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Editorial

Fearless, Free and Faithful

Asato ma sadgamaya, tamasoma jyotir gamaya, mrityorma amritam gamaya (From ignorance, lead me to truth; from darkness, lead me to light; from death, lead me to immortality) the *shanti mantra* from Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.3.28) says it all. There exists within human beings a throbbing aspiration to go beyond limits and to grow beyond limitations. Mystics are those who have managed to transcend convincingly many of human bondages and weaknesses to expose their humanity without boundaries. Spirituality is all about this innate human aspiration towards transcendence. “*Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter*” this couplet from the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, by the famous English poet, John Keats (1795–1821) speaks of this very same human tendency. Abraham Maslow (1908–1970), the eminent American psychologist in his famous “hierarchy of needs” speaks of this natural human drive towards transcendence. According to him, when basic needs are met, human beings tend to step to higher realms, namely, the psychological and spiritual.

Generally speaking, we human beings dwell in an artificial or unnatural world of signs and symbols, titles and roles. Whether we are aware of it or not our languages, arts, religions and politics are all combinations and compilations of signs and symbols, titles and roles. We cannot think of a human world without those virtual articulations. It is beyond doubt that they have contributed immensely to human progress and development. However, it is these very same mental formulations that often prevent us from getting in touch with reality as it is. Mystics managed to get behind these mental barriers and successfully got in touch with the reality they represent. Buddhism treats ignorance, attachment, and aversion (*moha [avidya], raga, dvesha*) - the three poisons (*trivisha*), as the very roots of suffering (*dukkha*). *Nirvana* is the wisdom to accept

reality as it is without attachment or aversion. If people get stuck with concepts and symbols and fail to be conscious of their mediatory role and treat them as if they are real, these signs and symbols, titles and roles can cause people to live a life of hypocrisy and make-believe. A life without reality-touch is neither authentic nor mature.

Consecrated Life, which is full of signs and symbols, titles and roles, if lived without grasping and realizing the spirit behind those signs and symbols, theories and concepts, can turn out to be a mechanical, naïve, or hypocritical life. This paper is an attempt to analyze some of the foundational symbols of Consecrated Life like the three vows and also the significance of prophetic, kingly and priestly ministries in the life of a consecrated person. At the very outset, let me remind you that these symbols, which originated during a male-dominated era, are not gender-sensitive or inclusive. Therefore, we need to reinterpret those symbols to understand the spirit behind them. These powerful symbols are originally meant to enable a person to be fearless, free and faithful. By overcoming the basic instincts and the primitive tribal mindset a consecrated person should become Catholic, in its real sense, one who embraces the whole world with love and compassion. This path of fearlessness, freedom and faithfulness is a path of detachment as well. That is why Jesus said, “*If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me*” (Mt 16:24). On his Path of the Perfect Spirit, we see John of the Cross prescribing detachment or *nada* (nothing) seven times. The Indian Maharishis too proposed *neti neti* (not this, not this) on the path towards *mukti* or liberation.

Every baptized person, on account of the choice he/she has made, is supposed to be fearless (prophetic), free (kingly), and faithful (priestly) to be true to their baptismal promise. Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Letter on 21 November 2014, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Year of Consecrated Life, reminds us that Consecrated Life is an attempt “*to follow Christ more closely*” (ALF.I,1). This means we are to be transformed into “*people who are turning the whole world upside down*” (Acts 17:6). Nevertheless, we should always keep in mind that Consecrated Life is nothing more than a zealous attempt, to live authentically one’s baptismal promise. The three vows (chastity, poverty and obedience) taken by a consecrated person are set against those three basic drives or natural instincts or the temptations of Jesus (which are: survival, possession and recognition) are intended to make him/her live fearlessly, freely and faithfully (that is to be: prophetic, kingly and priestly) at an uncompromising level.

