

# **Christological Embeddedness of the Three Evangelical Counsels: Implication to Consecrated Religious Life**

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The essay endeavours at realizing two objectives, namely, reviewing the Christological embeddedness of the three evangelical counsels,<sup>1</sup> and drawing implications from it to consecrated religious life. *Vita Consecrata*, the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II ascertains clearly the first objective. It declares that the counsels are ‘the characteristic features of Jesus’ i.e., the reality of evangelical counsels is found ‘in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord’ (VC 1). The second objective finds its space within a larger horizon. The three counsels constitute the baptismal commitment<sup>2</sup>: being poor, chaste, and obedient in the newly-found family of God, like Jesus our brother and Lord. As such, the whole Church is called to pronounce them enabling her to be what she is called to be – an embodiment of poverty, chastity, and obedience. When consecrated persons profess the counsels – which is our context – it entails profound significance. They “make visible the characteristic features of Jesus – the chaste, poor and obedient one – in the midst of the world” and by which “the eyes of the faithful are directed towards

the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven" (VC 1).

The significance of professing the counsels is crucial; its implications are vital. The Exhortation, in line with the Second Vatican Council<sup>3</sup> asserts: "The counsels, more than a simple renunciation, are a specific acceptance of the mystery of Christ, lived within the Church" (VC, 16a). This means that the counsels are not abstract truths or mere tools for ascetic endeavour; they are positive and decisive aspects of life. Professing the counsels stipulates proclaiming in an eminent manner the supremacy of God and the inviolable dignity of every human being, the marginalized in particular.

In order to realize the objectives of this paper, we develop the theme in three parts. We investigate the scriptural and traditional basis of the counsels, examine the rootedness of the counsels in the life of Jesus, and explore the relevance of the counsels to consecrated religious life.

### **Evangelical Poverty: Scriptural and Traditional Basis**

The theme of poverty in the Old Testament is seen from different, at times opposite points of view. In the Wisdom Literature, poverty is seen as an evil brought by one's own sins<sup>4</sup>. However, the Wisdom Literature is full of sympathy for the victims of poverty – the poor – who experience numerous and harrowing sufferings<sup>5</sup>. The Mosaic Law suggests measures to improve the lot of the poor<sup>6</sup>. The prophets have a completely different perspective of poverty. They believed that both poverty and the conditions that cause poverty (injustice in particular) are in opposition to the will of God. They combated such conditions (Is 3:14-15; 5:8ff; Amos 2:6ff; 4:1; 5:11ff)<sup>7</sup> with

a plea for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). The plea of the prophets for justice has been interpreted as "a surging movement, a life-bringing substance, a dominant power" which constitutes "justice not as a mere norm, but a fighting challenge, a restless drive"<sup>8</sup>. Besides Wisdom Literature and the Prophets, the Psalms depict a third line of thought: the poor, victims of oppression, place their trust in God, begging that God free them from their oppressors. In fact, God's unique relationship with the poor compels God to defend the poor who are victims of social conditions (Ps 12:5; 140:12). God delights to lift the poor out of their misery (Ps 107:41). This is because poverty has no place in the land God has visited with blessing (Ps 65:9-13).

Later on, during the Israelites' existence in exile, poverty acquired a spiritual dimension: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility" (Zeph 2:3). It was a transition from sociological poverty to religious poverty<sup>9</sup>. Those who preserved their faithfulness to Yahweh even in the midst of their humiliation and hardships constituted as the 'poor of the Yahweh'<sup>10</sup>. This group was characterized by an unfathomable trust in God and a profound hope to see the redress of grievances. This means that one attains spiritual poverty primarily by keeping the commandments (Prov 28:6; 19:1, 22; Sir 10:29). In sum, the Old Testament mentions material and spiritual poverty; however, voluntary poverty<sup>11</sup> was unknown to it.

No explicit pronouncements are noticed in the New Testament on the value of poverty. However, the New Testament reveals that Jesus chose poverty (Phil 2:6-7), he lived in total poverty from his birth until death (Lk 2:7, 2:12;

2:15-17; 9:5-8; Mt 8:20; 27:60) and he translated his poverty into action in the manner God embraced the marginalized along with their plight (Lk 1:53; Jas 2:2-6). The mission manifesto of Jesus (Lk 4:18-19) is unmistakably a clear intervention of God "in favour of the unfortunate, [which] takes place in Jesus, who proclaims the Good News of the Kingdom of God and makes it effective by his deeds"<sup>12</sup>.

Jesus lived in poverty and he demanded poverty from his apostles. Accordingly, the apostles were not to store up riches for themselves here on earth (Mt 6:19) but to live by the fruits of their preaching (Lk 10:4). This implies that to live in poverty is to be concerned about the Kingdom of God (Mt 6:33), for, God provides to such people all they need (Mt 6:26). The Early Church too lived in poverty. A specific feature of this poverty is sharing (Acts 2:44; 4:32-35). While their life of poverty was stirred by the life example of Jesus and the apostles, their specific feature of sharing their goods was dictated by the circumstances of a growing number of foreign converts who were mostly unemployed. Their sharing of possession in fellowship, catered to the less privileged members of the community (Acts 6:1-6)<sup>13</sup>. Hence, poverty, in the Early Church, marked a clear distinction between living poverty exemplified by the Lord and being a charitable steward of possessions acquired in the Lord. The former was proposed as an ideal of free choice, the latter, a matter of command.

The post-Apostolic writings insist on translating one's life of poverty into action, which entails benevolence with regard to sharing with the needy. Didache 1:5 stipulates charitable stewardship: "Give to everyone that asks thee, and do not refuse, for the Father's will is that we give to all from the gifts we have received"<sup>14</sup>. The Shepherd of Hermas

accentuates the need to share with the disadvantaged: "Instead of lands, then, purchase souls that have been afflicted, in so far as you can, and take care of widows and orphans and do not neglect them; spend your wealth and all your furnishings for such fields and houses as you have received from God. For this is why the Master made you rich that you may carry out these monitories for him"<sup>15</sup>.

The Fathers of the church embraced the shocking revelation of a God who was not only close to the poor, but who as 'Son in the flesh' lived a life of poverty. Thereby, they viewed the possession and use of earthly goods mainly from the viewpoint of assistance to one's needy neighbour. Clement of Alexandria stressed the need for detachment from possessions, family life and self-determination as means of imitating the martyr's own imitation of Jesus. Nonetheless, he did not underline the wholesale rejection of property but underlined temperance and generosity with what one owns<sup>16</sup>. Origen distinguished the 'common faithful' from 'chosen souls'. He proposed to the 'chosen souls' a spiritual growth toward perfection, which entailed selling their possessions and distributing them with the poor; this was in view of gaining detachment from this world<sup>17</sup>.

The first hermits and monastic movement insisted on responsible and charitable stewardship. Poverty as vow was mandatory only from the times of the mendicants. The religious Orders and congregations that grew in the course of time observed poverty as a vow<sup>18</sup>. A brief reference to the *Magisterium's* view on poverty seems relevant here. The Popes of recent times have insisted that virtuous lay stewardship together with preferential generosity to the poor and authentic consecrated poverty must and will make the Body of Christ

not the 'church of the rich' but the 'church of the poor'<sup>19</sup>. The Second Vatican Council offers a profound and even holistic meaning of the counsels by both situating and interpreting vowed life in the framework of the universal call to holiness (LG 39).

The scriptural and traditional views on poverty can be summed up as follows. The Old Testament makes no reference to voluntary poverty; nonetheless, the victims of poverty receive insurmountable attention. Because poverty is opposed to the will of God, God defends the poor and God seeks co-operation from people towards establishing a state in which there are no poor. This co-operation could be described as a call to keep the commandments – spiritual poverty – a reality that developed in the exilic and post-exilic periods of Israel. Jesus exemplified spiritual poverty in his life and he exhorted response to the material poverty of his time by means of a voluntary poverty. While chosen poverty was rare in the primitive church, there exists a continuous chain of evidence on responsible and charitable stewardship of possessions from the time of the apostles, through the first hermits, to the monastic movement. The mendicants and religious Orders and Congregations lived poverty as a vow. The *Magisterium* confirms the link between virtuous stewardship and preferential generosity to the poor.

