teachings on religious formation that encourage growth in fidelity. The final chapter in part I discusses the limitations of living a life of fidelity within the context of consecrated life today.

When one attempts to understand the concepts closely, both faith and fidelity seem to be intertwined in the complex web of spirituality; when united, they enhance each other’s beauty. Faith, a divine gift, bears the fruit of fidelity in the faithful heart. As faith guides one towards fidelity, the latter fosters commitment and more profound liberation, unveiling a covenantal reality. Reflecting on the figures of the OT, such as Abraham and Moses, we witness God’s unwavering faithfulness, underscoring an unbroken covenant with His

creation. Similarly, in the NT, Mary and Joseph are epitomes of fidelity, their quiet surrender echoing profound faith. Figures such as Antony the Great and Francis of Assisi embody faith and fidelity, drawing multitudes towards Christ and his teachings. Saints Teresa of Calcutta and Charles De Foucault exemplify how faith and fidelity in Christ can profoundly impact and transform the world, even during perceived spiritual desolation, revealing God's enduring presence through unwavering fidelity.

Today, consecrated individuals can embody and configure with the person and values of Christ through faithful adherence to their vows and a commitment to ontological transformation in Christ, shedding light on the truth of humanity and creation. By integrating contemplation with action, they can supplant atheistic humanism with theocentric humanism. Human formation begins from birth and is influenced by family, society, culture, education, religion, and other factors. The dimensions of formation exemplified by Jesus play a significant role in shaping consecrated individuals and their development programs. Through initial and ongoing formation, candidates gain a deeper understanding and mould themselves for their noble mission and vision.

We discussed under chapter 3 the crucial role of Magisterial teachings in fostering fidelity and commitment among consecrated individuals. The Church's teachings on religious life serve as essential guides, reminding them of the unique qualities of their vocation and the profound significance of their consecration. Living in a brotherly/sisterly community is indispensable for giving evangelical counsels genuine meaning. Through prayer and asceticism, consecrated persons ascend towards a life of fidelity and commitment. Additionally, the Magisterium emphasises the importance of public witness in today's complex world, providing a pathway for embodying Christ amidst societal confusion. Effective management of religious institutes and robust formation programs are critical factors in enabling members to thrive in their consecrated lives with fidelity and commitment.

The *Mutuae Relationes* document beautifully explains the sacramental essence of consecrated life and its active involvement within the Church. It portrays consecrated life as a spirit-filled endeavour to enhance humanity, especially for the faithful. Additionally, the document *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes* outlines the shared and essential elements required to develop consecrated individuals. The document emphasises the Holy Spirit's pivotal role and the Virgin Mary's guiding presence throughout the formation process. It also highlights the importance of personal choice

and portrays formation as the candidate's ultimate responsibility while acknowledging the communal support and guidance offered along the journey. The document *Religious and Human Promotion* emphasises the importance of being faithful in a dynamic way.

Similarly, *Vita Consecrata*, considered the Magna Carta of consecrated life, highlights the duty and responsibility of nurturing one's vocation. It emphasises that formation is both sacred and collaborative, representing a shared participation in the divine work of the Father. Ongoing formation is a perpetual quest for faithfulness, as the document emphasises. *Vita Consecrata* presents consecrated life analogous to the high ideals of Christian living as the evangelical extension of the Incarnation, making Christ visible (cf. VC 1). While the entire humanity is created and called to live the Image of God, the consecrated are called to live the "Image of Christ" (cf. VC 14). The document, *New Wine in New Wineskins*, sheds light on the pressing issues and challenges facing consecrated life today, emphasising the necessity of equipping formators with innovative approaches to adapt to the ever-evolving contemporary landscape.

In the fourth chapter, we discussed challenges to live fidelity in consecrated life amidst the complexities of the modern world. Various factors such as the nuclear family, urbanisation, secularisation, modernisation, and globalisation have undoubtedly influenced the secular landscape. These factors pose significant obstacles to the spiritual journey of today's youth, especially those in consecrated life. With the pervasive influence of contemporary trends on the younger generation, the discernment process for embracing consecrated life demands heightened effectiveness and vigilance. Addressing personal-level constraints such as leading double lives, succumbing to mediocrity, nesting tendencies, absence of role models, and lack of life focus requires specialised support and expert guidance. It is crucial to use the desire for perfection and professionalism judiciously, ensuring they align with the ethos of consecrated living. Part one correlates with findings from interview participants emphasising the damaging roles of electronic and social media in the lives of the consecrated, juxtaposed with the formidable challenge of maintaining lifelong commitment in an ever-fluid society.

