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THE SEARCH FOR A WAY TO IMITATE CHRIST:
An Answer to Religious Contemplative Evangelizing Missionary Life

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and has never been submitted to any college or university for academic credit. Informations from other sources have been duly acknowledged.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to father Chrisantos Nyabena, my mother Klemensia Mongina, to my Superiors, to my confreres and to all Religious, Contemplative Evangelizing Missionaries in Africa.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

0.1. PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

The purpose of this study is to explain the ways in which the imitation of Christ has been lived by the Christians throughout the history of the Church. It also aims at giving an answer to Religious Contemplative Evangelizing Missionary men and women who are searching for holiness and perfection of charity in the midst of this secularized world.

0.2. RATIONALE OF THE THESIS

I have come to acknowledge that in the history of the Church, there have been ways in which Christian perfection was achieved and lived. By studying these ways, we find that they can be of great achievement and help to Religious Contemplative life today.

0.3. CENTRAL QUESTION

This study investigates deeply the history of the imitation of Christ and how it has been achieved and lived. Secondly, in what ways can these approaches help the present religious contemplative men and women who are seeking for holiness and perfection of charity today? Thirdly, the role of the Church in promoting Religious contemplative Missionary life and the contribution of ancient and new “Orders” and Societies to the renewal of the Church today.

0.4. WORKING HYPOTHESIS

There are essential elements to be considered in order to achieve Christian perfection. Therefore it is my assumption that when these elements are investigated, they could enrich the present Religious Contemplative men and women.

0.5. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION

This research will make use of the methodological approach adopted in the department of Spirituality and Religious Formation in Tangaza College. This methodology will be foundational, dialogical, and integrational in a formative perspective.

a). **Foundational:** The research begins with a formative event of human experience. The researcher discloses, identifies, and investigates the structures that are foundational and formative as well as dynamics and dimensions that are universal and can be experienced by other people in a similar formative situation.

b). **Dialogical:** Universal statements that are basic to human experience are disclosed and then engaged in dialogue with the theories of other disciplines such as Spirituality, Theology and Scripture.

c). **Integrational:** All the insights and findings that are disclosed are integrated into a body of knowledge that can be applied to a particular segment of formation in order to examine the probability, foundationality, adaptability and applicability.

0.6. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The Thesis has Four Chapters. The first chapter deals with the community of Jesus and His Apostles, how they experienced holiness through the practice of the Beatitudes, the martyrdom of the first Christians, the end of the persecutions and the rise of Monastic and Religious Contemplative life. We find it of crucial importance to understand the basic elements of our Christian perfection as lived by Jesus Himself and His Apostles.

The second chapter deals with the Patristic Age. In this chapter, we are going to discover the teachings of the Fathers of the Church about Christian perfection/Holiness. We deal with people such as Pachomius, Basil the Great, Augustine and Athanasius among others and lastly the influence of Monasticism in the west.

The third chapter deals with the Scholastic Age and the Second Vatican Council. Here we try to investigate deeply on the Church's renewal and the mendicant Orders, the Council of Trent and the Catholic Reformation, Evangelization and Religious Contemplative life from Trent to Vatican II.

The fourth chapter deals with a tentative answer to matters and challenges related to Religious Contemplative Missionary life.

BOOKS AND JOURNALS OF REFERENCE

1. FLANNERY A (ed.), *Vatican II Council, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, St. Paul publications, Bandra, Bombay, 1989.
2. KOMONCHAK J A., COLLINS M., LANE DA (eds), *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Michael Glazier, Inc. Wilmington, Delaware, 1987.
3. *The Way*, 1970.
4. *Communal International Review*, 1966.
5. ZINKURATHI V., COLACRAI A (eds.), *The African Bible*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi Kenya, 1999.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0. INTRODUCTION

The meaning given to a term depends on the context in which it is used. So to understand a term or a concept implies knowledge of the context in which it is used. Thus in order to approach our topic: the search for a way to imitate Christ: An answer to Religious Contemplative Missionary life, we find it necessary to start by elucidating some concepts used in the field of Spirituality, that are misused in some casual spiritual conversations. This is to clarify the term *holiness* and *imitation of Christ* hence the importance to give their definitions.

According to Elizabeth M. Strub, holiness belongs to the very nature of God. To say that God is holy is to say that God is God. Strub says that people can know God's holiness only through their own perception of its effect. A person experiences God as ineffable, wholly other than oneself, present yet transcendent and immanent yet absent.¹

God's holiness therefore is visibly personified in the incarnation of His Son, and originally implanted in the human flesh. In the person of Christ, holiness was expressed in the unity of natures in one person and exemplified in the Trinitarian community. Hence, by His incarnation, each human dignity was immeasurably enhanced and Jesus Christ discovered the personal fulfillment within the bonds of the community through the revelation of the Trinity.

The Acts of the Apostles tells us of the spontaneous fellowship, which was normative for the early Christian community. During this time, holiness became then a

¹ E. M. STRUB, *Holiness and community in The way. Contemporary Christian Spirituality* (1970), 128-137.

prerogative to be lived by that community, the Church; until recently: the word “holiness” still evoked the attitude of prayer. People tended to think of holiness as a phenomenon documented in books. Today, gratitude is extended to the Liturgical reform and to the response of Vatican II to the spirit of their age: the universal call to holiness has gone out as a rallying cry to all the people of God wherever they are found.

“The holiness of the Church according to the new dictionary of theology is realized between baptism through which the Spirit initiates it and its eschatological fulfillment in the Kingdom (Eph 5: 25-27). Thus holiness characterizes the Church because of its election by God, its vocation from God, its covenant with God in Christ and the very indwelling of the Spirit of Christ. Holiness also pertains to Christians who are called to live a holy life.”

1.1 THE COMMUNITY OF JESUS AND THE APOSTLES AS THE MODEL FOR IMITATION OF CHRIST IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Jesus is our model in the exercise of charity and fervent prayer. “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God: and healing all kinds of sickness and every infirmity among the people” (Mt 4: 23). “And rising very early in the morning, going out, He went into a desert place and there He prayed.”(Mk 1: 35). Jesus desired to put into practice at the beginning of His mission to show everyone that He is the saviour of the world. He is not dismayed by the multitude; He receives all with incomparable goodness, so that even the poorest and most miserable person has a place in His heart.²

² All Biblical quotations are from the *African Bible*, VOLUME ZINKURATIRE and ANGELO COLACICCI, (eds.), (Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, 1999).

A Contemplative religious, also, must go through life, by doing charity: they must help wherever they can: comfort, counsel and proclaim the mercy of God. We have to be mindful of the fact that by discharging the duties of our vocation, we continue the work of Jesus. By so doing we grow in holiness and the poor, sick and all those in whose midst we labour might recognize in us a faithful image of our most benign and lovable saviour.

Jesus was constantly united with His heavenly Father, and even amidst the most distracting occupations, He was profoundly recollected. But He willed to be our model in everything. Therefore, He often retired into a lonely place, and spent whole nights in prayer and contemplation. He well knew that miserable as we are, we cannot pray rightly unless we cast aside all earthly cares and thoughts, and concern ourselves solely with God and the needs of souls.

As contemplatives religious, we too, rise early in the day, to strengthen ourselves in prayer and meditation for our daily tasks, which must be performed in union with God. By means of recollection and practice of the presence of God, by the good intention, by fiery aspirations and mortification of our senses, we must become thoroughly grounded in interior solitude. According to the example of St. Catherine of Siena, "convert our hearts into a cell, where in the midst of even the most distracting duties of our vocation, we can be united with God".¹

¹ J. MARENGONI, *Our Life of Prayer in the Constitution of The contemplative Evangelizers of the Heart of Christ*, (Limone, Italy, 1985), Art. 130 - 150.

1.2 THE BEATITUDES

In the sermon on the mountain, Jesus shows and teaches us the way to a perfect Christian life. A Religious Contemplative who is striving for holiness or for Christian perfection must first and foremost practice the beatitudes. For us Religious and more Contemplatives, the beatitudes should, nay are our rule of life. This was the programme of Jesus and His Apostles. The beatitudes comprise the essence of the true imitation of Christ, the practice of which constitutes our happiness here on earth and our bliss in eternity.

Jesus teaches us the life of poverty, meekness, and renunciation, as the essential foundation of religious perfection. This life presents many difficulties, and entails many sacrifices, but the more courageously and perseveringly we live it the more shall we taste the peace and consolation that Jesus promised us.

As Jesus, through His teachings, shows us the way to imitate Him, so by His example and His grace, He renders this way possible to live for us. He has given the precept of imitating Him for all but in a special way for religious, contemplative missionaries.

