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The Credo of the Consecrated Life

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Introduction

Lord let me know You that I may know myself
- (St Augustine)

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands ... that life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this to you so that our joy may be complete. (I Jn 1:2ff)

This text summarizes the content of the Kerygma of the Apostle John. It is a preaching about faith in Jesus Christ whom the Apostle knew through personal experience and had come to love and the same Jesus he felt the world should know. These words of the venerable Evangelist capture the faith of the consecrated life as an attempt at replicating the life of Jesus Christ in the Church and to the world.

In this epoch of great technological advancement the restlessness of the human heart seems to have reached its peak, where science tends to answer almost every question and what cannot be explained scientifically for many does not exist. Yet in the poorer nations of the world more emphasis is placed on the providence of God and the eradication of poverty and failed structures through prayer and miracles. Even though great Shrines and Pilgrimage centers across Europe are filled to breaking point with people searching for God, the parallel or paradoxical situation is that in the same Europe, churches are getting emptier on Sundays and sports complexes are filled to capacity as a response to the lurking deep emptiness, as an outlet for expressing suppressed anger, pain and similar emotions through chants and war cries etc. On the flip side our churches in Africa are filled to capacity in the quest for miracles and liberation from poverty and different forms of oppression, real or imagined, psychological, physical and metaphysical. We can say that both scenarios find a common ground for a reflection on the nature of faith of the consecrated life today as we celebrate “The Year of Faith” declared by Pope Benedict XVI.

It is not out of place to say that persons enter the consecrated life based on faith, no matter how little the faith may be at the time of entry, while some others enter hoping to find greater faith after religious profession or even after ordination for clerical religious. Many grow in faith through the years, while some probably lose theirs or act as if they do not believe in the course of the years. One major challenge we get from the Apostles is that they spoke about a Jesus they had known and experienced.ⁱ Thus for the faithful disciple as soon as he

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encountered God's revelation as Father and Son in the Spirit, who satisfied his/her yearning, he left everything to be with Him and thereafter make God known for his joy to be full. We intend to discuss the consecrated life in the context of a response in faith to God's call to leave everything behind and then come and follow, as an enduring invitation all through the life of the consecrated person.

What is Faith?

The Penny Catechism instructs that faith is a gift of God. This gift comes to us often through personal experience of God's Word, which does not have to be dramatic. It is in the light of this experiential faith that we affirm that there is no real atheist, only a decision to believe in something or someone different from the Being others choose to call God or divine Deity. Listening carefully to those who call themselves atheist one is quick to discover that they believe in something, some force or energy etc. The human person is a riddle to himself, since he continues to ask questions about the meaning of his very existence. He searches for the ultimate sense of his life and longs for a fulfillment which human sickness and death, injustice and war, cannot destroy. For us in the twenty-first century, as it was for St Augustine, it remains true that the human existence is characterized by the restlessness of the heart.ⁱⁱⁱ According to Karl Rahner, "Man's awareness of his limitation reveals to him his dependence upon the Infinite. Rahner says, "in every act of knowing and loving I am restless, striving beyond my present situation toward an horizon which I can never reach but which is inescapably present to me". In this situation, the religious question inevitably arises. Can I be content with limited areas of knowledge and of choice, or do I allow myself to be open to the Mystery, which is always present to me but which I can never manipulate and control? Rahner argues that this Mystery is God and that it is only God who can fulfill my restless longing, and in fact it is only God who allows my life to appear as a totality. Without this ultimate Mystery, my life is merely a bagatelle of fragmented experiences.

In simple language, faith is all about letting go: to let God be God!

In general, when we speak of "faith," we refer to the act of believing the truth of an assertion on the authority of the person making the assertion. When we have personal, "eyewitness" knowledge, we don't need to take another person's word for it—in other words, we don't need faith. But when we accept as true something about which we don't have such firsthand knowledge, we are making an act of faith. For example, imagine that we are passing through a town and ask a stranger for directions. If we act on this information, then we believe that the stranger told us the truth. Note that there are two aspects to this act of faith. First, we believe that the stranger is worthy of belief. Does he seem to know the area? Does he seem to be of sound mind? Does he understand our question? Does he have any reason to lead us astray? In short, is he credible? Once we accept the credibility of this person, we also accept the directions he provides us. If the person tells us that we need to go West to arrive at our destination, we either go that direction or we really don't accept the credibility of this person.

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With this basic understanding of merely human faith, we can better appreciate supernatural faith. As a theological virtue, faith involves a personal adherence to the living God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.^v As the Creator of the universe and the Author of all life, God is the source of all truth. In the prayer known as the “Act of Faith,” we acknowledge that God “can neither deceive nor be deceived.” In other words, His trustworthiness is unparalleled. It follows, then, that the truths revealed to us by God are more reliable and certain than merely human knowledge.^{vi} God has revealed His saving truth throughout human history, but especially through His Son, Jesus Christ.^{vii} When we accept Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh, then we are also accepting His preeminent authority to teach us the truth. (cf. Mt. 7:21-23). If we knowingly reject any of Christ's teachings, then we are implicitly rejecting Christ Himself, who is the very source of truth (cf. Jn. 14:6).

Faith in the Bible: biblical roots of faith

In the Bible, faith is the source and center of all religious life. By faith, man responds to the plan which God works out in time. Faith involves the whole person (intellect and will)^{viii} and it is a movement of the intelligence to which a word or signs permit access to realities that are not seen.^{ix}

The variety of the Hebrew vocabulary of faith reflects the complexity of the spiritual attitude of the believer. Two roots are however dominant, Amen or Aman: (so be it!) which suggests solidity and sureness, proclaiming that one holds for true what has just been said, with a view to ratifying a proposition or to uniting oneself to a prayer. The second word Batah, which implies security and confidence, intends stability and cocksureness, i.e. to be established in something. This kind of security could only be found in God. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, “if you will not believe, surely you will not be established” (see Isa 7:9). The Septuagint, not finding any specific Greek word for faith appropriated the Hebrew Batah which corresponds to words we find in the Vulgate (Latin Bible) as spes, sperare, confido signifying hope and trust; and words for Amen as fides, credere, veritas, signifying belief and truth.^x

In popular usage, faith is derived from the Latin word fides, from which we have many English words that border on trust, e.g. fidelity; confidence; confidential, etc. Indeed, faith is all about trust, that the one who says something has integrity and cannot deceive. In the Augustinian-Franciscan tradition, we could say that “Faith is a willing act of love”, by which we entrust ourselves to another. It is an act of confidence in the you of another, and for the Christian this other is God (that may be referred to as the subjective dimension) as well as in his revealed truth to the Church (i.e. the objective dimension). The Christian faith is belief in Jesus Christ the Son of God and in his name for our salvation.^{xi} Belief in God and in Jesus Christ is all one (Jn 12:44; 14:1), for Jesus and the Father are one (Jn 10:30; 17:21).^{xii} This unity itself is an object of faith (Jn 14:10ff).

