

“Reading this book, I am struck by the fact that the Church itself has shown a new face to the wider world in the person of this Jesuit pope with a Franciscan name, a leader with a spirituality and pastoral theology forged on many of the ministerial frontiers named in the book itself. Religious life has always served a prophetic function in the Church, whether it has been lived out by women or men. The chapters of this book accentuate this prophetic dimension of Christian priesthood, not only as it relates to the priestly identity of individual members of religious orders but as it informs ministerial collaboration among all ordained and lay leaders in the Church.”

—Christopher Hadley, SJ  
Jesuit School of Theology

“When Hollywood occasionally portrays a Catholic priest on film, the specter of Bing Crosby in ‘Going My Way’ still lingers. Usually that priest is a parish priest, living a solitary life in the rectory and worrying about the upkeep of the school. In fact, as recent history has shown, many diocesan bishops and even higher church officials have the same image in mind. This superb volume of essays reminds us that, although there is one priesthood, it has two very different expressions. Drawing on experience, sociological data, and sound theology and history, these well-informed essays illustrate the distinctive—and necessary—contribution that priesthood in a religious context offers to the life of the church. Religious priests represent a diverse, prophetic, and collegial experience of priesthood, rooted in the charisms of their respective communities and flourishing in a wide array of ministries.”

—Donald Senior, CP  
President Emeritus and Chancellor  
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

“This book calls religious priests to embrace the tension between profession and ordination in order to re-embrace the mercy at the heart of many of the founders of religious orders. This book highlights the mobility that allows religious to transcend both diocesan boundaries and cultural boundaries in order to forge new ways of discipleship for encountering a world of change revved up by the almost daily innovations of technology. This book is indispensable for anyone interested in the religious priesthood in the twenty-first century, and I cannot recommend it highly enough!”

—Garrett Galvin, OFM  
Franciscan School of Theology

“This book represents a deep and remarkably insightful integration of the past and the future in that it offers a vision of a prophetic and servant model of priesthood rooted in intercultural and international modes of religious life. I believe that this project not only points the way to the future of the religious life and ordained ministry, but also for the universal church and its own mission to ‘read the signs of the times’ and evolve as a truly inculturated prophetic and priestly community in the contemporary world.”

—John J. Markey, OP  
Oblate School of Theology

# Priesthood in Religious Life

*Searching for New Ways Forward*

Edited by Stephen Bevans, SVD,  
and Robin Ryan, CP



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## Preface

It is with great delight that I welcome you to *Priesthood in Religious Life: Searching for New Ways Forward*. This book is the fruit of a marvelous April 2017 conference by the same name, sponsored by the Center for the Study of Consecrated Life (CSCL) at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. This is the first book to come from the proceedings of a CSCL conference, and our hope is that it is the first of many such printed contributions to consecrated life today.

The mission of the CSCL is to serve as a theological, academic, and pastoral resource on contemporary topics and issues related to consecrated life. This book serves to contribute to and foster further conversations about the role of priesthood in religious life. Such discussions deepen one's own vocation to religious life, assist others to understand this particular call, and may create opportunities for bishops and religious priests to dialogue further about such a call. First and foremost, though, the desire is to deepen understandings of and the living of the service of priesthood in religious life. As such, the book engages many contexts, and it covers various topics related to culture, charism, spirituality, and ministry. The diversity of authors in this volume brings forth necessary voices and widens and deepens our perspectives on religious life and priesthood today.

I am grateful to Stephen Bevans, SVD, who led this project, organizing a wonderful conference attended by over two hundred people from all over the United States, and who was an editor of this volume. I am also very grateful to Robin Ryan, CP, the other editor of this volume. Immense gratitude also goes to the essay contributors. Each and every one has helped us in the search for new ways forward in the call of religious priesthood in our church and

world. This engagement of their vocations calls each of us more deeply in our own vocations.

Enjoy—and engage!

Maria Cimperman, RSCJ  
Director  
Center for the Study of Consecrated Life  
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

## *Introduction*

# A Priesthood Shaped by Religious Life

*Stephen Bevans, SVD, and Robin Ryan, CP*

On April 6–7, 2017, the Center for the Study of Consecrated Life (CSCL) at Catholic Theological Union (CTU) held a major conference entitled “Priesthood in Religious Life: Searching for New Ways Forward.” The response to invitations to attend the conference from priesthood candidates at CTU, from members of many religious congregations that make up the “Union” for which CTU is named, and from religious priesthood candidates and religious priests and brothers from other parts of North America was fairly overwhelming. Some 225 persons gathered at the opening session of the conference, signaling that the CSCL had hit upon a topic of immense interest to religious today, and in particular to those congregations whose membership includes persons who are ordained.

Because of this interest, we are so pleased to offer the reflections and findings of our conference to a wider public. We hope that the readers of this volume will find its contents helpful in their own search for ways forward in better understanding and living out the charism of ordained ministry within religious life. We also hope that they will join other religious—in community discussion groups, in further conferences, in blogs, in more scholarly reflection and research—in the search for a deeper understanding of this distinct form of Christian service.

Of course, the search that our conference and this volume have undertaken is not at all new. It is a continuation of a search for a more distinct understanding and practice of ordained ministry that has

emerged over the last several decades among members of religious congregations. While the theology of priesthood articulated at the Second Vatican Council provided a much-needed reform of priestly ministry and life, ordained ministers in religious life have found its perspectives more and more inadequate. The move from the Tridentine cultic understanding of the priest as the one who offered sacrifice and forgave sins<sup>1</sup> to a more pastoral model of the priest as participating in Christ's headship of the church as priest, prophet, and servant leader<sup>2</sup> was certainly crucial to a renewed understanding of ordained ministry. However, as church historian John O'Malley points out in a landmark article on priesthood in religious life, Vatican II's dominant image of the priest is that of the diocesan priest, in communion with the bishop of his particular church and ministering in or pastoring a parish.<sup>3</sup> Even though the council's document on priesthood does mention priests who are religious, it focuses on what diocesan and religious priests have in common rather than on how, in the exercise of the priesthood, they are distinct from one another (see PO 1).