1.2.1. Poverty:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5: 3). Knowing fully well that solicitude for temporal things hinders most people, especially, religious from securing their eternal salvation, Jesus places poverty at the head of the beatitudes as is found in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke. Therefore, also on becoming man, He gave us as the first lesson and the examples of poverty. Explaining the poverty and simplicity of Jesus, a religious of the congregation of St. Charles Borromeo says:

“As the crib was the platform from which Jesus taught poverty, so was the cross the pulpit from which He announced it (poverty) with His dying breath. For this reason, the first Christians prized poverty so highly. Through it they made such rapid strides in perfection for as a wanderer makes better times if he/she has no encumbrances, so do the poor in spirit who are not burdened with the goods of this world, walk with greater alacrity on the way of perfection.”¹

1.2.2. Meekness

“Blessed are the meek; for they shall possess the land” (Mt 5: 4). The virtue of meekness consists in calmly suppressing the uprisings of anger, and subjecting them to reason and faith. All Christians are expected to exercise self-control, sufficiently so as not to suffer the passion of anger to draw them into sin. Jesus however, calls only those blessed who have acquired the existential attitude of meekness by hard struggle, and who try to live it always, in accordance with His example, by accepting difficulties and hardships with calmness and amiability; who pardons injuries and requite evil with good.²

To such resemblance of our Divine Saviour we as Religious Contemplatives, are especially called, for without it, we could not acquit ourselves of our important duties among the people entrusted to us. The practice of meekness in our vocation presupposes serious struggles, which can terminate successfully only if the Holy Spirit imparts to us light and grace. Hence we must be assured ourselves of His (Holy Spirit’s) assistance by fervent prayer.

¹ ANONYMOUS, A Religious of the Congregation of St. Charles Borromeo, Translated by a Sister of Notre Dame: *Jesus the Model of Religious; Meditations for Every Day of the Year*, (New York and Cincinnati), 171.

² *Ibid.*, 174.

1.2.3. Sorrow

“Blessed are they who mourn; for they shall be comforted” (Mt 5: 5). Those who mourn and whom our Lord calls blessed are they who lament their sins, their faults and imperfections; those who strive to atone for their faults by sincere compunction of heart, so as to purify their souls more and more.⁶ The fond hope that sorrow and discomfort are the seed of our everlasting glory, those moments of suffering are counted by God, that not a single one remains unrewarded, elevates the soul and imparts new courage and cheer, to persevere in spite of reverses and misfortunes.

1.2.4. Ardent Desire for Justice

“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice; for they shall have their fill” (Mt 5: 6). To hunger and thirst for justice means to have an ardent desire for all virtues; and to strive with extraordinary zeal to acquire them. These people are those who accept humiliations and mortifications cheerfully and will bear all the difficulties connected with poverty, obedience, community life and the discomforts of office or employment, because in all these, they find nourishment for their souls.⁷

A religious Contemplative person is called for this justice: to give one’s life for the sake of justice in the community and in society. Hence our hunger and thirst for justice, however should not be confined to our personal needs, but must share in the hunger and thirst of our Blessed Saviour for the salvation of souls.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

1.2.5. Mercy towards our neighbour

“Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7). The perfection of charity and holiness entails mercy and love towards our neighbour. Jesus in Mt 25: 46 says “what you have done to the least of my brethren you have done it to me.” Jesus is the model whom we should try to emulate. His life on earth was an uninterrupted act of charity, which finds its continuation in the sacrament of His love.⁸ We are totally dependent on the mercy of God. The consolation found in the exercise of mercy, which in turn makes the human heart so happy is part of our imitation of Christ in holiness.

1.2.6. Purity of Heart

“Blessed are the pure of heart; for they shall see God” (Mt 5: 8). The lowest degree of purity of heart, which is necessary to attain eternal salvation, consists in being free from mortal sins. A great degree of purity is possessed by those who strive to be free from venial sin and from all inordinate affections and inclinations; and who endeavor more and more to put on the “new man”, created according to God in purity and true holiness.

St. Thomas Aquinas designates purity of heart as the fruit of a most fervent effort to grow in perfection and sanctity.⁹ This beatitude comprises the essence of all the virtues. If we actually hunger and thirst for justice and in earnestly and fervent prayer implore the aid of the Holy Spirit, He will give us a clear knowledge of the condition of our hearts, and will teach us how to rise gradually to ever great purity.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

The purity of heart sees God in the revealed truth, in the exercise of prayer and meditation. The enlightenments, the consolations and supernatural joys with which He favors them, surpass by far all earthly gratifications. The more sublime the purity of souls, the more disposed they are to recognize even here below, God, the source of all purity and sanctity, and to taste how sweet the Lord is.

Purity of heart towards which the requirements of religious life thus tend is not a mere rectitude. However it is the disposition to encounter God and to be admitted to His presence. God manifested Himself in the history of His people, which is also the history of each person.¹⁰

1.2.7 The Spirit of Peace

“Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called children of God” (Mt 5: 9). These are those who have subjected their flesh to the spirit, and the spirit to God. When we read the book of Job 9: 4, he says, “Who has resisted Him and found peace?” submit yourself to God and you will have peace; and you will yield the best fruits.

The peacemakers abandon themselves entirely to the Will of God that He may dispose of them according to His pleasure. Peace of heart is found pre-eminently among those who have cast anchor in the haven of peace, in religious contemplative life. The consummated happiness of religious consists in the peace of heart, which is the fruit of the daily victories over self.¹¹

All who possess peace are, in consequence, children of God, and have a claim to the heavenly inheritance. “And if sons, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ

¹⁰ L. BAUYER, *A History of Christian Spirituality: the Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, Vol. I. (England 1968), 9

¹¹ ANONYMOUS, *op. cit.*, 194

(Rom 8:17).” Our Divine Saviour Himself calls the peacemakers children of God, because acting as children of the heavenly Father, they serve Him, not through fear, but through love. The peacemakers are His children because they fulfill His Will, and by their meekness and love, seek to promote his honor by helping others find peace, being in reality, peacemakers.

1.2.8 Persecution for Justice Sake

“Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice sake; for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5: 10). All true disciples of the Lord, must, according to His word, endure similar sufferings. Jesus said, “If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (Jn 15: 20). The world persecutes the religious and in every possible way opposes the good they endeavor to do, for it is the enemy of God.¹²

1.3 MARTYRDOM AND THE IMITATION OF CHRIST AS A WAY TO CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

The spirituality of martyrdom had its roots in the Old Testament in the second book of Maccabees chapter seven. In Christ and with Christ it received a special dimension. Martyrdom was seen as an ideal, as the more perfect way to imitate Christ. Martyrdom left a deep mark in the life of the Church both before and after AD 312.¹³ In this way the imitation of Christ was the value, more than martyrdom itself. Even if martyrdom was conceived as a grace of God to suffer for the cause of faith (beatitude), Jesus’ imitation remains of more value. This is found in the writings of St. Paul: 2Cor 4: 8-12; always carrying about in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may

¹² ANONANOUS, *op. cit.*, 199.

¹³ M. FIGURA, *Martyrdom and the Following of Christ in the Communal International Review* 23:1 (1996) 101.

also be manifested in our body, Col 1: 24, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.

St Paul was a man deeply scarred by sufferings and this experience was the basic characteristic of his teaching, connected with the Church and the Eucharist. St Paul considered the whole life as martyrdom, the motivation being not a desire of death, but of true spiritual and eternal life. This is true holiness.

St Ignatius' of Antioch pastoral dimension of holiness: the good shepherd who gives his life for his sheep; in his letter to the Romans 2: 4; 4: 1-3, elaborated the same theme with the desire for martyrdom:

"I am writing to all the Churches that I am dying willingly for God. If you will not stop me, I am pleading with you that you would not use with me an untimely benevolence. Let me go to the wild beasts because through them it is possible for me to reach God. I am the wheat of God and ground by the teeth of the wild beasts I will be pure bread of Christ. Instead you will caress the wild beasts that they may become my tomb and that they would leave nothing of my body, so that I will not be a weight on anybody after my death. Then I will really be a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world will not see my body any longer. Pray to the Lord on my behalf that through those means I could become a victim for God. I am not commanding you anything like Peter and Paul did. They were Apostles, as for me I am a captive: they were free and I am a slave until now. But if I suffer I will be emancipated in Christ and I will resuscitate a free man in Him. Now that I am in chains I am learning not to desire anything."⁶⁴

Hence, holiness of life is connected with apostolate. In fact it has been pointed out that true holiness of life includes having the heart of an apostle: to share with Christ his desire to draw all humanity to Himself. On the other hand the apostolate, which does not flow from holiness of life, does not bear everlasting fruits.

1.3.1 Ecclesial Value of Martyrdom

If we turn to Tertullian's treatise on Baptism, we see there the first explicit mention of the familiar notion that martyrdom is a baptism in blood for those who have

⁶⁴ FIGURA, *op cit*, 100.

never been baptized in water. This is symbolized by the streams of blood and water that flowed from Christ's side on the cross. More than that, it offers the remission of sins to those who have lost their baptismal innocence.

