**SOME ADDED REFLECTION ON CONSECRATED LIFE**

**(*Most of this presentation is taken from a digitalized, unpublished copy of a document***

***by Father Víctor Codina, S.J., entitled, SUEÑOS DE UN VIEJO TEÓLOGO, Una Iglesia en camino*.)**

According to the Second Vatican Council, the Church is enriched by diverse ministries and gifts of the Spirit, hierarchical and non - hierarchical (LG 4). One of the most typical non - hierarchical gifts of the Church is that of Religious (or Consecrated) Life.

To begin with, we must clearly state that since the Second Vatican Council we have developed a mature and profound theology of Religious Life. In the pre-conciliar era Religious Life was studied mainly from canon law and spirituality. Vatican II clearly places Religious Life in the ecclesial context, especially in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* VI, and in the Decree on the adequate renewal of religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis*.

Thanks to the ecclesial vision of the People of God (LG II) and a theology of the charisms of the Spirit (LG 12), religious life appears as a gift of the Spirit that, although it does not belong to the hierarchy of the Church, is part of its life and sanctity (LG 44,4). It is an ecclesial fact; a tree has grown in the Church and has branched off with a great variety of families (LG 43). Its meaning is that an ecclesial sign that makes present in the Churches the various mysteries of the life of the historical Jesus (LG 46) and pre-announces the future resurrection (LG 44).

This ecclesial dimension of the religious life of LG is complemented by the Decree on the adequate renewal of religious life, *Perfectae caritatis,* that affirms that the ultimate norm and the supreme rule of religious life is the following of Jesus, poor, chaste and obedient to the Father (PC 2) and with the Decree on the missionary activity of the Church, *Ad gentes*, which confirms that the Church is not fully constituted in mission lands of the young Churches if religious life is not present, both apostolic and contemplative (AG 18).

It follows that, as Bishop Bergoglio affirmed in the 1994 Synod of Religious Life, "religious life is a gift for the Church, it is born of the Church, it is totally oriented to the Church" [1].

Medellin further deepened this charismatic dimension of religious life by affirming that religious life is a prophetic charism in the Church [2].

These reflections on religious life have been enriched after the Council with a series of papal documents [3] and of the Sacred Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life [4] .

Religious life was one of the sectors of the Church that was most profoundly renewed after the Council, returning to its evangelical and charismatic origins, and responding to the new signs of the times. One of the expressions of this renewal of religious life is the so-called religious life inserted in popular and poor media that, in many countries was a source of spiritual, community, apostolic and ecclesial renewal (*cf*. Decision # 32 of the XXV General Chapter, which speaks of programs of “insertion formation” which facilitates experiences of real proximity with the poor).

Number 6 of the Message of the General Chapter to the Congregation states, “Consecrated Life is one of the most beautiful treasures in the life of the Church.”

Pope Francis invites us to: "live this ministry with joy and gratitude, with the certainty that there is nothing more beautiful in life than to belong forever and with all our heart to God, and to give our lives to the service of our brothers and sisters." (Pope Francis, April 11, 2015).

[1] Pope FRANCISCO, Witnesses of joy, Rome 2014, III, 5.

[2] Medellín, 12, 2.

[3] PABLO VI, *Evangelica testificatio* (1971); JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata* (1996); Francis, Witnesses of joy (2014).

[4] Fraternal Life in Community (1994), Walking from Christ (2002), The Service of Authority and Obedience (2008), *Alegraos* (2014), *Escrutad* (2014), Contemplate (2016), New Wines in New Wineskins (2017).