

## SCRIPTURAL BASIS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

### Filial Model of Intimacy with God

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**Abstract:** Maria Anto CMC dwells on the scriptural basis of religious life, where she finds a filial model of intimacy with God. Divine-human intimacy is a recurring theme in the Scripture, which portrays a God who is 'in need' of our intimate relationship. She considers vocation as a call to be more. In the reflection, Maria Anto considers following Christ of the gospel as the core of religious life where one deepens the intimacy as a sacrificial victim in daily life. If the members of the younger generation are motivated in the right way, and if they have the aptitude for a life of joy, right from the early moments of their formation, and are constantly clinging to that through the daily life, the relationship will be natural for them.

**Keywords:** scripture, religious, intimacy, vocation, formation, candidates, metaphors, disciples, orders, institutes, monasticism, discipleship, Yahweh, contemplation, Trinity, archetype, experience, *aggiornamento*, Christification, *anamnesis*, memory, icon, Eucharist, testimony, master, reconciliation, humility, orthodoxy, orthopraxy, humanity, liberation, renunciation, abnegation, victim, Peter, baptism, Father, Abba, monastery.

My vocation is to be more. When one correlates this maxim with religious life and especially with formation, which is an enabling process, in it, the candidates are enabled to be what they are or what they should be. What one should be is contained in what one is. It denotes that what one is or one's being is not anything that is statically given; but rather one can be what one is (being). If one can be what one is, then one ought to be so; and hence the trilogy, is-can-ought. What one is already is not merely to be preserved or maintained, but is to be developed by the constant process of becoming more and better of oneself. The challenge to be more and better is engrained in one's being. For an integral formation, this process of becoming takes place in all levels – physical, psychological, moral and spiritual – of one's

life. Basing on the Scripture, the present paper concentrates on the spiritual aspect with an emphasis to intimacy with God.

Divine-human intimacy is a recurring theme in the Scripture and right from Genesis to Revelation, the Scripture portrays a God who is 'deliberately in need' of human being's intimate relationship. More than humans after divine, God is after his people. Metaphors like 'father-son', 'mother-child', 'husband-wife', 'master-disciple', 'friend-friend' etc. were used to describe the depth of divine-human intimacy in both the Testaments. Here without setting aside the First Testament, we focus more on the Second Testament and go through the texts in which Jesus invites and demands from his disciples the same intimacy that he shared with his Father. Basing on that filial model, religious life is pondered over here.

### **1. Following Christ of the Gospel: Core of Religious Life**

'Following Christ of the Gospel' constitutes the core of religious life. Holy Scripture especially the Second Testament offers solid ground for such following. The lifestyle of the Lord of the Gospel determines the style of life they ought to have in the world. The history of the consecrated life confirms this centrality of Christ and of his Gospel. Orders and institutes were born with the unique desire to live the evangelical life in full, following Christ of the gospels in his words and action. Primitive monasticism recognized the Gospel as the unique rule and proper norm of life. The call of the religious consists precisely in seeking to follow Christ of the gospels. If so, the sole purpose in the process of religious formation is to enable the candidates to follow Jesus as he is presented in the gospels.

The present article tries to bring up the way Jesus related with his Abba as the model for divine-human, master-disciple, intimacy which is the soul of religious life. The plan of procedure therefore is to look at both the life and teaching of him the perfect man who was constantly and intimately united to the Father and invited his disciples to keep up such close and constant relationship with him and thus to the Triune God in both life *ad intra* and *ad extra*. His paternal intimacy was so deep and strong that he could proclaim aloud, the one who sees me sees the Father (Jn 14:9). Religious life demands such an intimate relationship with the master where the face of the master must shine forth through the face of the disciples. It is a costly demand and it is one of the main challenges of religious formation in the contemporary web world. In order to become men and women of God in the world,

to become 'divine statues' and thus to make the Invisible visible, discipleship is offered to them.

