

Symposium on Apostolic Religious Life in Honor of the 200th Anniversary of the Archdiocese of Boston
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Panel on “Apostolic Religious Life in the Post-Vatican II Church: Ongoing Challenges of Renewal”

“De Accommodata Renovazione: Between the Idea and the Reality...”

Occasion and Intent and Consequences of Vatican Council II

These are 20/20 observations from forty-five years of hindsight--a perspective from which just about everything looks much clearer than it once did. This hindsight is distilled from nearly three decades of canonical consultation for more than two hundred religious communities (women and men) and more than a dozen arch/dioceses here and abroad. It includes sixteen years of teaching canon law at the graduate level to priests, deacons and seminarians, and (since 1990) it includes consulting on more than forty misconduct cases (1/10 of which involved religious). This perspective also includes assisting in the recent Apostolic Visitation of Seminaries and serving as delegate of the Apostolic See for final stages of the not-so-recent canonical union of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.¹ Finally, this 20/20 perspective includes publication of one book, several book chapters, more than thirty articles in canonical journals and ninety-eight successive “Canonical Counsel” essays in *Review for Religious* since the summer of 1990.

Basically, I am one of thousands of “BC” nuns, with “BC” referring to those who entered religious life before the Council or when it began and obviously had not a clue of what was on the not-too-distant horizon. In January 1959, when John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council (along with revision of the 1917 Code of Canon Law), my community had more than 700 sisters, operated two colleges and three high school academies, staffed more than three dozen grade schools and high schools in six states and owned and operated a small hospital.

¹ Culminating in 1991, that Mercy merger was more than fifteen years in the making and became a blueprint for what is now commonly called “reconfiguration.” Sisters of Mercy in the USA numbered more than 8,000 members in 1991. Today they have fewer than 4,000. For a detailed explanation of this reconfiguration, see the doctoral dissertation of Catherine C. Darcy, R.S.M., *The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas: The Canonical Development of the Proposed Governance Model* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993).

Twenty or more novices a year were common, as was Latin choral office, asking permission to write home (back then you never phoned home), wearing full habit whether teaching or waxing floors or playing basketball, and having monthly “chapter of faults.”

In 1984, a quarter century after the Council was announced, our Prioress sent me to Rome to apologize personally on her behalf to Cardinal Hamer, Prefect of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, because—without her knowledge or permission – one of our sisters had signed the full-page ad published in *The New York Times* on Pro-Life Sunday (October 7th) thus publicly affirming agreement with others who espoused “*a diversity of opinion*” among “*committed Catholics*” regarding abortion. Our Prioress wanted the Holy See to know this action did not represent who we were or what we were about as Dominican women religious in the Church. We were not--she said--in the business of embarrassing the hierarchy and were certainly not among those espousing positions contrary to Church teaching. Recently, this same (former) Prioress remarked that a quarter century ago sisters here or there might take stands contrary to Church teaching, but now it is those in leadership who do so, often frequently and often very publicly and often applauding other religious who do the same.

Now, about a quarter century after 1984, my congregation has one third as many sisters, operates two colleges and one academy and teaches in a half dozen schools in three states. This year there were three professions and we were one of only 56 congregations adequately funded for retirement by National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) standards. In early 2009, we will cease to exist in a canonical union with six other communities which will triple the number of senior sisters, will significantly raise the median age and will result in lack of adequate retirement funding for all sisters involved. And my religious community is certainly not alone.

It seems only fair to ask how it happened that so many communities of women religious in the USA have arrived at the brink of becoming an ecclesiastical version of “ENRON” writ large on the not-so-distant-horizon after nearly a half century in which thousands upon thousands of sisters tried diligently and, for the most part, quite honestly to implement as best they could the sweeping challenges Vatican Council II asked of them.

My 20/20 hindsight response is that--whatever anyone may think, say, hope or regret about Vatican II—hardly anyone senses that the intent of the Council or its genuine potential has been realized. Certainly its call for *accommodata renovatio* of religious life has yet to be realized; or, renewal for religious may not yet even have begun. And, in hindsight, the greatest contribution of Vatican Council II may well be that it truly hoped its bold and broad ranging challenges might (just perhaps) engender in the entire Church a deeply profound and interior, as well as a comprehensive intellectual and volitional conversion at all levels of ecclesial life so that this truly Catholic Church might offer ever more effectively to this increasingly complex and troubled world the salvation truly wrought by Jesus Christ alone. If so, that hope is still alive.

