

## Learning to “Flee from... Bishops”: Formation for the Charism of Priesthood within Religious Life

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**Abstract:** *In our Catholic tradition, religious life and priesthood are both central expressions of Christian life and ministry. This article focuses on questions of identity and formation when these two offices or charisms are combined in the one ministerial vocation. Various models of priesthood are discussed. However, the emphasis is on understandings of priesthood within the religious life context according to commitment to community, call to prophetic witness and the distinctive charism of each particular religious congregation. Suggestions are made with a view to developing formation programs which reflect these priorities in practical ways for the service of the church and the Reign of God.*

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**Key Words:** priesthood; religious life; formation; charisms; religious community; prophetic office

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Anyone familiar with the literature around priesthood within religious life will immediately recognize the source of the title of this presentation. It comes from John Cassian’s fifth century work *On the Institutions of the Common Life*, and reads in full that “a monk ought by all means to flee from women and bishops.”<sup>1</sup> As Brian E. Daley reflects on the passage, Cassian all but equates the lust of the flesh with the lust for power, and his dictum – already, he says, an “old maxim of the Fathers,”<sup>2</sup> – reflects the patristic tradition in East and West of “the reluctance of holy men to be ordained.”<sup>3</sup> They are sometimes forced into ordination, sometimes tricked into it; often they have had to hide in fields or flee to the hills in order to escape it. Daley recounts the story of one early monk, Ammonius the Tall, who after being kidnapped by villagers who wanted him to be ordained, cut off his ear so as to be canonically ineligible for ordination.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the antipathy went both ways as well. Canon 16 of the First Lateran Council in 1123 forbade monks to “celebrate masses in public anywhere,” and forbade

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<sup>1</sup> John Cassian, *De Institutis Coenobiorum et de Octo Pincipalium Vitorum Remediis*, XI, 18 (in J.-C. Guy, ed., SC 108.444). The original text reads “. . . omnimodis monachum fugere debere mulieres et episcopos.” I have translated “fugere” as “flee” instead of “fly.” The latter is the translation used by Brian E. Daley in his article “The Ministry of Disciples: Historical Reflections on the Role of Religious Priests,” *Theological Studies* 48 (1987): 605. The text is quoted by John W. O’Malley in “One Priesthood: Two Traditions,” in Paul K. Hennessy (ed.), *A Concert of Charisms: Ordained Ministry in Religious Life* (New York/ Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997). O’Malley’s quotation is in turn quoted by Paul Philibert in “Religious Priesthood: Issues and Concerns for Renewal,” in *The Charism of Priesthood: Diocesan and Religious Priests Together in Ministry* (Chicago: National Federation of Priests’ Councils, 1996), 10. Philibert is referring to the manuscript of the article which had not yet been published.

<sup>2</sup> Cassian, *De Institutis*, XI, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Daley, “The Ministry of Disciples,” 605.

<sup>4</sup> Daley, “The Ministry of Disciples,” 606.

them also to visit the sick, offer anointings and to administer penances, since "these things in no way pertain to their calling." And Charles Borromeo and his successor Federico Borromeo tried – unsuccessfully – to have all preaching in their archdiocese performed by their own Milanese diocesan clergy.<sup>5</sup>

Despite such mutual antipathy, however, monks, mendicants, religious, and members of societies of apostolic life have, through the centuries, exerted a profound influence on the identity of the presbyterate. This is evidenced, on the one hand, in legislation concerning celibacy and the recitation of the Divine Office for all clergy, and exhortations to a life of holiness, poverty, and a radical imitation of Christ. In turn, the presbyteral state has transformed monastic, mendicant and apostolic religious life by making ordination the normal way many religious live out their religious life, and – especially lately – by making parish community leadership more and more common as a religious community's principal apostolate. Indeed, as John O'Malley and others have consistently pointed out over the last several years, Vatican II's image of the presbyter takes as its norm the diocesan priest, working in a parish among already-believing Catholics in union with the local bishop.<sup>6</sup>

It is this subtle subsuming of priesthood into the one form of parish pastoral ministry that has sparked a number of reflections over the last several years on the specific identity of priests who are members of religious communities.<sup>7</sup> All of these reflections are convinced that, in the context most of contemporary understandings of the priesthood, we have not sufficiently recognized that our understanding, practice and formation for priesthood as religious is distinctively different from that of the diocesan clergy. The result, then, is that in our understanding, practice and formation for priesthood, we must learn to "flee . . . from bishops" – not in the sense that Cassian meant in the fifth century, eschewing ordination altogether, but in a truly analogous sense that we religious need to understand, practice and form candidates for a priesthood that is neither parallel to nor eclipses our religious life, but rather draws and builds upon its strengths and resources. Priesthood in the context of the religious life is certainly not lived apart from real communion with the local bishop, but it has its own integrity as lived out within the wide variety of charisms and forms of religious life. "All priests," wrote John Paul II in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, "share in the one priesthood of Christ . . ."<sup>8</sup> But, as Paul Philibert has argued, while for diocesan clergy priesthood is "an office that gives an identity," for religious "it is an office in the service of their religious identity which provides a charism as a warrant for ministry."<sup>9</sup>

The reflection that follows is in two parts: Part One will reflect on the identity of the religious priest; Part Two will reflection on how one might be formed to appropriate that identity.