From a Life of Convicts to a Life of Conviction

An overly regulated and protected life within monasteries and convents can easily turn out to be a life of convicts rather than a life of conviction. In the name of formation we feed our youngsters with all sorts of pious Christian moral teachings. However, without a transformation of consciousness, they will neither have the enthusiasm nor the energy to put them into practice. There is a dire need among religious to experience real life, rather than embrace a disembodied, intellectual spirituality. Consecrated persons should adopt a life-oriented, incarnational spirituality rather than an otherworldly, metaphysical spirituality. There is no doubt that religious too have inherited the primitive instinct for “hunting and collecting”. It is reasonable to be so at a certain age or stage. Abraham Maslow used the terms “physiological”, “safety”, “belongingness” and “love”, “esteem”, “self-actualization”, and “self-transcendence” to describe the patterns through which human motivations generally move. When basic needs are met, we tend to step to higher realms, namely, the psychological and spiritual. The problem arises when people refuse to move forward or get stuck at certain basic levels. There are consecrated persons who meticulously follow their rules and regulations. They zealously enforce and scrupulously adhere to rites, rituals, and canonical prayers but deplorably lack in mercy and love. Religious life controlled by schedule can easily become mechanical. We should not confuse contemplatives with introverts. Introverts are selfish people who do things for their own profit and personal satisfaction. It is in this respect Pope Francis writes as follows, “*It is not enough to read it (even though the reading and study of Scripture is essential), nor is it enough to meditate on it (which we do joyfully each day). Jesus asks us to practice it, to put his words into effect in our lives*” (ALF.I,2).

A “Performative” Spirituality

Theory and orthodoxy are of value only in the context of orthopraxy. True religiosity has little to do with verbal orthodoxy. We need to prove our identity not by our beliefs or words but through our lives. We must remember that our lifestyles and practices speak louder than what we believe or preach. Francis Assisi is believed to have instructed his friars, “*Preach the Gospel always, if necessary use words.*” He told his first friars, “*You only know as much as you do.*” His emphasis on action, practice, and lifestyle was at the heart of Franciscan spirituality. Words flowing from our head are not ours; they are merely repetitions or a synthesis of the information we collected from here and there. Only those words coming out of our heart reveal our true identity. That’s why the words of Mother Teresa were weighty and used to sink into

the hearts of people while the words of preachers who repeat them cause only sound pollution. The way we live our daily life makes more impact on others than our verbal counsels and wonderful ideas. It is said that Christianity can be better understood in the life of its great personalities than in its theories and dogmas. Eminent educationalists have categorically proved that listening to lectures and reading are among the least effective forms of learning. They are highly passive, individualistic and fail to integrate head with heart and hand. They leave people in their well-protected positions, virtually untouched. In fact, our ego is suspicious and afraid of any sort of change and is highly defensive by its very nature. Integrative, transformative or lifestyle education causes real changes in persons. If a life of conviction is to emerge we need to engage in hands-on experience and emotional risk-taking by moving outside of our comfort zones. We need to encounter different people than our usual homogeneous colleagues and dare uncharted waters and venture untrodden paths.

Yet, within minutes or hours of entertaining a new idea, in general, people fall back to their old associates, their assured roles, their familiar neural grooves, their ego patterns of response, and thus return to business as usual. Most of us, even those with lots and lots of good-will, who read and listen to inspiring talks and sermons may do very little - in terms of lifestyle changes, social or spiritual renewal. For most people, religion is all about believing certain dogmas, attending services, and offering regular contributions. People just listen to new ideas and judge them to be true or false. They are either impressed or not impressed. However, thinking about ideas or making judgments about what is good or bad seldom leads to change. We need a new perspective that is radically different from our highly academic spirituality and verbally argumentative theology. What we need is a "performative spirituality" which finds meaning in doing rather than saying. Transformation is the result of 'living' our convictions and not believing in certain doctrines and dogmas.

Reviewing and Revitalizing Religious Life:

Every radical ideology will get watered-down or domesticated as time elapses. Institutions and enforcement agencies cannot ensure the survival of an ideology unless individuals with personal conviction commit themselves to promote it. Lack of inner experience will lead followers to believe what they were taught on the authority of others - a situation that Jesus predicted: *The blind leading the blind* (Mt 15:14). Fanaticism and tepidity are the usual byproducts of this sort of hearsay religiosity and second-hand spirituality. The time-tested path towards

a “performative spirituality” promoted by Consecrated Life is living a vowed life, i.e., practicing chastity, poverty and obedience. The life of Jesus can be envisioned as a vigorous confrontation and his final victory over his natural instincts of survival, possession and recognition. According to the Gospels, Satan (tempter) followed him right from the beginning till the very end of his life. During his final battle at the garden of Gethsemane, he had to sweat blood to say ‘yes’ to his Father and ‘no’ to his survival instinct, the most basic among the three. The three vows or evangelical counsels are the sum total of the life pattern of Jesus. Practicing them can make a person fearless, free and faithful like Jesus. However, as we saw earlier, people can get stuck at certain basic levels or get addicted to certain needs which will prevent them from further growth and transcendence. There is an erroneous belief that addiction is all about substance abuse. The truth is far from this. People often replace one addiction with another addiction. Anything and everything can be addictive. That is why John of the Cross enumerates scores of spiritual addictions in his writings, which may be more harmful and subtle than physical addictions. What the Gospels describe as demonic possession could be regarded as addictions. All addictions are in a way possessions.

