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RELIGIOUS AND HUMAN PROMOTION

Sacred Congregation for Religious and for
Secular Institutes

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FOREWORD

The Church, which under the influence of the Holy Spirit is in a continuous process of renewal, is the living and dynamic context within which religious life finds inspiration and guidance for its own spiritual and apostolic renewal.

The convergence between the Church's mission and contemporary human history has become increasingly apparent and serious, tracing new paths of witness, evangelization and human promotion:

— from the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* to the Synod of Bishops (1971 on *Justice in the World*);

— from *Populorum Progressio* (1967) to *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971);

— from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) to the first encyclical of the present Supreme Pontiff, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979).

More and more, Christ is seen as the "centre of the cosmos and of history" (RH 1), and the Church's mission as an ardent and unceasing commitment to enable every person to encounter Christ, the new Man (GS 22; RH 8, 13-14).

Since religious are, by vocation, "in the vanguard of the mission" of the Church (EN 69), they have a greater obligation to give a response to the *burning question* of the apostolic exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*, so that their renewal becomes, in turn, a stimulant to renewal for the Church and the world (ET 52).



For this reason, at the plenary meeting of April 22-28, 1978, the Fathers of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes studied the theme "Religious and Human Promotion", taking into consideration its sociopolitical implications. In this way they hoped to provide criteria for discernment which conform to the nature and mission of religious life and to respond to the principal concerns which actual situations have brought to light. This wide-ranging preliminary inquiry showed how timely and urgent this was.

"The proper mission given by Christ to the Church is not of a political, economic or social kind, however; the purpose assigned to it, in fact, is of a religious nature" (GS 42). This should find a particularly dynamic sign in those who make the *religious* dimension the characteristic qualification of their

choice, and even of their name, in the Church and in society (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 44; ET 7; EN 69).

The following plenary meeting of 4-7 March 1980, therefore, gave the mission of religious its true meaning and proper place in the Church, outlining the contemplative dimension by which every religious life is defined in a particular way and is made fruitful.

The concerns that emerged from the preliminary inquiry and were considered most timely by the Fathers of the *Plenaria* are reflected in these guidelines. These concerns were confirmed in the message sent by the Holy Father. In this message we are given a synthesis of the values and demands of the contemplative dimension which, for Institutes of active life, involves a special effort to integrate consecration and mission, and for Institutes of specifically contemplative life, the joyful conviction that their choice is a constant reminder to the Christian community of the "better part" (cf. Lk 10:42).

The two themes are essential and inseparable components of the life and mission of religious in the Church. The guidelines which the *Plenariae* of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes give us, and which are here published together because of their complementarity, reaffirm and define the specific role of religious life in the ecclesial community which the earlier directive guidelines of *Mutuae Relationes* (14 May 1978) had described and studied in depth.

Having seen the documents, the Holy Father expressed his deep appreciation of their content and gave his consent for their publication, hoping that they would contribute to an ever more generous, consistent and persevering commitment on the part of consecrated persons so that they might be increasingly responsive to the divine call and live it joyfully and faithfully in all its dimensions.

RELIGIOUS AND HUMAN PROMOTION

(Plenaria of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, 25-28 April 1978)

Introduction

Importance and urgency of appropriate involvement of religious in integral human promotion.

— The evangelical demands of religious life find an incentive for renewal in the “signs of the times”. The Church, in her mission to contemporary society, needs to study carefully the emerging phenomena that characterize our times. These indicate the areas of choice for evangelization and human promotion.

— The teaching of the Magisterium, in fact, increasingly clarifies the profound links between the gospel requirements of the Church’s mission and the widespread commitment to the advancement of people and the creation of a worthy society.

Evangelization, for the Church, means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity and through it transforming humanity itself from within; its criteria of discernment, its determinant values, its sources of inspiration, its designs for living, opening them up to a total vision of humanity (1).

To accomplish this mission, the Church must search out the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel, thus responding to persistent human questions (2).

— Religious are called to give singular witness to this prophetic dimension. The continuous conversion of heart and spiritual freedom which the Lord’s counsels inspire and promote make them present to their contemporaries in such a way as to remind everyone that the building of the secular city must be founded on the Lord and have him as its goal (3).

Since the profession of the counsels binds religious to the Church in a special way (4), it is they who are exhorted more insistently and trustingly to renew themselves wisely in openness to human needs, problems and searching (5).

— Over and above the social and political dramas, in fact, the Church is conscious of her special mission to give a decisive answer to the profound questions of the human heart (6).

For this reason, recent documents of the Magisterium, wishing to integrate adequately evangelization and human promotion, stress how fruitful the relationship between evangelization and religious life is for the common mission of the Church (7) and the extent to which the work of religious has contributed in every age to the human and spiritual promotion of humanity (8).

— A radical change of mentality and attitudes (9) is needed to apply evangelical commitment to the concrete and often disturbing problems of human promotion.

This path of *conversion*, involving persons and preferential decisions in apostolic initiatives and works, was bound to have its moments of uncertainty and difficulty.

Besides, the doctrinal reassessment which, in various parts of the world, accompanied the praiseworthy endeavour to participate in the complex realities of the times, revealed positive and stimulating intuitions as well as narrow and ambiguous views.

The reflections of the Synod on Evangelization in the Modern World (1974), and later, the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, gave important clarifications and guidelines.

— Religious faced particular problems and difficulties when they tried to intervene more decisively in the areas of greater injustice and oppression. Conflicting viewpoints within the ecclesial community and within the Institutes themselves made the search for solutions still more difficult.

Furthermore, changed social and political contexts were creating new and unexpected situations. The traditional expressions of religious life were bound to face difficult challenges in their manner of presence and in their apostolic works. The need for greater solidarity with their contemporaries, especially the poor and the underprivileged, compelled religious men and women to become more actively involved, sometimes even in the working world and in politics.

