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REVITALIZING RELIGIOUS LIFE TODAY: ETHICAL CHALLENGES AND LEADERSHIP

REVITALIZAR LA VIDA RELIGIOSA HOY: DESAFÍOS ÉTICOS Y LIDERAZGO

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Abstract: This paper explores the possible ways of animating religious life in a time marked by sociocultural change and vocational crisis. It seems that a part of the Consecrated have their prophetic soul sickened, that they have lost the capacity of hoping and dreaming (1st part). However, Pope Francis reminds them that this is a time of hope and new prophecy. Therefore, they need the audacity and creativity of their founders to retake the core of their own charism and find the way of incarnating it today through a deep structural transformation (2nd part). More precisely, religious life needs inspiring leadership (3rd part) and a greater attention to fraternal life (4th part).

Keywords: Religious life, Vocational crisis, Leadership, Ethical challenges, Digital era.

Sumario: Este artículo estudia los posibles modos de animar la vida consagrada en un tiempo marcado por el cambio sociocultural, la crisis vocacional y el aumento de la edad media de los religiosos. Se diría que una parte de los religiosos tienen enferma su alma profética, que han perdido la esperanza y la capacidad de soñar (1^a parte). Sin embargo, el Papa Francisco les recuerda que éste es un tiempo de esperanza y nueva profecía. Por tanto, necesitan la audacia y la creatividad de sus fundadores para retomar el núcleo del propio carisma y encarnarlo en la situación actual, afrontando una profunda transformación estructural (2^a parte). Más concretamente, los religiosos necesitan un liderazgo inspirador (3^a parte) y una mayor atención a la vida en fraternidad (4^a parte).

Palabras clave: Vida religiosa, Crisis vocacional, Liderazgo, Desafíos éticos, Era digital.

Consecrated life is facing a period of inevitable transformation, due to sociocultural change, the vocational crisis¹ and the growing average age of its members,² mainly in Western countries. In Europe, the number of the Consecrated has decreased by more than a third in just two decades.³ The small number of young members compels religious institutes to discern about activities, presences, and even about their own identity: What is our reason for being as a group here and now? What are we and what do we want to be? How do we present ourselves and how do people perceive us?

Trying to prevent any kind of discouragement, Pope Francis reminded the Consecrated that this is a time of gratitude and wonder, of hope and new prophecy.⁴ Religious life has “a glorious history” of service and dedication to the poor and the weak, but, above all, it has “a great history still to be accomplished!”⁵ That glorious past must be carried forward in forms suitable for our time. Indeed, “a charism should not be preserved like a bottle of distilled water; it should be made to bear fruit, courageously comparing it with current reality, with cultures, with history.”⁶

The first part of this article presents the risks of clinging to the past, obsessed with preserving what the institute has always done and accepting only a few adjustments in management and programming. The second part invites every religious institute to recover the core of its own charism, in order to renew and transform itself, based on theological faith and hope. The

¹ From 1995 to 2005, the solemnly professed fell by about 25%. Cf. *AOFM* 3 (2016) 376; *Acta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum [=AOFM]* 3 (2016) 376. From 1970 to 2015, the OFM friars decreased by 65% and OFMCap friars by 40% in the USA. SORDO PALACIOS S. – GAUNT T.P. – GAUTIER M.L., «Population trends among religious institutes of men,» CARA, *Special report*, Georgetown Univ., Washington DC 2015, 1-2. A Spanish version of this article will be published on *Estudios Franciscanos* 467 (2019).

² In 2015, 36% of all OFMCap friars worldwide were over 60 years old, and their average age was over 63 in some conferences: CENOC 69.4, CECOC 66.4, NAPCC 64.8, CIMPCAP 63. Cf. UFFICIO DI STATISTICA OFMCap, *Statistiche*, Rome 2015. Also online: www.ofmcap.org.

³ The disappearance of congregations and religious institutes is not something new. “Approximately 75 percent of all Religious Orders or Congregations ever founded have become extinct.” O’MURCHU D., *Religious Life in the 21st Century: The Prospect of Refounding*, Orbis, Maryknoll, NY 2016 (part three: conclusion).

⁴ Francis, «Apostolic letter to all Consecrated» (Nov 21, 2014), in *AAS* 106 (2014) 935-947, nn. I,1 e II,2.

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, «*Vita consecrata*. Post-synodal apostolic exhortation,» [*VC*], (March 25, 1996), n. 110, in *AAS* 88 (1996) 377-486.

⁶ FRANCIS, «Address to the National Assembly of the Italian conference of major superiors (CISM),» (Tivoli, Nov. 7, 2014), in *OR* 255 (Nov. 8, 2014) 8.

third part outlines the characteristics of the leadership that is necessary today to accompany and encourage this process of transformation. Finally, the fourth part focuses on life in fraternity as the most attractive and significant aspect of consecrated life in today's world. People expect religious members to be experts in human relationships and their communities to be examples of welcoming and harmonious intercultural fraternity.

