Redemptorist Religious Life(1)

Finding the Essentials

* Finding what is essential is the main and most urgent challenge today for the Church, the human person, and, of course, for religious life.
* Today more than ever we are being impelled – while transcending the peripheral aspects – to go back to the very heart of our Christian and religious option.
* This is the great task that today religious life has up ahead, namely, to identify the indispensable elements of this project of life.
* And it is precisely in the indispensable elements that formation has to focus and concentrate on,
* Since Vatican II to the present day religious life has done a serious process of discernment as much at the level of each Order or Congregation as that of religious life itself.
* The theological reflection in this regard has been an important dynamic element to identify and – when it was necessary – to return to the essential and indispensable.
* The current theological reflection, as shown in the *seminar* on *Theology of Consecrated Life: Identity and Significance of Apostolic Religious Life*, held in Rome in 2011, and previously at the *First International Congress of Consecrated Life*, also in Rome in 2004, must continue to pursue these essential and indispensable elements of religious life, which are part of its identity, i.e., those elements without which there can be no radical Christian life, no radical following of Christ.
* Faced with an identity crisis that has certainly affected Religious Life in the post-Conciliar years, it is urgent to clarify such an identity and base it on a relationship model rather than a model of contraposition of strong identities, as happened not long ago.
* The aforesaid *International Congress of Consecrated Life* as well as the *Seminar on Theology of Religious Life* both have identified three elements that are characteristic of Religious Life at this historical moment we are living, namely, spirituality, fraternal life in community and mission.
* Benedict XVI insisted on these same elements at an audience granted to Superiors General on November 26, 2010.
* These are the key elements of the identity of Consecrated Life which each Order or Institute, including our own, must add, what characterizes its own charismatic choice. Formation, therefore, must insist mainly on these three elements at this time.

**The Spiritual Dimension of Religious Life. “You Are Everything:”**
**(St. Francis of Assisi)**

**Rooted and Built Up in Jesus Christ, Firm in the Faith (Col 2, 7)**

*Point of Departure*

* This is the first theological foundation of religious life. On it we must re-establish and re-found Consecrated Life. "Religious life consists in being completely seduced by the living God."
* The experience of the Religious is that of the prophet who said, "O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you art stronger than I, and you have prevailed" (Jer. 20: 7) or even that of the Apostle, who stated having been chosen from birth and have been called by his sole grace (cf. Gal 1: 15).
* God is the only truly necessary; the truly central One in the life of a Religious.
* Religious life cannot be understood except from the experience of being called, seduced, and drawn by the living and true God, and from the radical following of Christ "in a community of disciples to serve and do ministry in His name."
* Its mission is none other than affirming, with life itself, the absolute primacy of God.
* The strength and apostolic fruitfulness of the religious lie in intimate union with Christ and in the configuration with Him, expressed and realized through the profession of the evangelicals counsels.
* We read in *Consecrated Life* that "the more one lives in Christ, the better one can serve him in others, going even to the furthest missionary outposts and facing the greatest dangers."
* This configuration with Christ makes Religious Life "*a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting*...a living tradition of the Savior’s life and message."
* In Formation special attention must be given to the experience of God, so that one can develop the ability and sensitivity to capture the language of God, feel his presence, and his loving manner of acting in everyday life. It is the experience of God that leads us to say with Job: "Before, I knew you by reputation, now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42: 5-6).
* Experience always marks a *before* and an *after*, even in a personal relationship with God.
* The experience of God is always *disruptive*, producing the effect of an interior earthquake, to the point that what was bitter before becomes afterwards "sweetness of soul and body".
* Without the *after* "the experience is consumed, but not consumed." (????)
* One cannot confuse the experience of God by consuming prayers and pious exercises even though they are all necessary.
* The consummated experience generates attitudes, behaviors, and, ultimately, a new life, a life of those who feel and live as a disciple.
* The experience of God, more than any other, forges one’s own existence because it transforms it into an "icon" of the Lord.

