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The Religious and His Place in the Church: Open to the Spirit

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THE RELIGIOUS AND HIS PLACE IN THE CHURCH

OPEN TO THE SPIRIT. Religious Life After Vatican II, by Ladislav M. Orsy, S.J. Washington: Corpus Books, 1968. 286 pp.

It is enough to read the Table of Contents to see the richness and importance of the subjects treated: Prophets of the New Covenant (Chapter I); God's Companionship: Virginity (II); Possession of the Kingdom: Poverty (III); Journey in Faith: Obedience (IV); God's Trusteeship: Government (V); Earthly Wisdom in the Kingdom: Government (VI); Filled with Grace and Power: Contemplation (VII); Love of the World: Apostolic Action (VIII).

The Author explains the *place* that the consecrated religious person has in the Church, presenting both the problem and the answer in clear words: "Can consecrated religious person claim that their way of life is of divine institution...? Consecrated religious life is the existential gift of God to His Church, a special fruit of the dynamic action of the Holy Spirit in the Church."

The pages on *virginity* are among the best inspired in the whole book. "Consecrated virgins, more than anyone else, declare the absolute value of God's friendship and . . . eternal life." Chastity "is the most personal expression of our dedication to God." "No person could desire virginity, unless he found another person who is more lovable than any man."

Poverty, Orsy remarks, does not have the same meaning in modern English that it has in ecclesiastical language. The heart of the matter in the question of poverty is not only to be able to receive, but (more important) to give. "The best we can give is ourselves...real poverty of heart lies in this: the soul of poverty lies in giving myself away... It is the distributing of myself and letting other people take me." It is obvious that this concept of poverty is not the commonly accepted one.

Obedience should not be conceived as the virtue of the individual persons. Above all it is the virtue of the whole community which as one body has to subject itself to God's will. The religious community should be defined by its common mission in the Church, "from which 'common life' will follow whenever it is good for the mission, and not follow when it impedes the purpose of the mission." Hence the function of authority is mainly concerned with the religious aim of the Institute, thus carrying out the mandate of the Church. When the vow of obedience is made, an exchange of promises implicitly takes place. "The religious institute and the superior appear as God's trustees, and they promise, without words (it would be good if they did so expressly), that they will take good material and spiritual care of the candidate." Later on the author emphasizes the need of making this covenant explicit between the community and the candidate.

The difference between the religious life and the diocesan priesthood lies in the type of incorporation of the person into the structure of the visible Church. "For a religious, it is through community; for a diocesan priest, it is through a person-to-person relationship with his bishop."

Among the more profound insights in this book are some of the suggestions made in connection with the way of helping the life of the community and promoting the right type of obedience. For the legislative power in a religious institute, the author is in favor of a composition of the chapter where there is a balance of quality and quantity. The suggestion that the general chapter be divided into two chambers—one composed of superiors and freely elected members on an authoritarian basis, and the other composed of specialists appointed partly by superiors, partly by election by their peers, is worth considering. The aim of the members of the chapter should not be so much to bind the religious as to free them for the inspirations of the Spirit and the needs of men.

Examining the qualities and activities of the superior, the author acknowledges the well-known fact that to govern any religious institute by the wisdom of only one person would result in great damage; on the other hand "to enlist the wisdom of members may require great skill, but it is indispensable for good government." Hence the suggestion for experimentation in using a combination of the two systems: "The whole community elects a group who will share the executive power of the superior, so that major issues would have to be decided by the majority in this elected group. The group may be called the *senate*."

On the question of the *judicial power*, Orsy suggests a board of arbitrators which could function on provincial, regional, or universal levels, depending on circumstances. All this is presented as a point of departure for further reflection and perhaps for eventual experimentation.

The last chapter deals extensively with the problem of *contemplation*, starting with the general statement based on Vatican II that "all religious are called to both contemplative and apostolic love; therefore there cannot be any distinction between the so-called contemplative and apostolic institutes. If such a distinction existed in the past, it should not continue." Regarding personal prayer, the question should not be whether or not one needs such prayer or profits from it, but whether or not God wants such personal communication. The author insists on the need of following the Council in the distinction between monastic, conventual, and a fully apostolic way of life, leaving aside the classical division of communities, of contemplative, active, or mixed life. Intimately connected with this distinction is the difference in the training, that should be required for a young religious who is to live in an enclosed community, and for someone who is to lead an apostolic life. This will demand a rethinking of the whole concept of training

and the remodeling of the external structures thereto. In any event "the way of life that an apostolic community must follow, can be decided as openness to the Spirit and openness to the world."

Father Orsy's book should be read by all who are in charge of the training of the young members of a religious community, and by all Superiors. Among the book's merits is the balance offered between personal freedom and structural organization, as well as various profound insights into the true meaning of obedience. The subtitle *Religious Life After Vatican II* applies rather to the second part of the book. But it can rightly be considered as a partial commentary on the document *Perfectae Caritatis*. In general it can be said that, in contrast (for instance) with the book by Cardinal Suenens on *The Nun in the World*, Father Orsy's book is more balanced and definitely deeper. It presents a far better balanced view of the whole problem of religious life, emphasizing explicitly the spiritual values which at times are simply presupposed, if not forgotten, by Cardinal Suenens.

A few things may help to improve the book. Even a modest bibliography would have been helpful. The Acknowledgements (p. 8) are not enough. The author's concept of poverty, notwithstanding its originality, is not the commonly accepted one, and is rather reaffirmed than proved. The biblical treatment of some of the topics is rather "compartmental" and seems to be rather glued together than "integrated."

These minor criticisms, however, do not detract from the real merit and value of this book, which presents a balanced synthesis of what the religious life ought to be after Vatican II.

PEDRO S. DE ACHÚTEGUI, S.J.

A RAHNER TRANSLATION ON CHRIST'S DIVINITY

A THEOLOGY OF PROCLAMATION by Hugo Rahner, S.J. (Translated by Richard Dimmler, S.J., William Dych, S.J., Joseph Halpin, S.J. and Clement Patrick, S.J., adapted by Joseph Halpin, S.J.) New York: Herder and Herder, 1968. 216 pp.

This is a translation of *Eine Theologie Der Verkündigung (Freiburg im Breisgau—Herder & Co. G.M.B.H., Verlagsbuchhandlung—1939)*. In the Foreword, which is not included in the translation, the author tells us that twelve lectures given to a group of young priests in Austria in the summer of 1937, and published in two numbers of *Theologie der Zeit* in 1938, are newly presented here as a book. One might legitimately ask: why this translation now?