

Theological basis and Canonical Implications of Involvement of Religious in the Local Church

1. Introduction

There are two states in the church – the clergy and the laity. The two groups of persons are referred to as hierarchical/institutional and charismatic/prophetic. There are different categories of people in the church – the clergy, the consecrated people and the laity. The three categories are to work in collaboration with each other in order to evangelise and build the Body of Christ. The consecrated persons/religious are in the vanguard of the mission of the church. They are encouraged to be enterprising in their initiatives and undertakings in keeping with the charismatic and prophetic nature of religious life. But they depend on the hierarchical/institutional church for discernment and approval of their charism and apostolate. Working together does cause some conflict and tensions. Hence a proper understanding of these two groups along with the theological basis of consecrated life, their roles and dependence (canonical implications), will help to clarify the relationships and bring about more effectiveness in ministry. If they work in partnership, with dialogue and mutual consultation, the church will benefit and the kingdom that Christ inaugurated will be furthered.

2. Brief History of Consecrated life

How did consecrated life begin? What were its essentials? What is its present form? What was the role of the hierarchy in approving it? In order to seek an answer to these questions, we will have to look into a brief history of consecrated life. In early Christian communities there were virgins, widows and ascetics who lived a life distinguished from the ordinary life by its leaning to perfection, continence and sometimes the renunciation of riches. They lived in the world and in their own homes. In the third century there were monks who lived secluded from the world and in austerity. The persecution of Decius gave the desert the first hermit, Paul of Thebes. Anthony of Egypt had disciples and instituted monastic villages in which the monks sought perfection and lived away from the world. St. Pachomius of Egypt was the first to set down in writing a monastic rule and brought together his monks under one roof founding the cenobitic life. His ideas were taken up and developed by St. Basil. With the cenobitic life, the monks were to practice charity to one's neighbour. St. Basil also allowed his monks to undertake the education of children. St. Augustine lived a common life with the clergy and instituted monasteries of nuns and wrote for them a letter, which came to be known as the Rule of St. Augustine¹. The life of the monks were directed to their personal sanctification, contemplation and mastery over the flesh. They had to fast and mortify themselves. But they did not aspire to Holy Orders.

¹ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Religious Life", [http:// www.newadvent.org/cathen](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen). September 26, 2019.

Religious obedience began only with the cenobitical life. The cenobitical life also combined with solitary life in such a way that, after a sufficient formation by common discipline, the monk would be able to retire into solitude. Poverty consisted in the renunciation of worldly goods, and in the most sparing use of food, clothing and all necessities. The coenobites were forbidden to have any separate property and were to receive from their superior or procurator all that they needed for their life. Having entered the religious life, the virgin, ascetic and monk felt a certain obligation to persevere. Marriage or a return to the world would be such inconstancy as to merit the reproach of Christ. Still during this period there was no obligation of the vows as such.

St. Benedict was inspired by the writing of St. Basil and St. Augustine, and the rules he wrote regulated the whole of religious life from the eighth to the twelfth centuries². Besides the evangelical counsels, he introduced the vow of stability which bound the monks to remain in the same house in which he made his profession.

There had in fact been a great variety of approaches to what we now call religious life before the sixth century but then, in a comparatively short time, the Benedictine ideal became the standard for a life consecrated by vow. This entailed public profession of vows, living together according to a rule and stability in one place. The achievement of the monks was such, and their way of life so appealing to the age, that by the eighth century no other form of religious life was thought of. Indeed, the prestige of the monks was so great that the two distinct notions of consecrated life according to the counsels and the monastic form of life became confused, and for centuries monasticism was considered the ideal form of Christian living towards which all were encouraged to strive³.

After the decline of Cluny, the twelfth century witnesses a great development of religious life, and new forms emerged which were outside the traditional monastic pattern. There were the military orders like the Templars, founded for the defence of the Holy Sepulchre, who drew their rule from Benedictine and Cistercian models. There was the *Humiliati* of Lombardy who had members belonging to different classes: married members living with their families, laymen who lived a common life under rule, and the traditional monks and nuns consecrated by vow and living in monastic tradition⁴.

The reforms of the monasteries in the tenth and eleventh centuries gave rise to aggregations of monasteries, which prepared the way for religious orders of the thirteenth century. The Congregation of Cluny which was founded by St. Odo grouped more than 200 monasteries under the authority of the abbot⁵. In the tenth century, there were clergy who

² Catholic Encyclopedia [http:// www.newadvent.org/cathen](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen); "Religious Life", September 26, 2019.

³ Clarence Gallagher, "The Church and Institutes of Consecrated Life," <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/s050Gallagher.pdf>, September 26, 2019.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Catholic Encyclopedia, [http:// www.newadvent.org/cathen](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen); "Religious Life", September 26, 2019.

were attached to a church and living a common life and even added poverty, and they came to be called *Canons Regular*. They united Holy Orders with religious life and devoted themselves to promoting Divine Worship.

The flowering of religious orders led to a certain amount of confusion in the church of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 attempted to restore order by issuing the following decree: In order that too great a variety of religious orders should not cause confusion in the church of God we firmly prohibit anyone in the future from instituting a new form of religious life; if anyone wishes to take up the religious life he must follow one of the orders that are already approved. Similarly if anyone wishes to found a new order he must take over one of the already approved rules and constitutions.

This decree was renewed by the Second Council of Lyons in 1274. Such legislation did not altogether prevent the development of different forms of religious life, though it presented a considerable obstacle to the free inspiration of the Spirit. It did not, in fact stop growth because very shortly after the Fourth Lateran Council the Franciscans were approved and so were the Dominicans, though the Dominicans had to adopt and adapt the rule of St. Augustine. These mendicant friars made a clear break with traditional monasticism, in the sense that their priorities were not enclosures of local stability but bases for apostolic preaching in the world. The monastic ideals still exercised a strong influence, however, because the friars retained a distinctive habit and office in choir, and there was a tendency for friaries to stabilize into conventual life which affected their ideal as pioneers⁶.

In the twelfth and thirteenth century the churchmen were reproached for their riches, and laxity in their lives. St. Dominic and St. Francis insisted on fervent religious and forbade their followers from possessions of wealth or revenues even in common. They lived in communities and were moved by their superiors from one convent to another and were under a superior, local, provincial or general. They were founded by an express approbation of the Supreme Pontiff⁷. They also took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. These were the mendicant orders (Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, Servites, etc).

The military orders date from the twelfth century and had the obligations of religious life. But their special object was the defence of the cause of Christ by force of arms (Among these were the Knights of Malta, Order of Teutonic Knights and the Order of Knights Templars, etc). The Hospitaller Orders were specially devoted to the relief of bodily infirmities (The most celebrated of them are the Order of Brothers of St. John of God).

In the fifteenth century a new form of religious life appeared in the 'Brethren of Common Life'. These included clerics and laymen, and revived the old idea of married families living a

⁶ Clarence Gallagher, "The Church and Institutes of Consecrated Life," September 26, 2019.

⁷ Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen>; "Religious Life", September 26, 2019.

life of apostolic simplicity which the *Humiliati* had proposed centuries earlier. They came under attack because they did not take public vows in the same way as approved religious orders, but they flourished and were a great influence for good and for reform in the church. At the same time these monks and the friars were pilloried by the humanists for not living up to their ideals of religious life⁸. In the sixteenth century, there were the *Clerks Regular*, who undertook all kinds of priestly services, attending to the spiritual needs of their neighbour, especially the education of the young. They would not take titles of honour nor accept ecclesiastical dignities (Theatines, Barnabites, Camillians, Regular Clerks of St. Paul, Clerks Regular of Somascha, etc). All this led to new forms of religious life and a variety of new foundations. Notable among these were the *Clerks Regular*, and of these the *Society of Jesus* embodied the most radical departure from traditional monastic lines.

The Jesuits as they came to be called, were priests living together under the full vows of religion and engaged in preaching, teaching and all kinds of pastoral activity. Their aim was to be as far as possible from the restrictions of religious life as traditionally conceived, so as to be able to concentrate more effectively on pastoral renewal. They were not dedicated to solitary or contemplative life; they were not given to the rigorous practice of penance in common, or to the solemn celebration of the liturgy in choir; they had no distinctive habit. For all these reasons the Jesuits came under attack as not conforming to the requirements of religious life, but in the face of these attacks flourished and obtained papal approval for their way of life.

In the sixteenth century, the Orders took vows and were distinguished by their objects, hierarchical organisation, patrimonial system. Their vows were perpetual and made solemn by profession. Some of these orders had lay members called Tertiaries. Pope Leo X appointed a rule for communities with simple vows. St. Ignatius of Loyola introduced simple vows for a period preceding solemn vows and associated with the Fathers professed by solemn vows and lay brothers bound by simple vows.

Religious orders may be subdivided as:

- Monastic made up of monks (who may be clerics) and/or nuns, who are bound to live and work at their monastery and recite the Liturgy of Hours in common.
- Mendicant made up of friars (clerics or lay persons), who while living and praying in common, may have a more active apostolate, and depend on alms for their life.
- Canons Regular made up of Canons (clerics) and canonesses regular, who sing the liturgy in choir and may run parish like apostolates.
- Clerks Regular made up of priests who are also vowed religious and who usually have a more active apostolate⁹.

⁸ Clarence Gallagher, "The Church and Institutes of Consecrated Life." September 26, 2019.

⁹ Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ "Religious Institute"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious%20Institute), September 26, 2019.

There was no general legislation on simple vows in the church till 1857-58. On March 19, 1857, Pope Pius IX, in *Nemini Latet*, decreed that members of male religious orders must make simple vows for three years after the novitiate. The intention was for perpetual vows. But the individual or the community could change their minds after the testing period.

What we see from the above is that Consecrated life has taken a lot of time to develop to the present state. Initially it was meant for personal holiness and a movement away from the world. Then it came to be holiness achieved while living in a community, taking on vows, and having some form of service in the community. Later the element of stability was added, while also being obedient to a superior and following the rule. When there were many institutes cropping up, the church intervened to stop various forms and wished that the new institutes should base themselves on established and approved norms. From the 15th century, there are once again a number of institutes springing up and with less time for moments of community prayer, and more involvement in the apostolate. The essential elements that are essential are: evangelical counsels, community life, apostolate, and approval from the competent authority.

3. Clarification of Some Terms

Historically, what are now called religious institutes were distinguished as either religious orders, whose members took solemn vows, or religious congregations, whose members took simple vows.

Traditionally, institutes of men are referred to as “First Orders” and those of women as “Second Orders”. Some religious orders, like the Franciscans and Dominicans have “Third Orders” of associated religious members who live in community and follow a rule, or lay members who, without living in formal community with the order, have made a private vow or promise to it, but are not ‘religious’ so to say.