Part II explores the reality of fidelity in religious life within the Indonesian church context. It provides both a historical perspective and an empirical analysis of the subject. The fifth chapter carefully examines the origin and orientations of consecrated life in Indonesia, which are intertwined with the complex evolutionary history of religion and the Catholic mission in the region. Despite the painful legacies of colonialism that inflicted untold

suffering and exploitation upon Indonesia, the chapter acknowledges the paradoxical role of colonial powers in introducing different faith traditions and fostering foundational societal advancements. Furthermore, this chapter navigates the challenges inherent in the formation process for consecrated individuals, recognising the various inconveniences and deficiencies that beset it. Emphasising the formation as a crucible for fortifying divine vocations underscores the cultivation of solid personal attributes as a central objective. Within the Christian formation dimension, the discourse extends to the significance attributed to asceticism and sexuality, elucidating their pivotal roles in shaping the spiritual journey of consecrated individuals.

The fifth chapter ends with a detailed discussion on the formative structure in the initial and especially in the ongoing formation because it is directly connected to our topic of study, *fidelity and commitment*. Continuous formation is crucial in Indonesian religious life due to three main reasons. Firstly, contemporary culture and societal challenges obstruct unwavering religious commitment. Secondly, ongoing formation is necessary to adapt to cultural shifts and interpret modern contexts effectively. Lastly, evolving personal experiences require constant adjustment to maintain alignment with religious vocations and life goals. As one's consecration develops, three essential touchstones emerge such as: commitment to following Christ in poverty, chastity, and obedience; dedication to embodying Gospel values daily; and a steadfast commitment to serving others in the ecclesial mission. Chapter 5 discusses the need for thorough screening of candidates at admission stage, qualified formators, holistic formation programs, and addressing modern challenges such as digital age issues and ethnic biases in Indonesian formation.

Chapter 6 presents an empirical study on fidelity in religious living, evaluating the challenges and issues within religious formation in Indonesia. DICLSAL identifies three primary causes for the abandonment of consecrated life, such as: Lack of Authentic Spiritual Life, Loss of Sense of Belonging, and Affective Issues⁸²⁵. Although such factors are prevalent in Indonesia, our interviews revealed additional factors which call for focussed attention. The interview concurs that consecrated life encounters crises primarily in motivations, affectivity, conflicts, and religiosity, highlighting the urgency for attention and prioritisation in these areas. The problem of double life, mediocrity, practical atheism, and nesting among the consecrated person worsens the situation of fidelity and perseverance.

⁸²⁵ See the first part of *The Gift of Fidelity and the Joy of Perseverance* by Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (2 February 2020) 5-22.

Part III of the thesis deals with a creative formation paradigm for consecrated life. In Chapter 7, the findings and proposed recommendations highlight the importance given to the family and the childhood experiences of those who are consecrated, as revealed in the interviews. The interviews show that children often imitate their parents, and even minor incidents can profoundly impact a child's personality and life path. This emphasises that the maturity and happiness of today's consecrated individuals are often the result of the diligent efforts of their families. Authorities and leaders in the consecrated life are not imposing taskmasters but rather servants. Their primary responsibility is to create a friendly and collaborative environment where everyone feels supported by a network of helping hands.

During the interviews, it was stressed that having a strong sense of community and healthy relationships is essential when dealing with toxic community situations. When there are divisions or favouritism among members, it can weaken the bonds of love and brotherhood. Individuals can be strengthened in their calling and purpose by having a deep sense of humanity, creating a stronger connection better than familial ties. Our religious communities serve as platforms for manifesting the life of the triune God. Consecrated life is deeply rooted in the mystery of the Trinity. Just like Jesus' apostles, who had diverse personalities but were united for a crucial mission, community and leadership today should strive to unite people rather than divide them based on regional, clan, linguistic, or racial differences.

The thesis addresses the vital issue of the generation gap and highlights the urgent need to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between younger and older generations. This can be achieved through specialised training, facilitating the exchange of valuable experiences, and infusing youthful energy. During interviews, it was revealed that there is an alarming rise of *practical atheism* among consecrated members. This refers to a behaviour where religious individuals lack belief in the power of prayer and its benefits. Consequently, they lead a parasitic existence within religious institutes, negatively impacting the institute and its mission. To address the challenges of the twenty-first century, an integrated theology in consecrated life is necessary. Such a theology should foster an empowering spirituality that encourages active engagement rather than promoting withdrawal. Without this enlightened approach, confronting future difficulties creatively will be increasingly challenging in the latter half of the twenty-first century.