In conclusion, the historical survey can be said to assert the profound truth that poverty if and when chosen, ought to focus on redressing the suffering of the poor. The significance of the scriptural and traditional basis of the counsel of poverty can be further seen in the poverty of Jesus, the source and force of religious poverty.

## The Poverty of Jesus

Poverty determines the very existence of Jesus. Luke gives us an inkling of the poverty as pronounced and lived by Jesus as well as his followers (14:33; 18:18-30; 19:1-10). The underlying principle of Jesus' poverty is *kenosis* or self-emptying: "though he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but he emptied himself, and took the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Phil 2:6-7; GS, 22b)<sup>20</sup>. His birth marks the beginning of his self-emptying which continues until his death. At his birth, he empties himself of the royalties the Son of God would endow him with: he was 'wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn' (Lk 2:7; 2:12). Likewise, his first visitors were the shepherds (Lk 2:15-17), the least of society. Further, as an adult, he was devoid of the comfort and security of a permanent home (Lk 9:5-8; Mt 8:20). Finally, at his death, he had to be buried in a scrounged grave (Mt 27:60). Viewed from the perspective of the three vows, Jesus' self-emptying can be called a voluntary renunciation of the right to self-assertiveness, the temptation to display power, and the seduction of riches.

His self-emptying is in view of self-giving. Three ideals mark his self-giving, namely, detachment, trust in God, and sharing. His detachment is seen in his becoming poor in spite of being rich (2 Cor 8:9), distancing himself from home (Lk 9:57) and relativizing family ties (Mk 3:31-35); all of which was in view of committing himself fully to the pursuit of God's will, which was actualized through the service of humankind, the disadvantaged in particular. His parable of the rich man and the poor Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31), his episode of the widow's

mite (Mk 12:41-44) etc., express clearly his habitual solicitude to the disadvantaged.

In his detachment, Jesus was guided by a deep sense of trust in the Father and the Kingdom of the Father (Mt 6:25-30). He preached and demonstrated the Kingdom by two specific ways, namely, availability and identification. His availability concerned spending his time in the work of the Father; this, constituted spending his time for everyone except himself. B. Albrecht observes that the inability to use one's time as one wishes, is one of the hardest forms of poverty<sup>21</sup>. He identified himself with those who were detached from their dignity – the poor, the sinners, the widows, the tax collectors (Mt 8:6; 14:13-21; Jn 13:29). A preferential love – which excludes nobody else from his love – governed this act<sup>22</sup>.

His availability and identification together constitute the third ideal of his self-giving, i.e., sharing. He shared in the joys of people. He also shared the painful realities such as misunderstanding and betrayal, abandonment by one's own, slander and insults, being stripped of one's garments, passion, and a criminal's death on the cross<sup>23</sup>. Gutiérrez has spelt out the objective of such sharing; he says that it is in view of "love for and solidarity with [wo]men who suffer in it. It is to redeem them from their sin and to enrich them with poverty. It is to struggle against human selfishness and everything that divides [wo]men and enables them to be rich and poor, possessed and dispossessed, oppressors and oppressed"<sup>24</sup>.

In conclusion, we may reiterate that the voluntary poverty of Jesus characterized by self-emptying consisted in working for the Kingdom through a self-giving love, while entrusting himself totally and unreservedly to the provident love of the

Father<sup>25</sup>. A consecrated religious lives this evangelical poverty in service of the Kingdom with depth, intensity, completeness, and commitment by making it a vow through public profession.

### Consecrated Poverty

The Second Vatican Council regards the 'charism of consecrated poverty' as a gift from God to the Church, which helps to perfect the baptismal consecration of the consecrated religious. Its primary objective is greater love of God and neighbour, and this gives it its principal value of witness so needed today (*LG* 43, 44; *PC* 5, 6, 13). Consecrated religious concretize the love of God and neighbour through their vow of poverty first of all by sharing in the poverty of Christ, who became poor for our sake, that we might be enriched by his poverty' (Mt 8:20). In other words, the vow of poverty is obedience to follow Christ in his self-emptying through a free and voluntary 'yes'<sup>26</sup>. More specifically, to vow poverty is to put on the mind of Christ and the heart of that mind, as the incarnation attests, is the *kenosis*, the self-emptying love<sup>27</sup>.

The underlying principles of voluntary poverty or self-emptying love are two: divesting<sup>28</sup> and sharing. In the terms of the Council, it is poverty in spirit and fact (*PC* 13). 'Divesting' [of material possessions] has been so vital to consecrated poverty, consecrated poverty has been described as a 'voluntary renunciation of private property', the object of which is to follow Christ more closely (Mk 10:17-22; 2 Cor 8:9), serve others more freely, and witness more clearly to the absolute value of God's Kingdom (*PC* 13, *LG* 42). While the ultimate object of divesting – Christ, or the Kingdom of God and its concerns<sup>29</sup> – is clear, what needs to be explored is whether divesting is in reality an integral part of consecrated poverty?

Consecrated poverty has been interpreted in several ways such as, 'renunciation of ownership', 'responsible use of things', 'responsible effort and humble dependence upon God for material needs rather than destitution', 'an effective means towards greater charity which ought to be demonstrated through identification with the needy in terms of political action on their behalf rather than viewing poverty as an end in itself'<sup>30</sup>. These interpretations appear to be a distorted reading of the 'poverty in fact': they not only justify both the individual and communal possessions of the consecrated religious, but also generate a 'feel good' disposition in them. To be specific, these interpretations lack the stipulation for divesting that Jesus imposed on the rich young man who wanted to follow him (Lk 18:18-23)<sup>31</sup>. Jesus notifies that renunciation of material possessions (private property) is a pre-condition for following him closely.

Jesus demanded not only renunciation of material possessions – which includes selling ones possessions and giving the money to the poor (Mt 19:21) –, he also insisted on renunciation of one's family (cf. Lk 9:59-60). Following Jesus closely means accompanying him in his mission; mission and possessions (one's family often turns out to be a possession one can hardly renounce) are contradictory terms (Lk 10:4). The apostle Peter represents renunciation to the full when he declares, "here we have put everything aside to follow you" (Mt 19:27). In his response to Peter, Jesus indicates that the renunciation of human possessions is the basic component in following him and that those who follow him closely will be rewarded duly (cf. Mt 19:29). Hence, 'poverty in fact' demands at least a certain degree of divesting [of material possessions].

Just like the warped interpretation of the 'poverty in fact', 'poverty in spirit' also suffers from awry elucidations. It is reckoned with reaching into such areas as a 'proud spirit', 'inordinate desire for honour and prestige', or an 'absorbing self-love'. 'Poverty in spirit' simply means 'interior attitude of un-attachment to the goods of this world'<sup>32</sup>. If this account is not understood in the biblical sense, it can serve as an ideological backing to the consecrated religious to justify their great wealth under the pretext that they are 'unattached' to their possessions. It can also cause ignoring the issue of the wealth possessed already by the consecrated religious. In the purview of the discussion on 'poverty in fact', it has to be noted that a consecrated religious endeavouring to overcome personal ambitions such as a 'proud spirit', cannot be called poor in the sense that Christ was poor: "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt 8:20). In the words of D. Hoffman and B. Cole, by 'underlining material poverty, one can attain spiritual poverty whereas if one stresses only spiritual poverty, one may very well say and do little about material poverty'<sup>33</sup>. The discussion underlines consistently the fact that abandonment of material possessions is the essential basis for evangelical poverty.

