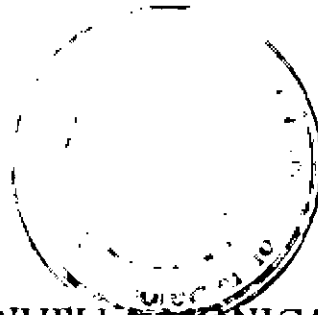


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**A CASE STUDY OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE
FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH**



AUTHOR: EMMANUELLA MONICA ATIENO (SR)

REG. NO. 96006 F

TUTOR: SR. MARGARET ARINGO, FSJ

**This is a long paper submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
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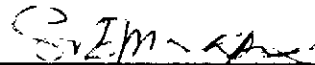
For their inspiration, I wish to thank my Superior General and the members of the Council who gave me the opportunity to take my studies at Tangaza College. I also wish to thank the Lecturers at this College who broadened my knowledge in the area of Spiritual Studies. I thank the members of Assisi Community.

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My further thanks goes to my beloved parents, brothers and sisters who planted the seed of Catholic faith in me, which later grew into a Religious vocation. And still more for any assistance they gave me at any time.

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for Academic Credit to any other Institute. All sources have been cited in full.



Emmanuella Monica Afieno (SR.)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFER	African Ecclesial Review
AMECEA	Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa.
AV	Authorised or King James Version (1901)
BCE	Before Christian Era
C	Constitutions
CE	Christian Era
Cf	Confer
Co.	Company
D	Directives
Ed.	Editor
etc.	<i>et cetera</i>
ff	following
FMSJ	Franciscan Missionary Sisters of St. Joseph
Fr.	Father
FSJ	Franciscan Sister of St. Joseph
Ibid.	<i>Ibidem</i> , meaning "In the same book, chapter, and passage"
LG	Lumen Gentium. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
Ltd.	Limited
LXX	Septuagint
NEB	New English Bible
NJBC	New Jerome Biblical Commentary
No.	Number
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (This is the version used throughout this thesis)
Omn.	Omnibus
PC	Perfectae Caritatis: The Decree on the up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life
RSV	Revised Standard Version
St.	Saint
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
Trans.	Translator
v	verse
Vol.	Volume
vv	verses

INTRODUCTION

A. General remarks

God is the initiator of each and every call. He has the absolute freedom to call one to himself to a particular style or type of life. God may call young women to a religious life style and therefore she is invited to live in a particular or specific religious community. The one invited to religious life has the freedom to respond to God's initiative and gratuitous call which depends completely upon God. In responding to this call, the religious woman exercises her humanness by seeking oneness, unity and integrity with her God. The religious is called to love God wholeheartedly without qualifications, conditions, or reservations.

Today, the religious face serious challenges in responding to God's call in the world. Their identity as religious is often challenged. Today's religious men and women live in a period where most of the formal structures that had supported religious life in the past are questioned and some are also reviewed. Hopefully this study and reflection will help the religious restructure their purpose and place in the world. The real priorities in religious life are questioned quite seriously. The dichotomy in attitudes and the shift in values have blocked the realities of the pristine ideal. For many, a dichotomy exists between human-spiritual, individual-community, action-contemplation, work-prayer. But in reality, these are not contradictions. Attitudes towards poverty, celibacy, authority-obedience have changed due to shifts in values concerning human person, and evangelical life. Community dynamism calls members for openness and this offers challenges for growth towards the better. New areas of apostolate, new avenues and values are inviting the religious to review their former and traditional apostolate.

The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph (FSJ), like every other religious congregation live within a technological and consumerist society filled with demands of all sorts. The difference in attitudes, shifts in values and morals, the number of members who join the congregation and those who leave, etc., tend to influence their lives, their theological stability and their inner consciousness concerning the religious identity. These factors also influence their call and response to religious life. The FSJ have based their Constitutions, with regard to their life of prayer, community life, vow of obedience and vow of poverty, on Franciscan spirituality.

Since this work is a case study of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph, for the primary data, the author administered a questionnaire among the same sisters plus five other Congregations following the Franciscan spirituality. She also delivered a questionnaire to another Congregation following the Jesuit Spirituality. The general background of the questionnaire gives the details on the age, related differences in Religious Profession and their level of education. The next section deals with the way the sisters live and express their charism and spirituality within their community living, vowed life and apostolate. The last section refers to the Constitutions of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph. The author gathered information by herself.

The objective for the field study was to find out what the Franciscan spirituality means to the sisters and whether it gives a relevant meaning to their lives or offers some challenges to the living out of their religious commitment. The responses did help reflect the living of the Constitutions. This whole study is meant to promote suggestions on how best the sisters could best live their vocation in today's Church and society.

Structural presentation of the study

The presentation of this study is divided into three parts, as follows:

Chapter One discusses the spirituality of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph. It begins with the general background, then it deals with the charism, spirituality of the Institute. Chapter Two deals with the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. Chapter Three discusses the apostolate of the sisters. It also analyses the data collected from the sisters through the use of the questionnaire. The study ends with specific references to the Franciscan Sisters by giving some reflections and observations.

CHAPTER ONE

SPIRITUALITY OF THE FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH

A. Introduction

The author intends to carry out a case study of the Spirituality of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph, a diocesan religious congregation whose history started at Asumbi. (Asumbi is situated in Homa Bay Diocese, Kenya). The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph have traditionally professed simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. They take these evangelical counsels within a religious community and carry out different forms of apostolate. They are governed by the rule of life and Constitutions of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Assisi and their own Constitutions. Thus, they are dedicated to the Franciscan spirituality under the patronage of St. Joseph.

1. *Background:*

i. The call to religious life

According to the Documents of Vatican II, all the people of God, laity, clergy and religious are called to holiness and sanctification¹ (cf. Matt. 5:49). They are to sanctify themselves and have an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God² (cf. II Pt. 1:1). Through baptism they share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ.³ They share in the salvific mission of the Church, "making the church present and fruitful in places and circumstances where it is only

¹ Cf. A. Flannery, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*", No. 30, 31, 32, 21 November 1964, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975), 356-358. (LG is the format to be used throughout this study).

² Cf. LG No. 33.

³ Cf. LG No. 31.

through them that she can become the salt of the earth.”⁴ This call to make Christ in his Church present is valid for both the lay people and for the religious alike. The call to discipleship can be traced in the scriptures. There are several calls in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The call to follow Christ can be traced in the Gospels. There are several instances mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels where Jesus calls people to discipleship. For example, Jesus calls Peter and Andrew, John and James, sons of Zebedee (cf. Mk. 1:17-20; Matt. 4:19-22). He calls the rich young man (Mk. 10:17-22; Lk. 18:18-23, 33d; Matt. 19:16-22) and Levi (Mk. 2:14; Matt. 9:9; Lk. 5:27-28). He also calls the blind man of Jericho who “followed him” (Lk. 18:35-43; Matt. 20:29-34; Mk. 10:46-52). There are several “calls” in John’s Gospel related to discipleship (Jn. 1:35-51; cf. 6:65, 10:3-5; 14: 26-28; 15:16; 21:20-22). In each and every call Jesus is the initiator (cf. Lk. 5:1-11). He demands an immediate and unconditional response on the part of the one called. The disciples are chosen by Jesus and he binds them to himself exclusively.⁵

In studying the Gospels (cf. Mk. 1:16-20; 2:14), Jesus looks for people in their own situation and where he finds them, he calls them to follow him. For example, Levi was at work and his call took place in a morally difficult situation (Mk. 2:14). Jesus reached out to the fishermen, talked to them and then invited them to follow him (Mk. 1:16; 1:19; Lk. 5:1-11). This implies that one is called to religious life from where one is invited in faith to follow Christ. Jesus approaches each one personally as he invites them. Here the decisive person is Christ himself and the one who responds to that call is the one who is called.⁶ The call Jesus makes is a

⁴ LG, No. 33.

⁵ Cf. A.J. Droge, “Call Stories”, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, D.N. Freedman, ed.(New York: Doubleday, 1992), 821-823. Cf. Rengstorf, 445.

⁶ Cf. W. Harrington and D. Senior, Gen., eds., *Mark, The New Testament Message*, Vol. 4 (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1979), 15.

one to one call and he often uses the words: "come follow me". This invitation requires faith in Jesus so that the one called leaves all (everything) and follows him.⁷ In other words, a "call" demands a radical break from all previous commitment to attach oneself to a life of intimacy with Christ Jesus.

In the call to religious life, the main object is the person of Jesus Christ who is the centre or the focal point through whom everything and every person in religious existence revolves, converges and culminates, for the religious' life in God and for God is made visible in Jesus. Religious life is an invitation to live a life of absorption in God to be fully bound up with God in a dialogical relationship. Christ Jesus wishes to share his very being with the ones called so that God's total being may surround them, possess them and live inmanently within them. This places God's love in a state of constant self-giving through Jesus Christ's self-emptying. The religious' deliberate choice to live for God alone lays a special claim on their part to love God and to belong to Him only. They are to respond to Jesus in complete attachment to him and in detachment from any obstacle that may be a hindrance to this call.

