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**THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

**Br. George Massay, CFC**

**RELIGIOUS BROTHERS – HIDDEN TREASURE:**  
The Witness of Vowed Brotherhood in the Church

Moderator

**Br. Robert Smith, FSC, PhD**

**A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for a Diploma in Religious Formation**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to Brother Peter Hudson, the former East African Area Coordinator of my Congregation, who took a risk in allowing me to do a course in the Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation at Tangaza College.

I also dedicate this work to my brothers of Otiende Community, 2001-2003, whose support and care I counted upon and benefited from greatly.

## **Epigraph**

“Come closer to me,” he told his brothers.

When they had done so, he said: “I am your brother...”

Genesis 45:4

## Acknowledgements

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To all I have mentioned and those I might have forgotten, I am deeply grateful. May God our heavenly Father, Jesus Christ our brother, and the Holy Spirit bless each one of you abundantly. May Jesus live in our hearts forever as we continue to explore the rich and deep meaning of our call as brothers -- the hidden treasure -- in and for the church.

### Student's Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method, and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Diploma in Religious Formation. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed:

— George D. Massay — — — —

Name of Student: Br. George D. Massay, CFC

Date: 17 March 2003

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor

Signed:

— Br. Robert Smith — —

Name of Supervisor Br. Robert Smith, FSC, PhD

Date: 17 March 2003

## Introduction

### Purpose of the Study

Marcellin Champagnat once wrote: “A brother is one for whom the world is not a big enough place.”<sup>1</sup> These words capture quite starkly the vocation of a brother. A brother is in relationship with whomever and whatsoever is around him. He is in relationship with the whole universe.

The words of Champagnat, I believe, are about the heart of being brother, the heart, filled with passion for love. The brother, I believe, is the one who opens his heart wide to love, serve, and save humanity and nature from human destruction by being sensitive. Sandra Schneiders comments: “What we do with our hearts, affects the whole universe.”<sup>2</sup> These are powerful words, loaded with meaning. The human heart can have an impact on the whole universe. The way one relates with people and nature can have

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<sup>1</sup> Attributed to SAINT MARCELIN CHAMPAGNAT by Br. Sean McManus in a personal conversation, December 2002.

<sup>2</sup> S. SCHNEIDERS, “The heart of being Brother,” talk given to the delegates of the 29<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of Christian Brothers, Rome, March 2002.

far greater impact than one can imagine. The brother's heart is wide enough to embrace the whole universe.

Brothers live and work amongst people. Their role in the church is not as evident as compared to that of priests, sisters and the laity.<sup>3</sup> They live together in communities and most of them dress in a very simple manner. Most of these men are cheerful, and full of life and enthusiasm. Yet, quite ironically, religious brothers in the Catholic church occupy an ambiguous position. Very few people know who they are. The majority of Catholics simply confuse religious brothers with priests who, they think, have similarities such as being unmarried men, celibate, and ministers in the church.

Catholic religious brotherhood is not valued highly by many people, neither lay nor clergy. According to my observation, it is seen as an incomplete state of life -- men who are not good enough for anything else. Brotherhood is seen as halfway towards priesthood. Because of this ambiguity and the non-recognition of religious brothers in the life of the church, I have a very special interest to explore, study and understand the nature and dynamics of this lifestyle -- the very one to which I have been called. I hope that this study might, in some small way, re-awaken the interest of laity, the brothers, and the clergy in further exploration about, and recognition of, the gift of brotherhood in and for the church.

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<sup>3</sup> By "laity" in this paper I intend to mean all the baptized, except those in religious life who pronounce religious vows. In this essay I will refer to those lay members in religious life as "religious". Religious who are ordained I will simply refer to as clergy or priests interchangeably.



These factors now lead me to explore the identity of brothers and where they “fit” in the church. Hopefully, this exploration will help brothers to respond to the needs of the church and of the wider society. The whole of humanity is faced with the crisis of identity. Are brothers an exception to this?

## CHAPTER I

### **The Identity of a Brother**

#### **1.0. Introduction**

In this chapter, I attempt to answer the question of who a religious Brother is. I start by dealing with the question of an identity crisis, which surrounds religious brothers.

I go to the origin of religious brothers' vocations by exploring the vocations of ancient monks, men who fled to the desert to seek God through the practice of ascetical lifestyle. The desert life was a lay movement, as it is the call of religious brotherhood. Religious brothers, as we see them today, are the closest expression of these early monks.

I also seek in the Gospels what Jesus taught about being brother to one another, and what the term "brother" demands in interpersonal relationships. Through the teachings of the church and other scholarly work, I endeavour to seek the identity and place of brothers in the church.

Welcome to this exciting journey.

## 1.1. Identity Crisis

Eric Erickson defined a sense of identity as “a feeling of being at home in one’s body, a sense of knowing where one is going and an inner anticipated recognition from those who count.”<sup>4</sup> Many people in our modern society are faced with a major identity crisis -- they are not at home with their own selves. Needless to say, religious are not spared from the same crisis. Erickson describes a theory that at the onset of puberty a young person is faced with the major question of “Who am I?” Teenagers are in a state of confusion; they are not yet sure whether they are still children or adults. The teenager often enters the crisis by becoming a rebel to any authority that does not recognize his/her autonomy as an adult. I remember my own experience during that period when, to prove to my parents that I was not a child as they thought but an adult capable of thinking and making decisions, I decided to rebel against their suggestions to me, through passive resistance. For example, if I wanted to go and play and instead I was told to go and do other house chores, I would deliberately not do the job as well as I could do. I needed to be acknowledged as a person and not simply as a child. I wanted to make my own choices and create my own story. Radcliffe states: “To have an identity is for the choices that one makes throughout one’s life to have a direction, a narrative unity. What I do today must make sense in the light of what I did before. My life has a pattern. Like a good story.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> T. RADCLIFFE, *Sing a New Song*, 200.

<sup>5</sup> Radcliffe, 197.

We see in today's society that people often gain their identity from a profession, a role, a group, or a movement -- and nothing more. The identity attained from these roles gives a person not only who he/she is, but also a certain status in a society. "To be a musician, a teacher, a nurse, a carpenter, a plumber, a farmer... was not just to have a job; it was to be someone, one belonged to a body of people with institutions that defined appropriate conduct, that shared a wisdom, a history, and a solidarity."<sup>6</sup> In other words, one acquires the identity of the group and as a result loses his/her own uniqueness as a person. Outside this particular role or group, the person is nothing.

Religious brothers are not spared this identity crisis either. Even in the present times for a number of congregations, the emphasis has been on seeking and strengthening the external identity, such as the emphasis on wearing religious habits, rather than an inner identity of who a religious person is. Some religious have identified themselves fully by their religious title, which has become even more important than their own name.

I remember talking to a religious brother who said that without putting on his habit or the cross (symbols of his consecration) he felt very inadequate while doing his ministry. For me, it sounded like an expression of insecurity in one's own identity and integrity. The person hides behind those religious external identities and in the process loses his true identity. I do not intend to suggest that religious habits or symbols are to be condemned, but that they should not be the most important aspect without which a

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<sup>6</sup> Radcliffe, 192.

religious person could not operate. In other words, appropriate congregational identity is important, but it should not be an end in itself.

## **1.2. Who is a Brother?**

It is quite difficult to define the term “brother”, because each definition does not exhaust the potential meaning. “Brother” is a relational term. Being a brother does not come about as a result of a particular role or professional qualification that one attains, but comes through a deeper relationship among the people. People call male children, who are born to the same parents, brothers. In evangelical churches, male members are often referred to as brothers. Hence, a brother is a person who is in relationship with other people, a mutual relationship that is characterized by equality, trust, and love. “A brother is a person you can trust with your story without any fear.”<sup>7</sup>

## **1.3. Who, then, is a Religious Brother?**

Religious brothers are men consecrated to God through their radical following of Christ through the profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. As religious, they do not belong to the hierarchical structure of the church; they are part of the laity. Schneiders emphasizes this point when she states: “Religious are not only de jure but de facto lay, and it is here that Religious need to claim solidarity

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<sup>7</sup> F. OTIENO, interview with the author, Otiende, Nairobi, 16 July 2002.

with all the laity in the Church.”<sup>8</sup> The Second Vatican Council, referring to religious, states: “This form of life has its own place in relation to the divine and hierarchical structure of the Church. Not, however, as though it were a kind of middle way between the clerical and lay conditions of life.”<sup>9</sup> Religious brothers are lay people, who are called by God to embrace a life form within the church characterized by a public profession of the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. They respond to this call and live it within their baptismal promises.

