

10. Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements: A Charismatic Sign

Convergences

a) The Church has always benefitted from the gift of charisms, be it from the most extraordinary to the simplest. Through them the Holy Spirit rejuvenates and renews the Church with joy and gratitude. The Holy People of God recognise in these charisms the providential help with which God sustains, directs and illuminates His mission.

b) The Church's charismatic dimension is made manifest in the rich and varied forms of consecrated life. This testimony has contributed to renewing the life of the ecclesial community in every age and provides an antidote to the perennial temptation towards worldliness. The diverse families that compose religious life demonstrate the beauty of discipleship and holiness in Christ, whether in their distinctive forms of prayer, their service among the people, whether through forms of community life, the solitude of the contemplative life or at the frontier of new cultures. Those in consecrated life have often been the first to sense important historical changes and to heed the promptings of the Spirit. Today, too, the Church needs their prophetic voice and action. The Christian community also recognises and wishes to be attentive to the practices of synodal life and discernment that have been tried and tested in communities of consecrated life, maturing over the centuries. We know that we can learn from them wisdom in how to walk the synodal path. Many Congregations and Institutes practice conversation in the Spirit or similar forms of discernment in the conduct of provincial and general chapters, in order to renew structures, rethink lifestyles, and activate innovative forms of service and proximity to the poorest. In other cases, however, we find the persistence of an authoritarian style, which makes no room for dialogue.

c) With equal gratitude, the People of God recognize the seeds of renewal in communities with a long history that has blossomed into new ecclesial communities. Lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities are a precious sign of the maturation of the co-responsibility of all the baptized. They hold particular value because of their experience in promoting communion among different vocations, the impetus with which they proclaim the Gospel, their proximity to those on the margins economically and socially and through their promotion of the common good. They are often models of synodal communion and of participation for mission.

d) Cases of abuse of various kinds experienced by those in religious life and members of lay associations, especially of women, signal a problem in the exercise of authority and demand decisive and appropriate interventions.

Matters for Consideration

e) The Church's magisterium has a well-developed body of teaching on the importance of both hierarchical and charismatic gifts in the life and mission of the Church. This calls for growth in ecclesial understanding and in theological reflection. It is therefore worth considering anew the ecclesiological significance and concrete pastoral implications of this teaching.

f) The variety of charismatic expressions in the Church underscores the People of God's commitment to being a prophetic presence in proximity to the least of our sisters and brothers, and to providing contemporary culture with a deeper sense of the spiritual aspects of life. There is a need to develop a more profound understanding of how consecrated life, as well as lay associations, ecclesial movements, and new communities, place their charisms at the service of communion and mission in local churches, augmenting existing paths towards holiness with a presence that is prophetic.

Proposals

g) We believe the time has come for a revision of the 1978 document *Mutuae relationes*, regarding the relationships between bishops and religious in the Church. We propose that this revision be completed in a synodal manner, consulting all involved.

h) To the same end, it is necessary to put in place, in a synodal spirit, means and instruments for promoting encounters and forms of collaboration between Episcopal Conferences and the Conferences of Superiors and Major Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

i) At the level of both individual local churches and groupings of Churches, the promotion of missionary synodality requires the establishment and configuration of councils and advisory bodies at which representatives of lay associations and ecclesial movements and new communities can meet in order to foster enduring relationships between their life and work and that of the local churches.

j) In theological formation at all levels, above all in the formation of ordained ministers, the prominence given to the Church's charismatic dimension should be monitored and strengthened where necessary

Source:

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