Mystics are open-minded people – fearless, free and faithful. This extraordinary freedom results from their readiness to let go and let God. Thus they reach a state of self-transcendence, where they are no longer divisive, separatist or exclusive but unifying, holistic and inclusive. However, as individuals move to higher realms of consciousness, they do not abandon, forget, despise or jump over the earlier stages but recognize, get reconciled to and rectify the earlier wrongs done. Otherwise, there will be no healing or progress for them or for those whom they have offended. What a consecrated person should do is not to flee from the world, but to enter into a more intimate and intense non-possessive relationship with the world. It is a relationship that will enhance everybody by means of the selfless and self-giving participation and mutual engagement. This provides an inner freedom on the part of the religious to contribute his/her best, even if it leads to self-sacrifice. From this stand point we need to appraise whether the vows, the way they are practiced today, are liberating or debilitating, binding or loosing.

Chastity Vs the Need for Survival

From the above perspective, chastity should be viewed as a vow that liberates a person from the societal dictate as well as one’s natural instinct for self-perpetuation that makes him/her submit to both

external and internal forces. Chastity is an intentional renunciation of the rights and responsibilities of a conventional family setup - and the security and the self-fulfillment it offers - to make oneself fully free and available for the service of a cosmic family. Therefore, the vow of chastity is positive not negative, constructive not destructive, connective not divisive, liberating not restrictive. The first temptation of Jesus was nature's most powerful call to survive. Food and sex are two expressions of the same survival instinct. Jesus overcame this most basic instinct by pointing towards the Word of God - the primary source of life, than relying on secondary sources, like food. A transformed self, living in union with the divine, will not feel the need for self-perpetuation through various means including the production of progeny. Among consecrated people this basic survival instinct finds its expression in numerous funny, subtle ways - including presenting papers, publishing books, founding institutions, etc.!

True mystics live neither in denial of their weakness nor in shame, but rejoice in their weakness and celebrate their blessings. Plainly speaking, food and sex are not controlling them; instead they are properly disciplined. They would not pretend that they are any more than what they actually are - which for them is, ironically, more than enough! Therefore, the vow of chastity, in its essence, is not depreciation of sex but appreciation of our incarnate status. Saint Paul made a confusing choice of the word *sarx*, translated "flesh," as the very enemy of *pneuma* or Spirit (Gal 5:16-24). Thomas Merton (1915-1968), renowned American mystic, preferred to translate *sarx* as "ego" or "false self," saying that it would be much closer to what Paul actually meant. In fact, Christianity is the religion that believes "the Word became flesh" (Jn 1:13), and Jesus even returned to the "flesh" after the Resurrection (Lk 24:40) - so "flesh" cannot be bad. If our spirituality is in any way anti-body, it is not authentic Christianity.

Poverty Vs the Need for Possession

Along the same line, poverty is the freedom from possessing and being possessed. Poverty is not just a life of simplicity, humility, restraint, or even lack. It is not a low self-image but a very liberating and utterly honest self-image. When Satan confronted Jesus demonstrating the wealth of the world and suggesting he take possession of it, Jesus once again pointed towards his heavenly Father, the primary source of all riches. Knowing that everything that his Father owns belongs to him as well (Jn 16:15), he never felt the need to have some private property. Non-possession or detachment means confidence, trust, fearlessness

and absolute freedom. Those who possess are possessed by their possessions and are not free.

Saint Paul recounts a kind of joy deriving from the spirit of poverty. God revealed to him, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."* This gave Paul the courage to write, *"I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong"* (2Cor 12:9-10). Unfortunately, when we are entrusted with something and we have something to protect, then we have things to prove and to defend. We will be defenders of the status quo - which appears to be working for us. Progress or real change is unlikely. The only free positions in this world are at the bottom and at the edges of things. Everywhere else, there is too much to preserve - an image to promote and a fear of losing it all - which ends up controlling our whole life. The spirit of poverty liberates us from fear of losing and keeps us humble. Jesus said, *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you"* (Mt 7:7). He was telling us to stay in the position of a beggar, a petitioner, a radical dependent. This will always be our spiritual posture, if we are honest. A daily and chosen *"attitude of gratitude"* will keep our hands open to allow and receive life at ever-deeper levels of satisfaction without the arrogance of entitlement.

