

CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED
LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

THE SERVICE OF AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE

Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_20080511_autorita-obbedienza_en.html

Instruction

INTRODUCTION

“Let your face shine upon us and we shall be saved”
(Ps 79:4)

Consecrated Life as a witness of the search for God

1. “Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram”: your face, O Lord, I seek (Ps 27:8). A pilgrim seeking the meaning of life, enwrapped in the great mystery that surrounds him, the human person, even if unconsciously, does, in fact, seek the face of the Lord. “Your ways, O Lord, make known to me, teach me your paths” (Ps 25:4): no one can ever take away from the heart of the human person the search for him of whom the Bible says “He is all” (Sir 43:27) and for the ways of reaching him.

Consecrated life, called to make the characteristic traits of the virginal, poor and obedient Jesus visible,¹ flourishes in the ambience of this search for the face of the Lord and the ways that lead to him (cf. Jn 14:4-6). A search that leads to the experience of peace — “in his will is our peace”² — and which underlies each day's struggle, because God is God, and His ways and thoughts are not always our ways and thoughts (cf. Is 55:8). The consecrated person, therefore, gives witness to the task, at once joyful and laborious, of the diligent search for the divine will, and for this chooses to use every means available that helps one to know it and sustain it while bringing it to fulfilment.

Here, too, the religious community, a communion of consecrated persons who profess to seek together and carry out God's will: a community of sisters or brothers with a variety of roles but with the same goal and the same passion, finds its meaning. For this reason, while *all* in the community are called to seek what is pleasing to the Lord and to obey Him, *some* are called, usually temporarily, to exercise the particular task of being the sign of unity and the guide in the common search both personal and communitarian of carrying out the will of God. This is the service of authority.

A path of liberation

2. The culture of Western Society, strongly centred on the subject, has contributed to the spread of the value of respect for the dignity of the human person, positively fostering the person's free development and autonomy.

Such recognition constitutes one of the most significant traits of modernity and is a providential given which requires new ways of conceiving authority and relating to it. One must also keep in mind that when freedom tends to become arbitrariness and the autonomy of the person,

independence from the Creator and from relationships with others, then one finds oneself before forms of idolatry that do not increase freedom but rather enslave.

In such cases, believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the God of Jesus Christ, must embark upon a path of personal liberation from every idolatrous cult. It is a path which can find its motivation in the Exodus experience: a path of liberation which leads from the acceptance of the common scattered way of thinking to the freedom of adhering to the Lord and from the monotony of one way of looking at things to itineraries that bring one to communion with the living and true God.

The Exodus journey is guided by the cloud, both bright and obscure, of the Spirit of God, and, even if, at times, it seems to lose itself down paths which do not make sense, its destiny is the beatifying intimacy of the heart of God: "I bore you up on eagle wings and brought you here to myself" (*Ex* 19:4). A group of slaves is freed to become a holy people who know the joy of free service to God. The Exodus events are a paradigm which accompanies the entire biblical reality and is seen as a prophetic anticipation of the same earthly life of Jesus, who, in turn frees from slavery through obedience to the providential will of the Father.

Addressees, intent and limitations of the document

3. The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life during its last Plenary Session, which took place 28-30 September 2005, turned its attention to the theme of the exercise of authority and obedience in consecrated life. It was recognized that this theme calls for careful reflection, first of all because of the changes that have taken place in the internal lives of Institutes and communities in recent years, and also in light of what more recent Magisterial documents on the renewal of consecrated life have proposed.

The present Instruction, the fruit of what emerged in the above cited Plenary Session and in the reflection of this Dicastery that followed, is addressed to members of institutes of consecrated life who live a community life, that is to all men and women who belong to religious institutes, to which societies of apostolic life are very similar. However, other consecrated persons, in relation to their type of life, can also cull useful information from it. This document hopes to offer help and encouragement to all those, called to witness to the primacy of God through free obedience to his will, to live their yes to the Lord in joy.

In confronting the theme of this Instruction, it is well recognized that its implications are many and that there exists in the vast world of consecrated life today not only a great variety of charismatic projects and of missionary commitments, but also a certain diversity of models of governance and practices of obedience, differences often influenced by the various cultural contexts.³ Moreover, one must keep in mind the differences that characterize also under the psychological profile, communities of men and women. In addition one must consider the new problems which the numerous forms of missionary collaboration, particularly those with the laity, pose to the exercise of authority. Also the different weights, attributed to local and central authorities in various religious institutes, determine ways of practicing authority and obedience that are not uniform. Finally one must not forget that consecrated life commonly sees, in the "synodal" figure of the general chapter (or of analogous gatherings), the supreme authority of the institute,⁴ to which all the members, beginning with the superiors, must make reference.

To all this one must add the realization that in recent years the way of listening to and living authority and obedience has changed both in the Church and in society. This is due to, among other things: the coming to awareness of the *value of the individual person*, with his or her

vocation, and intellectual, affective and spiritual gifts, with his or her freedom and rational abilities; the centrality of the *spirituality of communion*,⁵ with the valuing of the instruments that help one to live it; a different and less individualistic way of understanding mission, in the *sharing* of all members of the People of God, with the resulting forms of concrete collaboration.

Nevertheless, considering some elements of the present cultural influence one must recall that the desire for *self realization* can at times enter into conflict with *community projects*; the search for *personal well-being*, be it spiritual or material, can render total dedication to the service of the common mission difficult; *visions* of the charism and of apostolic service which are *too subjective* can weaken fraternal sharing and collaboration.

Also not to be excluded is the recognition that in some settings the opposite problems are prevalent, determined by an unbalanced vision on the side of collectivity and of excessive uniformity, with the risk of stifling the growth and responsibility of the individuals. The balance between the individual and community is not an easy one and thus neither is that between authority and obedience.

This Instruction does not intend to treat all the problems raised by the various elements and sensibilities just cited. These remain, so to say, at the base of the reflections and those directions which are proposed. The principle intent of this Instruction is that of reaffirming that obedience and authority, even though practiced in many ways, always have a relation to the Lord Jesus, the obedient Servant. Moreover, it proposes to help authority in its triple service: to the individual persons called to live their own consecration (*first part*); to construct fraternal communities (*second part*); to participate in the common mission (*third part*).

The considerations and directives which follow are proposed in continuity with those of the documents which have accompanied the path of consecrated life in these past not easy years, especially *Potissimum institutioni* of 1990,⁶ *Fraternal Life in Community* of 1994,⁷ the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* of 1996⁸ and the 2002 Instruction, *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*.⁹

FIRST PART

CONSECRATION AND SEARCH FOR THE WILL OF GOD

“Because freed we can serve him in justice and holiness”
(cf. Lk 1:74-75)

Whom are we seeking?

4. The Lord asks the first disciples, who, perhaps, still uncertain and doubtful begin to follow a new *Rabbi*: “*What are you looking for?*” (Jn 1:38). We can read into this question other radical questions: What does your heart seek? What concerns you? Are you looking for yourself or are you looking for the Lord your God? Are you pursuing your own desires or the desire of the One who made your heart and wants to bring it to fullness, as he knows and understands it? Are you running after only passing things or are you seeking the One who does not pass away? “In this world of dissimilarity, with what do we need to be concerned, Lord God? From the rising of the sun to its setting I see men overwhelmed by the turmoil of this world: some look for riches, others,

privilege, others yet again the satisfactions of popularity,” observed St. Bernard.¹⁰

“Your face, O Lord, I seek” (*Ps 27:8*) is the response of the person who has understood the uniqueness and the infinite greatness of the mystery of God and the sovereignty of his holy will but is also the response, even if it is only implicit and confused, of every human creature in search of truth and happiness. *Quaerere Deum* has always been the quest of every being thirsting for the Absolute and the Eternal. Many today tend to consider any kind of dependence humiliating, but the status of creature in itself implies being dependent on an Other and, therefore, as a being in relation, dependent on others.

The believer seeks the living and true God, the Beginning and the End of all things, the God not made in his or her image and likeness but the God who made us in his image and likeness, the God who makes known his will, who indicated the ways to reach him: “You will show me the path of life, fullness of joys in your presence, delights at your right hand forever” (*Ps 16:11*).

To seek the will of God means to seek a friendly and benevolent will, which desires our fulfilment, that desires, above all, a free response in love to its love, in order to make of us instruments of divine love. It is along this *via amoris* that the flower of listening and obedience blooms.

Obedience as listening

5. “Listen, child” (*Pr 1:8*). First of all, obedience is an attitude of a son or daughter. It is that particular kind of listening that only a son or daughter can do in listening to his or her parent, because it is enlightened by the certainty that the parent has only good things to say and give to him or her. This is a listening, full of the trust, that makes a son or daughter accept the parent's will, sure that it will be for his or her own good.

This is most completely true in regard to God. In fact, we reach our fullness only to the extent that we place ourselves within the plan with which He has conceived us with a Father's love. Therefore, obedience is the only way human persons, intelligent and free beings, can have the disposition to fulfil themselves. As a matter of fact, when a human person says “no” to God, that person compromises the divine plan, diminishing him or herself and condemning him or herself to failure.