Jesus stands as the centre or focal point in the call to religious life. He is the kernel through whom everything and anything in religious existence revolves, converges and culminates. Robert Faricy says that Jesus is the heart and centre of religious life, "our life with God and for God is made possible in Jesus. The primary love relationship in the life of a religious is his or her relationship with Christ."⁸ This relationship is central by the nature of religious life and it makes sense only if it is given the necessary priority. Tillard says that it is an expression of preference for Jesus Christ over any other good. All other relationships and cares centre around and hinge on Christ. The religious adheres to the person of Christ Jesus as the one thing necessary.⁹ The

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁸ R. Faricy, *Spirituality for Religious Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 3.

⁹ Cf. J.M.R. Tillard, *There are Charisms and Charism: The Religious Life*, O. Prendergast, Trans. (Brussels: Lumen Vitae Press, 1977), 46.

Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph like any other religious congregation, have a call to a religious life. They live it according to the Franciscan spirituality.

ii. Franciscan Spirituality

The Franciscan spirituality covers a wide spectrum of approaches to the Christian mystery. It has a mystical ascent, as well as an evangelical, existential, tender and practical dimension. It is a spirituality based on the Gospel message and the Good News contained in the New Testament as a whole. It is a spirituality bound on the person of Jesus Christ through his incarnation (the crib), crucifixion (the cross and stigmata), and in his real mystical presence in the Eucharist. This is a Christocentric spirituality. It can also be described as an affective spirituality. Affective spirituality implies that it was founded and built on St. Francis' experience and on his response to the unconditional love of God (cf. Rom 5:5), from the very moment of his conversion to his death. St. Francis had a burning love for Jesus Christ and experienced a deep love that was without limits or qualifications or conditions or reservations. It was a love that qualified the whole creation to be his brothers and sisters and God was their heavenly father. Hence, there is an ecology in the Franciscan spirituality where all creatures are relation of the infinite richness of God. Because of St. Francis' great love for God the Father and his son Jesus Christ, Franciscan spirituality has a Trinitarian dimension. St. Francis experienced and lived out a deep, spontaneous and unspeakable joy despite the suffering, humiliation, and pain that he underwent.

Franciscan spirituality is characterised by conversion or inner renewal, poverty, contemplation and availability. The virtues cultivated in the Franciscan spirituality are wisdom, poverty, humility, simplicity, joy and love. Franciscan spirituality also emphasises poverty which comprises powerlessness, humility and sharing. Humility is an inner side of poverty.

The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph live the Franciscan spirituality, share experiences and seek to follow Christ according to the Rule of Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis. Their Constitutions and Directives correspond to the teaching of the Canon Law.

B. The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph (FSJ)

1. History of the Institute of the Franciscan Sisters of ST. Joseph

Under the guidance of Fr. Philip Scheffer the Institute began in 1936¹⁰. Fr. Scheffer looked after a small group of girls who after their Baptism and Holy Communion came together under his spiritual and material guidance. These young aspiring girls who wanted to dedicate their lives to God were known by a Luganda name, "Bawezi" meaning helpers.¹¹ Since there were no Missionary Sisters yet to form the "Bawezi", they were organized as a family and made private vows under Father Scheffer. He writes:

Even before the Missionary Sisters came to give the aspiring girls formation, they made vows of obedience, poverty and chastity. These vows were always renewed every month orally and individually in the confessional: 'I vow before God by three vows: I will be obedient; I will live in purity (chastity); I will be poor.'¹²

Eric Doyle, "Franciscan Spirituality", In *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, edited by Gordon S. Wakefield, London: SCM Press Ltd, 199)

¹⁰ Fr. Philip Scheffer was a Mill Hill Missionary priest. He was appointed to the "South Kavirondo region" (today Homa-Bay Diocese) in Kenya in 1913. He himself attempted to become a Franciscan Friar, but left the Order as a novice. The founding of this order was not his original plan. It began with Akumu, a girl whom he met in the course of his pastoral work. She wanted along with other converts to dedicate their lives to God. (Cf. Sister Francis Therese, *Called to Witness* (London: Herbert House, 1975), 8-11, 20.

¹¹ Cf. M S Nkoi, *A Short History of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph* (Nairobi: Man Graphics Limited, 1986), 3.

¹² *Ibid.* In the original language it reads:
"Achikora Nyim Nyasaye, Gi Chikruok adek.
Anawuj Wach,
Anabed Maler,
Anabed jachan"

Even before the Missionary Sisters arrived the “Bawezi” were trained to teach at the mission school, others as seamstress, catechists and others were trained to look after orphans. They had granaries where grains were stored for the poor and the needy. They worked in gardens belonging to Christians who were sick and they took charge of the dispensary. They grew their own food, attended to the diet and cleanliness in the school and of the pupils’ living quarters. During recreation, they made beautiful floor mats woven from palm branches for the sanctuary, dormitory, sitting room and refectory.¹³

They prayed in common. They woke up at 5 a.m., made their meditation directed by Fr. Scheffer and in his absence meditation was guided by Katarina Akumu, Rosalia Achiado and Marita Nyambuga. Initially, they had learnt prayer by heart which they recited at prayer time. They also prayed the Angelus at noon and the Rosary. Their evening prayer was at 6 p.m. They made annual spiritual retreats of five days. Fr. Scheffer during such occasions instructed them on evangelical counsels and religious life.¹⁴

On January 6, 1936 after various difficulties, a Noviciate was opened in Asumbi under the charge and care of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of St. Joseph.¹⁵ On February 2nd, 1937 the first postulants entered the Noviciate and their training began which was to last for three years. From the archives we read:

Cf. Sister Francis Therese, *Called to Witness* (London: Herbert House, 1975), 11.

¹³ Cf. Nkoitoi, 6.

¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁵ Cf. Previous Communication between Bishop Brandsma to the Mother General of the FMSJ are as follows: 1. *Letter of Bishop Brandsma to Mother General FMSJ*, written at Yala, Kenya on June 4, 1933. 2. *Letter of Bishop Brandsma to the Rev. Mother General dated December 28, 1934* about beginning the Noviciate to form the Native girls. From the Archives of the FMSJ.

According to the agreement made between the Vicar Apostolic of Kisumu and the congregation of the Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph in the person of Bishop Stam and the Mother General - Mother Celestine, the Noviciate training for the African Sisters was to last for three years.¹⁶

The cultural misunderstanding between the novices and the Missionary Sisters reduced the number miserably. Some novices left and went to their homes, other novices left and joined the Ursuline Sisters in Kakamega and only four remained and were professed on September 8, 1940. This date marked the beginning of an indigenous congregation in Kenya under the name Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph. From this first profession the institute grew slowly, but steadily. Girls joined from Kisumu, Kisii, Nandi, Kericho and several made their perpetual commitment over the years, becoming permanent religious members of the congregation. Several houses were opened between 1956 and 1967.¹⁷ The years 1950 to 1970 were years of rapid growth. By 1970, the sisters had spread beyond the boundaries of 'South Kavirondo'¹⁸ and Kisii to 'Central Nyanza'. The communities were established in Nandi, Kericho, Kakamega, Narok and Kajiado Districts. The Congregation has continued to expand and today there are Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph's communities in Marsabit, Isiolo, Meru and Arusha in Tanzania.

In 1974 the Institute became independent with the election of the first African Mother General, Mother Mary Stephen Nkoitoi. They also received their first African Novice Mistress, Sister Maria Aoko.¹⁹ After the 1973 General Chapter, four more General Chapters have followed. Each General Council has five years of Office. In each Chapter the Constitutions and the Directives are studied.

¹⁶ Document File, from the Archives of FMSJ, Signed on February 2nd, 1937.

¹⁷ Cf. Nkoitoi, 13.

¹⁸ "South Kavirondo" was the name given to the region around Lake Victoria and Homa-Bay while "Central Nyanza" covered the present Kisumu and Siaya Districts respectively.

¹⁹ Cf. Nkoitoi, 21.

The Founder's aim was to promote and raise the dignity of womanhood²⁰ through religious and social services of every kind to the surrounding community. The Founder's dream is being realized since the members of the Institute participate in education at all levels, care for the sick and do pastoral and catechetical works as well. They also work among the orphans and the disabled. The Institute has opened up to new apostolates in new avenues and new areas where members have moved to. In their apostolate, they manifest the charism of the founder as well as the charism of the Congregation.

2. Charism and Spirituality of the Institute

a. Charism of the Institute

The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph have an apostolic Charism which is Trinitarian in nature. They draw their strength from the contemplation of the Holy Trinity. It is summarised thus: Our Charism is a Trinitarian Charism. We emphasise and cherish unity and love both in community and in our apostolate to reveal to all people that God is love. We also try to live in childlike simplicity and in unison with the whole creation.²¹ (They strive to live in deep relationship with the whole of creation).