The thesis argues that holistic formation is essential in guiding individuals towards maturity, fidelity and commitment in their chosen path. It emphasises a comprehensive approach to formation for consecrated individuals,

which involves the harmonious development of various aspects of personality and identity. Every aspect of formation is deemed vital and requires careful nurturing and protection, just as every facet of a tree's growth is indispensable. Integral formation led us to three pivotal dimensions that have a profound significance in consecrated life: encountering God, following Jesus, and embodying the ideals of the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, the thesis highlights the significance of effective inculturation processes within religious institutes. These processes are essential for local candidates to fully engage in the formation process and deepen their relationship with Christ.

The study reminds us that the primary purpose of formation is to help those considering entering religious life and young religious who have just started their journey to understand and later embrace and deepen their religious identity. F.D. Martinez says, "The deepest crisis of religious life is the crisis of meaning"⁸²⁶. Numerous contemporary theologians concur that many consecrated individuals experience an identity crisis, potentially precipitating turmoil in their lives and vocations. Integral formation, a dynamic process involving the aspirant and the mentor, is underpinned by divine grace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Its objective is to cultivate a calling to consecrated life within the Church. A reassessment of existing formation methodologies is imperative, considering the perspectives of the candidate, the mentor, and the institution. Integral formation underscores the vital importance of guidance provided by formators, spiritual mentors, and seasoned members in passing on Christ's mission to younger generations, mirroring Jesus' interaction with his disciples on the road to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13,22)

Religious consecration is a path initiated by a divine call instead of a human decision. This path involves different modes of accompaniment, such as divine, personal, and communal, which empower individuals to wholeheartedly embrace and manifest the joy and fulfilment intrinsic to their calling. Nurturing a daily communion with the divine, embracing imperfections, and encountering God's grace are crucial in this journey. Candidates in formation need to pay attention to the Spirit's guidance to discern and respond appropriately to the signs of the times as they progress toward discipleship. Engaging genuinely in this process fosters personal growth and enhances one's quality of life. The formation, a collaborative endeavour involving the Spirit, the candidate, and the formator, shapes the consecrated life. The candidate's disposition has a significant impact on their development and maturity.

⁸²⁶ F.D. MARTINEZ, *Refounding Religious Life*, Manila 2000, 8.

The study concludes exploring the importance of the contributions of psychology in the formation process and how it is crucial for the ongoing support of individuals throughout their lifetime. For the benefit of both the candidate and the church, psychological interventions need to be incorporated into the formation process to ensure that candidates come to possess a solid spiritual foundation and emotional and human maturity. This is essential for productive collaboration within the congregation. Religious institutes and the Church should aim to incorporate both the human and spiritual elements to promote the comprehensive growth of candidates. The objective is to identify individuals who have been called to this vocation and exhibit genuine devotion to the mission of Christ (see *PDV* 35). Better psychological health can lead to better people who can lead better religious lives.

The study encourages that the formation process aims to assist candidates in cultivating authentic love for God and fellow human beings. The primary obstacle in this process is establishing love as the supreme criterion by which the genuineness of every action is evaluated. However, candidates' insecurities and concerns about their capabilities may impede their capacity to love, resulting in feelings of inferiority and self-doubt. Candidates unable to advance sufficiently through each developmental stage may encounter constraints in their ability to experience affection. Personality traits significantly influence the degree to which we can experience affection. Participants revealed in interviews that many encounter personality style issues that are not dealt with appropriately during formation. Therefore, the formation task entails creating an environment conducive to the flourishing of evangelical values and allowing them to influence one's conduct. To foster empathy and affection among participants, their instructors must model exemplary conduct. Many formators, particularly in religious contexts, tend to be strict taskmasters solely concerned with meeting expectations, oblivious to each candidate's unique qualities and situations. The last chapter insists that psychological maturity intertwines with spiritual maturity, influencing our ability to form relationships. Religious leaders and formators must prioritise their psychological development to guide others effectively. While psychology explores human behaviour comprehensively, divine calling transcends human disciplines. Psychology can aid in selecting and training individuals for religious life, but it's not the sole determinant of suitability.