The issue of 'divesting' in consecrated life raises the question of the 'what' of divesting. As an answer to the question, Aloysius Schwarz leads the consecrated religious into a soul-searching exercise by pointing to their deliberate aberrations with regard to poverty. They include their expensive tastes in putting up luxurious buildings in the pretext of 'God's blessings' and the 'saints' benevolence'. He also hints at their sumptuous meals, their customary

publications, their fundraising in the name of the poor, their undue travels in the name of meetings, conferences etc<sup>34</sup>. It seems appropriate to focus our attention for a while on the institutions of the consecrated religious. It seems they are often a contradiction of their vow of poverty. There are justifications that these institutions are necessary in order to impart quality service such as health care and education. Joan Chittister, in spite of her radicality and prophetic stance concerning consecrated religious life, observes that a divested religious congregation has nothing to share. These perceptions raise the question as to whether the ministry of the consecrated religious is restricted to an institutionalized set-up. In the Indian scenario of the government-run schools<sup>35</sup> and even health institutions, I often envisioned a prophetic consecrated religious life that instead of putting up its own mighty institutions, opts to render its services in the government-run institutions and thereby also transforms the situation therein. This vision prompts me further to propose that consecrated religious should reach out to areas and places where the government does not arrive.

The second aspect of a kenotic poverty that we emphasize is sharing. What does one share if one divests oneself of everything? In the framework of the sense of the counsel of poverty emerged in the foregoing sections – as a means to redress the suffering of the marginalized –, the question can be answered from the way of life of Mangala, a poor, sick, and lone widow living in a slum of Bijapur, in Karnataka, India. Her belongings consist of a tiny thatched hut, few rags, and a single cooking pot. Despite all her hassles, whenever we visited her, she always slipped out unnoticed into a roadside cafe to buy and bring tea for us. Her act of sharing could be paralleled

with the widow in the Gospel whom Jesus acclaimed for handing into the temple treasury all that she had to live on (Lk 21:1-4). Mangala shares all that she has to live on; she shares not from her plenty but from her poverty. She perhaps prompts the consecrated religious into introspection in areas such as their institutions that are put up in the name of the poor but cater to the rich, their prime-most concern for economic stability while starting a new 'mission' rather than the mission itself, their refusal to cater to the economically weak in their schools, hospitals etc.

The rich young man in the gospel who wanted to follow Jesus but wrestled to give up his possessions is an apt reference to the consecrated religious in living the poverty they profess. Even a life dedicated to the service of the Kingdom is not free from the greed for possessions at various levels! However, there can be no poverty without deprivation. Rich consecrated religious amidst the wretched poverty of people are a contradiction in terms. Unless the voluntary poverty of the consecrated religious is tested against the forced poverty of people in our world, it is no evangelical poverty at all. This being asserted, we have to underline that poverty to the consecrated religious is not a negative concept as it is to millions in the world who are forced by circumstances to live in destitution. Poverty is neither living in squalor nor in destitution. The apostles of Jesus had a common purse and we have no record that they were without food or clothing. Religious poverty is a positive acceptance of the call to follow Christ<sup>36</sup>. It enables them to share in the poverty of Christ by 'freeing them from those obstacles which may draw them away from the fervour of charity and the perfection of divine worship' (LG 44). Their worship concerns opening themselves

to God and God's will in love. This is what has been emphasized by the Council in defining consecrated poverty. In living poverty, instead of losing the essence of poverty by concentration on secondary or derived meanings, the Council instructs consecrated religious to follow the Gospels closely. This is in view of living for God and God's Kingdom (PC 5).

Jesus makes new demands in his call to follow him; he also offers the freedom to answer the call. This is because the evangelical counsels are not precepts but counsels or invitations. However, it cannot be denied that only God can bring about certain detachments, especially the interior detachment that makes it possible to answer the call (cf. Mk 10:23-27)<sup>37</sup>. Consecrated poverty ought to make the consecrated religious declare in words and deeds, "We have left everything and followed you" (Mt 19:27). The inspiration for such a life or in other words, the restlessness for the Kingdom comes from God in Jesus who is a partisan to the poor, the defender of the widow and orphan, the champion of the oppressed, the seeker of the lost<sup>38</sup>. More specifically this concerns the mission of the consecrated religious especially with the disadvantaged of our society.

### **Evangelical Chastity: Scriptural and Traditional Basis**

As a prelude to this section, we wish to point at a distinction Aloysius Pieris has formulated between 'celibacy' and 'chastity'; the two terms are often used interchangeably in dealing with consecrated religious life. The indication seems necessary because we undertake the illustration of the evangelical counsels from the perspective of consecrated religious life. Pieris declares that celibacy is a voluntary renunciation of conjugal and family life; it is practiced for the

sake of the gospel. As an evangelical counsel, celibacy practically distinguishes canonically recognized status of the religious. It is for a few. Chastity on the other hand is an obligatory attitude of mind and heart. As such, it is the 'universal' quality of non-idolatrous communion with creatures. Chastity is for all. Moreover, chastity as the transparency of obedience and poverty generates all forms of communion and all degrees of intimacy<sup>39</sup>. *Everyone is obliged by chastity while a few choose to live in celibacy.* Even though the way of life of the consecrated religious ought to correspond to 'chastity' in the sense it is described here, in our study, we adhere to the term 'celibacy'. This is because we underline the canonically recognized status of the consecrated religious.

A survey of the sacred Scripture discloses considerable facts concerning the issue at hand. In the Old Testament, the practice of celibacy as a 'state of life' was unknown<sup>40</sup>. Nonetheless, the Old Testament values the outstanding individual examples of celibacy such as, Joseph (Gen 39:9); Suzanna (Dan 13:22-23); Sarah and Tobias (Tob 3:14-18; 8:4-9). The New Testament emphasizes several aspects of celibacy: celibacy as a means of worshipping God<sup>41</sup>; celibacy as a way to consecrate oneself to God in view of the Kingdom of heaven<sup>42</sup>; and celibacy as a state of eschatological beatitude (Lk 20:36)<sup>43</sup>. On account of these merits celibacy is a special grace<sup>44</sup> and vocation. The speciality of this way of life lies in the fact that "not all can accept this teaching" (Mt 19:11-12). According to St Paul, celibacy is in view of God and God's Kingdom. This perception leads him to consider marriage as secondary compared to life in Christ [celibate life?] (1 Cor 7:29-31)<sup>45</sup>. Further, he perceives celibacy as the condition for a more fervent consecration to God as it avoids earthly

concerns and prepares for the possession of eschatological goods such as communion (1 Cor 7:26-35). Finally, celibacy according to him embraces the sphere of one's conduct (Phil 4:8)<sup>46</sup>.

It is remarkable to note that the history of evangelical chastity offers little information on the historical development of the vow of celibacy<sup>47</sup>. Moreover, whenever, a historical development of the vow is traced, the accent is not on celibacy as such but on clerical celibacy<sup>48</sup>. One of the possible reasons for this state of affairs could be that celibacy was so fundamental to consecrated religious life, that it was not mentioned explicitly but subsumed along with the other two vows of poverty and obedience<sup>49</sup>.

The Second Vatican Council makes up for the lack of a clear articulation of the vow of celibacy by offering a comprehensive view of the counsel. First, in perceiving the three evangelical counsels as a programmatic scheme in the up-to-date renewal of consecrated religious life, it terms chastity as an 'outstanding gift of grace that frees the heart of the person in a unique fashion' (1 Cor 7:32-35). Moreover, chastity also 'symbolizes in a singular way the heavenly goods and the most suitable means by which consecrated religious dedicate themselves with undivided heart to the service of God and the works of the apostolate' (PC 12). In order to avert any danger to chastity, the Council encourages the consecrated religious to practice mortification and custody of the senses; it also invites them to take all natural means for good health in mind and body, rejecting anything that endangers chastity.

In discussing the counsel of chastity, the magisterial writings underline the virtue of love. In his apostolic

exhortation Pope Paul VI claims consecrated chastity as a self-gift made to God and others which compliments marital love and stands as 'the image and sharing of the union of love joining Christ and the church' (PC 13). Pope John Paul II, while affirming the ingredient of love in the counsel, reiterates the classical view of virginity that virginity is in view of the Kingdom of God. He also teaches that evangelical chastity is a means by which one dedicates oneself exclusively to God<sup>50</sup>. The forthcoming account on celibacy as lived and insisted on by Jesus offers more insight into this discussion.

