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ATNAUJINTO PAŠVĖSTOJO GYVENIMO ESMĖ: „PERFECTAE CARITATIS“ REFLEKSIJA

The Essence of Renewed Religious Life:
Reflection on „Perfectae Caritatis“

SUMMARY

This article emphasizes the essence of the renewal of religious life according to the decree of the Second Vatican Council, “Perfectae Caritatis.” The purpose and Christocentrism of religious life is revealed. Basing itself on observations of famous figures in the religious life, the concept of religious life is analyzed: reading signs of the time, noting the charisma of the founder, using given gifts, following Christ in solitude or in religious families. All of the executors of the renewal of religious life, whose duty is inner revival and external renovation, are named.

SANTRAUKA

Straipsnyje išryškinama pašvęstojo gyvenimo atnaujinimo esmė remiantis Vatikano Antrojo Susirinkimo dekretu „Perfectae Caritatis“, skirtu pritaikyti ir atnaujinti pašvęstąjį gyvenimą. Atskleidžiamas pašvęstojo gyvenimo tikslas ir Kristocentriškumas, pateikiant pašvęstojo gyvenimo sampratą, kurios analizė yra grindžiama svarbiausiais pašvęstojo gyvenimo bruožais: laiko ženklų skaitymu, atkreipiant dėmesį į įkūrėjo charizmą, naudojimui suteiktą dovanų, sekimu Kristumi vienetėje ar vienuoliškose šeimose. Įvardijami visi pašvęstojo gyvenimo atnaujinimo vykdytojai, kurių pareiga yra tiek vidinis atgimimas, tiek ir išorinis atnaujinimas.

INTRODUCTION

In a consumerist society materialistic thinking penetrates when a young person starts desiring to have more, but not

TO BE. The reality of only being is intimidating because it does not guarantee a better future, a safe and provided life,

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: pašvęstasis gyvenimas, refleksija, Perfectae Caritatis, atnaujinimas.
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but it guarantees nothing. Thus the choice of silence, communal or solitary religious life becomes a shocking reality where it is imagined that freedom, career, friends, etc., are given up in free will. There is a question if this is real, i.e., is this what religious life is like? This article is desired not only to answer the given question, but also to broaden the narrow and static concept of religious life and the variousness of choices of religious life in general. I will try to do this by examining the Vatican Second Meeting decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life – *Perfectae Caritatis* (cf. Dekretas dėl vienuoliškojo gyvenimo tinkamo atnaujinimo *Perfectae Caritatis* 2001 – subsequently, PC). It shows that the church wants renewal and those monks' roles and mission is important for it in today's different contexts and cultures.

The decree, which was signed in October 28th 1965¹, is not a set of rules that would indicate what and where something has to be statically changed. It is not written that people have to abandon

traditions, old customs or something similar. It is not such renewal that was understood by most monks of that time who dropped their robes and left their communities. I would say that this document is an encouragement as Saint Pope John Paul II use to say – “do not be afraid” (Jonas Paulius II 1978: § 5). Not to be afraid to be a sign to the world and stand out from the masses which goes with the flow. At the same time it is – an encouragement of Saint Pope John XXIII, to newly read the signs – “the signs of the times” (John XXIII 1961: § 3) and the time to respond to new requirements. For this reason, it is important for us what is referred to in this document and to be more specific it is possible to ask three basic questions that will reveal the essence of renewed religious life, which is the purpose of this article:

1. How does this document describe religious life?
2. Who executes the renewal?

While discussing these questions, we will also find answers to the question raised in the beginning of this article.

THE DESCRIPTION OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

When starting to answer to the first question (how does this document describe religious life?), it is important to highlight the purpose and objective of the decree which clearly accent that this decree provides just general principles but not their implementation and application. So the purpose of the decree is to provide general principles about religious life renewal. Meanwhile, the objective is that “this so valuable life conse-

crated by vows of evangelical counsels <...> under present conditions would serve the welfare of the church <...>” (PC 2001: § 1).