Faith approaches the invisible reality of the glory of Jesus without having need of seeing signs and miracles which make it known. But if in fact it has need of seeing (Jn 2:23; 11:45)

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and of touching (Jn 20:27), it is no less called to open itself in the knowledge (Jn 6:69; 8:28) and the contemplation (Jn 1:14; 11:40) of the invisible. St John insists on the present character of the invisible consequences of faith. For him who believes, he is already risen (Jn 11:25; 6:40), walks in the light (12:46) and possesses eternal life (3:16; 6:47).

Faith insists on the tragic grandeur of an urgent choice between death and life, light and darkness and of a choice all the more difficult because it depends on the moral conduct of him to whom it is proposed (Jn 3:19-21). Faith is a letting-go by which I surrender my own securities and take Christ alone as my rock. In St Paul's great hymn in Phil 2, he sings of Christ, who did not cling to his equality with God a thing to be clung to, but emptied himself taking the form of a slave (Phil 2:6-7). The Christian is invited in faith to relive this self-emptying of Christ. The more one is assimilated to Christ, the more one abandons one's self-boasting and lets Christ become the epicenter of one's personality (cf. Gal 2:20).

A fitting word to sum up the truth of faith is poverty. According to the testimony of the Saints the more one comes to know Christ, the more one is aware of one's poverty, helplessness and total dependence on God. Such poverty however is not paralyzing, because one's trust is not located in oneself but wholly in Christ. The difficulty is that we so often cloak over our refusal to accept our spiritual poverty with a spurious idea of holiness, which is a subtle form of pride. Ruth Burrows writes, "Striving for perfection is the most disastrous of the mistakes good people fall into. It feeds the very vice it intends to destroy. Most fervent souls are prepared to give God any mortal thing, work themselves to death, anything except the one thing He wants, total trust; anything but surrender into His loving hands. 'You must become like little children' whose one virtue is that they know they are unimportant".xiii

THE SPIRITUALITY OF FAITH IS CHILDLIKE SURRENDER!

The polar opposite of this is a pride which manifests itself in self-trust (i.e. arrogance). The faith to which Christ invites us is an insecurity which drives us to throw ourselves upon him like a starving man throws himself upon food. In the words of Ruth Burrows, the attitude of faith "consists fundamentally in a total acceptance of the bitter experience of our poverty and an obstinate refusal to evade it; to accept to stand, in every deed not just in pious imagination, stripped before the living God, our leprosy laid bare, crippled in limb, blind, deaf, dumb – a living need.xiv When we face this poverty radically, we are in a position for the first time to live the meaning of faith: "In you O Lord I put my trust, let me never be put to shame".xv

The Beginnings of Faith

Faith grows or even starts by hearing: To hear God is first of all to believe in him.xvi There is a sense of faith as part of the history of a people and its relationship with God. To hear requires that we listen. The "Royal Wedding Song" (Ps 45) captures this very well for us in

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the lines, “Listen O daughter give ear to my words, forget your own people and your father's house, so will the King desire your beauty, he is your Lord, pay him homage”.

In the OT, faith had to do with that which is reliable, that which gives security, that which can be trusted. Faith presupposes a correspondence between that which is promised and that which is realized. Something is worthy of faith which does not disappoint. Naturally, in the perspective of Israel's covenant relationship, only God is worthy of faith in this sense. Israel is summoned to believe in God's word which is a word of promise. This word will not disappoint because it has God himself for its guarantee (cf. Ps 109). God has bound himself to his word and his fidelity to his word is equivalent to his fidelity to himself. Therefore God summons his people to obey absolutely, to listen to his word, to surrender to it totally. The OT understanding of faith is thus far from intellectualistic; rather it involves an existential surrender of the whole person in obedience. It has to do with the totality of a person's life. Faith is consequently not belief in something but belief in someone. This is the essential characteristic of the Christian faith, belief in Jesus Christ the Son of God, the second person of the Blessed Trinity.xvii

In the NT, the centre of attention is obviously Jesus Christ who teaches us what true faith in God entails. He was subjected to all forms of trials of faith, not in the sense of intellectual doubts, but rather in the sense of the apparent failure of his mission (e.g. rejection by men and the seeming abandonment by the Father). Whereas Israel, when tested, turned to other gods, Jesus remained absolutely faithful to the end. His life was obedience and his one desire was to do the will of the Father. In this sense, Hans Urs von Balthasar argues that Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of the OT understanding of faith: through his obedience, his surrender to His Father, his perseverance in times of trial, he fulfills the Old Testament covenant, and as the Letter to the Hebrews (12:2) says, becomes the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Another element of mission and life of Jesus is that he is not only an embodiment of faith but is also faith's catalyst. We see in his ministry that it was his role to arouse faith in others.xviii When we speak of “the faith of Christ” (*pistis christou*) in the genitive sense we might wonder whether we are referring to Christ as the subject or the object of faith. Balthasar suggests that we could call this mystical genitive, that is, the

Christian is called to live within the reality of Christ and his faith. What Christ lived he now makes possible for us. We are called to be incorporated into his innermost attitude.

St Paul is yet another example of faith as an act of total trust, surrender and obedience as we read in Galatians 2:20. This faith comes through the preaching of the Kerygma.xix As a person allows the self to be grounded in the gospel which is the gift of God, one is justified. One's situation before God is made right, not by any human effort or by the works of the law, but solely by the gift of grace in Christ. Hence, faith as an act of obedience implies total renouncing of every form of self-glorification in favour of the foolishness of the Cross.

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Faith begins at the moment of conversion in which there is an initial adhesion to Christ. This is followed by a progressive assimilation to Christ. We are gradually purified of sin and our lives become ever more Christocentric. The culmination of this process is the replacement of our egoism with the person of Christ, what could be called a Christification.^{xx} As Paul expresses it, "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Finally, it is important to note that this Christification of our lives is a process which is sustained by the community; supported by the diverse charisms and responsibilities of the community and nurtured by the celebration of the Lord's Eucharist. In this way the believer's faith grows and matures.