The unfamiliarity of the Old Testament with the practice of virginity/celibacy as a 'state of life' and the lack of utterances on evangelical chastity in the history of consecrated religious life do not in any way reduce the importance of the counsel. The New Testament esteems it as a 'means to worship God' and as a 'state of eschatological beatitude'. More specifically the expression of the gospels and thereafter of the *Magisterium*, that chastity is 'for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven' makes the point: chastity is a means by which one dedicates oneself exclusively to God and God's service. The chaste life of Jesus offers motivation to the consecrated religious to live chastity fruitfully.

### **The Celibacy of Jesus**

Christian esteem for chastity draws its inspiration mainly from the life and teaching of Jesus. We wish to underline three specific features that depict the voluntary celibacy of Jesus. First, his celibacy is a symbol of the Kingdom of God<sup>51</sup>. That is to say, that his sole concern is the Father, in whose business he absorbed himself. This concern is born out of love that led him to offer himself as a gift, even to the

supreme sacrifice of the cross. Second, his celibacy for the Kingdom is linked to his single-minded commitment to his ministry. It included reaching out in compassion to everyone particularly to those who were isolated for reasons related to sexuality (Lk 7:36-50). For that matter it can be asserted that just as his poverty brought him closer to the poorest of the poor, his celibacy brought him closer to the lonely<sup>52</sup>, especially those excluded sexually from society. Finally, the celibacy of Jesus marks a unique relationship to women. In a culture that allowed only one way of relating to women, namely in terms of their sexuality and within a system of domination, Jesus chose a life-style which allowed him to relate to women as persons whose reality and value exceeded their sexuality (Lk 11:27-28). He treated them as equals (Jn 4:22), as friends and as disciples (Lk 24:10-12).

The celibacy of Jesus, reveals a new style of filial and mystical relationship with God and fraternal and communitarian relationship with human beings<sup>53</sup>. This alternative life-style has a deep prophetic significance: it was a symbol of the relationship of his person with the Kingdom of God and a privileged instrument for making the Kingdom present, which reveals that the heart of God, above all, is with the most oppressed of his children in order to rescue them.

### **Consecrated Celibacy**

Consecrated religious, like Jesus, embrace celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God. This ideal conjures up the notion of persons fired with enthusiasm and energy for the love of God. This means that the consecrated religious vow chastity not out of necessity, misfortune, or coercion. The

experience of the love of God is such that a life of love conformed by celibacy appears to be the best response<sup>54</sup>. Schillebeeckx confirms, "Grasped by the Lord in a radically new manner the celibate's whole life undergoes a basic reorientation and he/she experiences 'an existential inability to do otherwise'"<sup>55</sup>. A. Goggin narrates the situation as something like "becoming unmarriageable in view of the Kingdom"<sup>56</sup>. So, consecrated celibacy constitutes a free and deliberate choice as a consequence of an experience of God's love – a free choice to become eunuchs for the Kingdom of God (Mt 19:11). Hence, a complete gift of self to the Kingdom of God justifies and sanctifies celibacy.

Chastity for the Kingdom enables one to devote oneself wholeheartedly to the concerns of the Father (Lk 2:49; 1 Cor 7:32-45). The concerns of the Father are the concerns of his community. These concerns are established within the historical process of humanity subject to the destructive power of death, a process in which the Father has decided to re-establish His liberating sovereignty. Within this process, consecrated chastity aims at the liberation of the oppressed. G. M. DeLaTorre has framed this well. He states, "From the viewpoint of the poor, being a 'virgin' means putting one's own liberty and maturity in the service of rescuing them"<sup>57</sup>. Paredes declares that celibacy is not primarily an option for Christ but an option in Christ – 'following Jesus in order to opt for what he opted for'. This means that according to him the celibate existence of the consecrated religious is an "Eucharistic existence: a loaf of bread distributed, as a vessel of wine poured out, a life which, precisely because of its total self-offering, gives even in death"<sup>58</sup>.

Hence, chastity, a symbol of the relationship of a person with the Kingdom, is at the same time a privileged instrument to make the Kingdom present. It is a commitment to love God in response to God's love that has to be made concrete in one's love for neighbour especially the weak and the powerless sections in the society.

### **Evangelical Obedience: Scriptural and Traditional Basis**

Scriptural basis for evangelical obedience finds its origin in the Book of Genesis. The divergent act – disobedience – of Adam and Eve and its consequences warn that obedience should be the deliberate submission of a human person to the will of God. It entails carrying out commands whose 'meaning is not necessarily clear but whose character is perceived as divine'<sup>59</sup>. Abraham serves as an illustration of this assertion. He submitted himself to carry out the will of God. He obeyed God's command to leave the country (Gen 12:1), to walk in God's presence and be perfect (Gen 17:2) and to offer his only son as a holocaust from whom he expected his descendents (Gen 22:2). Abraham, thus, lives by God's Word and the Word constantly commands him to go forward and to perform acts whose full meaning lies beyond him. Subsequent to Abraham's obedience, Israel pledges to obey God. To the covenantal pact which God proposes through Moses, Israel responds, "All that Yahweh has spoken we will heed and do" (Ex 24:7). The covenant stipulated regulations of obedience on the Israelites: they were to obey their parents (Deut 21:18-21), kings, prophets and priests (Deut 17:14-18:22; 2 Sam 7:18). The obedience demanded through the covenantal pact is not the submission of a slave but the loving response

of a Son who is moreover a friend. This means that obedience is to be an action of loving fidelity. The connect between obedience and love is frequent in the Old Testament (Ex 20:6; Deut 11:13-22; Ps 19:8-11). It has to be noted that Israel also often disobeyed the covenantal pact (Ex 32:8-10; Jer 11:6-8; 31:31-32); this illustration does not comprise a part of our discussion.

Jesus brings to perfection the commands for obedience stipulated in the Old Testament. He says that obedience includes obedience to all human authority since true human authority comes from God (Mt 22:21; Jn 19:11). Paul informs that resistance to [civil] authority is resistance to God's ordinances (Rom 13:1-2). The civil authority to which Paul refers is the one that does not misuse its (his/her) rights. Peter exhorts to subject oneself not only to supreme but also to subordinate rulers, and for the sake of God (1 Pet 2:13-14). The Christian community views authority not in terms of distorted despotism, but as a means to service (Mk 10:42; Lk 22:25).

The Early Christians, finding the civil and ecclesial life too distracting, moved into desert; motivated greatly by charity, they sought to follow Christ as wholly as possible. They struggled to overcome the temptations of the world by means of chastity, poverty, prayer, manual labour, and fasting. Along with these means, they practiced obedience notably *to fight an inner enemy* that they named self-will. In order to master self-will, they pledged to follow the will of the Fathers such as Anthony<sup>60</sup>. However, this commitment was not organized or institutionalized; it was a private relationship meant to counteract prideful independence and to imitate the humble submission of the Lord Jesus. Eventually, the coenobitical

(community living) way of religious life came to realize that obedience was superior to every other ascetical exercise; it was a means to lead the monks to contemplate God<sup>61</sup>. Pachomius' (292-348) former life as a soldier enabled him to realize that giving up the goods, pleasures, and conveniences of this world was a less effective discipline of spirit compared to renunciation of self-will. He based the Rule of his community on the principle of obedience. Obedience fulfilled with zeal, in his view, was greater than fasting or prayer<sup>62</sup>. Basil the Great (329-379) valued obedience so deeply that he structured the common life of the monks around obedience. In view of an effective exercise of the vow, Basil built smaller communities so that abbots could know their subjects personally and direct them in the spirit of a family and household<sup>63</sup>. The above illustrations suggest that obedience was not only a matter of inner obligation to the coenobites; it was also something, which could be verified as a discipline in the external forum. Even when obedience was not formally promised, the monks practiced obedience. The love for Christ, Christ's obedience and humility and above all the Paschal mystery into which they had been baptized was the guiding force of their obedience; they were ready to crucify even the subtle exercise of their self-will<sup>64</sup>. St Jerome (340-420), a coenobite and doctor of the Scriptures, declared that obedience to superiors is obedience to Christ because the Lord dwells in them. This connection became generally accepted among the coenobites and hence, obedience of monks to their superiors was universally expected<sup>65</sup>.

