

## ECCLESIAL PERSPECTIVES OF RELIGIOUS FORMATION

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**Abstract:** Kuncheria Pathil CMI, reflecting on the ecclesial perspectives of religious formation, notes that in the period immediately after Vatican II, the Church faced a deep crisis in vocations. Underlying the various reasons for this crises, there was a deeper theological reason. The Council presented and endorsed a new understanding of 'holiness' – every Christian is called to holiness or perfection. Then, why should one become a religious or a priest? A similar crisis has surfaced today in the formation of religious. The Jesus' community at its origins was 'Kingdom Community' marked by the Kingdom values of love, freedom, fellowship and justice. Hence, the Church right from the early period witnessed to powerful spiritual, prophetic and missionary movements led by several holy men and women. A consecrated life is a spiritual and prophetic movement, so it is historically and theologically a powerful missionary movement proclaiming the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of Jesus in a dialogical and liberative way. To effect this in India, religious formation has to be in the cultural, religious, social and ecclesial context of India with a spirit of dialogue or relationship with all the living religions of India. Religious have to function as leaven, salt and light in the Church and move ahead with new experiments and prophetic movements welcoming them as creative polarities and spirit-filled *kairos*, which will lead the Church to ever new and wider horizons.

**Keywords:** formation, Vatican II, vocation, religious, priests, ministry, disappointment, frustration, Church, bishops, convictions, Kingdom, repentance, Community, love, freedom, fellowship, justice, sin, guilt, fear, ritualism, legalism, greed, power, position, communion, *kerygma*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*, autonomy, autocephaly, presbyters, episcopoi, dioceses, provinces, parishes, metropolitans, patriarchs, provincial synods Ecumenical Councils, Religious Orders, Institutes, evangelical counsels, prayer, apostolic activities, community, mission, ministry, movements, solitude, deserts, mountains, spirituality, sign, sacrament,

servant, evangelization, missionaries, vows, consecrated life, cloister, apostolate, consumerism, individualism, market, competition, Mammon, Vatican II, proclamation, witness, prophetic movement, mediator, tensions, hierarchy, traditions, inter-religious, *kairos*.

## 1. Introduction

The period immediately after Vatican II witnessed a deep crisis in vocations, both in priestly and religious life. Between 1964 and 1974 about 20,000 priests and religious left the ministry, some with dispensation and others without dispensation.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this exodus were diverse and very complex – disappointment, frustration and non-fulfilment in their life and ministry, ideological tensions in the Church between bishops and priests, bishops and religious, lack of faith convictions, difficulties of celibate life in a world where there is profusion of sex and hedonistic culture etc. Majority of those who left belonged to the intellectual elite. Underlying the various reasons for this exodus, there was a deeper theological reason. The Council presented and endorsed a new understanding of ‘holiness’. According to the teachings of the Council every Christian is called to holiness or perfection. It is not necessary to become a religious or priest in order to become perfect (LG, Chapter V “The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness”). The earlier notion was that priests and religious follow the way to ‘perfection’, whereas the ordinary lay people are called to ‘salvation’. The obvious question was that if any ordinary Christian can be as holy and perfect as a religious, why should one become a religious or a priest?

A similar crisis is there today in the formation of religious. There have been plenty of seminars and conferences on formation. They were focussed on who are we forming today and what for and how. Are we forming the candidates for ‘religious life and ministry’ or personnel for serving our institutions in order to manage them with maximum efficiency and success along the model of the multi-national companies? A multi-national company’s sole objective is economic profit and success for which they compete with other similar institutions. How do we discern the genuine call to authentic religious life? How do we nurture this religious vocation? Unless we define the objectives of religious life and clearly delineate the means and ways to reach this goal, our formation process and program will be futile

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<sup>1</sup>B. Kloppenburg, *The Priest*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974, p. 5.

without any focus. In this paper, an attempt is made to highlight briefly the ecclesial perspectives of religious formation and introduce the subject in a very general manner.