Faith involves the intellect and the will

St Thomas Aquinas insisted more on faith being an intellectual assent. There is no doubt that both the intellect and the will play an active role in belief. One decides to pursue what he has an understanding of no matter how little the understanding. Thus it is impossible to exclude the power of choice or decision from the act of belief. By implication we can say that most of our conscious decisions of faith are founded on our understanding of the operations of the God we love and obey.^{xxi}

Growing in Faith

The basic question here is, how do I believe? Blessed John Cardinal Newman gives us the idea that he calls the illative sense, which is a series of probabilities which lead one to absolute assurance. It is greater than any of the components which led to it. This type of illative sense is seen most clearly in personal relations. My trust in another person is based on a love which allows me to see more in the person than I can actually demonstrate. Nevertheless, such a trust is not irrational, even if it cannot be logically proved.

A second idea which helps us to understand the credibility of faith is Karl Rahner's distinction between object of faith and the ground of faith. According to Rahner, every ground of faith is an object of faith but not every object of faith is a ground of faith. In this argument, the object of faith is perceived within faith itself, i.e. the object of faith is not perceptible outside the realm of faith. The subject who believes is not just an objective knower but a graced subjectivity. God's grace (ground of faith) is already operating in me, allowing me to perceive the truth.^{xxii}

Balthasar considers the act of believing from the perspective of aesthetics.^{xxiii} Believing is an act of perception by the person who is enraptured by the inherent beauty of what is observed. That what is objectively contained to be seen in anything can only be perceived by the person who is enraptured. Being enraptured happens when God's grace transports the believer into God's world. This can be observed in the natural world where different people are able to capture or perceive the beauty of particular music while others cannot. This fact of a person's inability to capture the beauty of the music says nothing about the musician but rather reveals a lack in the perceiver. In this context, Jesus is perceived as the form of divine beauty. In him we see the glory of God made manifest. However, the biblical revelation of

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God's beauty requires a conversion, literally a metanoia or turning-around on the part of the human subject. This is because, God's glory, God's form, is manifested in the formlessness of the Cross. That such a revelation is a paradox and not a contradiction becomes evident when one sees that the beauty revealed here in the formlessness of the cross is the revelation of love. Love is the form of revelation and in the Cross we see the supreme manifestation of love, the love of Christ, who loved his own to the end (Jn 13:1). This explains why a decision to follow Jesus Christ more closely in the practice of the evangelical counsels makes sense only to the person who responds to the call and not to others. It is the case of falling in love with the beauty of God which is ineffable by the one experiencing the call and only comprehensible by others with a similar experience.

Living the Faith in God as consecrated persons

The proliferation of churches and tele-evangelists today who keep calling people to conversion leads one to this profound question: What does it mean to believe in Christ? And consequently, what does it mean to be a Christian? These questions are pertinent in this age of inculturation and worse still when we are bombarded by pastors and preachers who perm their hair and want to look European in apparel and speech etc. Does being a Christian mean living like a European, i.e. adopting western ways, in apparels, food, and social behaviours etc? This can lead to a serious danger or challenge of considering the consecrated life (including the clerical state) as a special caste people (community) with high social status. Somebody once remarked to a missionary in India: why do you take so much trouble to make people Christian? People are anyhow becoming more and more Christian: Many people wear pants, eat meat, drink wine and some are dancing already!xxiv

Faith in God is a response to God's history with humanity, i.e. a narration of God's history with human beings: the God Who guided Abraham, liberated Israel, raised Jesus from the dead, called us into fellowship, and the God who comes to save us (cf. Lk 21:28). Faith in God lives in the memory and re-presentation of this history, which has happened once and for all (cf. Rom 6:10).

Christianity and the Christian faith

The Christian faith is the sum total of the beliefs of all who are baptized into the Trinity and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Christianity is living like Christ! In other words, one can be a member of the Christian religion by accepting the beliefs expressed in the revealed truths, but one becomes a Christian by actually living out these beliefs, making them a way of life (existing). xxv

When persons are about to assume certain offices in the Church, they are made to officially say the Creed as the collective credo of the people of God (i.e. profession of faith). It is interesting to note that in the rite of religious profession, the religious does not recite the creed. The existential response to the call of God makes up for the verbal proclamation of the symbolum fidei. The religious life well lived is a daily profession of the credo of the

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Christian faith. This is because it goes beyond verbalization to express the real and complete abandonment of self (in totality) to the Lord. To accept the gift of God and to further strengthen this acceptance with total availability is faith in action. Just as we say the religious life is a close following of Christ (*sequela Christi*) and making him visible again, it is no exaggeration to say that religious life is a form of incarnation of the faith in Christ, made visible. It follows that without an ardent faith, the consecrated life will lose its meaning and foundation. The faith of religious life is an expressed alliance or covenant that is not realized once and for all after the profession of the evangelical counsels, nor in any particular historical moment. It is essentially a faith that is tested by socio-cultural factors, which stimulate and even threaten it. Oftentimes, this faith is endangered by the same internal dynamics of the professed religious (wishing to live contrary to the life) and sometimes by the very process of realizing the profession (institutional structures as such). Thus we may say that the sum total faith of the religious life is a gratuitous gift of God on the one hand and the free personal response of the recipient of the gift (i.e. choice). This dynamic understanding is to be seen not in a fixed reality that can be formally described, but in a lived experience. Like every personal odyssey, it is susceptible to growth and transmission, but only in fidelity can it attain its fullness.

Challenges of faith

Faith as a personal experience is beset with challenges which can result from among others, our varied ideas of God, our mental creation of God, a lack of satisfaction in the life of the counsels, the silence of God in critical moments, faulty or disordered understanding of the consecrated life from the onset, emptiness caused by burnout in the apostolic life, pressures from society and biological family, and even exaggerated involvement in family matters etc.

Faith as a gift of God is given to each and God does not take back his gift (Rom 11:29). We can choose to throw it away sometimes especially when God allows us to undergo moments of trial or purification. As part of the human experience faith does not exclude us from the daily vicissitudes that afflict the human being, since each is called to live his experience according to his faith. These rough experiences can become hostile or stimulating moments for faith to either grow or weaken. Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith may not fail (cf. Lk 22:32). Experiences can make God very close or far away, appear certain or dubious, light or darkness, depending on the strength of each. As already noted, faith is a dynamic personal action and operates on the balanced level of the intellect and affectivity. Thus a religious must never forget the attitude / exclamation of the father of the epileptic child, "I believe, help my unbelief" (Mk 9:24).