In his opening keynote address at our conference, Newark's Cardinal Joseph Tobin expressed in a particularly striking way the malaise that religious priests have come to feel regarding their distinctness as *religious* priests. Tobin is a member of the Congregation of the Holy Redeemer, or Redemptorists, and served from 1997 until 2009 as its superior general. He noted that on his visits to Redemptorist communities around the world, he would often encounter a diocesan bishop who would praise the Redemptorists working in his diocese. They were as much a part of the diocese, the bishop would say, as any of his diocesan priests. The bishop would observe that he could hardly tell the difference. Tobin wryly remarked that while the bishop certainly meant this as a compliment to him and the Redemptorist priests working in the diocese, it was a remark that disturbed him, as superior general of a religious congregation, quite profoundly.

1. Denzinger/Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum: Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, 34th ed. (Barcinone: Herder, 1967), #1764.

2. Vatican Council II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (PO), 1–2.

3. John W. O'Malley, "Priesthood, Ministry, and Religious Life: Some Historical and Historiographical Considerations," *Theological Studies* 49, no. 2 (1988): 223–24.

Was there no distinctive way in which Redemptorists lived out their ministry as priests and so were able to bring a distinctive contribution to their missionary service?

Here in the United States (the context in which our conference took place<sup>4</sup>), the inadequacy of—or even the disregard for—such distinction has been further aggravated by developments in the *Program of Priestly Formation (PPF)*. There has been a move in the document from greater acknowledgment of the “pluriform” nature of religious and diocesan priesthood in its first two editions to a much lesser acknowledgment of difference in the last three. Franciscan sister Katarina Schuth traces this development in her chapter in this volume. As a result of this development, as Franciscan Leslie Hoppe notes in his contribution, bishops who participated in the papal visitations of seminaries in 1981 and 2002<sup>5</sup> simply did not understand the style of formation for priesthood in schools of theology where religious were being trained. Hoppe’s chapter explains how the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) attempted to produce their own *PPF*, an attempt that resulted in the important document *The Gift of Religious Priesthood: Formation for Presbyteral Ministry in Institutes of Religious Life*.<sup>6</sup>

In the years since Vatican II there have been a good number of efforts to explore the distinct nature of priesthood in religious life. In the United States, CMSM began to receive requests to study the distinctiveness of priesthood in religious life in the early 1980s, especially in light of growing requests by bishops for religious to take over diocesan parishes because of the shortage of diocesan priests.<sup>7</sup> During the 1980s several landmark articles appeared, most notably

4. It should be noted, however, that Timothy Scott, CSB, offered a workshop on religious priesthood in the Canadian context. His workshop paper appears as chapter 13 of this volume.

5. Donald W. Wuerl, “Seminary Visitation,” *America*, September 30, 2002, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/403/article/seminary-visitation>.

6. As Hoppe references the document at the end of his article, it can be found at <http://cmsm.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/FormationReligiousPriestsOct2011.pdf>.

7. Paul K. Hennessy, “Introduction: The Parochialization of the Church and Consecrated Life,” in *A Concert of Charisms: Ordained Ministry in Religious Life*, ed. Paul K. Hennessy (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 4.

those of Jesuits Brian E. Daley and John W. O'Malley, both published in the prestigious journal *Theological Studies*.<sup>8</sup> In 1990 the CMSM began a process, first at the regional level and then at the national, to reflect on the question of priesthood in religious life. There were a number of consultations held in various venues around the United States, and the results of the process were published in 1997 in the book *A Concert of Charisms: Ordained Ministry in Religious Life*.<sup>9</sup> To our knowledge, this important volume—with significant contributions by Jesuit John W. O'Malley, Benedictine Kevin Seasoltz, Dominican Paul Philibert, Oblate David Power, and Mercy sister Doris Gottemoeller, among others—is the last major contribution to the discussion about priesthood in religious life published in the United States. Major contributions to the discussion were published in both Italian and Spanish in 2010,<sup>10</sup> but this present volume is the first book-length study of the question in English in the last twenty years.

The basic conviction that the studies and reflections of the past decades have brought to the discussion is that priesthood in religious life is a ministry *shaped* by religious life. Whereas, as the late Dominican Paul Philibert never tired of pointing out, diocesan priests take priesthood as their primary identity, religious priests find their identity first and foremost in the community life, the vows, and the particular charism or cluster of charisms of their particular religious congregation.<sup>11</sup> Religious priesthood needs to be rooted in the rich theology of brotherhood that Capuchin John Pavlik explores in his

8. Brian E. Daley, "The Ministry of Disciples: Historical Reflections on the Role of Religious Priests," *Theological Studies* 48 (1987): 605–29; O'Malley, "Priesthood, Ministry, and Religious Life," 223–57.

9. Hennessy, "Introduction," 5.

10. Rossano Zas Friz de Col, *Il presbitero religioso nella chiesa* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 2010); A. Bocos Merino, S. del Cura Elena, J. C. R. García Paredes, Mos. G. A. Gardin, J. Rodríguez Carballo, *Ministros ordenados religiosos: Situación—Carisma—Servicio* (Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 2010). The Spanish volume includes a nine-page bibliography.