Their Charism is consolidated in the Franciscan spirituality and flows from their union with God in the Eucharist, Liturgy of Hours, devotional prayers, personal prayers, recollections, retreats, and the participation in the sacraments especially that of reconciliation.²² They also have devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph emphasize and cherish unity and love in community and share the fruit of their contemplation in their apostolate,

²⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 22.

²¹ *Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph, Pamphlet, Asumbi, 1994, 1.*

²² Cf. C. 5.

giving more attention to the poor, the needy, the sick and the elderly giving them dignity and integrity.²³

b. Spirituality of the Institute

The Spirituality of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph is that of inner renewal, childlike simplicity, humility, poverty and availability.²⁴ The members express and manifest this spirit in the Church through utter trust in God and total dedication in service, animated by love and joy.²⁵ In this regard, the members embrace the Franciscan spirit permeated with four fundamental values, namely: *conversion to God and neighbour, poverty, "minority" (humility), and contemplation.* These values draw members to live a simple way of life which reflects that of St. Francis, a willingness to be poor themselves, to live among the poor and serve those who are needy.²⁶ The Constitutions state that if they are following Christ Jesus who emptied himself to become a human being, the members should share their spiritual riches, as well as their material goods with others. The Constitutions says that to share oneself, one's gifts and talents, each member must have a deep relationship with the Lord who is himself rich (cf. Phil. 2:5-7, II Cor. 8:9). From Jesus' infinite riches, each sister can enrich herself, and in turn enrich her surrounding and then the world through her sharing and service. Like St. Francis and St. Joseph, the members' union with Jesus sanctifies their activities of charity. Jesus would withdraw to a lonely place to pray (Mk. 1:35; Lk. 4:42-44), then continue with the ministry. St. Francis practised a similar thing as Thomas of Celano says: "He always sought hidden places where he could adapt not only his soul, but also his members to God."²⁷

²³ Cf. C. 6.

²⁴ Cf. C. 6a.

²⁵ Cf. C. 4.

²⁶ Cf. Carney and Horgan, 3.

²⁷ M.A. Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of Sources of the Life of St. Francis*, Raymond E. Brown, et al., Trans., 4th. ed. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 440. Cf. Constitution, C. 2.

The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph's prayer and service cannot be separated in any way because this will be the manifestation of their lives in the Institute. Many spiritual writers say that spiritual life without life of prayer is like the Gospel without Christ.²⁸ This is because prayer draws one to a personal union with God. It means that one participates and shares in God's life. Prayer leads to a dialogue of friendship, union, intimacy, adoration and love. It is a realization that one must draw nearer to God and cultivate a very intimate relationship which grows out of a personal encounter with Christ in the Eucharist, Scripture reading, adoration and visit to the Blessed Sacrament. The Constitution encourages members to commit themselves to personal and community prayer.²⁹ In response to Questionnaire I, Question no. 4, the respondents have given the same emphasis found in the Constitutions about union with God in prayer. For the respondents, prayer draws them to Christ and renders their service in community and apostolate meaningful. 113 out of 121 female and 6 out of 6 male respondents have rated prayer number one in their life. According to the years of religious profession, years 1-10 have 53 out of 57 respondents, years 11-20 have 19 out of 21 respondents, years 21-30 have 27 out of 28 respondents and years above 30 have 27 out of 27 respondents, all for whom prayer life takes first position. On the level of education, Primary have 20 out of 21 respondents, Secondary have 63 out of 66 respondents and Post Secondary have 23 out of 23 respondents for whom prayer has first priority.³⁰ Similarly 63 FSJ responded that self-sanctification and leading others to God³¹ is primary. 40 FSJ responded that their life should reflect that of Jesus.³² From the statistics above, it is clear that life of prayer is fundamental for the members.

²⁸ Cf. H.J.M. Nouwen, *The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life: Reaching Out* (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1975), 87.

²⁹ Cf. C. 31-41 a-d.

³⁰ Cf. Appendix II, Table VII, Questionnaire I, Question No. 4.

³¹ Cf. C. 4.

³² Cf. Appendix II, Table XIV, Questionnaire II, Question No. 12.

A second important aspect in regard to the spirit of the Congregation is the communal prayer where the members express their faith and vocation as a family. Together with the whole Church, they offer themselves at Mass with Christ as victim and in turn Christ offers them to God the Father. They are now nourished and begin to live out the Eucharist in the form of praise and thanksgiving. This communal prayer life draws each member to a share in the Church's unceasing adoration, petition and praise, and thanksgiving to God in Christ and in the Spirit. The life of prayer bears fruit when it is real, authentic and alive from deep within oneself.

c. Objective of the Institute

Father Philip Scheffer was concerned about the African woman of his time. He saw and watched the women in the villages and felt that they were marginalized and that they suffered from all kinds of domestic mishaps. He strained within his capacity to liberate them from various powers which daunted them. He was convinced that education would be the most appropriate means to fortify and buttress them against such social mishaps. His whole objective was to raise their dignity and to give them self-worth and integrity. It was for this that he founded the congregation so that its members could work among women and help their own people.³³ On Questionnaire II, Question no.12, 91 FSI have responded that their founder's aim was to raise the dignity of our people, particularly women through prayer and apostolate.³⁴

The aim of the FSI is to glorify God, sanctify themselves and draw others to God by elevating the dignity of human persons through education, medical care and other ministries. They try to draw their strength from the Gospel message.³⁵ They are therefore called to live the Gospel

³³ Cf. Letter of Bishop G. Brandsma to Rev. Mother General, FMSI, written at Yala, Kenya on 15th. August, 1925 in consultation with Fr Philip Scheffer. Bishop Brandsma had written to the Superior General of the FMSI - Mother Ignatius Ingham in 1925 to send sisters to work in the New Apostolic Prefecture especially in the area of Health and Education of women and girls). Cf. Nkoitoi, J. Cf. Francis Therese, 6.

³⁴ Cf. Appendix II, Table XVIII, Questionnaire II, Question No. 15.

³⁵ Cf. C. 7.

message in a prophetic spirit, being open to the needs of the time. This will be a reality only if they are objective and open to changes. Such attitude will show through the relationships they have had over the years cultivated in the community with each other and the people around them. Today the FSJ no longer speaks of apostolate among women but rather to raise the dignity of the people of God.³⁶ In order to raise the dignity of the people both men and women, the FSJ must begin with their own positive self worth and self-dignity.

³⁶ Cf. Draft Constitutions, I.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS

1. Introduction

The evangelical counsels are part of religious life. They are a gift from God concretized in one's life-style.³⁷ Without the counsels, religious life cannot exist. They are the fulfilment of the baptismal vows.³⁸ Ea

counsel is a means of self-realisation in grace, symbol and gesture in faith, hope and love, the virtues which confront the realities of human existence.³⁹ Through these counsels, the religious renounce their love, possession and independence. The renunciation demands one's totality and a letting go completely as Karl Rahner says: "We cannot really know whether we believe in the two birds in the bush until we let go of the one bird in the hand."⁴⁰ Renunciation involves risk taking but once this is done, one should live by its outcome. It therefore needs freedom and total commitment.

The Vatican Council II teaches that the counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience are based on the examples of Jesus.⁴¹ Once the members are bound with these counsels, they are to be totally dedicated to God. Through these vows, whether simple or solemn, one becomes more intimately consecrated to the divine service.

³⁷ Cf. LG, No. 43.

³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* Cf. C. 8.

³⁹ Cf. D. Knight, *Cloud by Day and Fire by Night*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Denville: Dimension Books, 1979), 59.

⁴⁰ K. Rahner, "On the Evangelical Counsels", *Theological Investigations*, Vol. VIII, No. 9 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., 1977), 155.

⁴¹ Cf. LG, No. 43.

2. Vow of celibacy

Consecrated celibacy is an embodied expression of a commitment whereby the religious live out their relationship of love for Jesus, in their human life experience. Van Kaam calls it the Christian vow of respect for love.⁴² It is a state of non marriage, but not a state of barrenness. If celibacy is a renunciation of marriage, then it is a vow to love radically. Through celibacy the religious express their faith-call-response. Since this renunciation in chastity involves the giving of one's love to Christ in an unmarried state of life, it calls forth from deep within oneself to sacrifice and to give oneself for the sake of the Kingdom. Matt. 19:12 says that it is for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. St. Paul says that it uniquely frees the heart of human persons (cf. I Cor. 7:32-35) so that they become fervent in love for God and for all people.⁴³ The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph's Constitutions say that it is an act of love, the love union between the sister and Christ.⁴⁴ It is an expression of love shared by every one as it is directed towards the proclamation of the Kingdom in a spirit of Agape, that is love and service.⁴⁵ In this case chastity is a specific gift which expresses friendship and caring concern (charity/love). On this aspect the constitutions states, "... chastity allows the sisters, freed from the responsibility of married life, to devote themselves more completely to apostolic works."⁴⁶ The sisters are reminded to practice the mortification and custody of the senses because these external practices are supportive help to the living out of their consecrated celibacy.⁴⁷ The members are reminded to be prudent with anything which may endanger chastity.