All male religious institutes are termed ‘monks’ and those of female religious institutes ‘nuns’, although in a restricted sense, a monk is one who lives in a monastery under a monastic rule. The term ‘nun’ was officially reserved for members of women religious institutes of solemn vows (1917 Code), and is sometimes applied only to those who devote themselves wholly to the contemplative life and belong to one of the enclosed religious orders living and working within the confines of the monastery and reciting the Liturgy of Hours in community. Religious who are not clergy tend to be called “Brother” or “Sister”, while the term “friar” properly refers to a member of a male mendicant order. The current Code has dropped all these distinctions.

The 1917 Code never employed the terms apostolate or apostolic works, but spoke of ministry or sacred ministry, which were applicable only to those who had been ordained, and works (opera) or pious works, which were applicable to both lay persons and clergy.

Vatican II definitively embraced the expression “apostolate” as fully applicable and belonging to the laity as well as clergy by promulgating the Decree on the *Apostolate of the Laity* and by employing the expression in practically all its other documents.

4. Forms of Consecrated Life

Consecrated life includes a wide spectrum of the faithful and clergy that encompasses a number of types of persons. It is important to know these different types before we speak about one specific category (Religious) related to our topic.

In the post synodal exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (VC), John Paul II describes three categories of persons in the Church: the clergy, the consecrated persons and the laity (n.4, n.60). The Spirit has gifted the church with a multiplicity of charisms. The umbrella covering these is Consecrated life. Under the consecrated persons come various groups:

1. Eastern and Western Monastics: The Monks and Nuns strive to create a harmonious balance between the interior life and work in the evangelical commitment to conversion of life, obedience and stability, and in persevering dedication to the meditation of God’s word. Monasteries are eloquent signs of communion, welcoming abodes for those seeking God and schools of faith and true places of study, dialogue and culture (VC 6).
2. The Order of Virgins; hermits and widows: Consecrated virgins either alone or in association with others, constitute a special eschatological image of the Heavenly Bride and the life to come, when the church will at last fully live her love for Christ the Bridegroom (VC 7).
Men and Women hermits belonging to ancient Orders or new Institutes, or being directly dependent on the Bishop, bear witness to the passing nature of the present age by their inward and outward separation from the world, living “in the desert” (VC 7).
Widows and Widowers – through the vow of perpetual chastity consecrate their state of life in order to devote themselves to prayer and the service of the church (VC 7).
3. The Institutes completely devoted to Contemplation - Members of Institutes completely devoted to contemplation imitate Christ in his prayer on the mountain. In solitude and silence, by listening to the Word of God, participating in divine worship, personal asceticism, prayer, mortification and the communion of fraternal love, direct their whole lives and all their activities to the contemplation of God (VC 8) (Cloistered Carmel).
4. Apostolic Religious life - Sisters or Brothers belonging to religious Institutes through public profession of the evangelical counsels in accordance with a specific charism and in a stable form of life consecrate themselves to God for the sake of carrying out different forms of apostolic service to the People of God (VC 9) (Benedictines, Franciscans, Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans, Jesuits and others).

5. Secular Institutes - Members of Secular Institutes profess the evangelical counsels in the midst of temporal realities and strive to transfigure the world from within by the power of the beatitudes, acting like a leaven within the cultural, economic and political life (VC 10) (Caritas Christi, Gleaners of the church, Anciliae Secular Institute, Maids of the Poor, etc).
6. Societies of Apostolic life - Persons in Societies of Apostolic Life or of Common Life pursue a specific apostolic or missionary end and may or may not profess evangelical counsels (VC 11) (Societies of Apostolic Life include many of the more modern missionary groups such as Missionaries of Africa, Oratorians, Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, Society of the Precious Blood, Paulists, Pallottines, Columbans and Maryknoll).

Each of these forms is specific and is neither inferior nor superior to the other as it expresses a specific vocation. The various vocations are like so many rays of the one light of Christ, whose radiance “brightens the countenance of the church” (LG 1). The *laity*, by virtue of the secular character of their vocation, reflect the mystery of the Incarnate Word particularly insofar as he is the Alpha and Omega of the world, the foundation and measure of the value of all created things. *Sacred ministers*, for their part, are living images of Christ the Head and Shepherd who guides his people during this time of “already and not yet”, as they await his coming in glory. It is the duty of *consecrated life* to show that the Incarnate Son of God is *the eschatological goal toward which all things tend*, the splendour before which every other light pales, and the infinite beauty which alone can fully satisfy the human heart” (LG 44).

5. Organisation of Religious Life

The religious life is the most traditional form of consecrated life which arose in the first centuries of the Church and which has been perpetuated by the religious institutes. Religious life is distinguished from other forms of consecrated life by the following:

- Special dedication to the worship of God and to prayer (Holy Mass, liturgy of the hours, fixed times of prayer in common; C. 663);
- The profession of counsels by means of temporary or perpetual *public vows* (C. 607, 2);
- Fraternal common life - the religious must live in a legitimately constituted religious house under the authority of the Superior, following a common time-table (C. 607,2).
- The public witness of the beatitudes by means of a certain separation from the world (C. 607, 3).
- The cloister – some parts of the house reserved to themselves.

All of these aspects are regulated by the particular law of each institute (C. 607; cf. CCC 925-927).

The government of religious institutes is normally, organized on three levels: that of every individual community or religious house, the provincial level, and the general level. The government of each of these levels belongs to a superior with the assistance of a council, whose opinion must be heard, or whose consent obtained in the cases indicated by law. The superiors are normally elected or appointed for a definite time.

The provincial and superior general (the latter is called the supreme moderator of the institute, C. 622) are *major superiors*. In addition, there are religious institutes organized so that every house constitutes an autonomous and independent unit (monasteries). In this case, the superiors of these communities are also major superiors. The superiors in clerical religious institutes of pontifical right are the proper Ordinaries of their subjects .

Chapters are gatherings of members whose function is to protect, in their own area, the spiritual patrimony proper to every institute, elect the corresponding superiors, to treat affairs of major importance and to issue norms. Chapters can be either general, provincial, or in certain cases, of the local community.

The institute, its provinces, and its houses are all public juridical persons and have a proper patrimony administered in accordance with the common laws of the Church and with those proper to the institute, which must manifest the spirit of poverty typical to the religious life. Every institute, every province, and it possible, every house must have a finance officer distinct from the superior, who carries out the administration of goods under the direction of the superior.

In every religious house there must be *cloister*, also as a manifestation of the separation from the world typical of the religious life, for which reason the religious must live in houses exclusively reserved to them from which they cannot absent themselves without permission. Cloister will be more or less rigorous according to the character, purpose, and rules of each institute. In monasteries of contemplative life it is always more rigorous, and in those of nuns, the so-called papal enclosure is observed, namely in conformity with the norms given by the Holy See (Cc. 665,667).

The Second Vatican Council documents clarified the concept of exemption of religious. *Lumen Gentium* (45) considers exemption as the withdrawal of an institute from the jurisdiction of the local bishop and subjecting it to Supreme Pontiff and him alone. On the other hand, *Christus Dominus* (35, 3-4) does not regard exemption as a privilege but considers that religious are withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the local bishop only by being called to the special service of the Supreme Pontiff. These two conciliar documents yield two different but complimentary principles concerning exemption. *Perfectae Caritatis* (PC 2; 8; 20) strengthens and compliments a similar view.

The exemption the Institutes of pontifical right receive is a recognition that charismatic institutes are a gift which God makes to the church, and they have a special place in the church of whom the Pope is the Vicar. To him is entrusted the task of directing the mission of the church and confirming his brethren. So the 'exemption' which a religious institute obtains is not a search for privileges, but an effort to enrich, increase and strengthen the mission of Christ unhindered. Exemption is granted so that Institutes can express their identity more adequately and devote themselves to the common good with special generosity and on a wider scale.

6. Meaning and Purpose of Consecrated Life

Consecrated life in the early church began as a specific radical way of living the call given to every baptised Christian to follow Christ according to the spirit of the beatitudes, even to the extent of martyrdom. During later centuries there emerged the practice of following of Christ through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The council clarified that the religious state is not one between the clergy and the laity. Some members of the laity as well as clergy are called to this life as it is a permanent state of life. As the church is by nature apostolic and missionary, so is consecrated life.

Consecrated life is primarily a prophetic call. *Vita Consecrata* emphasised it by saying that it is a special form of sharing in Christ's prophetic office. In speaking about the sign value of consecrated life, it refers to its prophetic witness of the religious to the primacy of God and the truths of the gospel. In the Patristic tradition prophet Elijah is presented as the model of monastic tradition, the courageous prophet who stood for the sovereignty of God in defence of the poor against the powerful ones of the world. In the history of the church, holy men and women, consecrated to God and inspired by the Holy Spirit exercised this prophetic ministry speaking in the name of God to all, even to the pastors of the church. They courageously announced the Word of God and denounced sin and evil even in high places without fear (VC 84).

Various institutes carry out the one mission of the church – a qualitative transformation of this world into the Kingdom of God – in different ways, stressing one or the other aspect of this mission. They all share the essentials of religious life: their commitment to radical living of the Gospel, their life of poverty, chastity and obedience, their leading prophetic commitment to the people, especially the poor and the oppressed, and their collective witness as community.

Consecrated life and service to the people are linked. Neither the church nor the institutes are for themselves. They are for the people. Neither religious life nor the church is an end in itself. Both are means for the realisation of God's kingdom for the transformation of people and of the world. The growth in a personal relationship with Christ is important, but should

take place by bringing others to the commitment and mission of Christ. The consecrated religious fulfil their prophetic function in the commitment to the people. The people's sorrows, concerns and struggles cannot be alien to the religious, if they are to be prophets of the people. Struggling for the cause of people belongs to the very core of prophetic religious life. The religious institutes become relevant and alive in the measure in which they are able to commit themselves for the people and lead a life in solidarity with them in their struggles as Jesus did.

Consecrated persons should possess a spirituality of profound commitment to God and concern for the poor and less privileged. They should shine forth as beacons of hope in the lives of Christians by helping them to gain a better understanding of their faith commitment. The appropriate starting point is Jesus Christ and his values and action for justice and equality. But religious life should not be reduced to an action oriented life. As a prophetic sign, the consecrated vocation to become persons of God is an invitation to be persons of prayer and charity.