#### **1.4. The Difficulty in Defining who a Religious Brother is**

Unfortunately, when one tries to describe who a religious brother is, comparisons are always drawn from the ordained priest or from religious sisters. One hears things like, “he is like a male sister” or “he is like a priest, but does not celebrate mass and does not administer sacraments.” “He is like a priest but is not a priest.” This has brought about a lot of confusion because the description is sought from a wrong source, namely from the clerical identity while it is supposed to be sought from the laity. Schneiders puts this clearly by saying that, “Religious are not really ‘drawn from the clergy’, ”<sup>10</sup> but from the laity. She explains that one enters religious life as a lay person and embraces a life form which distinguishes him/her from the secular laity, who possess a different canonical status under Canon Law. When a religious/secular lay person is ordained, he loses his lay status and adopts a different canonical status,

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<sup>8</sup> S. SCHNEIDERS, *Finding the Treasure*, 257.

<sup>9</sup> LG, 43.

<sup>10</sup> Schneiders, 257.

namely that of clergy. Clerical identity and functions become more visible and take precedence over his religious identity.

Due to the fact that religious priests minister within the diocese in collaboration with the bishop and diocesan priests, the temptation for them (religious priests) is to identify with the local clergy than with their fellow religious. Azevedo expresses this clearly by saying: "Once ordained, young religious may have less in common with other religious than with diocesan priests. They may frequently skip meetings of their orders but seldom of their fellow priests. In essence, their primary identification tends to be with priesthood."<sup>11</sup> They find themselves preoccupied with their priestly ministry to the detriment of their religious identity. No wonder, then, that Schneiders argues that religious priests remain just nominal religious because of their public profession of evangelical counsels and the community lifestyle, which are more identified with religious life.<sup>12</sup> But in practice she believes that they lose that original identity of being a religious person. This is because religious life from its origin was never a clerical movement; it was a lay movement of some Christians who wanted to live the gospel message more seriously. A monks vocation was a gift from God deep within, calling them to embrace a life of asceticism. As Rees writes: "The monastic vocation is primarily a gift of the Spirit, internally present in the candidate, a vocation which is not given by the monastery even though the monastery discerns and tests it. The priestly vocation on the other hand is, in the final analysis, an outside calling of a suitable ordinand by the Church, a vocation, therefore, which is not fully received until the time

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<sup>11</sup> M. AZEVEDO, *The Consecrated Life*, 34.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Schneiders, 257- 258.

of the ordination ceremony.”<sup>13</sup> This reality is even more emphasized in clerical orders because the goal of formation in those communities (with the exception of some few like Little Brothers of the Gospel<sup>14</sup>) is not final profession but ordination.

Religious brothers on the other hand are primarily religious and uphold the religious identity in a very special way. O’Murchu commented during an interview that: “Historically and theologically brotherhood and sisterhood are the primary expression of religious life but around 1200 there began a progressive clericalisation of religious life and that became very strong at the Council of Trent. Those in religious life who were priests were considered the real religious while brothers and sisters were a kind of a second-class citizen.”<sup>15</sup> This development goes contrary to the history of religious life that began near the end of the third century when some Christians withdrew into the desert to live a more intense Christian lifestyle. They practised an ascetic lifestyle of solitude, silence, and prayer.<sup>16</sup> They took flight from the “world” and attempted to deepen their relationship with God without the distractions of the world. These Christians who were later called desert fathers and mothers fled to the desert to seek holiness. Some of them were hermits, “the most famous being Anthony.”<sup>17</sup> But not all individuals were suited for the solitary form of life and many of the hermits formed communities in the desert. These communities which took their inspirations from the

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<sup>13</sup> D. REES, *Consider Your Call, A Theology of Monastic Life Today*, 324.

<sup>14</sup> The Little Brothers of the Gospel receive men who are interested in becoming religious. Anyone desiring exclusively to be a priest is directed either to the diocesan seminary or other religious congregations

<sup>15</sup> D. O’MURCHU, interview with the author, 19 August 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. H. NOUWEN, *The Way of the Heart*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> J. FITZ, *Historical Development of Brother-Priest Relationships*, 6.



communitarian image of the Acts of the Apostles, provided protection from the psychic, physical, and spiritual hazards of the solitary life. The most noted of this type of communities was that of Pachomius.<sup>18</sup> Monks were predominantly lay. In the biography of Pachomius, we read that he would invite a priest to come and celebrate mass in his monastery, “for there was no one among them invested with the clerical office.”<sup>19</sup> Slowly, clergy joined the monastic movement. They were initially received as brothers without any special privileges. Within the community priests and brothers were treated the same. But as a result of the clericalisation of the monastic movement, priests began to be treated as the real monks, and brothers as the helpers.

Brothers have a special place in our society and also in our church. Despite their contribution in helping people in so many fields and also as a prophetic group within the church, the brothers’ vocation is not highly appreciated in the Catholic church.

In the following section, I address the causes of this misconception that devalues brotherhood. I will achieve this by exploring some historical background to the vocation of brotherhood within the church.

### **1.5. Why are Brothers often Considered “Inferior” in the Church?**

The Catholic church holds that there are three distinct vocations, namely: ordained, lay, and religious, even though, as mentioned above, some religious are ordained and some are lay. All three vocations are calls and gifts from God. Each

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Fitz, 7.

<sup>19</sup> A. ATHANASSAKIS (trans), *The Life of Pachomius*, 41.

person called to respond to one of the above vocations is called to universal holiness. Unfortunately, the lay vocation came to be considered inferior as regards holiness; priesthood and religious life were to be desired. McGinnis writes: "That very universality is compromised to the extent that clergy and religious are seen as better in some essential way than other baptized Christians."<sup>20</sup> Socially, priesthood and religious life are more respected and deemed worthy of more honor than accorded secular laity. Brother Pascual Maymi makes the point clearly by stating: "Many 'traditional' ways of understanding vocation rest upon the bedrock of superiority and privilege."<sup>21</sup>

### *1.5.1. Power and Authority in the Early Church*

In the early church all Christians considered themselves equal in the sense that they are the sons and daughters of the same heavenly Father though having varied roles in the community. Jesus taught his disciples: "The greatest among you must be your servant" (Matt 23:11). He gave a model of a leadership based on service and humility. He showed an example to his disciples and asked his disciples to learn from him, for he is meek and humble of heart. (Matt 11:29). There was no superiority or privilege attached to the disciples offices. Humility and service were and are the core values of being a disciple of Jesus. The disciples missed this point several times. They had the traditional mentality of seeking who was superior among themselves, the one who had more power (Mark 9:33-35, 10:35-44). Jesus emphasized the relationship of equality for

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<sup>20</sup> M. MCGINNIS, "The Church, The Brothers and The Baptismal Paradigm," 21.

<sup>21</sup> P. MAYMI, *LASALLIANA*, No. 30, Article 7.

and among his disciples, and the fact that his followers are brothers and sisters with the same heavenly father. In the early church, leadership emerged as a result of a charism given by the Holy Spirit rather than through a status to which one aspired. Each believer had a different gift, some being apostles, prophets, teachers, and miracle workers (I Cor 12:27-28).