The exercise of obedience as a special vow begins with St Benedict (480-457). He ordered, "When he [the novice] is to be received, he comes before the whole community in the

oratory and promises stability, fidelity to monastic life, and obedience. This is done in the presence of God and his saints..."<sup>66</sup>. According to Benedict, the superior represents God and hence he ought to be obeyed. He proclaimed, "They carry out the superior's order as promptly as if the command came from God himself"<sup>67</sup>. The mendicants too underlined obedience to the superior, which was a reflection of their obedience to God. To the Dominicans obedience meant, "to abandon their own will in favour of God's will and of that of their superiors, to practice voluntary obedience in all things"<sup>68</sup>. For St Francis obedience is total trust in (and reverence for) indirect sources of knowledge of God's will, namely God-given authority: civil, military, or ecclesial<sup>69</sup>. For St Ignatius Loyola obedience was not primarily a matter of asceticism or even the means to peace and good order in the community; it was the essential requirement for effective cooperation with the saving work of Christ. A clear view of the Christological embeddedness of the evangelical counsel of obedience! Grounding the requirement of obedience in Christology, he specified adherence to the Pope, Christ's vicar on earth<sup>70</sup>.

The Second Vatican Council and the *Magisterium's* understanding of obedience can be presented in the following assertions: 'obedience as central to the mystery of redemption' (AG 24; LG 42); 'obedience vowed freely effects the total, permanent giving of self to God' (LG 43); 'the entire person (mind, will, talents of nature and gifts of grace) should carry out each act of obedience' (PC 14); 'superiors are to exercise consultation and active obedience' (PC 14; *Ecclesiae Sanctae* [ES], 18); 'every act of living obedience affects the welfare of the world'<sup>71</sup>. The centrality of the mystery of obedience discussed above is realized in the life of Jesus, the obedient Son of the Father.

## The Obedience of Jesus

The obedience of Jesus is distinctive. Contrary to the disobedience of Adam (Gen 3), or the rebellion of the chosen people (Ezek 2:5; Is 1:2), or our own present condition as 'slaves to sin, who nevertheless long from our depth to obey God but incapable of doing so' (Rom 7:14-15), Jesus submitted himself to the saving plan of the Father wholeheartedly and unconditionally (Rom 5:12-21). Through his obedience, he altered the defiant and therefore sinful situation and let every human being once again find 'the law at the heart of his/her being' (Jer 31:33). He opens his ear to Yahweh every morning (Is 50:4) and thus in everything he is able to say: "Behold, I have come... I delight to do your will, O my God" (Ps 40:7ff).

Jesus' obedience that confounds human judgment (Mk 14:36ff; Phil 2:6-11; Heb 10:5-7, 10) is not a passive compliance or a sheer submission due to any constraint; it is an adherence in love and freedom to the salvific plan of God: "I seek not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (Jn 5:30). The unique feature of Jesus' obedience – self-emptying – from incarnation until his death on the cross<sup>72</sup> – is three-fold. First, Jesus' obedience pertains to his *awareness* that he is the Son. He had known this by listening (*ob-audire*) to God in prayer; prayer was his habitual act of living in union with the Father. Lozano spells out the impact of prayer in Jesus' life of obedience: "He lived in constant company with Him who sent him, listening to his words, discerning his loving will, and carrying it out"<sup>73</sup>. He listened not only to the Father but also to the Spirit; he drew constant inspiration from the Spirit, for, "the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, her prompting is the soul of obedience"<sup>74</sup>. Besides being obedient to God directly (Heb 10:7; Phil 2:8), indirectly he was obedient through

intermediaries: parents, events, institutions, inspired writings, human authorities (Lk 2:51; Mt 7:27). The Son's loyal obedience to the Father, audacious obedience to the promptings of the Spirit, and humble obedience to the intermediaries directed him to pursue the realization of God's plan for humankind. Second, Jesus' obedience was characterised by *seeking and doing God's will*, which he claims to be his food and drink. His obedience as an expression of doing God's will was demonstrated fully in his passion. In doing God's will, he delivered himself to unjust inhuman powers that he did not resist; thus 'achieving through all his sufferings the experience of obedience' (Heb 5:8) and 'making of his death the most precious sacrifice of love and obedience' (Heb 10:5-10). Doing God's will meant to Jesus entrusting his freedom to the Father, which freed him totally for his task of setting the oppressed free (Lk 4:18). He is able to free others because "he is not subject to the law, he is above the law, and because he is above the law, he liberates us, giving us genuine liberty"<sup>75</sup>. In other words, his obedience to the Father served as his motivating force to live for those in the margins. Seeking the will of God in humility was not as if a sketch charted and followed: he experienced at Gethsemane the struggle to renounce the Father's will in favour of his own will (Mt 26:39, 42). However, as St Paul tells us, through his persistence to the Father's will, he redeemed the disobedient humankind (Rom 5:19). The third facet of his obedience relates to his realization that *obedience is mission*; it was a loving adherence to the salvific plan of God: "I seek not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (Jn 5:30). The salvific plan of God is that the Kingdom of God is established on earth, as it is heaven<sup>76</sup>. The search for the will of God culminated in his death on the cross: "He humbled himself,

becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). Those in the margins of social acceptance, the excluded, were the specific beneficiaries of his mission. His mission to the marginalized does not imply exclusivism of any kind: his forgiveness, compassion, table fellowship, healing, exorcism, and preaching were not restricted to any one group of people<sup>77</sup>.

In fact, the obedience of Jesus renders concrete the whole process of the history of salvation, the work of the Holy Trinity – "Only in Jesus, did the Father receive the perfect response of obedience"<sup>78</sup>. Jesus was always at the service of the Father, a service that is born out of love. Service of the Father is service to God's children, those alienated from community in particular. It was a perfect obedience because it demanded giving up his life for the mission that at the end he could triumphantly say that his mission is accomplished (Jn 19:13). The obedience of Jesus is the fundamental norm for Christians; it is unique to the consecrated religious due to their profession of obedience as an evangelical counsel.

### **Consecrated Obedience**

A Christian, by baptism, is obliged to a fundamental commitment to God. This means that the ontological state of being the child of God acquired at the baptismal consecration demands of the person to live for God totally. To live for God is to fulfil God's will. In other words, obedience is the concrete realization of one's commitment to God<sup>79</sup>. Religious consecration, which is a renewal of the baptismal consecration, advocates a total self-dedication to the divine Persons; it is at the same time, a total acceptance by the Trinity. Evangelical obedience, through which a consecrated religious surrenders his/her will to God as a total sacrifice

(*PC*, 14), is the greatest form of dedication<sup>80</sup>. Aquinas has rightly exalted the greatness of such an act: "A [wo]man can give nothing greater to God than to subject [her]/his own will to the will of another on account of God"<sup>81</sup>.

Love is the motivating force for submission of one's will to God<sup>82</sup>. More specifically, the surrender to God's will is in view of being guided towards love of God and neighbour<sup>83</sup>. The implication of a loving obedience is mission, the mission of redemption (*PC*, 14)<sup>84</sup>. The mission of the consecrated religious requires that they proclaim to the power-oriented world that power, pleasure, and possessions, the so called prime values are not the ultimate<sup>85</sup>. Besides, as part of their mission, they seek and accomplish God's will, which calls for serious concern to love God and God's plans. It also entails listening to the voice of the Spirit within<sup>86</sup> and the cries of the poor outside oneself. The poor determine how personal and social life of humans and of the consecrated religious in particular should be ordained according to the norms of God's Reign. To obey then, is also to opt preferentially for them.