Since there existed only one opportunity for forgiveness of sins after baptism in the early Church, this was an important aspect of martyrdom. In Origen's treatise on martyrdom, this idea has been expounded in a rather remarkable way that:

"Martyrdom profits not only a martyr him/herself, but atones for many others as well. In this respect, Origen suggests a comparison between the death of the martyr and the death of Christ. Baptism in the form of martyrdom as received by the saviour is purgation for the world; so too, when we receive it, it becomes purgation for many."¹⁵

1.3.2 Virginité as a Martyrdom

By the end of the Third Century, virginity was compared to martyrdom. It is then that Methodius of Olympus writes that Virgins will be the first to follow in the Lord's train into the Kingdom of heaven. He said;

"Into the repose of the new ages, their martyrdom did not consist in enduring things that pain the body for a short period of time; rather it consists in steadfast endurance of it throughout their whole lifetime, never once shrinking from the truly Olympian contest of being battered in the practice of chastity. Because they stood firm against the torments of pleasure, fear, sorrow, and other vices, they carry on the highest honors of all by reason of their rank in the land of the promise."¹⁶

To speak of virginity as a kind of martyrdom is already to understand something of its attractiveness to the early Church, since the martyr exerted such a tremendous fascination on it. For the Fathers of the Church, virginity touched everything, and for this reason its enemies were everywhere unchaste, but also avarice, intemperance in food and drink, disobedience and especially pride. According to St. Augustine, the two virtues that must accompany virginity are love and humility: he said that "Nothing

¹⁵ B. RAMSLEY, *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, (Paulist Press, New York, 1985), 132.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

guards the good of virginity except God Himself who gave it, and God is Love. Therefore the guardian of virginity is love but the place of this guardian is humility"¹⁷

1.3.3 Martyrdom as the Highest Proof of Love

The second Vatican Council fully adapts the theology of martyrdom of the early Church and classifies its statement in the fifth chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church; under the heading *universal call for holiness*. Martyrdom is meant here chiefly as fearless witness to the faith, although the classic definition of surrendering one's life reverberated. Vatican II Council states that:

"By martyrdom a disciple is transformed into an image of his/her master who freely accepted death on behalf of the world's salvation; he/she perfects that image even to the shedding of blood, though few are presented with such an opportunity, nevertheless all must be prepared to confess Christ before the world, and to follow Him along the way of the cross through the persecutions which the Church will never fail to suffer."¹⁸

According to the New Testament, Jesus Christ is Himself "The Martyr" (witness), who testifies to the truth (1Tim 6: 13; Rev 1: 5). In the Johanne farewell discourses Jesus sermons the disciples to a love that endures to the point of death (Jn 15: 13). He Himself had lived that love to the utmost and sealed it with His death. From the upward gaze to his crucified love, the disciples obtained the strength to undergo death after Easter for their own confession of the truth. An example of this is the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7: 55-59). Paul speaks of the sufferings he endures for the sake of Christ's gospel (Rom 8: 17; 1Cor 4: 9-13; 15: 30; 2Cor 1: 5; 4: 8-12, Ph 1: 7-20; 3: 7-11). The first letter of Peter ties the sufferings of Christians to the glorifications of God, for they have won a share in the sufferings of Christ (1Pt 4: 12-19).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁸ VATICAN II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Lumen Gentium*, General edition, (St. Paul Publication: Bandra, Bombay, 1989), 42

The supreme testimony for the nearness of the Kingdom of God therefore is the *Martyrion*, which consists in laying down one's life. This act of surrender may be demonstrated by blood – witness, but also by an unbloody manner, by a life led consistently in accordance with the evangelical counsels of poverty, obedience and chastity.¹⁹

1.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have seen that the principal motive for imitating Christ by the early ascetics was the desire to be more deeply united with Jesus and to live radically their Christian commitments.

The biblical themes that we have presented in a brief way are clear evidence that the way for Christian perfection has very authentic scriptural basis. From the historical point of view, the religious life that we have today-contemplative life included, finds its earliest manifestations in Africa-Egypt with the pioneers being Anthony, the father of Christian monasticism who brought the eremitical way of life: fasting, prayer, penance and solitude, Pachomius, the initiator of community life and Augustine of Hippo, who brought back to Africa from St. Ambrose's example, a monasticism that was inspired by the Eastern communities. St. Augustine stressed much the life of community between bishop and his priests, prayer, penance, pastoral life and study. With this background, we can now proceed to the discussion on the Patristic Fathers.

¹⁹ M. FIGURA, *op. cit.*, 104.

CHAPTER TWO

PATRISTIC AGE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will look into the early Christian Spirituality. It therefore deals with the Patristic Age. This is the Age after the death of the last Apostle, St. John the Evangelist. As we have seen in Chapter One, God's revelation was perfected in Jesus Christ. But under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church has constantly studied and meditated upon this revelation in succeeding centuries. As a result there has been a development of a doctrine. As Cardinal Newman stated: "The Whole Bible is written on the principle of development"²⁰

Christian Spirituality and its perfection are not exempt from this law of development. As a manner of life patterned after the example of Christ, it is intended for all people at all times. It could never be restricted to locality, culture or country. Consequently, Christian Spirituality and the imitation of Christ has changed through the ages both as doctrine and as life: as doctrine, so far as the fundamental principles of the Christian life have been further explicated and particularized: as life, so far as the varying circumstances and needs of society called for new application of the doctrine and this in turn produced different manifestations of Christian Spirituality and imitation of Christ.

Thus Christ's statement that imitating Him consists in the love of God and neighbour is as true today as when He first said it, but the ways of living this total love might have changed due to the development of spiritual life in our modern time. That is

²⁰ J. AUMANN, *History of Spirituality: Development of Christian Spirituality*. (Metro Manila, Philippines, 1979), 25.

why it is especially important to see how the principles of then Spiritual life have been applied throughout history and to note the distinctive tendencies and schools that have developed as a result.

2.1 SPIRITUALITY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

As the writings of the Apostles were authentic witness to the teachings of Christ, so also the works of the earliest Christian writers, called the “Apostolic Fathers”, were a continuation of the teaching of the Apostles. They were for the most part, men who had known either the apostles themselves or persons who had been close to them. Though in the second century the Church was not an institutionalized Church, there was already the beginning of a hierarchical structure and a liturgical tradition though there was no a systematized theology but the spirituality of the Gospel.²¹ This can nevertheless help us to describe the spirituality of the primitive Church in terms of its general characteristics.

2.1.1 Christological Aspect

The early Christian Spirituality was for the imminent Parousia, both because the words and deeds of Jesus were still fresh in the minds of Christians, and because Christians lived in anticipation of the return of the risen Christ.²² Jesus is constantly before the faithful as a pattern for the Christian and as the ideal of sanctity. Jesus was to the first Christians no abstract ideal. The very definite feeling of his presence in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful was everywhere displayed.²³ This presence of Christ was experienced especially in the liturgical contexts of the Eucharist, prayer and biblical preaching.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 38

²² *Ibid.*, 40

²³ *Ibid.*, 41

2.1.2 Liturgical Aspect

The early Christian Spirituality was also liturgical. St. Clement applies this word to Christian worship. The focal point of the liturgical life was the Eucharist. The Didache contains the first Eucharistic prayer, which is in reality a Jewish blessing with a Christian insertion (*Didache* 9, 10).

The primitive Eucharistic service began with a gathering of the assembly for scriptural reading and prayer. After the reading time was allowed for the charismatic homily after which came as a confession of faith or a hymn of praise? A prayer over the Bread and Wine preceded the reception of the Eucharist followed by the prayer of thanksgiving (*Didache* 9, 14). Thus as Evdokimov puts it, "at the time of the liturgy, the people are convoked first to hear and then to consume the word."²⁴ It was more in the liturgy than in any other way that Christians realized and experienced the presence of Christ. In the liturgy, there was not only the present moment and union with Christ but also the past of the passion, death and resurrection, and the future, the promise of the Parousia.

2.1.3 Communal or Social Aspect

The early Christian Spirituality was communal or social. From the beginning, as we know from the Acts of the Apostles, the common life was an essential element of the Church and Christian perfection. Theologically, it provided a setting in which the Christians could practice fraternal charity; liturgically, it made it possible for the entire Christian community to be nourished and sustained at the Eucharistic table and in the

²⁴P. EVDOKIMOV, *The Struggle with God*, (Paulist Press, New Jersey, 1966), 192.

common prayer. It also follows that from the very nature of community life: there should be a sharing of common possessions, common life common goods. This at least, is the testimony of the Acts of the Apostles:

“These remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common. They sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed. They went as a body to the Temple every day but met in their houses for the breaking of bread: they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved” (Acts 2: 42-47)

2.1.4 Eschatological Aspect

The early Christian Spirituality was also eschatological. Being under the impression that Christ would soon return, an impression fortified by a literal interpretation of Rev 20: 1-10, their main concern was vigilant preparation for the Parousia.²⁵ The early Christians experienced the tension of living an intermediated period and they were convinced of two things, the uncertainty of the final hour, and the imminence of the second coming of the Lord.