### ***1.5.2. Priesthood Within the Early Church and its Historical Development***

The term “priest” was not an exclusive one, because all the baptized faithful share in the common priesthood of Christ. They are the priestly people, people of God, set apart to witness God’s love and care. The priesthood of the faithful was emphasized in the early church. “Slowly, those who presided at the Eucharist (bishop, presbyters) began to be called priest.”<sup>22</sup> As a result, priesthood began to be identified with a minority group, namely bishops and presbyters. Through the course of history, clericalism entered and grew in the church. There was, then, a clear dichotomy between the clergy and the laity. Priests were considered “people of God” while the faithful were considered “of the world”. Priests were holy, others profane. Priests dispensed graces, the faithful were clients. McGinnis clarifies:

The clerical paradigm, which was basically in place in the church and even in the world’s perception of the church until the mid-sixties, divided the church into two groups: clergy and laity. ... The ontological distinction between clergy and laity has had a long history in the church and has created many dichotomies in the practice and theology of Christian life. ... Clergy were considered active, other-worldly, powerful,

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<sup>22</sup> Maymi, No. 30, Article 8.

selfless, celibate; laity, on the other hand, were passive, worldly, powerless, self-interested, non-celibate.<sup>23</sup>

The notion that clergy were seen as not part of this world comes from the Council of Trent. This is because this world was considered sinful, temporary, and evil, while priests were dealing with sacred things. The Council of Trent decreed: "For since they [priests] are observed to be raised from the things of this world to a higher position, others fix their eyes upon them as upon a mirror and derive from them what they are to imitate."<sup>24</sup> These teachings have had a tremendous effect on the church until the time of the Second Vatican Council. The teaching brought an inevitable superiority and power to priests over the laity within the church. As Schneiders puts it: "In regard to its hierarchical constitution, ...the church is a class society in which power and authority are concentrated in the hands of the upper class (the clergy) while the lower-class (the laity) is in a disempowered position in regard to decision making and sacramental participation."<sup>25</sup> These powers of priests come from the concept of sacred powers received through ordination. "Priesthood was defined in terms of the priest's relationship to the Eucharist, specifically, his power to consecrate. From this perspective, the priest too easily becomes not a minister but a sacred person who stands over the community, a mediator between God and the faithful marked by special powers and separated from them [laity] by the obligations and privileges of a clerical culture."<sup>26</sup> The celebration of the sacrament during preconciliar times were the monopoly of priests

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<sup>23</sup> McGinnis, 21.

<sup>24</sup> *CT*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Schneiders, 254.

<sup>26</sup> T. RAUSCH, "Priestly Identity," 169-179.

while the laity were the spectators who attended the celebrations. The faithful said their devotional prayers such as the rosary while mass was going on because the language used was Latin and very few lay people could understand it.

### ***1.5.3. Vatican Council II's Teaching on the Shared Priesthood of Christ***

The Second Vatican Council tried to remove this gap between and division among the clergy and laity by teaching a new theology of the "People of God," who are a priestly community, in which is found a variety of charisms, offices, and sacramental relations to the church.<sup>27</sup> In other words, all the baptized have a share in the priesthood of Christ. The Council, aware of the possible confusion, wanted to teach clearly about the priesthood of the baptized and the ministerial priesthood. It states that these priesthods

differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power that he has, forms and rules the priestly people; in the person of Christ he effects the eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people. The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist. They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity.<sup>28</sup>

The ministerial priesthood is drawn from the priesthood of all the baptized, and in return, the priesthood of the laity needs the ministerial priesthood for its completion. They are mutually interdependent; neither is in opposition to each other or superior to one another because of their common origin in the priesthood of Christ. The Council

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. S. WOOD, "Priestly Identity," 109-126.

<sup>28</sup> DC, 10.

clarifies this idea by saying: “The fact that there are in the Church pastors, laymen or religious does not imply inequality in the dignity common to all the members; it rather expresses the articulation of joints and functions in a living organism.”<sup>29</sup> The church, as a body, needs all its different parts in its proper functioning.

The clergy and the laity have the task of working together for the well-being of the church. They are all called to witness to Christ in the world, minister to one another, and form a community of the faithful that lives the values of the new reign of God. Vatican Council II, conscious of the necessity of the contribution of the laity in the mission of the church, teaches: “The apostolate of the laity is a sharing in the salvific mission of the church. Through baptism and confirmation all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself.”<sup>30</sup> Because of the clericalisation of the church, as a result of the preconciliar teachings, the laity came to the wrong realization that the mission of the church belonged to the clergy. They saw their responsibility as enabling the clergy do their mission easily. “The only partly humorous summary [*of the*] duties of the Catholic laity, “pray, pay, and obey”<sup>31</sup> can sum up quite clearly what is expected from the Catholic laity. Theirs is the position of docility to the powers that be.

The teachings of the Second Vatican Council intended to create and establish structures for a more inclusive church, in which the hierarchy is for the service of God’s people. Learning from Jesus Christ who is the Lord and head of the church, the local

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<sup>29</sup> *MPDC*, 1.

<sup>30</sup> *LG*, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Schneiders, 403.

church was given an opportunity to seek its own identity while at the same time maintaining the unity-in-diversity of the church universal.

In this model of church, each member has equal status as an adopted child of God, but with a different role. Each member is able to relate to God in a personal and also communal manner. The reality at the present moment is that this teaching has not yet been received or even heard by some laity. The Council still teaches about "sacred powers" as related to the ministerial priesthood. Schreiter argues: "From an anthropological point of view, the hierarchical ordering is based on an access to sacred power, an access which in turn confers a certain status. The sacrament of Holy Orders can be seen as the boundary marker indicating entry to that realm of sacred power."<sup>32</sup> Too much emphasis on this powers, I believe must have caused the church to shift from the church of the laity, where they can feel welcomed to exercise their roles as priests, kings and prophets as clearly taught by Second Vatican Council.

Religious brothers, because of not being priests, have often in history been seen as insufficient (not being like a priest). They are seen as ambiguous in the church. In order to cope with this tension, they dressed like clerics and identified themselves more and more with the clergy. The brothers of my congregation (Christian Brothers) dressed like clerics and that, I believe, brought considerable confusion to the faithful. The reality remained that the brothers were not clerics. Brotherhood was and still is seen by many faithful, even to the present time, as a journey towards ordained priesthood. In this sense brotherhood was seen as inferior to priesthood, because a brother had not yet

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<sup>32</sup> R. SCHREITER, "Cultural Context for Current Relationships," 39.

reached the “destination” of his journey, which was believed to be priesthood. In some religious congregation, being a brother is a stage between entry to the congregation and ordination. Within the church, in a practical sense, being an ordained priest seems to be better than any other state of life. This type of mentality gets even worse in mixed congregations of brothers and priests.

In those mixed congregations, brothers, who are usually the minority are treated as inferior to priests and perform minor duties. Brothers are, in most cases, not as educated as priests and often the requirements for joining as a candidate for priesthood and brotherhood are different. While perusing the vocation booklet for Tanzania titled “WITO” (Swahili for “vocation”),<sup>33</sup> I noticed that for most congregations the requirements to brotherhood are only the completion of primary seven and/or some vocational training, which can be of additional advantage to the aspirant, while the requirement for those entering for priesthood is form VI with satisfactory pass. The vocation director of my congregation says that he receives application letters mainly from aspirants who mostly got division four, the requirement that does not match up with that of priesthood.<sup>34</sup> Some of them quite honestly will say, “I wanted to be a priest but I was not selected for seminary,” or “kwa bahati mbaya” (“for bad luck”) did not pass form four. In my brief experience of vocation promotion I met similar incidents. I, quite gently and firmly, made the point to those aspirants that brotherhood is not a second option for those who are not good enough for priesthood. It is an authentic

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<sup>33</sup> RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS ASSOCIATION OF TANZANIA, *WITO, Jitoe nani? Mimi*, Place and date of publication unknown.

<sup>34</sup> S. MCMANUS, interview with the author, Sombetini-Arusha, 15 November 2002.



vocation from God. I believe vocation directors have to be wary of those types of aspirants, if the authentic vocation to brotherhood is to be sought.

### **1.6. Summary, Conclusion, and Transition**

The present chapter has dealt with the question of the identity of religious brothers. I have pointed out the ambiguity associated with the identity of religious brothers within the church. I have argued that religious brothers are lay people who are called by God to consecrate themselves to God as religious within the church through the public profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. I take into account the fact that brothers today are the “keepers of the vision” in their maintaining of the original identity of brotherhood as reflected in the desert by the early monks towards the end of the third century. Religious life, or monastic life as it was then known, was a lay movement. Slowly monastic life was clericalised through the admission of clerics.