Obedience Vs the Need for Recognition

In the same vein, obedience is freedom from egoism. It presupposes humility, faith, hope, courage and love. If any one of these factors is missing, that obedience is not genuine but bogus. When Jesus was challenged by Satan to prove himself by jumping down from the pinnacle of the temple, Jesus had nowhere else to point towards but to his heavenly Father - his primary recognizer and affirmer. Recognition or affirmation from anybody else is secondary and is of less importance. Of course, angels will be out there to protect us always. There is no need to test the trustworthiness of God. Testing God is equal to distrust and non-confidence. Obedience is the wisdom and confidence to join the 'flow' of the totality. It is a kind of openness and availability to truths beyond one's perception and comprehension. It is giving up one's control to a higher power or wisdom with a hope to find a new kind of "control" over one's own ego. It is a conscious refusal to enthrone one's ego on God's throne.

Like Jesus and Pope Francis, one would say about others, “Who am I to judge?” (Lk 12:14). This attitude is quite the opposite of elitism and infallibility. Obedience is degrading to the ego and will always feel like dying, and yet it is the necessary path to absolute freedom. We remain humble and patiently wait for what is in store for us, thanks to our trust and confidence in our heavenly Father. Opening ourselves to God involves preparing our mind for change, softening of our hearts, deepening of our trust and confidence, patience to wait and readiness to let go. The awareness that we really do not want to let go and the actual willingness to change requires weeks, months, and years of *sadhana* (concerted practice). The spirit of *sadhana* is willingness not willfulness, availability not activity, gentleness not exertion. We must be willing to endure God’s absence and abandonment, dark periods of feeling that nothing is happening. Only the humble, broken and wise will allow themselves to undergo such trials and confidently “let go and let God.”

The Prophetic Mission of the Consecrated

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Letter instructs consecrated people as follows: “*This is the priority that is needed right now: ‘to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth... a religious must never abandon prophecy’ ... Because they are free, they are beholden to no one but God, and they have no interest other than God. Prophets tend to be on the side of the poor and the powerless, for they know that God himself is on their side*” (ALF.II,2). A Consecrated person should be deeply and fundamentally transformed by the Christ consciousness to bring about transformation within one’s own life as well as in the lives of others. “The mind of Christ” (1Cor 2:16) is a non-discriminative, unifying mind. Wherever divisions and injustices prevail, consecrated persons should raise their voices even if they go unheard as a “cry in the wilderness”. The prophetic mission impels a religious to bring about a synergistic approach and bring about spiritual as well as social transformation within the whole society. Christ consciousness calls for cosmic communion since it is an awareness of being an integral part of the mystical body of Christ (1Cor 12:12f). As Pope Francis says, “*We will be able to love because we have the heart of Jesus*” (ALF.I,2). The vocation of a consecrated person is not to disassociate from the affairs of the world, but to become its conscience.

The Kingly Mission of the Consecrated

“Live life king size” does not mean to live luxuriously and comfortably, having the best facilities and lifestyle. Following the dictates of one’s ego, inner impulses and external influences and pressures is not actually freedom, it is bondage. Freedom is absence of bondage. That is why

Jesus said, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (Jn 8:36). True freedom is a condition in which a person is capable of carrying out one’s *svadharma* (own duty). *Svadharma* stands for things we cannot fail to do because they are our prerogative or destiny and the source of our life’s satisfaction and fulfillment. In *svadharma* we discover our life’s mission. By looking at our talents, knowledge and our life situation; it is quite possible to discern the ‘will of God regarding us’ or our *svadharma* at each moment of our lives. All the three above said factors will be positive if the demanded job is part of our *svadharma*. The driving force behind carrying out *svadharma* will no longer be mere instincts of survival, possession or recognition. Then our only specialness or uniqueness is in being ourselves. We are even “choiceless,” in front of the strong opinions, needs, preferences, and demands of our ego-driven life. We do not need our “visions” anymore; we happily participate in God’s vision for us. With that, the wonderful dreaming and the dreamer that we were in our ‘past life’ will be metamorphosed into someone else’s dream for us. We move from the driver’s seat to being a happy passenger, one who is still allowed to make helpful suggestions to the Driver. We are henceforth “a serene disciple,” living in our own unique soul as never before, yet paradoxically “living life king size” within the mind and heart of God, and playing our melodies in the great universal orchestra.

