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**Our Fraternal Communion of Life  
with Christ and with the Poor**

**Circular Letter**

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*Common life, fashioned on the model of the early Church where the body of believers was united in heart and soul,<sup>1</sup> and given new force by the teaching of the Gospel, the sacred liturgy, and especially the Eucharist,<sup>2</sup> should continue to be lived in prayer and the communion of the same spirit. As members of Christ living together as brothers, religious should give pride of place in esteem to each other<sup>3</sup> and bear each other's burdens.<sup>4</sup> For the community, a true family gathered together in the name of the Lord by God's love which has flooded the hearts of its members through the Holy Spirit,<sup>5</sup> rejoices because He is present among them.<sup>6</sup> Moreover love sums up the whole law,<sup>7</sup> binds all together in perfect unity<sup>8</sup> and by it, we know that we have crossed over from death to life.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the unity of the brethren is a visible pledge that Christ will return<sup>10</sup> and a source of great apostolic energy. (PC 15).*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Acts 4:32.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Acts 2:42.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rom. 12:10.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gal. 6:2.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Rom 5:5.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Matt. 18:20.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Rom 13:10.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Col. 3:14.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 1 John 3:14.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. John 13:35; 17:21.

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> , 1993.
CIC	<i>Code of Canon Law</i> , 1983.
Const.	CONGREGATION OF ROGATIONISTS OF THE HEART OF JESUS, <i>Constitutions</i> , Rome, 2010.
CV	FRANCIS, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to young people and all the people of God <i>Christus Vivit</i> , Rome, March 25, 2019.
EE	SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR INSTITUTES, Document <i>Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life, as applied to Institutes dedicated to works of the apostolate</i> , Rome, 1983.
EG	FRANCIS, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world <i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> , Rome, November 24, 2013.
ET	PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation <i>Evangelica Testificatio</i> , Rome, June 29, 1971.
FaT	CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, Instruction <i>Faciem Tuam, Domine, Requiram. The service of authority and obedience</i> , Rome, 2008.
FCM	BRUNO RAMPAZZO, <i>From Compassion to Mission - General Government programming guidelines 2016-2022</i> , Rome, 2017.
FLC	CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, Document <i>Fraternal Life in Community. "Congregavit Nos in Unum Christi Amor"</i> , Rome, 1994.
FT	FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship <i>Fratelli Tutti</i> , Rome, October 3, 2020.
LG	VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church <i>Lumen Gentium</i> , Rome, November 21, 1964.
MR	SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR INSTITUTES - SACRED CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Document <i>Mutuae Relationes</i> , Rome, 1978.
NMI	JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter <i>Novo Millennio Ineunte</i> at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Rome, January 6, 2001.
Norms	CONGREGATION OF ROGATIONISTS OF THE HEART OF JESUS, <i>Norms</i> , Rome, 2017.
NW	CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, Document <i>New Wine in New Wineskins</i> .

*The Consecrated life and its ongoing challenges since the Second Vatican Council. Guidelines*, Rome, 2017.

- PC VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, Rome, October 28, 1965.
- PI CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, Document *Potissimum Institutioni*. Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes, Rome, 1990.
- RA *Rogationist Anthology of the Writings of the Father Founder*, Ad usum privatum, pro manuscripto, Padua, November 1961.
- RCC CONGREGATION OF ROGATIONISTS OF THE HEART OF JESUS, *Rogationist Communion and Community*, Document of the VII General Chapter, Rome, 1986.
- RRL CONGREGATION OF ROGATIONISTS OF THE HEART OF JESUS, *Rogationist Rule of Life. Expression of consecration, guarantee of charismatic identity, support of fraternal communion, project of mission*, Document of the XI General Chapter, Rome, 2010.
- SAC CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ: a renewed commitment of consecrated life in the third millennium*, Rome, May 19, 2002.
- SIF CONGREGATION OF THE ROGATIONISTS OF THE HEART OF JESUS, *Stir into Flame the Gift of God that Is in You (2 Tm 1, 6)*, Project of Rogationist Permanent Formation, Rome, 2002.
- STC CONGREGATION OF THE ROGATIONISTS OF THE HEART OF JESUS, *Seeing the Crowds He Felt Compassion and Said: "Pray." Our charismatic identity in today's challenges*, Document of the XII General Chapter, Rome, 2016.
- VC JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, Rome, 25 March 1996.

## **Introduction: In communion**

1. The paragraph quoted from the Vatican II's decree on the renewal of religious life *Perfectae Caritatis* has "Common life" for its title, but it introduces the topic by speaking of "life in common." It is a way of making it clear, right from the start, that it is not a question of adapting to a common life for all, as has sometimes been understood in the past, but rather, of inserting one's own life "in common with that of the brothers", each one preserving the gift of his own originality, but sharing it in the communion of life.

The fundamental document of Vatican II, the dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, touched upon "The Religious" in Chap. VI, recalls that during the course of the centuries, different forms of consecrated life have developed in the Church, at times solitary, sometimes with common life. With regard to common life, it specified: "These religious families give their members the support of a more firm stability in their way of life and a proven doctrine of acquiring perfection. They further offer their members the support of fraternal association in the militia of Christ and of liberty strengthened by obedience. Thus, these religious are able to tranquilly fulfill and faithfully observe their religious profession and so spiritually rejoicing make progress on the road of charity."<sup>11</sup>

We find in it a wise synthesis of the value of fraternal life in community.

We learn that common life, which in some respects can be considered a penance and a limitation of personal autonomy, constitutes above all, a help that is offered to individuals so that they can persevere in the form of life they have undertaken. It should be noted, immediately afterward, that in the sharing of life according to the regulations, we are guided by a time-tested doctrine that guarantees us that the path we are following leads to the attainment of perfection.

In asceticism, we have been reminded that the path to perfection by its very nature constitutes a "spiritual combat." *Lumen Gentium* assures us that in this "militia of Christ" we find mutual support in fraternal communion.

2. It is tempting to see common life as a form of violence against our freedom. If we think about it more fully, this is not the case. Each of us, in fact, has made this choice in full freedom and without any constraint, as we declare in our application for admission to the religious profession. Our choice of religious profession is a choice of life according to a path that leads us to serve the Lord by doing his will in all things. Common life in obedience corroborates and strengthens our free choice. Sometimes common life has been compared to the rail tracks, which on the one hand, constrain the train within its limits, but on the other hand, allow it to proceed safely and with great speed. If we persevere faithfully in common life, we are sure to walk, day after day, toward our goal.

Finally, the document reminds us of two aspects that are proper to common life, which serve to build it up and, therefore, characterize it: fraternal charity and spiritual joy. It is not a question of external categories and outward attitudes. On the contrary, the members of the community must have a profound union with the Lord, which allows them to experience great serenity and spiritual joy, despite the difficulties they may have to face. This union with the Lord is associated with true humility that moves people to serve the brothers and sisters and to "infect" them with their joy.

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<sup>11</sup> LG 43.

3. In our reflection, we will focus initially on the spiritual identity of the religious community, as a sign of future life, the fruit of the call to consecrated life, a community that is a living part of ecclesial communion.

We will look at the Community today, in the context of the great external transformations and consequent development of the theological vision of consecrated life.

We will move on to reflect on the identity of the Rogationist religious community, charismatically characterized, a living part of the Rogationist Family, which expresses its mission guided by the Rule of Life.

We will then try to contemplate the Community that wishes to live its fraternal communion to the full, with a commitment to growth, in the encounter with the Lord and in fraternal dialogue.

In the concluding part, we will reflect on the Rogationist Community which intends to privilege the contemplative dimension, and on the Community which chooses to live with the Lord by meeting him in the service to the Poor.

# Chapter One

## The Spiritual Identity of the Religious Community

### 1.1. The fraternal community, sign of the future life

4. The doctrine of Vatican II has found in the *Code of Canon Law*, twenty years later, a normative reworking of its theological and moral aspects, preserving its spiritual inspiration, right from the definition of the identity of religious life:

“As a consecration of the whole person, religious life manifests in the Church the wonderful marriage brought about by God, a sign of the future age. Thus, the religious brings to perfection a total self-giving as a sacrifice offered to God, through which his or her whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in charity.

“A religious institute is a society whose members, according to proper law, pronounce public vows, either perpetual or temporary, which are to be renewed, however, when the period of time has elapsed, and lead a life of brothers or sisters in common.”<sup>12</sup>

Religious consecration, which expresses our total self-giving to God, is manifested through the profession of vows and fraternal life in community.

They are constitutive gifts and commitments of our consecrated life. One enters religious life with the profession of sacred vows. At the same time, one becomes a member of a new family, united by the Spirit, who, moved by the same Spirit, have chosen to live together.

The following canon adds two fundamental aspects of community life, reminding us that it is built around the Eucharist in a house under the responsible guidance of a Superior: “A religious community must live in a legitimately constituted house under the authority of a Superior designated according to the norm of law. Each house is to have at least an oratory, in which the Eucharist is celebrated and preserved so that it is truly the center of the community.”<sup>13</sup>

5. The Code explains that the fraternal life of a religious community is inspired by the life of a family and constitutes a reciprocal gift because living as brothers, we give and receive support: “The life of brothers or sisters proper to each institute, by which all members are united together as a special family in Christ, is to be defined in such a way that it becomes a mutual support for all in fulfilling the vocation of each. Moreover, by their communion as brothers or sisters rooted and founded in charity, members are to be an example of universal reconciliation in Christ.”<sup>14</sup>

In a discreet but equally clear way, the Code reminds us that fraternal life does not come about automatically when the members of the community come together, because each one brings with him his good qualities as well as his shortcomings. Therefore, fraternal communion is built with goodwill, patience, and love. In this process of “building”, the superior is called to play a special role that requires constant solicitude:

“Superiors are to devote themselves diligently to their office and together with the members entrusted to them are to strive to build a fraternal community in Christ, in which God is sought and loved before all things. Therefore, they are to nourish the members regularly with the food of the word of God and are to draw them to the celebration of the sacred liturgy. They

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<sup>12</sup> CIC 607.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 608.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 602.

are to be an example to them in cultivating virtues and in the observance of the laws and traditions of their own institute; they are to meet the personal needs of the members appropriately, solicitously to care for and visit the sick, to correct the restless, to console the faint of heart, and to be patient toward all.”<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2. The love of Christ has called us to live together

6. *Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor* (Christ's love has gathered us into one). This is the subtitle of the document *Fraternal Life in Community* of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, issued on February 2, 1994, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. This date, a few years later, will be chosen as the World Day of Consecrated Life.

Almost thirty years after Vatican II, the Church, aware of having lived a true season of updating (*aggiornamento*) and renewal, must face a painful identity crisis in the priestly order and in consecrated life.

The document acknowledges that “the physiognomy that today manifests fraternal life in common in many countries reveals many transformations compared to the past”, which have led to “positive effects but also to others that are more questionable.” It should be pointed out that some “evangelical values” have been highlighted and a “new vitality” has been aroused, but at the same time it has provoked “questions for having obscured some typical elements of the same fraternal life lived in community.” Even more importantly, it stated that “in some places, it seems that the religious community has lost its relevance in the eyes of men and women religious and is perhaps no longer an ideal to be pursued.”<sup>16</sup>

After this premise, we move on to examine the factors that led to changes. We note that where the “constant return to the sources of Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of institutes”<sup>17</sup>, desired by the Council, (and where it) was “more profound”, it has given new impetus and revitalized fraternal life in community; but where it has been “partial or weak”, it led to a certain “loss of tone.”

7. The religious community is inevitably confronted with the values and counter-values that characterize society and its structures in the world. In many cases, it has played a prophetic role of evangelical leaven. In a few cases, it has adapted the counter-values, ending up to succumbing to deterioration. From Vatican II, religious life draws special light on fraternal life.

On the theological and spiritual reasons for fraternal life in Community, we quote the beautiful summary of the document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, whose very title speaks of this reality:

“Vatican II affirmed that religious life belongs “undeniably” (Latin: *inconcusse*) to the life and holiness of the Church and placed at the very heart of its mystery of communion and holiness.”<sup>18</sup> The religious community, therefore, participates in the renewed and deepened vision of the Church. Hence some consequences:

8. a) *From the Church-Mystery to the mystery dimension of the religious community.*

The religious community is not a simple agglomeration of Christians in search of personal perfection. Much more deeply, it is a participation in and qualified witness to

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 619.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. FLC 1.

<sup>17</sup> PC 2.

<sup>18</sup> FLC, n.2, Cf. LG 44d.

the Church-Mystery, since it is a living expression and privileged fulfillment of its own particular "communion", of the great Trinitarian "*koinonia*", in which the Father has willed that men and women participate in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

*b) From the Church-Communion to the communion-fraternal dimension of the religious community.*

The religious community, in its structure, motivations, distinguishing values, makes publicly visible and continuously perceptible the gift of fraternity given by Christ to the whole Church. For this very reason, as its indispensable commitment and mission, it must be and to be seen to be a living cell of intense fraternal communion that is a sign and stimulus for all the baptized.<sup>19</sup>

*c) From the Church animated by Charisms to the charismatic dimension of the religious community.*

The religious community is a living cell of fraternal communion, called to live animated by the foundational charism. It is part of the organic communion of the whole Church, which is continuously enriched by the Spirit with a variety of ministries and charisms.

To become part of such a community, the special grace of a vocation is necessary. In concrete terms, the members of a religious community appear to be united by a *common calling from God* in line with the *foundational charism*, by a characteristically common ecclesial consecration, and by a common response in participating in the "experience of the Spirit" lived and handed on by the founder and in his or her mission within the Church.<sup>20</sup>

The Church also wants to receive with gratitude "the simpler and widely diffused" charisms<sup>21</sup> which God distributes among her members for the good of the whole Body. The religious community exists for the Church, to signify and enrich her,<sup>22</sup> to render her better able to carry out her mission.