1. Reduced to just keeping and administering

In the current circumstances, consecrated persons can fall into frustration and discouragement, as if the decline were inevitable and, therefore, as if they had to prepare themselves for a dignified death (*Ars moriendi*). In fact, it would seem that a number of the Consecrated have lost their prophetic impulse, along with hope and with the capacity to dream. Enclosed in the nostalgia of past times, they have put aside their creative and their reforming capacity.

Today, there is also a lack of new theological proposals on consecrated life. To cope with this difficult and complex situation, the Consecrated need to rekindle their hope:

The present moment of consecrated life is neither the best nor the worst in history. It is ours; the one that we have to live and to manage, moved by that faith which acts in charity and makes hope possible.⁷

1.1. The danger of a certain immobility

In responding to current challenges, many religious institutes simply look for the best way of managing and programming the activities that, until recently, were socially appreciated and personally rewarding. Looking with nostalgia at the past, they try to maintain and revitalize those experiences in all possible ways, even resorting to bringing vocations from other continents. Pope Francis has called “artificial insemination”⁸ to those “imports” of religious members, which are carried out without rigorous discernment, focusing above all on filling the gaps and keeping the old activities standing.

⁷ Spanish Union of Major Superiors (CONFER), *Pasión por Cristo, pasión por la humanidad*, n. 57, Claretianas, Madrid 2005 [My translation].

⁸ Francis, «Address: Jubilee for Consecrated life» (Feb 1, 2016), in *OR* 25 (Feb. 1-2, 2016) 8.

This way of acting responds to the so-called “programming method,” which usually starts with an analysis of reality. In a second moment, it formulates options and priorities that can guide the elaboration of concrete responses to the challenges encountered. Subsequently, the results are evaluated to verify if the planned objectives are being achieved.⁹ The aim is to preserve and improve the usual lifestyle and activities, without opening up to new perspectives of transformation.

Many religious institutes have devoted enormous efforts and energies to teaching, healthcare, and other social services that used to give them self-esteem and social prestige. At present, however, they feel confused, because they see that their presence in these areas is no longer required, as civil authorities are assuming those services. Nevertheless, they try to continue carrying out the same activities, appealing to the good management that the Congregation can guarantee and to the fact that those activities can be a good platform for evangelization. If, despite all effort, they realize that the Religious institute is no longer able to maintain those activities, then they first think about the possibility of renting the buildings or adapting them as hotels for religious tourism.

This does not seem to be a coherent option. Instead, their first step should be to make a serious discernment on how to live today the evangelical radicalism that has given rise to the institute.¹⁰ The fact of remembering the past lifestyle and activities should not lead them to nostalgia, hindering any possible change. Instead of idealizing the figure of the founder too much, they should re-read his teachings and vision in the light of the Spirit, in order to grasp their true relevance for today.

More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities.¹¹

⁹ García Paredes J.C.R., «Procesos de transformación: volar, viajar, contemplar» (Jan 31, 2017), in <https://vidareligiosa.es/procesos-de-transformacion-volar-viajar-contemplar/>

¹⁰ “To discern, in the light of the Spirit, the best ways to preserve and adapt their charism and their spiritual patrimony to changing historical and cultural situations.” *VC* 42; SECONDIN B., *Abitare gli orizzonti. Simboli, modelli e sfide della vita consacrata*, Paoline, Milano 2001, 99-102.

¹¹ Francis, «Apostolic letter to all Consecrated people» (Nov 21, 2014), n. I,1.

1.2. The *crowding-out* effect

The insistence on the method of programming can leave evangelical radicalism aside and thus cause *the crowding-out effect*,¹² which is also observed in many other areas of today's social life. It consists, basically, in abandoning the internal motivations to assume others that are more superficial and utilitarian. In the case of the Consecrated, *the crowding effect* could push them to live on the income of rented property, instead of putting into practice new ways of living today their own charism (exodus, desert).

Using the paradigmatic figures proposed by Bauman,¹³ we could say that, due to *the crowding effect*, the pilgrim becomes a tourist (and vice versa). The tourist is a potential pilgrim that has lost sight of his goal and has left aside the internal motivations that should guide his pilgrimage. Without that unifying center, he uses everything for egotistical interests, in an anxious search for immediate utility and pleasure, but without ever quenching his deep thirst.

The crowding-out effect can also occur in the opposite direction, turning the tourist into a pilgrim. For example, the vocation strengthens internal motivations, since it helps the individual to discover a mission that catalyzes his energies and gives direction to his personal and community life. The person who discovers it becomes a pilgrim; that is to say, a traveler who joyfully advances towards a precise goal, feeling in solidarity with his fellow wayfarers and always open to gratuitousness, which he experiences every day. The Consecrated themselves must be joyful pilgrims, who rediscover the radical nature of their own foundational charism, and so are always ready to start processes of transformation.