## 2. 'Follow Me': An Invitation to Possess His Lifestyle

*Sequela Christi*<sup>1</sup> lies at the heart of all Christian thought, life and ministry. It is the biblical root of discipleship. Within the 'follow me' of the Son of God is the base and source of all states of Christian Life. The term 'follow' received a new meaning when Jesus uttered it, a meaning which it has nowhere else 'except in those passages of the OT which declare that one must follow either Baal or Yahweh (cf. 1Kings 18:21; Prov 7:22). Jesus does not propose but calls imperatively, displaying audacious personal authority in summoning his followers to join him in advancing the kingdom of God. Thus, his insistence on discipleship to whom it is given is compulsory, not voluntary.<sup>2</sup> It is not a simple question of personal generosity but a response to a demanding call. He confronted certain individuals with his imperious command to follow him, a command that tolerates no opposition or delay. Jesus' question "what are you looking for?" (Jn 1:38) implies more than a banal request about the disciples' reason for walking after him. It touches on the basic human need to turn to God.<sup>3</sup> Jesus takes the initiative by turning and speaking. As Jn 15:16 will enunciate, "it is not you who chose me, but I chose you." The call is to be the 'apostle' of the Master, is to follow his lifestyle.

Those words addressed to the apostles primarily are also intended to all those who are the future followers of Christ. Even though, the command 'follow me' is meant for all Christians irrespective of their states of life in the mystical Body, some are called to follow the Son of God 'more closely'<sup>4</sup> and to embody in a 'special way' the particular requirements of *Sequela Christi*, by embracing religious life. They have a special experience of the light that shines forth from the incarnate Word.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In the NT the verb *sequela* (to follow) is used about 78 times. It is used always in the sense of following a person. With only one exception (Mk 14:13), this person is always Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup>F. Scott Spencer, "Follow me, the Imperious Call of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels", *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, 59/ 2 (April, 2005), p. 142.

<sup>3</sup>R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, New York: Anchor Bible, 1966, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup>LG 44, 46; MR 10.

<sup>5</sup>VC 15.

Biblical discipleship involves an uprooting and a close following which give identity to the disciples as disciples.<sup>6</sup> The Christian and especially the consecrated, by definition, is a disciple who is called to remain so always. For him/her it is not a passing but a permanent state of life. "*Sequela Christi* includes much more than mere spatial or ethical connotations."<sup>7</sup> One of the most comprehensive and concrete demands that Jesus poses when he utters 'follow me' is to possess and project his style of life as revealed in the Scripture. For that the person has to be 'seized' 'touched' and 'sustained' by the Son.<sup>8</sup> A close contact, intimate union with him is very essential without which this state of Christian life will bear no fruits. Only a personal, intimate and exclusive encounter with the Son brings radical change in the one who is called. Adherence to both the person and fate of the Master is inevitable here.

### 3. Adherence to the Person and Fate: Necessary for Intimacy

Every vocation to consecrated life is born in contemplation, from moments of intense communion and from a deep relationship of friendship with the Son, from the beauty and light, which was seen shining on his face. A living model is there for such adherence, which is nothing but the life of the Master himself. 'Filial fervour' is one of the striking features in the personality of Jesus. Adherence to the Father was his concern not only in the immanent Trinity (Jn 1:18) but also in the economy of salvation (Jn 14:10). The state of Jesus consisted in being 'together' with the Father; even though he had come forth from the Father, in the world he never ceased being in the Father. To phrase it differently, the ex-centric dimension of the Son in the world could not cast the slightest shadow on the con-centric dimension of his being in the Father. The Spirit allowed him these two-fold movements of intro-version (toward the Father) and extro-version (toward the world). His entire existence was oriented toward the Father (Lk 23:46); he belonged totally to the Father (Jn 17:10). He lived on earth in

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<sup>6</sup>The term 'disciple', which is derived from the Greek *mathētēs*, (literally means 'pupil', learner) appears about 250 times in the gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus' associates are called disciples who belong to him alone.

<sup>7</sup>Otto Semmelroth, "The Christ-Event and our Salvation," in Otto Semmelroth et al., *Man before God: Readings in Theology*, New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1975, p. 209.