⁴² Cf. A. Van Kaam, *The Vowed life* (Denville: Dimension Books, 1968), 169.

⁴³ Cf. A. Flannery, ed. "Decree on The up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life", No.12, 28 October 1965, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975), 557. (PC Perfectae Caritatis is the format to be used throughout this study).

⁴⁴ Cf. C. 10. Cf. PC. No. 12.

⁴⁵ Cf. L. Orsy, *Open to the Spirit: Religious Life After Vatican II* (Denville. Dimension Books, 1968), 97.

⁴⁶ C. 10.

⁴⁷ Cf. C.13.

The link between consecrated celibacy of a religious person and the Kenotic renunciation of Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:6-8), is love that is surrendered in both cases. There is complete renunciation on the part of Jesus when he “emptied” his divine glory. This implied that he “emptied” his divinity and any divine attributes which might belong to him in that state. At his death on a cross, he took a shameful death reserved for slaves. He intensely suffered in his total submission to God the Father. Christ Jesus’ choice to become man and to die on the cross was freely chosen by him. For each religious member of the congregation, to have renounced marriage and to vow chastity is their free choice. Their renunciation of a husband, motherhood, children etc. is likewise freely chosen for the sake of the Kingdom. If Christ lived to this fullness of death on a cross, these religious women may not die on a cross as Christ did, trying to imitate him, to live like him, but there is certainly a kind of sacrifice in living out the vow of celibacy. Besides, the Constitutions on celibacy ask the members to live their consecrated chastity faithfully. The individual should be convinced of the meaning of this vow to herself and its impact in her life. They have the obligation to translate it as a vow of love and live it in today’s world. As they live out the vow of chastity the sisters should be aware of their own limitations, strengths and weaknesses, including the different stages of their biological and psycho-sexual developments as they live their vow within the community. The community is to give them support and the sisters are called to live their lives vibrantly.

From an African perspective, chastity was strictly observed by all the tribes. Virginity was a value and any premarital sex was prohibited. Severe taboos were laid upon pre-marital sex. Life, procreation and sharing of that life with others was stressed as Mugambi and Kirima puts it:

As life was sacred, sexuality had to be kept pure so that it would be a worthy instrument for generation of children. The virginity of young girls was especially prized and many taboos were laid down regarding the conduct of sex life⁴⁸

For an African, love was synonymous to life because love comes from the depth of one's being. Life and love have a transforming relationship especially as children are born in a family. This life giving in procreation sustains the marriage, harmonizes and binds the couple in a permanent union (cf. Col. 3:14). The author sees consecrated celibacy with the same African eye or perspective where chastity is a way of choosing and committing one's self to Christ Jesus as the source of life, the ultimate value, just as Mbiti says: "For an African the ultimate value is life".⁴⁹ If these religious women believe in giving life or generating life, they will promote it and live it to its fullness. This life is expressed through joy and open friendship in and out of community. Vibrant life is to be accompanied with generosity and genuine love for God and neighbour.

3. Vow of poverty

Evangelical poverty is voluntary and freely embraced for the sake of the Kingdom and willingly chosen for the sake of love.⁵⁰ The author understands and therefore defines evangelical poverty as to have or possess something and to share it freely. It is vowed within the community to promote the Kingdom. The practical dimension of poverty is the readiness to share whatever there is with those in need within their community and to motivate others with whom they work to get what they need without making them dependent on the community (cf. Acts. 2:42). Poverty goes further because it is a way of being, thinking and loving. It is an attitude of mind and heart. It is a

⁴⁸ J. Mugambi and N. Kirima, *The African Religious Heritage: A Text Book based on Syllabus 228 of the Kenya Certificate of Education* (Nairobi: Oxford University press, 1991), 40.

⁴⁹ J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 275. Cf. A. Lott, "Inculturation of Religious Community Life in Africa", *AFER*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, August 1995), 241.

⁵⁰ Cf. L.G. No. 42. Cf. P.C. No. 13.

gift of the spirit which promotes detachment and freedom. It enables the members to renounce the power and joy of having with them their natural family to support. The vows of poverty, obedience and chastity are inseparable. Van Kaam says:

Poverty makes it easier to keep the flesh under control, and makes us to practice the vow of chastity. Poverty helps us to renounce self, and to live the vow of obedience. When we are detached from what is earthly and from ourselves, God lives and reigns in us.⁵¹

According to the Constitutions, the vow of poverty is when the sister shares in Christ's self-emptying after the manner of St. Francis who renounced his family and committed himself to "lady poverty" in order to serve Christ.⁵² The Constitutions call members to live a life of total renunciation so that each member is enriched by Christ.⁵³ They are called to a disposition of their hearts, attitude of trusting dependence on God, his gifts and his saving mercy.⁵⁴ Practically, the members are invited to be detached from things and people and be happy about it, trusting in the divine providence. They are to be obedient to the common law of labour and to work hard. On the question of the evangelical poverty as lived within the community, 104 out of 121 female and 4 out of 6 male understood poverty as detachment; 91 out of 121 female and 3 out of 6 male regard it as self-surrender; 85 out 121 female and 5 out of 6 male consider poverty as sharing gifts and talents; 47 out of 121 female and 5 out of 6 male mentioned it as responsibility and accountability; 47 out of 121 female and no male out of 6 saw it as living a poor life-style; 42 out of 121 female and 1 out of 6 male considered poverty as sharing prayer life; 35 out of 121 female and 3 out of 6 male had it as renunciation. 4 out of 136 respondents did not answer this question. On the level of education, 60 out of 66 with secondary education considered it as sharing of gifts and talents; 13

⁵¹ Van Kaam, 124.

⁵² Cf. I.M. Chebi, Kirono, *"A Franciscan Sharing of Jesus Christ in Africa Today: The Spirituality of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph of Kisii, Kenya"*, Unpublished Thesis "Master of Arts in Religious Sciences" (Rome: Pontifical Institute "Regina Mundi" Associated with Pontifical University Gregorian, May 1984), 59.

⁵³ Cf. C 17.

⁵⁴ Cf. C. 18. Cf. J. Nwaokopoh, *Religious Novitate: A "Fattening Room"* (Rome: Giovanni Canestri, 1979), 42.

out of 21 with primary education and 22 out of 23 with post secondary education preferred poverty as detachment.⁵⁵

The Constitutions re-echo the teaching of the Church. It has five dimensions for the members to follow namely: renouncing, preserving, edifying, producing and providing. Each religious before the final vows must cede or renounce the right to the administration of any independent use of material goods.⁵⁶ The religious gives up convenient things which suit them or their preferences and likes. They labour to support themselves in the community and go out in the various apostolates to work among the poor, the needy, the aged, the handicapped and the sick. The value of evangelical poverty consists in the act of choosing to live poorly, "as an experience of faith, hope and love". It is not destitution but a detachment. The poverty embraced as such is chosen for the value inherent in it precisely as a response to Jesus.⁵⁷ Jesus is the foundation of the sisters' life of poverty. He held nothing and even his divine origin did not shield him (cf. Phil. 2:5-11; II Cor. 8:9). Jesus chose the poverty of human existence, limited and powerless in his incarnation so that through his poverty he would impart the eternal riches of redemption to the poverty of all for whose sake he became poor (cf. II Cor. 8:9). In becoming man, Jesus took humanity's sinful nature, except sin. This was to bring fallen humanity back to God. So Jesus' state of poverty and humanity began with incarnation up to crucifixion. On the cross, he surrendered his life and his all back to the Father.

If the Constitutions are calling the sisters to identify themselves with Christ Jesus in his Kenosis (self-emptying), in his wants, in his powerless condition, then they are allowing themselves to be caught up in the mystery of Jesus' love. Gradually, they are able to let go of their

⁵⁵ Cf. Appendix II, Table X, Questionnaire I, Question No. 8.

⁵⁶ Cf. C. 20.

⁵⁷ Cf. D. Knight, *Cloud by Day, Fire by Night: The meaning and Choice of Religious Poverty*, Vol. II (Toronto: Publication of Canadian Religious Conference, 1979), 125.

possessive attitude, no longer allowing themselves to cling possessively to the material things. As they become rich in the love of Jesus in the one thing necessary, the self emptying of poverty helps them to develop their continual self-emptying attitude to distance themselves from views, values and material possessions. This shared life is outwardly reflected in the sharing of all that they are and all that they have and it must make the world stop and wonder what makes them live this way. The answer must not be phrased in terms of economics or sacrifice, but in terms of the extraordinary gift which is theirs; that is, the sharing of a new life in Christ. The renunciation of material possessions embraced in faith does something to them at the core of their being. Poverty is therefore a lived realisation that their lives are totally committed to Jesus.