Every healthy organization needs a prophetic dimension. So the church need not feel uncomfortable with or threatened by this important dimension of the Christian mission which belongs to the extra-institutional sphere. The need for charisms become all the more imperative as we live at a time of extensive and rapid changes affecting the quality of global life to a great degree. The religious are capable of, with the power of the Spirit, bringing new ideas and fresh initiatives, exploring alternative ways for the pursuit of growth and proffering hope.

7. Theological Basis of Consecrated Life

Consecrated life is a dynamic following of Christ. It is a rich concept and so the Code does not give us a definition of consecrated life, but it offers us a description. Canon 573#1 gives a theological description of consecrated life: "Life consecrated through the profession of the evangelical counsel is a stable form of living, in which the faithful follow Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, and are totally dedicated to God, who is supremely loved. By a new and special title they are dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God's kingdom, for the honour of God, the building up of the church, and the salvation of the world. They are a splendid sign in the church, as they foretell the heavenly glory." Consecrated life is a deepening of baptism. The canon brings out its various theological dimensions of consecrated life – Theological, Trinitarian, Christological, Pneumatic, Ecclesial, Missiological and Eschatological.

7.1 Theological dimension

In the countenance of Jesus, the 'image of the invisible God' (Col 1: 15) and the reflection of the Father's glory (Cf. Heb 1:3), we glimpse the depths of an eternal and infinite love which is at the very root of our being. Those who let themselves be seized by this love cannot help

abandoning everything to follow him (cf. Mk 1:16-20). Like St. Paul, they consider all else as loss 'because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ', by comparison of which they do not hesitate to count all things as 'refuse' in order that they may gain Christ (Phil 3:8) (VC 18).

In making profession of the evangelical counsels, the religious offers a total self-donation to God in order to derive more fruit from the grace of baptism. The entire life of the religious becomes a continuous worship of God and service to his people in love. Religious witnesses to Christ's love for his church and foreshadows the future kingdom. The church gives it canonical status and sets it forth liturgically as a state of consecration to God. It receives the vows of religious, intercedes for them in public prayer, bestows on them a special blessing, and associates their self offering with the sacrifice of the Eucharist.

The state of consecrated life implies a specific form of living the Christian vocation common to all the faithful, marked by a *special consecration* to God. All the faithful are consecrated and called to sanctity and to spread of the Kingdom of God in virtue of baptism. The ideal of perfection is given to all Christians without any distinction of clergy, religious or laity. There are different ways of practising this one ideal. The religious follow this ideal in their own specific way. Consecrated life is a special call, a special gift to some individuals. Only those who have received this gift are able to follow this specific life-style in the church. However, one cannot say that it is a 'superior' vocation. Every call and gift in the church and is unique and one may not compare them. The consecrated seek perfection in a stable form and by a concrete path.

The path is the *profession of the evangelical counsels*. In the Gospel, many counsels are found which can be summarized in the Beatitudes, proposed by Jesus not to only a few, but to all of his disciples (CCC 915). However, the consecrated life carries with it the *profession*, before the Church, of the three counsels of chastity in celibacy (loving God with an undivided heart), poverty (limitation and dependence on others in the use and disposition of earthly goods), and obedience (submission to the will of the lawful superiors)¹⁰. Christ lives his life as a virgin, even while affirming and defending the dignity and sanctity of married life. He thus reveals the sublime excellence and mysterious spiritual fruitfulness of virginity. His full acceptance of the Father's plan is also seen in his detachment from earthly goods: "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty, you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). The depth of his poverty is revealed in the perfect offering of all that is his to the Father (VC 22).

The profession of the evangelical counsels indisputably belongs to the life and holiness of the church. This means that the consecrated life, present in the church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of its basic and characteristic elements, for it expresses her very

¹⁰ Martin De Agar, *A Handbook on Canon Law*, Montreal, Wilson and Lafleur Limitee, 99.

nature (VC 29). Religious life is a special way of participating in the sacramental nature of the People of God. The consecration of those professing religious vows is a visible proof of the unfathomable mystery of Christ, inasmuch as in themselves they really present Christ in His different activities, but always in obedience to the will of the Father who sent Him. There is an unquestionable bond of religious life with the life and holiness of the church.

The members of an institute are subject to its internal hierarchy in virtue of the evangelical counsel of obedience and according to their own constitution. Therefore they are bound to their superiors by a tie of an associative nature different from that which exists between the faithful and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The latter is of a sacramental nature originating from baptism (which determines the Church's subjects) and from holy orders (which determines the members of the hierarchy).

In this regard, there is a difference between lay and clerical institutes, insofar as the latter, being governed by priests (members of the hierarchy), also have the ecclesiastical power of governance in addition to the power deriving from the tie of association (vow of obedience). In fact, the major superiors of clerical religious institutes of pontifical right are Ordinaries for their subjects (C. 134, 1)¹¹.

“The self-donation of the religious indicates the highest value which the person offers to the divinity. It signifies the loving desire of offering filially for ever to God one’s personal reality with all its components and functions and all its human becoming. God has graciously offered Himself in Christ and so man’s self-donation is a response to it”¹². “They have handed over their entire lives to God’s service in an act of special consecration which is deeply rooted in their baptismal consecration and which provides an ampler manifestation of it” (PC 5).

7.2 Trinitarian

One of the essentials of religious life is the profession of the counsels. The deepest meaning of the evangelical counsels is revealed when they are viewed in relation to the Holy Trinity, the source of holiness. They are in fact an expression of the love of the Son for the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit (VC 21). Consecrated life is to deepen the evangelical counsels in the Trinitarian dimension: love for Christ which leads to closeness with him; love for the Holy Spirit, who opens our hearts to his inspiration; love for the Father, the first origin and supreme goal of the consecrated life.

Chastity is a manifestation of dedication to God with an undivided heart. It is a reflection of the infinite love which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity, the love to which the Incarnate Word bears witness even to the point of giving

¹¹ Martin De Agar, *A Handbook on Canon Law*, Montreal, Wilson and Lafleur Limitee, 103.

¹² George Lobo, *New Canon Law for Religious*, Mumbai, St. Paul’s Publications, 1990, 21.

his life, the love 'poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit' (Rom5:5), which evokes a response of total love for God and the brethren. Poverty proclaims that God is man's only real treasure. Poverty lived like Christ is an expression of that total gift of self which the three Divine Persons make to one another. Obedience shows the liberating beauty of a dependence which is not servile but filial, marked by a deep sense of responsibility and animated by mutual trust, which is a reflection in history of the loving harmony between the three Divine Persons (VC 21).

Religious live life in communities. Community life is essential for religious. Fraternal life, whereby consecrated persons strive to live in Christ with "one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32), is put forward as an eloquent witness to the Trinity. It proclaims the Father, who desires to make all of humanity one family, it proclaims the Incarnate Son, who gathers the redeemed into unity. It proclaims the Holy Spirit as the principle of unity in the church, wherein he ceaselessly raises up spiritual families and fraternal communities (VC 21). By constantly promoting fraternal love, also in the form of common life, the consecrated life has shown that sharing in the Trinitarian communion can change human relationships and create a new type of solidarity.

7.3 Christological Dimension

Canon 575 states: "The evangelical counsels, based on the teachings and example of Christ the Master, are a divine gift which the church received from the Lord and which by his grace it preserves always".

By His call itself, God consecrates. By the individual response of self-consecration, there is a total, life-long gift effected through the profession of the evangelical counsels and made secure by some form of sacred bond. By following the call of Christ, the consecrated person leaves behind everything for the sake of Christ (Cf. Mt 4:18-22, LK 5:11), preferring him above all things, in order to share fully in his Paschal Mystery.

The counsels are based on the life and teachings of Christ. In a secularist culture in which there is a profusion of sex, the practice of the evangelical counsels may be seen as obstacles to personality development. This is a misconception. Jesus who was fully God and fully man is the supreme model for the religious. Humanity of Jesus is the most authentic one. He was a man fully for others. Though there is renunciation in consecrated life, its objective is, in fact, to fully liberate oneself for greater self-possession and creativity and universal love by which one is united with the whole humanity in a deeper and abiding fashion¹³.

Vita Consecrata (87-91) tried to clarify the anthropological significance of the evangelical counsels. Practice of the evangelical counsels, far from involving an impoverishment of true human values, leads to their transformation. Freedom, material possessions and sexuality

¹³ Kuncheria Pathil, "Challenges to Consecrated Life Today", *Jeevadhara*, XLI (July 2011), 262.

are all human values. But in the context of sinful human nature there is a tendency to absolutise them leading to the idolatry of the created. All these values have to be relativized before the supreme value of God.

By following the evangelical counsels, the religious propose a spiritual therapy for humanity.

- Poverty is an evil and is man-made. It has to be eradicated. But voluntary poverty is an expression of preferential option for the poor.
- Celibate life is not a denial of love, on the contrary it transcends the limits of natural love, intensifies and purifies it and elevates it to a higher universal and radical level, embracing the whole of humanity.
- Freedom is not doing what one likes, but taking the right option, the fundamental good of the human person. For the human person the right choice is to do God's will (obedience), as Jesus did and for which he came (VC 87-91)¹⁴.

God comes to us in Christ, we can go back to Him only in Christ, who is 'the way, the truth and the life' (Jn 16:6). Christian living is to put on Christ (Rom 13:14). The consecrated state enables one to experience closer intimacy with Christ in order to manifest in one's life His attitudes. Religious life is seen as a consecrated life and it goes beyond the virtue of religion and presupposes theological charity in a total gift of self to God. No longer do vows suffice to identify the religious, since others can also make vows, but rather, the entire person is consecrated to God, this too calls for fidelity.

Jesus gave his life for others. His disciples are called to do the same. A Christian's life will be genuine to the extent that he is willing to sacrifice one's being and all the possessions for the sake of giving life to others or enhancing the life of others.

It is a call to let go of everything, one's own self, one's own possessions and even one's own will so that one is absolutely and unconditionally leading a life of total surrender to Jesus. Gospel perspective on consecrated life is clear on insisting that one should let go of oneself with the self-surrendering attitude of Jesus, who climaxed his life on the cross, a total self-gift. It is in this perspective that consecrated persons identify and witness to a contrasting Christian life, especially in a world filled with people of self-interest¹⁵. The vows are taken during the Eucharist to show the link between Christ's self-offering and the offering of the religious for service in the church¹⁶.

¹⁴ Ibid., 262

¹⁵ Chackalackal Saju, "Consecrated Life and Ministry: A Profiling for the Consecrated in Contemporary India," https://www.academia.edu/19569889/Consecrated_Life_and_Ministry_A_Profiling_for_the_Consecrated_in_Contemporary_India. September 28, 2019.