## 2. Church and Religious Life

Origins of the Church should be understood in its historical, social, cultural, political and religious context. But to understand the specific spiritual nature of the Church we have to situate the Church in its religious context. The religious experience of Jesus and that of the disciples of Jesus played here the most decisive role. The core of the religious experience of Jesus may be characterized as the "*abba* experience," which Jesus proclaimed in the central message of the "Kingdom of God" (Mk 1:14-15). This Kingdom became present in Jesus himself. In Jesus God has revealed himself as the *abba*, the Father, as the Unconditional Love. "It is this revelation of God's love (God as *abba*) that is the true content of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom... The Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus, then, is ultimately his *revelation of God's unconditional love*."<sup>2</sup> The gift or offer of God's love, symbolized by the Kingdom of God, demands human response. When Jesus demands "repentance", he means this human response. Repentance means turning to God and to the neighbour and allowing oneself to be transformed into a new being by this unconditional love of God.

The Church or Jesus Community at its origins was 'Kingdom Communities' marked by the Kingdom values of Love, Freedom, Fellowship and Justice. "It was a community that was free, all-inclusive, open to sharing, prepared for service and radically equal."<sup>3</sup> In persons and communities transformed by love there will be total freedom, fellowship and justice.<sup>4</sup> The coming of the Kingdom into one's life or the experience of God's unconditional love liberates oneself from all internal compulsions and external forces. He or she is liberated from sin, guilt, fear, ritualism, legalism, greed or cravings for power, position or possessions, as shown in the supreme example of Jesus. Freedom flowing from the experience of God's unconditional love leads one to

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<sup>2</sup>George Soares-Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New Society," in *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society*, D. S. Amalorpavadass (ed), Bangalore: NBCLC, 1985, pp. 598-599.

<sup>3</sup>George M. Soares-Prabhu, "Radical Beginnings: The Jesus Community as the Archetype of the Church," *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XV, No. 88 (1985), p. 318.

<sup>4</sup>Soares-Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God...", pp. 601-608.

love others and to commit oneself totally for others and thus to create communion.

Although the concrete structures and lifestyle of such communities are drawn from the society and culture of the time and place, these communities had a prophetic task of challenging the existing structures and lifestyle of the society and offered alternative models. The most important characteristic of the Kingdom Community or Jesus Community was its sense and commission of "mission". It was sent to the world to continue the mission of Jesus by proclaiming the Kingdom, by its *kerygma*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*. The Church was thus a spiritual movement, prophetic movement, social movement and consequently a missionary movement. The Church was primarily not an institution with a central administration, although the early Churches had a strong sense of unity and communion. Local/Regional Churches had their legitimate autonomy and autocephaly within the fundamental unity of Christian faith and sacraments, with common Scriptures and the Apostolic Tradition and ministry. The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church was a Communion of different local Churches.<sup>5</sup> The ministerial and organizational structures of the Church too came from the structures of the society of its times. 'Presbyters' (Elders) of the Jewish synagogue communities and 'Episcopoi' of the Greek civil administration became the sacred ministers of the Church. The administrative divisions of the Church into Dioceses, Provinces, Parishes and primatial authoritative structures, such as, Metropolitans, Patriarchs etc., and the system of Provincial Synods and Ecumenical Councils and so on were modelled after the Roman political administrative system.<sup>6</sup>

The history of the Church right from the early period witnessed to powerful spiritual, prophetic and missionary movements led by several holy men and women. They were clearly inspired by the Holy Spirit in response to the needs of the Church and they subsequently founded their own religious communities for their followers. All of them had practically the same motto, to follow Christ freely, intensely and radically and to continue the ministry of Jesus and that of the Church in their own particular historical context and needs. All of them were fascinated by the life and example of Jesus who was chaste, poor and obedient to the Father and by His absolute commitment to the Kingdom of God. Four main elements run through all the

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<sup>5</sup>Kuncheria Pathil, *Theology of the Church: New Horizons*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2006, pp. 12-15.

<sup>6</sup>Pathil, *Theology of the Church*, pp. 15-28.

Religious Orders and Institutes, namely, practice of evangelical counsels, prayer, apostolic activities and community life. Intense and radical following of Christ entails not only following the life-style of Jesus by practicing the evangelical counsels but also continuing His mission and ministry by apostolic activities. As the Church is by its very nature missionary and prophetic, so also the consecrated life is essentially apostolic, prophetic and missionary.