On the other hand, once the religious recognizes (i.e. is aware of) the difficulties that can constitute serious threats to his faith, it will be in his best interest to work toward eliminating these obstacles and make efforts at a more responsible and possibly general healthy response. These difficulties or threats to the faith come always from two angles, the socio-cultural and the personal.

a) Socio-cultural difficulties

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An analysis of the crises buffeting Christianity in the West, from a once God-centered society (even on the US dollar we read – in God we trust) to a society that is at the verge of rejecting God and deifying man, i.e. from a where God used to be the center of everything, now man and his appetite are the centre and the measure of everything. The real truth of the apparent failure of religion in the West is not atheism, but the superficiality and egocentrism or self-centeredness of man. The human person is driven more by the desire to dominate rather than love. This fact only alienates man from himself and others, including God, rather help him toward self-discovery and realization. We must come to terms with the fact that the real threat to faith in God is not the systematic criticism of Marxism, Freudian psychology, positivism or existentialism, but the elimination of those conditions which will help man towards interiority and true self-emancipation. Religious must be aware of these subtle and radical threats to the faiths especially now that we are going on mission Overseas. Sometimes, mission Overseas is now seen as a favour to the Superior General's favorites since it is not just about evangelization again but an opportunity to have a better and more comfortable life.

Personal Difficulties could be summarized thus

- Individual crises arising from doubts and some seeming grey areas concerning revealed truths
- Unanswered prayers according to certain familiar patterns
- Distorted faith and fanaticism is a great risk to the religious life where persons manifest it
- Undeclared wish to have some proof of God's existence
- The danger of fideism (arising from latent conformism and mere obedience of faith) and possibly a non-existent faith from the onset which can lead to idolatry
- The desire to live a life contrary to the professed form of life
- Reducing faith to sentimental expressionsxxxvi

If faith must grow, it must put up with doubts and even constant dialectics. Doubts as part of searching for answers could become an opportunity for a more profound self discovery and into the depths of God and His ways. Therefore God's closeness can also be his distance, his responses – his question, his darkness – light.

Faith and Hope (Rom 1:5; 16:26)

Precisely because the object of faith is unseen, discussions about the credibility of faith often center on the relationship between faith and reason. However, for a more balanced anthropology, it is also important to see the inter-connectedness between faith and hope. The

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teaching of St Peter (cf. I Pet 3:15) reminds us that it is the nature of human beings to be historical: my relationship with God and God's activities in my life in the past should be my boast as I

look to the future. This fact of history propels one to the future and creates a longing for the future which can be satisfied only with the fullness of life without end, and which only God can give. The gospel of Jesus Christ is about human hopes: hope for a kingdom of justice and peace, the hope for the fullness of life. Hence the credibility of faith is proportional to the human being's capacity to hope.

The hope of faith, however, always involves the element of "in spite of". Here in this life we are confronted with the reality of suffering and death, war and injustice, the threats of Boko Haram expressed in the brutality of human beings one to another. A faith, however, which is rooted in the resurrection of the crucified Christ, is able to hope in spite of these encumbrances. Faith as observed in the OT calls for endurance of trials, perseverance amid tribulation, which Christ himself knew and through which he held out in faith to the end (Heb 12:2). With Christ as our model of faith, we can say with the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (11:1).

Faith and trials

As religious we are called to reproduce in and by our lives the itinerary of Abraham, our father in faith (Rom 4:11), who responded to the call to leave his land for another place (Gen 12:1). At the root of faith therefore there is a call from God, a vocation. The response presupposes a risk, a break from a known pattern of life (i.e. an interruption), as well as an acceptance of an uncertain future. His words are, "IN THE WORLD YOU WILL HAVE PROBLEMS". He does not leave us with a completely uncertain future because he says,

"DO NOT WORRY FOR I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD". I often wonder which part of the statement strikes us the most. In truth, when it seems that there is no more reason to believe, that is when the authenticity of faith is called to play. A major crisis for us who have left everything to follow Jesus Christ in total self dedication to God is the fact that in our lives and even in our homes often times there are difficult moments or experiences. The experience or the story of the Jews is a picturesque illustration to capture this better.xxvii

The consecrated life as a perfection of our consecration in Baptism is a call to the prophetic mission of the Church. The greatest prophetic sign the consecrated person gives may not be in the spoken word but in the habit (i.e. the religious garb) that is worn as an expression of faith in a particular charism, since this by its nature already make us a people set apart.xxviii By the reason of our presence we constitute an unspoken statement of God to humanity, a statement of hope, faith and encouragement.xxix

One challenge Israel had to contend with was the existence of false prophets alongside the true prophets. Every human being wants to be successful and so would go to different lengths to get some message of weal. This has exposed so many to fraudsters and false prophets who

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play on the gullible and greedy minds of our people. The Jews were not exempt from this trap. The greatest challenge to faith is the reality of pain and apparent failure by human standards, and the silence of God. The Jews could not understand this *Deus absconditus* or still, *silentium Dei* (hence they asked Aaron to make the golden calf) and neither can we even today. Part of the difficulty is that we want it now (realized eschatology) and nothing to do with the future. Many of us priest and religious are fast making different golden calves for people when we feel that God is taking long to answer our invocation.

Sometimes God calls us to take up a new challenge or new mission or even go on a transfer. At the start, like the Jews, it may be tough taking off (Jer 1; Ex 3:10ff; 4:1-17) and after calling us God may even seem absent along the way. It may not be us but persons close to us and they want us to give words of encouragement. It is good to recall the sense of our credo in God the Father. The response of the religious to God who is the Source of our vocation is not merely an acceptance of some objective content of faith but an unconditional total gift of self to God. The religious says I believe in You, i.e. I entrust myself to You; I place my security and future in You, even before saying I believe: that is what You (God) say to me is my vocation. These facts are the foundation of any response in faith to the consecrated life, built upon all the faith and teachings of the Church, out of which we cannot choose or select since a rejection of some part of the faith in the journey toward God is already disjointed in its trajectory. There is a reciprocal penetration between “to believe” and “to believe that”. The total offering of self, the response to the call of God “with all one’s heart, with all the soul, and with all the might” (cf. Deut 6:5, which the Church calls holiness) presupposes the consecration to God. This is also why many scholars say that consecration is the essence of religious life. *Lumen Gentium* 44 puts it thus: through the practice of the evangelical counsels by vow [...] Christians (we must be Christians before professing the vows) wholly give themselves to God their Supreme Love, thus by a new and special title they are dedicated to God and his service. Consecrated life therefore, implies living completely by faith; the recognition of God as the One who completes us and consequently a rejection or renunciation in every effective way any reliance on different forms of human powers for our happiness. This is the existential moment in the faith of the consecrated life and not in some form of abstract consideration. It is needless to say that this total gift of self is expressed by our membership in a particular religious Congregation.

