

**RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY AS COMMUNION  
OF COMMON LIFE  
IN THE LIGHT OF CCEO CULTURE**

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Dr. Sibi deals with the 1) Nature of Communion, 2) Communion and Common Life in the Religious Community (Monasteries, orders, Congregations and other forms of Consecrated Life) 3) The Juridical Conditions Essential for Religious Communities (Provinces, Houses, Superiors, Synaxes, and Councils, Rightful admission, observance of Statutes, Role and Responsibilities of superiors, Stability Cused by the Public Profession of Vows (Obedience, Chastity, Poverty) and 4) Stable Manner of Common Life and Sources and Manifestations of Communion. The key to her article could be found in her concluding statement: "It is a fact that nobody can 'kill' us from outside; we, the individual and community, die from within, in the absence of communion."

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## Introduction

The promulgation of the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (CCEO),<sup>1</sup> for all the Eastern Catholic Churches, today marked an era of two decades in the history of the universal Church. This remarkable occasion highlights the impact of the CCEO in the life and mission of the Eastern Churches in general and consecrated life in particular. In the past twenty years the spirit and light of the Code have been very much vibrant and have acted as a catalyst in the life of the religious in India. Monasteries, orders, congregations, as well as other forms of consecrated life are numerous in the Church. Each one of these expresses the spirit of communion in its own way based on its particular law and practices. This is a study of religious life under the qualification of community life as a state of common life in communion as expressed in various canons in the Title XII of the CCEO on religious institutes and other forms of consecrated life.

The Eastern Code presents an excellent legislation (cc. 410-572) on all forms of consecrated life founded and developed in the heart of the traditional sources of the Eastern Churches. The CCEO highlights the remarkable traditions and vivified spirit of the Eastern monastic way of consecrated life based on the solid theology and renewed spirituality of religious life as expressed in the Second Vatican Council. The 162 canons (410-572) on religious institutes and other forms of consecrated life contain the historical, theological and spiritual elements in an integrated harmony with juridical principles and norms.

It is true that a religious institute is a seat of communion in the frame of unity, cultivated and fostered by common life in a community. The CCEO guarantees the peculiarities of each religious institute in the Eastern *sui iuris* Churches. This is evident in the provisions in the common law for the particular

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<sup>1</sup>CCEO was promulgated by Pope John Paul II on 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1990 through the Apostolic Constitution *Sacri Canones*. See AAS 82 (1990) 1033-1363.

laws of institutes. The provisions given to each religious institute certainly have a specific impact on the life and activities of communities in the mission of the Church. Hence it is the duty of the religious to promote the life and traditions of their institutes through their special expressions of communion and common life in the community. It is important to note that this study considers mainly the consecrated life under the category of 'religious institutes' with particular reference to the theological understanding of communion, common life and community. In order to discuss these matters we need to analyze the meaning of the terms and go through the regulations of the Code regarding religious life.

### 1. Nature of Communion

The Greek word *koinonia*, generally translated "fellowship," "communion," "participation," signifies the meaning and essence of Christianity as a whole.<sup>2</sup> The Sacred Scripture underlines these ideas and characteristics.<sup>3</sup> The early Christians' fellowship became the guiding principle of the cenobitic monasticism as a participation in the spirit of communion or *koinonia*.<sup>4</sup> It was the communitarian life of the NT fellowship that everything was shared as common and had a participation in the form of service. It was an antecedent life pattern for the later religious community life, living together in the spirit of communion. The communion, attained in the

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<sup>2</sup>P. Hennebusch, "Christian Fellowship in the Epistle to the Philippians," *The Bible Today* 12 (1964), 793.

<sup>3</sup>According to St Paul, the fundamental aspect of a Christian vocation is *koinonia* (1Cor 1: 9). It is understood that a Christian maybe described as partner or companion or joint-shareholder (Phil 1: 7; Rev 1: 9) with his or her fellow-Christians. St. Luke also portrays, in the same way, that the life of the first Christians was as a fellowship unity, which means, "they had one faith and one heart" (Acts 2: 42). St. John, in his first epistle attributes the participation in *koinonia* is a communion or fellowship with the Father through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, leading the faithful to a fellowship with one another in union with Holy Trinity (1Jn 1: 3).