Another question arises, what do we learn about religious life from the provided general principles? What are the main elements? I think, that all this flows from a person's desire (and that can be described): reading signs of time, using the available gifts, to follow Christ in

solitary or religious families (cf. PC 2001: § 1). We can examine this sentence. What does it mean to read the signs of time? It can be said, that it primarily means to return to own roots (*ad fontes*). It means that every religious community or common life society or institute of worldly life are invited to come back to charisma of their own founders.² This also is an invitation to rethink and review not only the past but to insight and understand the message transmitted by the founder, according to which it would be attempted to live in today's world, under current conditions, and contemporary culture amidst. Pope emeritus Benedict XVI also talks about this (see Benediktas XVI 2008: 2). But since the patron saint of Europe Saint Benedict is held as the father of cenobitic monastic life, we can refer to the exceptional invitation of Saint Pope John Paul II to Benedictines to "renew and deepen the charisma of Benedictines" (Jono Pauliaus II 1999: l. 1). Such renewal allows every institute to be "ground salt" (cf. Matthew 5, 13) keep their identity. But that cannot be done if you do not know anyone else; you have to know not only the "garden" of your institute, but also today's problems and people (cf. PC 2001: § 2). Of course, such renewal which we are invited to is not possible without gifts. What is meant in the proposition: using available gifts? We all know that people often complain that monks do not do anything and are vermin. They only sit and pray when simple people have to support them. It means that they do not work. But that is not true. Only people with very narrow mind and approach

can say so. Firstly it is because monks not only live a contemplative life but they are also apostolate, and work a lot. These societies with different activities will be discussed later. But right now it is important to highlight two extremes to which consecrated persons are tempted.

First temptation – to become angels which not only pray, read the Word of God, contemplate but also do not work. The second temptation is to work a lot and to dedicate only a little time to the most important – God, i.e. not to find time for a prayer, silence etc. It appears that the decree provides an antidote to these temptations. The antidote for the first temptation is invitation of the Church to participate in various activities because participation in them is participation in the Church life, but only with one condition – without losing identity (cf. PC 2001: § 2). It means to work while praying so you would be a part of the Church life. The antidote for the second temptation is also the invitation of the Church not to drown in current activity and every day renew spiritually without forgetting to join God through following Christ and Evangelical counsels (cf. PC 2001: § 2). It means that the Church is encouraging and support humane and healthy approach to a person's goodness, which is to use available gifts according to their purpose by expressing them in different activities. By following Christ, the Church echoes His idea not to bury the talents but release them into circulation so after coming back the owner could say: "Good, my zealous servant! Because you proved to be trustworthy in small matters, you will

be given bigger ones" (Luke 19, 12-27). So in order for the consecrated life to give fruit and that the gifts would be released into circulation, the methods of life, prayer, and activity have to be combined so they could match "the current state of monks' bodies and spirit" (PC 2001: § 3). "Therefore let constitutions, directories, custom books, books of prayers and ceremonies and such like be suitably re-edited and, obsolete laws being suppressed, be adapted to the decrees of this sacred synod" (PC 2001: § 3). It is important to highlight that the annulment of obsolete provisions does not mean the annulment of provisions of community's identity. Rather, it is an annulment of what was implied and does not fit in today's world, what complicates the spiritual renewal and the deployment of the monastery's charisma, without becoming someone's duplicate. Of course, these identity questions are raised in both solitude and in a large religious family, where God's will and person's (or society's) will compatibility and the question how to authentically follow Christ are sought out. To follow Christ in solitude or in religious families is third and both essential and culminating part of the sentence which describes the religious life. Here we can distinguish essential religious life general elements. The first one would be to live for God because of God and for God. The second is to serve the Church. These two essential religious life elements are possible only in solitude (living solitary life but consecrating it to God) or religious families. („This service of God ought to inspire and foster in them the exercise of the virtues, especially humility, obedi-