The study emphasised the significance of discernment in consecrated life, as it determines quality and perseverance amidst the challenges of today's world. Navigating complexities, especially following Jesus Christ, underscores the call to love in daily decisions. Vocational discernment transforms

choices into steps towards ultimate joy. Proper formation and prayer are crucial for accurate discernment and alignment with one's vocation, impacting life quality. True discernment involves identifying divine calls, even if they don't align with personal inclinations.

In the current world of consecrated life, there is a noticeable trend of people leaving, both after their formation and in old age, across different cultures and locations. This happens because of emotional crises and disillusionment with inauthentic communal living experiences. Sometimes, the values preached do not align with practical realities, and excessive activities hinder deep spiritual growth. The isolation of young individuals in mostly older communities also worsens the issue. Despite many young people's natural inclination towards transcendence and Gospel values, rigid structures of consecrated life often obstruct genuine transformation. This highlights the complexity of human nature and the necessity for adaptable approaches to tackle contemporary challenges in consecrated life worldwide. As a congregation evolves, it may shift its focus from its charismatic beginnings to primarily becoming a social entity. During this transition, the emphasis changes from achieving goals to following rules, from a spiritual atmosphere to a structural organisation. Sacrifice is replaced by convenience, enthusiasm by institutional mechanics, idealism by cynicism, radicalism by compromise, and growth by consolidation. It is the duty of the consecrated individuals to become the living fifth gospels that present Jesus to the world.

In conclusion, there are still important areas that need to be explored to advance the consecrated life and support those who have committed to it. Firstly, there is an urgent need for more research within the Indonesian context to create a collaborative relationship between religious institutions and the families of consecrated individuals. This will help promote mutual understanding and support and strengthen the commitment of those who have consecrated themselves. Secondly, the formation program needs to be updated and expanded to include new developments and expertise from diverse fields. By integrating modern perspectives, the formation program can become more comprehensive and inclusive, and help consecrated individuals thrive in their vocation.

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APPENDIX – A

Certificate of Recommendation



Pontificia Università Lateranense
ISTITUTO DI TEOLOGIA DELLA VITA CONSACRATA
«CLARETIANUM»

Certificate of Recommendation

I, the undersigned, Prof. Babu Sebastian, Associate Professor at Claretianum – Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life of the Pontifical Lateran University and at the Institute of Psychology of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, certify that Sabu George, is a doctoral student at Claretianum – Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life and I am the Moderator of his doctoral thesis on “*Fidelity in Religious Living: An Evaluative and Empirical Study on Religious Formation in Indonesia*”

In witness, I hereby issue this certificate to confirm the above

Done in Rome on 20/04/2021

Do not hesitate to contact me if more information or clarification is needed.

Prof. Babu Sebastian

Claretianum – Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life

Largo Lorenzo Mossa, 4

Roma, 00165 Italia

babucmf@gmail.com

APPENDIX – B

Letter of Recommendation



Pontificia Università Lateranense
ISTITUTO DI TEOLOGIA DELLA VITA CONSACRATA
«CLARETIANUM»

Letter of Recommendation for Sabu George

To whom it may concern,

This is to confirm that Fr. Sabu George is a doctoral student at Claretianum – Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life of the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome. The Programme of doctoral studies lasts three years and requires doctoral students to do scientific research.

The doctoral research project of Fr. Sabu George on *“Fidelity in Religious Living: An Evaluative and Empirical Study on Religious Formation in Indonesia”* is supervised by me, Prof. Babu Sebastian, Associate Professor at Claretianum – Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life of the Pontifical Lateran University and at the Institute of Psychology of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

The purpose of the research is to investigate the causes of difficulties experienced in living a life of fidelity and commitment in consecrated life in the context of Indonesia, with application to formation of the religious and aims to offer possible recommendations based on the findings.

The findings of this research study will be most helpful to understand the various factors which play a crucial role in causing difficulties for the consecrated persons to remain faithful and committed in their religious vocation. Furthermore, the results would help recommend suitable modifications in the formative intervention methods and programmes of various religious institutes, both in Indonesia and elsewhere so that consecrated persons are able to live their lives with greater joy, commitment, and fidelity.

For his research, Fr. Sabu George needs to gather qualitative empirical data by interviewing consecrated persons who are: superiors, formators, perpetually professed members, and those who left consecrated life in the past 5 years.

