

## **CHAPTER V**

### **THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE BROTHER: AN APOSTOLIC AND COMMUNITY LIFE**

**16** The religious life of the Brother represents one of the possible ways of living in the Church as a layman. The religious state belongs inseparably to the life and the holiness of the Church, but not to its hierarchical structure (LG 44); "It is not an intermediate state between being a cleric and a lay person; rather, the faithful of Christ are called from both of these states of life so that in the Church they may enjoy this particular gift and each in his or her own way can be of service to the saving mission of the Church" (LG 44).

#### **RELIGIOUS CONSECRATION: A CONTINUATION OF THE LIFE OF BAPTISM WITH SPECIFIC NEW ELEMENTS**

##### **Rooted in Baptism**

**17** 1 - As with all forms of the Christian life, the religious life is rooted in baptism and the other sacraments of initiation. The call to religious profession invites the Brother, first of all, to deepen in faith his understanding of the richness and the demands of the life of baptism.

2 - There is richness in the free gift of God, who rescues us from the death of sin and introduces us to the new life of the risen Lord, incorporating us into Christ as prophet, priest, and king, and makes us members of the people of the New Covenant, as it journeys toward the new Jerusalem under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

3 - The demands of baptism evoke the free response of baptized persons who undertake to build their lives on faith in Jesus Christ and on the hope of his second coming. The baptized person chooses to make adherence in love to the will of the Father the rule of one's own life, and to put one's intelligence, emotional resources, and physical powers at the service of one's brothers and sisters in order to accomplish God's loving plan for them. Thus, as with all forms of the Christian life, the religious life of the Brother is directed by the ideal of the Gospel.

4 - As with all Christian living, the religious life of the Brother is apostolic. The vocation of everyone to the apostolate is rooted in the mission that the Son has received from the Father and that he communicates unceasingly, through the Spirit, to the members of his body. The goal of the apostolate is to bring God to human persons and human persons to God. It requires a profound awareness of our participation in the life of God and our responsibility for the fulfillment of God's plan, together with a realistic sensitivity to the needs of the world, to which all the members of the Church are sent.

##### **New Elements in Religious Life**

**18** 1 - As a consecrated layman in the religious life, the Brother is called, by leading a life more conformed to the risen Christ, to show forth, in complementarity to other states of life, the richness of the new life into which he entered by receiving the sacraments of initiation. The Brothers hear this call with joy and thanksgiving,

convinced that this personal invitation is worth the gift of his whole life to God and to God's service. Religious consecration, therefore, implies something that is new.

2 - There is something new in the particular vocation by which the Brother is invited by Christ to follow him in a special way. There is something new in his free response in faith to this call from the Spirit, who is the source of the Brother's vocation and without whom it could not survive.

3 - There is something new in a lifestyle that is visibly fashioned according to the renewed world revealed in Jesus Christ. It is notably through voluntary celibacy, vowed through love, that this lifestyle makes more evident the covenant that unites Jesus Christ and his Church. This implies also a special kind of presence to others, which is defined both by the depth of charity in everything the Brother undertakes and, at the same time, by a certain distance from the things the world holds dear, an attitude dictated not by any contempt for the world, but rather by a desire to remind the world of its transitory character, that this world is not an absolute.

4 - There is something new in the way the Brother exercises the universal priesthood. The public profession of the religious vows, especially the vow of obedience made in union with the dispositions of Christ in his paschal sacrifice, constitutes an act of worship, a special gift to God of all that one is and all that one does.

5 - There is something new in a community life which manifests concretely the universal brotherhood inaugurated by Christ. This community is built not only on natural ties, but also on the power of the Holy Spirit, the living principle of love between human persons.

6 - There is something new in what concerns the mission and the apostolic spirit. The work that the Church entrusts to the Brothers to be carried out in her name (PC 8) motivates them to serve humankind, to construct a world that is more liveable, and so to prepare for building the City of God in its definitive form. Religious consecration frees the Brother to be more totally available for this work; it makes his work more effective, even as it makes greater demands on him in the area of his apostolate.

7 - There is something new in a decisive choice, undertaken without any thought of return, by which the Brother bases his whole existence on Jesus Christ served in his members. In consecrating to Christ all the strength he presently possesses, the Brother abandons himself to Christ for the rest of his earthly life, giving himself up to Christ's love for better or worse. Each day, especially during the eucharistic celebration where the offering of the Lord himself is renewed, the Brother draws therefrom the source of new youth and vigor.