*d) From Church as Sacrament of unity to the apostolic dimension of religious community.*

The purpose of the apostolate is to bring humanity back to union with God and to unity among itself, through divine charity. Fraternal life in common, as an expression of the union brought about by God's love, besides constituting an essential witness for evangelization, is of great significance for apostolic activity and for its ultimate purpose. It is from this that the fraternal communion of the religious community derives its vigor as a sign and instrument. In fact, fraternal communion is at both the beginning and the end of the apostolate.

The *Magisterium*, since the time of the Council, has deepened and enriched the renewed vision of the religious community with fresh insights.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. PC 15a; LG 44c.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. MR 11.

<sup>21</sup> LG 12.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. MR 14.

<sup>23</sup> FLC 2; Cf. ET 30-39; MR 2, 3, 10, 14; EE 18-22; PI 25-28; cf. also CIC 602.

9. The religious community, while carrying out its own apostolate, subject to particular regulations, is called to safeguard its own identity and unity, above all at the spiritual and affective aspects, but also in the visible and organizational: “In community life, two elements of union and unity among the members can be distinguished: One, the more spiritual: “fraternity” or “fraternal communion”, which arises from hearts animated by charity. It underlines “communion of life” and interpersonal relationships.<sup>24</sup> The other, more visible: “life in common” or “community life”, which consists of “living in one’s own lawfully constituted religious house” and in “leading a common life” through fidelity to the same norms, taking part in common acts, and collaboration in common services.”<sup>25</sup>

### **1.3. A living part of ecclesial communion: the gift of the Holy Spirit**

10. We cannot build fraternal communion on our own; we can become instruments of this fraternity only if we welcome the gift of the Spirit and make ourselves docile to his inspirations. The human, sociological, and psychological aspects can help us but will not be able by themselves to cope with the obstacles that fraternal life encounters due to differences in culture, age, and character.

The Church-mystery is also a communion of members who are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, sons and daughters of the same Father, and therefore brothers and sisters among themselves, who must recognize and love each other as such. To enter the Church through baptism is to become part of this great family, to live and experience the law of love and thus contribute to the unity of the human race.

Members of the Church, consecrated Christians, Religious are called to live intensely the mystery of communion both within the Institute as well as outside, in the society and the territory where they are inserted. The yearning for unity and communion is one of the signs of the times, and religious life comes into play firsthand as an important factor in building a world characterized by relationships of unity and communion.

11. To establish Communities of communion requires “leaving everything behind to be together around Jesus”, “having one heart and one soul” because “they had everything in common”. Fraternity is a gift from God that makes it possible and fruitful. A religious community is called to live intensely the values of communion of the Church itself, in such a way as to be the visible permanence of the primitive church of Jerusalem as it appeared in the freshness of Easter and in the fervor of Pentecost, the first fruit of the Spirit and the first expression of faith in Jesus Christ: one heart and one soul, sharing of goods, united in prayer and the Eucharist, peace and joy, apostolic audacity, and the favor people accorded to them.<sup>26</sup>

The first value that underlies fraternal communion is the gaze of faith on the community itself and on each brother. A decisive element is the awareness, in faith, of the “mystery” and of the radical Christian newness of the community, so that, beyond the conveniences dictated by being together, fraternal attitudes are dictated by supernatural motivations and sustained by charity, a gift of Holy Spirit.

12. The documents that speak of fraternal life in common emphasize that fraternal relationships, like those of a “true family”, should seek to build an environment of mutual trust,

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. CIC 602.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. FLC 3; cf. CIC 608, 665, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Acts 2:42-48; 4:32-35

benevolence, readiness for forgiveness, where each confrere is accepted in his identity, beyond the definition of his origin, age, culture, function; where there are no differences between simple religious and those who have received the priesthood; where material, spiritual, and emotional goods are shared and exchanged; where we dialogue and give mutual help; where there is the courage of fraternal correction done with gentleness.<sup>27</sup> The fraternal community, therefore, is like a family where community discipline is accepted and shared, where the sense of belonging grows also through difficulties and problems of every day. All this leads to unity of spirit and action which should become the source of joy, of promotion of every member of the community, and certainly also of apostolic efficiency.

It is clear that this experience of fraternal life is demanding and beyond mere human strength. There is a need for God's grace, to be asked for in prayer, and which is received through the Word of God, the Eucharist, reconciliation, the founding charism, the loyal practice of vows, the various forms of community dialogue, and the service of animation and guidance.

With the religious profession, we have definitively committed ourselves to build and live fraternal "ecclesial" communion, because as expressed in art. 30 of our *Constitutions*, "we are aware that consecration takes place in the Church and for the Church ... in the service of God and of the Church."

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Gal 6:1.

## Chapter Two

### The Religious Community Today

#### 2.1. The great external changes

13. In bidding farewell to the apostles, Jesus prayed: “I am no longer in the world; but they are in the world, and I am coming to you, Holy Father” (Jn 17: 11). Religious life, embraced by men and women who consecrate themselves totally to the Lord for the Kingdom of God, by its very nature is “in the world”; even in its monastic or eremitic forms, it always has particular openness to the apostolate, or, in any case, it is attuned to the world, whose salvation it implores.

We must ask ourselves where the world is going today and, consequently, how religious life is fitting into this journey.

Toward the end of the last century, we have witnessed movements of political and social emancipation in developing countries. The Church, particularly in Latin America, has accompanied this evolution by promoting social commitment and “the evangelical and preferential option for the poor.”<sup>28</sup>

Thus, there has been a new impetus in many religious institutes to heed the invitation of Vatican II and to return to their roots by opening communities in peripheral environments or in contexts where immigration had brought about intercultural coexistence.

Alongside and at the basis of these social phenomena, a season of new demands and attitudes was taking shape: the demand for personal freedom and human rights, “assemblyism” with an anti-authoritarian attitude, the culture of individualism with a certain downsizing of the role of authority, and the promotion of women.

We have witnessed the explosion of communications that have influenced information, human relations, and lifestyle itself. At the same time, in countries that have had this experience, there has been a weakening of faith and a spread of consumerism and hedonism.<sup>29</sup>

The decline in vocations and the gradual entry of national governments into the areas of apostolate in which the Institutes were engaged, such as welfare, schools, and health care, have led to a new configuration of communities, often small, sometimes inserted in works not belonging to the Congregation, organized at different rhythms from the previous ones, often overburdened with work and with less time available for common life.

14. Hence the need for a rethinking of common life, also because, as the demand for traditional expressions of mission has diminished, new urgencies and new works emerged (drug addicts, refugees, the marginalized, differently abled people, the sick of every kind) to which one had to respond in appropriate ways. Involvement in these new forms of apostolate in a secularized context has at times overshadowed the reality of consecration, its spiritual dimension, and the mission of evangelization - dimensions that are little sustained also due to a weak life in common.

In the post-conciliar reflection, particular emphasis was given on the one hand, to the recovery of the value of the individual person and his initiatives, and on the other, to the sense of community understood as fraternal life built more on the quality of relationships than on regular observance. It has not been easy to find the balance between the two accents, which are exposed to radicalization on both sides. The Council has given us two paths expressed with two

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. General Assemblies of the Latin-American Bishops, in *Medellin, Puebla e Santo Domingo*.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. FLC 4.

keywords: *dialogue* and *synodality*, which have remained rather pious hopes or attempts to cope with an overall difficult situation, which required the need to establish a new basis.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.2. Theological developments in consecrated life

### 2.2.1. *New Wine in New Wineskins*

15. The analysis made by *Fraternal Life in Community* is taken up again twenty-three years later (in 2017) in the document of the same dicastery, *New Wine in New Wineskins*. On the one hand, it recognizes the commitment of the Congregations in this need for renewal and updating, and on the other, it notes that we remain in the phase of “work in progress”: “The outcomes of all this effort to revise the identity, lifestyle, and relative ecclesial mission were also accompanied by courageous and patient research into new formative itineraries that would be suitable for the nature and charism of each religious family.”<sup>31</sup>

The document notes that we are in a phase of the evolution of society and cultures, with rapid “unexpected and chaotic” changes, with a natural repercussion to consecrated life. On the one hand, there are the challenges of adaptation and demands for new responses, and on the other hand, there is a crisis of projectuality and charismatic profile. This involves a remarkable effort.

“The situation of accelerated change risks entangling consecrated life, forcing it to get by emergencies instead of horizons. At times it seems as though consecrated life is almost completely wrapped up in managing the day-to-day or in merely surviving. This way of facing reality is detrimental to a life full of meaning and capable of prophetic witness.”<sup>32</sup>

16. Faced with such a situation, it is normal to ask what has happened to the post-conciliar renewal, whether the established structure of consecrated life, through its mediating elements, has been able to welcome the new spirit introduced by the Council, and therefore whether a renewal of consecrated life is underway.

The document is not afraid to affirm: “The entire constellation of languages and models, values and duties, spirituality and ecclesial identity that we are used to has not yet left room for the testing and stabilizing of the new paradigm born of inspiration and post-conciliar practice. (...) We are unable to accept the signs of the new.”<sup>33</sup>

The urgency of overcoming “inconsistencies and resistances” is underlined and it is made clear that the intent of the document is “to give some guidelines so as not to be imprisoned by fear or laziness”, to provide advice and suggestions, for example, “about the ministry of authority, so that it is at the service of a truly communal style of fraternal life.” It is important to point out that at the basis of an authentic updating there must be a spiritual renewal: “At the basis of every journey we find it important to underline the need for consecrated men and women to have a new aspiration to holiness which is unthinkable without a jolt of renewed passion for the Gospel at the service of the Kingdom.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. FLC 5.

<sup>31</sup> NW 5.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 10.

## 2.2.2. Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*. "How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Ps 133)

17. With a particularly significant choice, Pope Francis, in Loreto, at the Shrine of the Holy House in Loreto, on March 25, 2019, Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, signed the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, addressed to the Young People and to the entire People of God. The Risen and Living Christ is the source of our communion; fraternal life in community, modeled on the family of Nazareth, is the source of our joy.

The Apostolic Exhortation does not directly deal with consecrated life and even less with fraternal life in community, but even synthetically, it does indicate the search for the other as an indispensable way to realize the project of life. In this way, one enters into communion and share the insights of the other, because in mutual service one learns to grow joyfully in the project that God manifests to us. The Pope explains that the choice of a life of communion and sharing, even when one is advanced in years, allows one to maintain a youthful enthusiasm.

18. We want to reread together some passages of the document that radiate an extraordinary light on our topic:

"Each age has its beauty, and the years of our youth need to be marked by shared ideals, hopes and dreams, great horizons that we can contemplate together.

"God loves the joy of young people. He wants them especially to share in the joy of fraternal communion, the sublime joy felt by those who share with others, for 'it is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35). 'God loves a cheerful giver' (2 Cor 9:7). Fraternal love multiplies our ability to experience joy, since it makes us rejoice in the good of others: 'Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep' (Rom 12:15). May your youthful spontaneity increasingly find expression in fraternal love and a constant readiness to forgive, to be generous, and to build community. As an African proverb says: 'If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.' Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of fraternity.

"When seeking to discern our own vocation, there are certain questions we ought to ask. We should not start with wondering where we could make more money or achieve greater recognition and social status. Nor even by asking what kind of work would be most pleasing to us. If we are not to go astray, we need a different starting point. We need to ask: Do I know myself, quite apart from my illusions and emotions? Do I know what brings joy or sorrow to my heart? What are my strengths and weaknesses? These questions immediately give rise to others: How can I serve people better and prove most helpful to our world and to the Church? What is my real place in this world? What can I offer to society? Even more realistic questions then follow: Do I have the abilities needed to offer this kind of service? Could I develop those abilities?

"These questions should be centered less on ourselves and our own inclinations, but on others, so that our discernment leads us to see our life in relation to their lives. That is why I would remind you of the most important question of all. "So often in life, we waste time asking ourselves: 'Who am I?' You can keep asking, 'Who am I?' for the rest of your lives. But the real question is: 'For whom am I?'. Of course, you are for God. But he has decided that you should also be for others, and he has given you many qualities, inclinations, gifts, and charisms that are not for you, but to share with those around you."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> CV 166, 167, 285, 286.

19. Consecrated life is a sign of fraternity, a sign of what the Church is in her deepest essence, a sign particularly appreciated today by a pluralistic society, characterized on the one hand by unbridled individualism and on the other by authoritarian nostalgia, between the utopia of a free world where equality and solidarity reign, between globalization and the jealous affirmation of one's own identity. When fraternal life allows itself to be involved in the life of the Church, placing itself at the service of the local Church in communion of purpose and work, then it becomes an example and stimulus of Christian fraternity. The journey of fraternity is long and not easy; however, it has always been and still is one of the most visible signs of Christian newness.

### **2.2.3. Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*. On fraternity and social friendship.**

20. On October 3, 2020, Pope Francis gave us his third encyclical letter, "*Fratelli tutti*" on fraternity and social friendship. After reflecting on the text that had been forwarded by the Conference of Superiors General in advance, I was able to send you a circular letter presenting the Holy Father's document and highlighting some aspects that closely concern us as consecrated and as Rogationists called to live our fraternal communion of life with Christ and the poor.<sup>36</sup> The commitment to live our fraternity and friendship will not only make us a "prophetic" sign for society but will also contribute to the building of a more fraternal world and society.