Obedience to God is the path of growth and, therefore, of freedom for the person because this obedience allows for the acceptance of a plan or a will different from one's own that not only does not deaden or lessen human dignity but is its basis. At the same time, freedom is also in itself a path of obedience, because it is in obeying the plan of the Father, in a childlike way, that the believer fulfils his or her freedom. It is clear that such obedience requires that persons recognize themselves as sons and daughters and enjoy being such, because only a son or a daughter can freely place him or herself in the hands of his or her Father, exactly like the Son, Jesus, who abandoned himself to the Father. Even if in his passion he gave himself up to Judas, to the high priests, to his torturers, to the hostile crowd, and to his crucifiers, he did so only because he was absolutely certain that everything found its meaning in complete fidelity to the plan of salvation willed by the Father, to whom, as St. Bernard reminds us, “it is not the death which was pleasing, but the will of the One who died of his own accord”.¹¹

“Hear, O Israel !” (Dt 6:4)

6. For the Lord God, Israel is a child. Israel is the people whom he has chosen, begotten, brought

up, held by the hand, raised to his cheek and taught to walk (cf. *Hos* 11:1-4), to whom — as the highest expression of affection — he constantly addressed his Word, even if this people did not always listen to it or considered it a weight, as a “law”. The entire Old Testament is an invitation to listen, and listening is a way of coming to the New Covenant when the Lord says: “I will place my laws in their minds and I will write them on their hearts; I will be their God and they shall be my people” (*Heb* 8:10; cf. *Jer* 31:33).

As a free and liberating response of the New Israel to the proposal of a new covenant, obedience flows from listening. Obedience is part of the New Covenant, which has obedience for its distinctive characteristic. From this it follows that obedience can be completely understood only within the logic of love, intimacy with God and the definitive belonging to the One who finally sets all free.

Obedience to the Word of God

7. The first act of obedience on the part of the creature is that of coming into existence in conformity with the divine *fiat* that calls one into being. Such obedience reaches its full expression in a creature free to recognize and accept him or herself as a gift of the Creator, to say “yes” to coming into being from God. This constitutes the first real act of freedom which is also the first and fundamental act of authentic obedience.

Thus, the real obedience of the believing person is adhering to the Word with which God reveals and communicates himself, and through which he renews his covenant of love every day. From that Word flowed life which continues to be transmitted every day. Therefore, every morning the believing person seeks a living and faithful contact with the Word which is proclaimed that day, meditating on it and holding it in his or her heart as a treasure, making of it the root of every action and the primary criterion of each choice, allowing him or herself to be edified by that Word. And at the end of the day placing him or herself before the Word, praising God as Simeon did for having seen the fulfilment of the eternal Word within the small events of the day (cf. *Lk* 2:27-32), and confiding to the strength of the Word whatever has remained unaccomplished. The Word, in fact, does not work only by day, but continuously, as the Lord teaches in the parable of the seed (cf. *Mk* 4:26-27).

The loving encounter with the Word shows one how to discover the way to life and the way through which God wishes to free his children, nourishes one's spiritual instincts for the things which are pleasing to God, conveys the sense and the taste for his will, gives peace and joy for staying faithful, making one sensitive and ready for all the expressions of obedience: to the Gospel (*Rm* 10:16; *2 Th* 1:8), to the faith (*Rm* 1:5; 16:26; *Acts* 6:7), and to the truth (*Gal* 5:7; *1 Pt* 1:22).

However, one must not forget that the authentic experience of God always remains an experience of otherness. “However great the similarity that may be established between Creator and creature, the dissimilarity between them is always greater”.¹² The mystics and all those who have tasted intimacy with God, remind us that the contact with the sovereign Mystery is always contact with the Other, with a will which is at times dramatically dissimilar from our own. To obey God means in fact to enter into an order of values which is “other”, taking on a new and different sense of reality, experiencing an unthought-of freedom to reach the threshold of the mystery: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts” (*Is* 55:8-9).

This entering into the world of God can arouse fear. Such an experience based on the example of

the Saints can show that what is impossible for man is made possible by God. Additionally, it becomes authentic obedience to the mystery of God who is, at the same time, “*interior intimo meo*”¹³ and radically other.

In the following of Jesus, the obedient Son of the Father

8. On this journey we are not alone: we are guided by the example of Christ, the Beloved on whom the Father's favour rests (*Mt* 3:17; 17:5), but also he who has freed us thanks to his obedience. It is he who inspires our obedience in order that the divine plan of salvation be completed through us.

In him everything is a listening to and acceptance of the Father (cf. *Jn* 8:28-29); all of his earthly life is an expression and continuation of what the Word does from eternity: letting himself be loved by the Father, accepting his love in an unconditional way, to the point of deciding to do nothing by himself (cf. *Jn* 8:28) but to do always what is pleasing to the Father. The will of the Father is the food which sustains Jesus in his work (cf. *Jn* 4:34) and which merits for Him and for us the superabundance of the resurrection, the luminous joy of entering into the very heart of God, into the blessed company of his children (cf. *Jn* 1:12). It is by this obedience of Jesus that “all shall become just” (*Rm* 5:19).

He also lived obedience when it presented a difficult chalice to drink (cf. *Mt* 26:39, 42; *Lk* 22:42), and he made himself “obedient to the point of death, and death on a cross” (*Phil* 2:8). This is the dramatic aspect of the obedience of the Son wrapped in a mystery which we can never totally penetrate, but which for us is very relevant, because it uncovers for us even more the *filial* nature of Christian obedience: only the child who senses himself loved by the Father and loves him with his whole self, can arrive at this type of radical obedience.

The Christian, like Christ, is defined as an obedient being. The unquestionable primacy of love in Christian life cannot make us forget that such love has acquired a face and a name in Christ Jesus and has become Obedience. Therefore, obedience is not humiliation but the truth on which the fullness of human persons is built and realized. Hence, the believer so ardently desires to fulfil the will of the Father as to make of it his or her supreme aspiration. Like Jesus, he or she wants to live by this will. In imitation of Christ and learning from Him, with a gesture of supreme freedom and of unconditional trust, the consecrated person has placed his or her will in the hands of the Father to make a perfect and pleasing sacrifice to him (cf. *Rm* 12:1).

However, even before being the model for all obedience, Christ is the One to whom every true obedience is directed. In fact, it is the putting of his words into practice that renders one a disciple (cf. *Mt* 7:24) and it is the observance of his commandments which concretizes love for Him and draws the love of the Father (cf. *Jn* 14:21). He is at the centre of the religious community as the One who serves (cf. *Lk* 22:27) but also as the One to whom one professes one's own faith (“You have faith in God; have faith also in me” [*Jn* 14:1]) and to whom one gives his or her own obedience, because only in this does one carry out a sure and persevering following. “In fact, it is the Risen Lord himself, newly present among the brothers and sisters gathered in his name who points out the path to take”.¹⁴

Obedient to God through human mediation

9. God manifests his will through the interior motion of the Spirit, who “guides to all truth” (*Jn* 16:13), through multiple external mediations. In effect, the history of salvation is a story of mediation, which makes the mystery of grace which God completes in the intimacy of the heart

visible in some way. Even in Jesus' life, it is possible to recognize not a few human means through which He became aware of, interpreted, and accepted the will of the Father, as the *raison d'être* and as the constant food for his life and his mission.

Mediations that exteriorly communicate the will of God must be recognized in the events of life and in the specific requirements of a particular vocation, but they are expressed as well in the laws that give order to the life of groups of people and in the dispositions of those who are called to lead such groupings. In the ecclesial context, laws and dispositions, legitimately given, provide an insight into the will of God, becoming the concrete and ordered realization of the demands of the Gospel from which they are formulated and perceived.

Consecrated persons moreover are called to the following of the obedient Christ within an “evangelical project” or a charismatic one, inspired by the Spirit and authenticated by the Church. Approving a charismatic program that is a religious institute, the Church guarantees that the inspiration that animates it and the norms that regulate it can provide a path for seeking God and holiness. Therefore, the Rule and the other indications concerning the way of life also become means of mediating the will of the Lord: human mediation but still authoritative, imperfect but at the same time binding, the starting point from which each day begins, and also for moving forward in a generous and creative impulse towards that sanctity which God “wills” for every consecrated person. In this journey persons in authority are invested with the pastoral task of leading and deciding.

It is evident that all this will be experienced coherently and fruitfully only if the desire to know and do the will of God, the awareness of one's own fragility and the acceptance of the validity of the specific mediations remain alive, even when the reasons presented are not fully grasped.

The spiritual intuitions of the founders and foundresses, especially of those who have significantly marked the path of religious life throughout the centuries, have always given great importance to obedience. Already at the beginning of his *Rule*, St. Benedict addresses the monk: “To thee, therefore, my speech is now directed, who, giving up thine own will, takest up the strong and most excellent arms of obedience, to do battle for Christ the Lord, the true King”.¹⁵

It must also be remembered that the authority-obedience relationship is situated in the larger context of the mystery of the Church and constitutes a particular actualization of its function as mediator. In this regard the Code of Canon Law recommends that “superiors are to exercise their power, received from God through the ministry of the Church, in a spirit of service”.¹⁶

Learning obedience in the day-to-day

10. Therefore, for the consecrated person it might also come to having “to learn obedience” through suffering or from some very specific and difficult situations: when, for example, one is asked to leave certain personal projects or ideas, to give up the pretext of managing one's life and mission by oneself; or all the times in which what is asked (or who asks it) does not seem to be very humanly convincing. Those who find themselves in such situations now should not forget that mediation by its nature is limited and inferior to that to which it refers, even more so if it deals with human mediation in relation to the divine will; but one should remember that every time one finds oneself faced with a command given legitimately that the Lord requests obedience to the person in authority who, at that moment, represents him¹⁷ and that Christ also “learned obedience from what he suffered” (*Heb 5:8*).