Applying this discourse to vocational promotion, the Consecrated should never try to lower the level of their charismatic proposal in order to obtain a greater number of possible candidates. On the contrary, their lifestyle will be more attractive to young people if it is consistent with the ideal. Their testimony should also express and make visible the values that are signifi-

¹² Frey B.S., *Not just for the money: An economic theory of personal motivation*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham 1997. *The crowding-out effect* could lead, for example, to the apparent paradox that workers are less diligent in doing their job well even when the entrepreneur increases their economic remuneration.

¹³ Bauman Z., *Dentro la globalizzazione. Le conseguenze sulle persone*, Laterza, Rome 2001, 102ss. "Il vagabondo è l'*alter ego* del turista [...]. Sono entrambi consumatori." *Ibid.*, 104-105. We have studied these figures more deeply in: CARBAJO NÚÑEZ M., «Estilos de vida y sostenibilidad: el peregrino y el turista,» in Hernández Vidales A. (ed.), *Francescanesimo e mondo attuale: stile di vita francescana*, Antonianum, Rome 2016, 567-584.

cant for today's world; for example, hospitality and forgiveness versus stark competitiveness; sobriety instead of consumerism and the throwaway culture; fraternity in lieu of anonymity and selfish individualism.

2. "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rm 12:2)

The consecrated life is a continuous search for God, a perennial yearning to find Him (*quaerere Deum*). In this quest, God always has the initiative. He lets himself be found, accompanies us and indicates the horizon we have to reach:¹⁴ "Behold, I make all things new." (Rev 21:5)

The consecrated person, due to his adherence to the Gospel, knows well in whom he has believed (cf. 2Tim 1:12), and this awareness supports him in facing fears, prejudices, and new challenges. He does not exclude weighted reflection and the necessary programming, but above all, he yearns to remain faithful to the ideal. He needs a program, but subordinates it to the dream; he sees the difficulties, but is moved by hope.

We need an inner motivation that encourages and gives us meaning. Indeed, "a commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us."¹⁵ Mysticism and spirituality "motivate, nourish, and give meaning to our individual and communal activity."¹⁶

2.1. To renew ourselves by theological virtues

Religious life is meant to symbolically anticipate the future we hope for. When the tension towards the ideal diminishes, the decline, accommodation, despair, and eventually death begin to take hold. In the spiritual life, if you do not progress, you go backwards.

"Do not conform yourselves to this age" (Rm 12:2). To advance is to be transformed, often through a profound revision of life; i.e., to leave the accommodated forms of life, vitiated by selfish compromise, and to assume those that best embody the ideal here and now.

¹⁴ Jn 1:14. "God himself had provided signposts, indeed he had marked out a path." BENEDICT XVI, «Meeting with representatives from the world of culture. Collège des Bernardins,» (Sept 12, 2008) in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*, IV/2 (2008) 270-280.

¹⁵ Francis, «*Laudato Si'*. Encyclical letter» [LS], (May 24, 2015), n. 216, in *AAS* 107/9 (2015) 847-945.

¹⁶ Francis, «*Evangelii gaudium*. Apostolic Exhortation» [EG], (Nov 24, 2013), n. 261, in *AAS* 105 (2013) 1019-1137.

“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Mt 14:31). All human beings can experience disappointment, but the person of faith manages to overcome it radically when he cultivates his “vocation” to supernatural life. By strengthening faith and hope, he manages to open his heart, will, and mind, transcending the limits of his knowledge. In fact, all of us “need dreams, vision, and audacity.”¹⁷ Being a small number is not a problem: God has always started his great works with a “small remnant.”

The biblical principle of the small number radiates hope. Of course, the fact that God always begins with a remnant of people does not imply that, wherever small numbers are given, God is there to start over. The small numbers can also mean the end of something that started with a remnant and reached large dimensions, but the soup lost its flavor because too much water was poured into it. We should not impoverish the biblical principle of the remnant.¹⁸

Current challenges demand a dynamic and creative fidelity to one’s own charisma, overcoming the disenchanting pragmatism that evaluates everything on quantitative criteria. We have to embrace a spirituality less triumphalist and more in line with the *kenosis* of Christ crucified. The main problem for the Consecrated is not the decreasing numbers, but mediocrity, the fading or even the absence of ideals. There is a lot of difference between being “a small remnant” and being a “leftover.”

Johann Baptist Metz invites us to assume “a mysticism of open eyes,”¹⁹ both inward and outward. The exterior gaze cannot be separated from interiority and vice versa. Only with a contemplative look, we can perceive the complexity of our world and discover the face of God in the suffering faces of the poor and abandoned. Opening ourselves to diversity, we welcome the One and Triune God, who is the source of all unity and all difference.

I ask you to work concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor, and finding creative ways to catechize, to proclaim the Gospel and to teach others how to pray. Consequently, I would hope that structures can be streamlined, large religious houses repurposed for works which better re-

¹⁷ García Paredes J.C.R., *Otra comunidad es posible. Bajo el liderazgo del Espíritu*, Claretianas, Madrid 2018, 160; cf. Id., «Procesos de transformación,» cit.