But, reflecting on the Council’s consequences, there seem to have been several (perhaps) small mistakes in the beginning which have gradually engendered significant errors and obvious negative consequences for religious life in the USA.

These (perhaps not-at-all) small mistakes relate to:

- (a) the Council’s **context**;
- (b) the **challenges** of *PC* compared to the **competence** (or lack) of those implementing it;
- (c) the genuine **theological confusion** arising from functional conciliar decisions; and
- (d) forty years of **confrontation** and **compromise** in oversight by the hierarchy.

Context of the Council

The historical context setting the stage for multiple unforeseen consequences of the Council was the tumultuous decade of the 1960's. By human standards it would seem to have been exactly the wrong time for the Council to have occurred. From beginning to end of the 1960's there were ongoing, global, cultural, social and political upheavals. To mention a few in the USA—that decade took us rapidly (shockingly at times) from the assassination of JFK to student deaths at Kent State University, from the Cuban missile crisis to the Tet offensive in Vietnam, from the Los Angeles riots to riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, from Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream" speech to his assassination, and from the "Sound of Music" at the decade's beginning to the decidedly different sounds of "Woodstock" at its end.

The decade of the 1960's also saw revival of earlier feminist movements in society and in the Church.² Social feminism readily critiqued oppression and dysfunction in gender-relations, while liberal feminism began to call for total egalitarian gender rights. The next decade saw liberal feminism in the civil sector evolve into radical feminism which condemned patriarchy as the cause of all social domination. By the late 1960's, Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968) had called the question on sexism in the Church. Echoing Daly, in the 1970's radical-liberal feminism in the Church condemned hierarchy as the cause of all ecclesial domination.³

Liberal-feminist influences quickly co-opted the (then) Conference of Major Superiors of Women, changing it into the Leadership Conference of Women Religious by 1970.⁴ Vatican officials noticed the difference but failed to recognize or to address the political agenda and

² Sara Butler, MSBT, "Women and the Church" in Peter C. Phan, ed., *Gift of the Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000): 415-433.

³ Sandra Schneiders, IHM, *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1991).

⁴ For various interpretations of this transition, see: George A. Kelly, *The Battle for the American Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1981) 289-294; Lora Ann Quiñonez, CDP, and Mary Daniel Turner, SNDdeN, "From CMSW to LCWR: A story of Birth and Transformation" in *Review for Religious* 49 (1990) 295-302; and Ann Carey, *Sisters in Crisis* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997) 84-107.

underlying methodology of its radical transformation.⁵ During the mid-1980's, LCWR (with the apparent cooperation of CMSM) successfully co-opted Pope John Paul II's attempt to assess the state of religious life in the USA at the time of the Quinn Commission. Vatican officials then somehow managed to agree with the Commission's report that religious life in the USA was basically "OK" after an obviously tumultuous twenty-year implementation of *Perfectae caritatis*. By the late 1980's, the hierarchy had adopted the "Gamaliel" principle for dealing with religious life in the USA, setting the stage for LCWR's agenda and methodology to co-opt practices of the Congregation for Consecrated Life. One example was Curial acceptance of "associations of the faithful" as a canonical structure for amalgamating multi-million dollar hospital systems in the USA, even though this canonical structure does not assure accountability for observance of the USCCB's Ethical and Religious Directives in the "umbrella" hospital systems which emerged.⁶

Meanwhile, leadership of multiple LCWR communities began re-defining the charism of their institutes as a global-social justice-oriented "mission" requiring internal structural change and then initiated "reconfiguration" of multiple communities into large-global-feminist-operated-business corporations. Power (not authority) became concentrated in top-level administrators who could deliver a "corporate impact" by determining the "mission" while controlling all structures and resources in what was (formerly identifiable as) a religious institute.⁷ Moveable assets then began to be easily (some would say, recklessly) depleted while congregations discovered they had only minimal control over institutions they had founded and operated for

⁵ See Lora Ann Quiñonez, CDP, and Mary Daniel Turner, SNDdeN, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1992), especially Ch. 4, "Their Name is 'Woman,'" 88-112, for the influence of feminism on the Conference. See, also, the Index under "Feminization of sisters." Turner was executive director of LCWR from 1972-1978, and Quiñonez was executive director of LCWR from 1978-1986.

⁶ For some consequences of this, see Ann Carey, *Our Sunday Visitor*, Vol. 96, No. 49, April 6, 2008, "In Focus: Women Religious" 11-14, especially at 12, regarding provision of medical services contrary to Church teaching.