In an African community, a young person (man) was formed to learn to provide for his family by working hard to earn enough wealth, cattle and farm land. Whatever he acquired, all the family members shared equally. For a polygamist, the husband ensured that each household had equal property. The wives in return looked after their resources carefully, cultivated their farm and shared their produce. The author coming from this kind of African homestead, and perhaps most of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph are like the author, where life, property, sorrows, and joys were shared, she prefers to call evangelical poverty, "a vow of sharing and detachment". The Sisters' response to the Questionnaire sees their vow of poverty as sharing, detachment and caring. They also see it as helping the poor and educating the poor children.⁵⁸ In the community the members share a common shelter, community property, their time and talents in the apostolate. They are also stewards of community property and they must protect them. They are accountable and responsible for each other and all community goods.

⁵⁸ Cf. Appendix II, Table XI, Questionnaire I, Questions No. 9.

4. Vow of obedience

Evangelical obedience is the visible expression of the interior freedom and choices of the heart of the religious. It is a call to availability of their will and of themselves for God.⁵⁹ This obedience touches the very roots of their human existence because they are willing to empty themselves of total power over their own lives. It is centered in Christ Jesus. He is the source and the model of religious obedience.⁶⁰ Obedience becomes the power by which the sisters tend towards listening in freedom. The Constitutions state, "Religious obedience obliges us to listen carefully to the Word of God, to reflect upon it, and to carry out what it asks of us. This will lead us to be open to the promptings and inspirations of the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 4:34).⁶¹ Another aspect of obedience is listening. Listening together with the community animator fosters in all members true presence, trust, intimacy, and rootedness in Christ.⁶² Listening presupposes and fosters personal inspired presence to reality as a revelation of the Father's will to the individual. Self-centred and self-preoccupied in listening to their own views and opinions is the problem most religious encounter when it comes to listening and especially on the part of some animators. Sometimes they tend to be very far away from participating in the life of the community whose ministry is to meet Christ in the mystery of community. Listening involves reflecting attentively. It goes hand in hand with dialogue. The Constitutions say:

⁵⁹ Cf. Van Kaam, 160.

⁶⁰ Cf. C. 25.

⁶¹ C. 26.

⁶² Cf. Van Kaam, 161.

The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph are obliged to obey these Constitutions and directives. Each community will strive to discover the will of God through prayer and dialogue between individuals and its members. However, while the need for consultation and dialogue is recognized, the obligation and the right of the superior to exercise the authority of her office is in no way lessened.⁶³

Dialogue adds two dimensions to obedience. It involves one speaking and the other listening. A real dialogue, either between members of the community and authority or a member and the superior/ animator will help the members unfold their lives and live a life free of fear and tension. Where there is true dialogue with the Superior, there will be genuine observing and living out of obedience. The members will live out the Constitutions, Directives and the Rule of the Third Order Regular of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis. With dialogue, the sisters will have opportunities for free expression of insights, feelings and inclinations.

Obedience to authority or to the community is not a repression of the feeling, views or opinions etc., of the members. Repressing the fact that they view life differently and obey blindly without humbly and respectfully expressing themselves would be partial and artificial obedience or what may be referred to as blind obedience, something of the past centuries. This type of obedience is not obedience of the whole person, instead it leads the members to uneasy forced relationship between the superior and the members themselves.

Obedience goes hand in hand with the need for *discernment* so that the sister can be able to create an atmosphere of serenity, humility and distancing. Discernment will allow God's grace to purify their insights and desire from self-centredness, exaggerations and agitation. After discerning, the vow of obedience calls the sisters forth to accept the decision they have made and carry them out. It is then that they are called to sacrifice and surrender themselves in submission to God's will. This vow of obedience is what Vatican II refers to when it says, "by their profession

⁶³ C. 27

of obedience, they offer the full dedication of their wills as a sacrifice of themselves to God and by this means they are united permanently and securely with God's saving will".⁶⁴

The vow of obedience goes along with humble submission of their will to God, their ability to express themselves and their freedom as the children of God. Another element of obedience is that the sisters who have vowed obedience enter into a covenant with Christ Jesus by learning to be obedient and demonstrate it in the service within the community and in their ministry which they render daily. They are to learn this generously by giving their full life service to the Church, following the example of Jesus since the obedience of Jesus is fundamental and profound in his human consciousness. Jesus is the man entirely given over to God, a man who identifies himself with the divine mission and one who always turned towards the Father for anything and for everything. This is what is profound in Jesus and what made him Son (cf. Heb. 5:8-9). The respondents were asked to mention four ways in which evangelical obedience conforms to that of Christ (cf. Phil. 2:5-11). 109 out of 121 female and 4 out of 6 male responded that evangelical obedience is submission to God's will. 104 out of 121 female and 6 out of 6 male responded that it is Christ-like obedience. 72 out of 121 female and 4 out of 6 male responded that it is love and service. 65 out of 121 female and 5 out of 6 male see obedience as dialogue. 57 out of 121 female and 1 out of 6 male see it as humility. 53 out of 121 female and 2 out of 6 male see it as obedience to authority. According to the years of religious profession, there is a small difference made by respondents between submission to God's will and Christ-like obedience. On the level of education, 64 out of 66 with secondary education have mentioned submission to God's will and 28 out of 66 in that same group have considered dialogue as that which conforms to the obedience of Christ. From the statistics above, we can say that, in order to conform to the obedience of Christ Jesus, the evangelical obedience calls for submission to God's will.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ PC. No. 14.

⁶⁵ Cf. Appendix II, Table VIII, Questionnaire I, Question No. 5.

Kenosis and obedience describe the whole way of Jesus. The full humanity of Jesus is involved in that of the voluntariness of his obedience and thus the human character of his obedience assumes that he was endowed with reason and free will. Jesus' self-surrender can implicitly be said to be motivated by love. Thus his self-emptying and self-sacrifice becomes an example for the sisters' Christian humility, charity and religious obedience⁶⁶ (cf. Phil. 2:5-8).

Among the Africans, it was obligatory to obey, respect and honour the elders and those in authority. Women were to behave like gentle-women, show respect in public especially to men and also to strangers. They had to respect and obey their husbands, the in-laws and the age-mates. Children were to obey the elders and one another. The peers were to obey each other. The Members of the Council of the Elders were to respect each other and obediently carry out the decision of the Council. Obedience was mandatory in every life situation and in daily life practice. Obedience and respect began from the family. Whatever the form of authority that was exercised within the African leadership, it could be narrowed down to service in order that community life was preserved. For instance, the one in authority served by interpreting the law and rules, traditions, cultures and even taboos of the clan and giving guidelines on how they should be preserved without tampering with them. It is with this regard that the author sees the evangelical obedience not only as a service, lived in the light of the Gospel message, and in the following of Christ crucified intimately, but it is a service carried out with love and respect, to preserve the life of each member with dignity. Therefore, for the author, authority in religious life is for the purpose of protecting the community, sustaining the Institute's traditions, customs, unity of its members and its existence with the guidance of the Constitutions and Directives. These are preserved through discernment, dialogue and listening. For example, when the sister and the superior/ animator are in a dialogue, it is both the sister and the superior/ animator listening and

⁶⁶ Cf. W. Kasper, *Jesus, The Christ* (London: Burns and Oats, 1977), 209. Cf. PC. No. 1.

discerning God's will for it is not the superior/ animator at work in isolation. The delegation of power of the one in authority to the local superior/ animator is a tool which will decentralize the powers from the superior (animator) General/ and the Council to leave them only with the essentials pertaining to their office. By delegation of power the Superior makes all the members of the Institute responsible and enables them to share in its government and matters. With this delegation of powers, the local communities could handle simple problems, moral problems, dishonesty and disloyalty of the members without involving the General Council. This is one step towards maturity and growth in the living out of the vow of obedience.

