

**HOW MEMBERS OF THE RELIGIOUS FAMILY CAN HELP THEIR SUPERIOR  
ACHIEVE THE MISSION OF HEALING AND CARING IN THE COMMUNITY –  
A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

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**Abstract**

*This article is approached from the revelatory starting point with sequential thinking. The aim is to demonstrate that the mission of healing and caring is a feat of communal enterprise and a personal responsibility; pointing out some attitudes which the members of the community must espouse in order to help the superior fulfill his/her role as a leader. It is recommended that the members exercise the virtue of patience and sue for peace; live in fraternal love by striving for mercy and compassion; supporting one another to do good; obeying the rules; seeking forgiveness; and displaying mercy out of compassion for those in need just like the Heavenly Father. The 'elderly ones in the community must act appropriately and not jeopardize the smooth running of administration because of undue competition so that they could attain the mission of caring and healing which everyone desires.*

**Introduction**

Religious life is a state of tending towards perfection. The religious person received the call, a precious gift from the Lord, and in response to that loving call such a religious lives a stable way of life in professing the counsels. By this life, the religious signifies the love of God to our world today and signifies the type of life that is to come. According to Clare Adams<sup>1</sup>, "Religious life is living a distinctive, unique, life-style embraced by men and women through a life dedication to God for a transcendent end."

Consecrated life is, thus, a way of following Christ in a singular mind of renouncing every other thing of this world in order to love Christ above all other things.<sup>2</sup> A consecrated person lives a special way of life designed and intended to bind the self to God through the evangelical counsels by a sacred promise. By taking this bond, one is totally dedicated to God by an act of ultimate love. The inclusive mission of such consecrated persons consists in making Christ present to the world through the personal witness of their lives.<sup>3</sup> This means that the members of religious community are called from different walks of life and have come together to pursue a common goal.<sup>4</sup>

In this way of living, it is necessary that members have a leader who is legitimately put in the position of authority, a work which St. Paul characterized as an excellent physical exertion.<sup>5</sup> The person in this office is recognized as a representative of God. Members of the community are trained to obey the governing authorities, because there is no authority except from God and so whatever authority exists has been appointed by God. Therefore, anyone who disobeys an authority is rebelling against God's ordinance; and rebels must expect to receive the condemnation they deserve.<sup>6</sup>

Since God has brought the members together in order to concretely live out their baptismal promises in full, everyone must do their best to preserve the unity which the spirit gives them by the means of the peace that bids them together from the time when they profess one faith and share one hope in the Lord.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, they must bear one another's burden. If one member is praised, all share the glory and if one is rebuked, all share in the defeat.<sup>8</sup>

The members are called to witness God's love to one another first and by that bringing healing to one another. Achieving the mission of healing and caring is an accomplishment of every member of the community, the little and the great, young and old members. Nevertheless, there is only one person who is called and chosen to lead at a point in time; such a person needs the support of every one in order to perform his/her duty faithfully. The members of the community must promote some friendly attitudes that can facilitate the peaceful coexistence of the members and make the community a joy and a happy home on earth.

### **What is this mission of healing and caring?**

When someone is on mission, this indicates such a person is sent to achieve a purpose. Consecrated persons are on special mission which must be carried out in line with each institute's own specific rules, charism and constitution. Concisely, each person is on a mission to care, to heal and to participate in the saving mission of Christ.

To care for someone or something is to give attention, to maintain and provide for upkeep of that person or something. When we look at the biblical theology for this word we get the word '**Mercy**.' Mercy is the quality of care for another, willingness to make effort, even at great sacrifice, to ease another's pain, readiness to forgive, eagerness to help.<sup>9</sup>

The word 'Mercy' has three Hebrew roots: *hesed, rahamim, and hen*.<sup>10</sup> We shall only look briefly at the root as *hesed and rahamim* because *he* means favour or grace and this is strictly the attribute of God. Grace or favour is a merit, a gratuitous gift bestowed upon a person even when such a person does not deserve it.