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<sup>5</sup> See O'Malley, "One Priesthood," 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> O'Malley, "One Priesthood," 11-14.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the sources quoted in note 1 above, see also the sources quoted throughout this article.

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 17.

<sup>9</sup> Philibert, 11. For his full argument, see Paul Philibert, "Priesthood within the Context of Religious Life," in Donald Goergen (ed.), *Being a Priest Today* (Collegeville, MN: Glazier / Liturgical Press, 1992), 73-96.

## THE CHARISM OF PRIESTHOOD WITHIN RELIGIOUS LIFE

### *Priesthood and Religious Life*

As we begin this reflection on the nature of priesthood within religious life, we need to be reminded from the outset that both terms under consideration here – “religious life” and “priesthood” – are terms that have been and are still currently under vigorous and often emotional debate. Paul Philibert points out the fact that the term “religious life” is one that is “dangerously abstract.” He insists that “there is no genus for religious life of which all the various institutes in the Roman Catholic Church are species. There is rather a vast spectrum of charisms that have been called forth by the Holy Spirit at different moments and in different circumstances for the sanctification of their members and the benefit of the church’s believers.”<sup>10</sup> For some, the key to religious life lies in the idea of consecration of life; for others, the key is radical Christian discipleship for the sake of the Reign of God.<sup>11</sup> Because of this there is probably no agreed-upon definition of religious life, but there are certainly a number of common elements that distinguish it as a particular state of life in the church: a corporate identity based on an original inspiration of a founder or founders, a commitment to a life in community, a prophetic stance in respect to the world and, often, to the institutional church, a life lived in public profession of promises or vows such as chastity, simplicity of life, obedience, stability, or conversion of morals.

My own understanding of religious life would see it much more along the lines of a radical discipleship lived and not a life lived for the sake of the religious him/ or herself—for a person’s sanctification or salvation (our old SVD Constitutions used to say that the purpose of the Society was the salvation of the members!). Religious life, to my mind, is a calling to some within the church to be signs of what the church is in its deepest reality—wholly dedicated to preaching, serving, witnessing to and celebrating the Reign of God. In other words, religious life is radical attention to and participation in God’s mission in the world, proclaiming with one’s life the fact that Holy Mystery is present in the world by the power of the Spirit and concretized in the life-giving ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Each religious community concretizes that life around a particular lifestyle or charism, and lives out that charism through commitment to forming community, making some kind of profession, and taking a prophetic stance in the world and the church. David Power suggests that the key to a renewed understanding of religious life today is to focus on mission, and then to see how it shapes the concrete life of the community.<sup>12</sup>

Even more debated, of course, is a definition of priesthood. Some fifteen years ago, Avery Dulles published a helpful article entitled “Models for Ministerial Priesthood”<sup>13</sup> in which he presented four models of priesthood current in the church today. A first model, favored, he said, by Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, is that of priest as minister of the Word. This model is based on *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 4, which states that “priests . . . have as their primary duty the proclamation of the Gospel to all.” Presbyteral liturgical and community leadership would flow from this ministry of the Word, since sacraments are, in Augustine’s phrase, “visible words,” and the community is to be organized and governed under the guidance of the Word. A second model, favored by the theologian Otto

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<sup>10</sup> Philibert, “Religious Priesthood,” 15.

<sup>11</sup> See David Power, “Theologies of Religious Life and Priesthood,” in Paul K. Hennessy (ed.), *A Concert of Charisms: Ordained Ministry in Religious Life* (New York / Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 85-88.

<sup>12</sup> Power, “Theologies of Religious Life and Priesthood,” 88.

<sup>13</sup> Avery Dulles, “Models for Ministerial Priesthood,” *Origins* 20 (1990): 284-289.

Semmelroth and by Pope John Paul II, understands priesthood in a more cultic or sacramental perspective. Such a theology of priesthood, of course, was also favored by the Council of Trent and is expressed at Vatican II in *Ad Gentes* 39, which states that priestly ministry "consists mainly in the eucharist, which gives the church its perfection." A third model is proposed, says Dulles, by Walter Kasper and Thomas O'Meara, and speaks of pastoral leadership as the key to priestly identity. In their interpretation, Vatican II explains priesthood as a particular participation in the threefold office of Christ, and consists in leading the community in terms of its ministries, worship and faith expression (see *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 1, 4-6). A fourth model is Dulles's preferred one: the priest as a representation of Christ. Dulles bases this model on the fundamental sacramentality of the church, as the representative of Christ in the world. While Christ is present in a manifold way in the church, Dulles argues that "for the church to be a social and public reality in the world it is also necessary for Christ to be represented by the official actions of the church as such. This he does by making certain individuals responsible for the church's self-manifestation as the body of Christ . . ." <sup>14</sup> For Dulles, then, what a priest is is much more important than what he does, and his ministry of word, sacrament and leadership is rooted in his conformity to Christ.