ence, fortitude and chastity. In such a way they share in Christ's emptying of Himself (cf. Fil 2:7) and His life in the spirit (cf. Rom 8, 1-13)" (PC 2001: § 5). The third one, which is a condition for the first two, is following Christ. After all, the only monk's concern is to listen and take care of God's matters; to leave everything and follow Him. To join contemplation and apostolate is to contemplate Jesus in another Love, to broaden God's Kingdom on earth by answering Him. (cf. PC 2001: § 5). But it is constantly forgotten that the centre and base is Love: "by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13, 35). Because of its absence monasteries today suffer crisis in Europe. There are provisions and schedule, everything is done according to the schedule but there is no Spirit, no Fire. And the Church talks about these provisions that are obsolete, there is a need for new winds, the new evangelization³ firstly for those who should burn and carry the Gospel to others. There is a need for renewal not for re-establishment⁴ in order to shade and hide all. There is a need for spiritual life preference. This is the reason, the very first, which was mentioned by Archbishop Rodriguez Carballo –

absence of spiritual life, lack of personal, social, and sacred prayer, when concentrating to just postulating, while there is the absence of spiritual life eventually becomes crisis of belief and religious life. Then even the vows lose their meaning and exit from the consecrated life is starting to look like a normal and logical solution. Often before exiting there is serious misconduct from the vows perspective. (Carballo 2013).

That is how the connection with the Source, from which Love arises, disappears. Because you are imbued with Love, loaded like a sponge that is there reason why it is leaking on others. But if you are dried and you try to squeeze something that you would like to give, it is empty, just “<...> ringing brass and sounding cymbals” (1 Corinthians 13, 1).

Because of this reason, Pope Francis encouraged that “*we have to overcome spiritual secularisation so we could be closer to simple and especially last people. We need strong communities that go through love in specific ways!*” (Pranciškus 2013). That can only be maintained by preferring spiritual life. To look for what heart loves (cf. Song of Songs 3, 1-2). After all, Love is the highest order: love for God and love for neighbour. That helps to follow Evangelical provisions. That love

comes from prayer and from prayer’s relationship with the Source of Love. Of course, the first Source is the Live Word, after that the acceptance of this Word – Eucharist which is the very base of common life (cf. PC 2001: § 6, see Ceple 2000). This is the only way to say the words with St. Bonaventura: “*Ecclesia enim mutuo se diligens est – the Church really is mutual love*” (Ciardi 1994: 50).

But after all, what does it mean to follow Christ? That is – To Be Real, the Living, Gospel. Here fits everything what was discussed. But all this would not be necessary if there were none prepared to follow Christ. Because of this reason, the second question in this document is: who executes the renewal or who are the executors of the renewal? We will try to name them and reveal their variety.

THE EXECUTORS OF THE RENEWAL OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

In this document, the executors of the renewal are understood as all the members of the institute. All are not only those who are in charge and are called the wisest, but also those who are very small and youngest because God can talk through them firstly (cf. *Šventoji Benedikto regula* 3, 3). That is why in order to execute the renewal, there is a need for everyone’s cooperation. Inevitably, there is a need for dialogue because it is a destruction of *death culture* which today controls lonely and abandoned person (cf. PC 2001: § 4). For it to really function, religious and communal life must thrive (cf. PC 2001: § 9). It means that everyone is equal. As apostle Paul says: “There is neither Jew

nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus!” (Galatians 3, 28). Because of this “all of you are brothers” (Matthew 23, 8) belonging to religious groups with different approach and activity, that the decree authors name institutes. They try to reveal the identity of the renewal executors by grouping the institutes according to life style in different planes. These planes can be defined by Mary and Martha models (cf. Luke 10, 38–42). Mary – prayer (contemplation - being) type, while Martha is an example of devoted service. But these two models are compatible; they complement each other, so there is another important mod-

el – between Mary and Martha, or maybe both Mary and Martha. So the first model is Mary's, the second – between Mary and Martha, and the third one – Martha's. This way there are three different institute types, models. We could say that the first one Mary's model – those that devoted themselves to contemplation.