21. I would like to point out a few passages in Pope Francis' encyclical that can help us reflect, deepen, and strengthen our fraternal life in community: "We have gorged ourselves on networking and lost the taste for fraternity. We are spectators of 'remarkable hostility, insults (...), and verbal violence destructive of others'." "We must not lose the ability to listen." "As silence and careful listening disappear (...), the basic structure of sage human communication is at risk." "Together we can seek the truth in dialogue, in relaxed conversation, or in passionate debate." "Jesus (...) did not ask us to decide who is close enough to be our neighbor, but rather that we ourselves become neighbors to all." "The spiritual stature of a person's life is measured by love." "What is tenderness? It is love that draws near and becomes real." "Approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground. All these things are summed up in the one word: dialogue." "Choose to cultivate kindness." "St. Paul describes kindness as a fruit of the Holy Spirit with the word *chrestotes* (Gal 5:22), which describes an attitude that is gentle, pleasant, and supportive, (...). This way of treating others can take different forms: an act of kindness, a concern not to offend by word or deed, a readiness to alleviate their burdens." "Kindness frees us from the cruelty that at times infects human relationships."<sup>37</sup>

22. Although the Holy Father's writing is addressed to every man and woman of goodwill, he cannot fail to remind us Christians and consecrated persons that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, children of God who created us in his image and likeness, and therefore such sonship from him which is love and Trinitarian Communion is distorted if this identity is lost.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. RAMPAZZO B., *Circular Letter* Prot. 210/20, Rome, October 4, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> FT 33, 44, 48, 49, 50, 80, 92, 194, 198, 222, 223, 224.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 85 ff.

## Chapter Three

### The Identity of the Rogationist Religious Community

#### 3.1. How Father Hannibal envisioned our communities

23. In the life and writings of Father Hannibal, we find precise indications about the virtues to be placed at the basis of fraternal life in our communities. Let us take some ideas from the text that we can consider as the Spiritual Rule of our Congregation, namely, the *Declarations and Promises* of 1910.

The title of the third declaration is “Practicing religious virtues and interior life: humility, love for God and Neighbor, with corresponding works for the children, the poor and the sick.”

In the text, we discover an extraordinary synthesis of the interior life of our holy Founder, flowing from his mind and heart inflamed for God and the Neighbor. To achieve this two-fold charity, he explains that we must become aware of our nothingness. He makes us declare:

“To correspond with such divine Mercy, always with the help of God’s grace and that goodwill which depends on me, I am determined to dedicate myself completely to the exercise of religious virtues, especially those that constitute the interior life, which are:

“1 - *Humility of heart*, so I will always keep in mind that I am a nothing and the last among all the members of the Congregation.

“2 – *The continuous exercise of the Divine Love*, having in mind no other goal as the reason of my every action and of my whole existence, other than Jesus alone (...).

“4 - Fourthly, as an essential exercise of the interior life, I shall strive to *love my neighbor* and to form a heart that is tender, compassionate, and affectionate toward all, especially toward those who contradict or persecute me, for the sake of Jesus Christ, my Supreme Good. I will love the children with pure and tender love, and I will procure the salvation of as many as I can, and I will ardently desire the salvation of all the children of the world.

“I will love and respect the poor of Jesus Christ with a spirit of Faith and Charity, considering them as suffering members of the Mystical Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ and always bearing in mind how much Our Lord Jesus Christ exalted the poor, declaring that he will consider as done to himself what is done to them.”<sup>39</sup>

24. Father Hannibal does not limit himself to affirming that for him Jesus is the object and the purpose of his whole existence, but he describes - in omitted lines - how in fact all his thoughts, affections, and actions are for Jesus. He can, without any doubt, make his own the confession of the apostle Paul: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). Moreover, in Father Hannibal’s love, Jesus and his brothers are fused together, especially the children, the poor, the suffering, and the dying. The experience he had, after helping a poor man, when he really saw and kissed Jesus in him, can be considered the paradigm of his life.

This experience confirms to us that we can live together as brothers if in our hearts we have this true humility and mutual acceptance. With a shared commitment, we can direct our apostolate towards the little ones and the poor if we love them in the Lord.

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<sup>39</sup> *Dichiarazioni e Promesse (per i Religiosi Rogazionisti)*, San Pier Niceto 15 agosto 1910, 2<sup>a</sup>, in *Scritti*, V, *Regolamenti (1883-1913)*, 2009, pag. 580-581.

These indications reported in the *Declarations and Promises* find a further clarification and illustration in the first *Constitutions* of the Congregation, approved by the Bishop of Messina on August 6, 1926.<sup>40</sup>

25. “The Congregation is made up of priests with their respective Clerics and Coadjutor Brothers, all of whom are united by the bond of Charity and the same goal, form one heart and one soul, and all live under the same discipline” (Art. 8).

The reference to the Acts of the Apostles is evident with recalling the unity of minds and hearts. In the articles that follow, there is an exhortation to live “with great love”, as true “spiritual brothers”, collaborating with “gentleness and charity” (art. 10-11).

The *Constitutions* dedicates a chapter to “fraternal charity”, which is introduced with the invitation to listen to the exhortation of Jesus: “Love one another as I have loved you! By this sign, you will be known to belong to me: if you love one another” (Jn 13: 34-35) (art. 77).<sup>41</sup>

It is then specified that the precept of charity is placed at the basis of our fraternal life, which calls us to live united in perfect brotherhood since the bond of the most precious Blood of Jesus Christ makes us a spiritual family.

We are invited to live fraternity with a true sentiment of the heart, with expressions of affection and closeness on various occasions, to be in solidarity and offer mutual support, even in the spiritual sphere.

Since our fraternal love comes from the Lord, it will welcome everyone and give itself to everyone; it will know how to forgive and forget offenses, as Our Father forgives us; it will make us operators of dialogue and peace.<sup>42</sup>

### **3.2. Rogationist Communion and Community**

26. In our Congregation this reflection on fraternal life in community was addressed by the VII General Chapter (1986), which handed to us the document *Rogationist Communion and Community*.

The document states that it was a choice made by the Congregation and a providential Eucharistic choice because “as Rogationists, we are given birth by the Eucharist, the sacrament which reveals the community and anticipates and prepares the perfect communion.”<sup>43</sup>

Making a reading of the situation, the document did not hesitate to point out the tensions that are sometimes present in communities and emerge from certain “attitudes: difficulties in accepting each other in the spirit of faith, evaluation and consideration of persons based on the criteria of efficiency in the office and work done; authority without authoritativeness; the pre-eminence of the administrative-managerial commitment of the superior to the detriment of that of spiritual animation; the mutual and ambiguous independence; little attention and enhancement of personal talents. All these are the causes and reasons for resentment and isolation within the community.”<sup>44</sup>

27. In the following passages, it is observed that the thermometer of the quality and intensity of communion can be verified in prayer and in the Eucharistic celebration. A look at

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. DI FRANCIA A., *Scritti, Regolamenti*, vol. VI, p. 724 ff.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ibid. p. 739.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Ibid. art. 78-82.

<sup>43</sup> RCC 5.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 17.

the situation concludes with the presentation of shadows and lights: “Communion in our communities is alive and present, but it is certainly mortified and undermined by individualism, hypocrisy, introversion, suspicion, division, careerism, activism, formalism, cultural leveling, and spiritual fatigue. Our communities are not just that, of course. There is no lack of edifying aspects such as fraternity, freedom of spirit, simplicity, solidarity, friendship, and dialogue.”<sup>45</sup>

Thirty-five years have passed since that document and there have been great changes in the socio-cultural context and in consecrated life itself. Once again, if we were to pause for analysis, we would find elements that favor fraternal life in community, as well as others that make it more difficult.

28. Our document affirms that the Rogate is placed at the center of the communion between God and the Rogationists, because it is the revealing word of the Divine Communion and reminds us that July 1, 1886, is the day of the Rogationist communion.

After this premise, the reflection is directly pointed out towards the community that will have to be a listening community, a community of grace that is zealous, faithful, and merciful.

Since such a community does not come to being by magic, the need for formation in the life of communion is felt right from the stage of vocation promotion. In this area, the indications recommended to formators are interesting:

“They will foster, on the one hand, a careful individual accompaniment and a conscious and responsible self-formation by facilitating creativity and spontaneity. On the other hand, they will be educated to live and feel like living and vital parts of a “single body”: Christ, the Church, the Congregation. In this body, only what is good, true, and just enables the whole community to grow in a well-composed manner.”<sup>46</sup>

The pages that follow make it clear that the journey of fraternal communion proceeds gradually, with paths suitable for the successive stages, as a fundamental element of ongoing formation.

The goal of this journey is the Rogationist community as a sign of communion:

“Enlightened by the Word of God, strengthened by the encounter with the Lord in the Liturgy, nourished daily by the ‘Bread of life’, the community achieves that fraternal union which is a sign and anticipation in time of the future reality, which we can always envision but we never fully possessed during the journey.”<sup>47</sup>

29. In the concluding section, the document summarizes and deepens the essential elements to be taken care of to promote fraternal communion. It dwells first on the Eucharist, the source of communion with God and with the brothers, and admonishes: “The Rogationist community, in the light of the Eucharistic celebration of July 1<sup>st</sup>, is called to discover and live its Eucharistic identity by interpreting and structuring its life on the basis of the Eucharist.”<sup>48</sup>

The elements of communion are then indicated: prayer as the soul of communion, Rogationist prayer, authority and service, obedience and dialogue, regular observance, love for the Institute, work, sharing of goods, salvific suffering, hospitality, and the remembrance of the deceased confreres.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 67.

Finally, the document focuses on the areas of the local community and indicates useful suggestions on some important moments and organisms in the life of communion, which can make the community a sign and instrument of communion.

### 3.3. Fraternal communion in our Rule of Life

30. Our *Constitutions* has taken special care of this aspect of fraternal life in community, in its charismatic dimension, and offer us a precious means of revision of life.

We are exhorted to recognize and love the Congregation as our spiritual family. In it, we live together as brothers, equals, in the same spirit, in ideals, in the apostolate and, above all, in the holiness of life.<sup>49</sup> Our fraternal love, to be authentic, must be born from a heart free from exclusive ties and open to authentic communion with God and with our brothers.<sup>50</sup> In this authentic spiritual fraternity, which becomes friendship, gift, and mutual service, we bear witness to the choice of chastity for the sake of the Kingdom.<sup>51</sup>

After the above indications, the *Constitutions*, in the second part, *The Rogationist consecrated life*, devote chapter VIII to “fraternal life in community”, which is a gift of the Spirit<sup>52</sup> who summons us to live the same charism, under the same rule, for the same mission. They remind us, then, that the new commandment of Jesus, “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12), according to the teaching of our Founder, while it “forms the badge of true Christians, is a primary precept for this Institute, like that of loving God above all things, with all one’s heart, with all one’s soul, with all one’s strength.”<sup>53</sup>

31. The community, a gift of the Spirit, is founded on the spirituality of communion and is built around the *loving center*<sup>54</sup> of the Eucharist. In this school, despite our many differences, we learn dialogue and fraternal coexistence, committing ourselves to cultivate the virtues that are the basis of every social coexistence, such as “the respect of truth, without which peace and common good are impossible; sincerity in personal relationships; justice applied with mercy; respect for the opinions of others; and the goodness that is expressed in concrete concern for all the confreres.”<sup>55</sup>

Our supernatural bond and shared charismatic mission lead us to give importance to the designated moments of community life which concretely strengthen fraternal life.<sup>56</sup> We grow together as a community and individuals if we are able to listen to each other “more fruitfully and humbly, generating respect, understanding, and creativity.”<sup>57</sup> In this way, the joy of being together can arise from the effort of dialogue, which becomes an authentic witness to the Gospel that fascinates and involves.<sup>58</sup>

Father Hannibal loved Jesus and the Poor with a single love. If our fraternity grows around the Eucharist, at the same time it must distinguish itself because it is lived *with* and *for*

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Const. art. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Ibid. art. 33.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Ibid. art. 36.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. FLC 8.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. art. 50. DI FRANCIA A. M., *Declarations and Promises*, 9th, in *Scritti*, V, p. 591.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. DI FRANCIA A. M., *Regolamenti per le Figlie del Divino Zelo*, in *Scritti*, VI, p. 396.

<sup>55</sup> Const. art. 51.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Ibid. art. 52.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. art. 53.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Ibid. art. 54.

the poor.<sup>59</sup> For the same reason and even more, the community is close to the elderly and sick confreres.<sup>60</sup>

32. Each of us is called to feel responsible for and to promote the quality of community life, which is “manifested first of all in a simple and sober lifestyle and finds its best expression in our daily prayer and in our respect and acceptance of each confrere. Therefore, we open ourselves to mutual understanding and forgiveness and to fraternal correction, by accepting with charity any brother in difficulty. We share the moments of relaxation.”<sup>61</sup>

Sometimes we feel the discomfort of not perceiving a community around us that helps us to grow humanly and spiritually. In this case, we should ask ourselves what commitment we have to foster the growth of our community.

The *Constitutions*, in the concluding part of this important chapter, focuses on two particularly precious components in sustaining our fraternal life in community. We cite them in their entirety so as not to miss any of the wise indications they entrust to us.