Though the founders of the various Religious Orders and institutes had responded in their own times to their special spiritual call to follow Christ radically by a life of holiness motivated by the love of God and their neighbour, in a way those spiritual movements were equally a challenge and corrective to the Church of their times to return to the authentic Gospel and the evangelical way of life. Those religious Orders and Movements were the gifts of God to the Church for spiritual renewal. Those holy men and women under the guidance of the Spirit constantly urged the Church to purify itself, renew it and return to the Gospel. The consecrated life is therefore 'a spiritual movement' 'in the Church raised by the Holy Spirit, and in the history of the Church it is 'a permanent element' both in the East and the West, though particular religious orders and institutes cannot claim any permanency (VC 5, 63).

Though the different Religious Orders are known by their own spiritualities, such as Ignatian, Carmelite, Franciscan, Dominican etc., the essence of the spirituality of consecrated life is one and the same. It is "the spirituality of Jesus" who is the way, model, guide and inspiration for the consecrated life. Jesus was constantly in communion with the Father. He often retired to the solitude of deserts and mountains, praying and communing with the Father the whole night (Lk 5:16; 6:12; 22:41; Jn 14:10; 8:29). But Jesus led an intensely active life (VC 74), being always with the people, teaching them, healing them, feeding them, with a compassionate heart. It is *an apostolic spirituality*, "a spirituality of action, seeing God in all things and all things in God" (VC 74). It is "understood as life in Christ or life according to the Spirit... (where) the consecrated person is guided by the Spirit and configured by him to Christ, in full communion of love and service in the Church" (VC 93).

The ecclesial dimension of religious life and the commitment of the religious to the mission of the Church are emphasized in the various documents of Vatican II (LG, PC, AG) and in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*. The call to religious life is not merely a personal call for sanctification, but it is essentially an ecclesial and missionary call.

The ecclesial role of consecrated life is to be a sign in the Church constantly reminding the faithful the meaning of the Church as the Body and Bride of Christ. The presence of consecrated life in the Church reminds the faithful the eschatological nature of the Church to be a sign, sacrament and servant of the Kingdom of God. The history of the missions is a powerful witness of the role of the religious orders and institutes in the evangelization of the world. It was primarily the religious missionaries who brought the Gospel to the four corners of the world and planted the Church among the different peoples and cultures. Those who are called to consecrated life are “impelled by a love which the Holy Spirit has poured into the hearts of those men and women, who spend themselves for Christ and the Church, which is His Body... The more ardently they unite themselves to Christ, the more vigorously they live for the Church” (PC 1).

In religious life the following of Christ by the evangelical counsels or vows are practiced in the context of community life. It is the religious community which endorses and spells out the norms and practices of the vows. Hence, community life or common life is an essential element of consecrated life (VC 42). Though the religious community is not a natural family, Vatican II affirmed that religious community is a “true family” gathered together in the Lord’s name and rejoicing in his presence (PC 15). Consecrated life is a sign set within the Church, which is a sign of the unity and fraternity of the whole humankind. Fraternal life bonded in love in the consecrated life is an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion (VC 42). Today in the contemporary culture of individualism and hectic personal activities of apostolate, the community life in consecrated life is at stake. As the members of the community are very often outside the cloister for different kinds of apostolate, new ways and means have to be evolved for the strengthening of community life. In the context of mission today both in India and overseas, where many religious stay and work mostly alone, the concept and practice of community life have to be redefined and new orientation be given.

Our contemporary world and its hedonistic culture is distorted and fragmented with the trends of consumerism, individualism, market, competition etc. ‘Mammon’ seems to be the only God today. Man has become shallow, restless and fragmented. Humanity and the world today have to return to their spiritual roots for the survival of humankind and of our planet Earth. Therefore the call of the religious to become a sign in the Church of the Kingdom of God and to live its transcendental values is all the more important. Vatican II and *Vita*

*Consecrata* set the religious or the consecrated life at the very heart of the Church as a *sign*, which meant the prophetic witness of the religious to the primacy of God and the Kingdom of God. *Vita Consecrata* mentions the lessons from the history of the Church, where holy men and women, consecrated to God and inspired by the Holy Spirit, exercised this prophetic ministry speaking in the name of God to all, even to the leaders and pastors of the Church. They courageously announced the Word of God and denounced sin and evil even in high places without fear (VC 84).

Ever since the emergence of religious orders, there has been some tension and conflicts between the hierarchy of the Church and the religious communities. It is in a way inherent and arises out of their different call, nature and function. This phenomenon of a tension or polarization or clash between the institutional (hierarchical) and the charismatic (prophetic) is clearly evident in the dynamics of the history of the Church. Whenever the institutional/hierarchical elements became more dominant at the expense of the charismatic/prophetic in the Church, the latter reasserts itself in the forms of various spiritual and prophetic movements and persons/communities. The origins of various religious movements/institutes (Orders and Congregations) may be explained and understood as the assertion of the spiritual/prophetic vs. the extreme tendencies of the institutional and the hierarchical elements in the Church.