Although, as I say, Dulles prefers the fourth, "representational" model, he acknowledges that all four models are valid. In fact, of course, these are not exclusive models, since all involve a ministry of preaching, presiding, coordinating and leading, and present the priest as an icon of Christ to the community which is itself an icon of Christ in the world. Every priest will "lead" with the model that fits his personality, his theological perspective and talents. The only wrong model would be one that excludes one or more of the others.

While I confess that I personally find the third model of pastoral leadership the most adequate of Dulles's four, it has struck me that the plurality of models might indeed be a key to understanding how priesthood could be lived out in very distinct ways in communities of religious. Our next section will explore how these distinct ways might be discerned in various communities of monastic, contemplative, mendicant or apostolic life.

### *Priesthood within Religious Life*

How might we conceive, then, of the service of pastoral leadership being lived out in a distinct way by men in religious communities today? There are, I believe, three dimensions specific to religious life that point to a number of distinct ways in which religious who are priests engage in presbyteral ministry. Religious life, first of all, is rooted in commitment to community, to the search for true communion in life with their brothers rather than the mere being or doing things together. This deep commitment has the potential of resulting in a presbyteral ministry that emerges from community and is geared in a particular way toward the formation of community among the people among whom it is exercised. Secondly, religious life always has been conceived as a kind of countercultural, prophetic witness both in the world and—particularly relevant here—in the church. This dimension of religious life has the potential for a priesthood that "speaks truth to power" and expands the church's ministries into new areas and dimensions. Third, religious life is always developed around a particular charism—something that has been the subject of renewal since Vatican II. This dimension has the potential of pointing to very particular ways of doing presbyteral ministry in the church and in the world. Let's

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<sup>14</sup> Dulles, "Models for Ministerial Priesthood," 288.

look at each of these dimensions in a bit more detail. Then it will be clear, I believe, how we need to think about formation for this distinctive kind of priesthood in the context of our particular religious communities.

### *Priesthood and Religious Community*

While there has always been and remains today a strain of religious life that cultivates the solitary, eremetical life, the overwhelming number of religious congregations have a life lived in community at their heart. Often in the past, unfortunately, community was understood in an almost mechanical way: what was important was that we did things together, that we all were present at morning prayer, Mass, meals and times of recreation, that we all lived together under the same roof. Today, however, many religious—and myself very much included here—see community in much more relational terms as a commitment to genuine communion with the men with whom they live. Our SVD Constitutions most likely echo the constitutions of many religious congregations when they insist that “sincere brotherly love, not merely living and working together”<sup>15</sup> is what community life is all about. Our SVD constitutions go on to exhort us to show interest in the life and work of each confrere, to offer encouragement to one another, and to bear with one another’s weaknesses. I have lived in communities where regular faith sharing, Bible sharing and just life sharing is a regular part of our life together; in the very small face-to-face community in which I now live it is imperative that we make efforts to share one another’s lives, friends, and struggles.

I am also a strong believer in the idea that our vows really only make sense within the context of a rich and vibrant community life. Although one can and should have intimate friends beyond community, I am convinced that celibacy can only be lived well if a religious has developed an intimacy within community as well. The vow of poverty only makes sense in the context of understanding it as a commitment to sharing one’s time, talent and material resources with the community, and a commitment to depend on the community for one’s own livelihood. The vow of obedience can be summed up, I believe, in fidelity or loyalty to community—situating one’s own ministry at the service of the community and its ministry, a thorough listening (*ob-audire*) by members and leaders alike to discern God’s will in the Spirit’s movement in the wisdom the community. Stability is clearly a vow of commitment to a particular group of men for the rest of one’s life.

Although it has always been the mark of some religious communities—e.g. my own congregation of Divine Word Missionaries—to live in multi-national and multicultural communities, such communities are becoming more and more common in many places around the world as demographics have changed and more and more societies are becoming less and less monocultural. This is particularly true in Europe, North America and Australia/New Zealand, where the numbers of Africans, Asians and Latin Americans in religious communities are growing and the numbers of Euro-Americans have dwindled drastically. When I look at the makeup of the communities whose seminarians attend Catholic Theological Union, for example, I see communities that are thoroughly international and multicultural. The great challenge of today and of the future will be for members of religious communities to develop a real sense of communion by learning to respect one another’s cultural worlds, learning how to profit from intercultural communication and dialogue, learning how to confront one another honestly, and struggling to learn one another’s languages. Those members from dominant cultures need

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<sup>15</sup> SVD Constitutions, §303.

to practice a spirituality of "letting go," while members of minority cultures within the community need to practice an equally demanding spirituality of "speaking out."<sup>16</sup> If such communion can be accomplished, there will be no doubt that our religious communities will be recognized as authentic signs of hope in a world where the plurality of cultures and all the tensions that go with it become more and more the norm.