5. Community living

A religious community is a covenant community of Christians within the Church who have voluntarily joined their lives with one another to seek God, in order that, they respond through service as a community to other people by making Christ present to them through their Charism. These religious are called to a particular way of carrying out the mission of Jesus within their religious communities and in their apostolates. The main thrust of a religious communion is community in Christ. It is the love of Christ which gathered the members together and constitutes an essential bond of unity and communion of persons. Community is rooted in their consecration to Christ which is the essential element of their religious life. This is what gives the unity and singleness of purpose: the priority and centrality of Christ to whom they are consecrated, that is, to "have that mind which was in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. They are at varying stages of spiritual growth, emotional and psychological development. They are bound to struggle daily as they live their call in community trying to serve their neighbours and God.⁶⁷ The Constitutions call each member to be reconciled, create a spirit of friendliness based

⁶⁷ Cf. Appendix II, Tables IV A, B, V, VI, Questionnaire I, Questions Nos 1, 2, 3.

on mutual healing with charity. The Constitutions read: "Every community should be a community of Christ-like love, where each sister will find support, strength and help from her fellow sisters. When necessary, sisterly correction should be given with charity".⁶⁸ From the Questionnaire I, Question no. 1 about the talents that would enhance Christian unity (cf. Phil. 2:1-4) charity scored 735 points from female and 35 points from the male respondents in order of priority. From the female respondents, forgiveness and listening scored 627 points, while from male respondents forgiveness scored 25 and listening scored 37 points. Understanding scored 557 points from female and 51 from the male respondents, respect 512 from female and 35 from male; openness 494 points from female and 41 from male. Bearing with one another patiently scored 387 points from female and 26 from male, self-surrender scored 308 points from female and 19 from the male.⁶⁹ According to the level of education, charity stands out first with 376 points from secondary respondents 152 points from primary and 145 points from post-secondary respondents. This is followed by listening 350 points from secondary, 160 points from primary and 128 points from post-secondary respondents. Self-surrender has the least points that is, 186 secondary, 37 primary and 64 post-secondary.⁷⁰ From these statistics charity and listening are the key to community living.

Chapter Five of the Constitutions dealing with Community Life calls the members to live a life of fraternal unity, sharing all things in common.⁷¹ As sisters share their community life, the emphasis is put on family or "household" a spirit of solidarity, care and concern. They share life, gifts, friendships, talents as they journey together learning through their weaknesses and supporting

⁶⁸ Cf. 16.C. Cf. C. 42.

⁶⁹ Cf. Appendix II, Table IV A, Questionnaire I, Question No. 1

⁷⁰ Cf. Appendix II, Table IV B, Questionnaire I, Question No. 1.

⁷¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* (Yaounde: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), 71-72. Cf. C. 42, a-f.

each other to grow in wholistically. In grief and in joy, during feasts and funerals, they form a solid unity typically African in nature.

Hospitality which is very much an African value of community life, is part and parcel of this Congregation. It is a mark of solidarity and friendship. Hospitality is more than homeliness. It goes beyond and it means openness of the heart, availability and offering a moment which is home-like. Hospitality in the Congregation includes receiving visitors with warmth and welcoming them warmly. It also manifests communal spirit of welcoming each other and going beyond to the people whom the members serve in their apostolate. Hospitality for strangers entails dangers today for all communities due to the social dangers, rate of crimes and violence, whether in urban or in rural areas where most of the Institutes' houses are located. This is something the members are to be aware of but they are still called to open their doors and reach out to the needy hospitably.

To offer good service in their apostolate, the members are called to integrate in themselves a life of prayer. It is from this source that they will reveal to all God's people that he (God) is love and to share their lives with the poor. These members must try to find a time for personal prayer, silence and solitude.⁷² Members are to have communal prayer and every evening come together for recreation and in the process of recreation they will share with each other their experiences of the day.

Phil. 1:27-30 and 2:1-4 emphasizes unity, harmony and steadfastness in community. It implies a sense of service for each other in the community. Paul saw that disunity in the Philippian community was bent to destroy them, that is why he called them back to unity and harmony. For the experiencing of jealousy and envy among the members, Paul called them to consider others better than themselves and to be of one mind as it was in Christ Jesus. He called them to share

⁷² Cf. C. 44.

everything in common. For the virtues and the vices found in the Philippian community, the author attempts to draw some comparison between this community and the community of the members of the FSJ. This text challenges the FSJ. They (FSJ) have several struggles in living within their religious community.⁷³ Concrete examples are jealousy, gossip and character assassination among some members. This may cause not only disunity but hatred and an unforgiving spirit among them. There are instances where some members show disinterest in the affairs of the others and reluctance to help or support them. There is some tendency of laziness and even refusal to effectively carry out the responsibility of the community. These forms of behaviour cause tensions within the community. Today Christ Jesus is challenging and calling them to look at their cultural and ethnic differences with Christ's eyes and see beyond these negative elements and vices. The sisters' religious vocation and call to be committed to Christ Jesus should remind this community to take risks and to correct the members who, by their character and style of living, cause division in the community. They should talk about these emerging problems in community and be reconciled and consider Christ's values, above all, those of love and charity. Other factors to be considered by the members is to try and see the gifts of the whole person in totality more than considering a member with her place of origin (ethnicity). If the emphasis is on the positive aspects and challenge members where necessary, the sisters will grow to appreciate one another, change their attitudes and to build a strong community bond or unity based on trust for each other with the aim of drawing the best from each other.

⁷³ Cf. Appendix II, Table VI, Questionnaire I, Question No. 3

CHAPTER THREE

A CALL TO HOLINESS

i. Introduction

A. Definition of Call to Witness

In order to define the two words from the phrase:- call to witness, it could be better to define the two words separately. Literally the word "call" means: speaking loudly, attracting someone's attention, naming, paying a visit or an inner urge to be a follower of some one.

In traditional Christian usage, call refers to a divine and special vocation to undertake a particular activity or to embrace a particular "state of life",⁷⁴ on behalf of God or the community. The term may often become attached to a calling to priesthood or religious vocation. Apart from being called to a particular state of life, there is a universal vocation to salvation and holiness. The broader understanding of call is that all believers are called to discipleship and it is made official with the baptism. Therefore the one called is to witness to the Gospel through the love of God and neighbour and participation in the priestly, kingly and prophetic ministries which Christ calls all the Christians to share in.⁷⁵

Witness is a personal testimony and involves the commitment of a person to a fact or to a truth, or to another person. It may be made by words or deeds. Christian witness expresses the whole of the Christian commitment in that to be a Christian is to give witness to Christ.⁷⁶ Vatican II declared that all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (cf. Acts. 2:42 - 47) should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (cf. Rom. 12:1). Therefore the task of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph is to take part in

⁷⁴ Richard p. Mc Brien, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 1995.

⁷⁵ Joseph A. Komonchak et al., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Theology*, 1989.

⁷⁶ Robert Broderick and Thomas Nelson, *the Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 1976.

the life of the Church by witnessing to the transmission of the faith both in words and deeds. Everywhere in and everything they must bear witness to Christ (cf. I Pet. 3:15).

ii. Apostolates of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph

The apostolate Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph is a means to witness Christ Jesus in the world. Their call to witness includes their apostolates in: education; medical care; pastoral work, social work and domestic work. They also serve in secretarial and accounting services; farming, administration and initiating self-help development projects for women and youth to educate them to self-reliance.

The emphasis laid by the founder in regard to the apostolate of the Sisters was on education, helping the poor, pastoral work and medical care. The whole objective was to raise the dignity of the people God and to reveal to them the love of God as reflected in the Gospel message. Education and medical care implemented by the FSIJ at all levels has been a long time traditional apostolate among them, that is why at almost all their convents there are schools and medical centre units attached. But today education and medical care are not the main apostolates because they have opened up to new apostolates and they are working towards new modalities and approaches. The emphasis in the new apostolates is to refocus and re-root the Institute's fundamental commitment of improving the status of all people. There is an urgent call to reconsider what the Congregation may mean when it calls members to the service of the "poor" and the "needy" because the urgent call of the Church is the "option for the poor". The Synod Fathers, in their message at the end of the Synod for Africa, speaking of inculturation and religious life, called the religious forth to become more discerning persons and to be more present in the

apostolate. They are to bear witness by their lives, living out their vows in the context of their community in an ever deepening personal relationship with Jesus Christ.⁷⁷

It is the impression of the author that the people of God are tired of words, verbal explanations about religious life and the evangelical counsels as lived by the religious. People need more demonstrations and practical examples than words. They are looking for good examples and real practising and living out of the Gospel values. That is why the apostolates of the Sisters should flow from their contemplation and union with Jesus Christ. Their concern in the apostolate is to spread the Good News of God's reign through the witness of their community living. This witness should spread out as they serve those needy, poor, the sick, the aged, the orphans, the handicapped and the disabled.⁷⁸ The Questionnaire II, Question no. 12 about new areas of apostolate, the respondents proposed to work in future with AIDS victims, youth ministry, street children and family counselling. They suggested to intensify pastoral work with parishes, health ministry and work among the marginalized. They intend to conscientize people so that they know their rights. They would like to do some professional jobs. For the respondents themselves, they have proposed to have further education and on-going formation for all members and to give the sisters the proper tools which will enable them to serve effectively.⁷⁹

Answering the question on the challenges that the respondents face in their apostolate, the majority answered that the people they work with have not fully understood what religious life really means and they ask them many contradictory questions. The respondents also expressed that as religious people, they too fail in their own witness to live the evangelical counsels. They expressed that in some instances the vows have not been lived and the members have failed in this

⁷⁷ Cf. *The African Synod: Pope's Opening Homily Message of the Synod, Message of AMECEA and IMBISA Bishops* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994), No. 58 and 61.