*Formed in order to form in the primacy of God*

* In difficult and challenging times, like what we are experiencing at present, it is urgent to establish or reestablish religious life on the rock that is Christ, the bedrock of radical faith, on the experience of God.
* If we do not want to build on sand, then we must foster in formation a true experience of God, an experience that leads us to open ourselves to Him, and accept Him unconditionally.
* It should be an experience that results in an *irreversible* *movement* directed toward conversion and in a *strong identity* that becomes a *mission*.
* It should be an experience that involves a process such that one can say, “he was there! I did not see, hear, or touch him, but he was there.” The path of faith begins from this confession.
* The experience of God we are talking about is, first of all, to be formed and to form in a radical faith and in the experience of the Absolute who relativizes everything else.
* It is radical faith or theological experience that gives meaning and flavor to the project of life of a Religious. Radical faith is what leads the believer, the Religious, to trustful surrender to the providence of God, even before it translates into religious or historical commitments.
* Radical faith is what leads us into the contemplative dimension and is nourished by it; and is what envelopes the whole person and becomes the source of true joy, unfailing hope, and our witness in the world.
* It is clear, then, that radical faith is not confused with the mere knowledge or theological reflection, or repetition of formulas.
* It is neither to be confused with mere religious feelings nor expended in the world of emotions; nor does it have much to do with an emotional experience in moments of prayer.
* The radical faith that we are talking about is not reduced to the moments of prayer as such, even when it is nourished by them.
* Rather, radical faith is a finding, a gradual and living act of welcoming the reality of God and man in the light of Jesus Christ.
* Radical faith is, above all, an experience of trust in the Lord as shown by Peter when he stated, "relying on your word I will lower the nets" (Lk 5, 5). It is a trust that goes beyond all reason, all human guarantees, our strength, our reasons, and our lights. This trust is what sustains fidelity, even in the most trying moments.
* Radical faith, therefore, introduces us in the way of discipleship till we "have the same feelings of Christ" (Phil 2, 5).
* To have this experience, it is not enough merely to return to regular observance or extend the time for prayer and meditation, or multiply liturgical and devotional practices of our religious family.
* To have this experience we must go beyond the merely ritual and mere observance. It is necessary to ask for it insistently; receive it with meekness because it is a gift of the Spirit; and consistently exercise it through an intense personal prayer, of daily listening to the Word of God, and the celebration of the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation.
* If there is a serious problem in religious life today, then it would be on the issue of spirituality and radical faith.
* Likewise, if formation should pay special attention to something today, it would be on the experience God and educating in the radical faith. Without Him we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15: 5).
* Faith, freely accepted, is the only solid foundation on which to build a life of prayer, chastity, fraternity, poverty, and service.
* Of course, when we speak of spirituality, we are talking about:

- A *unified spirituality* that makes us children of heaven and earth, in which the world, far from being an obstacle to an encounter with God, becomes a normal way through which God manifest himself.

- A *spirituality in dynamic tension* that makes mystics and prophets of us and leads us to live passionately for God and humanity at the same time.

 - A *spirituality of presence* to transform us into disciples and witnesses. (Cons. 10)

*Among the Formative* *Mediations to experience God, think of the following:*

1. God can only be spoken of from experience and not from hearsay. And if this is true, then we are entering into a critical area with regard to formation, that is, the need for spiritual masters and true spiritual guidance. In initial formation this requires the presence of *formators* who are on the path of this process themselves, people who are credible for their life of faith and true masters of the spirit. Formation stands in need of masters who, having quenched their thirst for God, like the Samaritan woman, become witnesses and teachers in search of the waters of life (cf. Jn 4, 1ff). I think this should be a real priority in both ongoing and initial formation because, in my view, there is a large gap right now in religious life and, perhaps, also in the Church.
2. In the homes of initial formation, it is necessary to foster an atmosphere of silence, intense prayer, deep spiritual exchanges, places in which faith is assessed constantly without fear. Only then will young people in initial formation be able to witness in their own search, that God lives, that Jesus is Lord, and the Spirit is the force that enlivens. Then our communities will be shining places of faith, places of prayer and Gospel reference for ourselves as well as for men and women searching for meaning in their lives. This is an urgency felt in religious life and felt by those in formation; they feel the need for formation houses that are "schools of prayer". This is a response which many lay people expect of us religious, namely, to form communities where the life of prayer is lived out as an obvious priority. This, in fact, is a means of evangelization which cannot be forgotten (especially in Asia) – if we wish to respond appropriately to so many expectations that come to us from our society, increasingly secularized, but also in search of meaning.
3. Other formative mediations to enhance the experience of God are: formation to an authentic liturgical spirit; introduction to the study and prayerful reading of the Word of God, authentic Marian devotion, retreats, and regular recollections.
4. Also important is a suitable education/formation that enables the reading of one’s life and history with the eyes of faith, the contemplation of Christ in the poor and the evangelical hierarchy of values ​​and activities, as well as proper use time, taking into account the requirements of fraternal life in community, people's needs and mission, and the use of the means of communication with the necessary discretion.