Religious who are priests, I believe, can exercise their presbyteral ministry in a truly distinct way as they recognize both their commitment to community and the way that their community life has shaped and formed them as Christians. Wherever they minister, priests who are religious can bring their experience of community to bear on their own presbyteral task of forming the people among whom they minister into a community where the Reign of God can be experienced. They can employ their own skill of living and working with their brother religious to collaborate perhaps more easily than their diocesan counterparts with religious women, and with lay women and men. Those priests who are members of "mixed" communities of both priests and brothers might also tap into the rich experience of living with and collaborating in ministry with confreres who share on the one hand their identity as religious, and on the other hand share an identity with the lay women and men in the wider church community. The decisions religious priests make as leaders of Christian communities or teams of ministers can be done much more in a collaborative, discerning way, since this is the way that decisions are made in their own communities. They can work as teams of priests in ways that model presbyteral collaboration. In this day and age of international and multicultural communities of religious, priests who are members of such communities might be able to put their own experience of multicultural community living to work in forming multicultural parish communities, multicultural communities of hospital workers where religious priests are chaplains, and multicultural communities of teachers and students in schools and universities where priests are involved in campus ministry.

Today, as we know, people are craving community. Priests who are religious can offer a particular and much-needed service out of their own experience and commitment to community living, with all its difficulties, with all its problems and tensions, but with all its beauty and personal rewards.

### *Priesthood and the Prophetic Dimension of Religious Life*

Religious life has always had a prophetic dimension. The first monks and nuns fled to the deserts and the mountains to protest a church that was forgetting its former marginal status and was becoming too comfortable as an institution of the Roman Empire. Religious vows have always been a countercultural statement, a prophetic stance over against what the prevailing culture considered normal for human living: one's own family, ownership of property, autonomy in decision making. As Pope John Paul's encyclical on religious life, *Vita Consecrata*, puts it, "there is a prophetic dimension which belongs to the consecrated life as such, resulting from the radical nature of the following of Christ and of the subsequent dedication to the mission characteristic of the consecrated life."<sup>17</sup> Throughout the history of the church, the encyclical goes on to say, religious women and men have

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<sup>16</sup> See Stephen Bevans, "Letting Go and Speaking Out: A Spirituality of Inculturation," in Stephen Bevans, Eleanor Doidge and Robert Schreiter (eds.), *The Healing Circle: Essays in Cross-Cultural Mission* (Chicago: CCGM, 1999), 133-146.

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, §84.

never ceased to speak a prophetic word in the name of God, "even to the Pastors of the Church."<sup>18</sup> As Kevin Seasolz expresses it:

The role of the prophet is to be countercultural in the sense that it emphasizes alternative values and ways of living, maintains a larger view of reality than the institution itself, and challenges those structures that repress or deny divine-human creativity. Institutional structures have a tendency to turn into idols; the prophet's role is to denounce all false idols while pointing continuously to God, who can never be confined, formalized, or limited to any set of institutions.<sup>19</sup>

Prophets, however, not only offer a countercultural witness, whether to the world or to the institutional church. They also dream new dreams, offer the church new possibilities, push the church over set boundaries into new territories of ministry and thought. "Prophets remain free enough to imagine different ways of being church and of proclaiming the gospel of Christ."<sup>20</sup> The church needs the vision of a Benedict of Nursia, a Francis of Assisi, a Dominic of Callaruega, an Ignatius Loyola, a Mary Ward, a Charles de Foucauld, a Mother Teresa, a Daniel Berrigan, a Michael Crosby, a Joan Chittister, a Gerry Arbuckle. This is why religious need to protect their autonomy and insist on their privileges of exemption.

Another way, therefore, of thinking about the distinctiveness of priesthood in religious life is to conceive it in terms of a "prophetic priesthood."<sup>21</sup> John Paul II calls all priests, it is true, to observe the evangelical counsels in some way; nevertheless priests who are religious might even more intentionally live a life that is a witness to justice, identification with the poor, identification with the ministry of their community. Religious communities are known for taking on parishes that are poor, or in some ways marginal to diocesan pastoral plans. Where religious communities serve in parishes or retreat houses or centers of social justice, there should be no question that the women and men who work as lay ministers or in other capacities receive a just wage and fair benefits.

Priests in religious communities might be the ones in a local church that take prophetic stances in regard issues that the institution opposes, like continuing to hold liturgies with inclusive language, perhaps to invite lay persons regularly to preach, or open their churches or houses to groups like Call to Action or chapters of Dignity. Communities led by priests who are religious might be active in organizations like Voice of the Faithful, or issue statements that might critique stances of the hierarchy toward politicians, or statements that might support Vatican statements against war in response to hierarchical support for a government's wrongful military action. Gatherings such as ours this week, which is trying to forge more clearly our identity as religious and priests

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<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, §84.