<sup>4</sup>L. Lefort, *Les vies Coptes de Saint Pakhôme*, Louvain 1966, 27.

frame work of the community when the members share the peculiarities of common life, is essential to the consecrated life of the religious.

The monastic communities of St. Pachomius and St. Basil were usually known as *Cenobium* or *Koinonium*, radiating the spirit and vibrations of unity, fellowship and service. The dynamism of the common life, as depicted in this early monasticism and in the rules or decrees of the Church, was transmitted to the various forms of consecrated community. The foundation stone of a religious community is laid down on the rock of the communion of members living in common. The true signs of communion - gathering of the members, daily practices, participation in common life, study, discussions etc. - are the important aspects necessary for the community living.

Today all these practices have become a kind of 'obstacle' for the religious in their busy apostolic undertakings and brimful daily schedule. The common life in community along with its external and internal practices used to provide a certain inner spirit of love, hope and faith. Today it is not a surprise to see the observances are like the dry bones in prophet Ezekiel's vision that are waiting to be quickened by a living spirit. The structural framework and rules are to provide support and space to the vivifying spirit of love. The following words are fitting to express the essential characters of a common living in community:

Listen to the word! Read the Scriptures! Read again and again with faith and love until the word comes to life within you, penetrating the deepest layers of your unconscious. Again, celebrate the Eucharist! Break bread with the community!... Again, listen to the community. Get guidance from some representatives of the community; read the mystical literature the community

has produced. Never get isolated, never go out on a limb, always be with the community!<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Communion and Common Life in the Religious Community

The CCEO recognizes the traditional monasticism of the East as the prototype of later developments in religious institutes and it has become the basic characteristic of the consecrated life. Article II (cc. 433-503)<sup>6</sup> of Title XII presents a complete and sufficient treatment of the monastic life. According to the legislative style of the CCEO there are different forms of religious life which follow a common life in community and share the spirit of communion.

### 2.1. Monasteries

Among the religious institutes, the monasteries in the Eastern tradition will always hold a special place. The personal and communal practices of the monks and nuns in the community helped to prepare them for a union with God in eternity. A life of dedication or consecration within the structure of a community, observing *the rules* and *the traditions* or particular styles of monasticism reached its highest degree in the early monasteries. The monastic life style is an exemplary model for orders, congregations and other forms of common life.<sup>7</sup> Monastic community is also considered *the stable manner of common living* in an institute approved by the church, striving for the perfection of charity by the practice of rules under a legitimate superior. This stability of life signifies the

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<sup>5</sup>W. Johnston, *Christian Mysticism Today*, San Francisco 1973, 10.

<sup>6</sup>For a useful commentary on different types of monasteries, see C. Pujol, *De religiosis orientalibus ad normam vigentis iuris*, Roma 1957, 62-78.

<sup>7</sup>J. Andres, "Observaciones introductorias al titulo 'De monachis coeterisque religiosis' del CCEO," *Appolinaris* 65 (1992), 137-39; for more details about the institutes of consecrated life, J. Abbas, *Two Codes in Comparison*, *Kanonika* 7, Rome 1997, 24-45.

perpetuity, perseverance, continuity and total dedication of life to Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

## **2.2. Orders, Congregations and Other Forms of Consecrated Life**

Having established the norms for monks in Chapter One Article II, the Code continues, in Article III, canons 504-553 and 554-570 to describe the characteristics of orders, congregations and other forms of consecrated life. As seen in the monastic tradition, these religious institutes have the same characteristics (c. 410) such as common life in a community, founded by a legitimate ecclesiastical authority and the public profession by vows or by a sacred bond. The members of these religious institutes pursue perfection within the evangelical counsels through the observance of the statutes under the guidance of the legitimate superiors. If the common life is excluded from the life of these institutes, then Pujol suggests that it cannot be called religious living the spirit of common life in communion.<sup>9</sup>