8 - It is necessary therefore to be careful that the consecration of the Brothers to God and to God's people is authentic. In discerning vocations, it is important to be attentive to apostolic criteria. Suitability for the Brother's apostolic vocation demands that the candidate desire to consecrate his life to the service of the young because he has become aware of what is needed for their salvation. It is fitting therefore that we avoid inducements based on emotion or motivation derived solely from an interest in the work alone, a desire for security, or a false idea of the religious life.

## THE COMMUNITY ASPECT OF THE BROTHER'S LIFE

### Structures Are for Persons

**19** 1 - The Brother actualizes his total consecration to God and to God's service within the context of the Church when he makes his commitment in the Institute. Thus the Institute becomes the instrument of the religious consecration of its members: the public character of the profession received by the Superior manifests one of the ecclesial dimensions of the religious life. In the unceasing dialogue between the Lord who calls and the person who responds, the Institute holds an essential place. When the Brother enters religion to seek God and to serve God's Kingdom, he expects that the congregation will aid him in this search and in this service. The Institute then ought to use every effort to help each Brother in his personal journey.

2 - Thus rules and structures are not established simply for their own preservation, but their purpose is the service of persons. They ought to guarantee to each Brother the freedom to live his relationship to God in a vision of faith, hope, and love, continually renewed in an authentic life of personal and community prayer. From this perspective, rules and structures of government ought to serve as reminders, without minimizing them, of the renunciation and forgetfulness of self that community life in fact demands. The Brother in his turn will be concerned for the common good through respect for these rules and structures, convinced that these too are a necessary part of the religious life.

### Community Spirit and Community Life

**20** 1 - In consecrating himself to the service of God in the Institute, the Brother associates himself with other baptized persons who have responded to the same call of Christ; it is in community that he undertakes to live a lifestyle according to the new world announced by Christ. At the beginning of the Institute, the vows pronounced by the Brothers showed that their personal consecration to God was inseparable from their commitment in a community established for a specific service of the Kingdom of God. In our day, the vow formula underscores with special vigor the will to associate together. This invites the Institute to focus more sharply by reflection and to make evident in practice the community character of the religious consecration of its members and of the vows that give it expression.

2 - In community life the Brother can find his personal fulfillment according to the divine plan inherent in human nature, for one can come to self-actualization and completeness only to the extent that one opens oneself to others. Thus "God has willed that all people should constitute one family and treat one another as brothers and sisters" (GS 24).

3 - The community life of the Brothers, each of whom has responded to a special call of the Lord, by its very nature manifests the truth that God chooses persons "not just as individuals but as members of a community, and that it has pleased God to save and to sanctify humans not merely in isolation apart from mutual ties, but to make of them a people which acknowledges God in truth and serves God in holiness" (GS 32; LG 2).

4 - The Brother meets God to whom he has consecrated himself when he opens himself to his Brothers in community. In listening to them in faith, he hears God speaking to him; in loving and serving them, he loves and serves Christ; in seeking the common good and in submitting for this purpose to the superior, whose function is to make clear what is for the good of all, it is really God whom the Brother obeys.

5 - In community the Brothers gather together to listen to God. They help each other to be attentive to the challenges that the Lord addresses to them through the mediation of the succession of daily events. Together they examine the quality of their response and strive to remedy any apparent inadequacies.

6 - In community the Brothers speak together of God and God's Kingdom. True community life gives rise spontaneously to interchanges concerning the One who gives full meaning to the existence of each Brother, as also to the apostolic commitments and educational responsibilities of each one.

7 - Times of work as well as of leisure are occasions when the authenticity of the spirit of the community becomes evident. The apostolic activity of the Brother is not an individual occupation carried on independently of the community. It is through the community that the Brother participates actively, according to his aptitudes, in the human and Christian educational work of the Institute.

8 - For this reason, community dialogue in all its forms emerges as a privileged instrument of individual conversion and fraternal union. Each member ought to contribute to the practical conclusions that will result. The superior here finds one of his important roles, namely, to bring the community to a decision and then to judge the authenticity of the decision in the light of the nature and mission of the Institute.

9 - In community the Brothers pray together to the God to whom they have consecrated themselves. Together they invoke the Spirit to be poured forth, they thank the Father for the love God has manifest in Jesus Christ, and they praise the Father for the greatness and goodness that shines forth in all God's creation, in history, in human achievement, in the life of the Church, in the Virgin Mary, and in the saints.

10 - The Eucharist which the Brothers regularly celebrate together is at once the source and summit, each day renewed, of the community life of consecrated persons, a life that has Christ for its foundation as well as its destiny. Christ is present in the Eucharistic assembly of the Brothers; his word to which they listen together reunites them more intimately in faith. Through him and with him they raise to the Father their thanksgiving and their supplication; in and through Christ's sacrifice, they make an offering of themselves and the work that they carry out for his Kingdom; from communion with his glorified body they draw a renewal of fraternal love as well as a new readiness to serve the youth to whom they are sent.