In this regard, it is fitting to recall the words of Paul VI: “You must feel something of the force

with which Christ was drawn to His Cross — that baptism He had still to receive, by which that fire would be lighted which sets you too ablaze — (cf. *Lk* 12:49-50) something of that 'foolishness' which St. Paul wishes we all had, because it alone makes us wise (cf. *1 Cor* 3:18-19). Let the Cross be for you, as it was for Christ, proof of the greatest love. Is there not a mysterious relationship between renunciation and joy, between sacrifice and magnanimity, between discipline and spiritual freedom?"¹⁸

It is precisely in these cases of suffering that the consecrated person learns to obey the Lord (cf. *Ps* 119:7), to listen to him and to remain devoted only to him, waiting patiently and full of hope for his revealing Word (cf. *Ps* 118:81), in complete and generous openness to accomplishing his will and not one's own (cf. *Lk* 22:42).

In the light and strength of the Spirit

11. One remains devoted to the Lord when sensing in some way his presence in human intermediaries, such as in the Rule, the superiors, the community,¹⁹ the signs of the times, the expectations of others and, above all, the poor; when one has the courage to cast the nets on the "strength of his word" (cf. *Lk* 5:5) and not only from solely human motivations; when one chooses to obey not only God but also others, but in every case, for God and not for others. In his *Constitutions*, St. Ignatius writes: "Genuine obedience considers not the person to whom it is offered but Him for whose sake it is offered: and if it is exercised for the sake of our Creator and Lord alone, then it is the very Lord of everyone who is obeyed".²⁰

If in difficult moments those who are called to obey request insistently the Father for the Spirit (cf. *Lk* 11:13), he will give them the Spirit and the Spirit will give light and the strength to be obedient and will help them to know the truth — and it is the truth makes one free (cf. *Jn* 8:32).

Jesus himself, in his humanity, was led by the action of the Holy Spirit: conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the work of the Holy Spirit, at the beginning of his mission, in his baptism he receives the Spirit which descends upon him and guides him; risen he pours forth the Spirit on his disciples that they might enter into the same mission, announcing the salvation and pardon which he merited. The Spirit who anointed Jesus is the same Spirit who can make our freedom similar to that of Christ, perfectly conformed to the will of God.²¹

Therefore, it is indispensable that all open themselves to the Spirit, beginning with superiors, who properly receive authority from the Spirit,²² and "docile to the will of God",²³ under his guidance must exercise it.

Authority at the service of obedience to the Will of God

12. In consecrated life everyone must sincerely seek the will of the Father, because otherwise the reason itself for this choice of life would disappear; but it is equally important to carry out such a search together with the brothers or the sisters because it is properly that which unites them, "making them a family united to Christ".

Persons in authority are at the service of this search to ensure that it occurs in sincerity and truth. In the homily at the beginning of his Petrine ministry, Benedict XVI affirmed significantly: "My real program of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history".²⁴ On the other hand, it is necessary to recognize that the task of being a guide for others is not easy, especially when the sense of

personal autonomy is excessive or conflictive and competitive in its relations with others. Therefore, it is necessary on everyone's part to sharpen his or her ability to see the encounters of this task in faith, in order that he or she might be inspired to have the attitude of Jesus the Servant who washes the feet of his apostles so that they might have a part in his life and in his love (cf. *Jn* 13:1-17).

This calls for a great consistency on the part of those who guide institutes, provinces (or other sections of the institute) and communities. Persons called to exercise authority must know that they will be able to do so only if they first undertake the pilgrimage that leads to seeking the will of God with intensity and righteousness. The advice that St. Ignatius of Antioch gave to one of his fellow bishops is valuable for them: "Nothing is done without your agreement, but you do not do anything without God's agreement".²⁵ Persons in authority must act in such a way that the brothers or the sisters can perceive that when they give a command, they are doing so only to obey God.

Reverence for the will of God keeps those in authority in a state of humble seeking, so that their acting conforms as much as possible to that holy will. St. Augustine reminds us that the one who obeys always fulfils the will of God, not because the command of the authority necessarily conforms to the divine will, but because it is the will of God that is obeyed by the one who is in charge.²⁶ But those in authority, on their part, must search assiduously with the help of prayer, reflection, and the advice of others for what God really wills. Otherwise, instead of representing God, superiors risk putting themselves carelessly in God's place.

With the intention of doing God's will, authority and obedience are not therefore two distinct realities or things absolutely opposed but rather two dimensions of the same evangelical reality, of the same Christian mystery, two complementary ways of participating in the same oblation of Christ. Authority and obedience are personified in Jesus: for this reason they must be understood in direct relation to him and in a real configuration to him. Consecrated life intends simply to live *His* Authority and *His* Obedience.

Some priorities in the service of authority

13. a) *In consecrated life authority is first of all a spiritual authority.*²⁷ Persons in authority recognize that they are called to serve an ideal that is much greater than themselves, an ideal which can be approached only in an atmosphere of prayer and humble seeking, which allows them to grasp the action of the same Spirit in the heart of every brother or sister. Persons in authority are "spiritual" when they place themselves at the service of what the Spirit wants to realize through the gifts which he distributes to every member of the community, in the charismatic project of the institute.

To be in the position of promoting the spiritual life, persons in authority will have to cultivate first in themselves an openness to listening to others and to the signs of the times through a daily familiarity in prayer with the Word of God, with the Rule and the other norms of the life. "The service of authority demands a persevering presence, able to enliven and take initiative, to recall the *raison d'être* of consecrated life, to help the persons entrusted to you to correspond with ever-renewed fidelity to the call of the Spirit".²⁸

b) *Persons in authority are called to guarantee to the community the time for and the quality of prayer*, looking after the community's daily faithfulness to prayer, in the awareness that the community approaches God with small but constant steps, everyday and by everyone's effort, and that consecrated persons can be useful to one another to the extent that they are united to God. Furthermore, persons in authority are called to take care that, beginning with themselves, daily

contact with the Word does not disappear, since “it has the power to edify” (*Acts* 20:32) individual persons and the community and to indicate ways for the mission. Mindful of the command of the Lord, “Do this in memory of me” (*Lk* 22:19), persons in authority will assure that the holy mystery of the Body and of the Blood of Christ is celebrated and venerated as “the source and summit”²⁹ of communion with God and among the brothers and sisters. Celebrating and adoring the gift of the Eucharist in faithful obedience to the Lord, the community draws from it the inspiration and strength for its total dedication to God, in order to be a sign of his gratuitous love for humanity and an efficacious pointing toward future goods.³⁰

c) *Persons in authority are called to promote the dignity of the person*, paying attention to each member of the community and to his or her growth, giving to each one the appropriate appreciation and positive consideration, nurturing sincere affection towards all and keeping reserved all that is said in confidence.

It is appropriate to recall that before invoking obedience (necessary) one needs to practice charity (indispensable). It is also good to make an appropriate use of the word *communion*, which cannot and must not be understood as a kind of delegation of authority to the community (with the implicit invitation to each to “do what he or she wants”), but neither as a more or less veiled imposition of one's own point of view (each one “does what I want”).

d) *Persons in authority are called to inspire courage and hope in the midst of difficulties*. As Paul and Barnabas encouraged their disciples, teaching that “we must undergo many trials if we are to enter into the reign of God” (*Acts* 14:22), persons in authority must help in accepting the difficulties of the present moment, remembering that they are part of the sufferings which are often strewn along the road that leads to the Reign of God.

Faced with some difficult situations in consecrated life, for example, where its presence seems to be weakening and even disappearing, the one who leads the community will recall the perennial values of this kind of life, because today, as yesterday, and as always, nothing is more important, beautiful and true than spending one's own life in the service of the Lord and for the littlest of his children.

Leaders of the community are like the Good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep, because even in the critical moment they do not retreat, but are present, participating in the concerns and the difficulties of the people confided to their care, involving themselves personally; and like the Good Samaritan they will be ready to care for any possible wounds. Furthermore, leaders humbly recognize their own limits and need for help from others, knowing how to turn their own failures and defeats into rich learning experiences.

e) *Persons in authority are called to keep the charism of their own religious family alive*. The exercise of authority also includes putting oneself at the service of the proper charism of the institute to which one belongs, keeping it carefully and making it real in the local community and in the province or the entire institute, according to the plans and orientations offered, in particular by General Chapters (or analogous meetings).³¹ What is required of persons in authority is an adequate knowledge of the charism of the institute, making it part of themselves, in order then better to see it in relation to community life and in relation to its place in ecclesial and social contexts.

f) *Persons in authority are called to keep alive the “sentire cum Ecclesia”*. Persons in authority have the task of helping to keep alive the sense of faith and of ecclesial communion, in the midst of a people that recognizes and praises the wonders of God, witnessing to the joy of belonging to

him in the great family of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. The task of following the Lord cannot be taken by solitary navigators but is accomplished in the bark of Peter, which survives the storms; and consecrated persons contribute a hardworking and joyful fidelity to good navigation.³² Persons in authority should therefore remember that “Our obedience is a believing with the Church, a thinking and speaking with the Church, serving through her. What Jesus predicted to Peter also always applies: ‘You will be taken where you do not want to go’. This letting oneself be guided where one does not want to be led is an essential element of our serving and precisely that which makes us free”.³³

Sentire cum Ecclesia that shines in founders and foundresses implies an authentic spirituality of communion, that is “an effective and affective relationship with the Bishops, primarily with the Pope, the centre of unity of the Church”.³⁴ To him every consecrated person owes full and confident obedience also in virtue of the vow itself.³⁵ Moreover, ecclesial communion demands a faithful adhesion to the Magisterium of the Pope and Bishops as a concrete witness to love for the Church and passion for her unity.³⁶

g) *Persons in authority are called to accompany the journey of ongoing formation.* A task always to be considered most important today on the part of *persons in authority* is that of accompanying the persons for whom they are called to care throughout their lives. This they do not only by offering help in resolving possible problems or in managing possible crises but also in paying attention to the normal growth of each one in every phase and season of life, in order to guarantee that “youthfulness of spirit which lasts through time”³⁷ and that makes the consecrated person ever more conformed to the “sentiments which were in Christ Jesus” (*Phil 2:5*).