The *CCEO* emphasizes an important element of consecrated life, namely, *communion* among the members of the institutes (c. 563 §1, 3<sup>o</sup>). Even though the members of the secular institutes do not follow or imitate the manner of life as constituted for the religious institutes, they have to express the rays of communion in their services. They must have a life of communion, a fraternal sharing among themselves whenever it is possible and profess the three evangelical counsels by a sacred bond. It is recognized by the Church and they have to assume certain activities in order to participate in the mission of the Church.<sup>10</sup> Since the common law does not make any

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<sup>8</sup>D. Salachas, "La vita monastica e religiosa nel CCEO," *Euntes Docete* 48 (1995/1), 88.

<sup>9</sup>C. Pujol, *La Vita religiosa Orientale: commento al codice de diritto canonico Orientale (canoni 410-572)*, Roma 1994, 396.

<sup>10</sup>D. Salachas, "La vita monastica e religiosa nel CCEO," 133-34.

norms stating that the members of secular institutes should lead a common life, there is no obligation for them to live together in a community. Even if not lived in a community, their consecrated life, organized as society,<sup>11</sup> is lived in the world by a consecration.

### **3. The Juridical Conditions Essential to Religious Communities**

The organized and structurally arranged religious community is a life in common in order to be together for sharing as stated in the Eastern Code c. 410. It demands certain conditions or obligations like that of rightful admission and formation of the members, observation of rules or statutes under the guidance of a legitimate superior, stability through the public profession of vows and sharing a common life in a legitimately constituted community.

#### **3.1. Provinces and Houses**

For the creation of a better fraternal atmosphere within a community, there is the need of juridical divisions such as provinces and houses, with an efficient governing structure in accord with the common law and the statutes. The relationship between these elements will provide an atmosphere which fosters growth in unity and fraternity in the entire institute, which, with its superiors and members, is the place where communion has to take root enabling every member to share with others.

The “house” indicates the ‘seat’ of a community, the flowering place of fraternity in common life among the members of the religious institute. Through the flowering communion among the members of a house, the Church could expect a great deal of strength in order to work and toil for the salvation of the people. Even though each religious house has its own

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<sup>11</sup>G. Nedungatt, *The Spirit of the Eastern Code*, Roma-Bangalore 1993, 114.

autonomy in governance, the emphasis given in the Code is for a mutual collaboration between the institutes, bishops and Apostolic See. This is supported and encouraged by the Eastern Code and it calls for a unity and fraternity in the Church through the means of small houses and communities of the religious. The change from the norms of PAL to the new Code is an attempt to implement this nature as well as different kinds of relationships, collaboration and communion in the total mission of the Church.

### **3.2. Superiors, *Synaxes* and Councils**

The major and local superiors (cc. 412-432), their councils and synaxes (cc. 511-516) govern the institutes, safeguard the good of all members and the different parts of the institutes, promote the vitality of the institute as a whole and foster cooperation among the provinces, regions and houses of the entire institute. The superiors are the primary instruments who fulfill the mission and other activities of the Church in collaboration with the bishops and pastors as well as with other religious institutes. They strengthen the faith and give necessary help in cultivating mature attitudes among all the members, through a strong intimate relationship with the Lord. In an institute, the superiors become powerful means of fostering communion and unity among the religious; they inspire the members to share this experienced communion first in the community and then with other people.

The important aspect stressed in canon 512 §1 is that the general *synaxis* in the religious institutes “should be the true sign of its unity in love.” It shows that the Code emphasizes the major superiors and general *synaxis* should be an essential element in promoting unity in the entire institute. An appropriate balance in governance of superiors with the participation of all the members is necessary and it helps the institute to be the mind and action of the Church in this modern time.