7.4 Pneumatological Dimension

The Spirit awakens the desire to respond fully, it is he who guides the growth of this desire, helping it to mature into a positive response and sustaining it as it is faithfully translated into action; it is he who shapes and moulds the hearts of those who are called, configuring them to Christ, the chaste, poor and obedient one, and prompting them to make his mission as their own. By allowing themselves to be guided by the Spirit on an endless journey of purification, they become, day after day, conformed to Christ, the prolongation in history of a special presence of the Risen Lord (VC 19).

All the charisms have the same source, God the Father, same mediation, of the Son and the same agent of distribution, the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Body of Christ, and the Church (1Cor 12:4-11). The church needs to recognize that the charisms are different and have to respect the differences of functions proceeding from the charism. Through the action of the Hierarchy, God consecrated religious for a more generous service of Him within the People of God. The church, through the ministry of her 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.

Christian life is a response to the action of the Spirit. Different religious families arise as a result of the impulses of the Spirit. Their members are called to live a life wholly inspired and motivated by the Spirit. At the origin of each institute, there was a particular gift or charism of the Spirit. This charism, which varies somewhat from institute to institute, finds its expression, not only in the life-style of its members, but also in their mission. The action of the Spirit is connected more to the living of consecrated life, rather than just the role of the Spirit in the founding of the institute.

The mystery of the church involves a mutual communion of life among her members. The life giving presence of the Holy Spirit builds up a unity in Christ. The Spirit bestows upon her a variety of hierarchical and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs her; and he adorns her with his fruits. The elements which differentiate the various members among themselves, the gifts (that is, the offices and the various duties), constitute substantially a kind of mutual complement and are actually ordered to the one communion and mission of the self same body. Consequently, the fact that, in the church, there are Pastors, laypersons or Religious does not indicate inequality in regard to the common dignity of the members, rather it expresses the articulation of the joints and functions of a living organism. Every sort of differentiation among the Faithful, based on the variety of their charisms, functions and ministries is ordered to the service of other members of the People of God¹⁷.

The differentiation that sets the Bishop before the other faithful based on his reception of the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, is a manner of being for the other members of the

¹⁷ Dominic Veliath, "Consecrated Life According to Vatican II", *Word and Worship*, 48(July-Sept, 2015), 175.

faithful which in no way removes from being with them. In the words of St. Augustine: “With you I am a Christian; for you I am a Bishop”.

The religious life is seen as expressing the charismatic dimension of the Church as a constant reminder to the entire Church and to the hierarchy in particular that the Church’s institutional structure is for the sake of the charism of loving service to the entire humanity for its liberation and salvation. Further, it challenges the institutional structures of the Church not to take upon the values of the power structures of the world and also to be at the service of its charism and not vice versa.

From earliest times St. Paul found the need for regulating the charismatic manifestations among the Christians in Corinth (cfr. I Cor 12). Hence the institutional church has been given the charge of recognising these manifestations. There will be an intrinsic tension between the prophetic character of consecrated life and its institutional ordering. Because of the importance of religious life for the whole church, hierarchical authority has to regulate it in some measure. But it also has to respect the workings of the Spirit that arouses prophetic movements in the church.

The Holy Spirit gives a certain gift to a founder and only by canonical recognition of that gift does the religious institute come into being in the church. On the other hand, it is this very canonical recognition which guarantees the continuity and integrity of the charism of each institute including its autonomy of life, especially of governance.

7.5 Ecclesiological Dimension

The Second Vatican Council has highlighted the ecclesial meaning of the consecrated life, that is, its belongingness to the Church’s mystery and mission. *Lumen Gentium* states: “By the charity to which they lead, the evangelical counsels join their followers to the church and her mystery in a special way. Since this is so, the spiritual life of these followers should be devoted to the welfare of the whole Church, this gives rise to the duty of working to implant and strengthen the kingdom of Christ in souls and to extend that kingdom to every land . . . It is for this reason that the Church preserves and fosters the special character of her various religious communities (LG 44).

The ecclesiality of the religious life, is in fact, a gift in the Church and for the Church, that pertains to her life and sanctity and is helpful in her mission of salvation (LG, 43b; 44; Cc. 574; 575). On the basis of the ecclesiology of the Body of Christ, the council stresses this fraternal nature of the priest’s relations with the other faithful. They are to build unity in truth and charity among various members of the parish. Pope John Paul II exhorted the bishops saying: “The presence and apostolic activity of so many men and women religious in your dioceses is a great resource which must be more efficiently recognised and put to use in the specific tasks stemming from their own charisms”.

The Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* invites institutes to participate in the life of the Church. This consciousness of being part of the communion of the Church and of being at the service of the Church ought to characterize the vocation, formation and the entire life of all consecrated persons, in the variety of their contemplative and apostolic services (*PC*, 2c;7-11). The ecclesial character has been amply treated in *Mutuae Relationes*. The sense of ecclesial communion, developing into a spirituality of communion, promotes a way of thinking, speaking and acting which enables the Church to grow in depth and extension.

The religious must be catalysts of communion. And it presupposes their life of communion with hierarchy which is meant to lead and guide, teach and sanctify the entire Church to fulfil its mission.

Though the consecrated life does not belong to the basic structure of the church and the church may exist without the religious, the consecrated life in the church arises from the very nature of the church and points to the fundamental mystery of the church as the Body and Bride of Christ. *Vita Consecrata* emphasised that the consecrated life is not something isolated and marginal but a reality that affects the whole church. "In effect the consecrated life is at the very heart of the church as a decisive element for their mission, since it manifests the inner nature of Christian calling and the striving of the whole church as Bride towards union with her one spouse...it is a precious and necessary gift for the present and future of the People of God, since it is an intimate part of her life, her holiness and her mission" (*VC* 3).

7.6 Missiological Dimension

The consecrated people are called to follow Christ more closely and to make him the 'all' of their lives. The task of devoting themselves wholly to the mission is therefore included in their call. By the action of the Holy Spirit consecrated life itself is a mission, as was the whole of Jesus' life.

The mission of the consecrated as spelt out by the Council involves a two-fold dimension. Through the spread of the Kingdom of Christ over all the earth, the Religious are called to share in Christ's saving redemptive work. Secondly, through the involvement of these very men and women who are partakers of that redemption, the whole world has to be ordered in a right relation to Christ, ie, the transformation of the temporal order.

Furthermore within the church, there is the unity of mission but diversity of ministry:

- There are the Apostles and their successors, who are entrusted with authoritatively teaching, sanctifying in the name of Christ;
- The laity participate in this self same mission of the church in their own way, with special reference to the secular dimension;

- And there are the religious who, participate in the mission of the church, by responding to a specific charism¹⁸.

The hierarchy of the Church and the religious in the Church exist in mission and for mission. Their common mission is to proclaim the good news of liberation and wholeness entrusted to them by Jesus Christ. In the history of the church the religious played a very vital role especially in the mission of the church. Their call is for the service of the church and the church cannot be what it is without them. Pope Paul VI had declared “the church cannot do without religious, that is, without witness of the love whereby Christ pursues men and which completely transcends nature, nor can the world be deprived of these lights without detriment to itself.”

The theological notion of mission is identified by the threefold mission of Christ, to teach, to sanctify and to govern. This is also entrusted to religious and members of other institutes as they share in the Word and sacrament, and provide for the internal government of the institute. In addition to its charism, the institute has to carry out a mission to be adapted to the needs and circumstances of time and place.

Consecrated persons seek the perfection of charity. While the Christian life is essentially this, the consecrated life brings a certain freedom from whatever binds and enslaves. Religious have to constantly seek the twofold love of God and neighbour. The evangelical counsels are an outstanding charism in the church. Those who live out their profession contribute in a special way to the up building of the church which is ‘sacrament of the salvation of the world’ (LG, 44). This calls religious to be good witnesses to the life of Christ.

Religious communities are called to give clear witness in the church of total dedication to God. This is the fundamental option of their Christian existence and their primary duty in their specific way of life. Furthermore, every religious Institute exists for the church and must enrich her with its distinctive characteristics according to a particular spirit and specific mission. The Spirit calls the religious to be a sign of the Kingdom in the world by becoming the voice of the poor and the voiceless, by becoming an anchor to those who are unanchored, partaking in their struggles to find fullness in life. The church wants to give through the Religious an increasingly clearer revelation of Christ to believers and non-believers. Religious life is a gift which God offers in order that everyone can recognise the ‘one thing necessary’ (Lk 10: 42). To bear witness to Christ by one’s life, works and words is the particular mission of the consecrated life in the church and in the world.

7.7 Eschatological Dimension

The profession of the evangelical counsels appears as a sign which can and ought to attract all the members of the church to an effective and prompt fulfilment of the duties of their

¹⁸ Cfr. Dominic Veliath, “Consecrated Life According to Vatican II”, 189.

Christian vocation. The people of God have no lasting city here below, but looks forward to one which is to come. The consecrated life gives witness to the fact that the world cannot be transfigured without the spirit of the beatitudes.

The consecrated life is a sign set within the church reminding all the faithful of their final destiny in the Kingdom of God and its transcendence. It reveals the mystery of the church, of the unbreakable bond between Christ and the church, His Bride. It makes visible the marvels of God in the frail humanity, a transfigured life capable of amazing the world. Consecrated life is thus an eschatological sign of the world to come¹⁹. It reveals "the heavenly goods which are already present in this age, and gives witness to the glorious future, "as a sign which can and should effectively inspire" the members of the Church to "unflinchingly fulfil the duties of their Christian calling" (LG 44). All earthly concerns are to find their fulfilment in the heavenly consummation which has already begun with the presence and action of the Risen Lord in the world.

Consecrated life is an eschatological sign and a foreshadowing of the future kingdom. Consecration "better foretells the resurrected state and the glory of the heavenly kingdom" (LG 42). It does this above all by the vow of virginity, which tradition has always understood as an anticipation of the world to come, already at work for the total transformation of man. Those who have dedicated their lives to Christ cannot fail to live in the hope of meeting him, in order to be with him forever...immersed in the things of the Lord, the consecrated person remembers that "here we have no lasting city" (Heb 13:14), for "our commonwealth is in heaven" (Phil 3:20). The one thing necessary is to seek God's kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt 6:33; VC 26).

In the forms recognized by the ecclesiastical authority consecrated life is thus a *stable form of Christian life* that belongs to the life and sanctity of the Church, expressing in a special way the spousal mystery between Christ and the Church. Although Christian perfection is a dynamic process, the permanent commitment gives a definite direction.