*2. The Apostolic Community
Art. 2: The Presence of Christ in the Community*

**23**. Since the members are called to continue the presence of Christ and his mission of redemption in the world, they choose the person of Christ as the centre of their life, and strive day by day to enter ever more intimately into personal union with him. Thus, at the heart of the community, to form it and sustain it, is the Redeemer himself and his Spirit of love. And the closer their union with Christ, the stronger will become their union with each other.

**24**. So as to share truly in the love of the Son for his Father and for people, they will cultivate the spirit of contemplation which deepens and strengthens their faith.

This will enable them to see God in the people and in the events of everyday life. They will see his plan of salvation in its true light, and be able to distinguish between what is real and what is illusory.

**25**. They will be docile to the Holy Spirit who works without ceasing to conform them to Christ, so that they learn to view all things as Christ does (cf. Phil. 2:5ff), and be of one mind with him (cf. 1 Cor. 2:16). This same Spirit moves them interiorly through a variety of ministries for the work of the apostolate.

For the gifts of the members and of communities vary "according to the measure of Christ's giving" (cf. Eph. 4:7), "but the Spirit is one and the same" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:14).

*Art. 6: A Community of Conversion*

 **41**. 1° The members must give all their attention to putting on the new self, created in the image of Christ crucified and risen from the dead, so as to purify their motives in judging and acting. For conversion of heart and continual renewal of mind should characterize their whole daily life.

This effort entails continual self-denial, which eliminates egoism, and opens the heart to others generously and fully, in accordance with the demands of the apostolic calling. Spending themselves for others in this way for the sake of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 4:10ff), they will acquire that interior freedom which brings unity and harmony into their whole life.

**THE APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY DEDICATED
TO CHRIST THE REDEEMER**

*Art. 1: The Mission of Christ the Redeemer, the Reason for their Dedication*

**48**. In order to fulfil his mission, which is essentially the exercise of pastoral charity, Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7) and submitted himself to the will of the Father in the work of redemption to which he dedicated his entire life.

**50**. The members walk the same way as Christ himself, the way of virginity, poverty and obedience, the way of service and sacrifice of self unto death from which he ascended victorious through his resurrection. They do this within the Church which continues and unfolds the mission of salvation.

*Art. 2: Signs and Witnesses*

**51**. Through this total dedication to the mission of Christ, the members share the self-renunciation of their crucified Lord, the virginal freedom of his heart and his wholehearted offering of himself for the life of the world. They must, therefore, become signs and witnesses before people of the power of his resurrection, proclaiming the new and eternal life.

Redemption - Communicanda, June 2006

13. For Alphonsus the whole of the Christian life is centered in Jesus and his work of redemption. If we want to understand the spiritual insight of our Founder, then I believe the critical focus is not upon redemption as an abstract category but rather upon the person of the Redeemer. For Alphonsus, a Christological approach is indispensable , for it is the Redeemer who reveals redemption. The Redeemer represents the true character of God in all its fullness. Who is God? What does God think about human beings? Alphonsus joins his voice to Jesus in the Gospel of John: ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.’ (Jn.3:16-17)

Spirituality - (Communicanda 1, 1998)

22. A third consequence, and surely the most important, is that the choice of spirituality, even before that of "Redemptorist spirituality" obliges each one of us to focus our attention on our personal relation with Christ, to see if this is "the primary motivating force of our way of life" (Final Message, XXII General Chapter n. 1). "Whatever the context, we believe that all Redemptorists are being called at this time to focus on a central aspect of our spirituality, i.e., on how we nourish and express our relationship in faith with Jesus (Final Message, n. 3). It is the Holy Spirit who ceaselessly draws us to this relationship and energizes it. It is He who awakens the desire to respond fully, making each one of us configured to Christ (*Vita Consecrata*, 19). It is He who convinces our intellect, making it accept in joy and love what in the eyes of the world may appear as foolishness.

*Sources:*

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