### 3.3. Rightful Admission

In the case of religious institutes, the initial thread which unites the subject to the institute and the institute to the subject is an act of valid admission into the institute. By reason of the admission, there exists an obligation to obey the norms or prescriptions of the rules and statutes and accept the leadership of the legitimate superiors. The legitimate entrance of a candidate into a particular religious institute may require a valid formation (cc 517-525), public profession of the evangelical counsels and a public acceptance by the legitimate superior. It is the acceptance into the religious institute by the legitimate superiors that creates the moral and juridical bond binding the institute. Through the formation the members are permanently motivated to aim more fully toward holiness of life as well as their abilities are developed through the study of sacred doctrine and the acquisition of human culture in accordance with the needs of the time, and they thereby become more skillful in the arts and tasks which are legitimately undertaken by the institute.

An important aspect of this formation is the growth of a member in a community. The communal life, the fraternal union, will help its members to know one another better. A full religious life of faithful commitment to God is possible only in a community. The members support each other in order to have a fruitful life and to serve the people of God in the spirit of their own charism and in accordance with the norms of the statutes. At the same time, the institute, in arranging its programme communally, is able to structure it so that they can come together and may live together.<sup>12</sup> The ongoing formation will help the religious to meet the needs of the Church and of the people. Similarly, the program of formation offers ample opportunity for a member to confirm her/his calling, reach the spiritual and personal maturity that will enable her/him

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<sup>12</sup>J. Hite, "Admission of Candidates and formation of Members," in J. Hite et al., eds., *A Handbook on Canons 573-746*, Minnesota 1985, 162.

embrace the life and mission of the institute. Hence it is true to say that,

Such flexibility (of the on- going spiritual or apostolic training) in the law is an attempt to recognize the operation of grace in each person and thus to offer each institute wide enough parameters to allow the grace to operate, to observe the development and growth in each person, all within the flexible structure of a common program that leads to a member being able to make a life commitment.<sup>13</sup>

### **3.4. Observance of Statutes**

No institute could be approved unless it is in possession of proper rules or statutes specifically defining the fundamental juridical structures, functions, duties, practices, procedures of governing and particular purpose or the charism.<sup>14</sup> The three evangelical counsels are to be practiced according to the specific statutes of the institutes under the guidance of the superiors. The statutes or the constitutions, most define the “patrimony of an institute” (PC 2), must have some juridical means to foster values and sustain the rights and obligations of the members in a community. The primary duty to follow or obey the norms of the statutes of any form of religious institute rests upon the individual members. Each member should discover the means to follow the norms faithfully; this should be in harmony with the spirit of the particular law of the institute. The statutes (cc. 413; 415 §2; 420; 422 §2; 543; 572) for religious institutes are referred to as an important aspect for the common life in order to foster the communion in community. In other words, the members always have a personal responsibility to fulfill their freely chosen commitment to follow Christ in a ‘particular way’ in a ‘particular institute.’

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<sup>13</sup>J. Hite, “Admission of Candidates,” 163.

<sup>14</sup>Scris, “Normae,” 316, no. 21.

### 3.5. Role and Responsibilities of Superiors

“Under the guidance of Legitimate Superiors” (c. 410) is a requirement common to all institutes of consecrated life that pursue a juridic state of perfection. No society, institute or community, whether ecclesiastical or civil, can exist and grow without some authority or superior having the power to direct. The new Code of the Eastern Churches focuses exclusively on the governance and recognizes the role and power of the internal superior or authority in the religious institutes. The governance “is a charism, a spiritual reality given freely by God to individuals for some special purpose in a community.”<sup>15</sup> “Such authority goes with the vow of obedience and is conferred for the achievement of the goal of the congregation, the spread of the Gospel in and through the unity, growth and service of the sisters.”<sup>16</sup>

The role of superiors in their pastoral and spiritual leading becomes the encouraging and harmonizing factors of the gifts of leadership in the community. The right to exercise authority encourages each sister/brother to become that person whom the Father called in Christ. The competent superior of the institute, province and community is confident that the Spirit, who creates diversity is able, by his/her loving influence, to preserve union of mind and heart among the sisters/brothers in a community. In this accepting community atmosphere, created by the influence of the superior, the grace of baptism and religious vocation gives rise to a number of leadership qualities among the members, all of which contribute to the vitality of the community and the fulfillment of the mission in the Church. Since the superior is the canonical leader of the institute and the unifier of the communities, she/he has the authority over and is responsible for spiritual and apostolic

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<sup>15</sup>M. Linscott, “Leadership, Authority and Religious Government,” *Review for Religious* 52 (1993), 167.