The eschatology of the primitive Church is found in the *Didache*, the letters of St. Ignatius, and to some extent, in the letters of the Pseudo-Barnabas. The *Didache*, for example, admonishes Christians: “watch over your lives; your lamps must not go out, nor your loins be unguarded; on the contrary be ready. You know not the hour in which our Lord will come.”²⁶

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

2.1.5 Ascetical Aspect

The primitive Christian Spirituality was ascetical. Here asceticism should be understood in its original meaning of exercise or practice in virtue, rather than practices of austerity and self-denial. Asceticism will later develop in a way that was identified with a particular class of people within the Church but in the early Church asceticism was a logical consequence of the Christocentric and Eschatological aspect of Christian Spirituality.

Following the teaching of St. Paul, St. Ignatius of Antioch had urged the imitation of Christ as a duty for all Christians. Martyrdom was considered the supreme example of the imitation of Christ, and most inspiring testimony. For most of Christians, however who did not undergo persecution, the imitation of Christ was achieved by the practice of virtues. Thus the early Christians were renowned for the virtues of fraternal charity, humility, patience, obedience, chastity and the practice of prayer.

To cultivate and safeguard these virtues, they soon found it necessary to resort to practices of austerity and some degree of separation from the world. St. Justine the martyr and apologist stressed much the life of morality as lived by the Christians, who in turn attracted many people especially the learned and the philosophers. Eventually the form of asceticism most widely practiced and respected was the practice of virginity freely accepted by both sexes and the continence of widows. Yet St. Clement and St. Ignatius never allowed the early Christians to forget that the greatest of all the virtues is charity.

2.1.6 Relationship between Asceticism and Eschatology

The relationship between asceticism and eschatology is evident in the Church. Living as they did under the impression that the Parousia was imminent, though uncertain as to time, the early Christians sought to anticipate the coming of Christ as much as possible. They realized that in view of the Parousia, it profited them little to accumulate many earthly goods if none of these had a place in the life hereafter. They were waiting for the Lord's return, and even when it became evident that the waiting period would be longer than first anticipated, the early Christians never lost sight of eschatology. Separation from the world, the relative isolation of Christian community, and their rather widespread practice of virginity also provided an atmosphere conducive to the growth of Monasticism.

2.2 MONASTICISM

It must be kept in mind that in the early church martyrdom meant the achievement of communion with Christ the first martyr. The end of persecutions opened the way to the search for an alternative ideal of imitating Christ; hence the monastic life and a life of virginity grew to be the practices for asceticism. Monasticism caught up with these two ways of life and developed them further. The first desert fathers continued a line of radical Christian life that already existed. Their motivation remained the imitation of Christ as the center of Christian life.

Monasticism had a cosmic dimension: "for our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with world rulers of this present

darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens” (Eph 6: 12). Therefore, monasticism, far from being the expression of a private and individualistic longing, developed a universal (or “catholic”) dimension. From the fourth century, monasticism took its rise. It was then that St. Anthony pointed out the way of solitary living in contemplation of God, which countless hermits were to follow.

During this century, the Thebaid, a region in Egypt saw the beginning of the life in community, induced by the example of St. Pachomius who took the scripture as the rule of life for his followers. This discipline gained ground swiftly in the East and was formulated for Greece and the Eastern Church in Asia Minor by St. Basil the Great the bishop of Caesarea and metropolitan of Cappadocia and Hexarchy of Pontus. His teaching definitely ranked the practice shared in common as preferably to the practice in solitude, and laid down works of charity and a rule suited to their performance as a true and holy part of the monastic life. Here we find already a form of religious discipline far different from the lonely pursuit life of contemplation and mortifying of the flesh for this end, which had been the burning desire of the desert monks after the example of St. Anthony. Thus by the end of the fourth century, monasticism was firmly established in the East. The same period saw its introduction to the West, particularly to Rome by St Athanasius who practiced and taught the precepts of religious life there from 340 onwards with the help of the Monks he had brought with him.

Monasticism in the West caught the fire of its fascination, and, individually or in common, men and women throughout Italy, Gaul and Northern Africa gave themselves to its dedication in poverty, chastity and obedience and the life of asceticism.

2.3 Foundation of Monasticism

Pachomius, (†347), began his ascetic life as a hermit (308). In 325, he introduced coenobitism into monastic life, that is, the community life for the monks. Pachomius could be called “the founder of monasticism.” Coenobitism (that became predominant) added to a radical consecration to the Lord the communitarian dimension, deeply inspired by the example of Jesus Christ. They lived a common life in a common place doing the common manual work under the spiritual leader.

The background of this choice was a precise existential experience, which Pachomius lived. He experienced a free and disinterested act of charity done by the Christians who helped him and his companions who were in jail and still pagans. The witness of a few Christians led Pachomius to meet with Jesus Christ. Fraternal service inspired the communitarian form of life for the monks. Pachomius laid the foundations that would make possible such a way of life. These foundations were:

- Materially constructing a wall surrounding the buildings where the monks lived. The wall around the place where monks lived together allowed the monastery and monastic life to be established in the cities also;
- Spiritually offering suggestions and guidance, first with his example, then through written instructions (also elaborated by others later).

2.4 THE PIONEERS OF CHRISTIAN MONASTICISM

2.4.1 St. Anthony of Egypt (251-356), Father of Christian Monasticism

Anthony, an unlettered Copt from a village in Coma in middle Egypt, while attending Church service, heard the words of Jesus, “if you wish to be perfect, go, sell

what you have and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me" (Mt 19: 21) and acted promptly as the word suggested. He gave his possessions to the poor and entrusted his younger sister to some virgins, then fled to the desert to lead a life of prayer, penance and mortification. His entry to the desert marked the beginning of monastic life in from where it spread to the west²⁷. This is why J.F. Conwell is right in affirming that the contemplative life has its roots in the early movements to the desert as is testified by the example of Anthony who is hailed as the father of Christian monasticism.²⁸

Anthony is specifically the pioneer of hermitic life. In fact J.A. Mohler notes that the word *monos* indicates a man who lives by himself although the word was later adopted for the semi hermits (*Lavra*) and coenobites as well.²⁹ However, because Anthony's Monastic life was hermitic, individuals lived alone and there were serious problems due to exaggerations in the ascetical practices that were at times unbalanced. All in all, thanks to him, the monastic life acquired its essential elements, that is, constant prayer, penance and mortification, in silence and solitude.

2.4.2 Pachomius (292-346), Pioneer of Cenobitic Life

The next earliest important figure in the history of monasticism is Pachomius. He too is an Egyptian and a contemporary of Anthony. He is reputed as the originator and pioneer of coenobitic life. Pachomius was a pagan drafted into Roman army at age

²⁷J.A. MOHLER, *The Heresy of Monasticism: A Historical Survey*, xvi, (New York, 1971), 45-46.

²⁸J.F. CONWELL, *Contemplative life*, NCF, V, (1981), 263.

²⁹J.A. MOHLER, *op. cit.*, 45. The term coenobite derives from *coenobium*, which means group. The Cenobites are those who live in a community.

twenty. He was converted by the exemplary charity exercised by the Christians who cared for the wounded soldiers and became a soldier-ascetic.³⁰

After his conversion, he spent some time with Palamon, his adviser, and then left him and founded a monastery at Tabennesis, on the banks of the River Nile. He developed the monasticism of Anthony further by organizing it in communities. His coenobitic monasticism eliminated the arbitrariness of the hermitic life, correcting some of the exaggerations. These monasteries were characterised by manual work alternating with prayer and conferences on the scriptures.³¹

Pachomius had so many followers and when he died, he left about seven hundred monks in different communities. Towards the end of his life he wrote recommendations (which were based on the Holy Scripture) that became the prototype of Eastern and Western monastic rules. Even today his rule is the one followed by the Coptic monks. The governing principles of Pachomian monasteries were fraternal love that was the most valued ideal in the community³²

2.4.3 Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Monk, Bishop and Theologian

Augustine, one of the principal founders of monasticism, was born in Thagaste, Numidia, in present day Tunisia in North Africa. He led a restless life that led him to Europe in pursuit of his rhetoric career. It is at Milan, Italy, where he came into contact with St. Ambrose who influenced him with his preaching and contributed much to his conversion to Christianity. After conversion to Christianity, he returned to Africa and

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 51-52

³¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

³² N. BROCKMAN, *A Popular History of Religious Life*. (Paulines Publications, Nairobi, 1990). 25.

lived a quasi-monastic life. When he was ordained priest in 391, he founded his first monastery at Thagaste and after becoming a bishop he converted his home into a monastery where he lived a common life with his priests.³³

J. Aumann points out that it is Augustine who began the cenobitic monastic life in Africa that was not based on the Eastern type of monasticism. He brought it from the West where he had seen it at Milan. It was characterized by common life, poverty, celibacy, obedience, community life, silence, humility, and other austerities. More emphasis was laid on fraternal love. The monasticism started by Augustine spread to France, Italy, and Spain. Its traces are found even in the Rule of St. Benedict. Some Orders such as the Canons of St. Victor follow the Rule of Augustine, which comprised Asceticism, community life, prayer, study and pastoral life³⁴

However, Augustine also treated of the contemplative and active bases of life here on earth. He says that in the exercise of active life one makes progress, but in contemplation one attains his/her goal. In the active life one labours to purify his/her heart for the vision of God; by contemplation he/she is at rest, beholding God. The active life is engaged in struggle, but the contemplative life enjoys repose; the active life consists in the pursuit of a good manner of living, but the contemplative life consists specially in faith.³⁵

From the active and contemplative exercises of life, Augustine turns his attention to three styles of life: the life of contemplation or study of the truth, the life dedicated to human affairs, and the life which is a combination of the two. In attempting to decide

³³ J.A. MOHRIC, *op cit*, 109-110.