⁷ Jean Alvarez, "Focusing a Congregations Future," *Human Development* 5 (Winter 1984) 25-34. Alvarez admitted she replaced Aristotle's final, efficient, formal and material causes with mission, power, structure and resources in a corporate re-organization restricting all significant decision-making to top-level administrators. See E. McDonough, OP, "Juridical Deconstruction of Religious Institutes," *Studia Canonica* 26(1992) 307-341, especially 322, note 16.

many decades. Leadership, now in complete control of a re-defined religious life considered merely as a series of evolving moments, could also regularly re-define the “mission” and “quietly retire” older versions as needed.⁸ By the mid-1990’s those marketing this corporate-oriented renewal effectively convinced ordinary sisters and the Roman Curia that adopting it was actually in accord with provisions of *Perfectae caritatis* 22. The truth is that these global-social-justice-oriented-feminist-business corporations have nothing to do with the renewal challenges of Vatican II at all. The Congregation in Rome, to its credit, is beginning to recognize that truth.

Challenges of PC and Competence for Implementation

Perfectae caritatis was obviously comprehensive in its call for renewal, so its consequent problematic implementation should not have been surprising. Religious were asked to make their way of life new again (*re-novatio*) by suitable, appropriate measures through continuous return to the sources of Christian life and to the original inspiration of their institutes. Under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church, they were to adjust their entire life to the changed conditions of the times with the added, timely caution that even the best possible adjustments would be ineffective if not fundamentally animated by a spiritual renewal (*PC* 2). The living, praying, working, government and all documents treating the nature of the institute, apostolic needs, cultural demands, and social economic circumstances were to be duly edited and

⁸ Alvarez, 31. The influence on communities of women religious of corporate re-organization through mission can hardly be underestimated. See (frequently cited in the Darcy JCD dissertation at note 1, above) Mary Trainor, RSM, “A Participative Approach to Corporate Restructuring in the World of Religious Women,” presented to the Conference on Coalitions at Boston University, May 1988, Introduction. It analyzed the RSM reconfiguration then occurring (which Trainor favored) thus: “The dynamic transformation of relationship and governance currently underway among twenty-six groups of Sisters of Mercy ... evolved out of a shared vision of how [they] could more effectively accomplish their common mission [...]. It is a story of voluntary corporate restructuring, a social change envisioned and initiated by leadership, and worked out in collaboration with the membership.” Trainor writes, in retrospect, that “...a change in the interpretation of the charism by persuasive leadership persons mediated the change in governance structures” at the time of the 1929 amalgamation into the Sisters of Mercy of the Union (17). She draws a parallel to the transition after a 1981 sesquicentennial celebration attended by more than 1,000 Mercy sisters when the Governing Board of the Federation of RSM’s envisioned a common charism of “corporate mission” among Mercies at national and global levels. Trainor points out (see 28-29) that “This concept of corporate mission represents a paradigm shift (i.e., a radical change in the framework which defines our understanding of mission”).

obsolete items were to be suppressed (*PC* 3). All members were to be involved in this *renovatio*, although introducing experiments explicitly belonged only to competent authorities and faithful observance was clearly affirmed as more important than multiplying norms (*PC* 4).

One hugely significant negative consequence of the ongoing process of renewal was apparent lack of foresight on the part of the Curia regarding the duration, difficulty and complexity of implementing *PC*'s multiple challenges. The Curia seems to have immensely underestimated the timeline and the degree of alteration which resulted from mandated renewal chapters. Subsequently, it could not keep pace with the volume of texts arriving in Rome in rapid-fire fashion which needed review and approval. Even more so, multiple *contra legem* experiments flourished and gradually became the rule rather than the exception.⁹ As time passed and versions of constitution revisions multiplied, the Curia approved documents apparently unaware of possible variant meanings in generic wording sometimes used deliberately to provide the possibility for interpretations different from those ordinarily expected by Curial officials.

A second hugely significant negative consequence of this ongoing process was that the Curia both overestimated and underestimated resources for renewal among women religious. Overestimation concerned the philosophical, theological, spiritual and canonical background of women religious, most of whom had only minimal or no knowledge of these fields. At first, women religious relied extensively on various religious clergy for assistance. But some of these advisors presented very different approaches for renewal than *PC* had articulated, and sisters who were encouraged to go beyond or to ignore various aspects of *PC* usually did so willingly.¹⁰

⁹ Joseph M. Becker, SJ, *The Re-Formed Jesuits: Volume I - A History of Changes in Jesuit Formation During the Decade 1965-1975* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), documents how gradual alterations became the norm.