<sup>19</sup> Kevin Seasolz, "A Western Monastic Perspective on Ordained Ministry," in Paul K. Hennessy (ed.), *A Concert of Charisms: Ordained Ministry in Religious Life* (New York/ Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 27.

<sup>20</sup> Power, "Theologies of Religious Life and Priesthood," 91.

<sup>21</sup> I am taking a different approach here than Michael J. Buckley and Thomas P. Rausch, who speak of a distinction between "cultic priesthood" (priests devoted to celebrating the sacraments and performing the office in choir) and "prophetic priesthood" (priests such as Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits whose ministry is focused on the word and characterized by mobility, commitment to evangelization and the intellectual life). While the distinction refers somewhat to diocesan priests whose function is primarily cultic and apostolic religious whose function is primarily kerygmatic, Buckley and Rausch see this distinction as valid within religious life itself. My own sense is that monastic, mendicant and apostolic religious communities can all participate in a "prophetic" priesthood. See Michael J. Buckley, "Jesuit Priesthood: Its Meaning and Commitments," *Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits* 8 (1976) and Thomas P. Rausch, *Priesthood Today: An Appraisal* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 82-104.

who are engaged in a formation for priesthood distinct from diocesan clergy, is also a prophetic act.

Religious who are priests might, finally, lead the way in new ministries in the church. Historically, this is what Francis, Ignatius Loyola, Vincent de Paul Francis Liebermann and John Baptist Scalabrini did. Today religious priests might assist in pastoring small, lay-run ecclesial communities; they might engage in the pastoral leadership of communities made up of victims of AIDS; they might envision new approaches to youth ministry and campus ministry; they might preside at eucharists with ecojustice activists; they might work as teams to serve a number of scattered immigrant communities over a larger area; they might engage in evangelization and ministry training on the Internet.

Priests who are religious will be priests who are "on the edge." They are called to the prophetic task of "forth telling," both in the sense of their radical personal witness to the demands of the gospel and to a fearless telling of the truth to those in whose ministry of governance they participate as presbyters. And, as prophets, they are called to "fore tell" in the sense of being the dreamers, the visionaries of the new to which the Spirit calls the church.

### *Priesthood and Community Charism*

One of the most, if not the most important directive of Vatican II in its document on religious life was its call to engage in "two simultaneous processes:

- (1) a continuous return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration behind a given community; and
- (2) an adjustment of the community to the changed conditions of the times."<sup>22</sup>

While keeping faithful to the traditional sources of spirituality and ministry, in other words, religious were encouraged to work for fresh interpretations of the purpose for which their various communities were founded. In the years immediately following the Council, every religious congregation held a major general chapter focused on renewal, and this opened up wonderful avenues for religious communities to rediscover their identities as Benedictines, Norbertines, Franciscans, Scalabrinians, Ursulines, Sisters of Mercy, Jesuits, Divine Word Missionaries. This search for an updated understanding of the original "charism," as it came to be called, yielded some amazing results. Franciscans, for example, rediscovered their identity as a fundamentally lay community, in which some of the brothers were ordained to the presbyterate. Jesuits reinterpreted their own founding charism in terms of a radical commitment to the ministry of justice. Scalabrinians reinterpreted their original purpose of ministry with Italian immigrants in the direction of a ministry among the world's migrants and refugees. We Divine Word Missionaries have articulated our missionary charism in terms of a rich process of "passing over"—understanding our missionary identity as leaving our national and cultural identities behind as we strive to bond with a local language, people and culture. Such a focus on recovering and living out our charisms has indeed been a cornerstone of the renewal of religious life in our time. *Vita Consecrata* places special emphasis on the uniqueness of religious congregations because of their charism in a very clear and strong passage:

The identity of each Institute is bound up with a particular spirituality and apostolate, which takes shape in a specific tradition marked by objective elements. For

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<sup>22</sup> Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, §2.

this reason the Church is concerned that Institutes should grow and develop in accordance with the spirit of their founders and foundresses, and their own sound traditions. Consequently, each Institute is recognized as having a rightful autonomy, enabling it to follow its own discipline and to keep intact its spiritual and apostolic patrimony. It is the responsibility of local Ordinaries to preserve and safeguard that autonomy.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the new life that this renewed dedication to religious congregations' founding inspiration has given religious life, perhaps no dimension of religious life today has contributed as much to a renewed understanding of the exercise of priesthood within religious congregations. As Paul Philibert writes, referring to the work of John O'Malley, "the call to ministry for religious flows from the charism of the institute, not only from ordination."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in many ways it is precisely the charism of the congregation that shapes the particular way that priesthood in a particular congregation is exercised. And so, for religious, "priesthood . . . springs from the heart of an institute and is a further expression of its charism . . . . . priesthood is enriched by being refracted through the prism of the Jesuit, Franciscan or Passionist tradition."<sup>25</sup>