³⁴ J. AUMANN, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, (London, 1985), 67-68, 118.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 70.

which of the three forms is best, he insisted that the choice should be determined by the degree to which one of the three will facilitate the attainment of one's ultimate end.³⁶

As years passed, the Augustinian monks started dedicating more time to active pastoral work and gradually, the contemplative aspect disappeared. These communities laid the foundations for future Orders that were entirely dedicated to active apostolate.³⁷

2.4.4 Basil the Great (330-379)

Born in 330, Basil studied at Caesarea, Constantinople and Athens. At Athens he met Gregory Nazianzenus and the two became fast friends. St. Basil's contribution to monastic life can be found in his two collections of monastic regulations: *longer Rule*, conversations on monastic asceticism, and, *shorter Rule*, answers to specific questions on monastic life. For St. Basil therefore, it is only in the cenobitic life that the Monk is able to observe the precept of fraternal charity and be of service to his neighbour. Moreover, it is only in a community that one can live in the manner and spirit of the Apostles and the early Christians.

According to Basil, the Cenobitic society is to remain small, so that community life can foster the recollection of its members and the relationship between Superior and subjects and of the Monks with each other can be more personal. He also insisted that the Monks should be involved in some form of apostolate that is compatible with monastic life. Thus Basil's monasticism consisted of work, prayer, the study of the

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁷ J. A. MOULDER, *op. cit.*, 67.

Scripture, mitigated asceticism, an apostolate that is not detrimental to monastic life, fraternal charity in community life and obedience to the Superior.³⁸

2.4.5 St. Benedict (480-547), Father and Legislator of Western Monasticism

Benedict of Nursia, whom scholars unanimously refer to as the father and legislator of Western monasticism, after his studies in Rome, withdrew in solitude at Subiaco where he organized monasteries almost similar to those in the East.³⁹

After establishing these monasteries, he stipulated a rule for them that is well known today as the Rule of St. Benedict. In 817, this rule was proposed by the council of Aix-La-Chapelle as the basic rule for monastic life in the West.⁴⁰

The reason as to why the Rule of St. Benedict became universally popular is given by N. Brockman who notes that it "gave very sensible directives for all practical things of life, was moderate and prudent and offered a monasticism that was flexible and common sense as well as spiritually strict but with focus placed upon conversion of heart rather than physical penance."⁴¹ In other words, Benedict wrote a rule that was faithful to the traditions of monasticism as well as adapted to the needs of the time.

The main contribution of Saint Benedict to the monastic life is his Rule and the vow of stability that helped to curb the problem of "wandering monks" that was a plague to the monastic life during those times. He is the one who established monasteries that were characterized by family spirit with the Abbot as the *Pater familias*, where nothing was ordered or forced. The monastery was supposed to be a

³⁸ J. LUMANN, *History of Spirituality*, (Metro Manila, Philippines, 1979), 56.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴¹ N. BROCKMAN, *A popular History of Religious Life*, 42-43.

school of service to the Lord and not like those of the East that resembled an army encampment.⁴²

St. Benedict knew from experience the importance of firm authority in the cenobitic life. Consequently, he placed full powers in the hands of the Abbot, who was to be elected by the Monks themselves and was to hold his office for life. Since Benedict had defined the monastery as a “school of divine service,” he envisaged the Abbot as the spiritual father who would lead the Monks to perfection.

The Rule of St. Benedict demands stability, which Benedict considered the fundamental virtue of a Monk. At the time of their profession, the Monks were required to make a vow of stability in the presence of the entire community, in addition to the customary vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The Monk was then to dedicate his life to manual labour and prayer for the glory of God.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have dealt with the teaching of the early Fathers concerning Christian perfection. They practiced this perfection by withdrawing themselves to the desert. The choice to go to the desert was a reaction against the laxity in the Christian life after the persecutions had ceased when Christianity became the State religion after the conversion of Emperor Constantine. We have also seen that the desert ascetics of the fourth century are the pioneers of the Monastic Contemplative life. In chapter three of our work, we are going explore on the Church’s teaching and understanding about Christian perfection or the imitation of Christ.

⁴² J.A. MOHLER, *op. cit.*, 202-205.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHURCH TEACHING ON THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter we are going to explore more concretely on the Church's teaching on the imitation of Christ. First we shall see the spirituality of the Medieval Ages, which was dominated by Scholasticism. In this period, we shall discover four mainstream spiritualities; Benedictine spirituality, spirituality of the Canons Regular, Franciscan spirituality and the Dominican spirituality. These Spiritualities have done a great deal in helping the Christians to improve their way of imitating Christ.

3.1 What is the Church?

The Church is a "community of Christ's disciples, the new people of God. It is a communion in spirit of the risen Lord, the sacrament or sign and instrument of union between God and humanity and unity among persons" (L.G 1). According to J.A. Komonchak, the Church is a "body of Christ which makes visible Christ's presence and action in the world through His Spirit. Its mission is to gather, reconcile, and unify all people and all things so that God may be all in all" (Eph 12: 3, 14; Col 1: 15-20; 1Cor 3:23).

The Church of Christ has been going through various reforms and purifications. To realize her full imitation of Christ and to participate fully in the plan of salvation, reforms and adaptations are necessary. They imply four aspects: the first aspect is *metanoia*, the call of Christ to repentance (Mk 1: 15) for the kingdom of God is at hand (Mt 4: 17). This call is addressed to the Church as a whole and to its individual members. The second aspect is a return to paradise; St. Paul describes his experience as

a return to paradise (2Cor 12: 2-6). This mystical reform influenced St. Gregory of Nyssa to outline human life in terms of “a potential return to paradise.” His treatise on virginity portrayed the Christian requiring paradise spiritually by approaching closer to God. The third aspect is that of the image of God. The Church is called to restore the image of God in humanity (Gen 1: 26) and in Christ (Col 3: 10; 2 Cor 3: 18). This is explained by St. Irenaeus’ theory of *Recapitulation*. He says, “The word of God recapitulates in Himself that which was formed by Him, i.e. reassumes the creation of humanity in body and soul through the incarnation.” The fourth aspect is the representation of the kingdom of God here on earth. When Christ preached about repentance, His words presented the Christian paradox of a Church immanent in the world and yet transcendent. This paradox opened a new way of reform – the mutual relationship of earthly and heavenly kingdom.⁴³

3.2 Medieval Spirituality

This is the spirituality of the Middle Ages as extended from the fifth century to the fifteenth century. A millennium divided into: from the fifth to the eleventh century was known as High Middle Ages, from the twelfth to the fifteenth century was known as Lower Middle Ages. This period coincides with the rise of Scholasticism, the emergence of schools of spirituality and the introduction of the new forms of monastic spirituality. According to Fr. Pourrant the spirituality of the Middle Ages is to be found mainly in the great religious families, which form so many schools, in which asceticism and mysticism became developed in accordance with the spirit proper to each

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 205.

foundation.”⁴⁴ During this period, several religious orders (sometimes known as schools) emerged and left their mark strongly impressed in spirituality. Some these religious orders are: the Benedictine Order, the Canons Regular of St. Augustine, the Franciscan Order and the Dominican Order. Each of these Orders had its own spirituality.