<sup>8</sup>VC 18b, 23c, 40a, 108b.

constant relation with his Father in the Spirit and revealed his adherence to the Father by his very life.

Jesus not only delighted in speaking about the Father-Son relation to his disciples but also was eager in getting them to hold on to that relationship. The purpose of revealing his Father was to introduce his disciples into the heart of the Father and into his intimacy. While Jesus never equates his personal relation to his Father with that of his disciples, he does want to bring the archetype and the copy so close together that the disciples become 'co-heirs with Christ' (Rom 8:17).<sup>9</sup> The only begotten Son shares with them his life, totally oriented to the Father and enables them to penetrate with him into the unsearchable depths of the Father.

#### **4. *Menein en* as the First Constitutive Element for Adherence**

The core of the discipleship is expressed by the phrase *menein en*, which is used 11 times in Jn 15:4-10. The instruction by Jesus: "Abide in me as I abide in you" (Jn 15:4), is not merely a comparison between two actions, nor is one part of the command the causal condition of the other, rather, one cannot exist without the other. Remaining in Jesus and having Jesus remain in the disciple are parts of the whole, for there is only one personal relationship between Jesus and his disciples; if they remain in him through faith, he remains in them through love and fruitfulness. The total dependence of the disciple on the Master, which is a *leitmotif* of the Johannine thought is expressed nowhere more eloquently than here.<sup>10</sup> Like the apostles, the consecrated ones are called nearer to join with the Master to be the closest followers of the Word incarnate. They are called away from their normal world (Mk 1:16-20; Mt 9:9) by virtue of his 'come and see' (Jn 1:39) and 'follow me' (Mk 1:17). Staying with the Master (Jn 1:39), to be with him (Mk 3:14), to abide or remain in him (Jn 15:4) is the first constitutive element of the call to consecrated life.

The consecrated person is called to have the same fundamental experience, which Jesus had. To have that experience he has to be caught up in the vision of the Master, being on fire with the fire of the Lord. As one reads in the Gospel of Thomas, "he who is near to me is

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. III, *The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ*, Graham Harrison (trans.), San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992, p. 258.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, New York: Anchor Bible, 1966, p. 678.

near the fire to be consumed by it.”<sup>11</sup> One becomes truly the disciple when he lives in the Master, totally being absorbed by the Lord. Here the identification is so complete and the great divide between the Master and the disciple is to be obliterated to the point, that now only the Master remains. The experience here is exactly that of Jeremiah, “you have seduced me, and I have let myself be seduced” (Jer 20:7). It means in simple terms a single-minded adherence to the Son apart from whom the one who is called has no autonomy or self-comprehension. The call is to become one living organism, like the vine and the branches (Jn 15:1-4).

This vertical aspect of ‘being with him’ (Mk 3:14) initiates the whole process of becoming disciples. This call, above all, is to establish a particular rapport without which, his proposals become stumbling blocks for them (Mk 6:3). Their returning to the place from where they are sent is not only to report all that they had done (Mk 6:30) but also “a returning to the place where they belong.”<sup>12</sup> Practically speaking, a constant and continuous return to ‘this place’ of their belonging is inevitable for a better sustenance of religious life. The time dedicated to mental and vocal prayers, the faithfulness to prayer life, being in His presence etc. are not out dated spiritual practices but the core of spiritual life as they assist the advance of the divine-human intimacy. An evaluation and a subsequent *aggiornamento* are needed in the spiritual practices of religious institutes today. Even though changes have been brought reading the signs of the time, an enthusiastic personal aptitude for interior life is lacking in many of the candidates aspiring for religious life. Its after-effect constitutes far reaching consequences.