¹⁰ David Fleming, SM, "Community, Corporateness, and Communion" in *Starting Points* (Washington, DC: LCWR, 1980) 33-44; Thomas E. Clarke, SJ, "Whose Life Is It?", *Ibid.*, 87-116; *Renewal Through Community and Experimentation* (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1968). Also see Carey, *Sisters in Crisis*, 82.

In turn, the Curia also vastly underestimated the feminist-oriented-social-justice agenda of women religious in the USA which began to emerge as early as 1964.¹¹ This agenda quickly became prominent in the transition from CMSW to LCWR by 1970. When the “Transformative Elements of Religious Life” were jointly affirmed by LCWR and CMSM in 1989, this agenda became public and—for the most part—has been totally unchecked.¹² That is, totally unchecked until very recently, since more and more faithful, more and more religious and more and more hierarchy are now recognizing that this long-term agenda is very much amiss and also harmful.

Functional Council Decisions with Significant Theological Consequences

Religious life brings following Christ more closely to the level of lifestyle according to a particular charism through consecration by vow. This consecration is recognized by the Church as placing anyone who becomes “a religious” in a category different from ordination or marriage or remaining single. Moreover, perpetually vowed religious life is a category of consecration recognized as a fundamental part of the Church’s structure, though not part of its hierarchical structure. While *PC* included specific mention of other forms of consecrated life such as secular institutes, its title was primarily directed to *renovatio vitae religiosae*, the clearly predominant category at that time. As it happens, a change in the final format of *Lumen gentium* before its approval in late 1964 had immense consequences for altering the theological interpretation of religious vows as they later appeared in *Perfectae caritatis* in the fall of 1965. The traditional order of the vows (poverty-chastity-obedience) was changed in *PC* in 1965 solely because of the changed order in which they had already appeared in *LG* in 1964. After the Council, some theologians quickly interpreted this change as intentional and as theologically significant.

¹¹ Sister M. Charles Borromeo Muckenhirn, CSC, ed., *The Changing Sister* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides 1965), details its beginning before conclusion of the Council. Idem., *The Implications of Renewal* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides, 1967) devotes 130 pages to renewal of religious life culminating with her version of “The Nun of the Future” (274-294).

¹² Marie Augusta Neal, SNDdeN, *Catholic Sisters in Transition* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1984); Idem., *From Nuns to Sisters* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990).

Subsequently, the change in order and these instant but misguided interpretations created great confusion about the import of professing these evangelical counsels by vow in religious life.

Without explaining in detail the transitions and multiple revisions of what became the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen gentium)*, it is obvious that Chapter V, “The Universal Call to Holiness” (nn39-42), and Chapter VI, “On Religious” (nn43-47), are both very brief. This is because Chapter V and VI had been in a single chapter (on the “Call to Holiness”) until it was split into its present form in September 1964. This split occurred at the insistence of bishops who were themselves religious and of superiors general of men’s religious communities who participated fully in the Council. The *Acta Synodalia* explanation for where the split in Chapter V occurred states that the point at which vows were first mentioned was considered an appropriate transition from one expression of holiness to another. It was, according to the explanation published in the *Acta Synodalia*, simply a convenient point requiring little change in wording which provided a “*quamdam transitionem ab uno ad aliud argumentum*” and thus a simple “*transitus fit ad Religiosos...*” Comments of the Doctrinal Commission for interpretation of the separation explicitly note that this division into two chapters did not contradict or reject or change any prior documents of the Church’s magisterium.¹³ So, Chapter VI of *LG* begins with chastity because the previous sentences, which are still in Chapter V, had first treated charity as full perfection of the law in Christian discipleship and then noted martyrdom as the supreme imitation of Christ. It then highlighted the preeminence and high honor of virginity or celibacy

¹³ *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, Vol. III, Periodus Tertia, Pars III, 65 and especially 67-68: “Quoad particularia attendendum est ad ipsam exegesis obiectivam textus. Ad hoc autem faciendum iuvat etiam mentem commissionis cognoscere. Quae mens praesertim ex actibus sive subcommissionis sive commissionis innotescit. Propositum in redigendo textu fuit, ut etiam obiective constet, neque selectam fuisse unam vel aliam scholarum methodologiam, neque, ut obvium est, anterioribus documentis Magisterii Ecclesiae contradicere vel in aliquo doctrinaliter immutare, neque recipere vel profiteri nec reicere ea quae in presenti sunt liberae disceptionis inter theologos. Monuit enim nuperrime etiam Em.mus Cardinalis Decanus hoc Concilium non intendere novas proponere doctrinas. Consequenter, quamvis differentia, praesentia et momentum status religiosi in Ecclesia clarius appareat ex capite distincto religiosi dedecato, tamen ex votatione Concilii circa hoc, qualemcumque exitum habeat, doctrinaliter nihil novum deduci potest aut debet.”

among the multiple counsels proposed by the Lord and emphasized the charity and humility of those who follow Christ in poverty and obedience. Chapter V of *LG* then concluded by summarizing and re-affirming the call given to all to seek the one holiness offered by Christ.