Imitating the Faith of Christ

A fact from the life of Jesus is its non-conformity with the ways of man and human society and systems of operation. His entire life demonstrates how very different he was from the human projection of how things ought to be, culminating in his death which rather than being considered a failure in the eyes of faith is the price for our Redemption. The society challenges the Christian faith greatly in wanting the Church to conform to its patterns, a danger to be wary about. History tells us of the involvement of secular powers in the life of the Church and the eventual break of this stranglehold by the Church at a given point. Imagine how manipulative the Media were in the days leading to the Conclave and the eventual election of Pope Francis. Faith clearly instructs us that the ways of God are different from the ways of man, and the Church, by extension the consecrated life, is called to

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transform the mentality of the society into God's intended plan for all which was the mission of Christ. The resistance to conversion and opposition of various forms must be seen as part of the solidification of the faith rather than as reasons for abandoning God. The challenges and opposition to the faith should be seen as favorable moments for the expression of total trust in God. Religious must look beyond mere conformism and rise in faith above superficialities.

Faith must be an expression of personal experience of deep prayer and reflection in contemporary times. The fact of the lack of this depth is responsible for many people today seeking solace in different forms of cultic worship and associations, and even Religious asking lay persons in certain pious movements to lay hands on them. Everyone must make the journey inward to discover God in the present existential itinerary, the absence of this can only leave us with an uncertain future about the consecrated life. We simply need to look at people coming out of our formation houses and we question their understanding of God and the Church. The difficult times and even materialism should serve as stepping stones to a more deepening of our faith experience. These no doubt challenge our vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Indeed, it is impossible to be a believer without trials. The words of Jesus Christ are very strong in this regard, "in the world you will have problems"; 'happy are you when people abuse and persecute you on my account". He never promised us a bed of roses, rather, the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head! The Lord promised us problems, but did not specifically tell us their shape, size or form.

It is true that sometimes the road is made rough by others (community members or apostolic collaborators), these can also become moments of growth in faith. As in the case of Israel, the religious is called to constantly pass from idolatry (personal fixations) to faith by holding on to God.

Faith as a Fundamental Choice

Faith as an experience of a covenant is a gift as well as a response. It is a process whereby man abandons himself freely to God in complete submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals. This implies that faith is not an act beside other acts. One does not believe in the same measure as he works, plays or writes. Faith is a fundamental choice which is expected to structure a person's general attitude to life and by which a person attains his full authentic human existence. In other words, it is the foundation on which all that a person does is founded. Show me your works and I will tell you what you believe. Man in his essential condition of freedom can only realize the self when there is a project toward which his life is directed. To attain this goal he has to have faith in something if not in someone. To come to the conclusion that only God can satisfy our longing is more than a discovery of extreme dialectic theology, it is a choice each must make for himself, founded on reality rather than mere arbitrary decision. In the discovery of this choice, the believer recognizes Jesus as "the sacrament of meeting with God" says Edward Schillebeeckx. As a consequence, the question about God turns out to be a question about faith in Jesus Christ. "Are you the one who is to come or have we to wait for another?" (cf. Mt 11:3). This in fact establishes a connection

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between Faith and following Jesus. No wonder the first disciples of Jesus were called Christians (Acts 2:44; 4:32).

To follow Jesus radically is an expression of faith in Jesus. To choose Jesus as a response to what makes reason in life, to believe in him is to follow him. Following Jesus means listening, since this is part of what he calls us to do (cf. Mk 4:24). Listening implies to hear (cf. Mk 7:14) and to follow in his steps. It calls for abandoning all (Mk 10:28); to love him above all things (Lk 14:26; Mt 10:37); and to follow him with the cross (Lk 14:27). In the Christological perspective, faith becomes a path, a personal adherence and a radical following. Faith in Jesus as an expression of following is always a process of interpreting our life in God with Christ as the starting point, i.e. as our access (Way) to the Father (Mt 11:27; Jn 14:6). Faith understood thus demands a complete change in the consecrated person, such that he or she becomes a new creation.^{xxx1}

The consecrated life aspires legitimately to “follow Christ with total freedom and to imitate him more closely” (cf. PC 1). The consecrated person wants to live faith as a radical following, and even though it is not only the religious that has this exclusive preserve of radical followership, they however have the interest of becoming reference point for the faith and to mirror their life in the light of the gospel. For a religious, to live the faith means, in this sense, to make the following of Christ the very project of one's life. Furthermore, it is an act of throwing light on the mystery of God and on the mystery of man, making a free decision on the development of his person. As a fundamental choice for Christ, the faith acquires a new meaning of life that is total and integrated, such that, the consecrated life rather than destroying the person or his freedom, actually helps his true and full human development.^{xxx2} To believe therefore is to become a new person in the measure of Christ the new Adam.

Religious Faith as a Call to the Truth

Jesus came as witness to the truth and even called himself the Truth. He instructed his followers that he came to guide all to the complete truth which will set us free. He never spoke about himself but about what he heard from the Father (Jn 16:13). This adherence to the truth as a way of life is something more profound than non-critical submission or fake fidelity to laws. This adhesion to the Truth frees the religious from libertine subjectivism of contemporary cultures and introduces him/her freely into the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Such adhesion does not issue from the individual's ability to justify the reasons behind the credo of the people of God, but from the Spirit who gives an inexplicable conviction to the believer, what we may call a divine knowledge even when the adherent cannot fully understand in-depth what is explained. For this reason the consecrated person is called to be a Spiritual person, and called to possess the gift of Wisdom, which does not consist in an accumulation of knowledge but in the ability to penetrate and taste the things of God.

Witnessing: Faith in the Community of the Church

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The Creed clearly expresses the gradual development of the faith of the early Church which was in turn transmitted to believers. Every member of the Church must believe in God within the faith of the Church since she is the creation of the Holy Spirit. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, “no one can have God as Father if he does not have the Church as Mother.^{xxxiii} It is possible to believe only in God, since it is only to Him that we must give total adherence required by the faith. However Christian tradition makes a distinction between *credere in Deum* with a preposition and *credere Ecclesiam* without a preposition. The Church is not an object of faith as is God. It is a creation of the Holy Spirit in continuation of the event of Christ. For this reason faith in the Church must be understood in the spiritual light, as a derivation of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, we must realize that there is no faith in Jesus (i.e. a simple admiration for his person or what he stood for) outside the community to which he gave his Spirit, even though this same community recognizes the fact that others outside the Church are not completely excluded from the Kingdom of God.^{xxxiv} Religious life therefore, as belonging undeniably to the life and holiness of the Church,^{xxxv} must harmonize within their own experience of faith, an obvious or exquisite fidelity to the *Depositum Ecclesiae* entrusted to the Pastors. This response to the truth is essentially responsible for the birth of many religious institutes in the Church.