— The importance and urgency of the appropriate involvement of religious in integral human promotion prompted the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes to give special attention in this matter to the specific role of religious in the mission of the Church.

The intention was to encourage a real search for renewal and, on the basis of circumstances and experience, to offer

criteria for discernment inspired by the Magisterium of the Church, by the nature and mission of religious life and by the goals of an evangelization which is closely linked to human promotion in today's historical circumstances.

— The *Plenaria* of the Sacred Congregation of 25-28 April 1978, therefore, studied a number of matters resulting from a wide-ranging international inquiry, in which the Episcopal Conferences, the Pontifical Representatives, numerous Institutes of both men and women and the Conferences of Major Superiors, men and women, collaborated.

— Four major concerns surfaced as of utmost importance;

A) *The option for the poor and for justice in our time.*

B) *Social activities and works of religious.*

C) *Involvement in the working world.*

D) *Direct participation in politics.*

— The resulting guidelines are intended to assist all those who are responsible for religious life in the Church in their task of communication, formation and coordination. It is they who must approve criteria and choices which, while taking into account the principles and guidelines offered here, respond to the diversity and complexity of the situations, so that Episcopal Conferences and Conferences of Religious in the different countries may reinforce the specific role of religious life in the common task of evangelization and human promotion in whatever ways they deem most suitable.

— The pastoral teaching of John Paul II has, in the meantime, clarified and defined the presence and involvement of the Church in the world, giving additional matter for reflection and inspiration. It highlights the present attention given both to human problems and to the irreplaceable encounter with Christ and with his Gospel.

We are encouraged, therefore, to clarify the direction of a path of evangelization and human promotion which, by a new and special title of consecration to God and to his purpose in human history, pertains to religious in the Church.

I. FOUR MAIN CONCERNS

1. The desire to be increasingly involved and active in the present historical situations within which the Church fulfils her mission seems to be a constant factor in religious renewal:

— in those places where, either through the works of their Institutes or those of the local Church, religious are called to carry out a *social* mission which is at the same time profoundly *religious*,

— and also, in those places where circumstances require new initiatives which are more pertinent to the life and problems of the people.

In every situation, however, careful reflection is needed to specify common criteria and options.

This is why, taking as our starting point the four main problems surfaced by the inquiry, we wish to indicate certain important points for evaluation and guidance. It will then be easier to point out the general principles of discernment.

A. The option for the poor and for justice today

2. The prophetic mission of Christ who was “sent to preach good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18), finds a strong resonance in today’s Church.

Proof of this can be found in numerous pontifical statements and in the clear and enlightening words of the Pastoral Constitution (GS) which appeal for closer solidarity between the Church and the lives of the people. The Synod of Bishops in 1971, in its document *Justice in the World*, pointed out the need for a conscientization in this dimension of the Church’s evangelizing mission.

The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* enlarged on these appeals, calling on every sector within the People of God to accept its responsibilities and to reach out to the life and conditions of “people engaged with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life” (10).

3. The themes of a *gospel liberation* founded on the kingdom of God (11) should, therefore, be very familiar to religious.

Indeed, the witness of religious who have courageously supported the lowly and the defence of human rights has

been an effective echo of the Gospel and of the voice of the Church. However, as we have already noted, the consequent interpretations and reactions within the local Church and religious communities and even secular society have not always shown a similar sensitivity and concern.

4. Some guiding principles, therefore, seem desirable so that the preferential choice for the poor and concern for justice may correspond to the purpose and style proper to the Church's mission and within it to religious life.

a) Religious often find themselves in a position to experience at close range the events that affect the people whom they serve. The prophetic nature of religious life requires that religious "embody the Church in her desire to give herself completely to the radical demands of the beatitudes" (12). They are "often to be found at the outposts of the mission, and they take the greatest of risks for their health and for their very lives" (13).

b) This sincere desire to serve the Gospel and work for integral human promotion demands that *communion* be at the core of every concern and that it be built up with patience and perseverance, seeking the truth in charity.

c) Conferences of Religious, without prejudice to the charism of each Institute, could have the important function of providing incentive and balance in this regard in coordination with Episcopal Conferences (14) and especially with the Commission "Justice and Peace" and with *Cor Unum*. It would be possible in this way to overcome positions of ambiguity taken either from a supposed and false neutrality or from group prejudice. Besides, different cultures and temperaments, as well as varying social and political contexts, would therein find an appropriate forum for mutual exchanges and for a communal consensus that would give security and surer effectiveness.

d) This presence for the defence and promotion of justice ought to manifest itself most actively and particularly in those persecuted sectors of "voiceless injustices" to which the Synod of 1971 referred (15).

In fact, while some social groups are able to form vigorous structures of protest and support, we see, on the other hand, much suffering and injustice which have little resonance in the hearts of so many of our contemporaries: the plight of refugees, those persecuted for their political views or their profession of the faith (16); violations of the rights of the unborn; unjustified curtailment of human and religious liberty; lack of social assistance which increases the trials of the elderly and marginalized . . .

It is for these, especially, that the Church wishes to be voice, conscience and commitment (17).

e) The witness of religious for justice in the world, however, implies, for themselves in particular, a constant review of their life-options, their use of goods and their manner of relating, because the one who dares to speak to others about justice must above all be just in the eyes of others (18).

Here we see that life-giving relationship between evangelization and human promotion which comes from the "silent witness" which *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 9 presents to us as the first and most effective challenge to the world and to the Church itself.

From this point of view the "role played in evangelization by religious men and women consecrated to prayer, silence, penance and sacrifice" (19) is particularly effective in witness and in apostolic fruitfulness. Indeed, the contemplative dimension inherent in every form of religious life is especially strong in them. The contemplative dimension, then, shows that religious life in all its forms not only does not alienate religious from other human beings and make them useless for human society but, on the contrary, permits them to be present to their brothers and sisters in a deeper way in the charity of Christ (20).