#### **1. The mission of caring:**

- 1.1. *Hesed*: this word refers to the kind of love which is mutual and dependable.
  - i. This type of love is common between husband and wife as we see in Abraham and Sarah.<sup>11</sup>
  - ii. This is also a type of bond which exists among people who share deep affiliation like deep friendship as we see this between David and Jonathan.<sup>12</sup>

This word 'mercy' demands action between the parties involved. This is a kind of covenantal love between Israel, and by extension, between us and God. It is also the same kind of love incumbent upon us to show to one another, it is a love meant to be shared between human to human. This type of love is enduring and it is communal.

1.2. The second root of the word 'mercy' is *rahamim*. This is related to the word 'womb' which means compassion.

- i. *Rahamim* designates 'womb love' which is the type of love a mother or a father has for the child.<sup>13</sup>
- ii. This 'womb love' also represents the type of love brothers and sisters share since the siblings came from the same womb.<sup>14</sup>

The compassion for the other person is felt in the center of one's body and this mercy results in action. This love is frequently predicated of Yahweh who has mother-love or father love for Israel. This 'womb love' of Yahweh leads to forgiveness for the wayward children.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, we are called to be merciful like our heavenly Father and do so perfectly in imitation of the heavenly Father.<sup>16</sup>

It is said that water of baptism is thicker than blood. In view of that, the members of the community are one family, brothers and sisters, and are enjoined to show mercy to one another as members of the same family.

## **2. The mission of healing**

“Blessed are the merciful for God will be merciful to them.”<sup>17</sup>

Juliana Casey affirms:

Mercy is that loving kindness and faithful service we owe one another as members of God’s people. Those who know God are called to be merciful to one another. This is true for leaders of the people. They are measured by quality and constancy of their mercy, especially to those most in need. They are rebuked for their lack of mercy, for the burdens they lay upon the people. The superior one, the powerful one does a good deed or forgives the debt of the inferior one.<sup>18</sup>

In general, then, Juliana Casey is reiterating that mercy is the disposition to help those in need of help simply because they are lacking one thing or the other. This virtue is therefore a life-giving action. Mercy is God’s attribute but this quality of God is demonstrated in the people, God’s people, who reach out to save someone in need.<sup>19</sup> With Jesus’ eyes of mercy, the lame walked, the blind had the sight restored and the sick were healed.<sup>20</sup> The fulcrum of this attribute and virtue of mercy is love. With passion of love, Jesus forgives and heals. His love has been poured into our hearts and urges everyone to act in kindness and tenderness to heal and save. We are called to be sensitive to the cry of others. God the Father has shown us this loving kindness by sending his Son to heal and save us. We must replicate this act of compassion to God’s people, made in his image and likeness and engage in acts that save and heal; by this we are cooperating with God in renewing the face of the earth.

Therefore, each consecrated person is on the mission of showing mercy and care to one another in the community. But because the community requires a supreme authority who represents God for the community at a point in time, it behooves such a leader to take the mantle of leadership of mercy and healing to the greatest height and do so exceptionally without prejudice.

Nonetheless, our focus is to decipher the responsibilities of the members on ways of steering the mission of mercy and caring and helping the superior realize this accomplishment.

### **How the members of the community can help the Superior achieve the mission.**

The members of the community can help the superior in the following ways but the list is not exhaustive:

- 1. Called to love:** the members of the community might need to recall that they are called to love, not only God but also their neighbour as they love themselves. This is the number one duty which they owe God and their neighbour. God made us to and for love. We demonstrate this love in friendship and in self-giving. We are called to love everyone including the superior and this love is reciprocal precisely because *nemo dat quod non habet*. The members must love their superior without any bias. When he/she receives love from the members of the community, he/she will be more disposed to carry the mission of healing and caring and any other leadership mission entrusted to him/her. If he/she is given love and affection in abundance, then out of the abundance, this will spill over to those members of the community who are wounded and in need of love, care and healing. But if he/she is starved of love, then many hearts and bodies will go cold and some might probably go into extinction.