The consecrated life as a life of faith is a charism given to some. It is an icon that sets out to demonstrate that one can live a life of faith, that is, depending trustfully in God the Father, following closely Jesus Christ His Son and according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Even though this life can sometimes separate a person from the internal operations of world, e.g. the contemplative life, it remains the best form of charismatic contribution that the consecrated religious life can ever give to the building up of the Church.

As a gift of the Spirit to the world, faith of the religious is called to give life and sanctify the earth. Jesus came that we may have life, and life in abundance. Faith is not like an experience of love which is consumed within the lover, but a call to a diaconal attitude of life in the religious in his mission to the world. This faith is in fact an anticipation of the world to come, eternal life. It sets itself in contrast to the present world of sin and evil which has closed itself to the Almighty God. At the same time the faith is able to discover the good (Phil 4:8) in all and love that good as God loves (I Jn 4:9) despite the evil inclination. Our diaconal dimension of faith is therefore a simultaneous denunciation of disbelief and a proclamation of the goodness of the Father.

Faith and the Evangelical Counsels

The evangelical counsels are the gift of Jesus Christ to the Church. They are given to help us seek holiness in our respective states of life, but when taken on in profession through vows or other sacred bonds, they now constitute a way of life as such. *Perfectae Caritatis* insists that the evangelical counsels are the constitutive elements of the consecrated life to the extent that they become the *ratio vivendi* of consecrated persons. When a person publicly takes on the practice of the evangelical counsels by vows or other sacred bonds, he is placed in a special relationship to the Church, i.e. within the Church. (Cf. PC 1). Canon 573 §1 (CIC'83) mentions the evangelical counsels as indispensable to the consecrated religious life in the

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church. Thus one cannot speak of the consecrated religious life in the church without the practice of the evangelical counsels publicly assumed by vows or other sacred bonds. This is because the profession of the evangelical counsels brings about a close following of the life of Christ, which the consecrated life represents.

The profession of the counsel in the context of the actual practice of the counsels as a way of life is a profession of faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God that entrusting my life to him, he will take care of all my needs, for human comfort (celibacy in chastity), my material needs (evangelical poverty) and the organization of my life through the instrumentality of another (evangelical obedience). While the public profession has a legal sense in the incorporation of the members, the actual practice of the vows makes the profession more meaningful to the society: church and world. It is the phase of witnessing which actually makes the religious life a profession: professional lovers, Christ bearers and representatives of the faith of Christ!

Traditionally, when we speak of the evangelical counsels, three main ones come to the mind: poverty, chastity and obedience. There is no harm in asking oneself how many counsels there are, or how many counsels could one possibly speak of? From studying the life of Jesus, it is actually possible to speak of many other counsels beside the three traditional ones. For instance we can also speak of prayer (the call to a constant union with God for strength as an expression of faith), fasting (abstinence and self-denial for self discipline and control of appetite as well as custody of the senses), humility, forgiveness and love (which is indispensable for fraternal life in the church,xxxvi among others aspects of the life of Jesus.

Sometimes we tend to think that only those who externally keep or observe the three traditional counsels are the best religious. No doubt they may be good religious, but when we stop praying because we are carried away with apostolic work we wither and forget the God who called us (PC 6). The same applies to other virtues as fasting, constant conversion, forgiveness and love, for these are the bedrock, foundation and the constant spiritual manure that help to nourish the daily living or practice of the traditional counsels. John Paul II includes among the counsels all that the Lord commands us in the gospels as necessary, when he told the disciples, follow me! These include the exhortation not to judge, to give without asking in return, to strive to look after the needs of those around us etc. We cannot exclude also the call to life in common for religious as in the Acts of the Apostles, as well as the apostolate that we undertake since it is the way we show witness to our common faith. According to John Paul II:

The first duty of the consecrated life is to make visible the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called. They bear witness to these marvels not so much in words as by the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world. To people's astonishment they respond by proclaiming the wonders of grace accomplished by the Lord in those whom he loves.xxxvii

Faith and Religious Fidelity

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The faith commitment to the religious life is a commitment to a person, Jesus Christ, in an irrevocable love. This commitment is a total self-gift that has an absolute priority in one's life and begins with no qualifications or loopholes or “if and only ifs”.xxxviii

To love Jesus is to discover Him, know Him and what he likes as in the scriptures. He must so internalize the life and concerns of Jesus that he is able to say with St Paul, it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me (cf. Gal. 2:20). Such unitive love not only justifies permanence in the commitment, it demands it, not as an obligation or a requirement but as the only adequate expression of the actual relationship. Thus the faith of the consecrated person is the incarnation of the love of Jesus Christ made visible in the life of the religious.

A great challenge to commitment today is infidelity which is not so much the antonym for faith but a decision to be unfaithful to the faith professed. It is commonplace to see many religious living in a community as if this is not where they want to be. It is amazing that before we came to the religious life, we romanticised about the life and we were even ready to take our parents or guardians to ecclesiastical courts for standing between us and our dream life of sequela Christi. The commitment to Jesus, like every other commitment is permanent in character and unless we understand this we will continue to live either in the past or in the future.

It is not an overstatement to say that every option blocks off other options. When we choose to make the vows we are saying no to other lifestyles and so should strive to make this option a success. To become a religious for instance will limit one's desire in using even what is available, make certain relationships illegitimate, and preclude total independence in choice of location, work or lifestyle. Religious life is not a trial and error commitment. No one enters or at least should enter the religious life to acquire professional or personal opportunities or perquisites. Our primary motive of entering the religious life is to become Saints. Therefore all the knowledge we acquire (academic or technical) must be directed toward realising the goal of becoming Saints. It is a choice of some option rather than others.

The person truly called to the consecrated life will most likely experience that the opportunities for growth and development inherent in that life are the ones to which he really feels drawn and is thus called in faith to a life of continuous discernment in every situation and experience. Discerning a call to perpetual commitment is a matter of choosing life, not death. Like the Israelites on the borders of the Promised Land, choosing life means obeying the commandments of the Lord your God ... loving Him and walking in His ways. (cf. Deut. 30:16)

In discussing the future of the religious life we cannot shy away from the question whether people are still or really interested in the commitment today. Various theories are proposed about new forms of consecrated life and how the church should reconstitute the life. Some of these do not really address the question of commitment. Commitment is about faith and the willingness to make the leap of faith. There is no doubt that we are the products of our environment and the way people keep their general commitments in the society could be rightly said to crisscross with the way most people respect their commitments and obligations,

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civil and religious alike. If people cannot be trusted with earthly goods, how can they be faithful in keeping the treasures of God!