B. Social activities and works of religious

5. The various activities and works which, through a diversity of charisms, characterize the mission of religious are one of the most important means by which the Church carries out its mission of evangelization and human promotion in the world (21). Hence the importance of the renewal of religious for the renewal of the Church and the world (22).

This is why *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 31 asks that there be an awareness of the profound links between evangelization and human promotion. To forget this would be to ignore "the Gospel teaching on love for one's suffering and needy neighbour".

6. Open to the signs of the times, religious will be able to seek and implement a new manner of presence which is in keeping with their Founder's creativity and the original purposes of their own Institutes (23).

In this context, a certain course of action in renewal emerges:

a) The activities and “social works” which were always part of the mission of religious bear witness to their constant commitment to integral human promotion. Schools, hospitals, charity centres and initiatives on behalf of the poor and for the cultural and spiritual improvement of people not only retain their relevance but, suitably updated, are often discovered to be privileged means of evangelization, of witness and of authentic human promotion.

In the evangelical service of so many and such urgent activities for human and social promotion, religious translate into a convincing “sign” (24) the gift of a life totally available to God, to the Church and to others.

b) The Spirit, who constantly inspires new forms and institutions of consecrated life in answer to the needs of the times, also animates the already existing ones with a renewed capacity for involvement in keeping with changing ecclesial and social conditions.

c) In the Church’s openness to ministries and in a continuous and orderly communal growth (25), religious are able to discover new forms of active participation, involving the Christian community increasingly in their initiatives and works.

In this way they have the opportunity to show what their own particular charism brings to the promotion of *ministries* which correspond to the apostolic and social purposes of their own Institutes.

d) The participation of the laity in the activities and works of religious assumes new proportions with the development of the ecclesial dimension of co-responsibility in a common mission. With adequate preparation, this participation could be extended even to works hitherto entrusted exclusively to religious (26).

e) Present social conditions, on the other hand, require new forms of solidarity and involvement. Changes taking place in some areas in the civil sphere are beginning to develop responsibility on all levels of society through structures and means of participation. Thus, every one is called to take an active role in solving problems relating to the building of the social order.

Side by side with the contribution of the laity, the witness and experience of religious can make an important contribution in this field towards solutions which are in line with the

criteria of the Gospel and the pastoral directives of the Magisterium (27).

C. Involvement in the working world

7. The pastoral concern of the Church for the working world is shown in numerous pronouncements which the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* sums up, placing them within the context of the new economic and social conditions.

Faced with such a vast sector of humanity, which insistently challenges the mission of the whole Christian community, religious experience a greater need for solidarity and participation. They feel that their choice of evangelical poverty already imposes on them the duty of recognizing the authentic values contained in the common law of work (28).

8. The Magisterium of the Bishops described precisely, in the case of priests, the reasons, objectives and conditions which should guide the more committed choices of involvement in the working world (29).

Obviously, these directives apply to *priest-religious* also. But, given the specific nature of religious life and its special bonds with the Church's mission (30), they are applicable analogously to other men and women religious as well.

In addition, the characteristics proper to the vocation and mission of religious suggest some criteria which could determine and direct their possible involvement in the working world:

a) dynamic fidelity to the purposes for which the Spirit brought their Institutes into existence in the Church (31);

b) the desire to witness to Gospel values which restore dignity to work and show its true purpose (32);

c) a commitment to strengthen the *religious* dimensions which characterize their profession and demonstrate the attractiveness of the kingdom of God to which they have committed themselves radically (33);

d) fraternal sharing which the daily communal experience in religious life supports and nourishes and which manifests the newness of Christ's love in establishing solidarity among peoples (34).

9. Specific criteria in choice and behaviour are needed, also, in the actual ways of participating.

As a matter of fact, there are two possible forms of involvement in the working world, both of which have characteristics that deserve distinct consideration:

I. — The taking on of a secular profession carried out in the same social and economic conditions as civilians (in schools, hospitals, . . .).

In some countries this is imposed by changed political circumstances, as in the case of nationalization when the state takes control of the services. Sometimes it is legislative reform or the internal needs of the religious Institute which prompt religious to take on a position equivalent to that of lay people so as to continue their own apostolic activities. The search for new forms of involvement has also been responsible for participation in the ordinary social structures.

In all cases, concern for the general nature of religious life and for the specific goals of one's own Institute requires that these new situations be faithful to community requirements and the commitment to obedience and religious poverty.

As a matter of fact, a civil profession commits religious at a more directly individual level, makes them more dependent on structures outside their Institute and creates a new relationship between work and salary. These are some of the aspects that the authorities in the Institute should take into account when considering these options. Indeed, these aspects require a capacity for discernment which safeguards and strengthens the religious purpose for which the options are undertaken.

II. — Involvement in a *labour situation*, along with the values it is meant to realize, presents special problems.

In fact, worker-religious enter a *world* which has its own laws, its tensions and, especially nowadays, its powerful pressures arising from prevailing ideologies and trade union conflicts which are often disturbing and ambiguous.

For this reason, it could happen that, in sharing the condition of workers so as to bear witness to the Church's pastoral concern (35), religious might be caught up in a view of humanity, society, history, and the working world itself which is not in harmony with the criteria for discernment and the directives for action contained in the social teaching of the Magisterium. That is why such an undertaking requires special care and guarantees (36).

10. Even more, involvement in trade union activities demands a clear awareness of pastoral objectives as well as of the limitations and risks of exploitation that could result in the lives and activity of religious.