Therefore, it will be the responsibility of persons in authority to keep a high level of openness to being formed as well as the ability to learn from life. In particular, this is important to do regarding the freedom of letting oneself be formed by others and for each one to feel a responsibility for the growth of others. Both will be fostered by making use of means of growth in community passed on by tradition and that are today especially recommended by those who have solid experience in the field of spiritual formation: sharing of the Word, personal and community plans, communitarian discernment, review of one's life and fraternal correction.³⁸

The service of authority in the light of ecclesial norms

14. In the preceding paragraphs the service of authority in consecrated life was described in reference to the search for the will of the Father and some of its priorities were pointed out.

In order that these priorities not be understood as purely facultative, it seems appropriate to consider the particular characteristics of the exercise of authority according to the Code of Canon Law.³⁹ In it the evangelical traits of the power exercised by religious superiors on various levels are translated into norms.

a) *The obedience of the superior.* Moving from the characteristic nature of *munus* of ecclesial authority, the Code reminds the religious superior that he or she is first of all called to be the first one to be obedient. In the strength of the assumed office, he or she owes obedience to the law of God, from whom his or her authority comes and to whom he or she must render an account in conscience, to the law of the Church, to the Roman Pontiff, and to the proper law of the institute.

b) *The spirit of service.* After having reaffirmed the charismatic origin and the ecclesial mediation of religious authority, it is reaffirmed that, as all authority in the Church, so too the authority of the religious superior must be characterized by the spirit of service, in imitation of Christ who “came

not to be served but to serve” (*Mk* 10:45).

In particular, some aspects of such a spirit of service are pointed out, whose faithful observance will assure that superiors, in fulfilling their service, will be recognized as “docile to the will of God”.⁴⁰

Therefore, every superior is called to bring to life again, brother to brother or sister to sister, that love with which God loves his children, avoiding, on the one hand, any attitude of domination and, on the other, any form of paternalism or maternalism.

All of this is made possible by *confidence in the responsibility of the brothers or the sisters* “promoting the voluntary obedience of their subjects with reverence for the human person”,⁴¹ and through *dialogue* keeping in mind that bonding must come about “in a spirit of faith and love in the following of the obedient Christ”⁴² and not for other motivations.

c) *Pastoral care*. The Code points out, as the primary goal of the exercise of religious power, that of building “a community of brothers or sisters in Christ in which God is sought after and loved before all else”.⁴³ Therefore, in the religious community authority is essentially pastoral by its nature in that it is entirely in function of the building of fraternal life in community, according to the very ecclesial identity of consecrated life.⁴⁴

The principle means that the superior should use to attain such a primary end can only be based on faith: they are, in particular, listening to the Word of God and the celebration of the Liturgy.

Finally, some areas of particular care on the part of superiors as regards the brothers or sisters are singled out: “they are to meet the personal needs of the members appropriately, solicitously to care for and visit the sick, to correct the restless, to console the faint of heart, and to be patient toward all”.⁴⁵

In mission with the freedom of the children of God

15. Today, it is not rare that the mission is addressed to people concerned with their own autonomy, jealous of their freedom, fearful of losing their independence.

With their very existence, consecrated persons present the possibility of a different way for the fulfilment of their own life, a way where God is the goal, his Word the light, and his will the guide, where consecrated persons move along peacefully in the certainty of being sustained by the hands of a Father who welcomes and provides, where they are accompanied by brothers and sisters, moved by the same Spirit, who wants to and knows how to satisfy the desires and longings sown by the Father in the heart of each one.

This is the primary mission of the consecrated person: he or she must witness to the freedom of the children of God, a freedom modelled on that of Christ who was free to serve God and the brothers and sisters; and moreover to affirm with his or her very own being that that God who formed the human creature from clay (cf. *Gen* 2:7, 22) and knitted that creature in his or her mother's womb (cf. *Ps* 139:13), can form his or her life, modelling it on that of Christ, the new and perfectly free man.

SECOND PART

AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE

IN COMMUNITY LIFE

*“One among you is your teacher and you are all brothers”
(Mt 23:8)*

The New Commandment

16. To all those who seek God, in addition to the commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul and with your whole mind”, there is given the second commandment “similar to the first”: “you shall love your neighbour as yourself” (*Mt 22:37-39*). Thus, the Lord Jesus adds, “Love one another as I have loved you”, because from the quality of your love “they will know that you are my disciples” (*Jn 13:34-35*). The building of fraternal community constitutes one of the fundamental tasks of consecrated life, to which the members of the community are called to dedicate themselves, moved by that same love that the Lord has poured out into their hearts. In fact, fraternal life in community is a constitutive element of religious life, an eloquent sign of the humanizing effects of the presence of the Reign of God.

If it is true that there is no meaningful community without fraternal love, it is likewise true that a correct view of obedience and authority can offer a valid help for living the commandment of love in daily life, especially when it is a question of facing problems regarding the relationship between the individual and the community.

Persons in authority at the service of the community, the community at the service of the Reign of God

17. “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (*Rm 8:14*): we are, therefore, brothers and sisters since God is the Father who guides the community of brothers and sisters with his Spirit, configuring them to his Son.

The function of authority enters into this plan. Superiors, in union with the persons entrusted to them, are called to build a fraternal community in Christ in which God is sought and loved above things, in order to fulfil God's redemptive plan.⁴⁶ Therefore, *persons in authority* are at the service of the community as was the Lord Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples, in order that the community in its turn be at the service of the Reign of God (cf. *Jn 13:1-17*). Exercising authority in the midst of one's brothers or sisters means serving them, following the example of him who “gave his life in ransom for the many” (*Mk 10:45*), in order that they might give their lives.

Only if superiors themselves live in obedience to Christ and sincerely observe the Rule can the members of the community understand that their obedience to the superior is not only not contrary to the freedom of the children of God but causes it to mature in conformity with Christ, obedient to the Father.⁴⁷

Docile to the Spirit who leads to unity

18. One and the same call from God has gathered the members of a community or of an institute together (cf. *Col 3:15*); one and the same desire of seeking God continues to guide them. “Life in community is thus the particular sign, before the Church and society, of the bond which comes from the same call and the common desire — notwithstanding differences of race and origin, language and culture — to be obedient to that call. Contrary to the spirit of discord and division, authority and obedience shine like a sign of that unique Fatherhood which comes from God, of the brotherhood born of the Spirit, of the interior freedom of those who put their trust in God, despite

the human limitations of those who represent him”⁴⁸.

The Spirit opens each one to the Reign of God, while maintaining his or her different gifts and roles (cf. 1 *Cor* 12:11). Obedience to the action of the Spirit unifies the community in its witness to his presence, makes the steps of all joyful (cf. *Ps* 37:23), and becomes the basis of community life in which all obey, each with various tasks. The search for the will of God and the willingness to carry it out is the spiritual cement that saves the group from the fragmentation that can arise from the great variety of persons in all their diversity when they are lacking a unifying principle.

For a spirituality of communion and a communitarian holiness

19. In these last few years, a renewed concept of anthropology has made the importance of the relational dimension of the human person much more evident. Such a conception finds ample confirmation in the image of the human person that emerges from the Scriptures and, undoubtedly, has also influenced the way of conceiving relations within the religious community, making it more attentive to the value of openness to someone other than oneself, to the fruitfulness of the relation with the diversity and enrichment that come to each one from it.

Such a relational anthropology has also exercised an influence, at least indirectly as we have already recalled, on the *spirituality of communion*, and has contributed to the renewal of the concept of *mission* understood as a shared commitment with all members of the people of God, in a spirit of collaboration and co-responsibility. The *spirituality of communion* presents itself as the spiritual climate of the Church at the beginning of the Third Millennium and, therefore, as an active and exemplary task of religious life at all levels. It is the main pathway for the future of a believing life and of Christian witness. It finds its uncompromising reference in the Eucharistic mystery always seen as more central, precisely because “the Eucharist is thus constitutive of the Church's being and activity” and “it is found at the root of the Church as a mystery of communion”⁴⁹.

Holiness and mission pass through the community because the risen Lord makes himself present in it and through it,⁵⁰ making it holy and sanctifying the relationships. Has not Jesus promised to be present where two or three are gathered in his name (cf. *Mt* 18:20)? Thus, brothers and sisters become sacraments of Jesus and of the encounter with God, a concrete possibility of being able to live the commandment

of mutual love. In this way the path of holiness becomes a way that all members of the community follow together; not just a path for an individual but ever more a community experience: in the reciprocal welcoming; in the sharing of gifts, above all the gift of love, of pardon, and of fraternal correction; in the common search for the will of the Lord rich in grace and mercy; in the willingness of each one to bear one another's burdens.