Conclusion

From the theological point of view, we find that consecrated people make a self-donation. They offer to God one's personal reality with all its components and functions and all its human becoming. They strive to live in Christ with one heart and soul. Their living in Christ proclaims the Father who desires to make of all humanity one family, it proclaims the Incarnate Son, who gathers the redeemed into unity. It proclaims the Spirit as the principle of unity in the church. From the Christological perspective we see that consecrated life is a special gift given to some, which enriches the church with its varied gifts and prophetic witness. Different religious families arise as a result of the impulses of the Spirit. They live a life wholly inspired and motivated by the Spirit. They form part of the church and work in

¹⁹ Kuncheria Pathil, "Challenges to Consecrated Life Today", *Jeevadhara*, Vol XLI, No 244, (July 2011), 261.

service of the church. Through their ecclesial communion they develop a spirituality of communion, being catalysts of communion. They share in Christ's redemptive work in the transformation of the temporal order. They participate in the threefold mission of Christ, to teach, to sanctify and to govern. They stand out as a witness of having no lasting city here on earth, but look forward to the one which is to come. This is a reminder to the faithful of their final destiny.

8. Canonical Implications

After having gone through a brief history of religious life and seeing how it has developed down the centuries, we looked at the different forms of consecrated life and their specific vocation in the church. We then moved into the theological basis of the consecrated vocation and how it is part of the church. Their charism is a gift to the church, and it has to be recognised and approved by ecclesiastical authority. In this section we see how the consecrated persons have to function within the church setting after getting their approval from church authority.

8.1 Dependency on the Supreme Authority

All of us in the church depend on the Roman Pontiff. The supreme authority of the Church includes the Roman Pontiff and the college of bishops (Cc. 330, 331, 336). Through the Pope, religious institutes and their members are linked to the episcopal college and united to all bishops who are in communion with the Pope (C. 336). Obedience to the episcopal college is the first consequence of dependence on him who is the head. His authority is personal. He also has power over all the particular churches and he can always freely exercise his power. He has to teach, preach and sanctify the entire Church. This authority of Peter on his successors is full and supreme (C. 331), immediate on the pastors and on the faithful (C. 331), and universal as the Pastor of the whole Church on earth (C. 331).

8.2 The Holy See and the Religious Institutes²⁰

When the Code uses the terms Apostolic See or Holy See, it includes besides the Roman Pontiff, other organisms of the Roman Curia (C. 361). The religious institutes are linked with the Holy See and are dependent on him, thus expressing their ecclesiality in the Church. The Code lists in a number of canons, how the religious institutes are subject and dependent on the Holy See.

- The competent authority of the Church canonically erects the religious institutes (C. 573, 2).
- The same authority interprets the evangelical counsels, legislate for their practice and by canonical approval constitutes stable forms of living and ensures that

²⁰ Varghese Koluthara, *Rightful Autonomy of Religious Institutes*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 1994, 73-75. I have taken this section from this book.

institutes grow and flourish according to the spirit of their founder and their sound tradition (C. 576).

- The same ecclesiastical authority approves the patrimony of an institute (C. 578).
- The Apostolic See must be consulted by the diocesan bishop before erecting an institute in his territory (C. 579).
- The Apostolic See is the only competent authority for the fusion, union, confederating or federating a religious institute (C. 582).
- The Apostolic See permits the changes in the institutes of consecrated life which affect the elements previously approved by the same (C. 583).
- The Apostolic See is the only authority to suppress an institute and dispose of its temporal goods (C. 584).
- The competent ecclesiastical authority approves the fundamental code or constitution of religious institutes and, they can be changed only with the consent of the same (C. 587, 2).
- The authority of the Church recognizes the clerical or lay condition of religious institute (C. 588, 2-3).
- The Apostolic See, through its erection or by formal approval by decree, establishes a religious institute into a pontifical one (C. 589).
- In a particular manner religious are subjected to the supreme authority of the Church, since the religious institutes are dedicated in a special way to the service of God and of the whole Church (C. 590, 1).
- To the Supreme Pontiff as their highest Superior, the individual members of the religious institutes are bound to obey, by reason also of their sacred bond of obedience (C. 590, 2).
- The Supreme Pontiff by virtue of his primacy in the universal Church, and with a view to the common good and better to ensure the welfare of religious institutes and the needs of the apostolate, can withdraw institutes of consecrated life from the governance of local Ordinaries and subject them to himself alone, or to some other ecclesiastical authority (C. 591).
- To the Apostolic See each Supreme Moderator is to send a brief account of the state and life of the religious institute, in the manner and the time determined by the same authority, to promote closer union between the institutes and the Apostolic See (C. 592, 1).
- Moderators of each religious institute are to promote knowledge of the documents issued by the Holy See which affect the members entrusted to them, and are to ensure that these documents are observed (C. 592, 2).
- To the authority of the Apostolic See, religious institutes of pontifical right are subject directly and exclusively in their internal governance and discipline remaining safely, without prejudice to C. 586 (C. 593).

- If the Holy See has intervened in some matters of the Constitution of a religious institute of a diocesan right, the bishop of the principal house cannot approve them until changes are made accordingly (C. 595, 1).
- The approval of new forms of consecrated life is reserved to the Apostolic See (C. 605).

These are the fundamental areas in which one has to refer to the Holy See for various approvals.

9. Areas of Bishop-Religious Relationship in a Diocese²¹

In the church, the religious work under the Apostolic See or under a diocesan bishop or a local church. There are many situations that the religious have to rely on the invitation to commence a work or on the authority for approvals of a work. This calls for collaboration and mutual understanding in sharing the work to build the Body of Christ. We shall now deal with some of these areas where the religious institutes need permission from the diocesan bishop

9.1 Foundation of a Religious House

The residential seat of a religious community is a religious house. In a religious house the members reside together and carry out a work assigned to them. But to establish a house, the religious need to be invited by the diocesan bishop or at least seek his approval to be present in that place (C. 608). For the foundation of a religious house in the diocese the Code demands the following (C. 608-610):

1. A place or locality
2. The community (at least of three persons - C. 115.2)
3. A superior
4. An oratory
5. Suitable provision for the needs of the members
6. Ecclesial need or usefulness for the church and for the institute
7. Written consent of the diocesan bishop
8. Formal erection by the competent authority of the religious institute.

While there are so many elements necessary, the consent of the diocesan bishop is important. It is a must for the validity of the erection of the religious house (C. 609). The competent religious superior must obtain it before he or she issues the decree of erection. It has to be given in writing. For the establishment of a convent of cloistered nuns, the permission of the Apostolic See is also needed (C. 609.1).

²¹ Anthony Pinheiro, "Bishop-Religious Relationship according to CIC and CCEO", *Vidyajyothi* (58(1994), 229-249. The points that I make under this title is structurally based on this article. However, I have restricted myself only to the Code.

While giving the consent, the bishop should know at least a little about the charism of the institute and the apostolic works to be carried out by them. Once consent is given, the religious are integrated into the life and mission of the diocese (C. 611).

If it is a clerical institute, then the Bishop should be aware that they have a right to perform proper works according to their state of life and would eventually ask for a church. But before they build a church, the clerical religious need the written permission of the diocesan bishop (C. 1215).

To change the apostolic works from those for which it was established, a new permission of the diocesan bishop is necessary (C. 612). However, such a permission is not required if the change affects only the internal governance and discipline, with due regard to the conditions fixed at the time of the foundation of the house (C. 612).

9.2 Written Agreement

A religious institute carries out apostolic works proper to it, according to its charism. There are works which the diocesan bishop entrusts to a religious institute. For these works an agreement should be entered into, so that, there is autonomy and also collaboration. According to canon 37 an administrative act which concerns the external forum is to be effected in writing. Strictly speaking, this is not a legal contract and as such it cannot, and does not, create obligations and rights in civil law. There is also no question of seeking commutative justice or filing a suit to solve the litigation from the stipulations of this agreement.

Canon 681.2 prescribes a written agreement to be drawn up between the diocesan bishop and the competent religious superior when the bishop entrusts apostolic works to religious (Cf. *ES* 1, 30.1; *MR* 57b, 58a). It is obligatory only when a work of apostolate, which belongs to the diocese and is to be carried out in the name and on the behalf of the diocese, is entrusted to the religious by the bishop.

The canon also stipulates the subject matter of the agreement, namely, the description of the work and how it is to be carried out, the qualified personnel set aside for it, and financial arrangements. While the Code gives these three conditions, it is always beneficial that a time frame is also mentioned for revision and renewal of the agreement. Besides there should be an exit clause if one or the other party wishes to terminate the agreement.

In deliberating about the personnel it should include, the qualification and number of religious to be assigned to a work, their rights and duties, hours of service, holidays, vacations, time for retreat, etc. Any obligatory or expected service to the parish or diocese over the normal duties should be indicated. It should also detail the process of appointment and promotion, as well as the causes and process of dismissal.

Financial arrangements should include salary/remuneration, housing or allowance for it, travel and transportation, health and other benefits, continuing education and sabbatical provisions for long term agreements. It should also be made clear to whom and at what intervals such compensations will be made. For the religious, it would normally go to their provincial superior or the community.

A written agreement is needed and is useful in other cases, especially when a religious house of an institute is erected in a diocese. Certain canons indirectly refer to such written agreements. Thus, canon 612 speaks of "the laws of foundation" (this means also the conditions connected with pious foundations- cf. Cc. 1303-1310) and "the apostolic works for which a house was established". Canon 611.n.2 refers to "conditions attached to the consent" given by the diocesan bishop for the erection of a religious house as per canon 609. According to canon 678.3, in directing the apostolic works of religious, the diocesan bishop and the religious superiors must proceed by way of mutual consultation. A proper agreement gives a certain amount of security to the work.

Canon 612 affirms that the consent of the diocesan bishop is required if a religious house is to be used for apostolic works other than those for which it was established. Here it would imply a change in the original nature of the work initially agreed upon. Canon 790 prescribes proper agreements between the diocesan bishop and the religious superior of an institute when religious work in mission territories. Canons 801 and 806 concerning the school apostolate should also be in the form of written agreements.

9. 3. Exercise of the Apostolate

Apostolate is an essential element of consecrated life (*EE* 23). The apostolic activity of religious institutes is of ecclesial activity. It is to be carried out in the name of the church. It is approved by competent authority and communion with the church must be maintained. (Cc. 675, 676, 588.2). The mission and the apostolate of the Church is only one, committed to her by Christ. However, it is carried out by all the faithful according to the gifts given by God (Cc. 208 and 216). These gifts are God-given; they are from the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor: 12.4; Rom 12:5-8).