Certain principles should guide reflection on this matter:

a) In principle there does not seem to be any intrinsic incompatibility between religious life and social involvement even at trade union level. At times, according to the different laws, involvement in trade union activity might be a necessary part of participation in the world of labour; on the other hand, such involvement might be prompted by solidarity in the legitimate defense of human rights (37).

b) Political involvement, however, often poses difficult problems. These situations should be evaluated according to the criteria given in the following section (cf. D. "Involvement in politics"). Special care is needed in dealing with ideologies which promote *class struggle*. In this case, the teaching of *Octogesima Adveniens* (26-36) would be most necessary.

c) From experience up to the present, moreover, it is possible to deduce certain principles of behaviour to direct the purpose and style of such choices. Within a body as influential in society as the world of labour, religious are the bearers of human and Christian values which will oblige them to repudiate certain methods of trade union action or of political manoeuvring which do not respond to the exact demands of justice which alone are the reason for their involvement.

Within their own communities also, these religious should know how to foster values of communion, avoiding undesirable polarizations. Such an attitude will help the communities to take balanced and credible options.

d) Another essential criterion which should determine the involvement of religious is the awareness that it is particularly to the laity by vocation and mission that the duty of promoting solidarity and justice within secular structures belongs (38). Their role in complementarity, especially in this area, will be expressed above all by their witness and their contribution to an ever more adequate formation of the laity.

D. Involvement in politics

11. Religious have shown, generally, that they are conscious of the fact that their involvement in human promotion is a service of the Gospel to humanity, not a preferential choice of ideologies or political parties.

On the contrary, in any such involvement, they see the risk of a loss of the identity proper to religious life and to the Church's mission (39) as well as a dangerous tendency to absolutize ideas and methods and to become a prey to easy and selfish exploitation.

12. Some guiding principles, in harmony with the teaching of the Magisterium, would then seem necessary to throw light on a subject which in itself is a matter of heated debate and is sometimes misleading.

a) *Politics* can be understood in the wider and more general sense as the dynamic organization of the whole life of society. In this respect, it constitutes a duty of responsible and active human participation for all citizens. Looked at in this way, the role of religious in activities and works is profoundly meaningful in its encouragement of and commitment to those cultural and social changes which contribute to human promotion.

b) But if *politics* means direct involvement with a political party, then certain reservations must be made in view of the vocation and mission of religious in the Church and in society, so as to arrive at correct criteria governing a possible involvement.

1) Religious, aware of the worthwhile contribution that their Gospel witness and the variety of their apostolic initiatives make, should not be deluded into thinking that they will have greater influence on the development of persons and peoples by substituting a *political* involvement in the strict sense for their own specific tasks (40).

2) To establish the kingdom of God within the very structures of the world, in so far as this constitutes evangelical promotion in human history, is certainly a theme of great interest for the whole Christian community, and therefore for religious also; but not in the sense that they allow themselves to become involved directly in *politics*. Through their scholastic institutes, the communications media, and multiple religious and educational projects, they can actively contribute especially to the formation of the young, thus making them architects of human and social development. The repercussions of this apostolate will not fail to be felt in the political sphere also. This is not through a strategy of conquest but through that service to human society which is the mission mandated by Christ to the whole ecclesial community (Lk 22:25-27).

3) It is from this point of view that the efforts of women religious to cooperate in the advancement of women are to be encouraged, so that women may succeed in being involved in those areas of public and ecclesial life which best correspond with their particular nature and the qualities that are proper to them (41).

4) In this way, religious will be credible *gospel experts*, and as such will be effective in healing and building up society, even when they stand apart from certain political options, being seen not as men and women who take sides, but as agents of peace and fraternal solidarity.

In fact, by the primacy of love of God which their options effectively manifest (42), religious situate themselves as persons of the Absolute in the dynamism of the Church, which is thirsty for the divine Absolute (43). They are called to be in the midst of the People of God both sign and stimulant of this fundamental option which promotes and conditions all others.

5) Active involvement in politics remains an exception then, to be engaged in only by way of substitution and to be evaluated according to special criteria. If exceptional circumstances require it, the individual cases must be examined so that, with the approval of the authorities of the local Church and the religious Institutes, decisions can be made that are beneficial to the ecclesial and secular community. But the priority of the specific mission of the Church and of religious life must always be kept in mind as well as the methods proper to it (44).

II. GENERAL CRITERIA OF DISCERNMENT

13. Four great loyalties constitute the basic motivation and guide of the role of religious in human promotion, according to the conciliar principles for renewal (45) and taking into account the problems examined thus far:

- fidelity to humanity and to our times
- fidelity to Christ and the Gospel
- fidelity to the Church and to its mission in the world
- fidelity to religious life and to the charism of one's own Institute.

A. Present to humanity and to our times

14. The cultural, social and political changes which affect peoples and continents, not without distress, demand of the Church an evangelical presence which is a response to the most widespread hopes and aspirations of humanity (46).

This pressing pastoral concern, made more acute by the reflections and goals of the Second Vatican Council, has reappeared in the Synod of Bishops and in apostolic exhortations, appealing clearly and insistently to the Christian community to make courageous choices in the process of renewal so as to draw modern men and women to the Gospel, the source of all authentic human and social progress (47).

15. The history of today's world, embodied in the concrete existence of every person, becomes an open book for serious meditation by the Church and by all Christians (48). It is a challenge to all vocations in the Church, calling them to an exacting revision of life and commitment.

Religious, because of the radicality of their evangelical options, feel more profoundly challenged. They know that, in the measure they themselves are *converted* to God's original plan for humanity as revealed in the New Man Jesus (49), they will help accelerate in others that *conversion* of mentality and outlook which will make the reform of economic, social and political structures authentic and stable and place them in the service of a more just and peaceful coexistence (50).