In the next chapter, I move on to explore the delicate issue of priest-brother relationships in mixed male congregations. Do brothers have any role in the mission of those congregations? What are the implications of those relationships to the well-being, identity, and growth of those congregations? I will do this in order to see how the relationship between brothers and priests interacts with the identity and purpose of religious life that I have presented in this chapter.

## Chapter II

### The Relationship Between Brothers and Priests in Mixed Congregations

#### 2.0. Introduction

Chapter one dealt with the question of the identity of religious brothers and the difficulties associated with brothers' identity. I pointed out that religious brothers are not well understood by many people within and outside the church. When an attempt is made to define who brothers are, they are described by who they are not, rather than who they are.

In the same chapter I discussed the reasons why brothers are often referred to as the lowest class and the forgotten<sup>35</sup> group within the church. I argued that brothers are viewed as such primarily because religious life is not well understood. People who do not understand the meaning and purpose of religious life are the very ones who mistakenly associate brotherhood with priesthood. These same people see brotherhood only as a journey towards ordained priesthood and that is the reason why

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<sup>35</sup> The term "forgotten" is used by Br. Michael McGinnis to discuss the effect of clericalism on brotherhood. M. McGinnis, F.S.C., "Being Forgotten and Forgetful: A Subtle Clericalism," *"Who are my Brothers?"* Armstrong P. (ed), New York, 1988.

brothers are asked regularly this most frustrating question: “Why didn’t you go all the way?”

The present chapter will discuss the role of brothers in mixed congregations of priests and brothers, often referred to as clerical congregations.<sup>36</sup> I will explore the brothers’ role in order to see how it interacts with their identity as religious. I will also show the effect of clericalism in and on those mixed congregations. Lastly, I will argue that brothers are and need to be understood as archetypal of religious life identity and as a result point out the gift brothers bring to those mixed congregations.

## **2.1. The Role of Brothers in Mixed Congregations**

Religious brothers were introduced into mixed congregations to help the choir monks, most of whom were clerics, carry on with their responsibility of prayer and ascetical devotion in the monastic life. Brothers performed domestic chores such as cooking, washing, working in the farm, carpentry, and many other minor jobs around the monastery. Regarding the historicity of this, O’Murchu commented during an interview that Cistercians, who were a reform movement within the Benedictine tradition, admitted lay brothers so that they could look after the land, the buildings, and all the domestic affairs while the monks, who were clerics, could devote their time to

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<sup>36</sup> The term “clerical congregation” contradicts the identity of those congregations because of the presence of brothers in them. In this essay I will not refer to them as “clerical congregations” because I do not want to perpetuate this inaccurate concept. I will simply refer to them as “mixed congregations of brothers and priests” or simply “mixed congregations.”

prayer.<sup>37</sup> The same idea is taken up by James Fitz: "Often a Cistercian monastery developed fields far from the monastery itself, making it difficult to return for prayer.

The lay brothers farmed these granges and often stayed there."<sup>38</sup> The respective roles played out by the choir monks and lay brothers in the monastery resulted in unequal relationships. Choir monks assumed roles of masters while the lay brothers were servants. As a result of this type of relationship there developed hostility amongst them.

Spiritually, lay brothers received minimal support from the monastery. They did not participate in the prayers of the community nor the high mass celebrated daily in the monastery. Brothers recited the Our Father and the Hail Mary 150 times -- a parallel to the 150 Psalms that were being recited by the choir monks. This division in spiritual practices and responsibilities was mainly brought about by the fact that the priests knew Latin while the brothers did not. Prayers (mainly the Office) and mass were conducted in Latin; consequently, the brothers did not participate. In this regard David Werthmann states: "Because brothers tended to the domestic chores of the house and were not schooled in Latin, they did not participate in the prayer life of the community. ... Brothers rose from sleep earlier than the priests and seminarians in order to tend the boiler and prepare the sacristy and altar for Mass."<sup>39</sup> In other words, a brother's vocation existed and was recognised in so far as they could help priests carry out their sacerdotal duties more easily. As a result, brothers were often looked down upon by priests in those congregations and had little or no status.

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<sup>37</sup> D. O'MURCHU, interview with the author, Christian Brothers' International Spirituality Centre, Lusaka, 19/8/2002.

<sup>38</sup> Fitz, 13

<sup>39</sup> D. WERTHMAN, "Brothers in Clerical Institutes: A Hidden Gift" 81.

The official ecclesial mission of apostolic mixed congregations belonged to the clerical members alone. Brothers participated in the mission as helpers -- mostly as manual labourers in building churches, managing the house, and other duties that would be regarded as secondary to the mission of the congregation. This was mostly because prior to Vatican II evangelisation was seen as the domain of clerics and brothers, being lay people, had no place in it.

The brothers' role in mixed congregations was even more hidden because they remained at home while priests went out to work in the missions.<sup>40</sup> This is because most of their jobs could be done at home. The brothers' world was much smaller compared to that of priests due to the lack of exposure to the public. Yet those people who were met by brothers were inspired by their warmth, compassion, and evidence of their simple lifestyle. Werthmann writes: "In the apostolate, brothers almost always stayed home while the priests went on mission. The only contact brothers had with the public was in the sacristy, at the rectory office window, or possibly while shopping for the house. Even in these limited situations brothers significantly affected those they encountered."<sup>41</sup>

Brothers in the mixed congregations did not have the same rights and responsibilities as compared to their confrere priests. Brothers were not allowed to be superiors of their particular congregations due to the fact that a layperson could not serve as a superior of the cleric; they also could not be elected as delegates to their

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Werthmann, 85.

<sup>41</sup> Werthmann, 85.

congregation's general chapter.<sup>42</sup> Brothers who had the gift of, or a talent for, leadership could not have offered it for the service of their congregation because of their state of life -- being a lay person in a mixed congregation. No wonder, then, that a vocation to brotherhood in mixed congregations was regarded as less significant than the vocation to the ministerial priesthood.

The separation between the two, priests and brothers, is very clear and based on privileges enjoyed by one group over the other. The typical constitution (of mixed congregations) reads as follows:

Our brothers should keep in mind that they are members of the clerical religious congregation. . . in such a congregation the Chorists should always have precedence over the lay brothers. . . . The Rule says, indeed, that all should be uniform in everything, but this should be understood of each in its own rank, that is, of the Fathers amongst themselves, and of the brothers amongst themselves, but not of uniformity between the Fathers and the brothers, because of the differences of state and duties<sup>43</sup>

This separation not only presents their difference in states but also in ranks. Clerics hold a higher position than brothers and the situation cannot be reversed. A number of mixed religious congregations have requested Rome to allow their brothers to take positions of leadership in their congregations but the possibility of that happening is far from being a reality. I spoke to a religious order priest who mentioned to me that in his congregational chapter the delegates elected a brother to be their superior but the decision was eventually disapproved by Rome.

Mixed congregations need to be firm and constant in advancing the idea that offices of leadership ought to be open to both lay and ordained members. This struggle

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Werthmann, 84.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted by Werthmann, 85, from *The Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of Priest Under the Title of the Most Holy Redeemer*, 5. It is interesting to note that in this quotation "Fathers" is spelled with an upper case "F" and "brothers" in lower case "b" This reflects, I think, a subtle or perhaps not-so-subtle latent clericalism.

with Rome has made some brothers give up the possibility of having a position of equality with priests in their congregations. Brother Bernard Spitzley arguing on this issue writes: "Some brothers in clerical institutes [*sic*] have given up hope and are filled instead with cynicism and anger. Their experience is that brothers are kept in a subservient role and not recognised as competent of their role of leadership."<sup>44</sup> Spitzley continues to point out that this is an injustice that exists in mixed congregations and unless its members are strong enough to name it, there is a danger of falling into a lethargic state. He recommends and argues that through honest dialogue there can and should be the possibility of change.<sup>45</sup> The change will recognise that one's contribution to the life of one's congregation should be based on skills, gifts, call, professional competency, and aptitude for various roles rather than state of life to which one belongs, cleric or lay.