¹⁸ Lohfink N., «El principio bíblico del pequeño número,» in *Selecciones de Teología* 42/165 (2003) 57-68, here 58 [My translation].

¹⁹ Metz J.B., *Mistica degli occhi aperti. Per una spiritualità concreta e responsabile*, Queriniana, Brescia 2013.

spond to the present demands of evangelization and charity, and apostolates adjusted to new needs.²⁰

2.2. Open to novelty and change

Religious life must always be open to novelty and change, since there lies its very reason for being. In fact, consecrated life “is not about survival, but new life.”²¹ To face the current challenges, the Consecrated must have the courage to make a profound structural transformation, which cannot be reduced to a restructuring process.²²

Religious institutes are living organisms that need to be constantly open to vital processes of transformation; that is, they must be ready to change and improve their form in order to respond adequately to the internal, external, spiritual, environmental, and contextual influences they receive. Spirituality is not possible without these processes.²³

Being aware that all we are and have is a gift, the Consecrated must open themselves to the future with hope,²⁴ paying attention to the signs of the times, exploring new paths, interacting with the vital context. In this way, they can orient adequately their continuous regeneration. Religious life cannot survive without this process of transformation.²⁵

The Consecrated must discern also their way of evangelizing and giving testimony. Today the Church invites all Christians to live and communicate the joy of the Gospel in forms, languages and symbols that are understandable to contemporary people. This implies a profound renewal, which in-

²⁰ Francis, «Apostolic letter to all Consecrated People» (Nov 21, 2014), n. II, 4.

²¹ Francis, «Omelia.» (Feb 2, 2019) in *OR* 29 (Feb 4-5, 2019) 11.

²² Miron E., «Nómadas o sedentarios,» in *Cistercium* 210 (1998) 267-304, here 290.

²³ García Paredes J.C.R., «Ars moriendi charismatica y la capacidad autopoiética del carisma: un liderazgo inteligente para los desafíos actuales,» in ALDAY J.M. (ed.), *Un futuro para la vida consagrada*, Claretianas, Madrid 2012, 153-175; cf. LALOUX F. *Reinventar las organizaciones*, Arpa, Barcelona, 2016.

²⁴ Jacques Derrida makes a useful distinction between the “future” and the “yet-to-come” [l’avenir]. We can, in some way, foresee, intuit, anticipate, and program the future, while the “yet-to-come” surprises us; its arrival is totally unexpected. “La condición para que el por-venir siga siendo/estando por venir es que no solo no sea conocido, sino que no sea cognoscible como tal”. DERRIDA J., *Mal de archivo: una impresión freudiana*, Trotta, Madrid 1997, 79.

²⁵ “La vie religieuse, sous les formes qu’elle s’est données, est non seulement en perte de vitesse, elle est bel et bien en train de disparaître.” DE MAHIEU W., «Quel avenir la vie consacrée se donnera-t-elle? Ou quel avenir accueillera-t-elle?» in *Vies Consacrées* 87/3 (2015) 209-216, here 209.

volves everything (customs, styles, language). Nowadays we can neither “passively and calmly wait in our church buildings,” (EG 15) nor stubbornly maintain the activities we have always done, but which have already lost their social relevance.

Pope Francis invites us to be in “a constant desire to go forth” (EG 27). Instead of nostalgically yearning for the sociological Christianity of past times, the Consecrated must bear witness to the Gospel, without fear or preventions, joyfully enculturating it in the new social context. When conventions fall, convictions must be strengthened.

2.3. “Let’s start, brothers”

Institutes of Consecrated Life are thus invited courageously to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today’s world.²⁶

Francis of Assisi is a model in this. He had been trained to be a good merchant and was willing to risk his life to become a knight. However, when he receives God’s call, he begins a laborious process of transformation that leads him to change radically his way of living, of perceiving the world, and of understanding his own identity.

Since his conversion, Francis lets the Spirit lead him. After three years, marked by laborious discernment,²⁷ he feels sure of the path he has undertaken and defends his choice before those who suggest him other possible alternatives (Bishop of Assisi, Cardinal of Saint Paul, Hugolin, Innocent III). He is convinced that the Lord himself has revealed to him that way of life, has given him the strength to initiate it,²⁸ and will continue to show him the way to follow. However, he also remains obedient to the Church and open to the voice of the Spirit.

²⁶ VC 37. Cf. Millán Asín M.A., *Liderazgo y gestión. Lo que podemos aprender de los fundadores*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2013, 89-122.

²⁷ Francis already feels sure of his vocation: “This is what I want,” he said, “this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart.” CELANO T. OF, «The Life of Saint Francis [*Vita prima*,]» [*ICel*,] in ARMSTRONG R.J. – HELLMANN J.A.W. – SHORT W.J. (ed.), *Francis of Assisi: Early documents*, 3 vol., New City Press, New York 2001 [*FAED*], I, 171-308, n. 22. Cf. Carbajo Núñez M. *Francisco de Asís y la ética global*, PPC, Madrid 2008, 45-68; Uribe F., «El proceso vocacional de Francisco de Asís,» in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo* 88 (2001) 44-69.