The Second Vatican Council asserts that respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious

matters. In fact, the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through courtesy and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them.<sup>21</sup>

2. **Be merciful and forgive:** we are called in a very special way to be merciful like the Heavenly Father. When we feel offended by the superior we must toe the path of genuine and humble dialogue. We must learn to forgive the superior and let go any grievances in good time. If the members hold grudges against the superior, there is the possibility that the community will be divided and a house divided against itself cannot stand; then such a community cannot achieve its mission of healing and caring. In case a member feels offended, such a member must take proactive steps, clarifies issues with the superior and give way for the spirit to heal the memory. Only then can the community pursue the mission of healing and caring.
3. **Give way for the superior to work:** some members actually think that they know more than the superior; some do not even have regard for the superior probably because they have other expectations. The fact remains that the mantle of leadership goes round. Each one must be patient and support the current leader. The wise, the prudent and the learned must come together and give a good backing to the superior and settle any form of arguments amicably.<sup>22</sup> The members must rid themselves of jealousy, bickering, insulting language and hypocrisy. If there are things that should be done or things are not moving as fast as the 'elites' thought fit; rather than having a separate camp, they will do well to shield the war of words and make good proposals capable of moving the community to a greater height.
4. **No quarrels and profane arguments:** St. Paul warned devoted Christians against these vices.<sup>23</sup> When there is no peace but quarreling and arguments over petty things, the work of God will be impeded and the members will be stunted in their spiritual growth. Some members are fault finders and will not see any good thing in the superior. At the root of this quarrel and argument is competitive spirit and rivalry which are destructive in character. Rivalry will negate the good of the superior rather than extolling the excellence. This begins gradually from slander to malicious contentions and could sometimes lead to open warfare. If we want to embrace the mission of caring and healing, members must lay down the pride/ego and see God in the superior.
5. **Obedience to the rules :**  
The mission of caring and healing can also be achieved by simple obedience to the common rules. God resists the proud and favour the humble.<sup>24</sup> Obedience and humble submission to the rules and commands of the authority will help the superior archive the mission of caring and healing. Humans owe obedience to God through obedience to legitimate authorities because they are organs of God intended for the proper ordering of human society.<sup>25</sup>  
Leo XIII teaches that power comes from God and as such, whoever resists the authority purchase to themselves damnation. The faithful are to be subjected to the authority for conscience's sake and render to all people their dues, tribute to whom is due, custom to whom is due, honour to whom honour is due, fear to whom to fear. There is order in heaven, there is order in the church and so must there be order in the society. The rulers are urged to use the power conceded to them to save and not to destroy. In a case where the state is rashly and tyrannical, the teaching does not allow an insurrection on authority lest the public order is disrupted and greater harm is

inflicted on the people. When there is problem, the Christians should be patient and pray to God.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the Encyclical on *Pacem et Terris* maintains that authority cannot be established except by the diligent observance of the divinely recognized order in the universe and the humanity must appreciate this order and devise the means for harnessing those forces for their own benefit. The Pontiff observed that God created the world out of nothing and subjected the universe under human's feet. Without the presence of some people who are vested with legal authority to preserve its institutions and to do everything to protect the interests of all its members, human society can never be well-ordered or prosperous. Those in authority derive their authority from God and thus have God for its author, have God for its origin and end. Those in authority have the mandate to govern in accordance with right reason.<sup>27</sup> The members must trust the work of God in the superior.

6. **Prayer:** we cannot rule out the position of prayer. Whatever we want from the Lord, we should ask.<sup>28</sup> The members must pray for their superior because it is a great task to lead the male or the female. The members must commit the path of the superior to the Lord.<sup>29</sup>
7. **Gratitude:** it may look ambiguous but expressing gratitude to the superior do wonders. When the members communicate appreciation to the superior, this singular act heals some of the wounds of the superior and this is a way of caring for the superior. The fact is that whatever care and attention that are given to the superior will definitely have riveting and reverting effects on the community at large.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The mission of healing and caring can be achieved with mutual cooperation and with individual efforts. There are many ways to achieve this task but the following can help the members of the communities.

1. The members must support one another and the superior in a special way. Whenever there are issues to be discussed, it is not for the members to disgrace or condemn the superior in private or in public. If there are mistakes needed to be pointed out; this could be done with pure intention and in fraternal correction so that at all times, we pursue peace and harmony in order to save our fellow.
2. In any community, there are 'elderly' ones. The elderly ones must act appropriately. They must aim at uniting the community and not jeopardize the smooth running of institute of the community because of rivalry. If they have submissions or interventions to make, this could be done with an open dialogue, with simplicity becoming of a religious.
3. The members must aim higher for the success of the superior in office. The downfall of the superior is a failure of every member; and everyone share in the glory and success of the superior.
4. Each one must pursue inner peace. When anyone is at peace with the self, he/she is most likely to be at peace with others and will cooperate peacefully in the right spirit with the leader.
5. Each member must frequently participate in the sacrament of reconciliation and go for annual retreat. The spiritual exercises are means of calling the erring members back to the fold.