<sup>16</sup>D. Linscott, “Religious Government,” 168.

leadership.<sup>17</sup> They exercise their authority according to the spirit and laws or statutes of the institute. They are bound to encourage the participation of all members to foster fraternity in the community and in the apostolic fields of their pastoral activities as well. On the local level, the superior serves as an instrument of the Holy Spirit who is shaping the community, from within, into a single body for the building up of the kingdom. By different terminology, one could clarify this by detailing the responsibilities of a superior such as animation, administration and formation.

It is important to notice that *CCEO* c. 421 describes the significant role and qualifications of a superior's exercise of power. Each member of the institute participates in the power of authority and the superior exercises their power only in collaboration. "The goal of this mutual exercise of power is the co-creation of a life in communion wherein God may be sought after and valued in preference to anything else."<sup>18</sup> Being an example to all the members, the superior encourages a close fraternity within the communities, particularly by providing the same message and love of the Word of God. This helps them to have conformity with the Gospel and to live in accordance with the spirit of their own statutes.

The responsibility and role of a superior, as indicated in c. 421, is mainly a pastoral one. She/he must seek the good of everyone in order to foster a true atmosphere of unity within the community; she/he must take care of the needy such as the sick, the unruly and the fainthearted, in a special way, by visiting them personally and also by providing everything necessary to meet their personal needs. Normally, it is not an easy task for the superiors, but still it is a personal relationship established between them, and the members will play an

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<sup>17</sup>S. Schneiders, "Towards a Theology of Religious Obedience," in L. Quininez, ed., *Starting Points*, Washington 1980, 62-63.

<sup>18</sup>H. Modde, "Religious Houses and Governance," in J. Hite et al., eds., *A Handbook on Canons 573-746*, Minnesota 1985, 76.

important role in fostering fraternity and cultivating an attitude of listening and confidence. The Code suggests certain means for forming the relationship between the superior and the members: a frequent, formal and informal visit by the superiors, (c. 420 §§1-3); they should, by example and exhortation, help all the members in pursuing the purpose of the religious state (c. 421). If they lack this firm relationship, as well as spiritual and physical leadership,<sup>19</sup> the superiors fail in their basic call, in fostering communion, in essential witness (c. 410), in the community and in making unity among the members.

In short, it can be said that leadership quality desirable in members of a religious institute exercising authority and government is the concrete process by which authority is exercised to unify and to animate the institute so as to attain its goal. The statutes of an institute are the juridical documents which provide norms and principles for entire governance.

### **3.6. Stability Caused by the Public Profession of Vows**

In the light of Second Vatican Council, the *CCEO* delineates the essential elements of religious consecration. The juridical and theological constitutive elements are combined in cc. 410, 426-428. The stable manner of common life in an institute by means of the profession of evangelical counsels is considered as an essential element of the consecrated life, which belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. "The holiness that consists in love for God and for neighbor and is helped in a particular manner by the evangelical counsels, based on the teachings and example of the Master" (*LG* 39, 42, 43).

In the religious institutes, the stability of common life is achieved by means of the public profession of the three evangelical counsels. The faithful observance of the counsels will help a person to resist the obstacles of the religious state of

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<sup>19</sup>M. Linscott, "The Service of Religious Authority," *Review for Religious* 42 (1983), 217.

life; this condition surely takes the person to the level of the perfection of life, which is the goal of religious life prescribed by the Code. "Its observance is necessary," says Schaefer, "for offering one's life as a sacrifice to God."<sup>20</sup> The stability or permanency in the condition of life is a necessary requirement for any state of life, in such a way that the individual is no longer free to abandon it. In the religious life, there is no other cause which gives that stability of life except the obligation received by means of the vows in perpetuity.