Thus, Chapter VI, *De Religiosis*, begins by mentioning the three counsels in the order in which they appeared when it was still part of the original Chapter V of *LG*. No theological reason was given for reversing any vow in the triad of poverty-chastity-obedience, and it is clear that chastity came first in the list in the original Chapter V because the format of that chapter was to comment briefly on the many specific expressions of the universal call to holiness. But the functional split of Chapter V at the logically optimal point for a “*transitus*” to the new Chapter VI soon acquired a significance and a significantly problematic theological “life of its own.”

Lumen Gentium was promulgated in late 1964. The amended text of *Perfectae caritatis*, which appeared in fall 1965 listed the vows (nn12, 13, 14) in the order of chastity-poverty-obedience. No prior schema of *PC* had done so. The change in order of the vows in the 1965 text of *PC* occurred only because *Lumen Gentium* had already been promulgated. That is, 441 of the Council Fathers had explicitly requested that the order of the vows in *PC* be chastity-poverty-obedience so that it would correspond to the order which had already appeared in *LG* Chapter VI.¹⁴ Many other interventions had requested retaining the traditional order of the vows as poverty-chastity-obedience because of the significance of progressive renunciation of legitimate “goods” in the theological explanation of that vow sequence. As it happened, the higher number of 441 who favored the sequence as already promulgated in *LG* prevailed.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Acta Synodalia*, Vol. IV, Pars IV, 535: “Quoad ordinem condiliorum plures modi proponuntur: (a) Circa 450 Patres postulant ordinem sequentem ‘castitas – pauertas – oboedientia’ (cf, p. 11, n. 3). **Ratio: ut hic ordo respondeat ordini consiliorum in Constitutione dogmatica ‘De Ecclesia’** (b) Alii volunt retinere ordinem: ‘paupertas – castitas – oboedientia’ (cf. pp. 11-12, n4). **Ratio: hic ordo est traditionalis et ostendit progressionem quamdam ‘vi cuius religious renunciat bonis quae habet’** [bold added].

¹⁵ *Acta Synodalia*, Vol. IV, Pars III. Votes and comments are at 529, 531, 535 and 560. The number requesting a change in the order to correspond to *Lumen Gentium* is recorded as 441 at p. 560.

However, before publication in the *Acta Synodalia* of the Doctrinal Commission's explanation for this split, authors began to speculate in unwarranted but definitive fashion about a clear theological change in the understanding of the vows precisely because of the new order in which they were now listed. Jesuits Paul Molinari and Peter Gumpbel claimed it was "not difficult **to guess** the reasons which led the Doctrinal Commission to abandon the traditional order and place virginity first"¹⁶ [emphasis added]. They then waxed eloquently that listing virginity first clearly showed the Council Fathers' emphasis on the importance of charity in undivided love as primarily indicative of religious life. After briefly outlining the theology for the classical order of the vows, they added that this former order (poverty-chastity-obedience) "failed to provide any explanation for the intrinsic connection" among them.¹⁷ Juan Lozano, CMF, also dismissed in very brief fashion the late, great triad of poverty-chastity-obedience and then devoted thirty pages to commenting on "Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom."¹⁸

So, the functional point of convenience for splitting the original Chapter V of *LG* into two chapters acquired an almost instant, completely unwarranted, theologically influential interpretation through convincing--but unsubstantiated--speculation which had no basis in the reasons for the Council's actual decision. Thus, quite ironically, the desire to avoid confusion about the order of the vows in two Council documents resulted in rather rapid theological dismissal of the poverty-chastity-obedience triad, and this has since caused immense theological confusion about the vows as central to the consecration unique to religious life as such. Why is this important? It is important because consecration in religious life brings the gift to the Church of a God-given charism to the level of a specific life-style in following Christ more closely. My

¹⁶ Paul Molinari, SJ, and Peter Gumpbel, SJ, *Chapter VI of the Dogmatic Constitution "Lumen Gentium" on Religious Life: The Doctrinal Content in the Light of the Official Documents* (Milan: Ancora, 1987) 84.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

¹⁸ Juan Lozano, CMF, *Discipleship: Towards an Understanding of Religious Life* (Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality: Chicago, 1980) 120 and 140-171.

decidedly, unapologetic, Dominican prejudice is that--if you cannot get your basic theology of religious life straight, you are never going to get the basics of your life as a religious straight.