16. To achieve this, in striving for renewal in their witness and mission, all religious Institutes are exhorted to procure for their members "a proper understanding of humanity, of the conditions of the times and of the needs of the Church, so

that, making wise judgments about the contemporary world in the light of faith and burning with apostolic zeal, they may be able to help men and women more effectively" (51).

B. By the transforming power of Christ and the Gospel

17. The Gospels bear witness to Christ and to the fidelity with which he fulfilled the mission for which he was consecrated by the Spirit (52). It was a mission of evangelization and human redemption which led him to live among his people, sharing their lot, but illuminating and directing it, preaching and witnessing to the Gospel of conversion to the *kingdom of God* (53).

His startling proposal of the "Beatitudes" introduced a radical change of perspective in evaluating temporal reality and human and social relations which he wished to be centred on a justice-sanctity animated by the new law of love (54).

His life options should be especially characteristic of religious, who make their own the "form of life which the Son of God embraced when he came into the world" (55).

18. Faithful to this *supreme norm* (56), religious know that they are caught up daily in a path of conversion to the *kingdom of God*, which makes them in the Church and before the world a sign capable of attracting, thus inspiring a profound revision of life and values (57).

This is, without doubt, the most needed and fruitful *commitment* to which they are called (58), even in those areas where the Christian community works for human promotion and for the development of social relations inspired by principles of solidarity and fraternal communion.

In this way, they cooperate in "safeguarding the originality of Christian liberation and the energies that it is capable of developing — liberation in its full, profound sense, as Jesus proclaimed and accomplished it" (59).

19. The power of transformation which is contained in the spirit of the beatitudes and penetrate dynamically the life of religious characterizes their vocation and mission (60). For them the first beatitude and primary *liberation* is the encounter with Christ, poor among the poor, testifying that they really believe in the pre-eminence of the kingdom of God above all earthly things and in its highest demands (61).

By spreading in this way the Christian and profoundly human meaning of the realities of history, which finds its

origin in the beatitudes which have now become the criterion for life, religious show how close is the bond between the Gospel and human promotion in social coexistence. For this reason, the Church can point to the evangelical witness of religious as a splendid and singular proof that the way of the beatitudes is the only one capable of "transforming the world and offering it to God" (62).

C. In the organic ecclesial communion

20. The common vocation of Christians to union with God and union with each other for the salvation of the world (63) should be considered before diversity of gifts and ministries.

On this common vocation are based the relations of communion between the ecclesial components and, especially, with those whom the Holy Spirit has chosen as Bishops to nourish the Church of God (64).

21. Religious, united more intimately to the Church (65), participate in a way altogether proper to them in the sacramental nature of the People of God (66); and, in the local Churches, they belong in a special way to the diocesan family (67).

The conciliar decree on the *Pastoral Office of Bishops* pays special attention to the role of religious. It places them among the cooperators with the bishop inasmuch as they attend to pastoral needs in conformity with the characteristic purposes, each of their own Institute (68).

22. The identity of religious life and of its specific role is further clarified by the pluriformity and complementarity of vocations and ministries in the Church.

It is necessary, therefore, to know and appreciate the duties that pertain to each of the components: the hierarchical ministry, consecrated life in its various forms, the laity.

Thus the exercise of one's own function unfolds in a constant search for fraternal convergence and mutual complementarity, which is at once an affirmation of one's own identity and of ecclesial communion.

23. This is a general criterion of discernment, more obvious when there is a clear awareness of the roles of the various groups in the Church and when their complementary aspects are taken into account.

It is the special function of the laity to seek the kingdom of God in dealing with temporal affairs and ordering them as God wishes (69).

The *secular* nature of some Institutes, among the various forms of consecrated life, permits a more direct presence and a fuller involvement in secular realities and structures. In these Institutes, on this account called *secular*, the members individually exercise their specific apostolate in any appropriate context, thus strengthening the structures of the world (70).

On the other hand, religious, by their choice of life, limit their participation in secular structures, but do not alienate themselves from the actions of the other members of the Church in building the secular city as a place capable of receiving the kingdom of God (71). However, they are present to it in their own special way, not by substituting for other groups in the Church either in duties or methods, but by becoming an increasingly radical sign of an evangelical way of life and of involvement through the public witness of their profession which is carried out communally in all its dimensions.

If religious participate in the ministerial priesthood, they are, by this new title, exhorted to preside over and serve the ecclesial community, thus giving a more striking witness of communion (72).

24. *Experts in communion*, religious are, therefore, called to be an ecclesial community in the Church and in the world, witnesses and architects of the *plan for unity* which is the crowning point of human history in God's design (75).

Above all, by the profession of the evangelical counsels, which frees one from what might be an obstacle to the fervour of charity, religious are communally a prophetic sign of intimate union with God, who is loved above all things (74).

Furthermore, through the daily experience of communion of life, prayer and apostolate — the essential and distinctive elements of their form of consecrated life (75) — they are a *sign of fraternal fellowship*. In fact, in a world frequently very deeply divided and before their brethren in the faith, they give witness to the possibility of a community of goods, of fraternal love, of a programme of life and activity which is theirs because they have accepted the call to follow more closely and more freely Christ the Lord who was sent by the Father so

that, firstborn among many brothers and sisters, he might establish a new fraternal fellowship in the gift of his Spirit (76).

25. From their communitarian way of living flows that form of presence and involvement which should characterize them in the Church's mission and which we now emphasize in view of the options concerning human promotion.

In speaking of the variety of gifts and ministries, it should be noted that the laity and members of secular Institutes can take on apostolic, social and political responsibilities as individuals in accordance with the purpose assigned them by the Spirit.

This is not the case with religious. They have freely and consciously chosen to participate completely in their mission of witness, presence and apostolic activity in obedience to the common purpose and to the superiors of their Institute. This participation expresses fraternity and support, especially when the apostolic mandate exposes religious to greater and more demanding responsibilities in the sphere of difficult social contexts.