⁷⁸ Cf. C. 54.

⁷⁹ Cf. Appendix II, Table XIV, Questionnaire II, Question No. 12.

regard. This inconsistency regarding the demands of religious life makes it difficult for the sisters to justify their identity to the people. Some respondents have experienced difficulty and problems in striking a balance between prayer and apostolate. Some feel very limited in relation to the demands and urgency of Evangelization. Others feel handicapped when they would like to give more material assistance to the poor and needy because of lack of resources. Others mention that their apostolate is not appreciated by their fellow sisters and this frustrates them.⁸⁰ In this regard, the Franciscan spirituality has not been fully understood and lived radically by the members. St. Francis' affective exhortation and his call to live radically for Christ Jesus and to find him in the Gospel message, calls the FSJ forth to put on love and take the example of Christ Jesus who totally emptied himself.

B. Reflections and observations: Data analysis

The Constitutions⁸¹ on community life speak of the same values as those found within the Franciscan spirituality. Constitution C. 42a, refers to the sisters as members of the same household. In an African context, a household is a family. A true family only becomes one through the concern for each other, support and unity. In the African family, members work, share the produce and eat together. Whenever there is any tragedy in the family, each one is concerned and all the members of the family get involved. The responses from the Questionnaire I, Question no. 1 point out that charity is important in the building up of a religious community. The female respondents have given 735 points to charity, 625 points to both forgiving heart and listening while the male respondents have given 25 points to forgiveness and 37 points to listening. Understanding has been rated fourth having 557 points from female and 51 points from male respondents. Charity, listening, forgiveness and understanding have been highly rated by

⁸⁰ Cf. Appendix II, Table XII, Questionnaire I, Question No. 9.

⁸¹ Cf. C. 42a-f.

respondents in their category of years of religious profession and even of the level of education.⁸² From the statistics given, charity, listening, understanding, forgiving heart enhance community living among the FSJ.

The same talents namely clarity, listening, understanding and forgiveness when seriously abused or manipulated for selfish reasons and personal motives within the community, would lead to division and disunity.⁸³ From the statistics it is clear that the members are aware of their unique differences. The respondents confirm that the Franciscan spirituality has not had a full impact in the lives of members as they struggle and search within their community to live with each other daily. There are still experiences of jealousy, strife, envy, misunderstanding, lack of clarity, laziness and even lack of social and spiritual support for each other. Some members even refuse to talk to each other after a misunderstanding or when a quarrel takes place between them. Other members gossip to the extent that they destroy the others' characters badly. This is where the Franciscan spirituality challenges each member of the FSJ community both individually and communally. The first challenge for the sisters is to approach religious life with a deeper commitment. Secondly, they are to live their community life more meaningfully centred in Christ Jesus. Thirdly, they should make their Constitutions their point of reference and live it more fully.

The respondents have observed that prayer life calls for intimate union with Christ. 113 female and 6 male rated prayer life as first, community living rated second with 56 female and 3 male respondents. Apostolate and humility have been rated third by 16 female respondents. 9 did not respond to the question.⁸⁴ It is obvious from the statistics given that prayer life is important. Every religious has an obligation to dedicate a sufficient period of time with God in prayer. The

⁸² Cf. Appendix II, Table IVA, Questionnaire I, Question No. 1.

⁸³ Cf. Appendix II, Table V, Questionnaire I, Question No. 2.

⁸⁴ Cf. Appendix II, Table VII, Questionnaire I, Question No. 4.

community living and apostolate of the members will reflect their life of prayer. It is prayer life that will transform their lives and unite them.

b. Some reflections on the Constitutions of FSJ

The purpose of raising the question on obedience was intended to test the respondents' understanding of St. Francis' obedience to Christ Jesus' obedience (Phil. 2:8) and in the way St. Francis lived the message of the Gospel, as revealed to him in the Church at St. Damian, and the FSJ's understanding of the living of the vow of obedience, as it is reflected in the Constitutions.⁸⁵ According to the respondents, there are four ways in which evangelical obedience conforms to that of Christ Jesus. These are submission to God's will, Christ like obedience, love and service, humility and dialogue. 109 out of 121 female and 4 out of 6 male respondents mentioned obedience as submission to God's will. 104 out of 121 female and 6 out of 6 male responded to Christ like obedience. Obedience as love and service was responded to by 72 out of 121 female and 4 out of 6 male while obedience as dialogue was responded to by 65 out of 121 female and 5 out of 6 male. Obedience as humility was preferred by 57 out of 121 female and 1 out of 6 male respondents. From the statistics above, obedience is understood as submission to God's will just as Jesus Christ showed his obedience to God the Father by the submission of his will "my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work" (Jn. 4:34).

Jesus' obedience was shown on the cross, crucifixion and death, but the sisters' obedience is expressed through the renunciation of their will by responding to those in authority, the Constitutions and the teachings of the Church. Obedience also calls the members to dialogue, listening and discernment of what God's will is for the individual or the community. Whenever the sisters obey sincerely and totally, they experience the surrendering of themselves, their inner

⁸⁵ Cf. C. 25- C. 30.

attitudes, desires and wishes to God. This self surrender could be equated to white martyrdom and it is for the sake of the kingdom. Therefore self-emptying, renunciation, submission or doing God's will have a link with the way St. Francis lived his call radically for the sake of the kingdom. The sisters are also called to live their lives of obedience fully and the Constitutions be their reminder. Their lives should point to Christ Jesus.

The Constitutions of the FSJ are drawn from Phil. 2:1-11, some parts of the Gospels, some Pauline letters, other NT epistles, the 1983 Code of Canon Law, the teachings of Vatican II and the Testament of St. Francis and the life of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Assisi. The Constitutions stress those values of Christ but which reflect the Franciscan spirituality. These are: conversion to God and neighbour; poverty; humility "minority" and contemplation. These values are to help the sisters live a simple life style which reflects that of Christ Jesus in his humility, self-emptying and obedience. The Franciscan spirituality even encourages the members to live among the poor and the marginalized.

In regard to the evangelical obedience, it is the renunciation of one's will to God. But Christ's obedience was unto death, the death on a cross, while the religious renounce their wills in living out the vow of obedience for the sake of the kingdom. They also draw the perfect example for their lives from Christ Jesus.

From the data analysed already, it is clear that, there are several difficulties encountered in the community living, like: disunity, ambition, jealousy, envy, gossip and misunderstanding. Such elements may threaten the growth in community based in Christ Jesus. In looking at such a summary of the data from the Questionnaire, one would begin to think that there are shifts of values here, but this is not so in any way. There is a new awareness that Christ Jesus is the primal axis of the religious existence. The majority of the sisters responded that each member feels the

need of an intimate relationship with Christ Jesus. Another response is that the members feel that to live the religious life one must really experience what it is to be a human person who has weaknesses as well as strengths. This awareness calls the sisters forth to want to have a deeper commitment to religious life. In Table IX, Question no. 11, the sisters feel that they should have self-worth and competence in themselves as human beings and primarily as women. They proposed to have further education at all levels. This implies that they should have appropriate courses and go for renewal programs frequently. They should have opportunities to further their education and have on-going formation programs. Other members expressed the need to move to new areas of apostolates.

It is important to observe that through responses to the Questionnaires, the FSJ see clearly and express the need to recognize that they are human beings with strengths and limitations just as Jesus took a human form, he too was very human. It is in this human nature that he understands the FSJ's struggles. They also mention that they are called to a total renunciation in living out their evangelical counsels within the community. They should go out in the apostolate and serve the people faithfully.

c. Proposals in light of the Constitutions of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph

The key word which rings a bell when used among the FSJ is "household" which represents family. This word brings out the sense of unity, oneness, trust, care and concern for each other. These values counteract issues of disunity, misunderstanding, competition, ambition and poor listening. These vices may appear to occur sometimes among some members. The author proposes that several seminars be organized and members should be encouraged to do community dynamics, a tool which is used to draw out the positive from the sisters and to see good in each other and to learn to draw out from each other that which is best. Other courses which could be offered are on the level of self awareness and integral human development at

individual and community level. When these are done regularly, members will be more positive, and they would be moved to search together for common goals. On the issue of ethnicity, the members should be formed to go beyond this limitation through conscientization and education. The best to be offered to the members is to encourage them to have a change of attitude, call their tendency to ethnicity by name, whenever it seems to occur, because this step is the beginning of openness and growth, and finally to pray about it. The final solution is time: it is only time which will bridge the differences of negative attitude to ethnicity which does not build the community of Christ Jesus. The author invites the members to re-examine and deeply study their Constitutions and draw from the text a deeper meaning built on the kenosis of Christ Jesus.