So, by functional circumstance, we now had a new sequence of vows beginning with chastity whereby feminist theologians could rapidly re-define the theological meaning of the vows to the advantage of progressive practices evident in the implementation of *PC* by myriads of women religious. Sandra Schneiders explained at great length how this new order of the vows made consecrated celibacy a “constitutive charism” manifesting the radicality and absoluteness of religious life which has nothing necessarily to do with community or with ministry as such.¹⁹ In the early Church, she explained, consecrated virgins could live “singly” or in groups of their own choosing for basic companionship and could then cooperate effectively for mutual spiritual and temporal assistance. When living in such freely-chosen groups, sharing of goods was appropriate as a forerunner of poverty, and communal cooperation among consecrated virgins of equal status was certainly preferable to any later, distorted development of obedience to a single superior. No matter that only women can be consecrated as virgins with an ancient liturgical ceremony even though religious life has been embraced by both men and women for nearly two millennia. No matter that the origins of cenobitical monasticism did not begin merely with virginity. Though monks and nuns were required to be celibate, it was also an early requirement that no one with personal assets would be accepted into cenobitical monastic life until these assets were given away completely. Why? Because it was realized early-on that fundamental elements of life together could not be sustained if those committed to a community retained personal “nest eggs” permitting them to do whatever they wanted to do whenever they wanted to do it quite independent from their commitment to, and with, others in community. From the

¹⁹ Sandra Schneiders, IHM, *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy, and Community in Catholic Religious Life* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2001). See Chapter 4 “Celibacy as Charism,” 117-200, esp. 125-132 and 145-149.

beginning, it was clear to those who lived common life that it could readily be undermined or abandoned by those with personal assets whenever daily circumstances of life in common failed to meet their personal expectations. Those without personal assets obviously had to stick around.

These entirely new explanations of the new order of vows thus conveniently rendered religious life as a purely personal, cooperative endeavor recognized by the Church, but as having no reference to prior communal or obediencial aspects as understood for more than 1500 years. Thus, hundreds of women religious living in apartments could now be described not as living alone, but—like consecrated virgin in the early Church—as merely living singly. In Schneiders' assessment, most women religious living singly do so primarily for spiritual reasons²⁰ and are no less observant or less poor or less obedient than those living in common. So, in a theologically unfounded twist, the post-Vatican II drift to apartment living was completely justified by a totally unjustified explanation of *PC* totally supporting this widespread practice of progressive women religious. Other religious and clergy and faithful laity simply looked on in disbelief.

And so it happened, that functional separation of *LG* Chapter V into Chapters V and VI at the comment on virginity which then changed the order in *PC* to chastity-poverty-obedience by majority vote in order to avoid confusion, inadvertently resulted in immense confusion about the core consecration of religious life today. This functional change as then extrapolated by feminist theologians significantly re-defined the entire meaning and import of the consecration of religious by public, perpetual vow.²¹ The entire theological context for the relationship among

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 339-348.

²¹ Another feminist who introduced significant theological changes is Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, who wrote the theological monograph for the Lilly funded study, *The Future of Religious Orders in the United States* (FORUS) ,published in 1992 by David Nygren, CM, and Miriam Ukeritis, CSJ. In “Between the Times: Religious Life and the Postmodern Experience of God,” *Review for Religious*, 53 n. 1, 6-28, Johnson writes: “If there is a God at all, then this is absolute holy mystery that can never be fathomed. [...] This mystery does not dwell in isolation from the world but encompasses it as the Matrix of its being and becoming. *God in the world and the world in God—panentheism describes the mutual relation.*” [emphasis added] In concluding, she notes that “*this* God” [original emphasis] is now “a key theological factor shaping the future of religious life in America” (23-24).

common life, poverty, obedience and chastity was reduced to a merely historical and outdated imposition, while a few, influential, misplaced explanations based on faulty sources engendered immense misunderstanding among religious (and most everyone else in the Church) about what religious vows are really about. Again, my decidedly, unapologetic, Dominican prejudice is that, if we cannot get our basic theology of religious life straight, we are never going to get the basics of our life as religious straight. Surely, this apparently small, mostly unnoticed, purely functional change has cast a long shadow of theological confusion on renewal of religious life.