26. The imperative need for the fundamental criterion of communion is rendered more urgent by the diversity of situations in which Christians find themselves in the world, especially in the sociopolitical field (77).

When it is a question of choices which, in an evangelization-human promotion context, necessarily involve both one's own community and the ecclesial community, there is the need always to bear in mind the directive of *Oc-togesima Adveniens* 4 (78).

27. The characteristic of *communion* should permeate the very structures of the common life and activity of religious. In virtue of this characteristic, the profoundly ecclesial nature of religious life becomes a pre-eminent aspect of their mission within the Church and within secular society itself (79).

In this light, acknowledgement of the ministry of Bishops as the centre of unity in the organic ecclesial communion, and the encouragement of a similar acceptance by the other members of the People of God, is a specific requirement of the special role of religious in the Christian community.

Nor should religious fear any obstacle to the generosity and creativity of their projects (80) from the hierarchical nature of this ecclesial communion (81), because every

sacred authority is given for the purpose of harmoniously promoting charisms and ministries (82). Indeed, on the contrary, religious are encouraged (83) to be “enterprising in their undertakings and initiatives”; this is in keeping with the charismatic and prophetic nature of religious life itself.

Through their mission which is open to the universal Church and carried out in the local Churches (84), religious are most favourably placed to strengthen those forms of *suitable coordination* which *Mutuae Relationes* presents as the path to an organic ecclesial communion (85).

D. In dynamic fidelity to their own consecration according to the charism of the founder

28. A renewed presence of religious in the Church’s mission of evangelization and human promotion would not be fully authentic if they were to renounce, even in part, the characteristics of religious life and the special nature of the individual Institutes (86). This requirement, which we have noted constantly, should be a serious obligation of religious communities.

29. It is a question of a dynamic fidelity which is open to the impulse of the Spirit, who speaks through ecclesial events, the signs of the times and through the constant exhortation of the Magisterium.

Made more watchful by being better informed of the needs of humanity today, its problems, searchings and hopes (87), religious communities are better able to discern the true signs of God’s presence and designs in the happenings and expectations which they share with the other members of the Church. Communal dialogue (88), guided by faith, by reciprocal acceptance and respect for persons and by religious obedience, is the best way of carrying on this discernment. Precisely because religious communities of their nature are built on faith, they preserve and radiate that light which helps the whole People of God to identify the intentions of the Lord regarding the integral human vocation and to discover fully human solutions to all problems (89).

30. The *burning question*, which *Evangelica Testificatio* 52 makes the apex of the apostolic exhortation on the renewal of religious life, rises like a cry from the heart, in which Paul VI expressed his intense pastoral concern, his great love for humanity and today’s world and the confidence he placed in religious men and women.

It throws light on the concrete choices of renewal. Their urgency appeals for a fidelity capable of restoring to the present life and mission of each Institute the ardour with which the Founders were inflamed by the original inspirations of the Spirit (90).

31. It is a constant reference to *life* in its dynamic profundity, as Pope John Paul II with enlightening words reaffirms (91): “to life as it presents itself to us today, bringing with it the riches of traditions of the past, to offer us the possibility of using them today. . . . We must be very searching in our discernment of how to help the religious vocation today towards self-awareness growth; how religious life should function in the ensemble of the Church’s life at the present time. We are still seeking the answer to this question — and rightly so. We can find it in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council; in the exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; and in the many statements of the Popes, the Synods and Episcopal Conferences. This answer is fundamental and many sided.”

The Pope reaffirms his hopes for a religious life faithful to these principles, which make it “an immense fund of generosity” without which “the Church would not be fully itself”.

“In an ever renewed fidelity to the charism of the Founders, Congregations should strive to be responsive to the Church’s expectations, to the commitments which the Church and its pastors consider the most urgent at this time, to implement a mission which has so much need of well-prepared workers” (92).

III. FORMATION REQUIREMENTS

32. The problems facing religious life in its renewal so that there may be a harmony between evangelization and human promotion have repercussions on the formation level.

This might require a revision of formation programmes and methods at the initial period as well as during the successive phases and during ongoing formation.

In this regard, a re-reading of the conciliar criteria for renewal (93) will show that it is not a question of simple adaptations of certain external forms. It is a deep education in attitude and in life style which makes it possible to remain true to one's self even in new forms of presence. This presence will always be as *consecrated persons* who seek the full conversion of people and society to the ways of the Gospel through witness and services (94).

33. In this regard, some aspects of formation seem to merit special attention.

a) There is need to assure an awareness of the profound nature and characteristics of religious life, both in itself and in its dynamic involvement in the mission of the ecclesial community in today's society. Fidelity to the charism of the Institute and a creative involvement in a renewal of activities and work are also among the more important elements of initial and ongoing formation.

b) The profession of the evangelical counsels, in the context of religious life-Church-modern world, may require new attitudes which are attentive to the value of prophetic sign as a power for the conversion and transformation of the world, of its mode of thinking and of its relationship (95).

c) Life in common, seen especially as an experience and witness of *communion*, develops the capacity for adaptation (96) permitting a response to different forms of activity. These do not weaken fraternal bonds and sharing of the Institute's specific service to the Church. In fact, with this attitude, these bonds could be strengthened.

d) New forms of involvement, which have been described in examining the above problems, could possibly create unforeseen situations. This calls for a spiritual and human preparation in the formation programmes of religious life which can help to achieve a mature presence on the part of consecrated persons, capable of renewed relationships, both within and outside their own communities.

Involvement in the life of the Church and in its mission, in an attitude of co-responsibility and complementarity, implies an up-to-date knowledge of its projects and the goals it hopes to attain (97).