In their mission, the consecrated religious are assisted by their superiors to whom they are subject in faith because they hold the place of God: "Through them [the Superiors]<sup>87</sup> they are led to serve all their brothers in Christ just as Christ ministered to his brothers in submission to the Father and laid down his life for the redemption of many"<sup>88</sup>. 'Obedience to the other', a deviation according to the postmodern world, has been given a theological significance by Pope John Paul II. He declares, "It should be always remembered that religious obedience is not simply a human submission to a human authority. Whoever obeys, submits himself to God, to the divine will expressed in the will of the superiors"<sup>89</sup>. Hence, religious

obedience is an imitation of Jesus in his obedience to the Father in the condition of the Incarnate Word who became the 'servant of Yahweh' (Is 42:1; 52:13-53; 12; Phil 2:7). It supplies the consecrated religious with a filial relationship – being a child of God by the very gift of the spirit; obliges a following – to hear the continuing call of the Lord in their life<sup>90</sup>; and entrusts them with the mission – to proclaim the Good News of salvation.<sup>91</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The evangelical counsels are the way of life of Jesus; they are his programme of life as well. Those who profess them knowingly and willingly assume a programme of struggle for full humanity for themselves and others, the marginalized in particular. The nature/ environment is also part of their concern. This means that the counsels they profess as vows are not only models of 'being', they are also conditions for 'action'. The 'action' is always action for the Kingdom of God. It is an incarnation of the poverty, chastity, and obedience of Christ, a witness of faith and life. It is co-operation in the mission of the Holy Trinity, the three acting as one for the salvation of the world. This is so or ought to be so because the vows pronounced in public give the society a right to call vowed persons to accountability because the vows affect the person's relationship to humankind<sup>92</sup>.

The above reality of the counsels guides us to assert that those who profess the counsels ought to contribute in some way to the nurturing of 'those values of human dignity, brother/sisterhood, love, and freedom', which lead to the growth of 'the new human family'. When consecrated religious live by the (vows) values of Jesus and commit to the building

up of the kind of community of freedom and fellowship that he envisioned, chastity generates spiritual fruitfulness, obedience impacts in spiritual freedom and spiritual poverty flourishes vanishing oppressive poverty from the earth: "... He will dwell with them and they will be his people..." (Rev 21:1-4).

The significance of such a profound state of the counsels is spelt out by Pope John Paul II. His remark seems to serve as a pertinent conclusion to our exposé of the evangelical counsels. He claims that "the practice of the evangelical counsels – whatever forms it may take – is guaranteed to last throughout history, because Jesus Christ himself desired and established it as a definitive feature of the church's economy of holiness. The idea of a church consisting only of lay people involved in marriage and secular professions does not correspond to Christ's intentions as we find them in the gospel. All this shows us that there will always be men and women who will want to give themselves totally to Christ and his kingdom by the way of celibacy, poverty and submission to a rule of life. Those who take this way of life will continue, in the future as in the past, to play an important role for the Christian community's growth in holiness and for its evangelizing mission. Indeed today more than ever, the way of the evangelical counsels offers great hope for the future of the church"<sup>93</sup>.

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**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 43 describes the evangelical counsels as that which is 'based upon the words and examples of the Lord'. It further illustrates the counsels as that which is commanded by the apostles and the Fathers of the Church, and by the doctors and the pastors of souls.

<sup>2</sup> Aloysius Pieris, "Religious Vows and the Reign of God," *The Way, Supplement* 65 (1990): 12-13.

<sup>3</sup> The following aspects vivify the Councils' renewed understanding of the counsels: 1) it declared the evangelical counsels as a gift from the Lord to the church; 2) it shifted the attention from the 'vows' to the 'counsels' as a means to follow Christ and as a response to a divine call; 3) it reordered the counsels, giving primacy to chastity; this, indicated a practice of consecrated life in its early years in which chastity marked a commitment of total self-gift to God; 4) the Council broadened the concept of consecrated life as 'consecrated through the evangelical counsels', which included secular institutes, religious institutes and societies of apostolic life (LG 43-47). *The Code of Canon Law* (599-601) succinctly articulates the same.

<sup>4</sup> Poverty is caused by sloth (Prov 6:9-11; 10:4; 12:11; 13:4; 14:23; 19:15), dissipation and drunkenness (Prov 21:17; 23:21; Sir 18:32-19:1). Kevin O'Sullivan, "Poverty," in *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Louis F. Hartman (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols' Catholic Press, 1962), 1886.

<sup>5</sup> The harrowing sufferings of the poor entail not only hunger and privation but also social disabilities: their treatment as an outlaw, the exploitation and injustice meted against them, their non-accessibility to legal redress as they have no money to bribe the judge. (The average judge was more like those denounced by Isaiah 1:23 than the clean-handed Samuel, 1 Sam 12:3). Besides, an excessive interest was charged for any money the poor person was obliged to borrow. When a poor person wanted to secure money from the wealthy nobles, he had to part with not only his house and vineyards but also his sons and daughters (Neh 5). The general sorrows of the poor were intensified in the case of the widows and orphans (Ps 109:9). Moreover, the poor ran

the risk of being hated by their friends (Prov 14:20), and their brethren (Prov 19:4). Even the wisdom that was in them was disregarded (Eccles 9:15ff). Julio De Santa Ana, *Good News to the Poor: The Challenge of the Poor in the History of the Church* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977), 2.

<sup>6</sup> In view of improving the lot of the poor, namely, redressing the grievances of widows, orphans, slaves and foreigners (Ex 22:1-11), the Mosaic Law suggests measures such as leaving the land fallow for the poor to collect the produce (Deut 24:21; Lev 25:2-7) and annulling the debt at the jubilee year (Lev 25:10). James Limburg, "Human Rights in the Old Testament," *Concilium* 124, no. 4 (1979): 22.

<sup>7</sup> For illustration on prophetic condemnation of injustice see, J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament: From Its Origin to the Closing of the Alexandrian Canon* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 233.

<sup>8</sup> Abraham Josua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 212.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Gelin, "Blessed Are the Poor," in *The God of Israel, the God of Christians: The Great Themes of Scriptures*, ed. Jean Gilbert (New York: Desclee, 1961), 108.

<sup>10</sup> De Santa Ana, *Good News to the Poor*, 9. For a brilliant description on the 'poor of Yahweh' see, Albert Gelin, *The Poor of Yahweh* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1964).

<sup>11</sup> Spiritual poverty too is 'voluntary' to a certain extent because it is an exercise in one's spiritual and practical life. However, in this context, by voluntary poverty we mean a renunciation of earthly goods such as material possessions, sexual relationships, and power.

<sup>12</sup> George Mangatt, "Jesus' Good News to the Poor," *Jeevadhara* 3 (1973): 304.

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that James did not insist on the practice of common pooling. Instead, he urged the Jewish Christians to make their charity to the poor practical (Jas 1:9; 2:1-9; 4:13-5:6). [Seemingly the experiment of common pooling had come to an end somewhere between 50 and 60 AD. The letter of James was written in AD 47]. Cf.

New Advent, *Epistle of St. James* <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08275b.htm>, accessed, 18.04.2015.]

<sup>14</sup> Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers: I Clement, II Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Didache, Barnabas*, vol. I (London, New York: William Heinemann, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 311.

<sup>15</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, ed., "*The Shepherd of Hermas*," *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. II (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2003), Parable 51:8, pg 309.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols., vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 594. See also, Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 155.

<sup>17</sup> Basil Cole and Paul Conner, *Christian Totality: Theology of the Consecrated Life* (Bandra Mumbai: St Paul Publications, 1990) 123.

<sup>18</sup> Cole and Conner, *Christian Totality*, 121.

<sup>19</sup> Pope John XXIII declared that detachment from earthly goods points to the real significance of poverty and it enables one to think more seriously of the divine saying, "For what does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world but suffer the loss of his own soul"? John XXIII, "Mater et Magistra," in *The Encyclicals and Other Messages of John Xciii* (Washington D.C.: TPS Press, 1964), no. 247, pg 414. According to Pope Paul VI, "Religious must surpass all others by their example of true evangelical poverty... and love that poverty to which they have spontaneously committed themselves". Paul VI, *Message to the General Chapters of Religious Orders and Congregations* ([http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/speeches/1964/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19640523\\_capitulari\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19640523_capitulari_en.html), 1964, accessed 02.04.2015). Pope John Paul II teaches that an effective answer to culture's craving for things despite the horrible sufferings of the weakest among us, can be found in the freely chosen and lovingly lived poverty. Such poverty testifies that God is the true wealth of the human heart and that it extends solidarity and charity to the most neglected, helping them to achieve a personal dignity and to work toward humanizing the world. VC, 89-90.