11. Paul Philibert in "Religious Priesthood: Issues and Concerns for Renewal," in *The Charism of Priesthood: Diocesan and Religious Priests Together in Ministry* (Chicago: National Federation of Priests' Councils, 1996), 11; see also Paul Philibert, "Priesthood within the Context of Religious Life," in *Being a Priest Today*, ed. Donald Goergen (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, A Michael Glazier Book, 1992), 73–96.

chapter in these pages. Ed Hahnenberg's keynote address at the conference warned the assembly not to get caught in a "blueprint ecclesiology" that would restrict the imagination in terms of the possibilities of a priesthood shaped by religious life. Religious should actually ask themselves what their experiences of priesthood are as they live it out as members of their communities. Religious life might offer an understanding of priesthood that "doesn't fit" within a neatly articulated theology of the ordained ministry, and yet would contribute mightily to the overall mission of the church. Emphasizing the communal, community nature of religious life, SCJ canonist David Szatkowski's chapter suggests that canon 517 §1's option of "*in solidum*" "when circumstances require" might provide a way of organizing a parish that could spotlight the nonhierarchical, fraternal nature of a male religious community. Spiritan anthropologist Anthony Gittins's reflections on cross-culturality suggest that priesthood might be shaped by a strong commitment to cross-cultural life in community and in the choices and style of ministry in which a religious priest will engage. While Robin Ryan admits that Pope Francis does not often specifically speak of *religious* priesthood in his communications, the pope's own perspective as a Jesuit, we believe, surely shapes his insistence on a priesthood that refuses to be caught up in careerism and clericalism and spends itself in close collaboration with ordinary Christian people.

An aspect of religious priesthood that has been rather underexplored in the literature is the contribution that culture might make to the shape of priesthood in religious life today. Given the commitment to intercultural living and mission that is central to both Catholic Theological Union and its Center for the Study of Consecrated Life, it was natural that several workshop presentations should search for new ways forward in this important direction. Redemptorist Maurice Nutt offers here a touching testimony to his love of his religious community, despite its unintentional disregard of his African American culture, and how it has nevertheless shaped his priestly ministry. One suggestion he makes is that, given the large percentage of African Americans who are pastored by Protestant, Evangelical, and Pentecostal ministers, African American religious priests might emphasize the importance of ecumenical activities and involvement. Claretian Eddie De León reflects on his experience as a Puerto Rican/Latinx religious and calls for an exercise of priesthood that is

“prophetic.” Such prophetic priesthood would put more emphasis on effective, contextual preaching (an emphasis that appears in Franciscan Daniel Horan’s chapter as well), would be a sign of hope for women and men on the margins of society, and would be fearless in confronting injustice, racism, and prejudice. SVD New Testament scholar Văn Thanh Nguyễn offers the very Asian image of a bamboo plant/tree to describe what religious priesthood might mean in the Asian-American context. Emphasizing in particular the charism of interculturality of his own highly multicultural and international community, Nguyễn highlights the need for Asian-American religious to exercise ordained ministry with gentle strength that comes with flexibility and is rooted, like the complex root system of the bamboo, in communal and cultural identity.

While these cultural perspectives shed light on how priesthood in religious life could be lived out distinctively by African Americans, Latinxs, and Asian-Americans, we believe that they shed light as well on how religious priesthood can be lived out distinctively in general, across the board, by members of all ethnic groups. Strong ecumenical and interfaith commitments, prophetic commitment that goes beyond a more cultic understanding of priesthood, and a commitment to fostering real interculturality in their communities are features of priesthood that might be espoused by religious men who choose to live out their religious life in a life of ordained ministry.

We have already referred to Capuchin John Pavlik’s chapter on the theology of religious brotherhood. Consciousness and acceptance of one’s brotherhood and the equality that it fosters can root the religious who is a priest within his identity as a brother to every member of his religious community. Another aspect of emphasizing such brotherhood is the perduring lay character of religious priesthood despite its belonging to the clerical state and ecclesiastical hierarchy. With its origins in lay movements of radical Christian life, religious life never loses its lay character,<sup>12</sup> even, we believe, if the

12. In an often-quoted line, for example, the fourth-century monk John Cassian repeated what he called “an old maxim of the fathers”: that “a monk ought by all means to fly from women and bishops.” Quoted in John W. O’Malley, “One Priesthood: Two Traditions,” in *A Concert of Charisms*, ed. Hennessy, 9. See John Cassian, *De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium vitorum remediis* XI, 18 (in *Sources chrétiennes*, ed. J.-C. Guy, 108.444).

religious enters ordained ministry. This lay, nonclerical character of priesthood in religious life is particularly apparent in communities in which nonordained members (brothers) and ordained members (deacons, priests) live and work together.

An effect of this lay orientation of religious presbyteral ministry might well be a ministry that pays particular attention to and cultivates lay ministries in the church—both “ordinary” lay ministries like lectoring or bringing communion to the sick and “lay ecclesial” ministries that require more formal training and special commissioning in the church. Parish ministry, hospital ministry, retreat ministry, or social justice ministry that is led by a religious who is a priest holds the “missionary discipleship” of every member in high esteem, gives every member a voice in decision making, and encourages every member to develop and grow. Indeed, ecclesiology has begun to reflect in more recent times the notion of “discipleship” (or “missionary discipleship” as Pope Francis seems to prefer<sup>13</sup>) as a way of speaking that transcends the lay-clerical distinction, rooting Christian ministry and life in the basic dignity and equality bestowed by baptism.<sup>14</sup> Along the same lines of Daniel Horan’s argument that religious priests might emphasize particular components of the *tria munera* of Christ’s priestly (cultic), prophetic, and governing (servant leadership) office, such focus on baptismal discipleship might point to religious priests’ particular focus (without neglecting the other two *munera*) on a style of leadership that calls forth the gifts of all the people among whom they work.