God acts in the events of history and *Vita Consecrata* asks the religious to discern the signs of the time and prophetically involve in the events of our time: "The consecrated life has the prophetic task of recalling and serving the divine plan for humanity by attending to the signs of God's providential action in history... it is through historical events we discern God's plan and effectively involve in the events of our time... but discerning the signs of the times must be done in the light of the Gospel... and by opening to the interior prompting of the Holy Spirit" (VC 73). The religious orders, institutes and communities have to make a serious introspection today, whether their proclamation, life and witness today is a credible prophetic sign or a counter-sign. Often the prophetic movement to which they originally belonged to has become a powerful and gigantic institution, which has swallowed up the prophetic movement. They became closely aligned to ecclesiastical structures and authorities and as a result they have lost their liminal and prophetic quality.

As consecrated life is a spiritual and prophetic movement, so is it historically and theologically a powerful missionary movement. The

specific mission of the religious is to be a sign within the Church, reminding the Church and the faithful of their spiritual and eschatological nature of the unbreakable union with Christ to be His Body and Spouse. As the religious remain in the heart of the Church, they also share in the overall mission of the Church. "The task of devoting themselves wholly to mission is therefore included in their call... By evangelical counsels they are made totally free for the service of the Gospel... sense of mission is essential to consecrated life" (VC 72). In the history of missions the religious always played a unique role by evangelizing different peoples and nations and building up authentic local Churches.

In the context of a positive understanding of religious pluralism and God's one plan of salvation which includes every one, mission and proclamation of the Gospel is not simply proclaiming the name of Jesus from door to door as some do, but *proclaiming the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of Jesus in a dialogical and liberative way*. However, this in no way excludes the direct proclamation of Jesus, the unique mediator, which may lead people to personal conversion and to joining the band of Jesus' disciples. The Church has to exist among all peoples as the sign, sacrament and instrument of the Kingdom of God. But first and foremost, the mission of the Church in a religiously pluralistic context is to create "a community of communities", cutting across all boundaries - caste, ethnic, cultural, social, political or religious. It is a mission of "bridge-making" between various communities, castes, cultural groups and religious groups and it demands new styles of living together as a community of communities.

### **3. Formation in Ecclesial Context**

As the Church at its origins was a spiritual, prophetic and missionary movement, so was religious life, which originated in the heart of the Church as a sign continuously reminding the Church of its nature and mission. The various official documents of the Church on Religious Life affirmed the essential relationship of religious life to the Church. Formation should be therefore situated in the ecclesial context. I shall highlight some aspects of formation in the universal, eastern and Indian ecclesial contexts.

Communion (*koinonia*) is the heart and essence of the Church both in the New Testament and in the ecclesiology of Vatican II. The inner reality of the Church is the divine communion. It is a participation in the life of the Triune God in and through Jesus Christ. This vertical communion of ours is attained sacramentally in a historical human



community on the one hand, and on the other the divine communion is the ultimate basis for the human communion. In other words, the vertical or divine communion leads to the horizontal human communion and vice-versa. As Henry de Lubac has said, the *communio* in the *sancta* (holy things) gives birth to the *communio* of the *sancti* (holy people, saints).<sup>7</sup> The communion of the Local Church was primarily expressed and realized in the Eucharistic celebration and it led to real communion in life by sharing both spiritual and material things and by building up community at a deeper level. Common sharing of goods and properties among the early Christians was an expression of the communion at all levels. In the early Church the communion, however, was never limited to the Local Church. Communion in the Local Church naturally led to the communion of the different Local Churches - *Communio Ecclesiarum*. According to Catholic ecclesiology, the Pope, as the successor of Peter, has a definite role to play in the Communion of Churches. He is a visible sign of unity and the bond of communion, the servant and instrument of unity. The formation of religious has to take place in the context of the communion of the Churches. Communion with the Pope and the local Bishops and a warm or intimate relationship with them are absolutely necessary for the ecclesial formation of religious.