3.2.1 Benedictine Spirituality

From the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Benedictine school or spirituality reigned supreme in the West. It was characterised by an affective and practical piety. The Benedictines imitated Christ by dedicating their life to the liturgy, reading of Scripture (*Lectio Divina*), and manual work. Their Rule of life was Prayer and work (*Ora et Labora*). They also took the vow of stability to remain in their monastery for the rest of their life. To the spiritual life of the Church, the Benedictine monasteries contributed a lot as Fr. Jean Leclercq states: “it gave a method of living the life proposed in Scripture; it offered examples of sanctity among its members and it produced the first literature of a systematized theology of spirituality.”⁴⁵

In addition to this the Benedictine monasteries performed two important services for the Church; first they introduced into the life of many Christians, both clerics and laypersons, spiritual practices that had been proper to the monastic life at the beginning. Such as retreats, spiritual direction, meditation, spiritual reading. The second important role it played was to lead people out of spiritual emptiness, which sneaked in their lives

⁴⁴ J. ALTMANN, T. HOPKO, D. G. BLOESCH (eds.), *Christian Spirituality, East and West*, (Priory Press, Chicago, 1968), 39.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

gradually due to the development of institutions, appearance of certain legalism as well as the material growth of the Church.⁴⁶

3.2.2 The Spirituality of the Canons Regular

The practice of the imitation of Christ for the Canons Regular required that they live a full community life and give obedience to the Superior though there was no renunciation of private possessions and no profession of vows. They dedicated themselves to the study of Scripture, doctrine, common life, pastoral life, asceticism, prayer, liturgy and some manual labour. They were in effect living the type of life that St. Augustine had envisioned for his clerics in the fourth century. Later on, abiding to rules imposed by the Synod of Rome in 1059, the Canons began to make profession of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience according to the Rule of St. Augustine. Their vowed life was for the ministry of souls and this brought a major distinction between the life of the Canons Regular and that of the Monks.

3.2.3 Franciscan Spirituality

“Religious Orders exist for the service of the Church and they come into being because of some need in the Church”. According to Thomas of Celano, “God sent Francis of Assisi to demonstrate the folly of worldly wisdom and to bring people to the wisdom of God”. During the time of St. Francis, the Gospel was being ignored everywhere due to the great wealth and temporal power of bishops and monasteries. The radical life of poverty of Francis was a kind of revolution to the Church. The lack of possessions made Francis and his companions free for the apostolate. It was the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

intention of Francis that they should be free travelling preachers who will live the Gospel literally and preach peace and repentance to the world.

Their way of life influenced many people who requested for a Rule of life for the third Order. These were the laypersons that remained in the world, kept their possessions, practiced penance, prayer and performed works of charity. Hence according to Thomas Celano, “the original idea of Francis was and is simply the imitation of the life of Christ in all its simplicity and poverty.”⁴⁷

3.2.4 Dominican Spirituality

St. Dominic founded his Order with the intention of converting the Albigensians and to evangelise the Christian people and even the infidels. In his life Dominic insisted on severe poverty, imposed the obligation to serious study and a preparation to the preaching apostolate. The plan of St. Dominic’s life of sanctity to his friars was; “let them conduct themselves everywhere as upright and religious men who desire to procure their own and their neighbour’s salvation as evangelical men following in the footsteps of the saviour, by speaking with God or of God, either among themselves or when in converse with their neighbour.”⁴⁸

3.3 The Church Teaching on the Imitation of Christ

The Church, the mother of all Christians and of all the people of God, calls all humanity to the imitation of Christ. When we read the Gospel of John, Christ says; “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14: 19). The Church therefore being the spouse of Christ, she invites all her children to follow this way, to practice the *truth* and to enter

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 48,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

into full *life* with Christ in Christ. Throughout the centuries, the Church being represented by the holy Fathers, the Popes and also Ecumenical Councils and Synods has been teaching that the practice of charity is the perfect way of imitating Christ.

All people are called in Christ Jesus through the grace of God to acquire holiness/ Christian perfection through the practice of Christian virtues of faith hope and love. Christ Jesus Himself, the “Divine” teacher and model of all perfection preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples without distinction.⁴⁹ The Lord said; “You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5: 48). “It is therefore quite clear that all people in any state of life, duties and circumstances are called to the fullness of Christian life, to the perfection of love through the imitation of Christ.”⁵⁰

Vatican Council II stressed that the Church’s holiness besides the practice of charity among the faithful; it is also fostered in a special way by the practice of *virginity* and *celibacy*. “This perfect continence for love of the kingdom of heaven has always been held in high esteem by the Church as a sign and stimulus of love and as a singular source of spiritual fertility in the world.”⁵¹

3.4 The Renewal of Religious Life

The sixteenth century saw an evolution in consecrated life. New institutes had a lay and Roman origin, i.e.: they were closely related to with lay associations flourishing in Latin countries (especially Spain and Italy), in many cases they were started in Rome

⁴⁹ A. ELANNERY, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in Vatican Council II Lumen Gentium*. (Pauline Publications, Bandra, Bombay, 1989), 63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 368

or at least they sought recognition and approval from Rome. More than the mendicant orders and in compliance with the new spirit of the modern age, which was more dynamic and troubled, the new orders got away from forms of monastic life in order to exercise the apostolate more freely: they did not wear a monastic garbs, some even limited their members to praying the office of the hours in private, dedicating themselves to youth education, preaching, administration of the sacraments. These were the characteristics of regular clerics: they were priests who dedicated themselves to the apostolate, while abandoning monastic habits as incompatible with the care of the souls, at the same time choosing consecrated life as a means that ensured efficiency to the apostolate and a higher imitation of Christ.

In the line of the renewal of religious life, it is necessary also to mention the evolution of women's religious life. On the side of women, solemn vows and papal enclosure (that allowed them to leave the convent only in time of danger, e.g. fire, leprosy and epidemic) constituted for a long time an essential element. Pope Pious V in his letter *Circa pastoralis* of 1566 stressed to all women's institutes these two elements: solemn vows and enclosure, prohibiting accepting any new novice to the institute that did not submit. Apostolate outside the convent was impossible. Here the dilemma was between saving women consecrated life renouncing active apostolate and consecration to the apostolate renouncing consecrated life. The juridical situation of the women remained unchanged, strictly speaking, until the 19th century. Since then only the sisters in the enclosure were considered true consecrated women. Yet, some bishops, like St Charles Borromeo, began approving women's congregations with simple vows and

sometimes they obtained also papal approval. In the end we can say that the creation of new religious institutes in the 16th century was a sign of strong religious vitality. We can now have a look at the institutes that had a large diffusion: Capuchins, Carmelites, Oratorians and Jesuits.

3.4.1 The Evolution of the Franciscan Order: The Capuchins

The history of the Franciscan order portrays the ongoing struggle between the heroic aspirations to live radically the ideal of poverty according to St Francis' life and the rule, and the inevitable and necessary compromises for the incarnation, the diffusion and the stability of the same ideal. The controversy was not limited to the observance of poverty, but concerned also the need for studies and scientific formation, which was judged as useless by the rigorists. At the beginning the friars were leading the hermitic life in which, manual work and the care for the sick had a very important place, while studies were neglected. Their life, which was poor and austere, their heroic charity for the sick and the poor, their preaching founded on the Gospel and expressed in a simple way, so that everybody could understand was their perfect way to imitate Christ in all His attitudes.

3.4.2 The Carmelite Reformation

The struggle between conservatives and reformed is not an exclusive phenomenon of the Franciscans: it happened also with the Carmelite and perhaps it was even harsher. But from these bitter contrasts came one of the more lively spiritual movements of the Church, the spiritual school of St Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. Teresa's program was neither a reaction to abuses that had grown in convents, nor a return to the origins; instead it was a largely innovative ideal of consecrated life

that was also contemplative and hermitical, dissenting openly with the trend that was prevalent among the other Carmelites.

The difficulties that St. Teresa's reformation encountered were similar to those experienced by the observants against the Conventuals, i.e.: the preoccupation to preserve the unity of the order, to reject reforms whose radicalism was deemed as dangerous and the refusal to accept historical developments. Dissention was also worsened by the interference of various authorities: kings, nuncios, bishops, superiors of the order, and visitators. However the result of the struggle was a positive one.

3.4.3 The Oratory

St. Philip Neri compelled by the requests of his disciples gathered in a community a small group of priests and lay people, who had fraternal charity as the only bond keeping them together. Pope Gregory XIII gave the structure of a congregation to Philip's Oratory, though it retained its own characteristics. Today the congregation is among those associations with common life but without vows.

3.4.4 The Society of Jesus

During the years immediately before 1540 Ignatius, affected by the example of the Theatines and other clerics regular gradually developed the purpose, which had been until then very much uncertain, of establishing a religious institute that was free from monastic customs and completely dedicated to the apostolate. Ignatius' decision came after avercoming two sets of difficulties: his companions' fears about religious vows hindering the apostolate and the Roman curia perplexities regarding the unprecedented innovations of the project which represented a breakaway from traditional forms of religious life.

The proper purpose of the Society of Jesus is not only the sanctification of its members; instead the sanctification of others is at the same level, as an equal and main purpose. The Society members dedicate their entire life and activity to the apostolate. They produced a structure according to the needs and purposes of the mission. Instead of monastic stability the Jesuits had to be ready to go to any part of the world, to carry out their duties at the service of the Church and of the souls always rendering special obedience to the Pope.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how in the middle ages people tried to imitate Christ as the way and model of their Christian perfection. The Church underwent many ups and downs hence several reformations came out. These reformations aimed at the purification of the Church against heresies that came out due to much stress of knowledge neglecting faith. St. Thomas of Aquinas tried to balance knowledge and faith. Also we have seen the development of religious life in medieval period. In chapter four we are going to find some tentative answers to the challenges related to Religious Contemplative Missionary life in their imitation of Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR
A TENTATIVE ANSWER TO MATTERS AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO
RELIGIOUS CONTEMPLATIVE MISSIONARY LIFE

4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter we focused on the Church's teaching on the imitation of Christ. Our part of investigation focused on the message the church can offer to her members who want to imitate Christ in a special way to reach holiness and perfection of charity.