However, the abiding enables the disciples to comprehend the identity of both the Master and of themselves and to proclaim the same ecstatic words of Peter: “Lord, it is well that we are here” (Mt 17:4) and of Thomas, “let us also go, that we may die with him” (Jn 11:16). Thus he becomes the only focus of their lives. Adherence therefore, is the *unum necessarium* without which the fate of Peter who followed the Lord at a distance (Lk 22:54) will be theirs too. The result

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<sup>11</sup>*Gospel of Thomas*, p. 86, quoted by John Fuellenbach, *Throw Fire* (Manila: Logos Publications, 1998): 92.

<sup>12</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, Mary Frances McCarthy (trans.) San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983, p. 140.

of this abiding is nothing but the transformation to *persone Christiformi*.<sup>13</sup>

### 5. Becoming *Persone Christiformi*: Fruit of *Menein en*

"I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (Jn 14:11). These words bespeak the *where* of the Son. He is at one and the same time both in the Father and gone forth from the Father (Jn 14:26). God the Father identified himself with the person of Jesus in such a way that the Son became the revelation of the Father; in his own person he reveals another person; his knowledge, his love and his activity have no other *raison d'être* than to serve this revelation. He expresses in himself the being and will of the Father. His constant adherence to the Father brought him to that merger with the Father. Although it is incomprehensible to human logic, it points to the configuration of the Father and the Son which takes place in the Spirit, the Trinitarian conformity.

"Where I am there will my servant be" (Jn 12:26). This phrase expresses the 'whereabouts' of the followers of Jesus. Jesus' invitation through the apostles to the consecrated 'to be with him and to be sent out' (Mk 3:14) also has this finality. They have no other thing to do than the identification with the person of Jesus, a progressive configuration with him. The images like stripping off the old self and clothing with the new self (Col 3:9; Eph 4:22-24) and to put on the Lord Jesus (Rom 13:14) are invitations to the consecrated to have this configuration with the Lord by coming out of themselves. They are thus destined by their very call to become conformed to the 'image' of the invisible God (Col 1:15). Every attitude and action at important moments as well as ordinary events of life must express that they belong completely and joyfully to the Lord. From this conformity, there emerges the identity and originality of consecrated life, as a life consecrated to Christ totally and absolutely. That is, it is a true and proper absolutization of the person of Jesus. His *persona* becomes the centre of their existence, both an acting role and an ontological person. In other words, "by their vocation to the state of Christ, they receive a definitive personal orientation by which all else is absorbed and made relative. Christ's form becomes for them nevertheless, as truly the form of their being as of their activity."<sup>14</sup> Hence, for them 'life means Christ' (Phil 1:21) who 'is all and in all' (Col 3:11). Like Paul, they too then are

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. VC 19.

<sup>14</sup>von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, p. 212.

able to acclaim: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). The Spirit has an active role in this *Christification*. The 'Christ-like existence' of the consecrated is achieved in virtue of their co-operation to the divine grace. John Paul II reminds the consecrated: "Do not forget that you, in a very special way, can and must say that you not only belong to Christ but that you have *become Christ*."<sup>15</sup> This 'becoming Christ' constitutes the nucleus of formation in consecrated life. Following Christ is a leaving to be configured by him, to be the 'other humanity of Jesus'. To be his *anamnesis*, the living memory is the after-effect of becoming *persone christiformi*.

### 6. Being the Living Memory: Effect of the Fruit

The configuration of Jesus with the Father was the after-effect of his constant adherence to the Father. This conformation made him acclaim: "Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). His *incarnational* existence became the living paternal memory, the visibility of the invisible Father. As John says "no one has ever seen God; it is God the only Son ... who had made him known" (Jn 1:18). Making the Father present, which was the aim of his earthly life, thus is the after-effect of his constant configuration with the Father. Today the presence of the Son is 'invisible' in accomplishing the paternal salvific will and the consecrated are called to become the tangible seals of that invisible presence. They are called to become, even in their frail humanity, a living, transparent image of the mystery of Christ and living *icons* of Christ. In them the invisible presence of Christ is to be portrayed visibly and in an appropriate manner. In other words, the visibility of the invisible Christ today is achieved by the Christians especially by the consecrated. This call is to build up the figure of Christ in the world.