“Art. 56 - The guidance of the Superior - The role of the Superior is fundamental for giving meaning and quality to the life of the Community. He is entrusted with the demanding task of a constant presence, capable of animating, proposing, helping, promoting dialogue, and making well-considered decisions. Guided by the Superior, the Community is united in fraternity and efficient in apostolic and ministerial service.”<sup>62</sup>

33. Regarding authority and service, the 1986 Chapter document *Rogationist Communion and Community* expresses it as follows: “The authority of whoever presides over the community in charity is a sign of Christ’s authority, which is expressed in terms of service, even to the point of the total gift of one’s life (Jn 10: 11-12). The role of a superior in the community should be exercised in the same way. It takes concrete form in guiding the confreres to holiness by word and by the example of life; in ensuring that no one is lost (Jn 17: 12) or left behind in the path of growth; in helping, encouraging, promoting, loving, and esteeming the brothers entrusted to him.”<sup>63</sup>

“Art. 57 - Community meetings and organisms of participation - In fraternal life, each member is called to co-responsibility and participation in the mission, in the exercise of dialogue and discernment. Community meetings and the various organisms of participation are places and moments of growth in the spirituality of communion and in the search for the will of God. For this reason, we take part in them responsibly with a spirit of collaboration and obedience, offering the Superior the best conditions for making the necessary decisions for the good of fraternal life and of the mission.”<sup>64</sup>

The same document provides us with a suggestion to render the Community encounters truly valuable, speaking of the Family Council:

“The Family Council is the organism that makes all brothers participants and responsible for the life of the community. It must be characterized by truth, sincerity, mutual respect, and charity. Here the Rogationists show their ability to dialogue in attention and respect

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. Ibid. art. 55.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Ibid. art. 59.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. art. 58.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. FaT 20; FLC 50.

<sup>63</sup> RCC 71.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. FLC 50.

for the opinion of others. The Family Council offers a very significant possibility to make the community grow in communion through the sharing of responsibility and decisions.”<sup>65</sup>

### 3.4. Missionary openness and decentralization in the Congregation

34. In the 1950s, the Congregation began its missionary opening outside Italy, first in the Americas and then, in the 1970s, in the Philippines and Africa, as well as in India and Europe and, recently, also in Australia. From 155 religious on December 31, 1950, with the Lord’s blessing, we have grown to 591 confreres by December 31, 2020.

It has been a journey of growth for the Congregation that has taken place in a socio-cultural context of great changes, with some positive as well as problematic outcomes.

35. The final document of the XII General Chapter, “*Seeing the Crowds, He felt Compassion for them and said: Rogate*” - *Our charismatic identity in today's challenges*, briefly describes today’s problems and challenges of Rogationist consecrated life.

“As a religious institute, we face multiple problems, such as how to balance the different dimensions of consecrated life; the exercise of authority and obedience; the formation of the new generations; the vocational crisis, particularly that of the religious Brother; aging; the insertion in new geographical contexts; the reception and integration of ethnic and cultural diversity; the expansion of parish apostolate; the dynamics of decentralization; the rethinking of structures and apostolic works; and the economic crisis.

“These issues can be briefly summarized in a three-fold challenge: how to render our presence an authentic witness to the Gospel, how to rediscover reasons for joy and celebration in fraternal life in community, and how to live our commitment of discipleship and mission as a proclamation of mercy and prophecy.”<sup>66</sup>

36. We note that in the various geographical areas and Circumscriptions there are various problems mentioned in the above-mentioned document. The administrative decentralization, with the establishment of the Provinces, Quasi-Provinces, and Delegations, on the one hand, gave the Circumscriptions their own autonomy to facilitate the management of local situations; on the other hand, it has placed them in a difficult position to deal with particular emergencies.

The *Constitutions*, updated both to reflect the development of the theology of religious life and to codify the new structuring of the Congregation that came about with decentralization, have felt the need to highlight that in the journey of the Congregation, both decentralization and unity and a sense of belonging must be safeguarded.

“The common mission we share calls us to participate with responsibility at various levels, in the choices of the entire Congregation. Therefore, those who exercise the service of authority foster this participation in the ways provided for in the regulations. The decentralization of the Congregation brings together the unity of the Institute and the proper autonomy of its parts, according to the principle of subsidiarity, through an adequate distribution of competencies and powers.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> RCC 85.

<sup>66</sup> STC 22.

<sup>67</sup> Const. art. 133.

37. This is a wise disposition that responds to an existential need of the Congregation, which is a living institution, both as a whole and in its parts. And therefore, as it happens in every living organism, the parts are interdependent among themselves and with the whole.

We must agree that the soul of the good common journey of the Congregation is the profound sense of belonging and fraternal life.

“Finding reasons for joy and celebration in fraternal life in community” is one of the three challenges that the General Chapter places before us. It might seem utopian if we think of all the difficulties that our communities face, but it is an invitation to hope, based on faith and also on our personal commitment.

### **3.5. In the name of synodality**

38. In the 2018 Synod of Bishops on the theme “Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment”, ample space was given to synodality. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit!*, addressed to young people and the entire People of God, Pope Francis dwells on synodality with considerations that refer directly to the world of youth ministry, but which retain identical value and relevance when attributed to the religious life.

“Youth ministry has to be synodal; it should involve a “journeying together” that values “the charisms that the Spirit bestows in accordance with the vocation and role of each of the Church’s members, through a process of co-responsibility... Motivated by this spirit, we can move towards a participatory and co-responsible Church, one capable of appreciating its own rich variety, gratefully accepting the contributions of the lay faithful, including young people and women, consecrated persons, as well as groups, associations, and movements. No one should be excluded or exclude themselves.”<sup>68</sup>

“In this way, by learning from one another, we can better reflect that wonderful multifaceted reality that Christ’s Church is meant to be. She will be able to attract young people, for her unity is not monolithic, but rather a network of varied gifts that the Spirit ceaselessly pours out upon her, renewing her and lifting her up from her poverty.”<sup>69</sup>

39. The words “journeying together” best express synodality and remind us that, when we fail to find support and encouragement in fraternal help, we risk not finding the strength to move forward.

The question of synodality is a matter for the General Government and the Governments of the Circumscriptions and the individual Communities, each with its own energies and weaknesses, resources, and shortcomings. What should not be lacking is, precisely, the sense of belonging, the feeling, neither more nor less, of being a true “family” when we speak of our Congregation or our Religious Family.

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<sup>68</sup> CV 206.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 207.

This means that each of us bears the burdens of the others, the problems but also the riches; we participate in the sufferings, but also share the joys; we encourage and support each other in overcoming moments of crisis, and together we broaden our outlook and our hearts to hope.

In order to pass from the affirmations of principle to the practical aspects, our synodality needs to express itself in the sharing of the analysis of situations, in the common identification of the goals to be achieved, the stages to be covered, and the projects to be carried out, that is, the planning of the whole journey, in which the individual programs converge.

The unity of minds and hearts must then be followed by the unity of forces. Pope Francis on many occasions exhorts us to guard against self-referentiality.<sup>70</sup> It can be a temptation both for individuals and for the various parts that make up a Congregation, who must identify themselves with the person of a holy Founder, a single charism and a single and shared mission. In our case, it is that of giving the charism of the Rogate to the Church and to the world. This is the direction toward which we are called to row together.

### **3.6. Our Religious Family**

40. The decentralization of the Congregation began several decades ago and took place through the constitution of some Circumscriptions as Provinces, once they were recognized as having the necessary conditions for adequate autonomy; others as Quasi Provinces and still others as Delegations. We can rightly speak of *works in progress* because the need for decentralization goes hand in hand with the growth of the Congregation.

This situation calls for a “director” who, through shared discernment, keeps in mind the overall progress of the Congregation; who is aware of the weaknesses and strengths of the individual parts; who can discern the most opportune choices to make regarding the consolidation of the Congregation as a whole and in its individual parts and, therefore, intervenes to promote the unity of the forces to put in place.

41. In order to move forward, it is necessary to give concrete form to the demands of synodality and to translate sharing into operational choices.

Let us make some general considerations. In some respects, the situations in the Circumscriptions are very different.

There is a diversity of paths because some have a centuries-old history behind them, others only a few decades. Then, there are even more recent presences, with good growth, that are in the position to detached themselves from the mother- Circumscription and set out on their own journey, which in any case, needs support and accompaniment. Among the Circumscriptions, there is a disparity of resources because in some there are many religious who have completed their initial formation and who are still on the way to completing it, both of whom are predominantly young; whereas in others, the religious are, on average, advanced in years and insufficient to lead the works.

The abundance of personnel is often contrasted with economic precariousness, which could also lead to limiting the number of new vocations, for fear of not being able to meet the economic commitment that needs to be made for their formation. On the other hand, in the Circumscriptions with a shortage of vocations, in general, there is no lack of economic resources although they have diminished considerably in recent times.

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. EG 8.

Circumscriptions that are in the phase of growth need to mature in experience, train their formators, promote the birth and the growth of socio-charitable works and prepare suitable religious to lead them, and meet the costs for the construction of the centers for the apostolate. On the other hand, the Circumscriptions that complain about the lack of religious personnel have the difficulty of managing large buildings because they are often underutilized.

In addressing these and other difficulties, possible solutions are sought locally and, on some occasions, even outside their own geographical area, especially in the field of promoting vocations.

It is natural and understandable that this should happen, but it should be equally important and necessary to broaden our view of the Congregation as a whole. It is true that one might fear the risk of being burdened with the difficulties of the other Circumscriptions but, at the same time, one should be aware that in this way one is also sharing resources.

42. Considering this state of affairs, everyone should be deeply convinced that we are a single institution, a living organism in which the various parts - persons, communities, and circumscriptions - receive and give (simultaneously) in a vital interchange.

Hence the importance of taking care, in the first formative stages, to inculcate the charism in the local reality and, at the same time, to broaden the outlook of the young people in formation to the entire Congregation. If the young people have grown up with the conviction that the entire Congregation is their home, they will naturally be interested in knowing what the path of the other Circumscriptions is like and they will cultivate a missionary readiness to go, with a sense of freedom, wherever fraternity calls, because wherever they are, they will feel at home, with their brothers.

If this is the situation and if one grows up with this sensitivity, one understands well that there is a need for a “director” who has a broad and, as far as possible, complete vision of the various realities. It is necessary that there be an active network among communities and the offices of the Governments of Circumscription, and therefore of the General Government, in which problems and difficulties, as well as availability and resources, are shared.

43. From this point of view, there is no doubt that at the various levels - of Confreres, of Communities and of Circumscriptions - there will be a simultaneous concern for the needs and progress of the individual, of his own Community, of the Circumscription and of the Congregation in general.

This is not a novelty, since such sharing and collaboration is called for in our regulations and has become operative since the decentralization of the Congregation. Recently, after the meetings of the Conferences of Superiors and Councils of Circumscriptions, this aspect was studied in-depth and the *Guidelines for the Exchange of Religious Personnel between Circumscriptions* were promulgated in the circular letter of October 24, 2020, Prot. n. 220/20. The decision to start the International Student Residence in Rome, which will start next September, is also part of this perspective.

In order to facilitate this process, we will probably need to adapt our regulations to this need for sharing, collaboration, and coordination by adding a few articles or by making some amendments to the Norms, but before that, it will be necessary to promote, everywhere in the Congregation, the growth of a sense of belonging.

A very ancient teaching on the value of community sharing comes to us from the Imitation of Christ: “He who seeks private benefits for himself loses those which are common to all.”<sup>71</sup>

### 3.7. Belonging to the Circumscription

44. We have just recalled that the *Constitutions* tells us that “the decentralization of the Congregation combines together the unity of the Institute and the rightful autonomy of its parts.”<sup>72</sup> It was a necessary choice to divide the Congregation into Circumscriptions since it was growing in geographical areas that were very distant and culturally distinct.

This was done “to better spread and carry out the charism and the mission in different places and cultures”, as the *Constitutions* remind us again, which renew the exhortation to walk together, affirming that “the unity and communion of the whole Congregation are supreme goods to be maintained and pursued with full commitment.”<sup>73</sup>

As we have noted, the regulation insists on recommending the safeguard of the unity of the Congregation along with the proper autonomy of the Circumscriptions because it recognizes that these two aspects are, by their nature, complementary. To facilitate the dialogue of these two aspects, the principle of subsidiarity comes into play, “according to shared roles and responsibilities. In this way, the network of relationships constitutes the vital fabric of the Congregation and constitutes the basis of true communion among confreres, making possible the recognition of the variety of forms in the expression of the common vocation and mission.”<sup>74</sup>

45. Then, subsidiarity as co-responsibility with respect to roles. Another aspect that characterizes subsidiarity is co-participation, as *Fraternal Life in Community* reminds us: “New governing structures emerged from revised Constitutions, requiring far greater participation on the part of men and women religious. This has led to a different way of approaching problems, through community dialogue, co-responsibility, and subsidiarity. All members became involved in the problems of the community. This greatly affected interpersonal relationships and, in turn, affected the way authority is perceived.”<sup>75</sup>

*New Wine in New Wineskins* indicates a new element useful for understanding when it defines “subsidiarity as an exercise of mutual trust and generous collaboration of all and with all.”<sup>76</sup>

The choice of an eventual erection or suppression of a House, which takes place “after consultation or proposal of the Superior of the Circumscription concerned”,<sup>77</sup> is placed in the line of subsidiarity. The reflection we are making leads us to believe that such a choice, unless for exceptional reasons, must find a place in the planning, in agreement with the General Government, which has the competence in guiding the journey of the Congregation, with which the journey of Circumscriptions must be harmonized. Therefore, in the normality of things, these choices must be confronted together from the beginning. It is understandable that the

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. A KEMPIS T., *The Imitation of Christ*, Book III, Chap. 13, 1.

<sup>72</sup> Const. art. 133.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. art. 168.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. art. 169.

<sup>75</sup> FLC 5.