Now in chapter four of our work will deal with the tentative answer or proposals to matters and challenges related to contemplative missionary life in their imitation of Christ. We shall try to summarize what we have already discussed in chapter one, two and three. After this we shall give a tentative answer of our main findings to the imitation of Christ. Finally we shall discuss the recommendations and proposals for the religious contemplative missionaries in Africa. We shall end with a General Conclusion.

4.1 Summary of the Main Findings

Humankind is called to imitate Christ in all dimensions of life. In His simplicity/poverty, obedience, chastity and pastoral and spiritual life, Jesus is the model of Christian perfection, which is constituted of the double acts of charity: in relation to God and in relation to one's neighbour. The following main points are the summary of what we have already discussed in the whole paper.

In chapter one, we discussed about the community of Jesus and His apostles as the model for the imitation of Christ in religious communities. In order to understand the nature of this community the following points emerged:

1. The beatitudes are shown by Jesus as the perfect way of imitating Christ so as to lead a perfect Christian life.
2. Poverty was placed first in the list of the beatitudes in both Gospels of Mathew and Luke.
3. All Christians are called to exercise self-control through the virtue of humility.
4. Sorrow for one's sins, faults and imperfections calls to repentance.
5. An ardent desire for justice is for all Christians. Justice is a right to all and the obligation of all.
6. True imitation of Christ and perfection of charity entails mercy and love towards our neighbour.
7. Purity of heart comprises all other virtues. Purity of heart is the disposition to encounter God.
8. All that possess peace are in consequence children of God, and have a claim to the heavenly inheritance.
9. Those who suffer persecution will have the kingdom of heaven. They will inherit a hundred fold here on earth and the life to come, but not without persecution.
10. Martyrdom was the common way to imitate Christ in the early church and the church's support of martyrdom.
11. Virginity as a martyrdom was yet another way to imitate Christ.
12. Vatican II Council proves martyrdom as the highest way of love and of imitating Christ.

In chapter two, we dealt with Patristic Age and their imitation of Christ. The following points are the synthesis of our findings in chapter two:

1. The spirituality of the early church was in five aspects: Christological for the imminent Parousia- Jesus was constantly before the faithful as a pattern for the Christians and as the ideal of society; liturgical especially in the celebration of the Eucharist; communal, as we know from the beginning in the Acts of the Apostles, the common life was essential element of the church and the Christians imitated Christ through charity; eschatological because the Christians lived in great expectation of the second coming of Christ; and ascetical through the practice of virtues such as fraternal charity, humility, patience, obedience, chastity and the practice of prayer.
2. Monasticism became an alternative way to imitate Christ after the end of persecution and martyrdom. This kind of life attracted many men and women who gave themselves to its dedication in poverty, chastity and obedience and the life of asceticism.
3. We also saw the pioneers of monastic life like St. Anthony of Egypt, Pachomius, and St. Augustine of Hippo who introduced community life, study and pastoral activity in his monastery, St. Basil the great and St. Benedict the Father of Western Monasticism.

Coming to chapter three of our work, which dealt with the Church's teaching on the imitation of Christ, we discovered that:

1. In her imitation of Christ, the Church is in need of constant reformation. In order to form her members she must be formed first.

2. The Church has gone through various reforms through the middle Ages. Here we discovered that the concept of the middle ages was that the people were objective in everything. They observed the rules objectively and not subjectively.

3. We also discovered that the middle ages contributed much to the growth of the Church. God used some simple men and women to found the religious orders and congregations so as to reform the Church from within. Such outstanding men and women were; St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross and St. Ignatius of Loyola.

4.2 Contemplative Evangelizing Missionaries in Africa

The Church in Africa in one hundred years of her marvellous expansion has given to God many fervent local clergy, several religious men and women and her own native bishops and Cardinals. The Church has developed her missionary dimension giving her own sons and daughters to missionary congregations from abroad. There are also local missionary institutes such as the congregation of the Apostles of Jesus, Evangelizing Sisters of Mary, the Sacred Heart Sisters of Sudan, and the Brothers of St. Martin De Paul among others. One dimension has to be developed more deeply and more extensively with greater adaptation to local African conditions: the Contemplative Evangelizing missionary dimension.

It was thought that this contemplative evangelizing missionary dimension could be developed through an institute of religious priests and brothers living a contemplative and active life. The aim of such institute should be to cultivate *contemplative prayer* in its members and in the people of God, combining together contemplation and apostolic life. According to the mind of the founder such an institute

had to be originated in Africa, with Africans and for the Africans in its beginning, in order to develop more easily the contemplative dimension of the Church in Africa, in accordance with the African mind and heart: eagerly seeking a real adaptation to local conditions, in a manner adapted to the genuinely religious tradition of the local people. The Institute of the Contemplative Evangelizers is completely a new undertaking in the history of the congregations in Africa. One of its peculiar aspects is that, it originated in Africa, with Africans and fore Africans adapted to the mentality, capacity and culture of the Africans, not excluding other parts of the world.

The emphasis on Evangelizing Africa by Africans, which has been given by the recent Popes, reveals clearly that the principle plan of Saint Daniel Comboni, which he had as far as back 1863, was a real inspiration of God and so a challenge to the Missionary Institutes called to carry out this vision in Africa.⁵² One way that this vision for saving Africa by Africans has been brought to full realization is in the works of Fr. John Marengoni (one of the greatest contributors in the Evangelization of Africa) who founded the Congregations of the Apostles of Jesus, the Evangelizing Sisters of Mary and now the Contemplative Evangelizers of the Heart of Christ. He also contributed in the founding of other religious institutes aimed at Evangelization of Africa such as: the Sacred Heart Sisters of Sudan and the Congregation of St. Martin De Paul. The Holy Father Pope Paul VI confirmed this vision when he visited Kampala in Uganda in 1969 when he said that “Africans have to be Missionaries to their own brothers and sisters”⁵³. The Bishops of the African Synod emphasized this same message.

⁵² Interview with FR. JOHN MARENGONI, 83 Years; Nairobi, on 7th February 2004

⁵³ *Towards The African Synod*, (St. Paul Publications, Nairobi, 1995), 23

4.3 Charism Spirit of the Contemplative Evangelizers

The Charism of the Contemplative Evangelizers manifests their Spirituality of Contemplation, Evangelization and Missionary activity. Contemplative life is a life characterized by solitude and prayer. Careful distinction should be made between a life of actual solitude and prayer and that state of life in which everything is organized as to create an atmosphere of prayer and quiet. In its canonical form the contemplative life is a state involving external profession of the religious life. It implies a cloistered existence in which through the exercise of prayer, mortification and work in some way connected with the cloister, everything is so directed toward interior contemplation that God easily and effectively penetrate the whole life.

4.4 Their Mission in the Church

As Contemplative Evangelizers, we are servants of the mission of Christ. We share the mission of the Church and so we exercise our mission within the entire evangelizing mission of the church. This mission includes life witness, proclamation of the Word of God, conversion, and promoting contemplative prayer in our members and in our people, dialogue and inculturation. In accordance with our Charism, we have to deepen the faith of our people by promoting prayer and preaching to them God's love and saving mercy. Conscious of the continuous call and invitation of Jesus, we undertake all our ministries and activities with confidence that the Lord has chosen us to be His servants not because we are strong but because he says to us as he said to the Apostle Paul: *My grace is enough for you for my power is made perfect in weakness* (2Cor 12: 19).

4.5 Challenges Related to Contemplative Mission Life in Africa

Being a young institute and as a sign of her growth to maturity, the institute has experienced many challenges both from inside and from outside. Speaking to some members of the institute, they all agreed that for the institute to grow they must undergo some hardships. I conducted this interview directly and indirectly by putting questions or simply having conversations with some members belonging to the contemplative community in Nairobi-Kenya. After these conversations they gave their answers to the question “what are the challenges related to contemplative missionary life in Africa today”? Here is what is reported.

Rev. Fr. James Muiruri one of the contemplative evangelizer gave the following points:

The contemplative vocation is a new undertaking in Africa. Due to this fact, it lacks some example from African Contemplatives. There are no pioneers whom we can call *mirrors* of contemplative life. He also said that the demands of contemplative vocation are a challenge to the background of an African. An African is a social person, so it is very difficult practice cloistered life. Hence as a consequence, the number of vocations is very few. The Church in Africa is one hundred years old, so the faith and spirituality of people is not deeply rooted. Hence it is difficult to embrace fully contemplative life because there is little understanding and practicability of the evangelical counsels.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Interview with FR. JAMES MUIRURI, 39 years, Contemplative Evangelizer, Nairobi Kenya, 27th February 2004.