As the Eucharist, the memorial par excellence re-presents him and his act at the last supper and becomes the eternal memory of the risen Christ, the special call of the consecrated is to make him visible, to 'represent' him in the modern world. They represent the Lord

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<sup>15</sup>VC 109. The theme of configuration or conformity with Christ is one of the prime concerns of the *Vita Consecrata* and it has been emphasized in various ways. For example, a particular communion of love with Jesus (15c), conformation of one's whole existence to Christ in an all-encompassing commitment, a profound configuration to the mystery of Christ (16), an explicit desire, a striving to become one with him, taking on his mind and way of life (18), a reflection of Christ's own way of life (32b), etc.



subjectively in their *life* just as the official priest is able by his power to make him objectively present in sermons, sacraments and pastoral ministry. In order to be the memory of Jesus, the configuration with him is inevitable. To be the presence of the paschal Lamb, the bread and wine have to become the body and blood. So too this 'becoming Christ' enables the consecrated to be his remembrance. The more they allow themselves to be conformed to Christ the more Christ is made present and active in history for the salvation of all. They are called truly to constitute a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting as the incarnate word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren; to be the living tradition of the Saviour's life and message.<sup>16</sup> Their effort to follow the life of Christ contributes directly to his continuing incarnation in the world. Thus Christ, the universal and unique sacrament of salvation, is being presented or represented by them. It is a permanent call to be the living presence of the Lord above all by the 'splendid', 'varied' and 'striking' testimony of the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of inspiring the world.<sup>17</sup> From their very life others perceive that in them someone else is at work. If they fail to be the living memory of the wonders God has wrought through the incarnate Word, their existence itself as consecrated will lack credibility.

## 7. Adherence to the Fate of the Master

To deepen the intimacy with the Lord, religious are invited to adhere to the person of Christ by adhering to his fate. To adhere to him also implies to know him closely and to follow him by choosing his own choice till the end of one's life, to share his fate (Phil 2:5-8) and to live in his spirit – born as poor, put himself in the line of sinners (Mk 1:9f), tempted (Mk 1:13), brought the reconciliation (Mk 2:1-17), the love and the new world (Mk 2:18-28) and thus became the liberator who evades our human reality. Divine kenosis stands at the core of his fate.

## 8. Kenotic *Sequela* to Deepen the Intimacy

The 'follow me' of the Son is *de facto* an invitation for a kenotic *sequela*. 'To be receptive' is the core of the filial kenosis. A descending kenosis of the Son can be traced well in the paschal mystery by which he revealed the selfless love of the Father. This revelation of God is fitted into man's category as he came down to their realm, humbling

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. VC 19 b, 22c, 72; SAC 9.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. VC 20b.

himself. So human beings are able to follow his style of life on earth, his humility.<sup>18</sup>

*Sequela Christi* is a challenge for the consecrated to participate in this filial kenosis, the very life of God in Jesus Christ who freely set aside his heavenly glory and stepped down becoming one among humanity. John makes it clear: "whoever says, I abide in him, ought to walk just as he walked" (1Jn 2:6). To say differently, the one who encounters Christ and chooses him, finds it logical to give primacy to that which Christ has chosen in his earthly life. The person, career and destiny of Jesus become the meaning and destiny of the called one. Therefore, the icon in front of them in *sequela* is the kenosis of the Master in whom both orthodoxy and orthopraxy go hand in hand.

Kenotic *sequela* costs a great lot. Costly grace is the gospel. It is costly because it costs a man his life and it is grace because it gives man the only true life.<sup>19</sup> The consecrated are called not only to contemplate the sublime mystery of the Word at the bosom of the Father (Jn 1:1) but to follow the Word who became flesh (Jn 1:14), lowered himself to regain the lost humanity. The aim of the call of the disciples, therefore, is to seek that God in eternity who decided to 'exit', to be *Immanuel* and to share the human destiny for the sake of humanity. By committing themselves to make their own the way of life practised personally by Jesus and proposed by him to the disciples they respond to the call and make their own that which he accorded supreme importance in his own life, which was totally for God and his people. That is, to live that vision, which the Master from Nazareth communicated – something to live for, to suffer for, to work for and ultimately to die for – by his life.<sup>20</sup> In Pauline terms to have the same mind of the Master (Phil 2:5) is the core of *sequela*. Albert Nolan portrays this mind of Jesus saying that he is a God who does not want to be given the highest possible rank and status in the society, but wants to take the lowest place and to be without any rank and status; a God who wants to be recognized in the sufferings of the poor and weak, irrevocably committing to their liberation. If this is the true picture of God, then God is more truly human, more thoroughly