### **The Community of the Institute**

**21** The community of the Brothers extends beyond the limits of the house where they live. The community embraces the District and the whole Institute; the Brothers

are aware of their solidarity with those among them who are suffering, who are undergoing persecution, or who are seeing their work destroyed by outside forces.

## **APOSTOLIC PURPOSE**

### **A Vocation That Is Essentially Apostolic**

**22** 1 - All that has been said so far is not enough to define the religious person that the Brother is. The reason why the Institute exists in the Church is to work for the salvation of persons and in that way procure the glory of God. In a single movement, Saint John Baptist de La Salle established the Brothers as apostles and as religious: by making the schoolteachers aware of the apostolic thrust of their professional work, he led them to offer themselves up totally to the Lord who employed them in his service. The spirit of the Institute is one spirit, although it is translated into practice by a twofold movement: the faith that makes the Brothers attentive to the design of God for the world blossoms into zeal which sustains and continuously rejuvenates the commitment of the Brother to the service of the members of Christ.

2 - The purpose of the Institute is apostolic and, for its members, apostolic activity belongs to the very nature of religious life (PC 8).

3 - The missionary urge and apostolic love, by which the Brothers "strive to associate themselves with the work of redemption and to spread the Kingdom of God" (PC 5), is an integral part of the consecration of the Brother to God. The renewal of the Institute requires that all its members reanimate in themselves the spirit of zeal in the light of the Council and the teaching of the Founder, especially in his Meditations for the Time of Retreat.

4 - The reason why the Brother has been the object of a special call from God is that he become a more dedicated worker in God's loving plan to bring back the children of God who have gone astray. The religious consecration of the Brother that associates him more closely with Christ makes him participate more fully in Christ's mission, since "the Son of Man is come to seek and save that which was lost." Entry into the Institute unites the Brother more fully to the Church and so ought to lead him to share more fully in its missionary zeal. The reason why the Brothers associate together and live in community is that they stimulate and help one another to procure the glory of God through the salvation of people.

### **The Needs of Youth**

**23** 1 - The Institute will find in its attentiveness to the needs of young people with regard to their salvation an indispensable source of the renewal to which the Council invites it.

2 - These needs are not less urgent in our world today than they were at the time of the foundation of the Institute. The youth of today are the hope of the Church, but they are also one of its major sources of concern.

3 - The community effort to identify and understand the challenges of the young

people of our time and to respond by generous apostolic commitments ought to be given top priority in the objectives of the Institute.

### **A Missionary Vocation**

**24** 1 - In order to respond to a major need in our world, the Church is renewing her awareness of her missionary vocation and the ways to accomplish it. She wishes to announce the Gospel to all; she seeks to be present to all civilizations. To affirm today the apostolic purpose of the Institute is also to proclaim its missionary character. The Institute is not, of course, exclusively missionary, but it has been established "to bring the means of salvation within reach" (MTR 193.3) of young people who lack an education and whose evangelization has been neglected.

2 - The original intent that brought the Institute into existence has to be translated today into a generous missionary spirit. The Council invites us to take this direction resolutely (PC 20). As with all other institutes engaged in the active life, now is the time "sincerely to ask ourselves before God whether we cannot broaden our activity with a view to expanding God's Kingdom among the nations," at the expense of "leaving to others certain of our ministries" (AG 40).

## **INTEGRATION OF RELIGIOUS CONSECRATION, COMMUNITY LIFE, AND APOSTOLIC MISSION**

### **Integration under the Sign of the Apostolate**

**25** 1 - Far from being in opposition to religious life or detrimental to it, the exercise of an apostolate is for the Brother an expression of his consecration to the Lord and a motive to live it well. The apostolic tasks of the Brother are religious because they are willed by God; in giving of himself courageously to them the Brother accomplishes the will of the Lord who sends him. These tasks are religious because the Brother finds Christ in those to whom he has been sent, above all in the poor; they are religious because they realize the divine plan as they contribute to the betterment of persons and prepare them to receive the Good News of salvation; these tasks are religious because they have for their ultimate purpose to prepare for God a People who will be adorers in spirit and in truth.