## **2.2. Brothers as Archetypal Religious in Mixed Congregations**

As mentioned in the first chapter, brothers are the "keepers" of the original vision and identity of religious life. Religious life has its roots in a monastic movement that was primarily a lay movement of men and women who chose to devote their lives to seeking God through ascetical practices. Monks were to monastic life as brothers are today to religious life. Brothers are archetypal religious because they respond to God calling to the depth of their being, inviting them to offer their lives to the task of seeking

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<sup>44</sup> B. SPITZLEY, "Creating Right Relationships in Clerical Institutes," 170.

<sup>45</sup> Spitzley, 170.

God's will. In the process of seeking God's will they become aware of their true identity as human beings embraced by the mystery of God.

The ancient monk has a very close resemblance to the brother in contemporary religious life. Brothers "...carry the archetype of a monk [which is]-lay, charismatic, and prophetic-but find themselves divorced from their origins due to juridical and historical developments within vowed religious life and church history. Thus, at the core of the archetype of the brother is the energising image of pilgrimage and attentive obedience to God's voice."<sup>46</sup> In other words, the introduction of priesthood within religious life changed the entire dynamic of religious life as a lay, charismatic, and prophetic movement. As a result religious life was clericalised.

### **2.3. Religious Brothers – Gift to Mixed Congregations**

Religious brothers have a lot to offer to mixed congregations of male religious. They are a clear reminder to the congregation's members of the primary call to religious life which is that of being lay, charismatic, and prophetic. Quite ironically, brothers are the most essential element of the identity of any religious congregation, whether lay or clerical. Werthmann remarks that "...brothers potentially bring one of the greatest gifts in their congregations by connecting them with the original roots of religious life and by living today most clearly the call to fraternity, the basis of religious community."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> T. MADDIX, "An Enduring Archetype: Naming and Claiming Our Uniqueness," 35.

<sup>47</sup> Werthmann, 95.



Brothers build community in mixed congregations mostly because what unites them is not a common sacerdotal ministry as it is with priests but their call to community life. Brothers can subtly challenge priests to remain focused on their community lives, especially when clerical ministry creates more demands at the expense of community life. Brother Alex Cappe of the Little Brothers of the Gospel during an interview mentioned to me that before a priest in his community commits himself to any parish ministry, he must seek the consensus of his community members. If his external commitment collides with other community needs, the latter takes precedence.<sup>48</sup>

Most religious congregations were founded for the purpose of having their members consecrate themselves to God as religious and, through that consecration, minister to others. One good example is St. Francis of Assisi who founded a religious congregation but never wanted to be ordained. I remember talking to a newly ordained Capuchin priest and asking him how he was feeling after being ordained. He replied that he was happier the day he had made his final vows as a friar than he was on the particular day of his ordination. He continued by explaining that priesthood for him was a result of the needs of the congregation and of the church. I now more fully understand what that newly ordained priest meant. If he only wanted to be a priest, he might have joined a diocesan seminary and become a priest, but that was not what he felt God was calling him to. Similarly, the Little Brothers of the Gospel direct any men who solely want to be a priest to a diocesan seminary, while they welcomed all those who feel

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<sup>48</sup> A. CAPPE, interview with author, Little Brothers of the Gospel Community, Dagoretti, 4 February 2003.

called to religious life. Those in formation in the Congregation of Little Brothers of the Gospel become brothers and are trained in theology and other appropriate field of study according to the needs of the congregation. A member is ordained only when the needs of the community and of the church demand it. Even after ordination the priest retains his identity and title as a brother.<sup>49</sup>

Brotherhood is also a great gift to the church because it brings to reality the vision of Jesus to see his disciples as brothers and sisters to and for one another, with a common heavenly father (Cf. Matt 12:50). Everything about brotherhood starts from Jesus; the entire message of the gospel emphasizes one's love for neighbour and the relationship of equality. Jesus' message does not perpetuate the patriarchal structure of any society but encourages fraternal and egalitarian relationships.

## **2.4. Summary, Conclusion, and Transition**

The present chapter has addressed the question of the relationship between brothers and priests and the role played by brothers in mixed congregations. I have observed that brothers in most mixed congregations are the minority and are often treated as "lesser members" in their congregation as compared to ordained members. I argue that brothers offer the greatest gift to mixed congregation simply by who they are, archetypal religious.

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<sup>49</sup> Ordained members of the congregation are seen more as "ordained brothers" than they are as "priest".

In the next chapter I will discuss the mission of religious brothers, both in mixed and non-mixed congregations within the church. I intend to show how the mission of brothers within the church interacts with the identity and vocation of brothers in our contemporary era.

## **Chapter III**

### **The Mission of the Brothers in the Church**

#### **3.0. Introduction**

In chapter two, I discussed the relationship between brothers and priests in clerical congregations. The chapter focused on brothers' position in, and their role as members of, those particular kinds of congregations. I also explored the concept of brothers as archetypal religious, in order to show the gifts that brothers offer to clerical congregations and in religious life in our contemporary era.

In this chapter, I intend to explore the mission of vowed religious brothers in both clerical and non-clerical congregations in the Catholic church. Are brothers needed in the Catholic church? If so, what do they offer that is distinctive from what clergy and members of the laity do?

I will discuss briefly the three important aspects of the life of brothers, which are prayer, community, and mission. I will deal with each of these three aspects as a separate entity and also show how they interrelate.

### 3.1. My Experience

Four years before I realized my own call to vowed brotherhood, I had an experience that led me, wrongly, to believe that brotherhood was “insufficient”. I was a leader of the Catholic community in a government secondary school in Arusha, in northern Tanzania. I invited a priest to come to celebrate mass. I informed the brother who was teaching religion in the school that we would have mass. He showed an interest in attending, which was warmly welcomed by all of us at school. The brother was always very enthusiastic, energetic, and cooperative in all matters concerning the Catholic community in the school. He had supported the students in so many different ways and he was always available to us whenever we needed him.

While we (students and the brother) were all gathered waiting for the priest, I received a message that he was not able to come. It was a great disappointment because of all the preparation we had done. I thought to myself: If this brother was called by God to be a priest, we would have had mass without any problem. I saw the brother’s call of being a brother as a total waste of a person who could have been very useful. I was not interested in who he was but in what he could offer to us if he was a priest. Many, including some clergy, hold to this view. As mentioned earlier in this essay, brotherhood is considered an incomplete lifestyle, halfway between clergy and lay, by some lay people, clergy, and religious. Canon Law considers all religious who are not ordained to be lay. Their lay character is different from the secular laity, because as lay

religious they have rights and responsibilities in Canon Law, which are not shared by the secular laity.<sup>50</sup>

Surprisingly enough, a few years later, I felt a strong call to become a brother, simply because of who the brothers are and not necessarily for what they do. I could not explain to those who wanted to know why I felt that God was calling me to be a brother. It was a call deep within me, and as far as I could understand, it was a call from God for me. To offer myself to God as a brother and to relate to others as a brother was for me a way of searching for God and God's will for my life. The following words surely make sense: "To follow a call is not to seek what is greater or what is less, what I like or what promises a bright future..., it is to open one's eyes and heart in the dark night of the search for God, as the puzzled lad Samuel did, and to say truthfully to God, 'Speak, for your servant is listening' (1 Samuel 3:10)."<sup>51</sup>

I experienced brothers as men who were very warm and friendly. In school, they were readily available to students and to staff members, yet they were not possessive. They were men committed to ministry, community, and prayer. I was especially attracted by their simplicity of life and by the way they related to people, particularly to youth. To be a brother, I learned, was to be an equal, not in the role we play but in our innate identity as sons and daughters of the same heavenly Father. I have seen this reality being lived out by many brothers. These brothers have been able to touch the lives of many individuals to an extent that ordained ministers could not achieve.

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. S. SCHNEIDERS, *Finding the Treasure*, 217-218.

<sup>51</sup> P. MAYMI, *LASALLIANA*, No. 30, Article 14.

Brothers, just like other Christians both lay and ordained, bear witness to Christ through the way they relate to people in the day-to-day events of life.

My personal experience leads me to explore the specific areas of prayer, community, and mission in the life of a brother as being the core of his vocation. In the next section, I will show the importance of prayer in the life of a brother and what are the possible consequences if that faithfulness to prayer is ignored. Following this, I will address the two remaining topics of community and mission.