In today's cultural atmosphere, community holiness is a convincing witness, perhaps even more than that of the individual: this shows the perennial value of unity, a gift left by the Lord Jesus. This becomes particularly evident in international and intercultural communities that demand high levels of welcoming and dialogue.

The role of persons in authority for the growth of the community

20. The growth of the community is the fruit of an “ordered” charity, which respects its points of reference. Consequently, “it is also necessary that the proper law of each institute be as precise as possible in determining the respective competence of the community, the various councils,

departmental coordinators and the superior. A lack of clarity in this area is a source of confusion and conflict. 'Community projects,' which can help increase participation in community life and in its mission in various contexts, should also take care to define clearly the role and competence of authority, in line with the constitutions".⁵¹

Within this picture persons in authority promote the growth of fraternal life through the service of listening and dialogue, the creation of a favourable atmosphere for sharing and co-responsibility, the participation of everyone in the concerns of each one, service balanced between the individual and the community, discernment and the promotion of fraternal obedience.

a) *The service of listening*

The exercise of authority implies that persons in authority should gladly listen to those who have been entrusted to them.⁵² St. Benedict insists: "The abbot calls the whole community together"; "all of us have been called to give advice...because often it is to the youngest that the Lord reveals the best solution".⁵³

Listening is one of the principal ministries of superiors for which they must always be available, above all for those who feel isolated and in need of attention. In fact, listening means accepting the other unconditionally, giving him or her space in one's own heart. For this listening conveys affection and understanding, declares that the other is appreciated, and that his or her presence and opinion are taken into consideration.

Whoever presides must remember that the one who does not listen to his brother or sister does not know how to listen to God either, that an attentive listening allows one to better coordinate the energy and gifts that the Spirit gives to the community and also, when making decisions, to keep in mind the limits and the difficulties of some members. Time spent in listening is never time wasted, and listening can often prevent crises and difficult times both on the individual and community levels.

b) *Creation of an atmosphere favourable to dialogue, sharing and co-responsibility*

Persons in authority will have to be concerned with creating an environment of trust, promoting the recognition of the abilities and the sensitivities of individuals. Moreover, with words and deeds they will nourish the conviction that the community requires participation and therefore information.

In addition to listening, persons in authority will value sincere and free dialogue — sharing feelings, perspectives and plans: in this atmosphere each one will be able to have his or her true identity recognized and to improve his or her own relational abilities. Persons in authority will not be afraid to recognize and accept those problems that can easily arise from searching, deciding, working and together undertaking the best ways of realizing a fruitful collaboration. On the contrary, they will look for the causes of any possible uneasiness and misunderstandings, knowing how to propose solutions, shared as much as possible. Moreover, they will commit themselves to finding ways of overcoming any form of childishness, and discourage whatever attempts are made to avoid responsibility or to evade major commitments, to close oneself in one's own world and in one's own interests or to work in an isolated manner.

c) *Soliciting the contribution of all for the concerns of all*

Whoever is in charge has the responsibility for the final decision,⁵⁴ but must arrive at it not by him

or herself but rather by valuing the greatest possible free contribution of all the brothers or sisters. The community is what its members make it. Therefore, stimulating and motivating a contribution from every person so that each one feels the duty to contribute his or her own charity, competence and creativity will be fundamental. In fact, all the human resources are strengthened and brought together in the community project, motivating and respecting them.

It is not enough to place material goods in common, but still more significant is the communion of goods and personal abilities of endowments and talents, of intuitions and inspirations, and still more fundamental, and to be promoted, is the sharing of spiritual goods, of listening to the Word of God, of faith: “the more we share those things which are central and vital, the more the fraternal bond grows in strength”.⁵⁵

Probably not all will be immediately disposed to this type of sharing. When faced with possible resistance, far from giving up the project those in authority should seek to balance wisely the urgency for a dynamic and enterprising communion with the art of being patient, not expecting to see immediately the fruits of their own efforts. They must also recognize that God is the one and only Lord who can touch and change persons' hearts.

d) *At the service of the individual and of the community*

In entrusting various responsibilities to members of the community, persons in authority must take into account the personality of each brother or sister and each one's difficulties and predispositions, in order to give to each a way to express his or her own gifts, respecting the freedom of all. Simultaneously they must necessarily consider the good of the community and the service to the work eventually entrusted to them.

Such organizing to realize goals is not always easy to put into practice. It is then that the balance of persons in authority, which manifests itself in the ability to take the positive aspects of each one and to make the best use of the strengths available, becomes indispensable. This must be done with that righteousness of intention that makes authority interiorly free, not too concerned with pleasing and humouring, but clear in indicating the true meaning of the mission for the consecrated person that cannot be reduced to a simple valuing of the abilities of each one.

However, it will likewise be indispensable that consecrated persons accept, in the spirit of faith and from the hands of the Father, the responsibility entrusted to them even when it does not agree with their desires and expectations or with their way of understanding the will of God. For each person, still being able to express the specific difficulties by candidly pointing them out as a contribution to the truth, obeying in such cases means relying on the final decision of the person in authority, with the conviction that such obedience is a precious contribution — even if involving suffering — for the building of the Reign of God.

e) *Community discernment*

“In community life which is inspired by the Holy Spirit, each individual engages in a fruitful dialogue with others in order to discover the Father's will. At the same time, community members together recognize in the one who presides an expression of the fatherhood of God and the exercise of authority received from God, at the service of discernment and communion”.⁵⁶

Sometimes, when the proper law provides for it or when the importance of the decision to be taken demands it, the search for an adequate response is entrusted to community discernment, in which

it is a matter of listening to what the Spirit is saying to the community (cf. *Rev 2:7*).

Even if true and appropriate discernment is reserved to the most important decisions, the spirit of discernment ought to characterize every decision-making process that involves the community. A time of individual prayer and reflection together with a series of important attitudes for choosing together what is right and pleasing to God, should never be missing prior to every decision. Here are some of these attitudes:

- determination to seek nothing other than the divine will, letting oneself be inspired by God's way of acting as seen in the Sacred Scriptures and in the history of the charism of the institute, and with the awareness that evangelical logic is often “upside-down” in relation to human logic that looks for success, efficiency and recognition;
- openness to recognize in each brother or sister the ability to discover the truth, even if partial, and consequently to welcome his or her opinions as mediation for discovering together the will of God — an openness to the point of knowing how to recognize the ideas of others as better than one's own;
- attention to the signs of the times, to the expectations of the people, to the needs of the poor, to the pressing needs of evangelization, to the priorities of the Universal Church and of particular churches and to the indications of Chapters and of major superiors;
- freedom from prejudices, from excessive attachment to one's own ideas, from perceptual frameworks which are rigid or distorted and from strong positions which frustrate the diversity of opinions;
- courage to ground firmly one's own ideas while also opening oneself to new perspectives and to changing one's own point of view;
- firm proposal to maintain unity in any case, whatever the final decision might be.

Community discernment is not a substitute for the nature and function of persons in authority, from whom the final decision is expected. Nevertheless, persons in authority cannot ignore that the community is the best place in which to recognize and accept the will of God. In any case, discernment is one of the peak moments in a consecrated community where the centrality of God, that ultimate end of everyone's search, as well as the responsibility and the contribution of each one in the journey of all towards the Truth, stand out with particular clarity.

f) *Discernment, authority and obedience*

Persons in authority will be patient in the delicate process of discernment, which they will seek to guarantee in its phases and support in its most critical steps, and to be firm in requesting the implementation of whatever is decided. They will be attentive not to abdicate their own proper responsibility, even for love of living in peace or for fear of hurting someone's feelings. They will feel the responsibility of not avoiding situations in which it is necessary to make clear and, at times, unpleasant decisions.⁵⁷ True love for the community is really what makes persons in authority able to reconcile firmness and patience, listening to each one, and the courage to make decisions, overcoming the temptation to be deaf and mute.

Finally, it must be observed that a community cannot be in a state of continuous discernment. After the time of discernment there is the time for obedience, which is the implementation of the

decision. Both are times in which it is necessary to live in the spirit of obedience.

g) *Fraternal obedience*

Towards the end of his *Rule*, St. Benedict affirms: “The brethren must render the service of obedience not only to the Abbot, but they must thus also obey one another, knowing that they shall go to God by this path of obedience”.⁵⁸ “That in honour they forerun one another (cf. *Rom* 12:10). Let them bear their infirmities, whether of body or mind, with the utmost patience; let them vie with one another in obedience. Let no one follow what he thinketh useful to himself, but rather to another”.⁵⁹ St. Basil asks himself: “In what way do we have to obey each other?” He responds: “As servants to their masters, as the Lord has ordered us: ‘Let him who would be great among you become the servant of all (cf. *Mk* 10:44)’; Then he adds these words which are still more impressive: ‘Like the Son of Man who came not to be served but to serve’ (*Mk* 10:45); and as the Apostle says: ‘Through the love of the Spirit, be servants to each other’ (*Gal* 5:13)”.⁶⁰

True fraternity is based on the recognition of the dignity of the brothers or sisters and becomes concrete in the attention given to others and to their needs, in the capacity to rejoice in their gifts and their fulfilment, in placing at their disposition the proper time to listen and to be enlightened; however, this demands being interiorly free.