Building on Horan’s and Eddie De León’s insights about a particular focus by religious priests on the *prophetic* aspect of Christ’s threefold office, we might speak as well of a prophetic priesthood in religious life that offers critique to the more institutional structures

13. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) (The Joy of the Gospel), apostolic exhortation (Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vatican, 2013), 24, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

14. EG 104. See Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (LG) 32; Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 173–207; and Kathleen Cahalan, *Introduction to the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

and practices that diocesan priesthood necessarily supports. As Yves Congar argued decades ago, the church needs the charismatic aspect of religious life to constantly challenge its institutional life.<sup>15</sup> While always remaining loyal to the episcopal leadership of the church, priests who are religious might call into question structures and practices that seem to benefit the institution or the clerical state more than the mission of the church and its service of the gospel. That Pope Francis has spoken out so strongly for a more missionary church and against clerical privilege may well be rooted, as we have noted, in his own identity as a religious. Religious who are pastors might push certain legitimate practices to their limits—for example, lay preaching under certain circumstances or sensitivity to culture and context in liturgical celebrations. They might embrace other legitimate practices that are not often taken advantage of, such as encouraging a more active (although still consultative) parish pastoral council, employing more qualified lay ministers, or developing stronger ties with other Christians and people of other faiths by means of common worship services when possible, common worship space, and common acts for social and ecological justice.

In his 1996 apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, Pope St. John Paul II observed that “in the [religious] priest, the vocation to the priesthood and the vocation to the consecrated life converge in a profound and dynamic unity.”<sup>16</sup> By this statement, we believe, the pope did not mean that priesthood in religious life is a “better” state of life than religious life as such. Nor did he mean that religious priesthood is somehow a better way to live out the vocation of ordained ministry than “mere” diocesan priesthood. What we think John Paul II was indicating is that priesthood in religious life does have a *distinct* identity. It is not necessarily a *unique* identity, in that diocesan priests can also be rooted in a community of presbyters, or can be particularly inclusive of laypeople in their ministry, or can be prophetic figures in the church, or can be experts in calling forth intercultural parish communities. What makes religious priests dis-

15. Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 249–54. Originally published in 1950.

16. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, post-synodal apostolic exhortation (Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vatican, 1996), 30.

tinct is the call to shape their priesthood according to the values and traditions of religious life, to be profoundly shaped by what Sandra Schneiders calls the “life form” of religious life, which is in turn shaped by community, vows, charism, and—for many—active ministry.<sup>17</sup> As a former SVD provincial was wont to say, SVD identity is not about being totally *unique or different from* other congregations. Rather, it is about being *faithful* to the particular charisms with which the Society of the Divine Word has been gifted. In the same way, we think, a distinct religious priesthood can emerge as ordained religious are faithful to their community-centered, vowed, and charism-inspired identities in their particular congregations. Their priesthood, in other words, would emerge as a priesthood *shaped* by religious life.

Contemporary ecclesiology’s reflections on discipleship can shed light on how this distinction is just that—a distinction, not a designation of a better or fuller or more radical way of life as such. We are all disciples, and as disciples we are all radically equal. But the discipleship we share in common is constituted by a variety of gifts, all of which are necessary for the whole and yet all of which differ—in intensity, in scope, in responsibility. The CMSM document on which Leslie Hoppe reflects gets it right: priesthood in religious life is indeed a gift given to some, but not to set them apart from or above the rest. Rather, religious priesthood is a gift for the building up of the entire church.

As we bring this book to publication, we want to acknowledge the leadership of Mark Francis, CSV, president of CTU, and of Barbara Reid, OP, vice president and academic dean. We are grateful as well for the leadership and support of Maria Cimperman, RSCJ, director of the CSCL and author of the preface to this volume. We are thankful to so many on the CTU staff who helped in the planning of the April 2017 conference from which this book has been developed,

17. The definition comes from a handout given by Sandra Schneiders at a workshop on religious life. See Marilyn King, RSM, “Are We Fascinating? Religious Life as a Prophetic Life Form,” [http://www.mercyworld.org/\\_uploads/\\_cknw/files/2015/2-King\\_Are%20We%20fascinating.pdf](http://www.mercyworld.org/_uploads/_cknw/files/2015/2-King_Are%20We%20fascinating.pdf); Sandra Schneiders, “Religious Life as Prophetic Life Form,” <https://www.ursulines-ur.org/phocadownload/userupload/Resources/propheticlifeform.pdf>.

and to the keynote speakers and workshop leaders who made the conference such a memorable event. Our thanks go as well to Br. Michael O'Neill McGrath, ST, for permission to use his painting "High Priest" on our book's cover. McGrath's painting graced announcements of our conference, appeared on the cover of the program, and was projected on screens in the conference hall. The painting's depiction of Christ exercising his priesthood by washing the feet of humanity in all its variety seems to us a particularly powerful image of a priesthood that is shaped by a vowed life lived in community for prophetic witness in our world. Finally, we are deeply grateful to Hans Christoffersen of Liturgical Press, who has helped bring this book to publication.

We hope, as we offer the proceedings of a wonderful conference to a general audience, that this book will indeed help the women and men of the entire church in their search for ways forward in understanding and living out the great gift that is priesthood in religious life.

## *Chapter 1*

# **A Bishop's Perspective on Priesthood in Religious Life**

*Cardinal Joseph Tobin, CSsR*

### **Introduction**

I am grateful for an opportunity to reflect on the service of ordained members of religious institutes in the light of the global theme of this conference: “Priesthood in Religious Life: Searching for New Ways Forward.” There is no doubt that this theme offers a number of interesting questions. Allow me to suggest a few.

First, what is the ecclesial identity and mission of religious priesthood? More precisely, how is the vocation of religious priesthood distinct from, and how does it overlap with, the vocations of nonordained religious and nonreligious priests? Is religious priesthood merely a hybrid of religious life and priesthood, or does it have its own integrity as a differentiated charismatic mission?

Secondly, does the vocation to religious priesthood compromise either the vocation to religious life or the vocation to priesthood? If not, why not?<sup>1</sup>

1. Professor Daniel Christian Raab, OSB, uses these two questions to introduce his doctoral thesis “Compromise or Charism?: The Identity and Mission of Religious Priesthood in Light of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology” (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2015), 1. I am grateful to Professor Raab for making a copy available to me.