From the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and from the insistence with which the Synods of Bishops have referred to the matter, it is clear that there can be no dichotomy between formation for the permanent gospel commitment and human promotion according to God's plan. Therefore, a programme of formation and renewal in religious Institutes would not be adequate and complete unless it took into account the Church's thinking in this matter (98).

This is even more necessary if religious are to be capable of their apostolic duty of *reawakening consciences* (99), of forming other Christians, particularly the laity, in such a way that they will assume their proper role in this common mission of evangelization and human promotion with competence and security (100).

Since the *missionary* dimension of the Church depends especially on the generous availability of religious (101), the formation of those called to this excellent form of evangelization and human promotion will need to be genuinely adaptable to the cultures, sensibilities and specific problems of the localities (102).

34. Chapters and General Curias assume considerable importance in the programming and animation for this updating and renewal in fidelity to the Spirit and to history. It is their duty:

- to discern the opinions which best respond today to the original purposes of the Institute,
- to guide the religious and communities by means of appropriate initiatives of information and formation,
- to promote, in thoughtful and substantive dialogue, a re-thinking of works so as to motivate those who, perhaps, have done little updating and to encourage and direct the search for new and suitable approaches.

All this aims at encouraging a more attractive and clear discovery of the values of consecration and mission which are basic for a conscious and joyful membership and participation in one's own Institute.

35. Conferences of Religious, because of their more immediate knowledge of ecclesial and social conditions, are in

a better position to identify the problems of different countries and continents. Through an exchange of experiences and study meetings, they could, in collaboration with the Episcopal Conferences and respecting the various charisms, find solutions and means more in harmony with the hopes for integral human promotion. In all of this, let them always be inspired by the Gospel and guided constantly by the Magisterium of the Church.

Cardinal Eduardo PIRONIO,
Prefect

Archbishop Augustin MAYER
Secretary

REFERENCES

- 1) EN 18-19.
- 2) GS 4 - "It is not, then, through opportunism or a desire for novelty that the Church, expert in humanity, defends human rights. It is through an authentic gospel commitment which, as in Christ's case, cares for the most needy" (John Paul II, Puebla, inaugural address, III, 3).
- 3) LG 46.
- 4) LG 44; MR 8; 10.
- 5) ET 52-53.
- 6) GS 10.
- 7) EN 69.
- 8) PP 12.
- 9) ET 17; GS 63; ET 52.
- 10) EN 30.
- 11) EN 33-34. In his inaugural address in Puebla (III, 4), John Paul II stated: "Christ was not indifferent to this great and demanding imperative of social morality. Neither can the Church be. In the Church's spirit, which is the Spirit of Christ, and supported by her vast and solid doctrine, let us get to work in this field".
- 12) EN 69; LG 31; MR 14a.
- 13) EN 69.
- 14) MR 59-60 and f.
- 15) AAS 1971, pp. 928-932.
- 16) EN 39.
- 17) "The Pope wishes to speak for you, to be the voice of those who cannot speak and of those who have been silenced, so as to be a conscience for consciences, an appeal for action, to recover lost time, which is often time of prolonged suffering and unfulfilled hopes" (John Paul II to the "campesinos" of Latin America, 29 January 1979).
- 18) Synod of 1971, p. 933.
- 19) EN 69.
- 20) LG 46.
- 21) *Perfectae Caritatis* 1; LG 46.
- 22) ET 52.
- 23) MR 19; 23, f; 41.
- 24) EN 69; Puebla document, nn. 733-734: Apostolic openness of ministries and a preferential choice of the poor are the most evident tendencies in religious life in Latin America. In fact, more and more, religious men and women are to be found in the difficult and underprivileged areas... This choice does not presuppose the exclusion of anyone, but it does mean a preference for and nearness to the poor. This has

brought about a rethinking of traditional works so as to make a better response to the demands of evangelization . . .

25) LG 9-12; 34-36; *Christus Dominus* 33-35; EN 13; 58; *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 2, 6-10.

26) Cf. document of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, on the Catholic school (19 March 1977), nn. 60-61; participation of the Christian community in the educative process of the Catholic school.

27) CD 35; MR 22-23.

28) PC 13; ET 20; cf. GS 67-72 concerning the human and Christian elements of work.

29) *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 8; OA 48. The document of the Synod of Bishops which treats of the ministerial priesthood cf. AAS, 1971, p. 912-913, recalling PO 8, states that the priestly ministry is to be considered a function which is valid in itself, and, indeed, in the light of faith, is more excellent than others. If, in particular circumstances, other activities accompany this ministry, the criterion of suitability is to be sought in the resulting contribution to the pastoral ministry of the Church. It is especially the Bishop and his Council of priests that must decide, having consulted, when necessary, the Episcopal Conference.

30) MR 10; LG 44.

31) Cf. ET 20: "But your activities cannot derogate from the vocation of your various Institutes, nor habitually involve work such as would take the place of their specific tasks". Cf. also the doc. of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education on the school, n. 74-76.

32) ET 20.

33) LG 44; PC 1; ET 3.

34) PC 15; ET 21; 39.

35) OA 48.

36) OA 48 and 50.

37) Cf. Puebla doc., nn. 1162-1163 and 1244 (discourse of John Paul II to workers).

38) LG 31; 33; AA 7; 13; GS 67; 68; 72.

39) GS 42; 76; Synod 1971, AAS, p. 932: Puebla doc., nn. 558-559.

40) Cf. discourse of John Paul II to the Union of Superiors General, 24 November 1978, in which he asked them to "interpret in the correct gospel sense the option for the poorer classes and for all victims of human selfishness, without giving way to sociopolitical radicalism . . . to draw close to the people without prejudice to their religious identity, and without dimming the specific originality of their own vocation". Cf. also Puebla doc., n. 528.