<sup>76</sup> NW 31.

<sup>77</sup> Const. art. 154.

Governments of the Circumscriptions should make inquiries, but not take steps that are in any way binding.

46. Circumscriptions have their own Directory, an internal set of regulations that allows, with the discernment of the Chapter or Assembly and with due authorization, for the adaptation of some articles of the *Norms* to local realities.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps, it may be appropriate for this particular norm to also include the exhortation to live the sense of belonging to the Community and the Circumscription together with the sense of belonging to the Congregation.

We have just mentioned the *Guidelines for the Exchange of Religious Personnel between Circumscriptions*, which should be included in this unitary vision of the Congregation.

Our regulations rightly entrust the exchange of religious personnel to the discernment of the Superior General because it takes place in the context of particular situations that must be evaluated within the overall development of the Congregation. Undoubtedly, the main motivation for the exchange of personnel should be fraternal help between the Circumscriptions, which is based on the generosity and missionary availability of the persons.

This basic motivation can sometimes be associated with certain predicaments that a religious may experience, for particular reasons, in the context he finds himself or with the desire to express his Rogationist identity in a Circumscription in which he feels he can put to good use the personal gifts he has received from the Lord. In other words, one should keep in mind that anyone who enters the Congregation does so within a Circumscription but, at the same time, he belongs to the Congregation as a whole.

Let us return now to the importance of acquiring this openness from the very first stages of formation, in a clear missionary dimension.

47. On this theme of the link between Houses, Circumscriptions, and the Congregation, we have a particularly significant article in the *Constitutions* regarding solidarity in the sharing of material goods, which I would like to quote: “Collaboration among Houses and Circumscriptions - In its temporal administration, every Community feels the responsibility and constant interest for the development of the Congregation. Thus, the Community avoids all forms of luxury, excessive gain, and accumulation of goods.<sup>79</sup> It actively collaborates with the Circumscription and General Government, in the fraternal spirit of sharing of goods.”<sup>80</sup>

The equitable sharing of goods must be based, first of all, on the conviction that the goods we administer belong to the Congregation, to the Church and, therefore, to the Poor.

The regulations rightly provide that the Circumscriptions and Communities, as far as possible, enjoy economic autonomy, which allows them to deal with the conduct of the Circumscription or the House, as regards life and apostolate, with all that this entails.

We must administer the goods with trust in the divine Providence but also with wisdom, foresight, weighing the plan and carrying out its verification, taking care to save in order to be able to meet unforeseen contingencies and the needs of house maintenance.

48. The final part of art. 190 of the *Constitutions*, in relation to the reflection we are making on fraternal communion, is a clear invitation to move from declarations of principle and good intentions to concrete facts, making our own the words of the *Code of Canon Law*.

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* art. 180.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. CIC 634, 2.

<sup>80</sup> Const. art. 190.

We are invited, first of all, to avoid luxury, which goes against our choice to dedicate ourselves to the Poor and to live alongside with them.

We are exhorted to avoid excessive gain because this can easily correspond to a loss of a rightful gain on the part of other confreres. Another reason to guard against excessive gain may derive from the choice we profess of freedom from material goods and gratuity in our apostolic service.

We are also admonished to avoid the accumulation of goods, both because of our duty to help the poor and the duty share goods equitably with the other Communities of the Circumscription and with the confreres of the other Circumscriptions, as true brothers.

49. At the foundation of this choice of sharing, we must lay the criterion that all of us, in solidarity, want to promote the journey of the Congregation as a whole. We must be aware that the personal and economic resources are intended for the good not only of one's own community and/or Circumscription but at the same time also of the entire Congregation.

In this area too, there is a need for a "director" who has a broad vision of the journey that is being taken, of weaknesses and strengths, of needs and riches, in the broadest sense. This role belongs to the General Government, because of the trust and mandate it has received from the General Chapter, and it is necessary that the Superior General with his Council assume it responsibly, in subsidiarity and in synodality. The General Government, based on the regulations, should have the concrete possibility of becoming a point of reference and encounter for the resources and requests for help that come from Communities and Circumscriptions, carrying out an effective action of mediation and equitable distribution.

### **3.8. The living cell of the united community**

50. In the reflection that we are doing on fraternal life in community, we deliberately turn our gaze constantly to the journey of the Congregation, the family that welcomed us as adolescents, young or old, and has become our new home, at the service of the Lord, according to the charism of the Rogate, which we received to be given to the Church and to the world.

The Religious Community is a living cell of the Congregation, which lives on the life of its parts - the Circumscriptions and Communities.

There is a clear interdependence in the Congregation between the institutions that carry out the service of authority - at the central, circumscriptional and local levels - and the religious communities, which are animated and guided by them. The proverb says that every people have the rulers they deserve. A Congregation that has, in general, members who are responsible, consistent in the choice of consecration, and committed will very easily identify suitable people to be chosen to carry out the service of authority, and a virtuous circle will be established. History, however, can also bring us exceptions at all levels, political and social, ecclesial, or congregational.

51. We have already dwelt on the changes that are found in religious communities today, due to a set of elements dependent on changing socio-cultural situations and, probably, also on choices, more or less suitable.

Furthermore, even though today the new means of social communication cause the new phenomenon of globalization, understandable variables in the lifestyle of the local religious community persist in different geographical and cultural areas.

The XII General Chapter's concluding document *Seeing the Crowds, felt Compassion for them and said: Rogate" - Our charismatic identity in today's challenges*, in addressing the challenges of Rogationist consecrated life today, looks in particular to fraternal life in community.

The document starts with the word "joy" but the subject of reflection is the theme "communion", from which, when it is authentic, joy springs.

We want to reread these enlightening considerations of the General Chapter in the following citations:

### **3.9. The joy of fraternal life in community**

52. "Through fraternal life in community we express the joy and celebration of living together, which refers primarily to the interior and profound happiness of belonging to a common history, marked by the charism of the Rogate. We are therefore called to build communities that are schools of prayer, places of encounter and dialogue, where we live with trust, respect, mutual support, and attention. Rediscovering each day that we are 'brothers' in Christ is a decisive factor for the affirmation of our identity and sense of belonging to a Congregation that we consider as our 'family'."<sup>81</sup>

"Valuing this joyful aspect of community life certainly represents a factor of a credible witness and for attraction to those young people who are seeking to 'something beautiful for God' in their lives."<sup>82</sup>

"Some communities are increasingly experiencing the mismatch between the apostolic demands and the inadequate number of religious. Besides, at times, there is a risk that apostolic activity is lived in an individualistic manner and without reference to the community. In this context, the service of authority is called upon to intervene either to reduce the apostolic activities, if necessary, or to harmonize the initiatives of individual religious with the apostolic project of the community and of the Circumscription."<sup>83</sup>

"In carrying out the numerous apostolic activities, one often runs the risk of neglecting the spiritual dimension and the community life itself. Our presence among the people of God, especially in the midst of young people, must help us to seek and live a more intense life of union with God to give witness to the beauty of life in Christ and the joy of fraternal life in community."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> STC 28.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 30.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 31.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Community, towards the Fullness of Communion**

#### **4.1. Community to build**

53. Usually, documents use politically correct language with words that define ideal situations, hoping that they reflect real conditions. In concrete terms, we remind ourselves that we must “live together” and that this should give rise to “joy” and “celebration”. We immediately clarify that “happiness” is “interior and profound” and that it comes from our common choice and fidelity to the charism.

With this clarification, which prioritizes joy in our hearts, a joy that no one can take away, some doubt arises that our being together, for various reasons and situations, could at times seem more like a funeral than a party.

Hence, the invitation to “build” the community, committing ourselves all together. It could be observed that the community is built by Superiors who assign the religious, sometimes without carefully considering their ability to live and work together in the best way.

But the document, without ignoring the fact that we can find ourselves together with confreres of different ages, cultures, and formative stages, looks with confidence at the possibility of building a community that is as ideal as possible. It invites us to rediscover each day that we are “brothers” in Christ because this fundamental belongingness in charity constitutes the basis and foundation of our fraternity in the Congregation.

This is a very wise observation: to build the community, we must rediscover our identity as brothers day after day. Sometimes, we are quick to lay the blame for dysfunctions on the community that welcomes us, but we do not ask ourselves what we have contributed to the building up of the community.

The document emphasizes that once the sacred foundation of our living together has been assured, then the human elements that must take over. First, we must have and intuit the sense of “belonging to the Congregation perceived as a family.” This means rediscovering each day that we are truly brothers. We will not feel like strangers to those who live side by side with us.

54. We can build our fraternity if we try to trust the other. We must overcome mistrust and suspicion. Even when we have doubts, we must strive to always think well. If objectively we find in our brother hostile or improper behaviors or conducts we consider dangerous, we must have mercy, as our Father in Heaven is merciful, and take the necessary steps as indicated in the Gospel of Matthew (18:15-17).

We are exhorted to esteem our brothers. Each of us has gifts and weaknesses.

Chatter and gossip, which dwell on emphasizing the negative aspects, generate distrust and disdain. On the other hand, appreciation of the qualities of our brothers becomes a constructive element of living together.

Being together should lead us to be attentive to others, certainly not to point fingers, but rather to be ready, when we become aware of some problem or difficulty, to rush to help promptly and generously, moved by true charity.

## 4.2. Community: a place of encounter and dialogue

55. The article of the Chapter document which we are focusing on, while reaffirming that the gift of consecration and the human virtues of trust and esteem, attention, and support are at the foundation of our fraternal life in community, also highlights two aspects that define the religious community as a place of *encounter* and *dialogue*.

56. We must give a broad, non-reductive meaning to the expression *meeting place*. It is not to be understood as a place where one goes to meet, but rather an environment in which one lives together with others and meets each other (Italian= *ci s'incontra*), and sometimes clashes (Italian= *ci scontra*) with others, and resumes meeting each other (Italian= *incontrarsi*).

We find ourselves together in a context of life and work, with our own ideas and habits, with our own nature and culture, moods, aches and pains, enthusiasm or depression, health or illness, good humor or frustration, spiritual fervor or fatigue, doubts, and certainties, virtues, and defects. It is normal for difficulties to arise in living together and when communities are made up of a minimum number of people, the situation can become optimal, if there is a good understanding, or unlivable if it is difficult to stay together.

One variable regarding the community as a meeting place is its mutation, that is, the insertion or transfer of some confreres. These are circumstances that can make things better or worse.

57. These considerations lead us to conclude that we need to make the community also a place for *dialogue*.

In the post-Council era, the theme of “dialogue” has entered into the doctrine on religious life, as an important element in discerning God’s will, especially in the service of authority in relation to the assignment of houses or offices to religious.

Dialogue, in view of discernment, is important when we gather for *lectio divina*, to ask ourselves what the Word of God is telling us to improve our religious life and our apostolate.

*Listening* is part of dialogue because obviously there can be no dialogue if there is no real listening to the other, a listening free from prejudice, which prevents one from accepting the arguments that are formulated; it should be a listening full of empathy, which leads one to welcome the person first of all and helps to understand more easily the communication of his thoughts.

Dialogue must also be free. There must be respect for people and their ideas, but this does not mean that one should be afraid to present one’s own ideas, because it is precisely through confrontation and dialectic between the different points of view that the most appropriate solution can be reached.

58. Privileged places for meeting and dialogue are the House Council, which assists the local Superior in animating and governing the Community, and the Family Council. The latter “has as its purpose the planning and periodic verification of the community, apostolic and administrative activities of the House and its members. In the Family Council, the methods and the fruits of the activities are evaluated, and most of all one’s own lifestyle is compared with the Gospel which is the supreme rule of religious life.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Norms art. 278.

The smooth running of a community, especially when it manages various and complex works of apostolate, requires careful planning, which must flow into a *Community Life Project*, to be worked out together, implemented responsibly, and verified. The *Norms* remind us: “In every Community, we elaborate the *Community Life Project*, to organize the spiritual and fraternal life, to plan out the initiatives of ongoing formation and to harmonize our activities as well as our internal and external apostolic commitments. In fact, careful planning also fosters discipline.”<sup>86</sup>

For this fulfillment, we have a valuable help in the *Project of the Rogationist Permanent Formation – Stir into flame the gift of God that is in you*, which provides us with a practical guide to implement this important appointment in the life of the Community.<sup>87</sup>

The document of the XII General Chapter on the subject of planning the life of the Community adds other appropriate observations. It points out that some communities “are increasingly experiencing the mismatch between the apostolic demands and the inadequate number of religious.” Moreover, it adds that “there is a risk that apostolic activity is sometimes lived in an individualistic manner and without reference to the community.” Evidently, there is an imbalance, accentuated also by inappropriate personal choices. Hence the reminder: “In this context, the service of authority is called to intervene both to reduce apostolic activities, if necessary, and to harmonize the initiatives of individual religious with the apostolic project of the Community and of the Circumscription.”<sup>88</sup>

### 4.3. Community: house and school of prayer

59. The Community is a place of encounter and fraternal dialogue, but even before that, it is united as one heart and one soul because it is called to come together by the love of Christ, as the well-known hymn says, *convocavit nos in unum Christi amor*.

Therefore, the Community is built, first of all, as a house of prayer and therefore aspires to become a school of prayer.

Our Rule of Life leads us in this direction.