<sup>20</sup> See Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, “*Potissimum Institutioni: Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes (1990)*,” *Origins* 19, no. 42 (1990):no. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Albrecht, “Evangelical Poverty,” *Review for Religious* 36, no. 6 (1977): 918-923.

<sup>22</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, March 22, 1986), 39.

<sup>23</sup> John J. O’Brien, “Poverty,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 750.

<sup>24</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Carida Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 30.

<sup>25</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Poverty for the Kingdom* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications and ICLA Publications, 1995), 4.

<sup>26</sup> Albrecht, “Evangelical Poverty,” 920. See also, Andree Emery, “On Religious Poverty,” *Communio* Spring (1982): 26-31.

<sup>27</sup> John J. O’Donnell, “Poverty and Incarnation,” *Review for Religious* 41, no. 4 (1982): 514.

<sup>28</sup> Pieris maintains that consecrated poverty would imply not only divesting of material possessions, but a non-addiction to whatsoever – to persons, to objects, to knowledge etc. See, Aloysius Pieris, “The Three Ingredients of Authentic Humanism: An Autobiographical Essay on the Religious Vows” *Vidyajyoti* 56, no. 1 (1992): 14-15.

<sup>29</sup> M. Puthenthara offers a nuanced explanation of the link between the Kingdom of God and poverty. Based on Mt 5:3, he asserts that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus promises the Kingdom of heaven to ‘poverty’, even though Jesus lists other qualities of the soul that are necessary to enter the Kingdom. He also claims that in Mk 10:29-30 Jesus’ words give assurance that the Kingdom of God or everlasting

life is the reward of those who embrace poverty in order to follow Christ. James Thattaparamban, ed., *Reflections on Religious Life: Collected Papers of Fr. Mayol Puthenthara, O.S.B.* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2004), 102.

<sup>30</sup> Felix Podimattam, *Consecrated Poverty Revisited* (Delhi: Media House, 2006), 15ff.

<sup>31</sup> Unlike the Old Testament where God asked his people to follow him by observing commandments, but without making such radical demands, Jesus reveals his divine sovereignty on the other hand, by requiring absolute devotion to himself, to the point of total detachment from earthly possessions and affections. John Paul II, "Jesus' Will is Origin of Consecrated Life," 15.

<sup>32</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (1973), 289.

<sup>33</sup> Dominic Hoffman and Basil Cole, *Consecrated Life: Contributions of Vatican II* (Bandra, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2005), 400-401.

<sup>34</sup> See, Aloysius Schwarz, *Poverty: Sign of Our Times* (Allahabad: St. Paul Publications, 1974), 141-151.

<sup>35</sup> The government-run schools in India are characterized by the following. 1) Deplorable standard of teaching as a result of which there is a poor record of performance by the students; 2) the infrastructure consists of poorly maintained buildings, dilapidated classrooms, ill-equipped libraries and laboratories, lack of sanitation facilities and even drinking water; 3) the school curricula and teaching methodologies stand obsolete and outdated, with the emphasis being on rote-learning and merely developing reading and writing skills instead of holistic education; 4) lack of vocational training and non-availability of such courses leaves students with barely any employable skills at the end of their schooling. Shubhi Vijay, *Poor Quality of Education in Government Schools* (<http://theviewspaper.net/poor-quality-of-education-in-government-schools/>, July 3, 2009, accessed 30.04.2015).

<sup>36</sup> In the words of Pope John Paul II, Jesus does not condemn the possession of earthly goods absolutely; instead, he is anxious to remind

those who own them of the twofold commandment of love of God and love of neighbour. John Paul II, "How Blest are the Poor in Spirit! (General Audience)," *L'Osservatore Romano* 49 (7 December, 1994): pg 11, no. 5.

<sup>37</sup> John Paul II, "Jesus' Will is Origin of Consecrated Life," 15.

<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, "How Blest are the Poor in Spirit!," pg 11, no. 2. In the words of Gutiérrez, "the existence of poverty represents a sundering both of solidarity among men and also of communion with God. Poverty is an expression of sin, that is, of a negation of love. It is therefore incompatible with the coming of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of love and justice". The eradication of poverty paves the way for the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (1973), 295.

<sup>39</sup> Aloysius Pieris, "The Three Ingredients of Authentic Humanism: An Autobiographical Essay on the Religious Vows," *Vidyajyoti* 56, no. 1 (1992): 18, 20.

<sup>40</sup> In the Old Testament, virginity in the bride was the object of high praise (Deut 22:14-29). In practice, a girl who had been sexually violated was unable to find a husband (2 Sam 13:20). But the state of virginity was not to be permanent: to be unmarried and childless was to be the object of shame (Gen 30:23; Is 4:1; 54:4; Judg 11:37-40). Marriage was considered honourable and compulsory for all, and to have many children was viewed as a sign of divine favour. P. Delhaye, "Celibacy, History of," in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, ed. Editorial Staff at the Catholic University America (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967), 369.

<sup>41</sup> Jesus, Mary and John the Baptist are some of the examples of 'celibacy lived in view of worship of God'. Matthew underlined celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom (19:8-12); Luke taught that virginal life is a special sharing in Jesus' death and glorification (18:28-30); Mark assured a hundredfold in the Kingdom of heaven to those who leave marriage and family in the present life (10:28-30).

<sup>42</sup> Two texts in the New Testament testify to the 'Kingdom of God', namely, Mt 19:12, 19 and 1 Cor 7:32. The former states that celibacy is 'for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven' and the latter is a reference to a celibates' being 'anxious about the affairs of the Lord'.

<sup>43</sup> Eschatological signs are important because they point not only to the final fullness, but because they also reveal what has already begun in Jesus Christ. As an eschatological sign, religious life manifests now what is hoped for in the future. Casey, "Towards a Theology of Vows," 106.

<sup>44</sup> As a grace, celibacy is a God-given adornment of a human being, a fruit of the presence and action of the Spirit (Gal 5:23; 1 Thes 4:3-8).

<sup>45</sup> St Paul's teaching on chastity, however, was not a universal law. For, Pauline churches were ruled by married bishops, priests and deacons (1 Tim 3:2-13; Tit 1:6-9).

<sup>46</sup> For Mark and Matthew celibacy resides in the heart and spirit respectively. (Mk 7:14-23; Mt 15:1-20).

<sup>47</sup> Lozano and Cole & Conner who offer detailed elaboration on the historical development of the other two vows, state hardly anything about the historical development of the vow of chastity. Cf. Cole and Conner, *Christian Totality*, 75ff; John M. Lozano, *Discipleship: Towards an Understanding of Religious Life*, trans. Beatrice Wilczynski (Chicago, Illinois: Claret Centre For Resources in Spirituality, 1980), 143ff.

<sup>48</sup> Michael S. Driscoll, "Chastity," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 147-151; S. O'Riordan, "Chastity," in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, ed. Editorial Staff at the Catholic University America (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967), 515-517.

<sup>49</sup> In monastic life, for example, celibacy is part of a monk's humility, self-surrender and renunciation of the world and its ways. A monk rejects the privileges of being a head of his own household by swearing obedience to the abbot, by embracing poverty, and by forswearing the desire to produce heirs. Hence, monasticism perceives celibacy as an

expression of a commitment to a church-family rather than to a natural family and household. Fry, ed., *RB 1980, The Rule of Benedict*, 5:1-19, pg. 187-189. St Jerome (345-420) views chastity (and poverty) as means to an end, i.e., the dialogue of the soul with God in prayerful seclusion. Clare E. Stancliffe, "Jerome, St," in *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Gordon S. Wakefield (London: SCM Press, 1983), 220.