All materials and documentations will be used exclusively for academic purposes. It would therefore be very much appreciated if you kindly assist him in this regard. For any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Babu Sebastian

Claretianum – Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life

Largo Lorenzo Mossa, 4, Roma, 00165 Italia

babucmf@gmail.com

Done in Rome on 20/04/2021

APPENDIX – C

Categories of Samples and Questions Used in the Interviews

In this work, we propose to conduct a small qualitative research study using the interview method to investigate the causes of difficulties experienced in living a life of fidelity and commitment in consecrated life in the context of Indonesia, with application to formation of the religious and aims to offer possible recommendations based on the findings.

This method uses four kinds of samples to draw the relevant data, which can help formulate the findings of this research study. 1. Consecrated persons at the General or Provincial Government level. 2. Members of Religious congregations of both men and women who are finally professed. 3. Those who left consecrated life within the past five years after their final vows. 4. Formators.

Since Indonesia is now home to many religious congregations and orders, we will focus only on a few of the numerically bigger and important religious institutes present in the country for this study. We will only collect information about the religious institutes relating to the past five years to focus on our findings' most recent and accurate data. I assure the study participants that all information acquired through this method will be strictly confidential and meant only for academic research.

Categories of Interview Participants

1. Consecrated persons at the General or Provincial Government Level
2. Members of Religious Congregations of both men and women
3. Those who left the consecrated life within the past five years after their final vows
4. Formators

Group A: Consecrated Persons at the General or Provincial Government Level

1. How do you feel about the members of your congregation in general? Are they joyful and committed religious?
2. Do you think your congregation's programme is good enough for the candidates to grow in fidelity to their vocation and mission?
3. What are your opinions about the ongoing formation and special programmes your religious institute offers its members?
4. How do you implement the psycho-spiritual formation of the members in your formation programme?
5. How effective is the vocation promotion in your religious institute? How favourable is the situation right now?
6. How many members have left the congregation after their perpetual profession within the past five years?
7. What, in your opinion, could be the reason why they left the consecrated life?
8. What kind of relationship does your institute maintain with those who have left it?
9. Do you think that consecrated persons' use of electronic and social media affects their ability to live in perseverance and fidelity?

Group B: Members of Religious Congregations of Both Men and Women

1. Are you a happy religious? If not, why/ if yes, why?
2. Are your family, friends, and relatives happy that you are a religious?
3. What is your opinion regarding your religious institute's initial and ongoing formation?
4. Does the spiritual and community life offered in your religious institute help you to be a faithful and happy religious?
5. How do you evaluate your personal and community prayer life? Does it help you be closer to the Lord who called you?
6. What are the major obstacles or challenges to living a life of fidelity and joyful perseverance, in your opinion?
7. What are the priorities for the upbringing of faithful and committed religious people, according to you?
8. How did electronic and social media influence you to live faithfully and persevere in your consecrated life?
9. What changes do you propose in your religious institute's formation programme to encourage the members to be more faithful and joyful in their commitment?

Group C: Members Who Left the Congregation after the Final Vows within the Past Five Years.

1. How long has it been since you left the religious institute?
2. Are you happy and content with your life now?
3. What are the main reasons you left the religious institute?
4. Were you happy with the formation you received, and the community structures you lived in the religious institute?
5. Do you think the formation and other community dynamics you underwent helped you properly discern your life now?
6. What suggestions do you have from your life experience for the consecrated persons to be faithful and joyful?
7. Did electronic and social media influence your decision to leave the religious order?
8. While you were a member of the Institute, did you experience relational difficulties?
9. How is your relationship now with the religious institute you left? Do you get any assistance from them?

Group D: Formators (Priests, Nuns and Brothers)

1. Are you happy and satisfied with your role as a formator?
2. What are the major struggles you encounter in your position as a formator?
3. Have you received any specialised training or undergone a specific programme to be a formator?
4. What are the main challenges of the contemporary formation scenario?
5. Do you believe that the formation process assists candidates in maintaining fidelity and perseverance in consecrated life?
6. What are the primary qualifications or requirements needed for someone to be an effective formator?
7. What are the essential elements needed for formation to be effective?
8. What are the main reasons people leave consecrated life in the present situation, according to you?
9. What do you propose to make the formation of candidates better than the present situation?