2 - The Brother ought to have no fear of losing God when he goes among the young "to serve them" (Mk 10, 45), nor of being estranged from Christ "when he spends himself for others" (2 Cor 12, 15). On the contrary, the exercise of an authentic apostolate is a source for him of spiritual growth; in listening to others, he disposes himself to listen more faithfully to the Word of God; in forgetting himself, he allows Christ to grow in him; in spending himself disinterestedly without counting the cost, he creates in himself the heart of a poor person. When apostolic work degenerates into empty restlessness or into self-seeking, inevitably one loses the ability to see the call of God in the real needs of the world, and there is no longer a reason to give oneself to prayer or to turn constantly to God who alone is able to build God's Kingdom.

3 - Accordingly, throughout the entire period of formation it is of the utmost importance that the apostolic spirit be awakened, discerned, and developed. To this

end, an apostolic dimension should be introduced throughout the entire process of formation, whether in formal instruction or in apostolic activities that then become the subject for community review. In like manner, formation to a life of prayer should be such that the thrust toward God be clarified and purified by an apostolic spirit, while at the same time that spirit awakens and sustains the impulse toward God.

4 - Since the Brothers are in association to work together, the community is constituted above all in the pursuit of a common objective, namely the Kingdom of God. Communities are renewed, the sharing of minds and hearts becomes more intimate, the need for prayer and the life of faith takes on new life to the extent that the members become more aware of their apostolic mission. Fidelity to the common search to serve God's plan through the needs of people builds day after day a community capable of responding appropriately. At the same time, this common effort to respond strengthens the community and enables it to see more clearly the signs of God present in the world. Furthermore, when everything is referred back to the common mission, this makes it possible to overcome the risks of the communities becoming closed in on themselves, of suffocating in the pettiness of small internal problems which threaten even the most regular communities when they are not constantly renewed by an apostolic spirit.

### **Integration in the Renewal of Consecration**

**26** 1 - Conversely, the consecration and the religious life of the Brother stimulate and sustain his apostolate. By his vows, and above all by his celibacy, the Brother becomes more available to serve others better, especially by a more unconditional dedication to the poor. If this detachment is correctly understood and lived out, thanks to a formation that has been open and positive, it will not involve either a lack of realism or affective maturity, neither will it seem in any way to be some sort of self-satisfied complacency or a fearful turning in on oneself. Rather it will assure the possibility of living in a way that is evangelical and community-oriented. Because of this availability and within the limits of his personal talents, the Brother is oriented especially to a leadership role in the service of the Christian laity, helping them to recognize and to assume their responsibilities, both human and Christian.

2 - Within the People of God, the Brothers are called, as are other religious, to be witnesses in a specific way. They are signs of the action and the presence of the Spirit of God in our history; signs that the new world inaugurated by Christ and announced by the teaching of the Church is a present reality; signs of the power of the risen Christ that grants to sinners the ability to respond to the Lord who calls them. This they do, without destroying their human dignity, their love for life on earth, or their readiness to serve others, by willingly making sacrifices that make them less self-centered in their activities, more all-embracing in their charity, more available in their service (LG 44).

3 - Such a witness is more necessary than ever in our scientific and technological world, where people in some way have to touch a thing in order to believe in its reality. It is advantageous that this witness be given by those who are not estranged by their consecration from participating in the life of the world. In addition, the Brother is called, at the very heart of his educational activity, to bear the witness of his total consecration to God. In this way, far from disparaging the things of this world, the

Brother makes clear that their value is founded in their divine origin and their eschatological destiny. The Brother's witness, then, is a kind of invitation to a continual transcending of all that is temporal.

4 - True community life constitutes a living sign of the central reality that it is the mission of the Brothers to announce. The love that God has shown to humanity in Jesus Christ becomes the principle of union among persons: "That they may be one so that the world may believe" (John 17, 21). That is why the Brothers' community ought to be built upon faith, so that its very existence points the way to the God whom the community reveals in its educational mission.

## **THE MYSTERY OF THE PERSON TRANSCENDS ACTIVITIES AND INSTITUTIONS**

27 1 - The service of the Brother in his apostolic mission has a direct bearing on every aspect of his consecration to God. Yet the religious consecration which the Brother lives at the very heart of his apostolic activities is not confined to any one of them, but reaches its full expression in the mystery of the personal relation each Brother has with God. It is a characteristic of the person to transcend the activities in which the person engages. This means that the Brother should be able to rise above his activity and to renew from time to time his awareness of the meaning of his life in the eyes of God.

2 - By the same token, the Institute and every community will consider each Brother in the totality of his person and not simply in terms of the apostolic work he does. The community should therefore appreciate the particular qualities and talents of each of its members, just as it should respect also the spiritual values that each one holds. Each Brother, for his part, ought to strive to give himself entirely to the common mission, convinced that it is in giving that we receive and that we must lose ourselves in order to be saved.