Commitment and Freedom

Freedom does not consist in doing anything I feel like doing, but in having the strength of will (character) to do what I ought to do, even when I do not feel like it. Freedom is the capacity to love, to desire the good of what I love, and to act in favour of that good.^{xxxix} It is about being constant in seeking fidelity in a relationship we have established. It involves commitment to a cause and readiness to make the cause succeed without any external compulsion, but from the conviction of being part of the cause. Commitment shapes and educates or instructs our living out our desires and then it protects us from our own weakness when our vision or resolve is obscured. The laws governing our commitments may be exteriorized as rules or custom, but the external formulation mirrors the choices we have made in our hearts. They reflect back to us from without what we most want to be and do when that interior desire becomes obscured by passion or lassitude or when we do not know what to do in a new or unforeseen situation.^{xl} Faith and freedom are at work all the time we obey the rules. The most brilliant achievements emerge precisely from the deepest mastery, i.e. the most complete internalization of the rules.

Conclusion

The religious commitment is permanent and perpetual: Commitment involves an obligation, a fact most present day adolescents do not want to hear. Unlike marriage in many societies today where people tell each other that they want to try, we do not come to try God in the religious life. The religious life evokes images of a free-standing, unchanging substance or condition. It has a perpetual character even though this perpetuity connotes both stability and change, i.e. what we call development or growth in which an organism, by living, eventually becomes completely other than it was at the outset and yet maintains its identity. At profession a person undertakes an unknown future from within the structure of a lifetime commitment. He has no idea what living that commitment will eventually entail. But he will certainly be a very different person at seventy or eighty than he is now. And yet, by profession, he says that he intends to be the same person because at the end, the same relationship will be at the heart of his being as now motivates his act of self-donation.^{xli}

A very important factor in fidelity is the process of actually letting go that should take place during formation and is formally finalized at profession, but which unfortunately, some people never accomplish. Faith is all about letting go, trusting in God to take care of all one's needs. Religious faith well lived becomes God's prophetic statement of hope to people seeking the face of God amidst the daily rough experiences of life. The person who does not really let go not only as a reality in the present but even as a theoretical possibility for the future, will be tempted to play with fire in this arena for the rest of his or her life.

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Religious Profession is an entrance into a state of life. It is not simply the graduation ceremony at the end of the novitiate, as it is commonplace now to consider priestly ordination after Seminary studies. We begin to live the faith of the religious life after the guests return to their homes. It is not an experimentation of a life form, but the enactment of a serious, irrevocable, personal decision about who one will be and what one's life will mean. We do not die at profession when we are consecrated or consecrate ourselves in this life of holiness. This would have been very fulfilling since we are now holy and free from sin. Rather, we are told to start living our faith and to tell people like Jesus did, that life is beautiful and worth living under God. We can only realise the true meaning of the religious life after long and careful discernment in prayer and prolonged testing by the person and the congregation. True love is shown after staying together for a long time, discovering the good and bad sides of the other and still waking up every day and saying, I love you! It is not a frightening experience but a joyful journey into a unitive relationship with Jesus. It is the maturing of love coming to expression.

This same principle governs the practice of the other evangelical counsels taken on at religious profession. Nibbling away at the renunciation of private ownership by the gradual accumulation of private property, self-marginalization in relation to congregational processes, evasiveness in dealing with community authority, independence that becomes isolation or estrangement are all expressions of not having let go of the options one did not choose. At profession two roads diverge, and one can take only one of them if any progress toward life-integration and holiness, is to be made.^{xlii} Just as marriage has legally enforceable consequences in the realms of finances, property, health care and child-rearing, so also the person who makes religious profession is not simply giving shape to his own spirituality or personality, associating himself with a group of people in various ways. Rather he is undertaking a specific set of obligations and responsibilities as well as assuming a certain set of rights for all of which he is accountable before the congregation, the Church, and sometimes even the State, all founded on God

The period of formation (not leaving out those who are already professed though) is a time to be conscious of one's vulnerabilities, such as a tendency to discouragement and despair, a seeming loss of faith, scrupulosity or self-criticism, laziness and luxury, making excuses, harsh judgements and hyper-criticalness of others etc. As these become evident during formation, it is important not only to work at their remediation in practice but to realise that most such limitations are fairly deeply rooted in the personality and each predisposes the person to particular types of temptation to give up in the face of life's challenges. In the final analysis, the only reason for honouring in perpetuity the commitment of profession, regardless of what happens or what else becomes available, is the love relationship between the consecrated person and Christ. That love, rooted in sustained contemplation of the beauty and lovable-ness of Christ is what is called the consecrated to the life. It is what comes to definitive expression in profession; it is what motivates one's ministry to Christ's body. This is what is lived day to day through a lifetime of joy and suffering. Nothing then is more important, indeed more crucial, than the daily nurturing of that relationship, the sustaining of that attention to the infinite worth of the One to whom a person's life is consecrated. The person who loses touch with the beloved, who becomes a stranger to the one to whom he is

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committed, may continue to keep his commitment out of a sense of duty or obligation, but the life has gone out of the relationship and the life itself has no further meaning.

When we are true to ourselves and the commitment we make to Jesus in the profession, we learn to share our life in Christ through spiritual direction, shared prayer and contemplative ministry. Retreats should not be a time for gathering just to socialise or do group therapy and workshops, as is happening in many places today, but a time to put aside everything, even Christ's own work, to be with him in uninterrupted mutual and loving contemplation like Mary at the feet of the Master. (cf. Lk. 10: 38 – 42) A relationship that does not grow is doomed, and a life commitment that is not founded on and expressive of a supremely worthwhile relationship is hollow. For us religious, we should be able to confidently say, we believe, therefore we are.

ENDNOTES

I.

Examples abound in this regard, Peter, Paul and even the Old Testament heroes like Moses, Elijah, Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah etc.

ii.

Cf. Rom 10:14, where St Paul talks about faith through hearing what is preached.

iii.

One would do well to read the Confessions of St Augustine, especially Book One where he prayerfully pours out his heart in the best language one could use to capture personal experience

iv.

Cf. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations IV*, London 1974, 36-73

v.

Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) art 176

vi.

Cf. CCC 157

vii.

Cf. Heb 1:1-2

viii.

Cf. *Dei Verbum*, 5

ix.