41) MR 49-50.

42) ET 1; PC 6.

43) EN 69; Puebla doc., nn. 527-529.

44) Cf. Synod 1971, AAS, p. 912-913: the criterion given for priests, as already mentioned for other forms of involvement in secular structures (n. 8), guides the behaviour of religious also, due to the close links of religious life with the hierarchical apostolate (CD 34) and the special relationship which binds it to the pastoral responsibility of the Church (LG 45-46). In MR (nn. 5-10-36) the theological reasons are dealt with more at length and practical conclusions are drawn for ecclesial obedience and appropriate arrangement. Cf. also the Puebla doc., n. 769, where the Pope's words are quoted: "You are religious and priests; you are not social or political leaders or officials of a temporal power. Therefore I tell you again: let us not be under the illusion that we are serving the Gospel if we try to dilute our charism by an exaggerated interest in the wide field of temporal problems" (AAS, LXXI, p. 193).

45) Cf. PC 2.

46) GS 9.

47) Cf. especially the Synods of 1971 and 1974; the apostolic exhortation EN which is complemented under the directly social and political aspects by OA.

48) Cf. RH 14; "The Church cannot abandon man . . . Man in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being and also of his community and social being. This man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission".

49) GS 22; RH 8.

50) GS 63.

51) PC 2 d; MR 26-32.

52) Is 42:1-7; 61:1-4; Lk 4:17-19; cf. Puebla doc., n. 1130: "The evangelization of the poor was for Jesus one of the messianic signs, and for us too it will be a sign of gospel authenticity".

53) Mk 1:15.

54) Mt. 5:3-12; 5:20; 43-48.

55) LG 44; PC 1.

56) PC 2, a.

57) LG 44; EN 69.

58) MR 16; 26-28.

59) John Paul II, Puebla, inaugural disc. III, 6; EN 9; 30-39; cf. also in the same inaugural discourse, I, 2-5 the call to a solid christology and the unique Gospel, without minimizing or deforming interpretations, as the basis for our capacity to "serve man, our people, to impregnate their culture with the Gospel, to transform hearts, to humanize systems and structures". Cf. RH 11.

- 60) LG 31.
- 61) LG 44.
- 62) LG 31.
- 63) MR 4.
- 64) Acts 20:28; MR 5-9.
- 65) LG 44.
- 66) MR 10.
- 67) CD 34; the theological principles and criteria of application are described at length in the document MR.
- 68) CD 33-35.
- 69) LG 31.
- 70) *Motu Proprio Primo Feliciter* AAS, 1948, p. 285; PC 11.
- 71) LG 46.
- 72) LG 28; GS 43; MR 36.
- 73) GS 19; 32 - cf. Puebla doc., nn. 211-219; 721: "Consecrated life is evangelizing in itself in view of communion and participation".
- 74) LG 44.
- 75) PC 15; cf. Puebla doc., nn. 730-732.
- 76) GS 32.
- 77) OA 3.
- 78) "Confronted with such diverse situations, we read in OA 4, it is difficult to sum it up in one word or to propose a universally valid solution. It is for the Christian communities to analyse objectively the situation in their own country, clarify it in the light of the unchanging words of the Gospel, draw principles for reflection, criteria for judging and directives for action from the Church's social teaching. It is for the Christian community to discern, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the bishops concerned and in dialogue with the other Christian brethren and all men of good will, the choices and commitments that must be made to bring about the social, political and economic changes that are obviously needed in many cases. In looking for what changes ought to be made, Christians should first renew their trust in the power and originality of gospel demands" - cf. Puebla doc., n. 473.
- 79) "Religious should not only accept, but they should loyally strive for unbreakable unity of intention and action with the Bishops. There cannot and must not be any lack of collaboration, which is at once responsible and active, but also docile and trusting, on the part of religious, whose charism makes them so much more suitable ministers in the service of the Gospel" (John Paul II, inaug. disc. Puebla, II).
- 80) MR 5.
- 81) *Ibid.* n. 19; 41.
- 82) LG 10-12; 27; PO 9; AA 2.

83) EN 69.

84) LG 45-46; CD 33-35; cf. Discourse John Paul II to Superiors General, 24 November 1978.

85) MR n. 52 and f.

86) LG ch. 6; PC 2; MR nn. 11-12.

87) GS 1-10; ET 25.

88) PC 14; ET 25.

89) GS 11.

90) MR 23, f.

91) Discourse to Superiors General, 24 November 1978.

92) Discourse to UISG, 16 November 1978.

93) PC 2; 18; *Ecclesiae Sanctae* II, 15-19; 33-38.

94) PC 18.

95) ET 13-29; cf. Puebla doc., n. 476: "Our social behaviour is an integral part of our following of Christ."

96) PC 3; 15.

97) PC 2, c.

98) "With reference to this teaching, the Church has a mission to carry out: it must preach, educate persons and groups, form public opinion, give guidance to public authorities. Draw, then, from these genuine sources. Speak with the voice of experience, of the sufferings and hopes of contemporary humanity" (John Paul II, Puebla, inaug. discourse, III, 4).

99) ET 18.

100) The document on Justice in the World (Synod 1971, AAS pp. 935-937), together with a synthesis of the Church's principal doctrinal statements, also gives directives for a commitment to an "education for justice".

And again, John Paul II (Puebla, inaug. discourse, III, 7): "Allow me then to recall the urgency of sensitizing the faithful to this social teaching of the Church. Special attention should be given to the formation of a social conscience at all levels and in all sectors. When injustices are on the increase and the gap between poor and rich is widening painfully, social teaching, creative and open to the wide fields of the Church's presence, should be an invaluable instrument of formation and action".

101) EN 69.

102) *Ad Gentes*, 18; 25-27.



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