### **3.2. Prayer – Center of a Brother’s Vocation**

Brother Robert Berger, FSC, begins his article titled “Faithfulness and Loyalty” with some rather shocking scenarios, yet real life situations which happen to religious, laity, and clergy. He writes:

A priest contemplates laicisation. ... A young sister discovers that her need for nurturing a family far outweighs her long hours of satisfying ministry. A middle-aged brother decides that the only way to survive what he foresees as an old age of loneliness is to get married. A husband and wife are considering divorce, locked in a fierce power struggle that leaves them unable to deal with the hurts of life.<sup>52</sup>

After listening to these stories, one might wonder: What has gone wrong? Why are these different groups of people desiring earnestly to turn away from what they willingly and enthusiastically embraced the day they made that commitment for the rest of their lives?

I propose two possible reasons as to why these people are experiencing this sense of bewilderment toward their vocation.

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<sup>52</sup> R. BERGER, “Faithfulness and Loyalty: Challenges for Lasallian Educators,” 55.

1. The earlier decision to commit themselves to the particular way of life was not properly discerned in the light and with the help of God's Spirit.
2. They do not see any meaning in or reason to remain firm in their commitment.

Permanent commitment is not an easy thing for a human being. In part this is because permanent commitment assumes that a person cannot choose anything else apart from what is already chosen. Human behaviour goes contrary to this type of mentality. John Haughey so accurately puts this concept of permanence and its difficulty for the human person with these words: "The image a permanent commitment suffers from is that it is a once-and-for-all-time choice. This doesn't accurately reflect the behaviour of people. A once-and-for-all-time choice is rare, and even more rare is a successful once-and-for-all-time choice."<sup>53</sup> Haughey, however, argues that this permanent commitment is possible only when it is an unconditional choice that which one makes. Further, every time there is doubt as to whether to continue or not and a positive conscious choice is made to continue, the original commitment is renewed.<sup>54</sup> In this manner a human person keeps choosing daily, an exercise that makes life dynamic.

Jesus is a model of commitment for us. He committed himself to the Father after carefully and continuously discerning through prayer what the Father was asking of him. Jesus did not have a complete and perfect vision of what God was asking of him. "The light he had at any one stage about what was being asked of him came from

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<sup>53</sup> J. C. HAUGHEY, *Should Anyone Say Forever?*, 68.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Haughey, 68.



his prayer..."<sup>55</sup> and the moment in which he clearly heard his Father's voice was for him a privileged time to come to a definite commitment and nothing was to dissuade him. A brother, like all Christians, has a lot to learn from Jesus, who continuously discerned the Father's will through prayer.

Coming to a definitive commitment, for us as it was for Jesus, is not an easy task. It is a process that needs God's grace as well as human intervention. God's grace can only come to us when we are disposed to receive it. This grace will neither guarantee the permanence in the commitment made, because God might even call a human person to follow a different path at another time. Brother Robert Smith, reflecting on his impending final vows, wrote: "A person would, even with the spiritual and psychological fervor which sometimes accompanies such an expression of definitive commitment, be presumptuous in claiming 'to be sure' that he would remain [a religious forever]..."<sup>56</sup> He suggests that this is due to human nature and the freedom to choose. He argues that "one can--and must--hope and work toward such a lifetime commitment..."<sup>57</sup> I believe the process of working towards a definitive commitment can only be achieved through prayer. In prayer we listen to God's voice speaking within and outside us. While prayer does not guarantee error-free decisions, the absence of prayer is bound to lead to error.

In regard to the second explanation, I take for granted that the initial discernment was done with God's help but for some reason these individuals no longer

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Haughey, 100.

<sup>56</sup> R. SMITH, " 'Lord to Whom Shall We Go?' A Personal Reflection on Final Vows," 82-83.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, 83.

found meaning in continuing to live out the decision already made. There are many reasons that might cause this to happen including psychological, emotional, spiritual, and physical dynamics. Given the limited scope of this essay, I will not explore those reasons. I investigate only the contribution of one's prayer life in the decision making process.

Human beings are created by God and for God. The life in us is the life of God. This life in a human person is what we refer to as soul. Because the origins of our souls are from God, they can only receive satisfaction from God, and nothing whatsoever can fill that space of God in the human heart. Saint Augustine came to the realisation "...that human fulfilment can only be found in God. ... [He earnestly prayed] 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts remain restless, until they rest in you.'"<sup>58</sup> This restlessness could be experienced in so many ways, one of the most common way is the lack of peace and stability. Au comments that the saint's prayer clearly expresses the truth that a truly human sense of happiness and satisfaction can only be found in God. The human heart longs for love; "only possessing and being possessed by God can satisfy that deep longing for love implanted in every human heart."<sup>59</sup> The experience of this love, deep within the human heart, provides a sense of direction and purpose, and is communicated only through an ever-closer relationship with God by means of prayer. In prayer, we let ourselves be loved by God, supported by God, and become receptive to what God offers us. Peter Van Breemen depicts prayer as "letting oneself be loved by

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<sup>58</sup> W. Au, *By Way of the Heart*, 49.

<sup>59</sup> Au, 49.

God, or more exactly, it is letting God be God (for God is love)."<sup>60</sup> It is in prayer that we reach out to God, who is the core of our existence. Nouwen comments: "Prayer, therefore, is God's breathing in us, by which we become part of the intimacy of God's inner life, and by which we are born anew."<sup>61</sup> This newness fills the human heart with joy, hope, faith, and zeal to continue to trust in God's voice calling a religious, cleric, or lay to closer union with God, the source of his/her being.

Because a brother has consecrated himself to God, his primary vocation is to seek God in all he is and all he is doing. A brother is called to develop a contemplative attitude that allows him to see the world with new eyes. Unless a brother is in constant union with God he cannot develop this contemplative attitude. Consequently, prayer is an essential aspect of a brother's life and his commitment to God.

Being in union with God in prayer gives a brother purpose and meaning in his celibate life, a commitment he made for the sake of God's reign. Commitment to celibacy is practically impossible unless a brother is a person of prayer. In other words, a vocation to religious life does not make sense unless it is perceived and lived in the light of faith and hope in the transcendent God. I remember my novice director saying that unless a religious person prays, sooner or later, that religious will leave religious life. I believe this simple statement carries a lot of truth because as vowed religious our purpose in life is not to transact business but to give witness to God's love toward all people.

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<sup>60</sup> P. VAN BREEMEN, *Called by Name*, 63.

<sup>61</sup> H. NOUWEN, *Reaching Out*, 125.

I see a religious vocation as a mystery to be lived. This mystery can only be lived in union with God through prayer. Brothers have to take the words of Saint Paul to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thes 5:17) quite literally in order to make sense of their vocation, a vocation which for most people seems to be less attractive when compared to other vocations in the church, for example priesthood.

In the next sub-topic I will address the communitarian aspect of religious life. In what follows I argue that a religious community is both for the mission and the consecration of its members. This community of adults reflects back to us the characteristic of the early Christian community as we read in the Acts of the Apostles (Cf. Acts 2:42). My primary focus is on the reason for the establishment of a religious community.

### **3.3. Community – Source of a Brother’s Mission**

Community is one of the primary expressions of contemporary religious life. There is hardly a religious congregation in our modern era that does not see community life both as an integral part of its mission as well as an expression of their individual member’s consecration.

A religious community is founded primarily for mission. The human need for companionship, a sense of belonging, the meeting of material and other needs are provided by the community to its members primarily as a means of supporting its members in the mission entrusted to them. Martin O’Reilly writes: “A religious community is at the service of mission. Religious are, first and foremost, Jesus’

companions in mission. What they do, and how they do it, is secondary to why they do it.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, coming together is not as important as the reason for coming together. The reason for coming together is mission, and because of the mission, the member consecrates himself to God.