Those persons are certainly not free who are convinced that their ideas and their solutions are always the best; who suppose they can decide by themselves without any mediation for knowing the divine will; who think of themselves as always right and do not have any doubts that it is the others who have to change; who think only of their own things and do not pay any attention to the needs of others; who think that to obey is something from another era, which cannot be propounded in a world which is more evolved.

Rather, free are those persons who live constantly attentive and reach out to take advice in every situation in life, and above all from every person who lives next to them, a mediation of the will of the Lord, however mysterious. “It was for liberty that Christ freed us” (*Gal* 5:1). He has freed us that we might be able to encounter God in the innumerable ways in daily life.

“The first among you must be your slave” (*Mt* 20:27)

21. Today, if assuming the responsibilities proper to authority can also seem a particularly heavy burden and demand the humility of being the servant of others, it is, however, always good to recall the severe words the Lord Jesus turns on those who are tempted to clothe their authority in worldly prestige: “Whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (*Mt* 20:27-28).

Those who seek in their own office a means of becoming greater or affirming themselves, having themselves be served or making others serve them, place themselves clearly outside the evangelical model of authority. St. Bernard's words to his disciple who became a successor of

St. Peter are worth some attention: “Consider if you have made progress on the way of virtue, of wisdom, of intelligence, of goodness. Are you more arrogant or more humble? More benevolent or more haughty? More indulgent or more intransigent? What has developed in you: the fear of God or a dangerous effrontery?”⁶¹

Obedience even under the best conditions is not easy, but it is made easier when the consecrated person sees persons in authority place themselves at the humble and hardworking service of the

community and of the mission: an authority that even with all its human limitations in its acting tries to present again the attitudes and sentiments of the Good Shepherd.

“I pray that she who will have the office of responsibility for her sisters,” St. Clare of Assisi affirmed in her last will and testament, “be committed to being in charge of the others through virtue and holy behaviour more than by virtue of her office, in order that the sisters, inspired by her example, obey her not so much because of her office, but for love”.⁶²

Community Life as mission

22. Led by persons in authority, consecrated persons are called to measure themselves against the new commandment, the commandment that renews all things: “Love one another as I have loved you” (*Jn* 15:12).

To love each other as the Lord has loved means to go beyond the personal merit of the brothers or sisters and to obey not one's own desires but God who speaks through the condition and needs of the brothers or sisters. It is necessary to recall that the time dedicated to improving the quality of community life is not time wasted because, as the late and fondly remembered Pope John Paul II repeatedly emphasized, “all the fruitfulness of religious life depends on the quality of community life”.⁶³

The tension of making real fraternal community is not only preparation for the mission but also an integral part of it, from the moment that “fraternal communion, as such, is already an apostolate”.⁶⁴ In the continuous search for the will of God, being in mission as communities that daily seek to build community means affirming that by following the Lord Jesus, it is possible to realize human life together in a new and humanizing way.

THIRD PART

IN MISSION

“As the Father has sent me, so I also send you”
(*Jn* 20:21)

In mission with all one's being, as Jesus the Lord

23. The Lord Jesus makes us understand with his own form of life that *mission* and *obedience* cannot be separated. In the Gospels Jesus is always presented as the One sent by the Father to do his will (cf. *Jn* 5:36-38; 6:38-40; 7:16-18); he always does what is pleasing to the Father. It is possible to say that the entire life of Jesus is the mission of the Father. He *is* the mission of the Father.

As the Word came in mission, enfleshing himself in a humanity that he took on completely, we collaborate in the mission of Christ in the same way and we permit him to bring it to its complete fulfilment. Above all we welcome him, making ourselves the place of his presence and, therefore, the continuation of his life in history, to afford others the possibility of meeting him.

Considering that Christ in his life and work was the perfect *amen* (cf. *Rev* 3:14) and the perfect *yes* (cf. *2 Cor* 1:20) spoken to the Father, and that to say *yes* means simply to obey, it is impossible to think about the mission if not in relation to obedience. To live the mission always implies being sent, and that includes referring to the one who sends or to the content of the mission to be

developed. It is for this reason that, without reference to obedience, the term *mission* becomes difficult to understand and is exposed to the risk of being reduced to something that refers only to those developing the mission. There is always the danger of reducing the *mission* to a profession to be done in view of one's own fulfilment, thereby being managed more or less by oneself.

In mission for service

24. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius of Loyola writes that the Lord calls all and says: “Whoever will come with me must work with me, so that following me in effort and suffering, will follow me also into glory”.⁶⁵ The mission must be measured, today as in the past, with notable difficulties that can be confronted only with the strength that comes from the Lord, in the humble and strong awareness of being sent by him and, because of this, being able to count on his help.

Thanks to obedience we have the certitude of serving the Lord, of being “servants of the Lord” in our acting and suffering. Such certitude is the source of unconditional commitment, tenacious faithfulness, interior serenity, disinterested service and dedication of our best energies. “Those who obey have the guarantee of truly taking part in the mission, of following the Lord and not pursuing their own desires or wishes. In this way we can know that we are guided by the Spirit of the Lord, and sustained, even in the midst of great hardships, by his steadfast hand (cf. *Acts* 20:22-23)”.⁶⁶

One is in mission when, far from seeking one's own affirmation, one is, in the first place, led by the desire to accomplish the will of God, which is worthy of adoration. Such a desire is the very soul of adoration (“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done”) and the strength of the apostle. The mission demands the commitment of all one's human abilities and talents that contribute to salvation when he or she is placed in the river of the will of God, which transports passing things into the ocean of the eternal reality where God, in unlimited happiness, will be all in all (cf. *1 Cor* 15:28).

Authority and mission

25. All this implies that authority be recognized as an important task in carrying out the mission, faithful to the charism proper to each. This is not a simple task, nor one without difficulties and ambiguities. In the past, the risk could come from persons in authority being directed mainly towards managing the work, with the danger of not taking care of persons. Today, the risk can come rather from excessive fear of hurting others' feelings or from a fragmentation of competencies and responsibilities that weakens the unified movement towards the common objective and frustrates the role of authority.

However, persons in authority are not only responsible for the animation of the community but also for the coordinating of the various competencies in relation to the mission. Thus, they respect the roles and follow the internal norms of the Institute. Even if persons in authority cannot — and must not — do everything, they nevertheless have the ultimate responsibility for everything.⁶⁷

Many are the challenges that the present time places on persons in authority in the task of coordinating energies for the mission. Some important tasks are also listed here:

a) *Persons in authority encourage the taking up of responsibilities and respect them when taken up*

For some, responsibilities can provoke a sense of fear. Therefore, it is necessary that persons in

authority convey to their collaborators Christian strength and the courage to face difficulties, overcoming fears and attitudes of giving up.

Their concern will be sharing not only information but also responsibilities, committing themselves to respecting each one in his or her own rightful autonomy. This involves, on the part of authority, a patient coordination and, on the part of the consecrated person, a sincere openness to working together.

Persons in authority need to “be present” when necessary, to foster in the members of the community the sense of interdependence, as far from childish dependence as from a self-sufficient independence. This interdependence is the fruit of that interior freedom that permits each one to work and collaborate, to substitute as well as to be substituted for, to take an active part and to make his or her own contribution, even from behind the scenes.

Whoever exercises the service of authority will have to be attentive not to give into the temptation of personal self-sufficiency, to believe that everything depends on him or her and that it would not be important and useful to foster community participation; it is better to take one step together than to take two or more alone.

b) Persons in authority invite us to confront diversity in a spirit of communion

The rapid cultural changes in progress do not only cause structural transformations that influence activities and the mission but also can give rise to tensions within the community, where diverse kinds of cultural or spiritual formation cause members to give different readings to the signs of the times and, therefore, to propose varied projects not always reconcilable. Such situations can be more frequent today than in the past because there is a growing number of communities that are made up of persons who come from different ethnic groups or cultures, thereby making generational differences more evident. Persons in authority are called to serve with a spirit of communion even these composite communities, helping them to offer, in a world noted for many divisions, the witness that it is possible to live together and to love one another even if different. It must then firmly maintain some theoretical-practical principles:

– to remember that in the spirit of the Gospel, a conflict of ideas never becomes a conflict of persons;

– to recall that a plurality of perspectives fosters a deepening of the question;

– to promote communication so that the free exchange of ideas makes the positions clear and causes the positive contribution of each one to emerge;

– to help free oneself from egocentrism and ethnocentrism, which tend to place the causes of trouble onto others, in order to reach a mutual understanding;

– to understand that the ideal is not that of having a community without conflicts but instead a community that is willing to confront its own tensions in order to resolve them positively, looking for solutions that ignore none of the values that must be taken into account.

c) Persons in authority maintain a balance between the various dimensions of consecrated life

These dimensions can come into tension among themselves. Persons in authority must assure that unity of life be preserved and that the greatest possible attention is paid to the balance between

time dedicated to prayer and time dedicated to work, between individual and community, between commitments and rest, between attention to common life and attention to the world and the Church, between personal formation and community formation.⁶⁸

One of the most delicate balances is that between community and mission, between life *ad intra* and life *ad extra*.⁶⁹ Given that normally the urgency of the things that need to be done can lead not to caring about the things that regard the community and that ever more often today one is called to work as an individual, it is opportune that some inviolable rules that guarantee simultaneously both a spirit of brotherhood or sisterhood in the apostolic community and an apostolic sensitivity in community life be respected.