<sup>50</sup> John Paul II, "*Mulieris Dignitatem*: Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women (1988)," *Origins* 18 (1988): no. 20.

<sup>51</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *New Wineskins: Re-imagining Religious Life Today* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1986), 118-135. See also, Donal Dorr, "Celibacy," *The Furrow* 55, no. 3 (2004): 138-144.

<sup>52</sup> R. Rolheiser illustrates Jesus' identification with the sexually isolated/deprived thus: "when Christ went to bed alone at night, he was in real solidarity with the many persons who, not by choice but by circumstances, sleep alone". Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality: Guidelines for a Christian Spirituality for the Twenty First Century* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), 199.

<sup>53</sup> José Cristo Rey García Paredes, *Celibacy-Virginity for the Kingdom of God* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2005), 2.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel J. Trapp, "Nuptial Love and Discerning Celibacy's Call," *Review for Religious* 56, no. 1 (1997): 61. See also, Joan Chittister, *The Fire in These Ashes: A Spirituality of Contemporary Religious Life* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 119ff.

<sup>55</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Celibacy*, trans. C. A. L. Jareth (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), 105.

<sup>56</sup> Ann Goggin, "The Heart of My Days," *Encounter* 18 (1975):4.

<sup>57</sup> G. Miguel DeLaTorre, "El Religioso, 'goel' de sus hermanos," *Vida* 62 (1987): 437.

<sup>58</sup> Paredes, *Celibacy-Virginity for the Kingdom of God*, 14.

<sup>59</sup> Cole and Conner, *Christian Totality*, 174.

<sup>60</sup> Maurice J. Grajewski, "The Supreme Moderator of Clerical Exempt Religious Institutes: A Historical Conspectus and Canonical

Commentary" (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, The Catholic University of America 1957), 6.

<sup>61</sup> Cole and Conner, *Christian Totality*, 181-182. See also, K. V. Truhlar, "Obedience," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berald L. Marthaler (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2003), 505.

<sup>62</sup> Pachomius is the founder of Christian monasticism. His stance on obedience is spelled out by Horasiesios, the third Abbot in Succession to Pachomius. He said: 'Obey your superiors and be subject to them for they are keeping watch over your souls and give an account for you'. Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia: The Lives, Rules and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples*, vol. 3 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1982), 185.

<sup>63</sup> Basil the Great is the father of Eastern monasticism. Cole and Conner, *Christian Totality*, 183.

<sup>64</sup> Truhlar, "Obedience," 505.

<sup>65</sup> Cole and Conner, *Christian Totality*, 185.

<sup>66</sup> Fry, ed., *RB 1980, The Rule of Benedict*, 58:17, pg. 269.

<sup>67</sup> Fry, ed., *RB 1980, The Rule of Benedict*, 5:4, pg. 187.

<sup>68</sup> Simon Tugwell, *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1982), 467.

<sup>69</sup> Cajetan Esser, *The Rule and Testament of St. Francis* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 174. See also, Eric Doyle, "Franciscan Spirituality, Franciscans," in *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Gordon S. Wakefield (London: SCM Press, 1983), 160.

<sup>70</sup> Robin Maas, "Obedience," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 710.

<sup>71</sup> John Paul II, *Speech to Women Religious Gathered in Rue du Bac Park in Paris* ([http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/1980/may/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1980/may/index.htm), 31 May, 1980, accessed 17.04.2015).

<sup>72</sup> Robert Faricy, *The End of Religious Life* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Winston Press Inc., 1983), 32.

- <sup>73</sup> John M. Lozano, *Life as a Parable: Reinterpreting the Religious Life* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 1986), 159.
- <sup>74</sup> Ladislav M. Orsy, *Open to the Spirit: Religious Life after Vatican II* (Cleveland, Washington: Corpus Books, 1968), 155.
- <sup>75</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Obedience for the Kingdom* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications and ICLA Publications, 1995), 39.
- <sup>76</sup> Gerald A. Arbuckle and David L. Fleming, *Religious Life: Rebirth through Conversion* (New York: Alba House, 1990), 29.
- <sup>77</sup> Judith Merkle, *A Different Touch: A Study of Vows in Religious Life* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 202-203.
- <sup>78</sup> Paredes, *Obedience for the Kingdom*, 4.
- <sup>79</sup> P. Shea, "Religious (Men and Women)," in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, ed. Thomas Carson and Joann Cerrito (Detroit, New York, San Diego, San Francisco, London, Munich... Thomson Gale, 2003), 88.
- <sup>80</sup> Sometimes evangelical obedience seems to have obtained additional weight compared to the other two vows of poverty and chastity. Pope John Paul II asserts: "Like poverty and chastity, obedience thus marked the fulfilment of Jesus' mission and indeed was its basic principle, expressed in the very intense feeling that led him to say: 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work' (Jn 4:34; cf. *Redemptionis Donum*, n. 13)". John Paul II, "Religious Offer their Own Wills to God," *L'Osservatore Romano* 50 (14 December, 1994): no. 1, pg 11. Cole and Conner declare that obedience is "the most mysterious vow because it counteracts those inherited or personally caused effects of sin which remain in us after the vows of poverty and chastity have worked their transformations". The additional weight to the vow is due to the fact that freedom is more central to human beings than possessions (cf. poverty) and the well-being of one's body (cf. chastity). Moreover, obedience is the most difficult because it can be the most demanding; nonetheless, living it can develop the greatest freedom from obstacles to, and the greatest security toward, achieving the goals of consecrated life. Cole and Conner, *Christian Totality*, 169.

<sup>81</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II 186, 5 ad 5.

<sup>82</sup> In the OT, the Israelites seek to do the will of God in the context of the covenant rooted in love (Deut 1-4; Jer 11:4). In the New Testament, having experienced God as love, Jesus accomplishes the will of God. His love for the Father enabled him on the one hand to withstand the temptation to do his own will (Mt 4:1-11) and on the other to be an example of selfless service (Jn 13:1-17) even at the cost of suffering death in fidelity to that will (Phil 2:8). John W. Crossin, "Obedience," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1987), 720.

<sup>83</sup> Hoffman and Cole, *Consecrated Life*, 153.

<sup>84</sup> Obedience was the leading element in Jesus' life and mission (Jn 6:38). Our redemption came because of Jesus' obedience (Rom 5:19). Even Christ's glorification came about precisely for the same reason: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him a name which is above every other name" (Phil 2:9).

<sup>85</sup> Claire Brissette, "Reflections on Vowed Living," *Review for Religious* 36, no. 3 (1977): 362.

<sup>86</sup> Edouard Pousset, "Human Existence and the Three Vows," *Review for Religious* 29, no. 2 (1970): 211.

<sup>87</sup> There has been a shift regarding the understanding of obedience. For a view on the shift from divine authority of the superior – to consultative role in obedience – to obedience as listening to the will of God, see, Wittberg, *The Rise and Decline of Catholic Religious Orders*, 30ff.

<sup>88</sup> The Council draws our attention to the fact that superiors too, are bound by a vowed obedience to God, and must constantly bear this in mind before giving orders. Both superior and subordinates by virtue of the same obedience are bound by the same task, which is not least the service of one another and of the community, implying a common responsibility. Cf. *PC*, 14.

<sup>89</sup> John Paul II, "Mysterium Crucis," *L'Osservatore Romano* (14 December, 1994): no. 4, pg 11.

<sup>90</sup> According to Korczyk to listen to the continuing call of the Spirit is often an experience of being crushed under the weight of our powerlessness to change a situation. Yet, she contends that obedience requires that we listen to, and experience the absurd situations. Donna M. Korczyk, "Obedience, Absurdity and the Cross of Christ," *Review for Religious* 46, no. 3 (1987): 375.

<sup>91</sup> Arbuckle and Fleming, *Religious Life*, 29.

<sup>92</sup> Joan Chittister, "Vows," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 1011.

<sup>93</sup> John Paul II, "Religious Live Baptismal Vows Intensely," *L'Osservatore Romano* 40 (5 October, 1994): 11.