APPENDIX – D

Letter to Superiors Requesting Recommendation of Participants

Date:

Address:

Salutation:

I am Sabu George, a Catholic priest from the Order of Claretian Missionaries; I am currently a doctoral candidate at Claretianum – Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life of the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome. My doctoral research is on the topic *Fidelity in Religious Living: An Evaluative and Empirical Study on Religious Formation in Indonesia*.

I am approaching you, (Name), to request that you recommend one or more participant(s) within your community or in your congregation who might be an ideal candidate(s) for the research interview. For the profile of an ideal candidate for my study, please keep in mind the following question: *In your opinion, is he or she sufficiently authentic in his or her religious and spiritual practices, an authenticity evidenced in the quality of his or her life?*

I would greatly appreciate it if you could take some time to reflect on the request and propose a candidate or two for my research interview. If you need any further information, don't hesitate to get in touch with me by phone: +62 82289004875 or by e-mail: sabumandala@gmail.com

Thanking you,

Fraternally,

Sabu George, CMF

APPENDIX – E

Sample Letter to the Participants Selected for the Study

Date

Address

Thank you for your interest and willingness to participate in my research about Fidelity in Consecrated Living in the context of Indonesia. I am writing to confirm your selection for the study.

As per our telephone conversation, I will meet you at (place) on (day, date, and time). You will find enclosed with this letter a copy of the informed consent that details your role and rights in the study and its benefits and liabilities. Please know that I am interested in exploring your lived experience of fidelity as a consecrated person. The research aims to identify the elements that favour the lived experience of fidelity and joyful perseverance of consecrated persons and the factors that positively and negatively affect fidelity. Hence, I invite you to share your experience with me honestly and sincerely. I will audio record our conversation to analyse the content faithfully. If, at a later point, I have some clarifications to seek on some part of our conversation, I will contact you for a follow-up telephonic interview of 15-30 minutes. During the data analysis, I will share the transcript with you so that you can verify that I have faithfully captured your experience. Your participation in the study is anonymous to protect your identity and respect confidentiality.

I am delighted that you will be part of my research and I look forward to listening to you. I hope our collaboration will provide rich insights that may be beneficial to others in their consecrated journey. Once again, I thank you for your willingness to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Sabu George CMF
(Research Scholar)

APPENDIX – F

Interview Protocol

I. Before the Interview

1. Engage in 10 minutes of centering prayer/mindfulness meditation to create recollected silence within and a mental state for focused awareness.
2. Review the protocol and the schedule to ensure all elements are in place.
3. Greet the participant warmly and build rapport. Facilitate a relaxed and positive environment for the participant.
4. Brief the participant about the purpose of the interview in simple terms. Discuss the Informed Consent. Offer clarifications, if any. Have the informed consent form signed by both the participant and the researcher.
5. Make sure the audio recorder is working correctly.
6. Place the audio recorder centrally to facilitate optimal quality of recording.

II. During the Interview

1. Begin with a casual conversation which puts the participant at ease before proceeding to the primary research question.
2. Use probe questions when necessary according to the ebb and flow of the conversation.
3. Note down relevant and significant para verbal and nonverbal communication.
4. Briefly note down the researcher's significant transferential reactions.
5. Throughout the interview, use simple questions and maintain a conversational style.
6. Conclude the interview when both the researcher and the participant feel a subjective sense of data saturation and the process's closure.

III. After the Interview

1. Thank the participant.
2. Carefully collect all the materials for the interview.

APPENDIX – G

Contract Form for the Transcriber

Title of the Study: *Fidelity in Religious Living: An Evaluative Study on Religious Formation Today in the Context of Religious Life in Indonesia*

Researcher: Sabu George, Research Scholar at Claretianum – Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life of the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.

1. I, understand that Sabu George seeks my expertise to be an official transcriber for the interviews undertaken by him towards the study mentioned above.

2. I realize that it is my task to faithfully, completely, and professionally transcribe the content of the interview recorded in the audio files that will be handed over to me by the researcher. In case of any error in transcription, I shall correct it without any pre-condition.

3. I am aware that the research study operates within temporal deadlines, and hence, I am expected to abide by the mutually agreed upon timeframe for the transcription. As per the mutual agreement, I promise to complete and submit the transcription of each interview within two weeks from the date of its reception at my end.

4. I understand that my services end when I submit the complete and accurate transcript to the researcher. Once the researcher is satisfied with my transcription and asks me to delete hard and softcopies of the records from my database, I shall do so with immediate effect.