²⁸ Francis of Assisi, «The Testament» [*Test*] nn. 1
14 (*FAED* I, 124-127).

“He constantly hoped to begin again.” (*ICel* 103) In fact, the way of life that he assumed in 1210 kept evolving, adapting to changing situations, although never leaving the freshness and radicalism of the beginnings. His last words, in the will of 1226, express it clearly (*Test*).

He enthusiastically transmitted to his brothers this constant openness to the newness of God: “Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up until now we have done little or nothing” (*1Cel* 103). He thus showed an absolute confidence in the divine Providence. Clearly, he did not attempt to reincarnate the myth of Sisyphus, condemned forever to climb the mountain with the weight of his burden. Francis had experienced the gratuitousness of God, who “gave him such faith,” led him among the poor and taught him to be merciful (*Test* 1-4). He knew that God himself accompanied him and helped him carry his light load.

3. The importance of leadership

The best leader is not an instructor, but a witness, who “collaborates with the flow of grace, who senses where the Spirit leads.”²⁹ Indeed, religious life needs an inspiring leadership that encourages active participation, creativity, and enthusiastic commitment in the process of transformation. In fact, the leader should inspire and instill enthusiasm.

In his book “Start with why,”³⁰ Simon Sinek uses the image of three concentric circles to show the characteristics of a leadership that is capable of inspiring change. The innermost circle corresponds to the “why,” then comes the “how” and finally the “what.” To be inspirational, the leadership has to give priority to the “why” and, starting from it, try to answer the questions of the outermost circles. Sinek says that the “why” of every individual and organization is always linked to the past; that is, to the path already walked and to the experiences lived.

Personal actions and lifestyle become rewarding and meaningful when the subject is aware of the “why” he is living and acting in that precise way. However, many people often take the opposite direction: they first de-

²⁹ García Paredes J.C.R., «El liderazgo “que viene de Dios,”» in *Vida religiosa* 112/4 (2012) 24 [My translation]. “No hacen falta maestros, sino testigos.” GONZALO L.A., «Líderes que mantengan la expectación y el apasionamiento,» in *Ibid.*, 17. “Today too, people prefer to listen to witnesses.” *EG* 150

³⁰ Sinek S., *Start with why. How great leaders inspire everyone to take action*, Portfolio, New York 2009.

cide about “what” to do, then about “how” to do it, and seldom arrive to think about “why” to do it. All organizations know “what” they do and even “how” they do it, but they often forget about the “why;” that is, about the social meaning of their activity. Consequently, they tend to focus only on their particularistic and utilitarian interests.

3.1. The *crowding-out effect*: from the “why” to the “what”

We can relate the image proposed by Sinek with the *crowding-out effect*. As previously indicated, this effect occurs when deep motivations are left aside and, instead, priority is given to the results (the “what”) and to the winning image (the “how.”)

Parents can fall into this trap when they educate their children by continually resorting to immediate rewards and punishments, without helping them to understand the deeper motivations. In this way, young people can think that everything is relative and that their collaboration has to be negotiated and bought. Thus, the selfish calculation supplants the logic of gift. Unable to perceive the deep reasons of their actions, they only look for utilitarian benefits, leaving aside the question of meaning and ignoring the ultimate goal of their lives.³¹

Incentives and rewards are frequently used in the business environment today, but the importance of the employee’s personal involvement is rarely acknowledged. If a company or institution shows that it gives great importance to money, it will attract those who, when looking for a job, are moved almost exclusively by pecuniary interests, without any other intrinsic motivation.³² However, if the entrepreneur succeeds in making his workers feel personally identified with the company’s objectives; that is, if he manages to involve them in such a way that they believe what he believes in, then they will really do their best to help the company achieve its purpose and objectives.

If the people inside a company are told to come to work and just do their job, that’s all they will do. If they are constantly reminded WHY the company was founded and told to always look for ways to bring that cause to life while performing their job, however, then they will do more than their job.³³

³¹ Luigino Bruni presents some examples: BRUNI L., *Il prezzo della gratuità*, Città nuova, 2008, 40-43, 71.

³² Cf. Frey B.S., *Not just for the money. An economic theory of personal motivation*, Elgar, Cheltenham 2007.

³³ SINEK S., *Start with why*, 99.

Therefore, every organization must clearly illustrate its identity, objectives, and priorities, so that the employees know and can assume the “why” of their collaboration with it. For instance, at a social level, “Dr. King said he had a dream, and he inspired people to make his dream their own.”³⁴

Religious life must also continually show its “why,” i.e., its ideal, its dream. In this way, all its members and candidates can feel fully involved in the common vision and mission.