When Jesus called his disciples to follow him, he did not promise them anything except a cross (Cf. Matt 10: 37-39). They were to follow him and leave behind father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even their own lives for the sake of the mission that Jesus would entrust to them (see Luke 14:26-27). Religious have left behind their primary community in order to join a secondary community. Sandra Schneiders distinguishes the two types of communities by using the term primary community to signify the community of one’s birth. This community includes father, mother, brothers, and sisters. In this model, a child is related to parents and vice versa. The secondary community is the group that one chooses to join as an adult. In the former style of a community, decisions are made for the children while in the other model decisions are made after consultation among the members, since the members are neither children nor parents. It is a community of adults.<sup>63</sup>

A brother joins a community voluntarily and through his life and work in this community he responds to Jesus’ call to service. He also grows into union with Jesus. The next sub-topic is concerned with the issue of a will deal with the issue of a brother’s mission. In it I argue that a brother is entrusted a mission primarily because of his

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<sup>62</sup> M. OREILLY, *The Challenge of Being Religious in Africa Today*, 122.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. S. SCHNEIDERS, *New Wineskins*, 247-248.

consecration to God through the church. I will attempt to achieve this task by drawing insights from scripture and other sources, including church teachings.

### **3.4. Mission – Reason for a Brother's Consecration**

A brother's mission is expressed primarily not in what he does but through who he is and how he relates to people. I believe strongly that our world today needs brothers as much as the church needs them. This is because the term "brother" denotes a special relationship that exists between people and that is what I believe our church and our world are hungry for. Philip Armstrong agrees with this point by explaining the term "brother" as conveying an "interpersonal relationship and open trust not based on kinship."<sup>64</sup> Jesus used the term brother in several instances, signifying the special relationship that exists between people and their equality as children of the same heavenly father. He said, "As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi'. You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers" (Matt 23:8). After his resurrection, Jesus referred to his apostles as his brothers: "But go to my brothers, and tell them, I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17b). In another quotation emphasizing mutual relationship and reconciliation, Jesus said; "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you..." (Matt 5:23).

Religious brothers have the role of brothering the sons and daughters of God in the world today. Many people are neglected and marginalized, be they poor, sick,

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<sup>64</sup> P. ARMSTRONG, "Who is a Brother?" 31.

prisoners, addicts, children with no opportunities for education, among many other problems. A religious brother, though not administering sacraments, brings people closer to God simply by being who he is, a brother. His special relationship with God through prayer, his enthusiasm in serving others, and his full participation in the lives of the people of God bear a profound witness to Jesus Christ, and that is what our world needs. Secular lay people can also do just as much, but the brother's contribution is unique because he does this as a response to his own calling and his contribution to the mission of the church, through which he has consecrated himself to God. Through his consecration by taking religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, a religious brother receives the responsibility from the church to carry out its mission, as is appropriate to the charism and mission of the religious institute to which he belongs. In other words, consecration for a religious person is for the mission, whether expressed in active or contemplative religious life. The Association of Bishops Conference for Eastern Africa (AMECEA) remind us: "The consecrated person receives consecration for mission in the church according to the specific nature of each institute."<sup>65</sup> They continue: "The witness of the consecrated life itself is the first and most important apostolate, engaging all consecrated sisters and brothers."<sup>66</sup> Pope John Paul II catches this stark reality by stating: "These religious are called to be brothers of Christ, deeply united with him, ... brothers to one another... brothers to everyone, in their witness to

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<sup>65</sup> AMECEA, 11.

<sup>66</sup> Amecea, 31.

Christ's love for all, especially the lowliest, the neediest...brothers for a greater brotherhood and sisterhood in the Church.”<sup>67</sup>

This brotherhood goes beyond the boundaries of the church, even though it originates from within the church. Jesus reached out to those marginalized of his time because he saw them as sons and daughters of God. Religious affiliation or piety was not his “check list” before he ministered to them. Such religious practices of piety were to come later as a response to their (disciples/converts) encounter with Jesus. And as a result of Jesus’ encounter with them, those elements of religious practices like following the law take on new meaning.

Similarly, brothers minister to all people. This is possible because of their attitude of non-discrimination towards people, which enables brothers to minister to all, hence giving profound witness to God’s love. My experience, while teaching at a school run by brothers, was that the school provided opportunities for various student religious groups to receive instruction and form themselves as a faith community. Because of not having enough rooms at the school, the brothers’ parlour was turned into a mosque. Respecting and recognizing the diverse beliefs of the students was seen as the mission of the brothers, at the same time without compromising their own belief and religious practices.

The purpose of the monastic movement in the fifth century<sup>68</sup> was to seek God and God’s kingdom through contemplation and ascetical practices. Religious life has the same purpose today, to seek God and God’s kingdom in the places where religious

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<sup>67</sup> Pope John Paul II, General Audience, 22 February 1995

<sup>68</sup> Fitz, 9.



live and minister. These practices increased because of the church's laxity in its own commitment to and lived witness, of being a witness to God's reign. The church began to identify itself more with the values of the world of power, sensuality, and richness. Seeking God and God's will was the desire of the monks. This is the heritage that religious life is trying to live today through commitment to prayer, community life, and mission. These are the aspects of religious which I intend to explore below to seek and point out the interrelatedness that exists between them.

### **3.5. Prayer, Community, and Mission as Integral Aspects of a Brother's Life**

Prayer, community, and mission are the fundamental necessities for a vowed religious brother. These aspects of religious life might vary from one congregation to another depending on the nature and purpose of the congregation. Apostolic religious will certainly have a different dynamic as compared to monastic religious.

Are prayer, community, and mission necessary for one to be a brother?

My answer to this question is certainly yes. Unless the person is in relationship with God through prayer, and in relationship with other people through community and mission, he cannot be a brother. As stated earlier, a brother is in relationship with God, people, and the whole universe. Not that brother is an exception in relating as compared to other human beings, but a brother relates in a manner that is deeply rooted in his spirituality of being brother.

Brothers are baptized men who are called to form Christian community. They are inspired and commissioned to form gospel community, following the example of the first Christian community of the Acts of the Apostles in which the disciples “devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

Brothers are united by their common desire to seek God and God’s will for themselves and for the world. United in one heart and mind, they witness to our world that it is possible to live as brothers and sisters in a world in which race and family background are sometimes a source of division and hatred. Through community living, religious brothers witness that it is possible to live the commandment of love, which our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us to live. As a general principle, I believe that a brother living alone and performing his ministry alone does not live the authentic expression of religious life, of which community is an essential part.

Through prayer, brothers witness themselves as men deeply committed to God, as individuals and as a group. They are not public leaders of prayers but pray together with the church. Being in a certain liminal<sup>69</sup> space, they share with the rest of the laity the pain and suffering of the body of Christ through and with those who feel marginalized by or alienated from the institutional church and excluded from full participation in the life and mission of the church, for example women, homosexuals,

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<sup>69</sup> This word, as used by the contemporary scholars of religious life such as O’Murchu, denotes the place of vowed religious within society. Religious are men and women who are on the edges of society reflecting back to society archetypal values. O’Murchu defines liminality as “a subconscious drive for wholeness, for completeness, for tangible connection with the Originating Mystery which impinges upon our lives, whether we consciously acknowledge it or not. It is an inner orientation of the human spirit that defies logical or rational explanation” (O’Murchu, 1995, 44).

handicapped, et al. Prayer for a brother should be a driving force to reach out to people by promoting the values of the kingdom. Prayer moves a brother to mission.

In mission, brothers live out the fruits of prayer, which are the gifts of God's Spirit. As men filled with the zeal for the kingdom of God, they seek to promote social justice and right relationship between and amongst people. Beatie writes: "The apostolate is, therefore, the unifying factor for the Brother by placing him in relationship with God, with the world, with human beings."<sup>70</sup> I believe that is what a brother is all about -- to seek unity and harmony between God, world, and humanity. His life and mission should be a true manifestation of these elements. A brother's prayer life, community life, and mission are not independent entities but interrelated. Gaffney so rightly points this out by claiming: "All the elements in the lifestyle of the brothers are unified by their commitment to serve in the spirit of Jesus Christ. The constitutive elements or components of their lifestyle are interrelated: their faith and zeal; their apostolic spirituality; the fidelity that they maintain to a specific charism and tradition"<sup>71</sup> are all the manifestation of a brother's identity.

### **3.6. Summary, Conclusion, and Transition**

This chapter has addressed the question of brothers' mission in the church. I have argued that brothers have a mission within the church. Their mission is that of being a catalyst to help people own their faith. Brothers are available in the church to

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<sup>70</sup> W. BEATIE, "The Brothers in the Church," 54-62.