It will be important that persons in authority be the guarantors of these rules and remind each and everyone that a member of the community who is in mission or is performing some apostolic service, even if working alone, always acts *in the name of the institute or of the community* and thus works *thanks to the community*. Often, if some are able to accomplish that particular activity it is because others of the community have given of their time for them, advised them or conveyed a certain spirit. Furthermore, the one who remains in the community substitutes in certain tasks in the house for the persons committed outside the community or prays for them or supports them with his or her own fidelity.

And now it is right not only that apostles be *deeply grateful* but also that they remain *closely united to their own community* in all that they do. The apostle must not act like the owner of the community but should try at any cost to have the community move along together, waiting, if necessary, for the one who goes more slowly, valuing the contribution of each one, sharing as much as possible the joys and efforts, insights and uncertainties, so that all feel as theirs the apostolate of each one of the others, without envy or jealousy. Apostles may be certain that no matter how much of themselves they give to the community, it will never equal what they have already received and will continue to receive from it.

d) *Persons in authority have a merciful heart*

St. Francis of Assisi, in a moving letter to a minister/superior, gave the following instructions about the possible personal weaknesses of his brothers: “And in this I want to know, if you love the Lord and myself, His servant and yours, if you have done this, namely, that there be no friar in the world, who has sinned, as much as one could sin, that, after he has seen your eyes, never leaves without your mercy, if he seeks mercy. And if he would not seek mercy, you are to ask him if he wants mercy. And if afterwards he would have sinned a thousand times before your eyes, love him more than me for this, so that you draw him to the Lord; and you are to always pity such ones”.⁷⁰

Persons in authority are called to develop a pedagogy of forgiveness and mercy, that is, to be instruments of the love of God that welcomes, corrects and always gives another chance to the brother or sister who makes a mistake and falls into sin. Above all they will need to remember that without hope of forgiveness a person finds it hard to get back on the path and tends inevitably to add wrong to wrong and failings to failings. The perspective of mercy, instead, affirms that God is able to draw out, even from sinful situations, a way that leads towards the good.⁷¹ May persons in authority spare no efforts so that the whole community may learn this merciful style.

e) *Persons in authority have a sense of justice*

If the invitation of St. Francis of Assisi to forgive the brother who sins can be considered a

precious general rule, it must be recognized that there can be behaviours in the members of some communities of consecrated persons that seriously harm their neighbour and that imply a responsibility vis-à-vis people outside the community and also within the institutions themselves to which they belong. If it is necessary to have understanding for the wrongdoing of the individual, it is also necessary to have a rigorous sense of responsibility and charity towards those who are eventually damaged by the incorrect behaviour of some consecrated person.

May he or she who errs know that he or she must answer personally for the consequences of his or her acts. Understanding for the confrere cannot exclude justice, especially in the face of vulnerable persons and victims of abuse. To accept and recognize the real evil and to assume the responsibility for it and its consequences are already steps on the path that leads to mercy: as for Israel who distanced itself from the Lord, the acceptance of the consequences of evil, that is, the experience of the Exile, is the first step in once again taking up the path of conversion and of rediscovering more deeply that real relationship with him.

f) Persons in authority promote collaboration with the laity

The growing collaboration with the laity in the works and activities conducted by consecrated persons raises new questions that require new responses both on the part of the community and on the part of authority. “The participation of the laity often brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism,” given that the laity are invited to offer “religious families the invaluable contribution of their ‘being in the world’ and their specific service”.⁷²

It was fittingly recalled that in order to reach the objective of mutual collaboration between religious and laity, “it is necessary to have: religious communities with a clear charismatic identity, assimilated and lived, capable of transmitting it to others and disposed to share it; religious communities with an intense spirituality and missionary enthusiasm for communicating the same spirit and the same evangelizing thrust; religious communities who know how to animate and encourage lay people to share the charism of their institute, according to their secular character and according to their different style of life, inviting them to discover new ways of making the same charism and mission operative. In this way, a religious community becomes a centre radiating outwardly, a spiritual force, a centre of animation, of fraternity creating fraternity, and of communion and ecclesial collaboration, where the different contributions of each help build up the Body of Christ, which is the Church”.⁷³

Furthermore, it is necessary that there be a well-defined description of the competencies and responsibilities of the laity as much as of the religious, as well as of the intermediate entities (administrative councils and the like). In all this, the one in charge of the community of consecrated persons has an irreplaceable role.

Difficult obedience

26. In the concrete development of the mission, some instances of obedience can be particularly difficult because points of view or means of apostolic or diaconal action can be perceived and thought of in different ways. In the face of certain difficult situations of obedience, to all appearances absolutely “absurd,” there can arise the temptation towards distrust and even abandonment. Is it worth continuing? Could I not realize my ideas better in another context? Why get worn out in pointless conflicts?

St. Benedict already confronted the question of an obedience “very burdensome or positively impossible to perform”; and St. Francis of Assisi considered the case in which “the subject sees

things which are better and more useful for his soul than those which the prelate [superior] orders him to do". The Father of monasticism replies, asking for a free, open, humble and trusting dialogue between the monk and the abbot, though in the end, if requested, the monk "obeys for the love of God and confiding in his help".⁷⁴ The Saint of Assisi invites the person to implement a "loving obedience," in which the friar voluntarily sacrifices his views and carries out the command requested, because in this way he "pleases God and neighbour",⁷⁵ and sees a "perfect obedience, there, where even not being able to obey because he is being commanded "something against his soul", the religious does not break unity with the superior and community, and is also ready to bear persecution because of it. "In fact," observes St. Francis, "whoever chooses to suffer persecution rather than wish to be separated from his brothers truly remains in perfect obedience because he lays down his *life* for his brothers".⁷⁶ This reminds us that love and communion represent supreme values to which even the exercise of authority and obedience are subordinated.

It must be recognized that it is understandable, on the one hand, to have a certain attachment to personal ideas and convictions, fruit of reflection or of experience and matured over time, and it is also a good thing to seek to defend them and to carry them forward, always in the perspective of the Reign of God, in a straightforward and constructive dialogue. On the other hand, it is not to be forgotten that the model is always Jesus of Nazareth, who even during his Passion asked God that his will, as Father, be done, nor did he pull back from death on the cross (cf. *Heb* 5:7).

When requested to give up their own ideas or projects, consecrated persons might experience loss and a sense of rejection of authority or to feel within themselves the "loud cries and tears" (*Heb* 5:7) and pleading that the bitter chalice might pass. But that is also the time to entrust oneself to the Father in order that his will might be done, and thus to be able to participate actively, with all one's being, in the mission of Christ "for the life of the world" (*Jn* 6:51).

It is in saying these difficult "yesses" that one can understand in depth the sense of obedience as a supreme act of freedom, expressed in total and confident abandoning of oneself to Christ, the Son freely obedient to the Father, and one can understand the sense of mission as an obedient offering of oneself that brings the blessing of the Most High: "I will bless you with every blessing...(and) all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice" (*Gen* 22:17, 18). In that blessing obedient consecrated persons know that they will again find all that they left with the sacrifice of their being detached; within that blessing is also hidden the full realization of their own humanity (cf. *Jn* 12:25).

Obedience and objections of conscience

27. Here one could ask: Can there be situations in which a person's conscience would not seem to permit following the directives given by persons in authority? Can it happen, in short, that the consecrated person must state in relation to the norms or to their superiors: "It is necessary to obey God rather than men" (*Acts* 5:29)? This is the case of the so-called *objection in conscience* of which Paul VI spoke,⁷⁷ and that should be considered in its authentic meaning.

If it is true that conscience is the place where the voice of the Lord resounds, the voice that indicates to us how to behave, it is also true that it is necessary to learn to listen to this voice very attentively in order to know how to recognize it and distinguish it from other voices. In fact, it is necessary not to confuse this voice with those which emerge from a subjectivism that ignores or disregards the sources and criteria that cannot be given up and are mandatory in the formation of judgments of conscience: "It is the 'heart' converted to the Lord and to the love of what is good which is really the source of *true* judgments of conscience",⁷⁸ and "freedom of conscience is never

freedom 'from' the truth but always and only freedom 'in' the truth".⁷⁹

The consecrated person will then have to reflect long before concluding that it is not the obedience received but what is sensed within him or herself that represents the will of God. He or she will also have to remember to keep the law of mediation in force in all cases, guarding him or herself from making serious decisions without any examination and verification. It certainly remains indisputable that what counts is to arrive at knowing and fulfilling the will of God, but it ought to be likewise indisputable that the consecrated person is committed by vow to accept this holy will through determined mediations. To say that what counts is the will of God, not the means, and to reject them or to accept them only on the basis of what is pleasing, can take away the meaning of the person's vow, and empty his or her own life of one of its essential characteristics.

Consequently, "apart from an order manifestly contrary to the laws of God or the constitutions of the institute, or one involving a serious and certain evil — in which case there is no obligation to obey — the superior's decisions concern a field in which the calculation of the greater good can vary according to the point of view. To conclude from the fact that a directive seems objectively less good than it is unlawful and contrary to conscience would mean an unrealistic disregard of the obscurity and ambivalence of many human realities. Besides, refusal to obey involves an often serious loss for the common good. A religious should not easily conclude that there is a contradiction between the judgment of his conscience and that of his superior. This exceptional situation will sometimes involve true interior suffering, after the pattern of Christ himself 'who learned obedience through suffering' (*Heb 5:8*)".⁸⁰

Difficult kinds of authority

28. But persons in authority can also become discouraged and disillusioned. In the face of the resistance of some members of the community and of certain questions that seem irresolvable, he or she can be tempted to cave in and to consider every effort for improving the situation useless. What we see here then is the danger of becoming managers of the routine, resigned to mediocrity, restrained from intervening, no longer having the courage to point out the purposes of authentic consecrated life and running the risk of losing the love of one's first fervour and the desire to witness to it.