## 2 *Priesthood in Religious Life*

While it is possible to identify theologies and spiritualities that are more amenable to the notion of ordained religious, in my personal experience, as well as that of most religious priests I know, there is an undeniable tension between one's profession and one's ordination. I do not believe the object of this symposium should be the elimination of such tension. I hope that our conversation over the next two days will illuminate the reality of the unique path of religious priesthood and thereby assure those called to walk it that the tension in our lives will remain creative.

Someone observed, "You can tell the preacher's sins by what he preaches about." I hope you will allow me to forgo a treatment of the fundamental questions regarding the theological basis for religious priesthood in favor of a modest discussion of a relationship that has interested me for many years. A memory from my service as consultor general and superior general of my religious institute, the Redemptorist Missionaries, may help you understand the topic I intend to present.

During the eighteen years I served in the general council, I was privileged to visit communities in seventy of the seventy-eight countries where my confreres are missioned. I thus had many occasions to listen to a diocesan bishop describe the situation of the Redemptorists in a particular church. Often the ordinary would assure me with evident satisfaction that there were no problems with the confreres. "In fact," he might add, "unless I really think about it, I cannot distinguish your confreres from the diocesan clergy." For some diocesan bishops, that sort of assimilation appears to be good news; a superior general would arrive at a different conclusion. So would Pope St. John Paul II, who expected that "the charisms of the consecrated life can greatly contribute to the building up of charity in the particular Churches."<sup>2</sup>

So what I would like to consider with you is the relationship of the charism of religious priests and the particular church by focusing on two questions. First, in what sense are religious priests members of a diocesan presbyterate? I propose that we begin with number 8

2. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, post-synodal apostolic exhortation (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), 48.

of Vatican II's Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (PO),<sup>3</sup> which provides a fundamental orientation. I will trace the postconciliar development of this doctrine in other documents of the magisterium, giving particular attention to the instruction *Mutuae Relationes* (MR).<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, what does the pastor of a particular church need to keep in mind as he coordinates the charismatic gifts that should enrich the people of God? Here I am particularly interested in a proper understanding of canon 586 §1, which attributes to institutes of consecrated life a "just autonomy." While the canon situates this autonomy in the area of internal governance, I will argue that it should condition the way that the ministry of ordained priests is incorporated into the pastoral plan of the particular church.

Let us begin, then, with a consideration of the first question: what is the relationship between religious priests and the diocesan presbyterate?

## **Religious Priests and the Diocesan Presbyterate: A Rereading of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 8**

### ***Elements***

The conciliar Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis* begins with a consideration of the role of priests in the mission of the church. After beginning with some thoughts regarding the nature of priesthood and situating the order of priests within the broader context of the people of God, the decree tries to identify the functions of this vocation. The relationship among the ordained is acknowledged to be critical. Number 8 insists that "it is of great importance that all priests, whether diocesan or [religious], should help each other, so that they may be fellow-workers in the service of

3. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (December 7, 1965).

4. Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes and Sacred Congregation for Bishops, *Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church* (Roma: 14 May 1978).

truth. Each is joined to the rest of the members of this priestly body by special ties of apostolic charity, of ministry and of fellowship.”<sup>5</sup>

The decree attributes a fundamental unity to the ordained priesthood and hopes that priests, whether diocesan or religious, will support each other towards the goal of being always “fellow-workers in the truth.” The formula “whether . . . or” clearly recognizes as legitimate two ways of living priesthood: as diocesan priests or ordained religious. From a theological point of view, there can be no doubt about the truth of the affirmation; hence, there would not be the slightest difficulty in applying the doctrine of the decree to all presbyters.

On the other hand, in the practical order, this unity is also a goal to be achieved within the pastoral context of a particular church. Here we can see a particular challenge for religious priests—that is, how they will live the conjunction *and*: religious *and* priest. In other words, how do religious successfully articulate both their participation in the sacrament of Holy Orders and the special consecration of religious life?

Beyond recognizing the fundamental unity of all priests in one presbyterium, it seems useful to highlight two other elements in number 8 of *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. First, there is an exhortation that is original, even generative: “that all priests . . . help one another always to be fellow workers in the truth” (i.e., “cooperatores veritatis”). Beyond hearing in this phrase a reference to the third Johannine epistle,<sup>6</sup> today one cannot help but think of Pope Benedict XVI, who chose the phrase as his episcopal motto. The phrase also offers a paradigm for relationships among ministers at all levels of the church communion.

Secondly, if it is true that the problem of the unity of the presbyterium is to be situated primarily in the practical rather than doctrinal sphere, the three “special bonds” that should exist among

5. “Quapropter magni momenti est ut omnes Presbyteri, sive diocesani sive religiosi, sese invicem adiuvent, ut semper sint cooperatores veritatis. Cum ceteris ergo membris huius Presbyterii, unusquisque specialibus apostolicae caritatis, ministerii et fraternitatis nexibus coniungitur” (PO 8).

6. “Therefore, we ought to support such persons, so that we may be co-workers in the truth” (3 John 1:8).

ordained priests, “apostolic charity, ministry and fellowship,” will help all priests make visible and credible such accord.

## The Road after the Council

### *Instruction Mutuae Relationes*

Commenting on the origins of the instruction *Mutuae Relationes*, Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, at the time the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, highlighted the spirit that guided the preparation of the document. It was born “from a deeper appreciation of the mystery of the Church as the ‘new People of God’ as well as the urgency for more effective coordination of the different charisms and pastoral ministries.”<sup>7</sup> The dynamism that permeates the whole document is a strong impulse of the Holy Spirit within the church and “the principle of unity in communion.”<sup>8</sup>

The instruction *Mutuae Relationes* does not hesitate to insert religious priests into the one presbyterium, even if there is no reference to the above-cited number of *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. Instead, the fundamental unity of the presbyterium is posited by appeal to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), and to the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus* (CD): “Religious priests, by virtue of the very unity of the priesthood (cf. LG 28; CD 28; 11) and inasmuch as they share in the care of souls, ‘may be said, in a certain sense, to belong to the diocesan clergy’ (CD 34); therefore, in the field of activity, they can and should serve to unite and coordinate religious men and women with the local clergy and bishop” (MR 36).