<sup>71</sup> J. GAFFNEY, "The Religious Brother in the Life of the Church," 140.

empower God's people and to enable them to recognise their identity as children of God.

Brothers' mission in the church also includes being prophets and heralds of God's reign. Brothers accomplish this by their deep-rooted desire to seek God and in turn by enabling others to seek God. Their prophetic stance is first and foremost acknowledged through their public profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Through these vows, brothers consecrate themselves to God and offer their lives in the service of God's people through what we refer to as their mission. They accomplish this mission by choosing freely to be the voice of the voiceless, to seek justice for the oppressed, and to provide opportunities for all -- especially those who are materially poor or otherwise marginalized.

The next and final chapter will suggest a new understanding of the vocation of religious brotherhood, in church and society, especially in East Africa. I will point out reasons for this new vision. I will explore this vision in order to see how it interacts with the whole idea of brothers as a hidden treasure, which is the title of this essay. I will also offer recommendations on the way forward for religious brothers.

## CHAPTER IV

### **A New Vision of Brotherhood**

#### **4.0. Introduction**

In chapter three, I discussed on the mission of religious brothers within the church. I argued that a brother's mission is to be a catalyst, prophet, and herald of God's reign. I also explored the three aspects of brothers' lives--prayer, community, and mission and showed them to be expressions of brothers' consecration.

In this final chapter I develop further the idea of religious brothers as prophets within the church. This prophetic stance within the church I perceive to be a new vision of brotherhood. The root of brothers' prophetic identity originates in Christ because brothers are consecrated for and by Jesus Christ to be his followers and witnesses. Hence, brothers need to start afresh from Christ who is the source of their consecration.

#### 4.1. A New Vision of Religious Brothers

While writing this essay I found myself dealing with the issue of religious brothers as the “oppressed caste”. At times I experienced anger and wondered why brothers had to go through all the injustices done to them, as if they were the rejects of society or some sort of servants to their clerical brothers.

One particular incident that happened in a class held in the Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation at Tangaza College, became the immediate cause that moved me to explore this topic of religious brotherhood. As a class we were having a meeting with the director of the Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation. The director asked us to volunteer to do some tasks for an upcoming symposium. One priest exploded and said “let the brothers serve the tea, that is their work.” I was so angry that I could not wait for the director to leave the room; as soon as she did, I and two other brothers wanted him to explain what he meant with those words. He eventually apologised. Even though he claimed he made the statement without thinking, the truth is that what he said was likely his honest feeling about and thinking toward religious brothers, especially given the fact that he is the member of a mixed congregation of brothers and priests.

Now the question stirs in me: what is the new vision of and for religious brotherhood in our contemporary era? In his letter at the beginning of the new millennium, titled *Novo Millennio Inuente*, Pope John Paul II urged both clergy and

laity to “Start Afresh from Christ.”<sup>72</sup> The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life developed this theme and specifically directed it to those in consecrated life. The documents exhorts: “...starting afresh from Christ means proclaiming that consecrated life is a special following of Christ, ‘a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren.’”<sup>73</sup> I believe religious brotherhood is just exactly that: living and acting like Jesus in relationship to the Father and to the rest of the human family.

Brothers have all the reasons to start afresh from Christ, because he is the centre of their consecration. Brothers leave everything for Christ, in order to consecrate themselves to Christ, by following him and by being one with him in mind and heart. The Pope rightly urges the brothers and all consecrated religious to “...strive to become one with him, taking on his mind and his way of life.”<sup>74</sup>

I believe these words catch starkly the reason for brothers’ existence in the world today -- to be Christ-like in mind and heart. Starting afresh from Christ means that whatever brothers do and whoever brothers are should reflect this fundamental identity that is rooted deeply within them. Brothers as Christ-like are also prophets of and to our present age. They are prophets because they have the same characteristic features of prophets in that they are called, gifted, and sent.<sup>75</sup>

Brothers are called to consecrate themselves to God in order to freely offer themselves to God and to their brothers and sisters through ministering to them. They

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<sup>72</sup> POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Inuente*, 25

<sup>73</sup> CICLSAL, *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 22.

<sup>74</sup> POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Consecrated Life*, 18.

<sup>75</sup> CONSTITUTIONS OF THE CONGREGATION OF CHRISTIAN BROTHERS, 2, 3, and 4.

are gifted with the Holy Spirit and the charism of the congregation to which they belong in order to become signs of God's love and compassion for all humanity. Through consecration, brothers are sent to be ministers to God's people, but more especially to the poor for whom Jesus had a special concern.

Brother Edward Coughlin writes: "The simplicity of the brothers' consecration creates a powerful paradox, making of their lives a prophet paradigm: a sign which can and ought to attract all members of the Church to an effective and prompt fulfilment of the duties of their Christian vocation."<sup>76</sup> These duties in particular presume a willingness to serve as witnesses to God's love and compassion for all God's people.

Brothers as prophets are within the church to challenge the church when it forgets the reason for its existence, which is to be the herald of God's reign on earth. This demands that a brother shift from the previously existing paradigm of being a workforce in and for the church to being "a prophetic witness, free to do good works."<sup>77</sup>

#### **4.2. Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

In this final chapter I have suggested that brothers are and ought to be prophets who have to start afresh from Christ who called, gifted them with his Spirit, and sent them to be witnesses of God's love and compassion. Religious brothers as prophets are a hidden treasure within the church. They challenge members of the church who seek power and privilege for their own benefit and sometimes through their particular states of life.

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<sup>76</sup> F. EDWARD COUGHLIN, "Religious Brothers: Blessed Ambiguity, Future Possibility," 145-146.

<sup>77</sup> J. F. MARTIN, "Heroes Seldom Ask Permission," 197.



Brothers as prophets should dissociate themselves from what is termed within the church “clerical ministry” because by engaging in ministries associated with clerics and clerical functions they compromise their vocation by identifying themselves with clerics. Brothers need to involve themselves with ministries associated with seeking social justice and the rights of all people. This is what Brother Thomas Page was getting at when he described brothers as being “... prayerful people of faith who will develop a spirituality for justice and equality which is non-violent, hopeful, courageous, and collaborative. To be brother for and with those who cannot speak or hear: the poor, the marginalized.”<sup>78</sup>

Brothers need to read the signs of the times and offer an alternative spirituality that is needed especially by a large and growing number of young men and women who are no longer interested in formal religion but seek new ways of living their spiritual lives.

This study did not exhaust all that could be said about religious brotherhood. The following areas could have been more extensively developed:

- the prophetic identity of religious brotherhood
- the contemplative attitude of a brother's identity
- a new vision of religious brotherhood

I believe future studies need to address the above mentioned topics as well as the following:

- religious brothers and vows

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<sup>78</sup> T. PAGE, “An Epilogue: Brotherhood - A Renewed Vision,” 233.

- the formation for candidates for religious brotherhood
- religious brothers as a liminal group within the church

I believe that structures, perceptions, and lived experience of brotherhood could be enhanced especially in mixed congregations of brothers and priests by doing the following:

- opening possibilities and opportunities for leadership for both priests and brothers within mixed congregations
- abandoning the term “clerical congregations”
- celebrating the Eucharist within the community in such a way that it reflects and emphasizes the fraternal unity that exists between brothers and priests
- providing equal academic training for brothers and priests, depending on individual gifts and desires as well as congregational needs
- emphasizing one’s final vows -- preparation and celebration within the congregation -- rather than ordination
- requiring the same qualifications for all those joining the congregation, brothers and priests alike

I conclude this essay with the hopeful words of God to the prophet Habakkuk:

*Write down the vision,  
Clearly upon the tablets, so that one can read it readily.  
For the vision still has its time,  
presses on to fulfilment, and will not disappoint;  
If it delays, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late.*

## List of Abbreviations

All Scripture quotations are from “The African Bible” Nairobi, 1999.

Cf. *Confer*: compare.

CICLSAL Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

CT Council of Trent.

LG *Lumen Gentium* -- Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

MPDC More Post Conciliar Documents.

N.p. No Place

n.d. No Date

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