6. The biblical injunction is very relevant; the sunset must not find any one in anger.<sup>30</sup> If there are any conflicting issues between a member and the superior, it is better sorted out in time before the issue aggravates to warfare.
7. Anonymous letters are discouraged; this act wounds the weak members and casts doubt on the fate and faith of some members.
8. Some expectations cannot be met and we must recognize this fact. Money matters can cause a lot of havoc in communities. Therefore, we must be patient with the superior and know that God has not finished with anybody yet. God who calls and puts the superior in position of authority will make way for wherewithal of the community.

### **Conclusion**

Achieving the mission of healing and caring in the community is a mutual help which is the basis for progressive community. The members will support the superior with prayer, love, understanding and acceptance. Whatever any member puts into the community has multiplying effect on every member. Each one must remember that leadership goes round in a circle. Individual must purge the self of biases and see authority as a call to service.

Pope Francis had stressed the importance of this virtue of mercy in the Bull for this year's Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy.<sup>31</sup> He says mercy is linked to a compassionate heart; the art and the ability of reading the heart of those we come across in life and the attitude of responding to their deepest needs. Our God is a compassionate God, therefore, human beings created in the likeness of God must reflect the compassionate heart of God for this heart never gives up on anybody, forgives often, and rejection is overcome by kindness. Mercy, he says, is the ideal of our life and a test of our faith in Christ.

Our present world is enmeshed in cultural way and trained in a peculiar way to dominate and subdue the earth, to strike and annihilate, to spite and pull down. We as Christians are called to bear faithful witnesses and become ambassador and witnesses of mercy after the heart of the merciful Father in order to transform the world.<sup>32</sup>

We are called to nurture the world in kindness and gentleness in our dealings with one another for the measure we give is the measure we shall get in return.

### **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Clare Adams, "Religious Life" , *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Downey Michael Ed., India: Theological Publication, 1995, s.v. "Religious Life." P.817

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern world, *Lumen Gentium*. (21st November, 1964) # 44.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, The Consecrated Life, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation , 25th March, 1996, # 72

<sup>4</sup> Cf. 1 Pet. 1:2ff; 1 Pet 2:9

<sup>5</sup>Cf. 1 Tim.3:1

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Romans 13:1-5

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Eph. 4:3-6

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gal. 5:16-26

<sup>9</sup>Nowel Irene, "Mercy", in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Komonchak Joseph *et al*, editors, Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazer, 1989, p. 650-652.

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<sup>10</sup> JCa & XLD, “Mercy” in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, second edition by Leon- DuFour Xavier, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973, p. 351-354

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Gen 20:1-13

<sup>12</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 20:3

<sup>13</sup> 1 Kings 3:26

<sup>14</sup> Obadiah 1

<sup>15</sup> Nowell Irene, “Mercy”, p. 651.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Luke 6:36

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 5:7

<sup>18</sup> Casey Juliana, “Mercy” in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, by Michael Glazier and Hellwig Monika, editors, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1994.

<sup>19</sup> Luke 10:37.

<sup>20</sup> John 9: 67; John 5: 1-5.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* , # 28.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. 1 Tim. 6:20; 1 Pet 2:1

<sup>23</sup> 2 Tim 2:14-26

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Luke 1:52-53

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* , December 7, 1965, # 73-75.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Leo XIII’s Encyclical Letter on Socialism, *Quod Apostolici Muneris*, December 28, 1878, # 6-7

<sup>27</sup> Cf. John XXIII Encyclical letter, *Pacem in Terris* 1963, # 2, 7, 46-57.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Matt. 7:7

<sup>29</sup> Cf. 1 Tim 2:1-4

<sup>30</sup> Eph. 4:26-27

<sup>31</sup> Francis, “*Misericordiae Vultus*”, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, April, 2015, # 8-11.

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