A vow is juridically public when it is pronounced legitimately by a candidate after the completion of novitiate formation according to the particular statutes of an institute recognized by the Church and accepted in the name of the Church by a legitimate superior. Through the vows, a person deliberately and freely promises to God to observe the evangelical counsels.<sup>21</sup> Once they are pronounced perpetually, she/he is incapable of renouncing the resulting obligations but must continue to fulfill them until legitimately released; and it can be granted when a grave reason arises (cc. 489-491; 546-553) by a competent superior with the permission of the lawful ecclesiastical authority.

Religious profession is comprised of two essential elements, a handing-over, or sacrifice of oneself to God through three vows and acceptance by an institute. It is like a bilateral contract, consisting of the vows and the acceptance, by which a person embraces the religious life and which creates a whole series of reciprocal rights and obligation (cc. 426-427; 545) between the institute and the religious.<sup>22</sup> The profession and the attaining of stability are the acts of formal and public aggregation of a candidate into the institute. At the same time, the vows are

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<sup>20</sup>M. Linscott, "The Service of Religious Authority," *Review for Religious* 42 (1983), 217.

<sup>21</sup>Aertnys-Damen, *Theologia moralis*, 2 vols., Roma 1950, 404.

<sup>22</sup>Bouscaren-Ellis, *Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, Milwaukee 1949, 271.

promises directed to God which create a bond, more internal than external, between God and the person, when accepted by the superior in the name of the Church.

### **3.6.1. Obedience**

The purpose of authority in a religious community as ministers of the Church is to make known the will of God to the members of the community. God's love is what justifies the exercise of authority and obedience in the church and in every religious community.<sup>23</sup> As Jesus did, the religious must know the will of God in human realities, through community discernment and personal dialogue with their superiors. To make the final decision or to reveal the will of God to the community or to the individual is the task of the superior. To obey the superiors by virtue of the vow of obedience is closely connected with the institute's life and juridical matters of governance.

The members should be obedient, of their own free will, in matters connected to the well-spring and unity for the community. A significant sign of the obedience of each member is the fraternal fruitfulness in the community; it produces the rays of faith and hope in the missionary activities of the institute. The adequate functioning of the community would not be related to obedience, but rather, to the mutual respect and freedom, charitable services, personal and communal responsibilities and the voluntary aspect of fulfilling orders and functions.

### **3.6.2. Chastity**

The vow of chastity signifies a special union of life, the life of a strong communion with Christ and with the other members of the community in which she/he lives and serves. The Code proposes a modified and fruitful way of living one's chastity, that is, the common life in the community. The fraternal life

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<sup>23</sup>L. Örsy, *Open to the Spirit*, Washington 1968, 43-48.

and communion among the members are a great help in living the vow of chastity in its fullness. The various means of fostering a chaste life in community should be formulated in the statutes of each institute. Along with this effective community life, is apostolate particular to the institute.

Such a communion of faith and life brings to mutual love and fulfillment, proper to each human heart, to enjoy friendship, understanding and compassion. Fraternal communion helps the chastity of religious, while, in turn, chastity helps fraternal charity, in the sense that, it joins the religious to Christ, it helps her/him to come closer to all who are in communion with Christ.<sup>24</sup>

The religious who give themselves totally to the apostolic work assigned by the institute's own spirit and charism find personal fulfillment, peace and daily growth. Because of their undivided heart and selfless intentions in the service of God and others, they could achieve a hundred fold of fruit in the mission work of the Church. Hence, chastity shares with all its unique grace and it derives from her/his angelic way of life which preserves the person to be always available to God's command, for any mission, without being hindered or delayed by anything of this world.