Fr. Michael Kamau, a contemplative evangelizer also said that due to the strong bond of family among the Africans, it is very difficult to separate one from his/her extended family. He also added that poverty has contributed much to the decline of contemplative vocation in Africa.⁵⁵

Another member, Deacon Peter Mugambi said that African culture itself is a challenge to contemplative evangelizing missionary life. Things like marriage, inheritance of property, and participation in social aspects hinder contemplative vocation in Africa. Modernity in its negative aspect has brought problems to young people whom the Church expects to embrace Christianity and its spirituality in a deep way. This has influenced young people to leave their good qualities of life by copying the western style.⁵⁶

4.6 The Role of the Contemplative Evangelizers in Africa Today

I addressed this question to the members of the contemplative evangelizers' community in Nairobi-Kenya. Some answered in written form while others answered orally after some conversations with them. Their responses were spontaneous based on their life experience as reported below.

Fr. Chrispinus Kakai (contemplative evangelizer, 35 years)

The contemplative evangelizers have contributed much in the Church in Africa in bringing the dimension of contemplative spirit in Africa. Contemplation gives the Church in Africa that deep understanding and communion with God. Africans

⁵⁵ Interview with FR. MICHAEL KAMAU, 33 years, Contemplative Evangelizer, Nairobi Kenya, 20th February 20004.

⁵⁶ Interview with DEACON PETER MUGAMBI, 31 years, Contemplative Evangelizer, Nairobi Kenya, 22nd February 2004.

themselves in the spirit of both contemplation and evangelization translate this communion into action.

Fr. Fredrick Omollo (contemplative evangelizer, 35 Years)

The contemplative evangelizers remind the African Church that the word has to be installed before it is brought to the reality of their world. E.g. our Blessed Mother Mary conceived the word (Jesus) and then she brought him to the world. Hence in contemplation Jesus has to be conceived in the hearts of people before giving it out. This giving out is what we call evangelization, which means sharing the fruits of our contemplation to as many people as possible.

Fr. James Muiruri (contemplative evangelizer, 39 Years)

By the virtue of being Christians we are all called to be contemplatives. Then institute being established in Africa is already a sign that contemplative spirit and contemplative life is necessary. He continued saying that the world is dynamic and so the Church in Africa has to move with these dynamisms. The institute of the contemplative evangelizers reminds the Church in Africa not to be too secular but also to realize the importance of contemplation in the peoples' prayer life.

Deacon David Ouma (contemplative evangelizer, 30 years)

The contemplative evangelizers have contributed much to the Church in Africa in spiritual matters. They engage themselves in preaching popular/parish missions in parishes, preaching retreats to religious and other lay people, blessing houses. They offer sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. Through their example of prayer, they teach people to pray by promoting contemplative prayer in them and in other

people. They also cultivate devotions to the pierced and glorious Heart of Christ and the immaculate heart of Mary.

4.7 General Conclusion

We have successfully developed our topic “The search for a way to imitate Christ: An answer to religious contemplative missionary life in Africa” with four themes: first we began with a clarification of the term holiness and imitation of Christ, then we tackled the community of Jesus and His apostles as the model to imitate Christ in religious communities martyrdom being the highest practice of Christian perfection. Secondly we saw how the people in the Patristic Age imitated Christ through monastic life. Some people withdraw to the desert running away from the world as substitute for martyrdom. Thirdly, we came on the Church’s teaching on the imitation of Christ and its reformation during the Middle Ages. Lastly we have seen how the contemplative evangelizers try to imitate Christ through their life of contemplation and evangelization and their contribution to the Church in Africa as such. To conclude, the contemplative evangelizers of the Heart of Christ (C.H.C.C) try to imitate Christ in His interior attitude trying to balance both contemplation and evangelization. That is prayer and activity. Hence our motto is the one of St. Benedict: *Ora et labora* (prayer and work). Consequently, searching for a way to imitate Christ for religious and contemplatives is to respond to the divine call, not merely being dead to sin, but renouncing the world also, responding to the cry of the poor and listening to the signs of times hence returning to the charism of the founders.

ABBREVIATIONS

Biblical abbreviations

Old Testament

Gen _____ Genesis

Job _____ Job

New Testament

Acts _____ Acts of the Apostles

1Cor _____ 1Corinthians

2Cor _____ 2Corinthians

Eph _____ Ephesians

Jn _____ John

Mat _____ Mathew

Mk _____ Mark

Phil _____ Philippians

1Pt _____ 1Peter

Rev _____ Revelations

Rom _____ Romans

1Tm _____ 1Timothy

Miscellaneous Abbreviations

AD _____ Anno Domini

C.E.C.C. _____ Contemplativi Evangelizatore Cordis Christi
(Contemplative Evangelizers of the Heart of Christ)

Ed _____ Editor

Eds _____ Editors

Fr. _____ Father

Ibid _____ Ibidem

L.G. _____ Lumen Gentium

MCCJ _____ Missionari Combonian Cordis Jesu (Missionary
Comboni of the Heart of Jesus)

St. _____ Saint

U.S.A _____ United States of America

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration..... I
Dedication..... II
Acknowledgement.....III

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

0.1 Purpose of the Thesis..... V
0.2 Rationale of the Thesis..... V
0.3 Central Question..... V
0.4 Working Hypothesis..... V
0.5 Methodological Consideration..... VI
 a). Foundational..... VI
 b). Dialogical..... VI
0.6 Structure of the Thesis..... VI
Books and Journals of Reference.....VIII

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction..... I
1.1 The Community of Jesus and His Apostles as the Model for Imitation of Christ
in Religious Communities.....2
1.2 The Beatitudes.....4
 1.2.1 Poverty..... 4
 1.2.2 Meekness.....5
 1.2.3 Sorrow.....6
 1.2.4 Ardent Desire for Justice..... 6

1.2.5	Mercy Towards our Neighbor.....	7
1.2.6	Purity of Heart.....	7
1.2.7	The Spirit of Peace.....	8
1.2.8	Persecution for Justice Sake.....	9
1.3	Martyrdom and the Imitation of Christ as a way to Christian Perfection.....	9
1.3.1	Ecclesial Value of Martyrdom.....	10
1.3.2	Virginity as a Martyrdom.....	11
1.3.3	Martyrdom as the Highest proof of Love.....	12
1.4	Conclusion.....	13

CHAPTER TWO

PATRISTIC AGE

2.0	Introduction.....	14
2.1	Spirituality of the Early Church.....	15
2.1.1	Christological Aspect.....	15
2.1.2	Liturgical Aspect.....	16
2.1.3	Communal or Social Aspect.....	16
2.1.4	Eschatological Aspect.....	17
2.1.5	Ascetical Aspect.....	18
2.1.6	Relationship Between Ascetical and Eschatological.....	19
2.2	Monasticism.....	19
2.3	Foundation of Monasticism.....	20
2.4	The Pioneers of Christian Monasticism.....	21
2.4.1	St. Anthony of Egypt (251-356).....	21

2.4.2	Pachomius (292-346), Pioneer of Cenobitic Life.....	22
2.4.3	St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430).....	23
2.4.4	St Basil the Great (330-379).....	25
2.4.5	St. Benedict (480-549).....	26
2.5	Conclusion.....	27

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHURCH TEACHING ON THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

3.0	Introduction.....	28
3.1	What is the Church?.....	28
3.2	Medieval Spirituality.....	29
	3.2.1 Benedictine Spirituality.....	30
	3.2.2 The Spirituality of the Canons Regular.....	31
	3.2.3 Franciscan Spirituality.....	31
	3.2.4 Dominican Spirituality.....	32
	3.2.5 The Church teaching on the Imitation of Christ.....	32
3.3	The Renewal of Religious Life.....	33
	3.3.1 The Evolution of the Franciscan Order-The Capuchins.....	35
	3.3.2 The Carmelite Reformation.....	35
	3.3.3 The Oratory.....	36
3.4	Conclusion.....	37

CHAPTER FOUR

A TENTATIVE ANSWER TO MATTERS AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO RELIGIOUS CONTEMPLATIVE EVANGELIZING MISSIONARY LIFE IN THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

4.0	Introduction.....	38
4.1	Summary of the Main Findings.....	38
4.2	Contemplative Evangelizing Missionaries in Africa.....	41
4.3	Charism – Spirit.....	43
4.4	Their Mission in the Church.....	43
4.5	Challenges Related to Contemplative Missionary Life in Africa Today.....	45
4.6	Role of the Contemplative Evangelizers in Africa Today.....	45
4.7	General Conclusion.....	47
	Abbreviations.....	48
	Bibliography.....	50
	Table of Contents.....	52