Cf. Heb 11:1ff; St. Thomas and other disciples of Jesus received the singular gift of being eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus. Modern-day Christians, however, have not seen the risen Lord in the flesh. Yet joyfully referring to us, Our Lord says: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (Jn. 20:29). Christ speaks to us today through the Holy Spirit who breathes life into the Church. All baptized Christians have received the Holy Spirit, who instructs the faithful and leads them into all truth. (cf. CCC 91)

x.

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We would recommend for further reading in this regard, John O'Donnell, "Faith" in, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Joseph Komonchak et al, Bangalore 1996

xi.

Jn 1:12; 2:23; 4:39; 6:35

xii.

Cf. CCC 150 ff

xiii.

Cf. Ruth Burrows, *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer*, 1980, 83-84 (Emphasis is mine). St Therese is a striking model of this type of spiritual childhood, for she refused to take herself seriously and was unwilling to play the Saint. It was told that when they asked her to say a few pious words to her doctor on her deathbed, she refused, letting him think what he wanted. Most saints have some form of 'neurotic qualities' which help them quite often to be scrupulous, sometimes, in the extreme. Therese reached true sanctity, for she had the courage to accept herself as she was, since her centre of gravity was not in herself but in Christ.

xiv.

Cf. Ruth Burrows, *ibid*, 89

xv.

Cf. Ps 71:1; Rom 10:11

xvi.

Cf. Dt 9:23; Ps106:24f

xvii.

The paradigm of faith in the OT is Abraham (Gen 15:6) who, despite all odds, left his land for an unknown place; believed he would be the father of many nations even in his old age; was ready to sacrifice Isaac, and all the while trusting in God. This faith remains the perfect model even in the New Testament. (cf. Rom 4; Heb 11:8 Like Abraham, Israel was called to let go of its own security and to risk all on God. Without this rock of faith, one is left only with counterfeit securities. The prophet Isaiah puts it beautifully that, "If you will not believe, you shall not be established" (7:9).

xviii.

He told Peter to put out into the deep. Peter, bemused, yet obeyed and his doubt came crashing down. The feeding of the thousands amidst the skepticism of the Apostles is another case in point. When again, the father of the epileptic boy comes to Jesus and asks in desperation, "If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us" (Mk 9:23), it is Jesus' rebuke that stirs up faith in the man, so that he cries out, "I do believe; help my unbelief" (v 24). In that moment the father's act of faith helps him to share in the power of Jesus and his son was healed. Such episodes are typical in the gospels where it is precisely Jesus' mission to summon people to faith.

xix.

See also, Rom 10:17; 1:5; 16:26.

xx.

By the term Christofication we intend the gradual transformation into the likeness of Christ.

xxi.

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Vatican I addressing the crises of its times discussed faith as the submission of the intellect and will to God when he makes a revelation. (cf. Denz 3008) The teaching of the Penny Catechism is culled from this, that “faith is a supernatural virtue by which with the inspiration and help of God's grace, we believe that what he has revealed is true – not because its intrinsic truth is seen with the natural light of reason – but because of the authority of the God who reveals it”. This definition was an attempt to strike a balance between faith and reason, that man is capable of receiving and interpreting God's action. Just as faith is rooted in God's historical events culminating in Jesus Christ, so faith is challenged to discover God's presence amid the vicissitudes of the historical realities of everyday life.

xxii.

K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, V

xxiii.

Cf. *The Glory of the Lord, A Theological Aesthetics*, vol 1, 1982

xxiv.

Cf. H. Staffner, *What does it mean to be a Christian?*, Badrai Mumbai 1999, 8. The crisis of proselytization in the days of Paul of wishing converts to be circumcised. (Acts 15:5; Gal 2:4). Paul thought it absurd to oblige pagans to “Judaize” for it was faith in Jesus Christ that had saved the Jews themselves (Gal 2:15; 5:2; 6:12). This new crisis was for St Paul the occasion of deep reflection on the role of the Law and of the faith in salvation history. The Pastoral Letter of Bishop Hilary Okeke, “Faith rooted and built up in Christ”, Nnewi 2011

xxv.

Cf. Acts 11:26. The disciples were called Christians because they lived like Christ.

xxvi.

Sometimes we are tempted to ask whether some persons had any faith before entering the religious life. It would seem that some expected to find faith after entering the life, but this does not always happen. There are others who are simply emotional about faith and can only relish that aspect of their relationship with God. These often block any meeting point between faith and reason. A reaction of this sort only ends up limiting each to its camp. It is more of a consistent denial of the proper objective of faith. While faith as an act of self-expression cannot be devoid altogether of strong emotional elements, the sentiments must be separated from the source of faith, since sentiments do not define the complete person.

xxvii.

The difficulties of the existence of Israel until the exile were a severe temptation of its faith. The prophets denounced idolatry (Hos 2:7-15; Jer 2:5-13) which suppressed faith in Yahweh and alone, the formalism of worship (Amos 5:21; Jer 7:22) which fatally limited its demands, the seeking of salvation by arms (Hos 1:7; Isa 31:1). Isaiah was the most striking of the heralds of faith (Isa 30:15). He called Ahaz from fear to peaceful confidence in Yahweh (7:4-9; 8:5-8) who will keep his promises to the house of David (Ps 89:21-38). It was in faith that he uncovered the paradoxical wisdom of God (19:11-15; 29:13-30; I Cor 1:19). The faith of Israel was essentially threatened at the taking of Jerusalem and the exile. “Wretched and poor”, (Isa 41:17) Israel ran the risk of attributing its lot to the impotence of Yahweh and of turning toward the gods of victorious Babylon. The prophets then proclaim the omnipotence of the God of Israel (Jer 32:27; Ezek 37:14).

xxviii. Cf. Canon 669

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xxix.

This is an indictment to situations of priest and religious visiting prophets, seers, fortune-tellers and even native doctors for protection and infliction of curses or diseases on a fellow consecrated person.

xxx.

Cf. I Kgs 19; Jer 15:10-21; 20:7-18

xxxi.

Cf. Gal 6: 15; 2 Cor 5:17

xxxii.

Cf Lumen Gentium, 46

xxxiii. Cf. CCC 168-169

xxxiv. Cf. Lumen Gentium 1

xxxv.

Cf. Lumen Gentium 44

xxxvi. Cf. PC 15, canon 602

xxxvii. Cf. Vita Consecrata, 20

xxxviii. Cf. S. Schneiders, *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy, and Community in*

Catholic Religious Life, New York / Mahwah 2001, 80 – 81).

xxxix. Cf. S. Schneiders, *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy, and Community in*

Catholic Religious Life, 92

xl.

Cf Schneiders, *ibid*, 93

xli.

Cf. Schneiders, *ibid*, 95-96

xlii.

Cf. Schneiders, *ibid*, 98

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