### **3.6.3 Poverty**

The evangelical counsel of poverty demands a life of poverty in fact and in spirit (*PC* 13) and, indeed, a life lived in imitation of the poor Jesus. The total dependence on God and an unconditional trust in divine providence with regard to all matters concerning religious are the true goals of the evangelical poverty. Poverty is a personal affair with a communitarian expression. Each member must strive to live it in the spirit and nature of her/his institute and it is to be

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<sup>24</sup>G. Battelli, *Religious Life in the Light of the New Canon Law*, Nairobi 1990, 64.



expressed and practiced according to the norms of the statutes. The apostolic activities of the community must be performed in the light of each institute's norms concerning the spirit and nature of the vow of poverty.

Above all, the vow of poverty insists on moderation, detachment of the heart and the use of only that which is needed for one's mission. An expression of poverty is to be found in labor, mainly the apostolic activity demanded by one's own vocation in a particular institute. The work or mission in which the religious is involved is a selfless service for others, sharing with others what one has received or learned. It can be one's own spiritual wealth, ideas, projects, time, etc., in service to the needy, both spiritual and material.

### **3.7. Stable Manner of Common Life**

The word "stable" in this context denotes a 'permanent,' 'steadfast' and 'profound' manner of the religious state of life with more or less set characteristics of duties, rights, privileges and obligations (c. 410). It is said to be merely cenobitical when a certain number of persons form a distinct group with mutual interpersonal relationships both within their own group and with outsiders.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the notion of living in common as a fundamental aspect of consecrated life can be traced, at least, to the early fourth century to the efforts of St Pachomius, who was one of the first to introduce aspects of common life for his followers. The common life is one of the basic canonical requirements for the religious institutes.

The term 'common life' is not defined in the *CCEO*, and it can be understood canonically only from the long standing traditions. The traditional understanding of common life, in a broad interpretation, had consistently been used in reference to "religious as belonging to the same juridic entity or institute and as having a determined superior who governs in accord

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<sup>25</sup>A. Guttierrez, "Doctrina generalis de statu perfectionis," in *De Institutis Secularibus*, 77.

with the determined rule or constitutions by which all members are bound."<sup>26</sup> One could interpret the common life, in a strict sense, as the members of the same institute living in a house having equal right to the same facilities of food, residence, furnishings, comforts and difficulties.<sup>27</sup> This is directly related to the spirit of the vow of poverty. The common life represents a practical arrangement for manifesting the obligatory dependence and limitation in the use and disposition of goods, that is, the personal earnings and things which belong to the institute (c. 529).

The common life does not necessarily mean a life under the same roof wearing the same habit. It is a life of fraternal and mutual sharing. It can be manifested by living together with other members in a community.<sup>28</sup> In the solitary life or in the single religious life, one cannot possibly show fraternity, extend service and share with her/his sister/brother. The particular statutes of each institute should prescribe the required norms for the common life of its members. In the religious institutes, to whatever degree the common life is prescribed by the statutes, the life itself remains a 'juridical' or 'constitutional' one; the various details of life in common are ordered and governed by their prescriptions, such as cloister, comings and goings, observances, exercises, missions, etc.

As stated above, *PC 15* explains clearly the beauty of having common life in a religious institute. It defines common life as "prayer and sharing of the same spirit, being united in one heart and soul, and carrying one another's burdens," and it is a "source of great apostolic power." The *CCEO* formulated these elements in a single statement that the religious state is *stabilis*

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<sup>26</sup>E. McDonough, "Common Life," *Review for Religious* 52 (1993), 305.

<sup>27</sup>R. Hochwalt, *The Concept: 'in communi viventium sine votis,'* Rome 1957, 133.

<sup>28</sup>L. Chiappetta, *Il codice di diritto canonico I: commento giuridico-pastorale*, Napoli 1988, 703.

*in communi vivendi modus* (c.410). Some other terms which emphasize the same connotation of common life that appear in the Code include 'communion,' 'unity' and 'life together' in a legitimate religious house. The Code demands that each member must realize and visualize concretely this fraternal life in the community according to her/his own vocation. The fraternity or communion which is rooted in charity is a valid example and expression of the reconciliation of Christ still manifesting itself in the world.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, it is true that living in a religious house and living a strict common life do not necessarily guarantee a true experience of the important elements of common life. If the members of a religious institute theoretically live in common, but everything, such as financial, material things, facilities and resources functions in isolation from one another, the law for common life may technically be fulfilled but the meaningful understanding of its fundamental value and spirit is absent.