There is an accusation that the hierarchical Church and the religious communities appear to function as parallel institutions. Local Bishops and Religious Congregations, especially of Pontifical right, have often mutual tensions, suspicions, misunderstandings and even confrontations. Religious Congregations of 'Pontifical Right' are functioning not directly under the local, regional and national Bishops and the latter do not have much control over the religious. The Bishops often complain that they do not know anything about the religious, their activities, mission and institutions. The religious, on the other hand, complain that they do not get enough support from the local Bishops and parish priests. They are not adequately represented in the diocesan meetings and forums, and sometimes the presence of the religious in the diocese is completely ignored. There is a grave situation today that as there are more than enough priests in the diocese, the religious are often unwanted in the diocese and their presence is even ignored. Such tensions, misunderstanding and unhealthy relationship between bishops and religious have to be

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<sup>7</sup>Henry de Lubac, "Credo... Sanctorum Communionem", in *Int. Kath. Zeitschrift*, I (1972), 18-32.

rectified for the well-being of the whole Church in whose heart is the mission of the religious located. Formation has to be given in the ecclesial context in full communion with the hierarchy of the Church.

Religious communities originate in the Local Churches, and they are endorsed, recognized and approved by the local hierarchy. Their ministry is entirely at the disposal of the local Churches. But when religious communities grow and expand, their service is extended to other local Churches and to the Universal Church. In the process of their growth and expansion, they are approved by the Universal Church, and they get the status of Congregations of "Pontifical Right". It means that they are functioning directly under the supervision of the Roman Pontiff, and their service is generously extended to the needs of the Universal Church. Although the religious communities are born in one 'Sui Iuris' or Individual Church, Religious Congregations of Pontifical Right are called to serve all the 'Sui Iuris' Churches directly under the supervision of the Roman Pontiff and the Universal Church. Formation of religious therefore has to be under the guidance of the Universal Church and in the context of the Universal Church. Familiarity with the magisterial teachings of the Universal Church, adequate knowledge of the history of the Church and its universal mission are essential ingredients in religious formation. They have to be also familiar with the liturgical, spiritual and canonical traditions of all Churches both in the East and the West. The young religious have to be inspired to take up missions in all the *sui iuris* Churches and in all parts of the world. The candidates must be given enough opportunities to study the languages necessary for their mission and they must be introduced to different cultures in the new missionary context. Religious Congregations of Pontifical Right must be ready to start communities, houses, regions and provinces in the different "*sui iuris*" Churches whenever and wherever required.

The categories of Eastern and Western Churches and traditions have their origin with the division of Roman Empire into East and West after the death of Emperor Theodosius (395) and his two sons separately ruled the two empires. Thereafter the East and West developed their own distinct "ways" with different traditions, liturgies and theological thinking. Although the Persian Empire and the Persian Church remained outside this political category of "East", yet the Chaldean Church of Persia, its liturgy and theological thinking shared the general "Eastern culture and ethos". As the St Thomas Christians of India were ruled by the Chaldean Bishops of Persia from the 5<sup>th</sup> century till the period of the Portuguese, the Church of St Thomas in

India naturally became a 'hybrid Church' having the features of Indian, Persian and Oriental. The religious congregations or communities having their origins among the St Thomas Christians share this Indian and Oriental heritage. Therefore in the formation of these religious there must be sufficient space to imbibe the Oriental spirit by the study of the history of the Eastern Churches, their liturgy and spirituality. However, we shall not forget the fact that the Syro-Malabar Church today has been enriched immensely by its relationship to the Western Church and its liturgical, spiritual and theological heritage. Identity of a Church is not static and ready-made, but dynamic and processive in continuous relatedness to all other Churches, cultures and traditions.<sup>8</sup> Identity of a Church is like that of any living being continuously growing in a process of giving and taking. Ecumenical approach and ecumenical learning by an open relationship is essential to religious formation today.