3.2. Characteristics of these three leaderships

The leadership of the “what” reflects people’s obsession with efficiency in today’s society.³⁵ What really matters are the results, the numbers (“How many young people signed up?”); everything else is subordinated to it. This can lead to manipulation, abuse, and blackmailing others: “Collaborate or you will suffer the consequences.” The leader is supposed to be a good manager, coldly effective, with no regard for the suffering he can cause to his brothers or employees.

The leadership of the “how” is mainly concerned with the appearance, the way of presenting himself, in order to convince and convey a good image. The truth of the facts is not as important as the good representation of the actors. Instead of discerning the deep motivations and the true roots of the problems,³⁶ this kind of leader prefers to appeal to feelings. He tries to fascinate his potential followers with marketing techniques and constantly playing on the effects. An example of this is the theatrical dramatization of current politics, increasingly assimilated to a media show. Politicians try to attract people, to have many enthusiastic supporters, but they prefer to keep them rather passive and disinterested in improving society and in overcoming the structures of domination. Even in religious life, the authorities can generate admiration without encouraging members to carry out the necessary changes.

The leadership of the “why,” instead, agitates the consciences, pushes to revise the accommodated ways of understanding the charism, the vision, and the mission. It focuses neither on the results (the “what”) nor on “how”

³⁴ Sinek S., *Start with why*, 138.

³⁵ To clarify and expand what we say in this section: GARCÍA PAREDES J.C.R., «¿Tengo un sueño?» o «¿Tengo un programa?» El liderazgo del Espíritu,» in *Internet*: <http://www.xtorey.es/?p=2679> (Access: June 22, 2019).

³⁶ “Si cerca di attirare a qualsiasi prezzo l’attenzione delle telecamere.” RIEFFEL R.M., *Che cosa sono i media? Pratiche, identità, influenze*, Armando, Rome 2006, 103; SARTORI G., *Homo videns. La sociedad teledirigida*, Santillana, Madrid 2008, 69-106. In Italy, everything seemed to revolve around Berlusconi’s personal life during his last term as president.

to get them, but on the identity itself and on the ideal that should inspire everything. When the Congregation needs to be reorganized, the reflection does not focus on knowing “what” other Religious Institutes have done and “how” to apply it to one’s own situation, but it begins discerning the “why” of that specific religious group in the current world. Rather than applying well-known models, it opens up to the inspiration that gave rise to their own charism, in order to discern how to incarnate it today. Rather than a program, it pursues a dream.

3.3. In the light of the Spirit and according to God

The leadership of the “why” is clearly present in Francis of Assisi. He wanted his friars to have the Holy Spirit as general minister of the Order³⁷ and to obey him when making any possible decision. Furthermore, he asked them to “serve and obey one another voluntarily,”³⁸ Therefore, he proposes a leadership that is expression of mutual and charitable service.

In the exercise of leadership, his friars must always keep in mind the “why” of their consecration;³⁹ that is, they should discern if they live “according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel.” (*Test* 14) The Rule they profess and the authority of the “ministers and servants” find inspiration and measure in the Gospel.⁴⁰ Consequently, their activities and structures must be continually revised in the light of the “spirit of the divine letter”⁴¹ and with an eye on the giver of all good⁴² - that is, “according to God.” (*Rnb* 2,10)

The history of the Franciscan family shows innumerable attempts to return to the originality of the charism and to incarnate it in the different times and places. The movements of reform have tried to return to the simplicity of fraternal life and to the apostolate of presence carried out by the first friars. Today, once again, the Franciscan family and other religious congregations must take back the nucleus of their own charism to express it in an understandable language for today’s world.

³⁷ Celano T. of, «The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul [*Vita seconda*,]» [*2Cel*], n. 193, (*FAED* II, 231-393).

³⁸ Francis of Assisi, «The Earlier Rule,» [*Rnb*], n. 5,13 (*FAED* I, 63-86).

³⁹ Francis of Assisi, «The Later Rule,» [*Rb*], n. 12,4 (*FAED* I, 99-106).

⁴⁰ The “ministers and servants” must not command their brothers “anything that is against their soul and our rule,” (*Rb* 10,1) and the brothers must obey them in “those matters concerning the well-being of their soul and which are not contrary to our life.” *Rnb* 4,3; 5,2.

⁴¹ Francis of Assisi, «Admonitions,» [*Adm*], n. 7,3 (*FAED* I, 128-137).

⁴² “In whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God.” FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «A Letter to Brother Leo» (*FAED* I, 122-123).

More than a program, the Consecrated need a dream, an ideal that catalyzes all their energies and pushes them to be completely open to the action and novelty of the Holy Spirit. They too need to exercise, in a rigorous way, the *sensus fidei fidelium*, safeguarding the authentic and founding values of their own charism. To do this, they must discern how to assume the *novum* of history and the challenges they face, in a dialectical relationship between tradition and innovation, charisma and prophecy.