The canonical erection of a particular religious institute through the approval of its constitutions provides a mandate to engage in church activities. The permission of the diocesan bishop to establish a house within a diocese carries with it the right to engage in works proper to the institute. Subsequent major changes in apostolic works needs permission. The works also need the permission of the competent religious superiors (Cc. 608, 609, 611,2). In accordance with the particular gift of apostolate of the institute, all religious are obliged to work zealously and diligently for the building up and growth of the whole Church and for the good of the diocese (*CD* 33a). They should also comply promptly and faithfully with the requests and desires of the diocesan bishop for the apostolate, but respecting the character and purpose of the institute of which they are members (*CD* 35.1).

9.4 Preaching the Word of God (Cc. 762-772)

Canon 386 insists that the diocesan bishop has an obligation regarding his teaching ministry (CD 12-14). He is a teacher of doctrine. He is to preach frequently and propose and explain the truths of faith and morals. According to canon 756.2, he is the "moderator" of the ministry of the word of God in his diocese and the faithful should respect and obey his teachings. While canon 758 states that by reason of their consecration to God, members of institutes of consecrated life bear particular witness to the Gospel, and so are fittingly called upon by the bishop to help in proclaiming the Gospel, at the same time, by virtue of canon 764 the bishop can restrict or take away from religious their faculty of preaching in his diocese.

The diocesan bishop has the legislative power of issuing particular norms concerning the exercise of preaching in the diocese (C. 772). He can prescribe parish retreats and missions in order to renew the faithful (C. 770). The religious are to obey these directives of the bishop in exercising their apostolate of preaching to the people. Besides, the preaching ministry can be exercised by lay religious in keeping with the norms given by the episcopal conference of the place (C. 766). But it should be remembered that lay preaching is not a substitute for clerical ministry.

9.5 Catechetical-Liturgical Formation (Cc. 773-780)

Catechesis looks into making the faith living, alive and operative. It includes the teaching of Christian doctrine and the experience of Christian living. Priests and religious have in catechesis a preeminent field for their apostolate. Canon 776 prescribes that the members of institutes of consecrated life have to collaborate with, and assist the parish priest in his pastoral care through their apostolate of catechism, with due regard for the character of each institute. The superiors are obliged to see that catechetical formation is diligently imparted in their churches, schools and in other centres of apostolate entrusted to them (C. 778). And, observing the prescriptions of the Apostolic See, it is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop to give norms concerning catechetics and to make provisions that suitable instruments for catechesis are available, even by preparing a catechism, if such seems appropriate, and by fostering and coordinating catechetical endeavours (C. 775).

The liturgical instruction and formation of the faithful is also part of catechetics (cf. SC 14b & 35.5). With zeal and patience pastors of souls must promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful and also their active participation, both internal and external, taking into account their age, condition, way of life and standard of religious culture (cf. SC 19). As sacred liturgy and the liturgical apostolate of the diocese are under the direction of the diocesan bishop, religious are subject to the authority of the bishop in this area of apostolate (Cf. SC 45; C. 678, 1).

9.6 Public Exercise of Divine Worship

The prescription of Canon 678.1 is that all religious are subject to the authority of the diocesan bishop in matters concerning the "public exercise" (celebration) of divine worship. Public celebration would imply divine worship which involves many people, which is open indiscriminately to all, or which is known by many. Even when the religious celebrate divine worship within the community, where there are no externs, they are obliged to observe the general liturgical norms and regulations of the Church concerning divine worship. The general norms given in Canons 834-839 are applicable to religious for their liturgical celebrations in their private chapels.

Through the liturgy, a complete public worship is offered to God. This worship takes place when it is offered in the name of the Church, by persons lawfully deputed and through actions approved by ecclesiastical authority (SC 7; C. 834). The diocesan bishop is the moderator, promoter and guardian of the entire liturgical life in the diocese entrusted to his care. He safeguards its integrity and authenticity within the particular church (C. 835.1).

Canon 678.1 refers expressly to the public exercise of divine worship. For, the divine worship of the Church, especially through the liturgy and administration of the sacraments, whether celebrated or exercised privately alone, or with two or three persons, or publicly with a group of the faithful, belongs always to the "public actions" and not the private actions (cf. SC 26 and C. 837).

9.7 Parish Ministry (Cc. 515-555)

Parishes can be entrusted to a clerical religious institute or to a clerical society of apostolic life (C. 520). The diocesan bishop, with the consent of the competent religious Superior, can entrust a parish to religious. He can also erect a parish in a church of the religious community, with the condition that one priest should be the proper pastor of the parish or, if it is entrusted to a team of religious, one priest should act as the moderator (C. 517.1). A physical person and not a juridic person should be a pastor (C. 520.1).

The religious parish priest is appointed by the diocesan bishop, with the previous presentation or at least with the consent of the major superior of the religious who is to be the parish priest (Cc. 523, 682.1). The removal of a religious parish priest can be done by the bishop at his discretion after notifying the religious superior of it, or by the religious superior at his discretion after notifying the bishop of it; neither requires the consent of the other (Cc. 682.2, 538, 1742.2).

The parish priest is an ecclesiastical office, and as such it is subject to the authority of the diocesan bishop. The religious as parish priest has to exercise the pastoral care of the faithful in the parish community under the authority of the diocesan bishop (Cc. 515.1, 519). The norms given in canons 515-555 and in different provisions of the Code for parish ministry are to be followed by the religious parish priest.

If a religious is assigned as the proper pastor of a "quasi parish" or of a community of the faithful, as provided by the diocesan bishop, he is to follow the norms of a parish priest (C. 516). The pastoral care exercised by religious either as parochial vicars (Cc. 541, 545-552), or as "team priests" (Cc. 517.1, 542-543), or as parish administrators (Cc. 539-540) is also subject to the authority of diocesan bishop.

Canons 564-572 deal with chaplains. A chaplain is appointed by the local ordinary (C. 565). The chaplain for a religious community is appointed by the local ordinary after having consulted the superior of the community, who has the right of proposing a priest after hearing the religious community (C. 567.1).

9.8 Exercise of Missionary Activity (Cc. 781-792)

It is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop as head of the diocesan apostolate and its centre of unity to promote, guide and coordinate missionary activity. Religious, by virtue of their special consecration to the service of the Church, are obliged in a special manner to engage in missionary work, according to the character of the institute (C. 783; *LG* 44, *AG* 40, *PC* 20). In the Middle Ages the monasteries became places for the study of cultural riches of the past and for the development of a new humanistic and Christian culture. Many consecrated persons have been promoters of culture, and frequently have studied and defended indigenous cultures. Consecrated person should contribute to the promotion of culture (*VC* 98).

The religious dedicated to missionary activities in mission territories are subject to the directives/prescriptions given by the bishop or authority equivalent to the diocesan bishop, with a view to promoting, supervising and coordinating the endeavours and activities which concern the mission (C. 790.2). Making a written agreement between the bishop of the mission-diocese and the institute engaged in the mission is prescribed by canon 790.1.n.2. The aim of the agreements is to ensure clarity regarding the mutual rights and obligations of the ecclesiastical authorities and of institutes and their members to contribute to the good of the mission.

9.9 Catholic Schools, Religious-Moral Education (Cc. 793-821)

The Catholic schools are an opportunity to provide possibilities for catechism, and for giving education in faith. Parents are the primary educators. Catholic schools help the parents to fulfil their role in the education of their children (C. 796). The religious who have education as their proper apostolate should keep faithfully to this apostolate and earnestly strive to devote themselves to Catholic education, providing it also through their own schools established with the consent of the diocesan bishop (C. 801). The church is full of admirable examples of consecrated persons who have sought and continue to seek holiness through the involvement in education. Many of them have achieved the perfection of charity through teaching (*VC* 96).

Catholic religious formation and education are subject to the authority of the church. The diocesan bishop is to exercise vigilance and supervision of educational institutions. The provisions of canons 802-806 outline the role and functions of the diocesan bishop in this area of diocesan apostolate. And canon 806 states that the diocesan bishop has the right to watch over and inspect Catholic schools situated in his territory, even those established or directed by religious. His right of visitation is focused on elementary and secondary Catholic schools. He also has the right to issue directives concerning the general regulation of Catholic schools. Such directives apply also to schools conducted by religious, although the religious retain their autonomy in the management of their schools.

Religious-moral education is also a part of the catechesis (CT 25, 26). The diocesan bishop has to take care that the religion teachers, both in Catholic and non-Catholic schools, are outstanding for their correct doctrine, for their witness of Christian living and for their pedagogical skills (C. 804, 1 & 2). He has the power to name or approve them and likewise to remove them or to demand that they be removed, if it is required for reasons of religion or morals (C. 805). Offences or deficiencies of faith and morals would have to be of a serious nature to warrant removal.

9.10 Media Apostolate (Cc. 822-832)

The Church uses media for the evangelization and teaching purposes. Those who have the institutional charism of working in this field, have the duty to learn the language of the media, in order to speak effectively of Christ to our contemporaries, interpreting their joys and hopes, their grief and anxieties (VC 99). The Church aims at promoting a correct understanding of the dynamics underlying the media and a careful ethical assessment of their programs, as well as the developments of healthy habits in their use (VC 99). Religious exercise their apostolate through the media of the press, newspapers, magazines, periodicals, radio, and television and other instruments of social communication. Canons 822-832 deal with this apostolate.

According to canon 831.2, the episcopal conference has to lay down norms determining the requirements for clerics and religious to take part in radio and television programs which concern Catholic doctrine or morals.

In the case of written media, the religious require the permission of their major superior, in accordance with the Constitutions, for publishing writings on matters of religion or morals (C. 832). In the case of written works, the religious require approval or permission of the bishop/local ordinary in the light of canons 822-831.

9.11 Associations of the Faithful (Cc. 298-329)

It is the competence of the diocesan bishop to erect public associations of the faithful (Cc. 312.l.n.3 and 312.2). The associations working in the diocese are subject to the vigilance of the local ordinary (C. 305.2). Canon 317, 1 & 2 refer to the power of the diocesan bishop in

the appointment of the supreme moderator and the chaplain for the associations. The bishop can suppress an association which he has established, and also those which the religious have established by apostolic indult and with the consent of the bishop himself (C. 320.2). In case of suppression, an association can always take hierarchical recourse against the decree of the competent authority (Cc. 1732-1739). Religious are also bound by the particular laws, decrees and ordinances of the bishop or of the episcopal conference of the place concerning the membership in or the cooperation with societies or associations.