Finally, religious formation has to be in *Indian* ecclesial context. Though Christianity has been in India from the first Christian century itself and the Church of St Thomas might have been fully and authentically *Indian*, the concept and awareness of a Church typically Indian is of later origin along with the cravings for national independence. I shall not touch upon the history of the attempts for Indian Christianity, elaborated by different historians and theologians. I only want to point out here that religious formation in India has to be in our cultural, religious and social context. In many formation houses of the religious the students are trained in an artificial world separated from the actual world. God is meeting us and acting probably not within the high and secluded walls of our formation houses but in the midst of the world in the actual life and problems of humans in the concrete world of labour, toils, poverty, illness, bondage, sufferings, conflicts and tragedies. Formation of religious and seminarians has to be in this actual life context. The triple dialogue or immersion called by the FABC has this spirit of identifying with our life-world and its problems. It was a call to the Churches to be immersed in the life of Asia's poor, Asia's rich cultures and religious traditions.<sup>9</sup> Formation of religious in India has to be in the living context of India's massive

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<sup>8</sup>Kuncheria Pathil, "The Syro-Malabar Church in Theologizing: Context and Concerns Today" in *Syro-Malabar Theology in Context*, Mathew Manakatt and Jose Puthenveetil (eds), Kottayam: OIRSI, 2007, pp. 183-185.

<sup>9</sup>G. Rosales and C. G. Arevalo (eds), *For All the Peoples of Asia*, New York and Manila: Orbis/Claretians, 1992, p. 14.

poverty on the one hand, and its rich and flourishing religions and cultures on the other hand. In this regard, Pope Francis challenges us with new surprises every day. He invites us to see the face of Christ in the poor, the sick and the marginalized. Once our students are able to discern the face of Christ in such people in our own neighbourhood, then they will be able to see the face of Christ in the Bible they study and they will understand the meaning of the word of God in their theological courses and classes.

India has a millennia-old rich culture with a variety of sub-cultures with emphasis of unity in diversity. In the general overarching culture, reality is conceived as “cosmotheandric” - a unity of cosmos, God and human, which are inseparably united.<sup>10</sup> One cannot be without the other two. Human (Atman) is the manifestation and reflection of the Absolute (Brahman). As this culture focuses on unity, it emphasizes ahimsa, non-violence and universal love. The whole cosmos points to God the Absolute and universal harmony. Protection of the earth and nature is the integral principle of this culture. Natural resources may be used for human life, but never exploited and wasted. Man is given the stewardship to protect the nature for the welfare of all. There is an accusation that Christianity in India has become to some extent alienated from this ‘Indian culture’ due to its affinity with the Western world and its consumeristic culture. Christian doctrinal, theological and liturgical systems are drawn mainly from other cultures. The ‘ecclesiogenesis’ and liturgical inculturation have not taken in a big way in India in dialogue with Indian cultural genius and ethos. In the formation of the religious more attention should be given to integration into our Indian culture and its life-style. More courses should be included in the curriculum on Indian history, philosophy and culture. Serious and sustained efforts should be made for inculturation in our liturgy, prayers, rituals and theological thinking.

Another vital element of immersion is dialogue or relationship with all the living religions of India. Some Christian missionaries in the past thought that other religions were evil and they had to be replaced by Christianity. Others thought that all the other religions are natural and imperfect and they will be fulfilled in Christianity. Today there is an increasing awareness on the value and validity of other world religions, as affirmed by Vatican II. The Council called Christians to acknowledge and promote the values of other religions

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<sup>10</sup>The concept of reality as “cosmotheandric” was developed by late Raimundo Panikkar, the well-known Indian theologian and philosopher.

and to enter into a healthy relationship with them in dialogue. In a world threatened by religious fundamentalism, atheism, agnosticism and religious indifference all the world religions have to relate to each other in dialogue and collaboration for the welfare, peace, harmony and prosperity of the whole world. Therefore, it is inevitable that in formation the students should be introduced into all the world religions and their common foundations. They should be familiarized with the tools and skills of interreligious dialogue and collaboration. It is said that to be authentically religious today, one has to be inter-religious. Exclusion is replaced by inter-relationship and collaboration.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In the ecclesial perspectives of formation we have to hold together two views in complementarity: On the one hand, formation should be in harmony with the directions and teachings of the Church. We have to be with the Church and 'feel with the Church'. Religious have to be the agents and spokespersons of the Church. They have to be faithful missionaries of the Church. On the other hand, the prophetic role of the religious in the Church has to be emphasized today. Religious have to function as leaven, salt and light in the Church. They have to be the avant-garde in the Church by their prophetic witness and challenge. They have to move ahead in the Church with new experiments and prophetic movements. There may arise some tension when we hold together these two different postures and approaches. Such tension and conflict must be understood and welcomed as creative polarities and spirit-filled *kairos*, which will lead the Church to ever new and wider horizons.