5. In case I need to withdraw my services during the contract phase, I shall do so with an advance notice of 3 weeks (except in the case of a genuine emergency). Should I withdraw, it shall be my responsibility to provide the researcher with a

substitute transcriber professionally and ethically committed, unless the researcher releases me from such obligation.

6. I understand that I am bound by the terms of confidentiality and ethics mandated by the research study, and hence, the identification details of the interviewee will not be present in the data given to me. However, should I perchance recognize the identity of the interviewee, I shall respect the privacy of the interviewee and confidentiality of the content.

7. I am aware that I may choose to do the transcription on a pro bono basis or for a mutually agreed upon financial compensation.

8. I realize that I am free to contact Dr. Babu Sebastian CMF (First Moderator of the research) at *babucmf@gmail.com* in order to clarify any significant concern regarding this study and my rights as a transcriber. I may also contact Claretianum – Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life of the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome at the given address (Claretianum, Largo Lorenzo Mossa, 4- 00165 Roma) with any question or concern regarding the research.

I have read and reviewed the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent to offer my services as a translator to the study.

Name and Signature of the Translator

Date

Name and Signature of the Researcher

Date

APPENDIX – H

Informed Consent Form by the Participant

***Title of the Study:** Fidelity in Religious Living: An Evaluative and Empirical Study on Religious in Indonesia*

***Researcher:** Sabu George, a doctoral candidate at Claretianum – Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life of the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.*

1. I agree to allow the researcher, Sabu George, to interview me on a series of questions regarding my experience of Fidelity in Religious Living, my life and relationships.
2. I understand that the researcher will brief me on the nature and purpose of the study and the interview without prejudice to the integrity of the research. After I clarify my doubts and sign this consent form, I agree to participate in a 20–30-minutes interview which may be audio-recorded for the purpose of analysis. If deemed necessary by the researcher, I shall participate in a 15-20 minutes follow-up interview over telephone, in order to further clarify some aspects of the content of the first interview. I will receive a copy of the transcript of the interview so that I can verify its accuracy and comprehensiveness.
3. Although there is no direct risk involved in this study, I understand that some questions may cause psychological discomfort. I realize that I am free to request a pause during the interview, continue the interview later, or opt out of the interview permanently at any point in the study. If necessary, the researcher will provide me with referrals for psychotherapy, the cost of which shall be my own responsibility.
4. I am aware that participation in this study is voluntary, and I can decide to refuse to answer any question during the interview or opt out of the study at any point. I also understand that the researcher may decide not to interview me or drop my interview from the final analysis. Should I choose to withdraw, the researcher will delete the audio record files and the transcripts of my interview and inform me of the same in writing.

5. I understand that I can choose a pseudonym or permit the researcher to assign a pseudonym to me to disguise my identity, protect privacy, ensure confidentiality.

6. I realize that the researcher will make use of the services of a transcriber to transcribe the audio-recording. I am aware that the transcriber will not know my identity and will be committed to respecting confidentiality.

7. I understand that the interview is for the purpose of academic research. The benefit I may gain from participating in the study is an opportunity to reflect on my experience and deepen my insights into it. I realize that there will be no material compensation of any kind for my participation in the study.

8. I understand that the researcher will confidentially preserve the interview records of this study for three years for the purpose of any ethical questions or research verifications on its procedure. The records will not include any identification details about me. The records will be kept in a locked file and any electronic record will be password-protected.

9. I consent to the use of the interview material for any scholarly publication related to and emerging from the research study. I understand that for the use of the interview content for any other publication, the researcher will seek explicit written permission from me. I may choose to grant or deny permission for the same. There will be no published material that will allow readers to identify me.

10. The researcher has discussed with me the time and location of the interview. I am aware that I can contact the researcher for purposes related to the interview by calling +62 82289004875 (9:00 AM - 9:00 PM, Monday-Saturday).

11. I realize that I am free to contact Dr. Babu Sebastian CMF (First Moderator of the research) at *babucmf@gmail.com* in order to clarify any significant concern regarding this study and my rights as a participant. I may also contact Claretianum – Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life of the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome at the given address (Claretianum, Largo Lorenzo Mossa, 4- 00165 Roma) with any question or concern regarding the research.

I have read and reviewed the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent to participate in the study.