The FSJ have a very rich tradition and culture reflected in their warmth and hospitality which they have established over the years. However they are still stick in some areas and are attached to others like structures, external expressions, guidelines and rhetorics, which in themselves are not bad but they could be improved for a better way of living the Gospel Message of Jesus Christ. The author proposes that for any positive growth, change for the better, and transformation in the religious life, there must be an on-going formation for all the members of the Institute. The sisters should know their rights. They should have self empowerment and be self-starters, taking initiatives. They should also believe in themselves so as to believe in the members of the community and the people they serve.

Concerning evangelical poverty, the major question the sisters are confronted with is about their salary or wages and secondly why they would not support their families financially, or educate their brothers and sisters and lift the family from certain financial hardships. As far as the salary question stands, it could be explained that since the sisters live in a kind of a "family" where everything is shared in common, even their salary and wages are shared in the same way. In regard to the poverty experienced by family members, the sisters are encouraged to inform the

leaders of the Congregation. The Superior and the Councillors would delegate some help through the local community in the sister's mission to her family. In this regard, the author prefers that the vow of poverty be called "vow of sharing", while the vow of Chastity be called the "vow of nurturing life." The vow of obedience could be called "vow of listening and service", since it sustains unity through dialogue and listening in searching for God's will. In regard to the sisters' apostolate, it is important that the tools to be used in the apostolate or tools to enhance the apostolate be provided for the members so that the apostolate becomes a loving service.

"Welcoming" and "hospitality" for the FSJ is not only an African value, but also typically a Franciscan value. The most important element to be considered today is that hospitality could be manipulated and be overdone in some communities. Whenever "welcome" and "hospitality" to visitors and the relatives begin to interfere and visitors intrude with the community programs, the members should evaluate themselves honestly and give a certain limit to "hospitality" and "welcome".

E. Conclusion

The laity, the clergy and the religious are all called to be holy and to sanctify themselves. The call is initiated by God himself and it is the responsibility and freedom of the one called to respond to God. The FSJ are called to live a vowed life in a religious community. They follow the Trinitarian charism with an emphasis on unity and love. They express their Trinitarian charism in community living and in apostolate where they reveal to God's people that he (God) is love. They try to live a simple life style. They follow the Franciscan spirituality permeated with the four fundamental values of conversion to God and neighbour, poverty, humility and contemplation. Their objective is to raise the dignity of every person they serve.

The members embrace the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience expressed in the religious community. They express their commitment in the various apostolates. From the field research among the sisters, it is clear that the Franciscan spirituality has not fully made an impact in their lives. They are struggling daily in their community living to be Christ like as they live out their Franciscan spirituality, a task of a life time, but certainly worth of the cost.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Concerning community unity, the Constitutions of the FSJ admonishes the members to be united and work hard to detach themselves from pursuit of ambition, status and worldly glories.⁸⁶ From the Questionnaire, the respondents mentioned the talents like charity, understanding, forgiveness, listening etc., which when manipulated or abused could lead to disunity in community living.⁸⁷ From the author's experience, disunity in any community causes distrust, lack of love and disharmony among the members. The feeling one gets in such a community is that the members live superficial lives with each other. In a case like this, what is seen is a sense of insecurity and lack of trust. Tensions are likely to build up among the members and at times they may stop communicating with each other. In this regard, those individuals within the community just co-exist or co-inhabit, but they do not live with each other and for one another. The community fails to become a symbol of a family, what the Constitutions would refer to as a "household".

The challenge the Franciscan spirituality offers the sisters is for them to focus on Christ and his self-emptying, to deepen their faith and fidelity in Jesus Christ and to strive to have one mind in Christ Jesus. To have one mind in Christ would mean that the members should strive to surrender their vices which cause disunity, things like quarrels among themselves, destructive gossip, laziness etc. It is important that the FSJ are encouraged to study their Constitutions and to understand its content. They should go back to it regularly during seminars, workshops, community meetings so as to draw meaning and impress its meaning in their lives. The FSJ should foster Christian life and commitment, effecting real communion in community. Just as the Constitutions state, the sisters should be encouraged to cultivate deep spiritual values, spirit of reconciliation, harmony and peace with God, with oneself and with one another in the community. It is the wish of the author that the FSJ

⁸⁶ Cf. C 17

⁸⁷ Appendix II, Table V, Questionnaire 1, Question No. 2.

cultivate these values and attitudes as expressed also in the living out the Franciscan spirituality of the Third Order Regular of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis, in the Constitutions and in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. If this is done by the members, then the FSJ could have a continuous inner-search that leads to an identity and security with God. This could be a step forward to a deep spiritual commitment.

St. Francis was deeply united with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. It is appropriate to remind the sisters about the Eucharist because it reveals Christ's real presence among them. The author sees the Eucharist as the center of all liturgical celebrations. This is why the FSJ Constitutions direct that the Eucharist be celebrated daily within their communities.⁸⁸ If the Eucharist is lived authentically, the community life would change for the better. In the Eucharist, the sisters are invited to enter into communion with Christ Jesus and to become one body with Christ, a body which is in communion with God (cf. I Cor. 10:10-18). So then, sharing in the Eucharist daily, the sisters should be taken up into communion with Christ Jesus and with one another. Since these members participate in the Eucharist daily, they should strive for unity. Besides, the meaning of the Eucharist should not be limited to liturgical celebration but it should include the implication of that celebration, that is the commitment to the person of Jesus Christ, so that his self-emptying in love, justice, peace and truth is interiorly emulated and outwardly practiced by the sisters in the community. The author sees that it is possible to enhance even a greater unity in the FSJ communities once the members follow Christ who emptied himself for their sakes.

It is the author's wish to continuously see that the FSJ's community life is relational. It has to be something spontaneous and natural. For the members to open themselves to relationships, they are also to be ready to open themselves to communion, to the ability to relate, communicate and open themselves to one another in order to give and receive from each other their gifts and talents; what

⁸⁸ Cf. C. 3.

Paul would refer to as to look “to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4). There is no relationship without dialogue and love. Neither is there a community without reciprocity and listening. Dialogue creates communion and collaboration. The author suggests that the FSJ accompany one another and complement one another by showing interest in one another. This should lead them to form one body in Christ Jesus. The most practical way to enhance this is to have a general assembly once a year. During this assembly, the sisters must be accompanied by a qualified and able facilitator. At this assembly the members of the Institute should freely express themselves. It would be a moment of challenge, growth, pain and healing.

As far as the apostolate of the sisters is concerned, the FSJ should embrace Christ Jesus who emptied himself to take the form of a servant. He was obedient unto death on a cross (Phil. 2:8). Jesus’ death was performed to fulfill his life of service for others. He even served and he gave his life as a “ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45). In Lk. 22:24-27 Jesus showed that the leader is the servant and the least of all. It follows therefore that Christ Jesus’ followers should adopt the new values of service which Christ had set. This service should be done without counting any cost, but with love and dedication. By sharing their time, talents and gifts, they should serve effectively in their various apostolates of nursing, teaching, social work, pastoral work, domestic services, secretarial services and accounting. The sisters should focus much attention and interest on the people they serve because their objective is to reveal to all people that God is love and so to raise their dignity.

The Franciscan spirituality has its emphasis on Christ Jesus’ humanity, humility, obedience and exaltation. To have the mind and attitudes of Christ Jesus, one has to be humble and obedient to God. In regard to this obedience, the author maintains that all the faithful are called to be obedient to God the Father through Christ Jesus. Concerning the evangelical obedience, its known definition among the FSJ is “to do God’s will”. This phrase came out from the responses as being the

respondents' understanding of evangelical obedience.⁸⁹ For the author, obedience as doing God's will is related and cannot be divorced from dialogue, discernment and listening. After the dialogue, discernment and listening, then, the final decision made by the superior should be carried out by the members either as individuals or as a community. This process calls for a real renunciation of one's will so as to do God's will. Such attitude may involve sacrifice and even pain and it is what makes evangelical obedience meaningful, because at this juncture, the one living the vow has something to offer of herself, that is her will. For the evangelical counsel of poverty, the members are called to share whatever they have, namely their gifts, talents and even their material possessions with those in need. Evangelical celibacy calls the members to love intimately and to share the gift of their lives within community and in the apostolate.

As far as call and response in religious community is concerned, there is no call that comes from God to any person except in the person of Christ Jesus and no one makes a response to the call of God except in Christ Jesus (cf. I Tim 2:5). Every FSJ is supposed to respond only in Christ Jesus who is the unique mediator and initiator of religious life. Therefore, Christ Jesus is followed and emulated by the members in the religious community. If there is a personal identity in the FSJ, then it should be in Christ Jesus. It is the wish of the author that the FSJ manifest this call through utter trust in God, total dedication and service and animated by joy. The spirit of hospitality and welcoming should also be manifested in the community because hospitality is a sign of giving life and sharing with others. The author believes that when this is accomplished, it will be a real manifestation and celebration of God's dwelling presence among them.

⁸⁹ Cf. Appendix II, Table IX, Questionnaire 1, Question No. 6.

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