9.12 Exercise of other forms of Apostolate

Canon 678.1 extends the area of subjection and obedience of religious to the authority of the diocesan bishop in exercising all types of apostolic works in the diocese (spiritual and corporal works of mercy, social services, legal services, advocacy, self help groups, etc.). In this connection the provisions of canons 285, 286 and 287 concerning public office, business/trade, politics and labour unions are of importance and the religious working in a diocese are obliged to observe them by virtue of Canon 672. Religious are public ministers in church, and certain activities have been judged generally inappropriate or unbecoming for public ecclesial ministers. In these matters they have to follow also the diocesan norms or directives given in view of the need to protect the rights of the Church and the common good of the faithful in the diocese (C. 287.2). The ministry of the clergy is directed to the faithful, not just members of a political party or trade union.

9.13 Public Comportment of the Religious

Canon 669 prescribes that the religious should, as a sign of their consecration and as a witness of poverty, wear the habit of their institute, determined in accordance with the institute's own law. The religious clerics who do not have a special habit should wear suitable ecclesiastical dress, in accordance with the norms established by the episcopal conference and legitimate local custom (C. 284). If the episcopal conference has not given any norms, they should follow the diocesan policy.

9.14 Entrusted Works of Apostolate/Ecclesiastical Offices

The diocesan bishop recognizes that members of certain religious institutes could best accomplish certain works because of the nature and end of the institute and their professional training. If these specific works are entrusted to a religious, they remain under the bishop's authority. But religious work in many dioceses and may have transfers from one diocese to another. Hence it is suggested that the diocesan bishop and religious superiors meet from time to time to discern how best to carry out the pastoral plan of the diocese (C. 678. 3). The written agreement, which is a must in the case of entrusted works, should include also the matters concerning the assignment, number of persons to be assigned, proper remuneration, health benefits, transportation, provision for retreat and vacations, transfer and removal of persons connected with the works (C. 681.2).

According to canon 678.1, religious are subject to the authority of the bishop in the exercise of apostolic activities. This is true also in the case of entrusted works. However, in the exercise of entrusted works, the religious are subject also to the direction of the bishop, that is to say, to his guidance and moderation, to his pastoral vigilance and visitation and to his particular and practical criteria and guidelines given to effectively engage in for the good of the diocese. While keeping this in mind, the religious, while working in the entrusted works, is to be obedient to their own superiors and be faithful to the discipline of the institute (Cc. 681.1, 678.2 & 3).

Ecclesiastical offices (Cc. 145-196) also can be entrusted to or conferred on religious (C. 682). If an ecclesiastical office in a diocese is to be conferred on a religious, the religious is appointed by the diocesan bishop on presentation by, or at least with the consent of, the competent religious superior. The religious can be removed from the office at the discretion of the authority that made the appointment, with prior notice being given to the religious superior; or by the religious superior, with prior notice being given to the appointing authority. Neither requires the other's consent (C. 682). If there is a written agreement in place it will provide stability, as an appointment to an office requires stability.

9.15 Pastoral Visitation

The bishop has the obligation to make the pastoral visitation of his entire diocese at least once every five years (C. 396.1). The visitation is an occasion to know the faithful entrusted to his care and to see to the various institutions present in the diocese. Persons, Catholic institutes, pious objects and places within the boundaries of the diocese are subject to ordinary episcopal visitation. The bishop may visit the members of religious institutes of pontifical right and their houses only in the cases stated in the law (C. 397.2).

To apply these general norms of law on episcopal visitation to the apostolic activities of the religious in the diocese, canon 683 says: Either personally or through a delegate, the diocesan bishop can visit churches or oratories to which Christ's faithful have habitual access, schools other than those open only to the institute's own members, and other works of religion and charity entrusted to the religious, whether these works be spiritual or temporal. He can do this at the time of the pastoral visitation, or in a case of necessity (C. 683.1).

The purpose of the pastoral visitation is to help the ministers to evaluate and function effectively and pastorally for the good of the people and the church. It is also an occasion to address issues and encourage persons in ministry. The pastoral plan of the diocese is to be looked into and any grievances that people may make should be addressed.

As to the obligations of the religious at the time of the pastoral visitation, the Code prescribes that they are to act with trust towards the visitor, to whom when lawfully questioned they are bound to reply truthfully and with charity. It is not lawful for anyone in

any way to divert the religious from this obligation, or otherwise to hinder the scope of the visitation (C. 628.3).

When the bishop discovers an abuse or certain abuses at the time of the visitation, he is first to notify the matter to the competent religious superior, and may advise the superior that the situation be corrected. But, if after having notified the situation of abuse or irregularity, the superior concerned does not take the necessary measures, or the superior's intervention proves to be ineffective and in vain, the Bishop can provide or take remedial action on his own authority (C. 683.2).

9.16 Sanctions

In all matters in which they come under the authority of the local ordinary, religious can be constrained by him with penalties (C. 1320). The bishop is the primary moderator of the exercise of the apostolate in his diocese and religious are subject to him, especially in apostolic concerns. In fact in canon 679, it mentions that a bishop can forbid a religious to reside in his diocese for a very grave reason, provided the person's major superior has been informed and the superior has failed to act; the matter must immediately be reported to the Holy See.

The punishment indicated in canon 679 is the prohibition of religious from his/her remaining/residing in the diocese (Cf. Cc. 1336, 1. n.1, 1337). The penalty prescribed by canon 679 is not obligatory but only facultative. Accordingly, to rectify the situation of a delinquent religious in the diocese, the bishop should make use of other pastoral means.

The penalty is to be imposed only when there is a most grave cause. In the context of canon 678.1, the cause is connected with the matters in which the religious are subject to the power of the diocesan bishop in exercising their apostolic activities in the diocese or a violation of ecclesial or civil law causing public scandal.

The application of this penalty of canon 679 demands three conditions: (i) the bishop has notified the major superior of the most grave cause about the religious in question; (ii) the major superior has failed to act; (iii) the bishop is to report the matter to the Apostolic See. The religious and/or the major superior have the right of recourse to the Congregation of Bishops against an action of the diocesan bishop perceived as unjust.

9.17 Taxation

Canon 1263 says that the diocesan bishop, after consulting the finance committee and the council of priests, has the right to levy taxes on public juridical persons subject to his authority for the needs of the diocese.

To provide for the needs of the seminary, the bishop can impose a levy in the diocese. Every ecclesiastical juridical person is subject to the levy for the seminary, including private juridical persons which have a Centre in the diocese (C. 264). Such a tax should be moderate

and in proportion to the income of the persons being taxed and the needs of the seminary. Exempted are those supported solely by alms and those who operate a college for the common good (formation houses run by religious).

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10. Principles for Collaboration

There will be problems between the charismatic and institutional, but a proper pattern of dialogue should be regularly in place. The pastors should encourage charisms and give them freedom to operate. It is the Holy Spirit that gifts the church with charisms. The charisms are to enrich the church. For, the Holy Spirit through these charisms makes the recipients fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the church, as it is written, “the manifestations of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit” (I Cor 12:7). Those who have charge over the church should judge the genuineness and proper use of these gifts, through their office not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good (I Thes 5: 12, 19-21).

Vatican II gave us some fresh insights into the mystery of the church. *Lumen Gentium* while emphasizing the nature of the Church as a Mystery gave importance to its visible expression in the community of the people of God. It also indicated that the kingdom of God is epitomized in the Church but is larger than the Church which is at the service of the Kingdom of God. The council also made it clear that the hierarchy is at the service of the people of God or those in the hierarchy are ministers or servants of the people of God and orient the mission of the Church accordingly²².

When Jesus found that the disciples were moving away from his kingdom values, he called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles Lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve , and give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:25-28).

Jesus establishes his servant–leadership as the model of Christian leadership. “But it shall not be so among you”(Mk 10:43) is not an advice but a command equally valid as “love one another” “go out to the whole world proclaiming the good news” (Mt 28:18). The Gospel style of leadership is defined in terms of being shepherd, servant and steward. The leadership is for mission not just for order, discipline, or to maintain structures.

The human qualities of Jesus like love compassion, understanding, caring, sensitivity, respect for others, availability, adjustability, courage to stand for truth come what may, etc. are the hall-marks of the servant-leadership. Washing of the feet of the disciples is set as

²² Cfr. Jacob Parappally, “Hierarchy and Religious: Partners in Mission” *Jeevadhara*, XLI, No 244 (July 2011) 288.

the attitude the ecclesiastical leader should have in leading and guiding those in his charge. Whatever be his position in the hierarchy he needs to be a loving brother in his shepherding, teaching and sanctifying ministry because in Jesus' kingdom all are brothers and sisters equal in dignity but different in the gifts of charism given for the sake of his body, the Church and for its mission²³.

The decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church, *Christus Dominus*, seeing it in the perspective of the mission says: "A well-ordered cooperation is to be encouraged between various religious communities and between them and the diocesan clergy. There should also be a very close coordination of all apostolic works which especially depend upon a supernatural attitude of hearts and minds, rooted in and founded upon charity... For those works of the apostolate which Religious are to undertake, bishops or episcopal conferences, religious superiors or conferences of major religious superiors should take action only after mutual consultations. In order to foster harmonious and fruitful mutual relations between bishops and religious, at stated times and as often as it is deemed opportune, bishops and religious superiors should meet to discuss those affairs which pertain to the apostolate in their territory" (CD 35).

Conflicts arise between hierarchy and the religious superiors. Some of these originate from ego problems and grow into causing public scandal, sometimes even loss of faith in the church. The fundamental principle governing the affairs of the church should be charity. Juridical procedures and canonical provisions are needed in the church for its smooth functioning, but if things are managed only from the legal angle, couched in conceptions of rights and duties, we do not function as a body of Christ's disciples. In this sense the elder in the community of disciples has the greater responsibility to initiate ongoing dialogue in charity and see that the common good prevails in charity²⁴.

In order to foster better relationships, two principles must be grasped: Consecrated life is by its nature and characteristics, a work of God in the church. Due respect must always be paid to its particular qualities and typical features. Secondly, everything which exists within the church, and which is bestowed by God for her well-being, should, in keeping with God's will, be subject to sacred hierarchy. There should be a harmonious complementarity between the Bishops and the religious. Thus the local authorities should not submit religious to be mere functionaries in the diocese, but must respect their charism and their superiors who have competence over them. Religious must collaborate as fully as possible with those whom the Holy Spirit has appointed to lead the flock of God (Cf. Acts 20: 28). The religious

²³ Ibid, p. 291.

²⁴ Cfr. Saju Chackalackal, "Consecrated Life and Ministry: A Profiling for Consecrated Life in Contemporary India", Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram. September 28, 2019.

must realise that it is in the church they receive the nourishment of their baptismal life and their religious consecration²⁵.