#### **4. Sources and Manifestations of Communion**

This section will discuss the principles or sources for growing in communion, sharing obligations and the rights of religious in the common life. These obligations and rights are the manifestations of the religious fraternity in the pastoral ministries and apostolates and this spirit of communion emerges from the common exercises of the institutes.

In the exercises of a community, such as personal and communal prayers (divine praises), Eucharistic celebration, silence, studies and other common practices are the expressions and sources of unity, fraternity, and communion among its members. The Code places such obligations on each member so that she/he herself/himself will see to it that she/he performs perfectly her/his communal and personal exercises. The superiors need to facilitate a better atmosphere

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<sup>29</sup>L. Chiappetta, *Diritto canonico*, 696

for the vigorous performance and participation of the members.

As religious life is, above all, a God-centered life, the principal and prime duty of all religious is to have a constant union with Christ through prayer and praises. All religious are invited by Vatican II (PC 1) to practice a life of 'contemplation in action' and 'searching God in everything.' In the religious institutes of apostolic life, all forms of work and apostolic ministries can be done prayerfully. It is not enough that all the activities of the religious are accompanied by personal and communal prayer, instead there should be an appointed time for both types of prayer in the community.<sup>30</sup> Eventually, in the personal and communal prayers, all must find God and experience the Lord in prayerful communication. "Intimacy with God, the necessity to adore Him, the need to intercede for others and the experiences of the Christian life, all reflect the importance of prayer in which God can reveal Himself to His servants. The religious in apostolic institutes must integrate interiority and activity."<sup>31</sup> The pastoral ministries (cc. 415 §§ 1-3, 542) and apostolic activities of the institutes are the effective means of manifesting the communion and of sharing the fraternity of religious consecration in the mission of the Church.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we have treated the descriptions of the religious community as a manner of common life in communion, in the light of canonical legislation formulated for the religious institutes and other forms of consecrated life in the *CCEO*.

The structures, such as provinces, houses, superiors and *synaxes*, are only the means and components that help religious to live totally the fraternal sharing in the structure of a community in the intensity of communion. For the fulfillment

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<sup>30</sup>G. Lobo, *New Canon Law for Religious*, Bombay 1990, 101.

<sup>31</sup>D. O'Connor, "Obligations and Rights," in J. Hite et al., eds., *A Handbook on Canons 573-746*, Minnesota 1985, 171.

of this aim and goal there are certain conditions given by the common law and by the particular laws of the institutes. From the moment of acceptance into a religious institute, throughout one's life, the obligation accepted by the public profession of vows is that the religious should strive for a meaningful life of consecration. The *CCEO* introduces certain means and conditions through various regulations on religious institutes and prescribes the suitable and adaptable common practices for the manifestation of communion within the structure of a community.

As the study has observed, in the community, common life and personal practices have a tremendous effect on bringing the diverse personalities together. The community practices must be arranged according to the nature, need and change of the life style of the members. In this age, more than ever, there is the need to emphasize the "being" rather than "doing." The words of Pope John Paul II are worth mentioning at this point:

Consecrated men and women are sent forth to proclaim, by the witness of their lives, the value of Christian fraternity and the transforming power of the Good News, which makes it possible... to inspire a self giving love towards everyone, especially the least of our brothers and sisters. Such communities are places of hope and of the discovery of the beatitudes, where love, drawing strength from prayer, the wellspring of communion, is called to become a pattern of life and source of Joy (VC 51).

Communion and common life point to that reality. Moreover, renewal of religious life is a capital and important matter for the very survival of the individual religious and the community life. This is because, it is a fact that nobody can 'kill' us from outside; we, the individual and community, die from within, in the absence of communion.