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. Thomas J. Norris, 'Jesus Crucified and Forsaken: the face of God for Modern world', *Communio* 26/4 (Winter, 1999), p. 894.

<sup>19</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, London: SCM Press, 1959, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Fuellenbach, *Throw Fire*, Manila: Logos Publications, 1998, p. 21.

*humane* than any human being.<sup>21</sup> Schillebeeckx's definition of God as *Deus Humanissimus* – a supremely human God – also refers to the same fact. The Gospel depicts some constitutive elements of such a response.

### 8.1. Leaving All

Leaving everything – the net, the father (Mk 1:16-20), the tax table (Mk 2:13-14), etc. – was the first challenge the men from Galilee faced, to respond to the call 'follow me'. Jesus' primary intention to win men to that personal following of himself thus starts with 'renunciation' as in the case of himself. He proposes something positive in his invitation to 'follow me'. He communicates this message so powerfully that those who are thus called feel as if they have been captivated and they leave everything for this Man from Nazareth. Leaving is the after-effect of a response to the call. The fundamental option of the consecrated as in the case of the apostles in favour of the Lord severs all their previous bonds and they throw in completely their lot with him. They are called to share the uprooted life of Jesus by breaking all family ties (Mt 8:18-22; Lk 9:57-62). By giving up all other ties they recall and remind everyone: "whoever does not hate father and mother, sons and daughters cannot be the disciple" (Lk 14:26). In biblical terms, to hate can mean to love less. The parallel passage in Mt 10:37 expresses it quite well – 'who loves father and mother more than me'. In Matthew, these words are followed by the saying about taking up the cross and following Jesus. The implication of this sequence is that giving one's family second place to the kingdom of God is one way of taking up the cross.

The leaving everything is to risk everything for Christ. That is, it is a call to descend from the 'mountain' with the Master to set off on the road to Calvary. Thus, renunciation becomes the reflection of the mystery of Golgotha, which is God's final kenosis. The intimacy with the Lord becomes stronger and stronger to the extent they are able to leave everything for His sake. This leaving everything also includes the setting aside of the self.

### 8.2. Abnegation

Abnegation is a denial, especially self-denial. God in Jesus Christ proclaimed that self-exaltation is contradictory to the divine nature itself. As God, his place with the Father has been from the beginning a

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<sup>21</sup> Albert Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity*, Maryknoll: Orbit Press, 1992, pp. 166-167.

going-out from himself to be in the Other and others. In his short span of earthly life the Lord never clung onto his own interest, kept nothing for himself, but placed everything in the hands of the Father. In the Son one discovers the original blessedness of losing oneself and the depth of his *manifesto*: "if anyone wants to become my follower, let him deny himself" (Mk 8:34). Death to the 'self' is the radical command to the consecrated in *sequela Christi*. It is a call, and more than denying things to oneself which is asceticism and self-mortification, it requires the denial of 'self' itself. At the very outset, once and for all, the consecrated is called to say 'no' to certain things, and to say it to oneself. It is the leaving aside of human logic to be guided by a new and unfamiliar divine logic, the logic of the Master. So they do not have their own dispositions. This abnegation is an initial act without which the discipleship and intimacy with the master become impossible.