Curial Oversight and Episcopal Vigilance

Post-Conciliar overload at the Curia also conveniently contributed at least indirectly to the transition of the Conference of Major Superiors of Women (CMSM) into the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) from 1967-1971. Despite multiple complaints, the Curia mostly overlooked the far-reaching consequences of LCWR's "Sisters' Survey" project, begun in 1965, which used sociological methods and less-than-verifiable "belief scales." The Survey was based on the 1963 doctoral dissertation in sociology of Sr. Marie Augusta Neal, SNDdeN, which had been explicitly designed to assess readiness for change in a random sample of 259 Boston diocesan clergy.²² For the 139,691 women religious who completed the 23-page booklet of 649 questions, the Sisters' Survey itself functioned as a "change agent" by reason of the content alone. LCWR executives assessed the Survey as being "*catalytic far beyond what its creators dreamed,*"²³ while Neal herself admitted that the "*pre-and-post-Vatican II belief scales...became the most controversial and the most discriminating variable, which accounted for the pace and direction of changes in structures of the religious congregations involved...*"²⁴

Nor did the (then) Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes seem much alarmed when

²² Marie Augusta Neal, *Values and Interests in Social Change* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965).

²³ Quiñonez and Turner, 43-44, who note its results were used extensively in renewal chapters of women religious.

²⁴ Neal, *From Nuns to Sisters*, 1990, 126-127, note 9.

Marie Augusta Neal reported to that Dicastery in her June 1969 “Memo” on survey results that “there as a proneness to fascism in the sister who prefers a pre-Vatican belief orientation.”²⁵

Simultaneously, multiple change-oriented general chapters influenced by the Sisters’ Survey conveniently combined with a parallel lack of Curial oversight and/or lack of appropriate Curial intervention to initiate open placement in apostolates and apostolic invisibility in attire. These changes brought institutional decline and the emergence of “communities” of sisters who related occasionally to one another rather than living in common. Ongoing renewal chapters also eroded the legal stability of congregations as “leadership teams” replaced superiors and councils, as chapters became large, volunteer assemblies controlled by appointed-outside-facilitators, and as those in “leadership” began “governing” through multiple levels of administrative appointees.

Also, in the first twenty years after Vatican II, when a member of the hierarchy occasionally intervened in matters related to women religious, it usually became an immediate media “cause célèbre” for those in progressive communities while simultaneously becoming an embarrassment for the traditional-oriented sisters in these communities, as well as for Catholic faithful throughout the country. From the Los Angeles IHM confrontation in the late 1960’s, to the resignation from public office and departure from religious life in 1983 of Sr. Agnes Mary Mansour, RSM, to the New York Times ad of October 1984, confrontation escalated until the Quinn Commission amazingly pronounced religious life in the USA as basically “OK” in the mid-1980’s. What actually happened [in 20/20 hindsight] was that the functional tutelage of LCWR had successfully brought community after community entirely within the control of progressive leadership who belonged to that Conference which systematically co-opted the entire

²⁵ From the unpublished June 1969 “Memo” of Marie Augusta Neal to the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. Portions of the “Memo” appear in the doctoral dissertation of M. M. Modde, OSF, *A Canonical Study of the LCWR* (Washington, DC: Catholic University, 1977) 126-128. The “Memo” can still be found in archives of some religious communities (which is where my copy was obtained).

course of renewal with a liberal-feminist-ecological-social-justice oriented agenda.²⁶ Meanwhile, bishops became increasingly wary of any intervention regarding women religious even in matters pertaining to diocesan communities; and they readily (but erroneously) claimed they had no authority whatsoever regarding pontifical ones. After twenty years of sporadic confrontation and LCWR's obviously successful co-option of the Quinn Commission's assessment, the hierarchy adopted a deliberate "Gamaliel" approach to the growing problem of the supposed renewal of religious life in the USA, particularly regarding communities of women religious.

Thereafter, more and more communities and their apostolic endeavors gravitated towards being global-business-organizations in structure and orientation. Leadership teams, conveniently ensconced in corporate executive lifestyles, began redefining congregational charisms as a global mission requiring internal restructuring. They then initiated multiple corporate mergers referred to as reconfigurations which are still occurring. In hindsight, the "losers" in this escalating trend are:

- (1) senior sisters who suffer a never imagined experience of radical, inner poverty;
- (2) Catholic faithful who wonder "Where all the Sisters have gone?" as community assets are depleted by a corporate executive lifestyle among leadership who publicly challenge fundamentals of Catholic belief and practice with impunity; and
- (3) the immensely significant genuine religious heritage of the entire Catholic Church in the United States, which is fast disappearing from (perhaps) not-so-benign neglect.