Institutes that devoted themselves only to contemplation, whose members follow silence and solitude, using prayer and diligently repentance they surrender to God alone, no matter how pressuring the active apostolate need in the mystical Body of Christ would be, "the Body in which all joints do not perform the same task" (Rom 12, 4) always take an honorable place. They sacrifice for God exceptional honor offering, enlighten the people of God with abundant fruits of holiness, attract it by their example and contribute to its expansion with mysterious apostolic fertility. So those institutes are the Church ornament and heavenly graces source. (PC 2001: § 7).

These are people who chose the best part and made their mind (cf. Luke 10, 42). The second one is people who are between Mary and Martha – institutes devoted to apostolate – these are institutes devoted to apostolate-seculars or priests with different gifts to serve. As the apostle Paul writes: "There are different gifts of grace but the same Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12, 4). They should not forget the Source of apostolate – Christ, because it flows just from unity with Him. (cf. PC 2001: § 8). So while drinking from the Source, everyone been Mary, at the same time they also are Martha. However, they are neither purely Mary nor purely Martha. "Even though secular institutes [*institute saecularia*] are not in-

stitutes of monks [*insituta religiosa*], in them by a recognized way of Church genuinely and fully considered evangelical counsels in the world of confession. <...>. The institutes themselves just maintain unique and special secular nature, so that everywhere in the world and from the world itself they could carry out the apostolate effectively, for which they set up" (PC 2001: § 11). So being Martha they help and take part in the Church pastoral activity without forgetting that there are seculars' consecrated life [*vita religiosa laicalis*], which "<...> is a total way of evangelical counsels profession" (PC 2001: § 10). It means that they do not forget the prayer which occurs as full contemplation of Jesus in the Other. So these three different institutes reveal not only the variety of the chosen life but also highlights three different models that allow better understanding and perceiving their peculiarities. Besides, this wide horizon of choice allows understanding that the Church provides the called ones a freedom to choose more individually preferred life style forms. But everyone is called to combine their will with the will of God. It is a grace to the person and to his surrounding community when they combine. One more invitation for which this document is for is to renew on the inside so that it would be visible on the outside. That is a big challenge by the Church to every member of the institute. After all, through personal holiness unfolds communal holiness. How to reach it? The Church does not raise a challenge without leaving ways to deal with it. But this would be a theme for another article, which would need a broader and deeper analysis.

CONCLUSIONS

Religious life – reading signs of the time, resisting temptations, is using all of God given gifts, e. g., talents, following Christ in solitude or in a religious family. Christ becomes the center of whole life. That is why the essence of renewed religious life – without losing an existing identity, i.e., vesting oneself in Christ, looking at the signs of time – to Be The Living Gospel. Being The Liv-

ing Gospel, i.e., being Alive, should encourage young people not only to choose religious life, but first to change their approach and understanding of it. The executors of renewal are all who are called into religious life. No single member is exempt from the duty of first reviving themselves and lastly from renewing in a broader sense of religious life.

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Endnotes

¹ Historical development can be further read in: Confoy 2008: 177-273.

² Several examples of religious life documents where it is written about it: Pašvęstojo gyvenimo institutų ir apaštališkojo gyvenimo draugijų kongregacija 2002: § 24; Jonas Paulius II 1996: § 16. And, of course, PC 2001: § 2.

³ "Especially traditionally Christian lands' churches need a jump so they could match current situation requirements and this jump requires renewed missions' spirit. "New evangelization" does not mean one formula for all situations. It is much more: to develop strong vision and soul-guiding activity based on it, by respecting different traditions, old Christian

lands Churches' uniqueness. "New evangelization" will not accomplish goals if it remains an abstract formula. Quite opposite, it has to be filled with strong theological soul-guiding content. In this work, according to Archbishop Fisichella, a lot of initiatives that were done by individual bishops, Churches or bishops conferences will have to be checked." (From "l'Observatore Romano 13/10/2013").

⁴ „G. Abruksas declares in his work „Auto of Caos: refunding religious congregations“ (New York 1989): after all "today's need is not renewal of monasteries but their reestablishment"" (Brilius 2010).