One can see how the fact of the unity of the presbyterium and its coresponsibility for the *cura animarum* create bonds that unite religious priests with the diocesan presbyterium. A further task is assigned to religious priests: that of serving as a sort of bridge to other members of the consecrated life in the local church with an aim to strengthening and expanding the participation of all in the

7. Ángel Aparicio, ed., *La vida consagrada: Documentos conciliares y postconciliares*, 4th ed. (Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 2009), 170 [my translation].

8. *Ibid.*, 171.

mission of the diocese. Finally, the instruction asserts that the attitude of the members of the presbyterium as well as the structures of the local church should witness to a tangible appreciation for members of the consecrated life.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata***

*Vita Consecrata* (VC), the apostolic exhortation that brought to completion the work of the Synod of Bishops on Consecrated Life,<sup>10</sup> in number 48 gave particular attention to the relationship between religious and the local church. Although Pope John Paul II is speaking about consecrated people in general and does not refer specifically to the relationship of religious priests to the diocesan presbyterium, it is not hard to apply the broad vision of the Holy Father to that particular bond. Let us examine briefly the content of number 48 of *Vita Consecrata*.

Consecrated persons play a “significant role” within the local churches, to which the conciliar doctrine regarding the church as mystery and communion attributes the full presence of a portion of the people of God. In the years following Vatican II, the importance of this role has been confirmed by various documents of the magisterium. These texts illustrate clearly “the fundamental importance of cooperation between consecrated persons and Bishops for the organic development of diocesan pastoral life” (VC 48). The charisms of the consecrated life can greatly contribute to “the building up of charity in the particular Churches.”

The church recognizes the “rightful autonomy” that is enjoyed by institutes of consecrated life; for their part, bishops “should preserve and safeguard this autonomy.” Bishops are asked also “to welcome and esteem the charisms of the consecrated life, and to give them a

9. “In order that the diocesan presbyterium express due unity and that the various ministries be better fostered, the bishop should, with all solicitude, exhort the diocesan priests to recognize gratefully the fruitful contribution made by religious to their Church and to approve willingly their nomination to positions of greater responsibility, which are consonant with their vocation and competency” (MR 55).

10. IX Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops met October 2–29, 1994, and studied the theme *The Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World*.

place in the pastoral plans of the Diocese. They should have a particular concern for Institutes of diocesan right, which are entrusted to the special care of the local Bishop” (VC 48)<sup>11</sup>

### **Pastores Dabo Vobis *and* Pastores Gregis**

The apostolic exhortations that followed the Synods on the Formation of Priests (1–28 October 1990) and the Office of Bishop (30 September–27 October 2001) do not contribute directly to our discussion. Even though John Paul II introduces *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV)<sup>12</sup> by expressing his desire through this exhortation “to meet with each and every priest, whether diocesan or religious” (4), he does not develop further the relationship between religious and diocesan priests.

*Pastores Gregis* (PG),<sup>13</sup> the exhortation that concluded the Synod on the Office of Bishop, invites the diocesan ordinary to display pastoral care for consecrated life with an aim of promoting greater communion within the particular church (21, 22, 48), and it refers to a concrete problem between bishops and missionary institutes (65). There is no specific treatment of religious priests as members of the diocesan presbyterium.

In summary, while the magisterium has made efforts to develop the conciliar vision of the church as a mystery of communion, it appears that the relationship between religious priests and the presbyterium of the diocese has not had a prominent place in this theological reflection. The affirmations of the council (cf. PO 8; LG 28; CD 28, 11) on the relationship among priests, whether religious or diocesan, in the presbyterium are not echoed in postconciliar documents, save the important exception of the instruction *Mutuae Relationes*.<sup>14</sup>

Now I want to address the manner in which religious, particularly those who are ordained, are inserted into a particular church.

11. See also numbers 49–50 for a broader exposition on the role of religious in the communion of the particular church.

12. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, post-synodal apostolic exhortation (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992).

13. John Paul II, *Pastores Gregis*, post-synodal apostolic exhortation (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003).

14. Cf. n. 8 above.

## Consecrated Life and the Particular Church

In the wake of Vatican II, both the theology of the particular church and that of consecrated life have developed significantly. However, such development has not been accompanied by a successful integration of the two.

Here I would simply note two matters that call for further reflection, even experimentation:

- On the one hand, consecrated life needs to be inserted adequately within the particular church, since it is within a particular church that it lives and that the universal church is made present (“in quibus et ex quibus [Ecclesiis particularibus] unica et una Ecclesia catholica existit” [LG 23]).
- On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that consecrated life is called to witness to the universal church within the reality of a particular church. The apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* clearly affirms this mission.<sup>15</sup>

In effect, different particular churches, especially in Asia and Africa, have experienced directly the contribution of religious men and women who came from other dioceses and were present at the birth and growing years of these young churches. In addition, religious frequently bring to their diocese of origin requests for help for these young churches and thus can favor a real “exchange of gifts.”

Hence, the bishop should avoid—if I might be permitted a neologism—an excessive “diocesization” of consecrated life, that is, acting as if a religious institute, which is by nature international, instead is only a function of a particular church. It is interesting to note that Proposition 29 of the Synod of Bishops on Consecrated Life recom-

15. “All this brings out the character of universality and communion proper to Institutes of Consecrated Life and to Societies of Apostolic Life. Because of their supra-diocesan character, grounded in their special relation to the Petrine ministry, they are also at the service of cooperation between the particular churches, since they can effectively promote an ‘exchange of gifts’ among them, and thus contribute to an inculturation of the Gospel, which purifies, strengthens and ennobles the treasures found in the cultures of all peoples” (VC 47).

mended that religious give greater attention to the particular church and that bishops value and welcome the charism of consecrated life, making room for religious within the pastoral plan of the diocese.