The Priestly Mission of the Consecrated

The priestly role of a consecrated person is in his/her faithfulness and total commitment to the plan and program of God while playing a mediatory or intercessory role between the Creator and his creation. His/her heart should beat in union with God’s heart, so that “the heart’s desire” is God’s desire. Therefore, a spirituality that is not palpable and applied in daily life - uniting contemplation and action - is fraudulent. When we see that everyone and everything belongs to the same stream of life, our suffering will vanish. A life of faith, hope and love is a daring resolve to live without full resolution. It is a life without an end in sight. At every turn it is full of surprises. Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures make that very clear. We are often called to walk in darkness, where God leads us to that next step which is usually not clear, predictable, or controllable by the rational mind. It is a choice to live 100% by leaving 100% to God’s choice. Such a change in perspective will transform us to *love what we have* rather than *to have what we love*.

Freedom from ‘Religious Ego’

Whenever and wherever consecrated persons remain head-based and resists metamorphosing into heart-based and hand-based spirituality,

they exhibit a tendency to uphold separateness from the laity and maintain a hypothetical superiority. Consecrated people have to eschew this prevailing 'religious ego' or religious-superiority-complex. Only by letting go of our very need to 'think well of ourselves' can we tackle our egocentricity. It is possible for us to show others our love by 'not' wishing to change them according to our yardstick. As Francis Assisi instructs, "*We must bear patiently **not** being good . . . and **not** being thought good.*" St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) has said, "*If you are willing to bear serenely the trial of being displeasing to yourself, then you will be a pleasant place of shelter for Jesus.*" It is what we fear, avoid, deny, and deem unworthy that God uses and finds necessary for our edification and transformation. It is our 'ego' that prompts us to approach God by eliminating our imperfection. It is our imperfection that makes us aware of our need for God's mercy and love.

Human sins, failures, and imperfections are matters to be wept over and sympathized, not issues to be detested or hated. Being small, poor, or ridiculed; being outside the system of power and status; hurts only our ego. Weakness is not something that we should deny, oppose, or fear. Francis Assisi and Thérèse of Lisieux made known to the world that we do not come to God by eliminating our imperfections, but by rejoicing in them because they make us aware of our need for God's mercy and love and they keeps us humble and simple. Thérèse of Lisieux named this her "Little Way," a way which everyone can follow. It is a way of being aware of our need for assistance; a willingness to give ourselves to God's loving embrace like a child abandons itself with confidence and love into the arms of its loving parent, and then freely shares its love with others in creative good works of peace and justice. It is the readiness to be the person God calls us to be.

A Renewed Face of Religious Life

The most repeated request of Pope Francis to the consecrated persons which finds a place even in his apostolic letter is as follows: "*None of us should be gloomy, discontented and dissatisfied, for 'a gloomy disciple is a disciple of gloom'. Like everyone else, we have our troubles, our dark nights of the soul, our disappointments and infirmities, our experience of slowing down as we grow older. But in all these things we should be able to discover 'perfect joy'*" (ALF.II,1). Through the phrase 'perfect joy' Pope Francis is trying to remind us of an incredible definition given by Francis Assisi to 'perfect joy'. He continues, "*We are called to know and show that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness*" (ALF.II,1). Recently while addressing the seminary formators Pope Francis said as follows:

I tell you sincerely: I am afraid of rigid priests. I am afraid. Rigid priests, keep them far away, they bite! The words of St Ambrose come to mind: 'Where there is mercy, there is the Spirit of God. Where there is rigidity, there are only his ministers.' And a minister without the Lord becomes rigid. This is a danger for the people of God. Be pastors, not officials... It is interesting: When a young man is too rigid, too fundamentalist, I do not trust them, behind him there is something that may be not even he knows.

