

The Church 40 years on

No. 6

Living the Dream of Perfect
Love!

Religious Life

Chapter Six

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
Second Vatican Council, 1965

A Small Group Reflection

Inside:

1. How to use this reflection.
2. Part One: Our experience of religious life
3. Part Two: What scripture teaches, What the church teaches.

How to use these reflections

Contents: The guide provides texts for reflection and brief supplements on the texts. At the end, there are questions suggested for reflection and sharing.

Method: There is no fixed method. Groups that meet regularly may use their established ways of presenting the materials, reflection and sharing. For others, it is suggested that a facilitator leads the reflection and sharing.

[**Note:** The texts are not easy to read. Have the reader(s) prepare. After each text, pause, and give time for the others to read the texts quietly on their own. The reflection questions provided are only suggestions – do not be limited by them.]

Comment: You will need a Bible. Allow people to find the passages in their own bibles and work with the texts themselves. The flyer that accompanies this booklet has the chapter summary from *Lumen Gentium*.

Caution: This is the fourth of a series of eight reflections on the Church. Try to stay focused on the aspects of Church discussed in each chapter. Used in conjunction with the flyer will help.

LIVING THE DREAM OF PERFECT LOVE!

RELIGIOUS LIFE Lumen Gentium Chapter Six

INTRODUCTION

This section on Religious Life (chapter six) can be seen as an extension of chapter five on the 'Universal call to holiness'. We would like to deepen our appreciation and understanding of religious life today. The religious is not a third state in addition to the clergy and the laity, but they may be clerics or lay people who have dedicated themselves to a life more "explicitly" according to the evangelical counsels and live in a stable community. In order to indicate its special appreciation and esteem for religious life, the Church devoted one chapter of *Lumen Gentium* to Religious life in particular, stating that it is essential and enriches the life and holiness of the Church, in a particular way.

Indeed, as one writer put it:

"Religious life is to remind the world of what it can be, what it must be, of what it wants most to be: deep down, at its best, at its most human core. Religious life lives at the edge of society – to critique it, at the bottom of society - to comfort it, at the epicentre of society - to challenge it. Religious life is a reminder of the will of God for the world."

The true meaning of religious life cannot be grasped except in relation to Christ, whose life and ministry the religious seek to mirror and perpetuate.

Part I

A. OUR EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

1. Share a story:

What are the images you have of a religious brother or sister?

When did you first meet him or her? (Think of just one)

What is the feeling you had of him/her that you want to remember/or do not want to remember?

2. Read the short story

By a Holy Cross Brother in the United States. From Horizon: Journal of the National Religious Vocation Conference, Spring 1998. Vol.23, No.3.

WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE: THE VOCATION OF A BROTHER

Waiting for a connecting flight, Br. Paul learned that his plane would be delayed by two and a half hours. So he decided to go to a bar for a beer and to watch television.

While he was sitting there, a well-dressed gentleman struck up a conversation with him.

What began as a conversation about the weather eventually led into personal territory. He spoke about the ongoing pain of his former marriage, the alienation from his only son and his disillusionment with his present occupation. Although initially Br. Paul was taken aback with his candid honesty to a stranger, he continued to listen patiently and carefully and asked some clarifying questions. Br. Paul never said he was a brother. Ironically the well-dressed gentleman admitted he was a Catholic at one time, and although he continues to believe in God, he had left the Church. The discussion then centred on the struggle with faith, the shame he felt in the face of God, and his desire to renew his relationship. Br. Paul asked challenging questions which led to an amazing discussion on the mystery of God's unconditional love and the gift of reconciliation.

After spending nearly two hours with the gentleman, Br. Paul heard his flight number being called and wished his newfound friend God's blessing. The gentleman responded: "Why did you listen to me all this time? Someone else would have walked away an hour ago, but you're different. You listened to me, never judged me, and I don't even know your name. Thanks for everything.

As Br. Paul sat in the plane, he was overwhelmed by the profound presence of God he experienced in the unexpected ministry. Suddenly he realized that his vocation was indeed to be a "brother" and it had become a way of life.

"Religious are different, not in the sense that they are unlike or better than other people or ministers, but in that their presence could make a difference ...as they are meant to be brother and sister to any and every person".

3. Questions for reflection and sharing

- What impressed you in the short story about Br. Paul?
- What do you think is the essence of being a religious brother or sister?
- What would you like to tell the Religious Brothers or Sisters that you know today?

Supplement

From the earliest times in the history of the Church, religious men and women had been drawn to know and love God with an undivided heart, mind and strength by following more closely the person and life of Jesus whether by living alone or with a community.

Inspired by the community of Jesus or the life of the first Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles, the community aspect of religious life developed and gradually became formalized and institutionalised by the Church through the ages.

The present state of affairs is such that there is an urgent call for religious to return to their core and essence to be mystics and prophets for a global world that hungers for spiritual guidance – in spirit and in truth – without props and without frills... so that the words of Gal.2: 20 may become a reality: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me".

Part 2

B. WHAT SCRIPTURE TEACHES

The life of Jesus totally turned towards God the Father and totally poured out for God's people is the basis of Religious life.

Take one passage each. Look out for the characteristics of religious life from the texts then share with the whole group:

1. Call of the Prophets - Jeremiah 1: 4 - 9
2. Call of the Apostles – Mark 1: 16 - 20
3. Call of the rich young man – Mark 10:17-22
4. Samaritan Women called to mission – John 4: 1-42
5. Good Samaritan - Luke 10: 23 - 37

C. WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

Extract from Perfectae Caritatis No.1

It happened by divine plan that the wonderful variety of religious communities grew up. The variety contributed mightily towards making the Church experienced in every good deed and ready for the ministry of service in building the body of Christ. Not only this, but adorned by the various gifts of her children, the Church becomes radiant like a bride made beautiful for the spouse and through her God's manifold wisdom could reveal itself.

Question for reflection and sharing:

- a. How has your encounter with sisters, brothers and priests from different congregations or institutions enriched your experience of the richness and mystery of the person of Christ?

CONCLUSION

Think of the many sisters, brothers and priests who are living in religious communities in Singapore today. Name them and pray for them. Thank God for their lives of service and dedication.

For further reflection and sharing look at the following text and questions:

WORLD CONGRESS FOR CONSECRATED LIFE 2004

From The National Catholic Reporter

The remarkable gathering of 850 participants at the First World Congress for Religious life concluded their experience with a call to be "more witnesses than professionals" as well as to be "mystical prophets" and "prophetic mystics".

The fundamental desire of the great event was to try to live a collective discernment of the new signs of the times and the new calls of the Spirit in order to sustain with courage and confidence the burgeoning growth, and to recognize without fear the end of a certain model of consecrated life.

Questions for reflection

1. What new forms of consecrated life do you see as relevant in today's world?
2. What would attract a young person to live their life with great passion for Christ and for humanity?
3. If you could speak to the men and women religious in Singapore today from our 12 men Congregations and 10 Women congregations what would you say to them with regard to their role and mission in Singapore today?