Name and Signature of the Participant

Date

Name and Signature of the Researcher

Date

APPENDIX – I

Interview Transcript Approval Form by the Participant

Research Topic: Fidelity in Religious Living: An Evaluative and Empirical Study on Religious Formation in Indonesia

Researcher: Sabu George, doctoral candidate at Claretianum – Pontifical Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life of the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT APPROVAL

I have reviewed the transcript of the interview I gave to the Researcher for the study mentioned above. I attest that the transcript is an authentic and complete text of my interview and faithfully captures what I shared during the interview.

Hereby, I approve the text of the Transcript.

Name of the Participant.....

Signature.....

Date

APPENDIX – J

Researcher's Statement of Positionality/Personal Reflection

This personal reflection is based on the background and expertise that I brought to the research which was both an asset and a challenge in this study. The study was emotionally and academically challenging due to the personal sharing of how some consecrated individuals who strive to maintain their fidelity and commitment despite facing enormous difficulties. Upon completing the study, I can say that I have learned a lot and experienced personal growth and academic competence in my research area.

I want to mention that several aspects of my life may have impacted this study, including the research topic, method, analysis, and interpretations of the study. I have worked as a Claretian Missionary in Indonesia for over twenty years. During this time, I have worked in formation and administration in the congregation and at diocesan levels. Becoming a religious missionary has been a dream of mine since childhood, and it came true through the congregation of Claretian Missionaries. I owe my vocation and the spirit that remains with me today to my parents and family. Their prayers and support have strengthened me when I felt weak and exhausted. Their prayers have enabled me to remain faithful and committed as a consecrated person.

As a formator, I have often been surprised when very active and talented individuals in consecrated life leave due to lack of support and encouragement from their parents and family in the context of Indonesia. Due to financial constraints or superstitious beliefs, families sometimes ask such religious to go against their will and the personal call they have received. As a formator and religious, it pains me to see this happening and makes me wonder how God works among us. With years of experience in formation, I have also felt sad when excellent and talented candidates leave seminaries due to a lack of attention to formative guidance or the absence of accompaniment

from formators. On two occasions, those who left shared that they still felt the call to consecrated life after some years.

Sometimes, even those who have dedicated themselves to religious life can make unwise decisions due to impulsiveness or from being under the influence of by their emotions. During the interview, I heard people share that they found it difficult to heal from the pain they experienced while they were still part of their religious community. Stories of immature decisions from superiors and the difficulties in community life were numerous among the participants. It is not uncommon to hear stories of those who are meant to foster and encourage religious life yet ending up hindering and suppressing it. Such experiences make it difficult to be emotionally detached or indifferent to the suffering of the participants I have interviewed.

As the vicar in charge of the religious affairs in the diocese, I often deal with matters that sadden me. It is disheartening to hear stories of injustice done to people, especially when those who are supposed to be the icons of justice and brotherhood not only lack it but become hard-hearted individuals. I must acknowledge that my religious background may have influenced positively some of the participants to share their experiences more openly, and my personal life experiences may have led to a biased judgment in this study. However, my desire and passion to do something for the consecrated life motivated me to conduct this interview in as much a detached and professional manner as possible. I intend to utilise every opportunity to revive and refresh the consecrated life so that such unfortunate situations involving difficulties with fidelity and commitment do not arise in the future or are at least reduced to the minimum. I am convinced my study will facilitate awareness among the consecrated persons, superiors, and formators to do what is needed for a holistic and integral formation.

During the interviews, I made sure to be very careful when questioning the participants so as not to cause any psychological harm while they recounted and shared their experiences. I maintained a calm and empathetic attitude, being fully present and communicating to the participants that they were important to me and that I cared about them. From the beginning, I committed to pray for this work and offered daily prayers for each participant. I also shared some of the interview content with my mentor and professor Fr. Babu Sebastian who is a psychologist because some of the topics discussed were disturbing to me as well. I mentioned earlier that my motivation to continue with this study is rooted in my belief that it can positively impact the lives of

consecrated individuals. By becoming more creative and enthusiastic, they can embody fidelity and commitment to a greater extent.

Although my doctoral studies on fidelity and commitment were challenging, they helped me develop a more profound sensitivity towards other consecrated individuals, making me a better listener and more available to others. Through the interviews, I gained a deeper understanding of the various aspects of consecrated life and felt a personal need for renewal and refreshment. This experience also taught me how to organise my thoughts and ideas and the value of planning and setting personal deadlines, contributing to my intellectual and emotional growth. Some participants' firm reliance on their faith in God challenged me, but it also helped to strengthen my faith and vocation.