When everything is evaluated in reference to our knowledge and convictions, our judgments become too narrow and shallow. Those who flee from 'the world' to stay away from being contaminated by the institutionalized evil of the world often find themselves involved and engulfed in what they tried to flee from. "To be in the world; but not of the world" is the mark of a true consecrated person. Thomas Merton says, "*The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream. . . . This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. . . . I have the immense joy of being [hu]man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate*" (Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Doubleday:1966, 140-142). Consecrated people can turn out to be so self-absorbed and worried about their own private goodness and their private badness. In fact, private salvation and private damnation are in conflict with the economy of salvation we discover in the Bible. According to the Bible individuals are chosen not for their own sake but for the sake of others. The great African wisdom, "*Umuntu gnumuntu, gnabantu*" (A person is a person because of others) is the vision of the Bible too. We are parts of the whole. As John of the Cross would say, we have no existence besides *il todo* (the All). The divisive, unkind, elitist, pharisaic mentality was rigorously criticized and condemned by Jesus. He claimed himself a shepherd who would go in search of the lost sheep leaving behind the ninety nine on mountains!

The self we are conscious of, the self we are absorbed in, is precisely the self that mystics say does not exist! It's actually our 'false self'. The 'real self' that exists, in Christian language, is the communal "Body of Christ" (1Cor 12:12f). It was Thomas Merton who made use of the terms "True Self" and "False Self" to clarify what Jesus meant when he said that we must "*die to ourselves*" or we must "*lose ourselves to find ourselves*" (Mk 8:35). This passage has caused much confusion and setback in Christian spirituality because it sounds negative and ascetical, and it was usually interpreted as an appeal to punish the body. Even now certain Congregations promote the use of 'discipline' among their members and they are expected to travel around carrying

their 'discipline' in their bags! But what Jesus intended was not self-punishment but selflessness. The self-torturing of the self-focused monks and nuns is of no value at all. For centuries many Christians erroneously assumed that if they could "die" to their body, their spirit would come "alive". We come across this Platonic denial of the body in most religions. Merton rightly recognized that it was not the body that had to "die" but the "false self" or ego. The "False Self" is in fact, a symbol of our "True Self". Symbol is useful and is needed, but it is just a stand-in; the danger is when we think we are only our false, separate, small self. Our attachment to False Self must die to allow True Self - our basic and unchangeable identity in God - to emerge and to live fully and freely.

Pope Francis Shows the Way Forward

In his letter Pope Francis appeals to religious as follows: *"Live the mysticism of encounter, which entails "the ability to hear, to listen to other people; the ability to seek together ways and means" (ALF.I,2)*. He continues, *"It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction. The consecrated life will not flourish as a result of brilliant vocation programs, but because the young people we meet find us attractive, because they see us as men and women who are happy!... The effectiveness of consecrated life does not depend on the efficiency of its methods. It depends on the eloquence of your lives, lives which radiate the joy and beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ to the full" (ALF.II,1)*... *spread the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries" (ALF.II,3)*. Pope Francis demands from consecrated people fearlessness, freedom and faithfulness, which in turn will enable and embolden them to go out and reach out beyond boundaries. He also cautions them to be humble, saying: *"Nor can we forget that the phenomenon of monasticism and of other expressions of religious fraternity is present in all the great religions. There are instances, some long-standing, of inter-monastic dialogue involving the Catholic Church and certain of the great religious traditions" (ALF.III,4)*.

Conclusion

In his apostolic letter Pope Francis reminds all Consecrated People *"I am counting on you "to wake up the world", since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy" (ALF.II,2)* Pope Francis also has a crystal-clear vision of how to carry out that mission: *"live the present with passion" (ALF.I,2)*. He reminds us that *"the creativity of charity is boundless; it is able to find countless new ways of bringing the newness of the Gospel to every culture and every corner of society" (ALF.I,2)*. Subscribing to an all-

inclusive and integrating approach, consecrated people should open up their life's horizon, extending the experience of divine presence as well as communion with the Divine, to every stratum of creation. This will empower them not only to harness the divine power to challenge and grow beyond the limiting structures and debilitating practices perpetuated in the name of God and traditions, but also to employ their creative powers to design novel outlooks and holistic approaches to transform the lives of both contemporaries and future generations. As higher plateaus of divine experience stretch us out into infinity, and a clearer vision for a better humanity becomes accessible in the emerging and established consciousness of individuals, they will eventually give shape to more just and humane structures and practices, so that the same vision and conviction, sustained in their cosmic consciousness, could be shared by everyone else, leading to the ongoing establishment of the Kingdom of God amidst the whole creation. Imbibing the true spirit behind the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, and living up to the prophetic, kingly and priestly ministries of Christ, a consecrated person is called to live day by day the mystic dimensions of fearlessness, freedom and faithfulness.

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