What I would suggest is that here is where the various models of priesthood offered by Avery Dulles and referred to earlier might come together with the various charisms of religious communities or societies of apostolic life. A Benedictine priesthood, for example, might be one rooted in study and prayer and exercised in a deep appreciation for liturgy. Lived out more along the lines of the model of priest as sacramental minister, the Benedictine will be an expert at preparing and presiding at liturgies. A Benedictine community will be where women and men can go to be inspired and renewed by the beauty of the Liturgy and the rhythm of the liturgical seasons. Dominican priests, in contrast, will shape their exercise of priesthood out of the model that images the priest as bearer of the word. Also known for learning in their venerable tradition, they will be experts in preaching, perhaps write books and edit journals on preaching, and be sought after for retreats and missions. But their expertise as priests will be the homily at Mass. We SVDs have begun to reflect on the fact that, when we take on the leadership of a parish community, that parish should eventually take on a missionary character, reflective of our own missionary charism. This would certainly bring to the for an exercise of priesthood as pastoral leadership, as we SVDs "equip the saints" (Eph. 4:12) for missionary outreach, preside at liturgies that provide a truly catholic vision of the church and nourish women, men and children for the ministry of justice and witness, and preach in ways that call people to a worldwide concern and sensitivity, while recognizing that the global is also present in the local.

It seems to me that many other apostolic religious communities might also share this particular model of priesthood, while tailoring it to their own particular charism: e.g. Scalabrinians with migrant ministry, Josephites with African American ministry, Columbans and Maryknollers with a ministry focused particularly on planting and nurturing churches in overseas missionary situations. Avery Dulles offers his "representational model" as one that gives priests who are involved in ministries such as education or scientific research a sense of identity, and so this might be a way of combining the priestly identity of priests who teach high school or college, or who are involved in other more "secular" pursuits like poverty law, social work or astronomical research with the charisms of their congregations—for example, Viatorians and Marists. To

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<sup>23</sup> John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, §48.

<sup>24</sup> Philibert, "Conclusion: Road Signs at a Crossroads," 188.

<sup>25</sup> Roland J. Faley, "An American Experience of Priesthood in Religious Life," in Hennessy, ed., 123.

this however I must add, to be honest, that I'm not sure what is particularly priestly about, for example, teaching. This is certainly my main vocation, something that really defines my life in so many ways, but I'm not sure how my teaching differs from that of, say, my colleagues Barbara Reid, a Dominican, or Edmund Chia and Michel Andraos, lay persons. But what it might mean to be an educator or scientist and a priest in the context of a religious congregation could indeed be the topic of an important ongoing discussion in communities who see these ministries as their primary identity. On the other hand, not everything a religious priest is or does has to be specifically priestly. My colleague Ed Foley has written quite interestingly about the possibility of a kind of "double belonging" in communities like his own Capuchin one.<sup>26</sup>

I think Paul Philibert's cautionary remarks, echoing *Vita Consecrata*, are also very apropos here. When religious priests tend to "blend in" with the diocesan clergy, and have nothing about them that is particularly unique as Croziers, Spiritans, SCJs, Combonis or Norbertines, not only are their respective communities "deprived of spirit," but so is the local church.<sup>27</sup> Certainly, as David Nygren and Miriam Ukeritis insist, if a community fails to develop a clear corporate identity, there would be "little to attract the commitment or capture the passion of potential new members."<sup>28</sup> Living out of one's founding charism is pivotal for religious life today, and it is also pivotal for the identity of those who serve within it as priests.

#### FORMATION FOR THE CHARISM OF PRIESTHOOD WITHIN RELIGIOUS LIFE

We come now to the heart of this presentation, focusing on the actual topic to which I have been assigned: how do our communities' candidates for priesthood learn to "flee . . . from bishops"? How do we form them for a presbyteral ministry that does not compromise their primary identity as vowed religious? While this second part of my presentation is indeed the point of the presentation, I do not think it needs to be overly long. I think the most important issue in regard to formation has been treated already in our first part, for if we do not know, as the scholastics would say, the final cause of our formation – what our formation is aiming at – we will never be able to employ the efficient and instrumental causes – our formation programs and concrete practices. So let me reflect briefly on what I see some of the formation goals and practices might be so that the charism of priesthood within our communities might be stirred into flame among our brothers in formation.

#### *Formation and Community*

The first aspect, I suggested, that contributes to a distinctive exercise of the charism of priesthood within religious life is its practice of and commitment to community – not just in the sense of "merely living and working together," as our SVD Constitutions put it, but in

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<sup>26</sup> Edward Foley, "A Capuchin Contribution to the Church's Understanding of Priesthood: An Analogical Consideration of Biculturalism and Double Religious Belonging," *Analecta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum* 120 (2004): 558-572. A shorter version of this article appears as "Mixed Communities' Gift to the Church: Analogical Considerations," *Review for Religious* 64.1 (2005): 22-36.

