

Religious Life

‘Pure, unspoilt religion, in the eyes of God our Father is this: coming to the help of orphans and widows when they need it, and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world’(James 1:27).

‘This holiness of the Church ... is expressed in many ways by individuals who, each in his own state of life, tend to the perfection of love, thus sanctifying others’(LG n. 39).

Lumen Gentium declared that religious are: ‘called by God so that they may enjoy a special gift of grace in the life of the Church and may contribute, each in his or her own way, to the saving mission of the Church’(LG n. 43).

‘The Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament - a sign and instrument, of communion with God and of unity among all’(Lumen Gentium 1).

‘The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus (see Jn 19:34) and are foretold in the words of the Lord referring to his death on the cross: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself.’(Jn 12:32) (LG 3)

‘The forms and tasks of life are many but holiness is one - that sanctity which is cultivated by all who act under God’s Spirit, and obeying the Father’s voice and adoring God the Father in Spirit and in truth, follow Christ, poor, humble and cross-bearing, that they may deserve to be partakers of his glory.

Each one however according to his own gifts and duties must steadfastly advance along the way of living faith, which arouses hope and works through love’(LG 41).

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing ...
even as he chose us in him ...
that we should be holy and blameless before him
in love ...

For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he set forth in Christ as his providential design for the fulness of time, to put all things under him as head ...”(Ephesians 1:3-4,9-10).

‘God has put all things under his feet
and has made him head over all things for the church,
which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all things
completely, everywhere’(Ephesians 1:22-23).

‘Jesus went up on the mountain,
and called to him those he desired;
and they came to him.

And he appointed twelve,

to be with him,

and to be sent out’(Mark 3:13-14)

‘Looking on him who was pierced,
we see the new Heart that God has given us,
an inexhaustible source of life ...

We want to proclaim his love
to the world’(MSC Constitutions 9-10)

‘The disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them...

Jesus came up and spoke to them.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations;

baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.

and know that I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS;

yes, to the end of time’(Matthew 28:16-20)

‘Of this gospel I was made a minister,
according to the gift of God’s grace
which was given me by the working of his power.
To me this grace was given, to preach to the nations the
unsearchable riches of Christ,
and to make EVERYONE see the divine design of the
mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things:
that THROUGH THE CHURCH the manifold
wisdom of God might now be made known ...
This was according to the eternal purpose which he has
realised in Christ Jesus our Lord’(Ephesians 3:7-11).

‘To claim that this (modern-contemporary) culture cannot be evangelized is to admit, for the first time in the history of Christianity, the capitulation of the faith and of the Gospel in the face of a culture.’(Marcello Azevedo: Brazilian Theologian)

‘I have appointed you as prophet
to tear up and to knock down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant’(Jeremiah 1:5, 10).

“There is a time for planting,
a time for uprooting what has been planted ...
a time for knocking down, a time for building ...
a time for keeping, a time for throwing away.’

Qohelet 3:2, 3, 4

‘A certain apostolic diligence is urgently necessary in order to devise new, ingenious, and courageous ecclesial experiments under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who is by his very nature Creator.

Thanks to their religious consecration, religious are above all free and can spontaneously leave everything and go to announce the Gospel even to the ends of the earth.’(Mutuae Relationes)

‘The convergence between the Church's mission and contemporary human history has become increasingly apparent and serious, tracing new paths of witness, evangelization and human promotion.’(Religious and Human Promotion SCR 1978, Foreword)

‘To accomplish this mission, the Church must search out the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel, thus responding to persistent human questions’(RHP, Foreword)

‘A radical change of mentality and attitudes is needed to apply evangelical commitment to the concrete and often disturbing problems of human promotion’(RHP,I2)

‘the need for greater solidarity with their contemporaries’(RHP,I3)

‘The Spirit ... animates the already existing institutions with a renewed capacity for involvement in keeping with changing ecclesial and social realities’(RHP 2I).

‘The charism of the Founders appears as an experience of the Spirit, transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth’(Mutuae Relationes II).

‘The present social evolutions and cultural changes, which we ourselves are witnessing, even though they evoke in the Church the need to renew not a few perhaps of her human aspects, are nevertheless unable to deface in the least her specific structure as universal sacrament of salvation.’(MR 3)

‘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’ (Mutuae Relationes 12).

The church in history has been through periods of relative consolidation, and periods of dramatic changes.

At periods of change, new religious orders have been raised up which make connections between the gospel and the new world.

Older religious orders have done one of three things:

a: They have died out.

b: They have continued on in a much reduced way, reminders of the past and witnessing to values still needed in the present, though no longer at the cutting edge of the Church's mission.

c: They have re-forged the connections between their charism and the changing circumstances of their day, and re-emerged at the focal point of the church's mission, connecting with their world and seen to connect by it, living the Good news in a way that attracted a new generation in a new world to the perennial riches of the Gospel.

‘Today we have to bring the Church into existence, to make the Lord’s love present in the midst of the world by truly evangelical communities, truly at the disposal of mankind ... God expects nothing else from the persons who have committed themselves to religious life and the communities in which they gather, nothing more than to be truly religious, to achieve in today’s world, according to conditions which have always to be discerned, a life staked on the Gospel, surrendered to love, consecrated in faith.

‘It is truly a matter of setting one’s heart on God’s kingdom first, of losing one’s life, of agreeing to lose it in order to find Christ ... Today active religious are discovering that the essential is not to do a particular job, but to do in a very special way what all others do ... Contemplatives are beginning to see that contemplation is not identified with separation from the world, and is not even essentially linked with it, nor with the rhythm of monastic life, and still less with the structures of their convents.

J.M Faux SJ (continued)

‘The evolution of active and contemplative shows convergence towards the accentuation of the essential: through the realism of the faith-option on which it is founded, religious life expresses the complete sufficiency of God’s love revealed in the Mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection ... We cannot begin to know what religious life is today until we find ourselves in the midst of others. But this is only the beginning.’

‘One undeniable fact – young men and women are not entering religious congregations – appears to prove that the religious life of today, recognisable still as that of thirty years ago, is gradually dying. Young people evidently do not see it as relevant.

Naomi Turner Which seed will grow? 1988

‘Whether the existing religious life has within it the seeds of new growth is debatable. If it has, then we must look for changes within religious men and women themselves, because change in personal values and attitudes will eventually determine changes in ministry and in lifestyle and, finally, produce a completely new form of religious life. Change, valid and radical, is the only hope for the future of religious life.’

a: The direction we are to take is a matter of obedience

b: God reveals his will through the Spirit's inspiration. We are speaking, therefore, of prophecy.

c: Where are we look to discover the prophet? God can choose absolutely anyone as his instrument. It could be any one of us, individually and together.

d: This demands of us that we each renew our personal commitment to listening to the Spirit of Christ moving within us.

e: We are not isolated individuals. We are persons in community. If we are to respond corporately to the call of Christ, we must learn to share our responses to the Spirit.

This will demand of us that we establish community structures to facilitate such sharing.