“We grow in fraternal communion by nourishing ourselves at the table of the Word and the Bread of Life, with the gaze of the hearts drawn to the mystery of the Trinity dwelling within us and whose light is also caught on the faces of the brothers around us.”<sup>89</sup> The Eucharist and personal and community prayer strengthen the mutual acceptance and the sharing of common life, mutual esteem, and affection, since a great means to sanctify us is to unite and live together in holy charity,<sup>90</sup> giving importance to presence in the Community while safeguarding the commitments of the apostolate.”<sup>91</sup>

Our life as Rogationist religious should be marked by times of prayer, personal and communal, lived not as obligations but rather as an expression of our identity as consecrated persons with the charism of the Rogate. Given the experience of the Covid 19 pandemic that has affected us, even in this area of prayer, we have probably suffered from restrictions in our community meetings, but at the same time more space for personal prayer has opened up for each of us.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. art. 55.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. SIF, p. 89 ff.

<sup>88</sup> STC 30.

<sup>89</sup> SAC 29.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. RA, p. 60.

<sup>91</sup> Norms art. 37.

60. Another passage of our *Norms*:

“Called to be men of prayer, we make our communities houses and schools of prayer<sup>92</sup> for good laborers. We express, on a personal and community level, our fidelity to the grace of the charism first all through a commitment of prayer lived according to the indications of the Rule. We commit ourselves to cultivate the spirit of prayer and prayer itself by drawing from the rich tradition of the Church and that of the Institute, in the conviction that a solid life of personal prayer is a necessary condition for the fulfillment of the Rogationist mission.”<sup>93</sup>

The *Constitutions* express the charismatic reason for this need for the Community to become a home and school of prayer:

“The very name “Rogationists” determines the first mission that belongs to each of us so as to respond to the cry of the harvest which lies before us: first of all, to pray: Rogate ergo!<sup>94</sup> The prayer for good laborers is at the heart of the mission. It pervades, inspires, and sanctifies the whole life. As Rogationists, we are called to be men of prayer and our communities houses and schools of prayer<sup>95</sup> for good laborers.”<sup>96</sup>

We are exhorted, with the words of *Vita Consecrata*,<sup>97</sup> to exert every effort so that in our communities there is a constant growth of the spirituality of communion, around the Eucharist, present in the chapel of each House,<sup>98</sup> which for us is the *loving center*<sup>99</sup> around which our fraternity and communion are built.<sup>100</sup>

#### 4.4. Witnessing to the spirituality of communion

61. The Community is a house and a school of prayer because it is Rogationist, consecrated to prayer for vocations, to be lived, spread, and witnessed to as a community of laborers in the Lord’s vineyard.

As we implore the gift of vocations, we strive to promote their birth in the pastoral care of vocations, which has its foundation in prayer and support in witnessing.

“As children of St. Hannibal, called to be *worshippers and implorers for the Kingdom*,<sup>101</sup> we acknowledge in the pastoral care of vocations the primacy of insistent and trusting prayer to the Lord of the harvest so that he may send out laborers into his harvest.”<sup>102</sup>

“The invitation of Jesus *come and see* (Jn 1: 39) is the main way of promoting vocations. It presents the fascination of the person of the Lord Jesus and the beauty of the total gift of oneself for the Kingdom. We all have the duty to propose with courage, by word and example, the ideal of following Christ. The testimony of our life joyfully given to God and to the others, the climate of fraternal love and community, the sharing and communication are the best attraction for all those whom God calls. For this reason, our communities intend to be true

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. NMI 33.

<sup>93</sup> Norms art. 83.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Message to the X General Chapter*, 4.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. NMI 33.

<sup>96</sup> Const. art. 66.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. VC 51.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. CIC 608.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. DI FRANCIA A. M., *Regolamenti per le Figlie del Divino Zelo*, in *Scritti*, VI, p. 396.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Cost. art. 51.

<sup>101</sup> PAUL VI, *Address to the Audience granted to the Capitular Fathers*, Castelgandolfo, September 14, 1968, in IV GENERAL CHAPTER (1968), *Declaration and Decrees*, p. 313.

<sup>102</sup> Const. art. 91.

workshops of faith, schools of prayer, places of discernment, reflection and encounter, communion and service.”<sup>103</sup>

Pope Francis invites all the communities of the world to “a testimony of fraternal communion that becomes attractive and luminous. May everyone admire how you take care of each other, how you mutually encourage each other, and how you accompany each other.”<sup>104</sup>

62. As we consider the need to renew our spiritual life in prayer and revive our spirituality of communion, we can find an answer to the restlessness we feel about the lack of vocations. We ask ourselves: Is our prayer to the Lord of the harvest to send the laborers for his harvest fervent and incessant? How was it for Father Hannibal?

Young people generally love to be together, to share difficulties and joys, to dream together, opening themselves to tomorrow. Do the young people who approach us in our apostolate discover that our being together is a peaceful coexistence, pastorally committed with the poor, joyful, capable of infecting?

The document of the XII General Chapter, after recommending that care be taken to ensure a balance between apostolic activities, the spiritual dimension, and community life itself, adds: “Our presence among the people of God, especially in the midst of young people, must help us to seek and live a more intense life of union with God, to bear witness to the beauty of life in Christ and to the joy of fraternal life in community.”<sup>105</sup>

And again, the same document reminds us that young people in search are projected towards “something beautiful” and need to discover models that live the same ideal and can show them the way: “Valuing this joyful aspect of community life certainly represents a factor for a credible witness and attraction towards those young people who are striving to do in their life ‘something beautiful for God’.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. art. 93.

<sup>104</sup> EG 99.

<sup>105</sup> STC 31.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 29.

## Chapter Five

### The Community: from Contemplation to the Poor

#### 5.1. Contemplative community

63. For some decades, there have arisen in the Congregation community experiences, that, with due authorization, have chosen to devote themselves primarily to contemplation. The General Government acknowledged that this is a novelty and, at the same time, believed that it could be considered as an expression of an aspect of the charism.

Father Hannibal was described as a “contemplative in action”; the Pious Work of Evangelical Rogation had its beginning on July 1, 1886, with the permanent presence of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus in the Avignone Quarter, and Paul VI characterized us as *worshippers and implorers for the Kingdom*.

The XII General Chapter in the Concluding Document, among the challenges of the Rogationist consecrated life, regarding compassion and prophecy, affirmed:

“Contemplation and continuous prayer are significant expressions of the richness of the charism and must be lived in harmonious balance with the other essential elements of the Rogate. Rogationist communities that intend to propose a stable experience of contemplation represent an opportunity to be welcomed and promoted as a new expression of the charism.”<sup>107</sup>

The General Government, in line with the Chapter, in its Programming, in Project 10, on the personal and community spiritual life, has proposed to “promote from the basic formation an initiation to the contemplative dimension of the charism and the pedagogy of prayer, and accompany, where possible, Rogationist communities that intend to propose a stable experience of contemplation as a new expression of the charism.”<sup>108</sup>

At the moment we are in the phase of defining a Statute that delineates the nature of these communities that intend to dedicate themselves primarily to contemplation, clarifying what the implications and peculiarities should be in reference to the general norms of the Congregation.

In this way, these initial experiences could become paradigmatic for the birth of new communities that wish to be inspired by them.

#### 5.2. The Community and the Rule of Life

64. During the Novitiate, the Master presented to us the Rule of Life, *Constitutions* and *Norms*, explaining that the Rule constituted the path of our future journey and that we should welcome it as a sign of Rogationist consecration because, in fact, it represented its concrete expression and implementation.

In the journey made in recent decades by consecrated life, the Church has felt the need to call our attention to a *renewed reference to the Rule*: “There is a pressing need today for every Institute to return to the Rule, since the Rule and Constitutions provide a map for the whole journey of discipleship, in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church.”<sup>109</sup>

Subsequently, the document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and

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<sup>107</sup> STC 34.

<sup>108</sup> FCM pp. 21-22.

<sup>109</sup> VC 37.

Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting Afresh from Christ*, emphasized the importance of seeing in the Rule of Life the mediation of the charismatic foundation of the Institute:

“It was the Holy Spirit who sparked the Word of God with new light for the founders and foundresses. Every charism and every Rule spring from it and seeks to be an expression of it. In continuity with founders and foundresses their disciples today are called to take up the Word of God and to cherish it in their hearts so that it may be a lamp for their feet and a light for their path. The Holy Spirit will then be able to lead them to the fullness of truth.”<sup>110</sup>

65. The XI General Chapter, taking up the work of preparation that lasted six years, revised our regulations and handed it over to the Congregation in the concluding document: “The Rogationist Rule of Life - expression of consecration, guarantee of charismatic identity, support of fraternal communion, project of the mission.”

As “support of fraternal communion”, the Rule appears to be the guarantor of common life and, in some respects, competes against the individual achievements of those who make up the community. However, Jesus himself made clear what the relationship between the rule and the person should be when he declared: “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath!” (Mk 2:27). The Rule must deal with man, with man who is sociable and in communion.

The Chapter Document observes: “Modern man is influenced by a culture that promotes and defends subjectivism in defense of the dignity of the human person, of his development and autonomy, but often favors individualism.<sup>111</sup> The Rule of Life, on the contrary, calls us to privilege relationships with others, to live in communion, and to bear witness to the quality of fraternal life.”<sup>112</sup>

It is necessary to safeguard the two requirements: the good and the orderly direction of community life; the good and the fulfillment and growth of the individual persons who make it up. The *Code of Canon Law* reminds us of all this: “The life of brothers or sisters proper to each institute, by which all members are united together as a special family in Christ, is to be defined in such a way that it becomes a mutual support for all in fulfilling the vocation of each. Moreover, by their communion as brothers or sisters rooted and founded in charity, members are to be an example of universal reconciliation in Christ.”<sup>113</sup>

The ideal is to identify, in different situations, solutions that manage to reconcile personal aspirations and gifts with fraternal communion in the community project, something that is not easy, due to a series of difficulties that the Chapter document lists.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> SAC 24.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. FaT 2.

<sup>112</sup> RRL 52.

<sup>113</sup> CIC 602.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. RRL 55: However, there are some problematic situations, both at the personal and community level, for which we must all feel responsible: conflicts, reciprocal closure, distancing, inability to give forgiveness to each other. At times, these situations are due to strictly personal reasons for discomfort, to a lack of discipline and religious fervor, or perhaps due to structural reasons, such as the small number of members of the community, an overload of apostolic commitments, personal visions of life and the apostolate, and difference in age and culture. There is no shortage of confreres who participate little in the community life and do not feel involved in the common project, who organize their ministry autonomously, who take on commitments that have little to do with the duties assigned to them, who consider community life as almost an obstacle to the exercise of their apostolate.

66. It would be unlikely to think of realizing fraternal life in community without sharing the regulations. The reappropriation of the Rule of Life must take place not only on a personal level, that is, on the part of each one of us, but also on the level of the Institute in its various dimensions: central, circumscription and community, with a unified commitment. As the XI General Chapter reminded us, "there is now a need for a personal and community journey of conversion to the value of the Rule, so that it may not only be an object of formal observance but a stimulus for a journey of holiness, an *expression of consecration and charismatic identity, a support for fraternal life, a project for mission.*"<sup>115</sup>

67. The vocational crisis experienced by so many Congregations of men and women, it has been said, is a crisis of the joy of being disciples and missionaries of Jesus in fraternal life in community. Timothy Radcliffe, a Dominican, says in this regard: "It is joy that gives authority to our preaching. No one will believe a sad preacher, even if he brings good news. It is a joy that opens our eyes wide to a world of gifts; it is the joy that points out to the Kingdom... we must care for the joy of our brothers and sisters... that joy is made more splendid by the vulnerability to the suffering of this world. Without that suffering that digs the heart to the core, joy will remain on the surface. But the suffering of this new world is global and therefore requires a global response. We are like all neighbors now. We need to be freed from our too narrow identities: ethnic, national, and even those of our beloved Province."<sup>116</sup>

### **5.3. The service of authority in fraternal community**

68. In recent decades there has been a significant evolution of fraternal life in the communities. More space has been given to the active participation of all, there has been a shift from a life in common too centered on observance to one that is more attentive to the needs of individuals and to the human dimension. Communities have begun to be less formalistic and authoritarian, more fraternal and welcoming. There has been a certain reevaluation of the role of authority which, in some cases, has led to experiences of fragmentation of community life. Hence the path towards a progressive rediscovery of the need for and role of personal authority, in continuity with the entire tradition of religious life.

69. The Document *Fraternal Life in Community* emphasizes:

"While the widespread democratic climate has fostered the growth of co-responsibility and of participation of all in the decision-making process even within the religious community, nevertheless, it cannot be forgotten that fraternity is not only a fruit of human effort but is also and above all a gift of God. It is a gift that comes from obedience to the Word of God and, in religious life, to the authority who reminds us of that Word and relates it to individual situations, according to the spirit of the institute."<sup>117</sup>

The service of authority, with reference to a community that is inserted in a particular cultural context and called to carry out a certain type of apostolate, therefore, while preserving the essential characteristics proper to the role, must be carried out in ways appropriate to different situations.

In this service, *Fraternal Life in Community* suggests that the following aspects should be privileged: a) A spiritual authority, b) An authority that works for unity, c) An authority that

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<sup>115</sup> RRL 11.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. RADCLIFFE T., *Essere cristiani nel XX secolo. Una spiritualità per il nostro tempo*, Queriniana, Brescia, 2011, p. 289.

<sup>117</sup> FLC 48.

knows how to make the final decision and ensures its execution through community discernment,<sup>118</sup> on which we have already dwelt, speaking of the House and Family Councils.

Probably the key to solving the problems that may arise in the service of authority, in the context of the community or of individual religious, is to be found in the discernment, which must aim not so much at the validity of the motivations that are confronted, but rather at discerning the Lord's Will.