What does this mean, in practical terms, for the relationship of religious priests and a particular church?

- First, there is a need for mutual respect and effective communication between the diocesan bishop and the major superiors of religious priests who serve in the diocese. A bishop should treat serious matters with the major superior instead of limiting his communication to the local superior, pastor, school director, etc.
- The diocesan bishop will want to identify with major superiors different occasions for regular communication as well as promote extraordinary celebrations, such as the annual commemoration of consecrated life (February 2). Reciprocal visits have also proven to be helpful in fostering communion between the diocesan bishop and religious.
- The bishop ought to appreciate persons and structures, such as the diocesan vicar or delegate for consecrated life, that will enhance his pastoral care for religious.
- The bishop may wish to include religious in some of the diocesan offices or consultative bodies such as presbyteral or pastoral councils.

## **The Autonomy of Religious**

As is the case with nonordained forms of consecrated life, a particular church, particularly its pastor, needs to acknowledge the autonomy of religious life. Canon 586 §1 of the Code of Canon Law recognizes a “just autonomy of life, especially of governance”<sup>16</sup> for institutes of consecrated life; canon 732 calls for a similar recognition in the case

16. “Singulis institutis iusta autonomia vitae, praesertim regiminis, agnoscitur, qua gaudeant in Ecclesia propria disciplina atque integrum servare valeant suum patrimonium, de quo in can. 578.”

of societies of apostolic life.<sup>17</sup> This autonomy is the means by which a single institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life can enjoy in the church its own internal discipline and preserve intact its proper charism and identity.<sup>18</sup>

With regard to their proper bishop, a “just autonomy” is attributed also to institutes and societies of diocesan right by canon 594, which judges as illegitimate any interference by the bishop in the internal life of the institute. The local ordinary is charged with safeguarding and protecting the just autonomy of institutes of either pontifical or diocesan right that are present in the diocese.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, the bishop is never considered the superior of an institute. Even in the case of institutes of diocesan right, the Code never applies to the bishop any title that is proper to a religious superior, such as “moderator.” The preferred phrase is typically something like “[The institute] remains under the ‘special care’ of the diocesan bishop.”<sup>20</sup>

The just autonomy of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life should not be understood simply as respect for their freedom but rather as a requirement of the church herself, for whom the variety of charisms in the individual institutes represents a rich source of evangelical witness and pastoral activity.<sup>21</sup> Obviously, the just autonomy we are speaking about does not signify in any way a

17. “Quae in cann. 578–597, et 606 statuuntur, societatis vitae apostolicae applicantur, salva tamen uniuscuiusque societatis natura societatis vero, de quibus in can. 731, § 2, etiam cann. 598–602 applicantur.”

18. It is in this sense that one should read the word *patrimony* in the final phrase of canon 586 §1 (“and can preserve whole and entire the patrimony described in Can. 578”), since the word *charism* is not used in the Code.

19. See CIC c. 586 §2.

20. CIC c. 594: “Institutum iuris dioecesanum, firmo can. 586, permanet sub speciali cura Episcopi dioecesanum.”

21. In canon 586 §1 (“Singulis institutis iusta autonomia vitae, praesertim regiminis, agnoscitur . . .”), the use of the verb *agnoscitur* is significant. The formulation indicates that a just autonomy is not the fruit of a concession by canon law, but rather a natural right of each institute, which the legislator recognizes by the act of giving juridical approval to institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life.

total independence from legitimate ecclesiastical authority—for example, that of the pope<sup>22</sup> or the diocesan bishop.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, religious priests do not need to be unique in the way adolescents strive to differentiate themselves from their parents or other authority figures. Rather, within the same presbyterium, religious priests should bring the spiritual patrimony of their institute as a gift to the particular church. In order that a diocesan ordinary might fulfill his responsibility of “preserving and safeguarding” a “just autonomy” for religious, an autonomy that is aimed at “preserving the entire patrimony of the Institute,” it is clear that the bishop must acknowledge and appreciate the respective charisms of religious institutes whose priests are members of the presbyterium.<sup>24</sup> This appreciation will condition the way the bishop inserts religious into the pastoral planning of the diocese.

### **A “Just Autonomy” in Mission?**

Today the question of mission preoccupies many institutes of consecrated life. There is an effort to overcome a certain dichotomy, insofar as the mission is not something over and above one’s consecration; rather, as *Vita Consecrata* affirms, what one does is, in the deepest sense, an essential element of one’s special dedication to God (72). That same paragraph of the apostolic exhortation affirms, “It can therefore be said that a sense of mission is essential to every Institute, not only those dedicated to the active apostolic life, but also those dedicated to the contemplative life.” Earlier in the document, John Paul II teaches that “it can be said that the sense of mission is at the very heart of every form of consecrated life” (25).

The history of the Catholic Church in the United States has been marked by its “parochial” character. For many Catholics, the word *parish* is practically synonymous with local church. Catholic colleges, monasteries, health care centers, retreat houses, and the like are

22. CIC c. 590 §1.

23. See CD 35, 4.

24. CIC c. 586 §1, §2; cf. c. 578.

seen as “extras,” as tangential to “real” Catholic life.<sup>25</sup> The “parochialization” of ecclesial life has had a major impact on religious, especially Institutes with ordained members. As the number of diocesan clergy has declined and the number of Catholics increased, religious institutes have felt an ever-greater pressure to administer parishes. Even religious who are not ordained have been inserted into parochial ministry in significant numbers.<sup>26</sup>

The demographics of and pastoral pressures on the ordained ministry in the United States portend decades of more pressure on religious institutes of men to provide clergy for the maintenance of diocesan parishes. These pressures may blind both the ordinary and the religious to the fundamental question of the fidelity of the religious to the foundational charism of their institutes and its proper expression in ministry. These pressures further exacerbate an ambiguity within religious institutes regarding the founding charism in the face of historical and accelerating trends towards the “parochialization” of mission in the United States.