### 8.3. Being a Sacrificial Victim in Daily Life

The consent of the Son to the paternal will in the Spirit was so deliberate that Jerusalem became the aim of his whole life and his daily programme were steps towards that final destiny. Thus he showed that the way to the Father is the way of the cross and he offers the same to his followers. Only the cross can reveal the depth of *sequela* in its full sense. The gospels witness that each passion-resurrection prediction is followed by a discourse on discipleship and for the most part these conversations between Jesus and the disciples are centred on the qualifications of discipleship. By weaving the passion-resurrection predictions and discipleship discourses together into the narration of the Journey to Jerusalem the evangelists weave together the life of Jesus and the life of the disciple.<sup>22</sup>

It is noteworthy that the historical disciples could not comprehend Jesus prior to his climatic fate on the cross. The passion announcements were in vein, none of the disciples could comprehend them. The rebuke to Peter (Mk 8:33) is not a personal attack on the apostle Peter but on any disciple. Thus, the climax of Jesus' career becomes the key to understand that career and as the cross-orientation of Jesus became the patrimony of the apostles, so too it must be of the consecrated. The cross of the Lord is their point of reference. If one deviates from this point of reference, the leaving everything has no

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<sup>22</sup>Cf. Augustine Stock, *Call to Discipleship: A Literary Study of Mark's Gospel*, Wilmington: Michael Glazier Inc., 1982, p. 146.

sense at all. Jesus' words for Paul: "for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:16), is addressed in the same force to all his followers in the future. The 'yes' to Christ's call is always associated with a death that gives actual expression to one's being buried together with Christ.

To be the active participants in the *sequela Christi* the invitation is to take up the cross *daily* (Lk 9:24). By qualifying it with the term 'daily', Luke has turned it completely into a metaphor. It calls for a daily sharing in the fate of the Master. It is a call to 'die every day' (1Cor 15:31). It means that one is exposed to the risk of death every day for Jesus' sake. The call here is to be a sacrificial victim in daily life. It demands a daily participation in the cross of the Lord, the immolated Pasch (1Cor 5:7) who calls to be immolated in daily life for him and for his people. This call often runs counter to one's own inclinations and expectations; after all who has ever had a natural aptitude for the cross? The moments of coming back to the daily reality from the 'mountain experience', where one sees only Jesus in the lowliness of his human nature is very common (Mt 17:1-8). The only surety here is that there will be nothing more to experience which the Lord has not experienced, because he goes always ahead (Mk 16:7), making the yoke easy to bear (Mt 11:30).

#### 8.4. An Itinerant Life

Jesus was an itinerant Master. Starting from the bosom of the Father, until he reached back, his life was in constant motion. He was not only the Way (Jn 14:6) but was on the way.<sup>23</sup> The phrase 'on the way' is associated with each of the three passion predictions (Mk 8:27; 9:33; 10:32). Disciples have to follow the master on his way. To follow Christ is to commit to him without any guarantee other than that of himself; a total commitment to him without knowing in advance his plans, without knowing today what is going to be done tomorrow, without any personal programme. The insecurity and uncertainty from a human perspective are always there. "What am I to do Lord?" (Acts 22:10). Jesus' answer to this question of Paul was what he ought to do

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<sup>23</sup>In the Acts of the Apostles, the earliest self-designation for Christians was those who belonged to 'the Way' (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Luke's great central section in the gospel (9:51 – 18:14) is structured as a journey. One of Paul's favourite metaphors to describe Christian existence is 'walking' (*peripatein*) (Gal 5:16; Rom 6:4; 13:13; 14:15; Phil 3:17; 1Thess 2:12). In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is described as 'the Way' (Jn 14:6).

at the moment: “get up and go to Damascus” (Acts 22:10). This is often the manner of God’s direction in *sequela*. He directs the person one step at a time instead of laying out the details of the grand plan at once. This uncertainty lies at the heart of an itinerant life. To have nowhere to lay one’s head (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58) in the case of Jesus was literally true. This ‘nowhere’ led him to arrive at a place ‘outside’. As the letter to Hebrews witnesses, “he suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood” (Heb 13:12). His companions must be prepared to share the same uncertain lot. Their call also is to “go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured” (Heb 13:13). This ‘no place’ is having a place outside every human comfort this world can offer; a place that cannot be comprehended in any worldly sense. Before them there is only the following of him who calls himself the Way (Jn 14:6). From a worldly perspective, it is impossible to see where he is leading. So it is permissible to ask: “what then shall we have?” (Mt 19:27).<sup>24</sup>