<sup>27</sup> Philibert, "Conclusion," 190. See *Vita Consecrata*, §48.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Doris Gottemoeller, "The Priesthood: Implications in Consecrated Life for Women," in Paul K. Hennessy (ed.), *A Concert of Charisms: Ordained Ministry in Religious Life* (New York/ Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 133. See David Nygren and Miriam Ukeritis, *Religious Life Futures Project: Executive Summary* (Chicago: De Paul University Center for Applied Social Research, 1992), 35.

the sense of working for real communion among the members, and working for real collaboration in ministry and decision making. It follows, then, in the first place, that formation for priesthood candidates in a religious community should be one that helps them develop an authentic sense of community. Care should be taken that seminarians do not develop a false, "therapeutic" sense of community, by which the community primarily serves their individual needs. Rather, the men preparing for religious profession and ordination should be formed to participate in a community that both shapes their identity and at the same time gives them the gift of individuality.<sup>29</sup>

As foundational to this sense of community, there needs to be a strong conviction on the part of the formation team of the fundamental equality of all Christians through baptism,<sup>30</sup> and this needs constantly to be communicated and demonstrated to those in formation. This fundamental equality is in turn the basis for a sense of equality between the clerical and lay members of the congregation, and should be demonstrated particularly by the way professions are celebrated, particularly celebrations of perpetual vows. Another way this can be demonstrated is by making sure that every member of the congregation has the same basic theological education. I have advocated for years that both our SVD clerical members and brothers should have the basic M.Div. in theology, since, no matter what our brothers do, they will do it out of a sense of ministry and need the theological and pastoral training that the M.Div. provides. Ordinations, while certainly not downplayed, should also not be overdone—especially ordination to the diaconate. It seems to me that a seminarian preparing for ordination within a religious community, seeing the importance of the ceremony of religious profession and the more auxiliary nature of ordination would begin to understand that their first and most important identity is that of a religious. This would lead to real collaboration between brothers and priests in the community.

It would also lead to a sense of collaboration and decision making by discernment. Formation programs for ordination candidates in religious communities should ensure that students are exposed to good examples of pastors who collaborate well with laity in parishes, chaplaincies, youth ministry, social justice ministry and the like. Special training in collaboration skills would also be essential, as would training in decision making that takes into account the wisdom of the entire community that one serves as a pastor.<sup>31</sup> Along this line, regular theological reflection, faith sharing and Bible sharing would also be an important skill to learn and a process to participate in. The point of all this is, given a particular commitment to equality of all Christians, and even a certain persistent lay character that religious life affords, the practice of pastoral ministry—in liturgy preparation, in homily preparation, in community leadership, in the person of the priest himself—should have a distinct communal and collaborative quality about it. And so our candidates should be formed accordingly.

The other aspect regarding community mentioned in the first part of this presentation is how the growing international and multicultural nature of religious communities—especially in the North American, European and Australian communities, but not confined to them—offers a kind of laboratory for the development of pastoral

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<sup>29</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the nature of community, see Frank G. Kirkpatrick, *Community: A Trinity of Models* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1986) and Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> See especially Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, §32.

<sup>31</sup> On discernment in decision making, a wonderful resource is Mary Benet McKinney, *Sharing Wisdom: A Process for Group Decision Making* (Allen, TX: Tabor Publishing, 1987).

agents in the growing international and multicultural nature of the church in general in those areas. What this means, therefore, is that formation programs need to concentrate particularly on developing in their candidates skills at intercultural communication and cross-cultural living. Students preparing themselves for priesthood in religious communities should be required to learn at least one other language than their own native language, and be required as well to do their ministry *practica* in situations which challenge their own comfortability and ethnocentrism. Courses in missiology and anthropology should be part and parcel of their theological training. Again, this is something that diocesan priests certainly have to deal with today, but it seems to me that given the community commitment of religious to developing real communion with one another, religious who are ordained might provide a particularly distinct gift in this regard.

These community attitudes and skills – a sense of baptismal equality, congregational identity, collaboration, willingness to hear all the community's voices, an ability to communicate and minister cross-culturally in a multicultural world – should be real criteria for promotion to vows and admittance to ordination.

### *Formation and Prophecy*

The second aspect of religious life that might contribute to the distinct identity of a religious who is ordained is that of the prophetic dimension of religious life – in terms of the radicality of lifestyle, a willingness to be "on the edge" of ecclesiastical acceptability, and a desire to cross boundaries into new ministries. These are all areas which need to be fostered during formation.

Once again, I think it is important for formators and formation programs to impress upon their ordination candidates their primary identity as religious, and their primary commitment to their vows. Since so often in the past—and in my experience something that still persists—the primary goal of a student is priesthood, the full nature of the vow of celibacy needs to be explained and explained often. Celibacy is not a sacrifice religious make in order to be ordained, but expresses in a particular dramatic way their commitment to the community and through the community to Christ and his ministry. The vow of poverty, too, cannot just be something that is practiced in the formation house, basically to be dispensed with after perpetual vows and ordination. Afterwards these may not be as austere, but students need to see that their perpetually or solemnly professed brothers are also living a life rooted in simplicity and accountability to the community. So often it is said that it is the religious who take the vow and the diocesan priests who keep it. What a shame if that is really the case; it certainly compromises the prophetic value of the vow. The vow of obedience as well needs to be rooted in community accountability and responsibility. Candidates need to be taught how true discernment in community is the essence of obedience, and that the community's need is the one that precedes any individual need or fulfillment. As discernment is continually practiced, this kind of attitude can be impressed on the students who seek ordination.