A pioneering study of religious life in the United States emphasized the exceptional role clarity of religious involved in ordained ministry as compared to all other religious in their study.<sup>27</sup> But the hypothesis employed by the researchers to explain the phenomenon was that the role clarity of religious priests likely came from their

25. Paul K. Hennessy, CFC, “The Parochialization of the Church and Consecrated Life,” in *A Concert of Charisms: Ordained Ministry in Religious Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 1.

26. The “co-opting” of religious for parochial ministry has been present throughout the history of the church in the United States. The first members of my own institute arrived in the United States in 1832 with the intention of cooperating in the first evangelization of Native Americans and the apostolate of preaching parish missions. The bishops, however, insisted that the Redemptorists assume parishes among the growing population of Catholic immigrants. In the minds of the European leaders of the congregation, the cooperation of the confreres in parishes raised serious questions about their fidelity to the charism of the congregation.

27. David Nygren, CM, and Miriam Ukeritis, CSJ, *The Future of Religious Orders in the United States: Transformation and Commitment* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993). An executive summary of their research can be found in *Origins* 22, no. 15 (September 24, 1992): 258–72; regarding role clarity of religious priests as compared to other religious, see p. 261.

role as ordained ministers, not from a fundamental clarity regarding their identity as religious.

Reducing the mission of an institute to the provision of validly ordained priests for parochial work without regard to a renewal of the institute's mission not only demeans fidelity to mission and charism that has been emphasized throughout the initial formation of religious. It also deadens creativity within the institute, as satisfaction, personal fulfillment, and role clarity are enhanced by the very behavior that is leading to decline in the institute. Young religious often become socialized into a parochial model of mission and ministry.<sup>28</sup>

Hence, it should be recognized that a diocesan bishop might be cooperating in the real infidelity of religious if their insertion into the diocesan pastoral plan requires them to sacrifice such essential elements of their charismatic identity as community life, a preferential choice for the poor, a partiality to extraordinary preaching (i.e., noneucharistic preaching, such as parish missions, retreats, novenas), etc. If a bishop knows little about the charism or proper mission of an institute, there will be a greater chance that the pastoral benefit to the particular church results in lasting damage to the religious institute.

The shortage of secular clergy in a particular church can influence the religious priests who remain in the diocese. These can be tempted to respond generously to the sacramental needs of the diocese by assuming new commitments that effectively imperil their charismatic identity. Even today, number 11 of *Mutuae Relationes* can provide a salutary corrective to an excessively pragmatic vision of religious priests in a diocese: "In this hour of cultural evolution and ecclesial renewal, therefore, it is necessary to preserve the identity of each institute so securely, that the danger of an ill-defined situation be avoided, lest religious, failing to give due consideration to the particular mode of action proper to their character, become part of the life of the Church in a vague and ambiguous way."

The Code of Canon Law attempts to preserve the charismatic integrity of a specific form of consecrated life by putting clear limits

28. Cf. Ted Keating, SM, "The Religious Priests in the United States Church," *Touchstone* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 16.

on the possibility for pastoral service by members of contemplative institutes.<sup>29</sup> The particular church should recognize that its exigencies may provoke a conflict among all religious priests, who must struggle to discern a way to respond generously to the needs of the diocese and faithfully to the demands of the charismatic project of their institute.

Hence, while the Code reserves explicit protection only to religious of contemplative institutes, and while the internal governance of an institute is envisioned by canon 586 §1 as the principal beneficiary of “just autonomy,” given that the object of just autonomy is the preservation of the patrimony of the institute, a bishop should not simply insert religious priests into parochial ministry without regard for the essential elements of the charism of their institutes. While the institution of exemption<sup>30</sup> is one means of ensuring this autonomy of life, it should be reiterated that all religious remain subject to the authority of the bishop in those matters which pertain to the *cura animarum*, public worship, and other works of the apostolate.<sup>31</sup>

However, respect for the “just autonomy” of the institutes of religious priests in his diocese will lead the ordinary to fulfill his “pastoral duty” by “fostering religious life and protecting it in conformity with its own definite characteristics” (MR 9c). This responsibility includes doing his best to understand the *patrimonium* of the institute and the way the charism should condition the pastoral service of religious priests in his diocese.

## Conclusion

Without a system of mutual relations that is based on the principle of communion, there is the real possibility that other forms of rela-

29. “Instituta, quae integre ad contemplationem ordinantur, in Corpore Christi mystico praeclaram semper partem obtinent: Deo enim eximium laudis sacrificium offerunt, populum Dei uberrimis sanctitatis fructibus collustrant eumque exemplo movent necnon arcana fecunditate apostolica dilatant. Qua de causa, quantumvis actuosi apostolatus urgeat necessitas, sodales horum institutorum advocari nequeunt ut in variis ministeriis pastoralibus operam adiutricem praestent” (c. 674).

30. See c. 591

31. See c. 678 §6.

tionship will enter the church: that of a commercial corporation, a parliament of opposing interests, or the law of the jungle, where only the strongest survive.

The strength of the church is found in communion, which is the real source for projecting the mutual relations among the disciples of Jesus Christ. The magisterium and canonical disposition can favor a harmonious and fruitful collaboration among bishops and major superiors. But not all the problems presented by life are resolved by the application of norms. The search for the common good of the church, love, and sincerity, together with a lively sense of communion and an appreciation for creative dialogue will always provide the best help.<sup>32</sup>

32. Teodoro Bahillo Ruiz, CMF, "Las relaciones entre obispos y religiosos en la Iglesia: Realidad y perspectivas a los XXX años de la *Mutuae Relationes*," *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 83, no. 327 (2008): 565.

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