When the exercise of authority weighs heavily and is difficult, it is good to recall that the Lord Jesus considers such a task an act of love towards him: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (*Jn 21:16*). And listening again to the words of Paul becomes beneficial: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer, contribute to the needs of the saints" (*Rm 12:12-13*).

The silent interior struggle that accompanies fidelity to one's own task, marked at times by solitude or misunderstanding of those to whom one gives oneself, becomes the way of personal sanctification and a means of salvation because of what he or she suffers.

Obedient until the end

29. If the life of the believer is entirely a search for God, every day of life becomes a continual learning of how to listen to his voice in order to do his will. It is a question certainly of a demanding school, almost a struggle between that I who tends to be in control of oneself and one's history and that God who is "the Lord" of every history, a school wherein one learns to entrust oneself so much to God and to his Fatherhood, as also to trust in men and women — his sons and daughters and our brothers and sisters. In this way the certitude grows that the Father never abandons anyone, not even when it is necessary to entrust the care for one's own life into the hands

of the brothers or sisters and to recognize in them the sign of his presence and the mediators of his will.

With an act of obedience, even if unaware of it, we came to life, accepting that good Will that has preferred our existing to non-existence. We will conclude our journey with another act of obedience that hopefully would be as much as possible conscious and free but above all an expression of abandonment to the good Father who will call us definitively to himself, into his reign of infinite light, where our seeking will have found its conclusion and our eyes will see him in a Sunday without end. Then we will be fully obedient and fulfilled, because we will be saying “yes” forever to that Love that has made us happy with him and in him.

Prayer for persons in authority

30. “O Good Shepherd, Jesus, good, gentle, tender Shepherd, behold a shepherd, poor and pitiful, a shepherd of Your sheep indeed, but weak and clumsy and of little use, who cries out to You.

“Teach me, Your servant, therefore, Lord, teach me, I pray You, by Your Holy Spirit, how to devote myself to them and how to spend myself on their behalf. Give me, by Your unutterable grace, the power to bear with their shortcomings patiently, to share their griefs in loving sympathy, and discretely to help them according to their needs. Taught by Your Spirit, may I learn to comfort the sorrowful, to strengthen the weak, to be weak with those who are weak, to be indignant with those who suffer scandal, to become all things to all in order to save all. Place true, just and pleasing words in my mouth, so that they all may be built up in faith and hope and love, in chastity and lowliness, in patience and obedience, in spiritual fervour and submissiveness of mind.

“I commit them into Your holy hands and loving providence. May no one snatch them from Your hand, nor from the hands of Your servant's, unto whom You have committed them. May they always persevere with gladness in their holy purpose, unto the attainment of everlasting life with You, our most sweet Lord, their Helper, who live and reign to ages of ages. Amen”.⁸¹

Prayer to Mary

31. “O sweet and holy Virgin Mary, with Your believing and perplexed obedience, at the announcement of the angel You gave us Christ. At Cana with Your attentive Heart You showed us how to act responsibly. You did not wait passively for the action of Your Son but You anticipated it, making Him aware of the need and with discreet authority taking the initiative to send the servants to Him.

“At the foot of the cross, obedience made You the Mother of the Church and of believers while in the Upper Room every disciple recognized in You the gentle authority of love and service.

“Help us to understand that every true authority in the Church and in consecrated life has its foundation in being docile to the will of God and help each one of us become in fact, authority for others with our own life lived in obedience to God.

“O merciful and compassionate Mother, ‘You who did the will of the Father, ever ready in obedience’,⁸² make our lives attentive to the Word, faithful in the following of Jesus, the Lord and Servant, in the light and with the strength of the Holy Spirit, joyful in fraternal communion, generous in mission, prompt in our service to the poor, looking forward to the day in which obedience in faith will flow into the feast of Love without end”.

On 5 May 2008, the Holy Father approved this present Instruction of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and ordered its publication.

From the Vatican, 11 May 2008, the Solemnity of Pentecost.

Franc Card. Rodé, C.M.
Prefect

+ Gianfranco A. Gardin, OFM Conv.
Secretary

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1 Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* (25 March 1996), 1.

2 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Paradise*, III, 85.

3 Cf. *Vita consecrata*, 42; Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life Instruction *Fraternal Life in Community* (2 February 1994), 5; Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Instruction *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate* (31 May 1983), 41.

4 Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 631, § 1; *Vita consecrata*, 42.

5 Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* (6 January 2001), 43-45; *Vita consecrata*, 46, 50.

6 Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *Potissimum institutioni* (2 February 1990), in particular nn. 15, 24-25, 30-32.

7 In particular nn. 47-52.

8 In particular nn. 42-43, 91-92.

9 Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium* (19 May 2002), in particular nn. 7 and 14.

10 St. Bernard, *De diversis*, 42, 3: *PL* 183, 662B.

11 St. Bernard, *De errore Abelardi*, 8, 21: *PL* 182, 1070A.

12 Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi* (30 November 2007), 43; cf. Fourth Ecumenical Lateran Council, in *DS* 806.

13 "More intimate than I am to myself": St. Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 6, 11.

14 Benedict XVI, *Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly*, 27 September 2005, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 12 October 2005.

15 St. Benedict, *Rule*, Prologue, 3. Cf. also St. Augustine, *Rule*, 7; St. Francis of Assisi, *Regula non bullata* 1, 1; *Regula bullata*, I, 1; cf. *Vita consecrata*, 46.

16 *Code of Canon Law*, can. 618.

17 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae caritatis*, 14; *Code of Canon Law*, can. 601.

18 Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio* (29 June 1971), 29.

19 Cf. *Evangelica testificatio*, 25.

20 St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, 84.

21 Cf. Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), 12.

22 Cf. Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and the Sacred Congregation for Bishops, Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church *Mutuae relationes* (14 May 1978), 13.

23 *Perfectae caritatis*, 14.

24 Benedict XVI, *Homily during the Mass for the beginning of his Petrine Ministry* (24 April 2005), AAS XCVII (2005), 709.

25 St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Polycarp*, 4, 1.

26 Cf. St. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 70.1.2: PL 36, 875.

27 Cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, 50

28 Benedict XVI, *Address to Superiors General*, 22 May 2006, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 31 May 2006, 13; cf. *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 24-26.

29 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 11; *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 26.

30 Cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis* 8; 37; 81.

31 Cf. *Vita consecrata*, 42.

32 Cf. *Mutuae relationes*, 34-35.

33 Benedict XVI, *Homily during the Chrism Mass*, 20 March 2008, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 26 March 2008, p. 12.

34 *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 32.

35 Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 590, § 2.

36 Cf. *Vita consecrata*, 46.

37 *Vita consecrata*, 70.

38 Cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, 32.

39 Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 617-619.

40 *Code of Canon Law*, can. 618.

41 *Code of Canon Law*, 618.

42 *Code of Canon Law*, 601.

43 *Code of Canon Law*, 619.

44 In fact, the religious community is able to follow and manifest the primacy of the love of God that is the end itself of consecrated life and, thus, also its first obligation and the first apostolate of individual members of the community, cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 573, 607, 663, § 1, 673.

45 *Code of Canon Law*, can. 619.

46 Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 619; 602; 618.

47 Cf. *Perfectae caritatis*, 14.

48 *Vita consecrata*, 92.

49 *Sacramentum caritatis*, 15.

50 Cf. *Vita consecrata*, 42.

51 *Fraternal Life in Community*, 51.

52 Cf. *Perfectae caritatis*, 14.

53 St. Benedict, *Rule*, 3, 1.3.

54 Cf. *Vita consecrata*, 43; *Fraternal Life in Community*, 50c; *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 14.

55 *Fraternal Life in Community*, 32.

56 *Vita consecrata*, 92.

57 Cf. *Vita consecrata*, 43.

58 St. Benedict, *Rule*, 71, 1-2.

59 St. Benedict, *Rule*, 72, 4-7.

60 St. Basil, *Short Rule* Question 115.

61 St. Bernard, *De consideratione*, II, X, 20: *PL* 182, 754D.

62 St. Clare of Assisi, *Testamento*, 61-62.

63 John Paul II, *To the Plenary of the Congregation for Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*, 20 November 1992, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 2 December 1992, p. 2; cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, 54, 71.

64 *Fraternal Life in Community*, 54.

65 St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 95, 4-5.

66 *Vita consecrata*, 92.

67 Cf. *Vita consecrata*, 43.

68 Cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, 50.

69 Cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, 59.

70 St. Francis of Assisi, *A Letter to a Certain Minister Provincial*, 7-10.

71 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, 30 November 1980, 6.

72 *Vita consecrata*, 55; cf. *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 31.

73 *Fraternal Life in Community*, 70.

74 St. Benedict, *Rule*, 68, 1-5.

75 St. Francis of Assisi, *Admonition III*, 5-6.

76 St. Francis of Assisi, *Admonition III*, 9.

77 Cf. Paul VI, *Evangelica testificatio*, 28-29.

78 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis splendor*, 6 August 1993, 64.

79 *Veritatis splendor*, 64.

80 *Evangelica testificatio*, 28.

81 Aelred of Rievaulx, *Pastoral Prayer*, 1, 7, 10. CC CM Vol. I 757-763.

82 *Vita consecrata*, 112.