Students who seek ordination should also be exposed to the traditions of prophecy within their own religious congregations, and be led to reflect on how that prophetic edge – for the good of the church—needs to be maintained today. There are few congregations, to my knowledge, that have not had to challenge the institutional church in some way at their founding, or at some point in their history – just a mention of a Francis of Assisi, an Ignatius of Loyola, a Francis Liebermann or a Charles de Foucauld makes this clear. Learning to "flee . . . from bishops" might entail strong example on how to keep from being

overshadowed by clerical concerns, or by being enticed into simply maintaining the status quo in parishes. The seriousness, as well, with which the opinions and ideas of the students are taken by the formation director or staff, or the encouragement for students to speak out in critique of the formation program or established policies in the congregation, might all contribute to the formation of men who will exercise priesthood in dedication to the truth in the face of power and institutional bias.

Finally in this regard, members in formation should be exposed to some of the "cutting edge" ministries in the congregation. They should hear from some of the community's most creative thinkers, and be encouraged to be creative themselves. So often the dreams of our candidates revolve around the parish. Other areas of the community's ministry need to be explained to them, especially those ministries that seem to jibe more with the community's founding inspiration. But this reflection verges on the third and final set of reflections on the possibility for formation for candidates for ordination in our communities.

In any case, only those who show real promise of living such a prophetic lifestyle should be considered for perpetual or solemn profession and eventual ordination. Priests who are religious should be formed to love the institution in which they serve as public ministers and cooperators with bishops. But they should also be formed in their community's countercultural and less institutional tradition and practice.

### *Formation and Community Charism*

The third and perhaps most promising aspect of religious life for the development of a distinct identity of the religious priest comes from the recognition of priests in religious communities that "religious priesthood is an office placed at the service of their charism."<sup>32</sup> What this means for formation is that those preparing for priesthood within a particular community should be steeped in that community's charism, and receive the proper training to live that charism out in their presbyteral ministry. The Benedictine, Dominican and Jesuit traditions are well known for their rich theological traditions, and students need to be exposed to that. Further, the Benedictine needs to be formed deeply in prayer and liturgical presiding, the Dominican in the art of preaching, the Jesuit in social justice tradition and practices. I can see seminarians in my own congregation needing to be schooled in the best of missiology, of anthropology, and, as leaders of "missionary parishes," in presiding, preaching and skills of ministry training. The devotion to the Holy Spirit at the heart of the Spiritans' charism, and the prophetic potential of that, will need to be appropriated by candidates who want to serve as Spiritan priests. I could go on to give examples of many other communities, but I don't think it is necessary here. The point is only that each community needs to discover ways by which its charism can enrich and shape the priests who minister as its representatives.

Referring once more to Avery Dulles's four models of priesthood, each community needs to decide which model might be especially cultivated in its formation programs. To put this negatively for the sake of clarity, Dominicans will certainly not want to admit to ordination a person who has no passion or who is not skilled at preaching; nor would Spiritans want to admit someone who has no interest in being a dedicated pastoral leader; nor would the Norbertines or Benedictines be interested in ordaining a man who dislikes community prayer, or who cuts a poor figure as a presider at Liturgy. On the other hand, monastic orders will be much more attentive to developing theologies of priesthood that

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<sup>32</sup> Philibert, "Religious Priesthood," 15.

revolve around liturgy and communal prayer, mendicant orders will cultivate ways of forming their candidates into worthy and skillful bearers of the word, apostolic communities will promote the pastoral leadership or perhaps even the representational model for their ordination candidates.

In sum, an attention to what makes a religious congregation distinctive in the church should play a large part in the formation of priesthood candidates within them.

## CONCLUSION

"In the priest," declares *Vita Consecrata*, "the vocation to the priesthood and the vocation to the consecrated life converge in a profound and a dynamic unity."<sup>33</sup> This does not mean that priesthood finds its summit in the religious life, nor does it mean that a religious who does not discern within himself the charism of the presbyterate is any less a religious. What it does mean, however, is that there is, indeed, a distinctive identity for a religious who is a priest. It is a valid, grace-filled way of living out his basic identity as a religious and a Christian. I believe that the more we can make our candidates for ordination aware of this distinctiveness, and provide the practices for their appropriation of it in their ministry, we will be serving both our religious communities and the church at large in a very important way. Being formed for priesthood within a religious congregation is being formed to "flee . . . from bishops." But, ultimately, that "flight" is necessary only so that the entire church, led by bishops, can better be itself: the community-in-mission that preaches, serves, witness and celebrates the Reign of God.

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<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, §30.