While walking with Jesus, the disciple learns that true discipleship means to take up one’s cross, to lose one’s life, to be last and least, to drink the cup that Jesus is to drink and to be baptized with Jesus’ baptism. Thus his ultimate kenosis, which is the choice to be present in the world in and through his disciples, becomes real by their kenotic *sequela*, the finality of which is not death but resurrection, life everlasting. If one is bound with the person and fate of Jesus, one becomes the real disciple in whom He is well pleased and one’s life will become a blessing to humanity.

## 9. Life in God

“My Father, ... My Blessedness, if not in You, how will I live?”<sup>25</sup> These are the words of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the *herald* from the East, the faithful disciple who became a blessing for the people of God, by being a man of selfless service to humanity, which was the fruit of his mystical love relationship with Jesus, his Abba. Jesus was his ‘portion and cup’, his ‘food and drink’, his ‘breath of life’. Jesus could live his *ad extra* life on earth only in relation with his Abba, Father as was the case of his *ad intra* life in immanent Trinity. So too, only inclining constantly to Jesus his Abba, St Kuriakose could lead his religious-priestly life. He confessed in his *Colloquies* that he could call Jesus only *Abba* (*Appa* in Malayalam). He was a disciple who abided in the

<sup>24</sup>Cf. von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, p. 149.

<sup>25</sup>CWC, Vol. II, ‘Compunction of the Soul’, II, 142.

master, remained constantly in touch with the master, walked side by side with the master as a good friend or companion and always conversed with the master. Therefore he could give practical advice to others in the same way. For example, to his spiritual daughters, the sisters, he said: "ah! Abide in the love of Jesus Christ. Remain constantly before his eyes. Walk side by side with him and constantly converse with him."<sup>26</sup>

Since the Saint was united with his master so closely, he could imbibe the mind of the master always. For the master, *thy will be done* was the motto that boosted his life on earth. So too for St Kuriakose, the recurring slogan in life was *God's will be done. It will always be done*. Right from the beginning, until the end of his life, he could side up with the divine will both in favourable as well as non-favourable situations. Humility/gentleness was the virtue that the master from Nazareth demanded to learn from him (cf. Mt 11:29). St. Kuriakose, the disciple of that humble master was well known among the foreign bishops and missionaries, clergy and religious priests, nuns and lay faithful for his virtue of humility and soft talk.

It is not seven but seventy times seven, one must forgive (cf. Mt. 18:22), the master said and forgave from the cross praying: "Forgive them, Father! They do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). St Kuriakose kept alive that spirit of his master throughout his life. Therefore, in his Testament he advised his fellow religious to help those families who had wronged the monasteries and at his deathbed he asked for forgiveness of all the members of the community. These are some of the effects of his being one with the master. This saint, by his very life challenges men and women religious and those who are in formation today, to be with the master and to imbibe his attitude and life style.

## Conclusion

The intimacy with the person and fate of the Lord, invites religious to dedicate themselves to bringing others closer to God. Being with the Lord enables them to burn with not only the passion for God but also with that of humanity. One's closeness with the divine can be measured by his closeness with humanity and his dedication in service. Down through the centuries, many religious men and women by their very life witnessed this twofold relationships.

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<sup>26</sup>CWC, Vol. IV, 'Letters', No. VII/6.

The aptitude for intimacy, intimate relationship is natural for human beings. This spirit of relatedness is more visible in the younger generation. If they are channelled and motivated in the right way to take up the risk of keeping up the intimacy with the Lord, right from the early moments of their formation, if they get the aptitude for such a life very early and if they are constantly clinging to that through the daily life, the relationship will be natural for them. They are the religious.