4. The need to foster fraternal life

The general model of religious life has much changed since the Second Vatican Council.⁴³ The Code of Canon Law of 1917 insisted on the “regular observance,” normally understood as a strict and scrupulous compliance with norms, rules, and schedules, which guaranteed a visible uniformity.

With the Second Vatican Council, the emphasis has shifted from the “common life”⁴⁴ to “fraternal life;” that is, it has focused on a more spontaneous and less regulated lifestyle. The new Code of Canon Law speaks of fraternal communion (c.602) and emphasizes the *vinculum fraternitatis*. This ideal is beautiful, but also very demanding. It is easier to be formally observant than to be truly fraternal.⁴⁵

4.1. A treasure, but also a challenge

In our anonymous and efficiency-oriented world, fraternal life is the aspect that attracts more candidates to religious life and, at the same time, the greatest challenge for the Consecrated themselves. In fact, the fatigues and crises related to an often-disappointing fraternal life are the reasons most frequently pointed out by those who abandon religious institutes, far

⁴³ Cf. Uribarri G., «La vida comunitaria y sus demonios,» in *Vida Religiosa* 93/3 (2002) 12-18.

⁴⁴ “In quavis religione vita communis accurate ab omnibus servetur etiam in iis quae ad victum, ad vestitum et ad suppellectilem pertinent.” *Codex iuris canonici* 1917, c. 594,1.

⁴⁵ “A religious institute is a society in which members, [...] lead a life of brothers or sisters in common.” *Code of Canon Law*, [CIC], c. 607,2, Ancora, Milano 2017. The canon 602 emphasizes the fraternal aspect of life in common. Cf. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, «Fraternal live in community,» [VFC], (Feb 2, 1994), *LEV*, Vatican City 1994.

above those related to celibacy, to the crisis of faith, or to tensions with authority.⁴⁶

This discomfort is especially felt by those who have just completed the period of initial formation, during which fraternal life is carefully cultivated, and receive the Obedience for their first destination. These young Consecrated often experience a deep sense of loneliness. Therefore, superiors must discern how these young can be gradually incorporated into the communities, without having to face seriously problematic situations in fraternal life.

Religious life must be a visible sign of a reconciled humanity, which longs for the unity of hearts without annulling diversity. We expect much from fraternal life, but it is not so easy for us to live it and, in many cases, we are not even willing to assume the ascetic burden that it requires. The always-lurking tendency to activism⁴⁷ and individualism⁴⁸ hinders this ideal.

4.2. Intercultural workshops

In recent decades, religious communities have become intercultural laboratories, since people from very different cultural backgrounds and continents live together. These communities must also face a generational gap, both in the way of conceiving ascetic life and in the changes associated with the digital age.

4.2.1. *Self-realization and “turning to the self”*

In addition to the challenge of coexisting with people from very diverse cultures, religious communities must face a growing generational gap, even in the moral sphere. According to some authors, the ancient morality of

⁴⁶ Amadeo Cencini formulated these conclusions after analyzing the data received in the 1980s at the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. CENCINI A., *La vida fraterna: comunión de santos y de pecadores*, Salamanca, Sígueme, 2019, 16.

⁴⁷ Uribarri G., «Los peligros de la sobrecarga de trabajo para el futuro de la Vida Religiosa,» in *Sal Terrae* 86/1 (1998) 57-66. Against the apostolic Prometheism: Id., *Sal Terrae* 87/6 (1999) 505-513.

⁴⁸ “A one-sided and exasperated stress on freedom contributed to the spread of a culture of individualism throughout the west, thus weakening the ideal of life in common and commitment to community projects.” *VFC* 4b; cf. *VC* 43.

self-denial has been replaced by the morality of self-fulfillment.⁴⁹ While the former promoted social virtues and strong values - sincerity, loyalty, sacrifice, responsibility, and loyalty to the social group - the new morality focuses on psychological values. Pleasure is now seen as a basic criterion of morality, rather than self-control and discipline. Happiness is supposed to depend on self-realization and on being true to oneself.⁵⁰ An old friar in my community has summed up this change by saying: “When I entered religious life, my superiors told me that Profession was the beginning of a life of penance, but now young candidates enter it to be happy. What a big change!”

Charles Taylor argues that this “turn to the Self”⁵¹ began to take shape with the Renaissance anthropocentrism⁵² and, since the 18th century, it has crystallized into “the ideal of authenticity.” This ideal is not an invitation to moral anomy and complacency, but – well understood – it generates internalized moral imperatives and turns the individual into a more autonomous, sociable, and responsible being.

In this new context, religious communities must welcome and properly orientate the desire for self-realization of their young candidates, so that they can feel moved to respond generously to the divine call. These young people need to understand that the scope of religious life is to achieve a complete donation of themselves for love. Assuming the logic of gift, they will experience that our efforts and fatigues are not enough to reach God. The initiative is always his. In fact, God attracts us to Himself and lets us find him. That is why, in the Bible, the indicative precedes the imperative. Also, in spiritual life, the mystical experience accompanies and gives sense to the ascetic commitment.