“The person called to exercise authority must know that he will be able to do so only if he first undertakes that pilgrimage which leads to an intense and upright search for the will of God (...) assiduously, with the help of prayer, reflection, and advice of others.”<sup>119</sup>

70. Along with the important topic of discernment, with regard to the role of the service of authority, equal attention must be given to the proper balance between the action of governance, commitment to regular observance, correction of abuses, paternity, understanding, and a certain tolerance in particular circumstances.

The role of authority, at various levels, must be accompanied by authoritativeness, which is an expression of the coherence and exemplary nature of one's life, as far as possible, and in any case, manifesting the positive will to live in line with the profession of religious consecration. On the one hand, it may be inappropriate to intervene from time to time with reference to the regulations, because in some cases it may be preferable to delay action, waiting for the right moment, but at the same time, for the excuse that the religious of the community are adults and mature, certain questionable habits cannot be tolerated, which weaken the role of guardian of the charism of the Congregation and of the orderly coexistence of the community.

To indicate the office of the Superior, we use to speak of the “service of authority”, with an expression that is significant if in the community it expresses the role “as one who serves” and if it operates by placing the greater good of the community at the center, avoiding self-referentiality which becomes a cause of division and discord.

“Self-referential authority defies the evangelical logic of responsibility among brothers and sisters, weakening in them the certainties of faith that should guide them. This opens a vicious circle that compromises the vision of faith, an unequivocal presupposition to the recognition of the role of superiors. This recognition is not limited to acknowledging the personality of the one in charge but goes far beyond that. It is a matter of trusting and relying on one another in truth.”<sup>120</sup>

71. The *Constitutions* emphasize the importance of the task of the Superior for the good progress of the Community: “The role of the Superior is essential for giving meaning and quality to the life of the community. To him is entrusted the demanding task of a constant presence, capable of animating, proposing, helping, promoting dialogue, and making balanced decisions. Led by the Superior, the Community is united in fraternity and efficient in the apostolic and ministerial service.”<sup>121</sup>

The *Norms* reminds us that the qualities that should characterize the Superior are: paternity, the spirit of service, dialogue, the ability to promote the co-responsibility of religious in the roles within their competence: “The Superior is primarily responsible for fraternal life, apostolic

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<sup>118</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 50 ff.

<sup>119</sup> *FaT* 12.

<sup>120</sup> *NW* 45.

<sup>121</sup> *Const.* art. 56.

activities and economic administration of the House. He animates and directs the Community with the collaboration of the House Council and in line with the Family Council. He carries out his mandate with paternity and spirit of service, seeking dialogue with the Community and with the individual Religious. He avails of the collaboration with those responsible of the various sectors of formation and apostolate.”<sup>122</sup>

72. This role of being primarily responsible in the Community for fraternal life and apostolic activities challenges him, in particular, when the number of religious is unequal to the works that the Community manages, or in the case of religious who are dedicated to personal activities to the detriment of those proper of the House. The XII General Chapter reminds us: “In this context, the service of authority is called upon to intervene either to reduce the apostolic activities, if necessary, or to harmonize the initiatives of individual religious with the apostolic project of the community and of the Circumscription.”<sup>123</sup>

The service of authority, therefore, has a particularly important role in the growth and progress of a community in fraternity. It is not easy to have people who have the baggage of the virtues, spiritual and human, which are required for this office, especially when it comes to large communities or in the first formation. Hence the importance of adequate preparation to assume this role.

“It is becoming increasingly important to include serious initiation into government in continuing education. This so fundamental task in the life of the community is sometimes entrusted with improvisation and implemented in an improper and incomplete way.”<sup>124</sup>

The General Government, for this awareness, has proposed again in the planning to make every effort to guarantee superiors the necessary preparation to carry out their office.<sup>125</sup>

#### **5.4. The community that goes forth**

73. The General Chapter, in its reflection on our charismatic identity in today's challenges, reminded us that Rogate calls us to “go out to others”, in line with the invitation, dear to Pope Francis, to be a Church that “goes forth”. The Rogate, in fact, implores for the good laborers, who, moved by compassion, go out to help the tired and exhausted crowds.

“The spiritual dynamism of the prayer of the Rogate takes on a programmatic and missionary meaning that is more accentuated in the *Lukan* version (Lk 10:1-3). The evangelist Luke places the giving of the Rogate in the context of the “great journey” of Jesus, presenting the mission of the disciples as a first “harvest” that anticipates the fulfillment of the Messianic Kingdom. From the compassion for the crowds (Mt 9:35-38) to the mission to the crowds (pray/go), the task entrusted is accomplished in the prayer for good laborers united to the dynamism of the proclamation of the Gospel, that is, to “go forth toward others”, to reach everyone, especially the poor and suffering.”<sup>126</sup>

74. In his first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* - on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world, Pope Francis recalls that God, in the history of salvation, called Abraham and brought him out of his land, to constitute a people, and equally he did with Moses.

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<sup>122</sup> Norms art. 250.

<sup>123</sup> STC 30.

<sup>124</sup> NW 16.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. FCM, Project n. 24, p. 27.

<sup>126</sup> STC 60.

God calls and then sends. Jesus does likewise with his disciples. He sends them out on mission and exhorts them to “get out of their own comfort and have the courage to reach all the peripheries that need the light of the Gospel.”<sup>127</sup>

Pope Francis explains that making ourselves “go forth” means taking the initiative, as God does with us, who has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), and therefore “boldly go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.”<sup>128</sup>

We are invited to go to the excluded with enthusiasm but, above all, with acceptance, understanding, and mercy. The Pope cites the testimony of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine in support of what he said:

“Saint Thomas Aquinas pointed out that the precepts which Christ and the apostles gave to the people of God ‘are very few’.<sup>129</sup> Citing Saint Augustine, he noted that the precepts subsequently enjoined by the Church should be insisted upon with moderation “so as not to burden the lives of the faithful” and make our religion a form of servitude, whereas ‘God’s mercy has willed that we should be free’.”<sup>130</sup> This warning, issued many centuries ago, is most timely today. It ought to be one of the criteria to be taken into account in considering a reform of the Church and her preaching which would enable it to reach everyone.”<sup>131</sup>

75. These words of the Pope constitute a strong admonition to go towards our lost brothers and sisters, not as inquisitors, but rather with merciful love, making oneself weak with the weak and things to all.<sup>132</sup> Reminding us of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Pope invites us not to be discouraged when we are called to help people whose behavior does not encourage us to do so: “The imputability and responsibility of an action can be diminished or canceled by the ignorance, inadvertence, violence, fear, habits, excessive affects, and other psychic or social factors.”<sup>133</sup>

To the project of the Church that “goes forth”, the Pope adds that of the Church that is “open” and, with another expression, of “a mother with an open heart.” And yet he warns: “Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world.”<sup>134</sup>

This invitation of Pope Francis to go out, to go towards the distant and the excluded, without fear, and to welcome them with open arms, risks creating perplexity. Therefore, the Pope feels the need to clarify that this “does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world.”

We recognize that we are a bit puzzled when we hear the encouragement to “go forth”, even if we have to take some risks, in order not to lock ourselves in false protection. Let’s listen:

“Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ. Here I repeat for the entire Church what I have often said to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting, and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. EG 20.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Ibid. 24.

<sup>129</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 107, a. 4.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> EG 43.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. 1Cor 9, 22.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. EG 44-45; CCC 1735.

<sup>134</sup> EG 46.

strength, light, and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures that give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits that make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: “Give them something to eat (Mk 6:37).”<sup>135</sup>

76. How can we fail to grasp this pressing invitation from the Pope to rethink our apostolate, broadening its horizons? But since our mission emanates from our identity, I believe that we must ask ourselves to what extent our heart beats in unison with the Heart of Jesus, who draws to himself all the “weary and oppressed” (Mt 11:28) to restore them?

In more recent times, this theme has also been addressed by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, with the document *New Wine in New Wineskins. The consecrated life and its ongoing challenges since Vatican II – Guidelines*. The title itself is eloquent, reminding us that we are faced with challenges that are still open, although they have been around for some time.

The document notes that many religious Congregations, with a courageous experience of leaving their own geographical and cultural borders, have opened foundations in young Churches and have found themselves with international communities. This has brought about great changes within Religious Families and has challenged traditional formative frameworks. This has been a great wealth, which nevertheless led to various tensions and, at times, even to breaking point.<sup>136</sup>

It is recognized that the challenge remains open:

“The great commitment to renewal and creativity seems to have recently been followed by a stagnation with no way out just as we are called to generously embrace new exodus. In many cases, the fear of the future weakens and devitalizes that prophetic ministry - on which Pope Francis insists<sup>137</sup> - which consecrated life is called to exercise in the Church for the good of all humanity.”<sup>138</sup>

77. It is understandable that in a situation in which the socio-cultural reality experiences rapid changes, and our communities are naturally involved, we must rethink a new style of religious life, which does not distort its identity but adapts its structures and methods. Pope Francis' reminder: “Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way.’ I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the objectives, structures, style, and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.”<sup>139</sup>

Along this line, *New Wine in New Wineskins* encourages us to embark on new paths, suitable for our time, bearing in mind that we are called to the fidelity of the Spirit, to the founding charism, facing the inevitable tensions and sufferings.

“It is therefore a matter of discovering new *paths* towards authenticity of the evangelical and charismatic witness of consecrated life. It is a matter of discerning and then starting the necessary processes of purification and healing from the *leaven of malice and wickedness* (cf.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid. 49.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. NW 7.

<sup>137</sup>Cf. FRANCIS, *Apostolic Letter to all consecrated on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life* Rome, November 21, 2014.

<sup>138</sup> NW 8.

<sup>139</sup> EG 33.

1 Cor 5: 8). In this exciting and demanding process, inevitable tensions and sufferings can be signs of a new development. In fact, we are already at the threshold of new syntheses that will arise with inward and inexpressible groans (cf. Rom 8: 23.26) and with patient exercise of creative fidelity.”<sup>140</sup>

The considerations we made, speaking of the community that goes forth, have been of a general nature, and therefore to be taken into consideration first of all by the General Government and the Governments of the Circumscription. There is no doubt about it. Just as it is clear that particularly innovative choices require people or communities charged with a strong inner motivation, who meet the harmony and encouragement of those who carry out the service of authority.

It is important that, in listening to the enlightened leadership of Pope Francis, of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and, even before those, of the Second Vatican Council, a new culture of religious life is developed, one that revives the charismatic zeal of the Founder and brings about a renewal and updating that responds to today’s evangelical challenges.

## **5.5. Community open to the poor and inserted community**

78. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, issued by John Paul II on March 25, 1996, which brought together in an extraordinary synthesis the Church’s teaching on consecrated life since the Second Vatican Council. It retains all its validity, including the evangelical poverty in consecrated life.

The Apostolic Exhortation reminds us, first of all, that the religious vow of poverty and the apostolate that the Congregation carries out in favor of the poor has its main foundation in the life of Jesus. The Pope tells us that it is normal for Institutes to have different charisms since their consecration calls them to “clothe themselves” (Rom 13:14) in Jesus Christ, to try to live an aspect of his mission, and yet, while retaining their own charismatic identity, each of them, in its own way, is dedicated to evangelization and to helping the poor. We want to reread what the Holy Father says about this.

“Preference for the poor and the promotion of justice. At the beginning of his ministry, in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus announces that the Spirit has consecrated him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives, to give sight back to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to declare a year of favor from the Lord (cf. Lk 4:16-19).

“Taking up the Lord’s mission as her own, the Church proclaims the Gospel to every man and woman, committing herself to their integral salvation. But with special attention, in a true ‘preferential option’, she turns to those who are in situations of greater weakness, and therefore in greater need. “The poor”, in varied states of affliction, are the oppressed, those on the margin of society, the elderly, the sick, the young, any and all who are considered and treated as ‘the least’.

“The option for the poor is inherent in the very structure of love lived in Christ. All of Christ's disciples are therefore held to this option; but those who wish to follow the Lord more closely, imitating his attitudes, cannot but feel involved in a very special way. The sincerity of their response to Christ's love will lead them to live a life of poverty and to embrace the cause of the poor.

“For each Institute, according to its charism, this involves adopting a simple and austere way of life, both as individuals and as a community. Strengthened by this living witness and in

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<sup>140</sup> NW 30.

ways consistent with their choice of life and maintaining their independence vis-à-vis political ideologies, consecrated persons will be able to denounce the injustices committed against so many sons and daughters of God and commit themselves to the promotion of justice in the society where they work. In this way, even in present circumstances, through the witness of countless consecrated persons, there will be a renewal of that dedication which was characteristic of the founders and foundresses who spent their lives serving the Lord in the poor.

“Christ ‘is poor on earth in the person of his poor ... As God he is rich, as man he is poor. With his humanity he has gone up to heaven and, prosperous, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and yet, here on earth, still poor, he suffers hunger, thirst, and nakedness’. The Gospel is made effective through charity, which is the Church's glory and the sign of her faithfulness to the Lord. This is demonstrated by the whole history of the consecrated life, which can be considered a living exegesis of Jesus' words: ‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ (Mt 25:40). Many Institutes, especially in modern times, were established precisely to address one or other of the needs of the poor.

“But even when such a purpose was not the determining factor, concern, and care for the needy — expressed in prayer, assistance, and hospitality — was always a normal part of every form of the consecrated life, even of the contemplative life. And how could it be otherwise, since the Christ encountered in contemplation is the same who lives and suffers in the poor? In this sense, the history of the consecrated life is rich with marvelous and sometimes ingenious examples.”<sup>141</sup>

79. We need to rediscover, each day more and more, the bond that Father Hannibal nurtured for the poor, the veneration and affection that he had for them. We believe that it was not simply a personal gift, but a dimension of the charism, because the charism of the Rogate is motivated by compassion for the lost and abandoned crowds. Father Hannibal gave the Rogate to the Poor and wanted his testament on the Help and Evangelization of the Poor to find a place in our *Constitutions*.