The *motu proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* lays down principles for the right relationship between the hierarchy and the religious. It says “Religious even the exempt, are bound by the laws, decrees and ordinances enacted by the Local Ordinary for various activities, in those matters which touch upon the exercise of the sacred apostolate, as well as for pastoral and social action prescribed or recommended by the local Ordinary” (ES 25, 1) Even though the Episcopal authority is supreme, a sincere dialogue with religious authority is required in matters concerning the apostolate and activities in which religious are involved.

11. Relationships between the Bishop/Diocese and Religious

According to J Danielou, Religious life belongs to the Church charismatically and not to its hierarchical structure. “This charismatic aspect will remain a characteristic of the religious life. The fathers of the desert and the stylites are charismatics. The great religious orders are of charismatic origin. They witness the liberty of the Spirit in the heart of the Christian community. Benedict, Francis, Dominic, Ignatius and Teresa are expressions of the charismatic action of the Spirit in the building of the Church alongside her hierarchical action. The orders which they founded are the necessary institutionalization of these charismata to assure the permanence of their presence in the Church”²⁶.

Bishops along with the clergy should be convinced advocates of the consecrated life, defenders of religious communities, promoters of vocations, firm guardians of the specific character of each religious family both in the spiritual and apostolic field.

1. Bishops should encourage and support religious who are engaged in important apostolic fields. Social communications, technical education, legal interventions, advocacy, fundamental rights of people, inter-religious dialogue, care for migrants and construction workers, should be part of the visioning of the apostolic works of a diocese. These could even be entrusted or carried out by religious.
2. The Bishop as Shepherd of the diocese and Religious Superiors inasmuch as they are responsible for their Institute, should promote the participation of Men and Women religious in the life of the local church. The religious are to obey the Pope and Bishops and show obedience and reverence (Cc. 590, 273). Superiors should strive to increase unity within their own Institute, follow directives of the ecclesiastical authorities and show reverence to them.

²⁵ Cfr. S. Pallissery, “The Charism of Consecrated Life and Diocesan Clergy” *Indian Missiological Review*, 16, No 3, (September 1994), 16-17.

²⁶ J. Danielou, “The Place of Religious in the Church”, *Review for Religious*, 24(July, 1965), 520.

3. In the kingdom Jesus preached and ushered there are only brothers and sisters - God's children. The message of equality of all has not been realized. At times patriarchy expresses itself as the discrimination of women even though the Church as a community of all the baptized would not advocate it. There should be equal dignity with the role of consecrated women in the church. *Vita Consecrata* invites women religious to come forward and speak out on the basis of their experience in the church and in the world and eliminate certain one sided perspective in the church and thus to safeguard the dignity of women and make their unique contribution to the life and mission of the church (VC 57). Bishops, together with their collaborators in the pastoral field should see that the apostolic service of women religious is better known, intensified and increased.
4. Women occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It depends on them to promote a 'new feminism' (VC 58). The regular complaints are that women are not heard, they are dictated to by bishops and diocesan priests and exploited as cheap labour force, their charism and gifts are not taken seriously, they are not represented in decision making bodies in the church, they are not encouraged to specialise in theological subjects and teach and thus make their unique contribution to theology. Until women take up their rightful place in the church, humanity will remain incomplete, imbalanced and defective.
5. The task of promoting vocations should increasingly express a joint commitment of the whole church. It calls for the active collaboration of pastors, religious, families and teachers, as required in something which forms an integral part of the overall pastoral plan of every particular Church (VC 64). Bishops, priests and religious should closely collaborate in the promotion of vocations to religious life. Parishes must give their full cooperation.
6. The pastor must cultivate sincere and familiar relations with the religious superiors, in order to fulfil his ministry of shepherd towards men and women religious (Cfr. CD 15-16). In fact, it is his specific office to defend consecrated life, to foster and animate the fidelity and authenticity of religious and to help them become part of the communion and of the evangelizing action of his church, according to their distinctive nature. His presence at CRI meetings, feasts of institutes, professions, and interest in them will do a world of good.
7. There could be differences in the perceptions of the common good. The Bishop while initiating dialogue should not impose his own view point, but listen to the stirrings of the Spirit revealed through members involved and arrive at a commonly acceptable formula for the realization of the common good of the church. Such processes of dialogue and the attitude of 'give-and-take' will create a more conducive atmosphere for Christian witness and establishment of the Kingdom of God. It would also enhance mutual respect and collaboration in the mission of the church.
8. In a diocese there should not be duplication of works in the same parish. There are a variety of works and these could be shared with different parishes. If the Pastoral

council prepares a calendar of events in the diocese and a pastoral plan for the diocese, it helps religious to plan accordingly. Each year a focus could be given in the diocese (Liturgy, catechesis, vocations, youth etc). The non-Christians should also be part of the parish out reach. Proper catechesis for couples and children of mixed marriages and inter-faith marriages should be encouraged. Various forms of apostolate - Media, Prison, elderly, disadvantaged, terminally ill, substance abuse, new contagious diseases, migrants, construction workers, maids, nurses, etc should be thought of on a diocesan level on a regular basis.

A quote from *Vita Consecrata* would be apt here: “A diocese which lacked the consecrated life would not only be deprived of many spiritual gifts, of suitable places for people to seek God, of specific apostolic activities and pastoral approaches, but it would also risk a great weakening of that missionary spirit which is characteristic of the majority of institutes. There is a duty then to respond to the gift of the consecrated life which the Spirit awakens in the particular churches, by welcoming it with generosity and thanksgiving” (VC 48).

12. Relationship of Religious with Bishops/Diocese

In the church the religious spearhead renewal. Their prophetic charism is different from the charism of authority in the church. These are distinct but they complement each other for the common good. Their relationship is interdependent and dialogical. The dynamics of the church consists in a healthy tension between the charism of prophecy and the charism of authority. Neither of them must be ignored not controlled by the other.

The relationship between the various communities is not one of assimilation but of collaboration and convergence in the Lord. There is an appreciable improvement with regard to the spirit of collaboration, but in all honesty we must admit of increasing situations where the clergy and consecrated people face very painful conflicts that adversely affect both interpersonal relationships and also the effectiveness of their ministries.

Every religious exists in the church and for the church. They should enrich the Church with their distinctive characteristics, according to their specific charism.

1. Religious should cultivate a renewed ecclesial awareness by offering their services for the building up of the Body of Christ, by persevering in fidelity to their rule and by obeying their superiors. They should follow the pastoral plan of the diocese, attend functions of the diocese, and take an active role in the movements and committees of the diocese. Their charism is to enrich the diocese.
2. Religious superiors have a duty to assure the fidelity of the members to the charism of the founder, by fostering the renewal based on the spirit of the times. Religious even while showing a particular spirit of enterprise and foresight for the future, should be intensely loyal to the intention and spirit of their institute, in

full obedience and adherence to the authority of the Hierarchy. Aware that religious life of its very nature requires a special participation on the part of the members, Superiors should strive to encourage it. Contextual formation, involvement in diocesan activities and willingness to cooperate actively in the local church would be some of the means to achieve this.

3. In places where there is more than one rite, religious, when carrying out activities on behalf of the faithful of rites of different from their own, should follow the norms regulating the relationships between themselves and Bishops of other rites²⁷. The religious should be open to inviting other priests from the other rites to conduct services for the people.
4. Religious priests, by virtue of the unity of the priesthood and inasmuch as they share in the care of souls, may be said, in a certain sense, to belong to the diocesan clergy; therefore, in the field of activity, they can and should serve to unite and coordinate Religious Men and Women with the local clergy and Bishop. The religious should use their church forums (CRI) to bring out unity and coordination.
5. Religious should consider the Bishop as Shepherd and the one who guarantees fidelity to their vocation as they carry out their service for the good of the local church. They should comply faithfully with the requests of bishops when they are asked to undertake a greater share in the ministry (*CD 35, 1*). In some cases, they may be qualified and equipped to carry out such ministry.
6. All religious, even exempt, are bound by laws, decrees, ordinances laid down by the Local Ordinary affecting various works, in those matters which concern the exercise of the sacred apostolate as well as the pastoral and social activity prescribed or recommended by the Local Ordinary (*CD 15, 4*). The Bishop is in fact the one responsible for apostolic activity in the diocese; consecrated men and women must cooperate with him so as to enrich ecclesial communion by their presence, witness and ministry.
7. A sense of equality in mission is necessary if the church has to be a catalyst in the whole society. The religious should not be counter-productive with their activities and by going against the explicit instructions of the bishop. If there is some injustice meted out to any member of a community of consecrated persons, Christian internal forums must be created and approached to settle them. It is also good to remind ourselves that in keeping with the style of Jesus, justice dispensed without mercy is not in tune with understanding of justice in the gospel.

²⁷ Dominic Veliath, "Consecrated Life According to Vatican II", 180-181.

13. Conclusion

Consecrated life has grown over the centuries. In the initial stages, it was more of a personal living away from the people. Slowly the idea of living with people, or doing some work for them, gave it a new look. It was always meant to be prophetic and a radical following of Christ. Consecrated persons are called to be a leaven of communion at the service of the mission of the universal church. The charisms they receive are a gift of the Spirit and it is to be recognised by church authority. They work to build up the body of Christ.

The theological basis speaks of their self-donation taken voluntarily, in order to imitate Christ and follow him in his poverty, chastity and obedience. They do this to be more available for the mission, working in and through the church, cooperating with pastors and other laity. Their charism is not a 'private' good to be cherished and cultivated exclusively, but a dynamic gift that ultimately strengthens the ecclesial communion by being at its service. The church recognises them and protects and promotes their way of life. There should be regular dialogue and mutual consultation between the Bishops and religious superiors in order to effectively promote the mission. Both are invited to imbibe a spirit of universal openness, greater cooperation and collaboration, active participation, generous giving in their ecclesial existence and mission.

Abbreviations

AAS	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i>
C	Canon
Cc	Canons
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CD	<i>Christus Dominus</i> : Vatican II, decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church
CT	<i>Catechesi Tradenda</i> : John Paul II
ES	<i>Ecclesiae Sanctae</i> : Apostolic Letter having three parts containing norms for the implementation of certain decrees of Vatican II, Paul VI, 6 August 1966, in AAS, 58 (1966) 757-787
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> : Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> : Vatican II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
Nos	Numbers
PC	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> : Decree on the Up-To-Date Renewal of Religious Life.
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> : Vatican II, Constitutions on the Sacred Liturgy
VC	<i>Vita Consecrata</i> : Post-Synodal Exhortation on Consecrated Life, John Paul II, 25 March 1996

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