⁴⁹ Rieff P., *The triumph of the therapeutic. Uses of faith after Freud*, London 1966, 49-50.

⁵⁰ Already in 1950, Riesman claimed that external norms had been replaced by internal criteria: RIESMAN D., *The lonely crowd: a study of the changing American character*, Yale University Press, London 2001.

⁵¹ Taylor C., *The ethics of authenticity*, London 1991 (6th reprint 1995), 78; Id., *Sources of the self. The making of the modern identity*, Cambridge 1989 (8th reprint 1996). On Taylor’s thought: KENNEDY T., *Charles Taylor on authenticity and the morality of Modernity*, in *StMor* 32 (1994) 399-415.

⁵² “It is hard to find anyone [...who] gives no weight at all to something they would identify as fulfillment, or self-development.” TAYLOR C., *The ethics of authenticity*, London 1991 (6th reprint 1995), 75.

4.2.2. *Digital natives & Digital immigrants*

The generational gap occurs also between young people, born in the new digital culture, (digital natives) and the old generations (digital immigrants.⁵³) In a recent internal document of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (*Redemptorists*), it is stated that their candidates “possess another type of experience, other ways of conceiving the world, of reflecting, thinking and working; they use new technologies and new languages. This tension, in many cases, creates two isolated groups.”⁵⁴

Digital natives express themselves and perceive reality in a new way. When they approach consecrated life, they are already accustomed to the use of new technologies and to the communicative dynamics associated with them. Opening their mind and heart, religious communities must strive to understand correctly and objectively how these young candidates relate and see reality.

At their side, digital immigrants try to learn the new language, but “always retain, to some degree, their ‘accent,’ that is, their foot in the past [...]. They speak an outdated language,”⁵⁵ because they did not learn the digital language during childhood. Furthermore, these mature Consecrated often have a dualistic view of the online/offline. Quite often, they see online communication as virtual, unreal, ephemeral, and fallacious. Therefore, they think that the Consecrated must avoid it as much as possible, because it could hinder authentic religious life. Here, too, an effort is needed to assume the new culture.

Today, the prevailing approach to communication no longer speak of virtual/real, online/offline, as opposed and mutually exclusive terms.⁵⁶ The person’s experiences can be authentic or fictitious in both. Rather than separating them, we must integrate them, avoiding any kind of dichotomy. Therefore, all religious (digital immigrants and digital natives) must assume

⁵³ The distinction between digital natives and digital immigrants had been proposed by: PRENSKY M., «Digital Natives, Digital immigrants,» in *On the Horizon* 9/5 (2001) 1-6.

⁵⁴ Redemptorist General Curia, *Revitalizar nuestra vida apostólica: El servicio del liderazgo al estilo de Jesucristo,* pro-manuscripto, Rome 2019, n. 9.

⁵⁵ Prensky M., «Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants,» 1-6.

⁵⁶ “O online e o offline não se substituem como coisas opostas, mas se inter-retroinfluenciam, articulando-se em um nível mais complexo de experiência.” SBARDELOTTO M., «“Tudo está interligado”: uma leitura comunicacional da *Laudato Si’*,» in *internet*: <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/noticias/543914-tudo-esta-interligado-uma-leitura-comunicacional-da-laudato-si> (Access: March 18, 2019).

a type of communication that is always integral, empathetic, and harmonious; i.e., an expression of proximity and encounter.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Cultural change compels religious life to begin a process of renewal and transformation, in order to respond adequately to the new challenges. To achieve it, the consecrated must overcome the temptation of discouragement and the obsession about keeping the activities they have always done. In this regard, we have indicated the importance of leadership and the need to strengthen fraternal life.

Consecrated persons must reinforce their conviction that “the truth of Christ is the full and authentic response to that human desire for relationship, communion and meaning which is reflected in the immense popularity of social networks.”⁵⁸ This implies a serious discernment, both at personal and community levels, since there are no fixed and universally valid solutions.

“Let’s start brothers,” Francis of Assisi repeated to his friars. Moved by the strong faith and hope that animated the founders, the Consecrated are called today to recover the core of their own charism and to incarnate it anew through a profound process of transformation.

⁵⁷ Francis, «Messaggio per la 48ª Giornata mondiale delle comunicazioni sociali,» [WCD], (Jan 24, 2014), in *AAS* 106 (2014) 113-116.

⁵⁸ WCD 2011, in *AAS* 103 (2011) 123-126. “La persona umana e la comunità umana sono il fine e la misura dell’uso dei mezzi di comunicazione sociale.” PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, «Etica nelle comunicazioni sociali,» (June 4, 2000) in *OR* (May 31, 2000), suppl. Ins. Tab. I-IV, n. 21.

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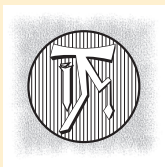
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