Our senior sisters now see the efforts of generations evaporating before their eyes as they are relegated to retirement facilities with sisters from multiple congregations who have little in

²⁶ See Quiñonez and Turner, Chapter 1, "Changing Times," 3-30. Along with its name, LCWR's mission changed radically from 1967-1971 and accomplished the "transformation" their book extols. See 18 and 23, respectively: "The evolution of the LCWR's perception of its own mission is an important index of a changing self-definition." and "The striking redirection of the conference's mission did not take place without struggle." And see 165-167, "Afterward." Ongoing co-option of renewal is still evident even at the level of the National Religious Retirement Office of the USCCB. The November 2007 "LCWR Update" (4) reports that Sandra Schneiders offered theological insights on the future of religious life, and Ruby Cribbins, a facilitator for multiple reconfigurations, "brought her perspective" at the October 2007 NRRO meeting which decided more funds would be allotted to "systemic change."

common except the same letters after their name. Faithful, hard-working laity who financed the Church's educational and hospital systems for two centuries now see these mostly abandoned, even as they are now asked to finance our senior sisters' retirement. And, it is possible that part of our nation's Catholic heritage--integral to its *institutio Christiana* and *regula fidei* and to the support of its *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* and *lex vivendi*--is in jeopardy from a long-term failure to recognize that what occurred in renewing religious life in the USA may (mostly) not be what Vatican II asked of us at all. Religious in progressive communities, who are not themselves progressive, sensed this long ago. Now they sense a very limited ability to alter current agendas.

In short, in the nearly half century since Vatican II, some of us who are religious have made some very serious mistakes in interpreting and implementing that Council. Some in positions of (what we now erroneously call) "leadership" have abandoned their moral, legal and spiritual responsibilities while happily holding the offices entrusted to them. Some among the hierarchy seem at times to have forgotten their responsibility for exercising genuine, responsible vigilance--as successors of the Apostles--regarding the public role of religious in their dioceses and in the universal Church. But all of that may now, slowly, be changing. This Symposium and the efforts of His eminence, Cardinal Rode--present with us--as well as the interest and efforts of many bishops participating in this Symposium, witness on the part of the hierarchy to a new awareness and a new understanding and a new willingness to respond in meaningful, measured and responsible fashion to the realities which greatly concern us all -- right here, right now.

Between the idea and the reality...

If we are at all honest in our 20/20 hindsight, those of us who are religious might have to admit we are not so much renewed as we would like to think. We might also have to admit that religious life in the USA has hardly experienced the renewal some may try to claim. A 20/20

perspective (whether in hindsight or in forty years of endurance) reveals a visible, veritable chasm between two groups of women religious in the USA. On one side of this chasm are those who have apparently, randomly or deliberately trod a circuitous path of unchecked adaptation leading to the brink of imminent extinction. On the other side are those who have apparently carefully walked a straight road of studiously maintaining a very respectable *status quo ante*. The latter are not likely to disappear. Not merely because this form of life is genuinely attractive to the new generation of youth, but also because in every transition from one dominant form of religious life to another (monasticism, mendicants, apostolic congregations, etc.) the prior form did not simply disappear, because it still had something significant to offer to the great diversity of the truly universal (truly) Catholic Church. But, the thousands of non-progressive sisters caught in progressive communities with no opportunity to live the renewal asked of them must be acknowledged as both a personal and an ecclesial tragedy of immense proportion. Bluntly, it is a genuine *de agendo* which leaves the renewal Vatican II requested as mostly never really tried at all. No matter which side of the great religious-life-chasm in this country one favors or on which side of that great chasm one may happen to be, consequences of the renewal asked of us leave us still--to some extent--wandering in a forty-year desert experience with multiple mirages of self-proclaimed progress toward an ever elusive promised land of “authentic renewal.”

Looking to the future with 20/20 hindsight, all the above challenges are on-going. We still know not where this all might lead as we grow daily in deeper embrace of living the reality that God must eventually, truly and totally, become our “enough.” And no matter what transpires, we are each still and always called to ongoing, generous fidelity to the promise each of us once made to give our very self to God alone, forever.

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