Our Founder is recognized as an outstanding apostle of prayer for vocations and father of orphans and the poor because his apostolate, which began in the footsteps of a poor man, was then characterized by the preoccupation of helping and defending all the poor who flocked to him. He understood very well that the option for the poor leads not only to help and evangelize them but to live as poor and together with the poor. This he did by going to live in the Avignone district. Today, all this is common thinking in the doctrine on consecrated life when it speaks of communities inserted in contexts of poverty, but such indication is already found in *Vita Consecrata*:

"Evangelical poverty at the service of the poor - (...) Consecrated persons are therefore asked for a renewed and vigorous evangelical witness of self-denial and restraint, in a form of fraternal life inspired by the principles of simplicity and hospitality, also as an example to those who are indifferent to the needs of their neighbors. This witness will of course be accompanied by a *preferential love for the poor* and will be shown especially by sharing the conditions of life of the most neglected.

“There are many communities which live and work among the poor and the marginalized; they embrace their conditions of life and share in their sufferings, problems, and perils. Outstanding pages in the history of evangelical solidarity and heroic dedication have been written by consecrated persons in these years of profound changes and great injustices, of hopes and disappointments, of striking victories and bitter defeats.

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<sup>141</sup> VC 82.

“And pages no less significant have been written and are still being written by very many other consecrated persons, who live to the full their life "hid with Christ in God" (Col 3:3) for the salvation of the world, freely giving of themselves, and spending their lives for causes which are little appreciated and even less extolled. In these various and complementary ways, the consecrated life shares in the radical poverty embraced by the Lord and fulfills its specific role in the saving mystery of his Incarnation and redeeming Death.”<sup>142</sup>

80. Our *Constitutions* remind us that, by following the Lord, we make our own the condition that he required of those who wished to become his disciples. Accepting the invitation of Jesus who says: Go, sell everything you own, give it to the poor, by the vow of poverty we renounce the right to use and dispose of material goods independently.<sup>143</sup> By following Jesus, who from being rich became poor, we free our hearts from all attachment to the goods of the earth; leading a sober and hard-working life,<sup>144</sup> we live poor in fact and in spirit. In this way, we become witnesses of the first beatitude which declares God the only true wealth for man.”<sup>145</sup>

The regulations, motivating the reasons for our poverty, remind us of “our origins among the poor”; we must keep in mind that, along with the historical reference, there is the charismatic reason, because the Rogate is born from compassion for the poor, in the broadest sense, and is aimed at their assistance and evangelization. Mindful that our origins are among the poor of the Avignone Quarter of Messina, we live evangelical poverty not only personally, but we take care that the entire religious family, bears witness to poverty. The dwellings of the communities are distinguished by simplicity and modesty in the buildings and furnishings.<sup>146</sup> The lifestyle, food, clothing, and furnishings testify to the spirit of poverty and trust in divine Providence.”<sup>147</sup>

The *Constitutions*, moreover, grasping the deepest motivations that our Founder attributed to “evangelical” poverty, tell us that it is “the most precious pearl and solid foundation of the very existence of the Congregation (...) source of heavenly treasures.”<sup>148</sup>

In the *Norms*, we find a very valuable example of how to live poverty with the poor. We are reminded that we must defend their cause, as Father Hannibal did on many occasions and, in particular, when, on August 30, 1899, he took sides as their lawyer, with a heartfelt appeal that he delivered to the city’s newspapers against the “Hunt for the Poor.”<sup>149</sup> We are invited to network with agencies that share this commitment of solidarity with the poor. We are also presented with the ideal of working alongside the poor in our interventions, collaborating with them, to the point of planning, when possible, the creation of an “inserted community” among the poor. We welcome this important invitation:

“In the exercise of charity, we commit ourselves to promote social justice by fighting the causes and effects of poverty. In working with the poor, it is important to organize them, to evaluate their situation together, and to plan the interventions which they themselves can carry out. Therefore, in imitation of Father Hannibal, where possible, some Religious live in Communities inserted among the poor. It is important to work in collaboration with the Church, government, and private agencies engaged in social work.”<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> VC 90.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. CIC 600.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. VC 21.

<sup>145</sup> Const. art. 37. Cf. VC 21.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. DI FRANCIA A. M., *Declarations and Promises*, 5<sup>a</sup>, in *Scritti*, V, p. 583.

<sup>147</sup> Const. art. 38.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* art. 39.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. TUSINO T., *P. Annibale M. Di Francia. Memorie Biografiche*, Vol. III, Rogate, Roma, 1998, p. 23.

<sup>150</sup> Norms, art. 98.

81. The General Chapter recalled that the apostolate for and with the poor is part of the charism; it referred to the exhortation to verify the possibility of creating “inserted” communities and, at the same time, to open our houses to the poor.

“In the choice of new foundations and new projects to be launched, it is necessary to consider the possibility of offering a specific service to the poor in the locality. This can be achieved, first of all, by assigning religious therein, even in the style of inserted communities. Thus: - they shall be provided with adequate places for the welcoming, assistance, and evangelization of the poor, counseling centers or facilities for families and children in difficult situations; - they shall be provided with temporary lodging facilities for poor or migrant families, wherever this service is needed, and with the deliberation of the respective Superiors of Circumscription.”<sup>151</sup>

The General Government, in the programming of the six-year period, considered the two souls of the charism, God and the Neighbor, prayer and charity, which can be lived in a special way, to the point of favoring communities that are dedicated primarily to contemplation and communities that are inserted in contexts of poverty. In this regard, Project 10 expresses it, on personal and community spiritual life which, with regard to interventions during the time of initial formation, provides:

“Encourage in the various stages of formation a gradual initiation to the pastoral experience in the Church, the collaboration with laypeople, and the process of synthesis between the two icons/faces of the Rogationist charism, on the example of St. Hannibal Mary,<sup>152</sup> that is, the intuition of the Rogate that arises from contemplative prayer and the service of charity to the little ones and the poor, even in the style of an inserted community.”<sup>153</sup>

Such experiences of apostolate and insertion among the poor, which particularly involve young people in formation, have been taking place in the Circumscriptions for some time, in various ways. The General Government, together with the respective Governments of the Circumscriptions, encourages and follows them with due attention.

82. When I began this reflection on the poor, I said that we must let ourselves be guided by the example of Father Hannibal, by the “affection and veneration” he had for the poor. It does not seem exaggerated to speak of veneration. He was guided by great faith in the words of the Lord Jesus who assured us that He is present in the poor. In this, we are enlightened by an episode reported by Fr. Domenico Santoro in the Bulletin of the Congregation.<sup>154</sup>

On February 20, 1925, Fr. Santoro with much insistence, succeeded in obtaining from Father Hannibal a confidential account of an extraordinary experience he had in helping a poor man, a confession obtained “to make known how the Lord did to attract him to the love of the poor.” He told him that, at the beginning of the Pious Work, he witnessed the disgusting scene of a group of people mocking a poor man. Father Hannibal rescued him from their insults, took him by the hand and brought him home, cleaned him up, dressed, fed him, and put him to bed. Then, considering that Jesus was in that poor man, he approached to kiss him, when he saw and kissed Jesus.<sup>155</sup>

Father Hannibal dedicated himself to the Poor with the same zeal with which he lived for Rogate, he cultivated the friendship of other apostles of charity, his contemporaries, who

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<sup>151</sup> STC 103.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. STC 45-51, 103.

<sup>153</sup> FCM, p. 38. Cf. STC. 45-51; 103.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. *Bollettino*, maggio-agosto 1927, p. 132.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. TUSINO T., *L'anima del Padre – Testimonianze*, Roma, 1973, p. 493.

were equally attracted by the poor. We recall, among others, Don Bosco, Don Orione, Father Ludovico da Casoria, and Father James Cusmano. The latter, in Christological and ecclesial terms, considered the Poor as the "eighth sacrament."

We have recalled an extraordinary encounter with a poor man, but in the life of Father Hannibal, there are countless references to encounters with the poor that have left the witnesses enchanted. This is a precious heritage that we cannot lose.

## Conclusion

### 6.1. In closing

83. We recalled that one of the three challenges that the General Chapter set before us was: “To rediscover the reasons for joy and celebration in fraternal life in community.” I deem it important to offer a contribution, to myself and to each of you, for a revival or review of fraternal life in community, as we move toward the end of the six-year period and look forward to the next General Chapter.

The Commission for the *Lineamenta* has prepared the text on the specific theme of the next Chapter: *Rogationist religious life today: unity, sharing, coordination*. This circular letter on *Our fraternal communion of life with Christ and with the Poor* looked at the theme of the Chapter from the perspective of the religious community.

We have tried to deepen some aspects of fraternal life in community, the support of fraternal communion. When Christ calls someone to follow him, he demands from him a love that is willing to leave everything for him. The call to fraternal life in community is an invitation to love to the full, putting into practice the first commandment in its most radical form: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.” (Mk 12:30). Loving Christ implies a profound love of neighbor. Quoting the first commandment, Jesus does not separate it from the second: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk 12:31). Opening our hearts to the Master is therefore inseparable from a wider opening towards the brothers.

Jesus did not limit himself to calling the apostles to follow him, but he gathered them in a community around him. This is a sign of the Savior’s will to start a style of life that later resulted in community life. Jesus asks the members to practice a deeper fraternal charity. This is what is required of us: to live and practice a more intense charity. This is an essential aspect of consecrated life, an aspect that needs to be constantly renewed interiorly. We must take responsibility with joy and humility, with great audacity and courage to build fraternal communities.

We can be advocates and promoters of ecclesial communion to the extent that we know how to be witnesses of communities where fraternal life is lived with intensity.

84. On May 16, 2022, our Congregation will commemorate the 125th anniversary of its foundation which took place with the taking of religious habit of the first three coadjutor Brothers.

With this letter I want to express, on behalf of the Rogationists, my deepest and unanimous thanks to God our Father, for having called us to live in community, having the Founder, St. Hannibal Mary Di Francia, as the charismatic point of reference in our consecration to the *sequela Christi*, guided by the Holy Spirit, the soul of the Church.

We are aware that our fraternal life must be inspired by the evangelical style taught by Jesus Christ “to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deep yearnings.”<sup>156</sup>

Let us ask the Lord to welcome and live the spirit that should animate fraternal life, as indicated by the Acts of the Apostles:

“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many

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<sup>156</sup> NMI 43.

wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart." (Acts 2: 42-47).

"The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all." (Acts 4: 32-33).

85. The Rule of life, which represents for us the concrete way to holiness and to the perfection of charity proper to every Christian, tells us what fraternal life is for us Rogationists. In conclusion, I propose a descriptive definition of fraternal life in the Rogationist community as it emerges from the *Constitutions* and *Norms* and to which we often want to return, as an ideal to be achieved.

"Fraternal life in the Rogationist community is a gift of the Spirit where members commit themselves to live the primary precept of mutual love taught to us by Jesus Christ, which achieves the total self-giving of ourselves to God and to our brothers and sisters. The community is built around the Eucharist, where the confreres find the strength to live according to truth, with sincerity and justice, with respect and goodness. The Gospel, the Liturgy, and prayer in common are the strengths of the Community. The Community must be a listening community, where one breathes the joy of belonging to the Risen Lord living together with confreres; this makes the Rogate prayer effective and becomes a reason for vocational promotion. The community is strengthened by being a community for and with the poor, expressing a sincere preferential option for those who are the least and the excluded. The guidance and service of the superior are important in discerning together God's will and in making the necessary decisions. In this context, community meetings are necessary to discern the will of God in the full co-responsibility of all members of the community. Fraternal life must be characterized by a simple and sober life where attention is placed on the confreres, especially the elderly and the sick, and where, as a sign of gratitude and out of a spirit of charity, all the deceased confreres are remembered, prayed for, and their example of fidelity and love to God and the Congregation is handed down."<sup>157</sup>

86. "To grow in fraternal life, we make use of the means that we always have at our disposal, first of all, the Word of God and the Eucharist, prayer, sharing, and mutual esteem. Fraternal correction plays an important role and is done following the rule given to us by Jesus in the Gospel, first by approaching the confrere who is in difficulty with kindness and confidentiality. Communication with all the Confreres and those who lead the community is important and is part of the religious lifestyle. A true sign of fraternal charity is the care and attention to the sick Confreres, in whom we serve Jesus himself. The prayer for the living expresses our attention to the Rogationist religious family and to those people who share our lifestyle and journey with us towards the heavenly homeland. The death of a Confrere is an event that requires a choral prayer on the part of all the Confreres. Holy Masses and suffrages are offered for him according to what is prescribed. We also remember the deceased Confreres by celebrating a Holy Mass every

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<sup>157</sup> Cf. Const. art. 50-60.

first Monday of the month and reading the necrology on their anniversary. Then in November, there is a very special memory of those people who have been close to us and have shared our charism. We then remember the parents, brothers, and sisters of our religious who have returned to the house of the Lord. We rest in the common chapels of the cemetery waiting together for the resurrection of the bodies.”<sup>158</sup>

A final thought goes to all the Confreres who have preceded us and are in the presence of the Lord and who remind us of the importance of fraternal life.

May the Lord bless us, accompany us and make us grow for the service of the harvest.

Fr. Bruno Rampazzo, R.C.J.  
Superior General

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. Norms art. 37-52.

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