INTERDEPENDENCE: GUIDELINE FOR HOLINESS

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THIS WORLD of ours has come into a new dimension of consciousness. The Conference on Environment at Stockholm gave incentive to our awareness of a total world-wide interdependence. Pope Paul VI in his message to the conference wrote:

> The compression of distance by progress in communication, the formation of always closer bonds between peoples through economic development, the increasing domination of nature's forces by science and technology, the multiplication of human relationships across the frontiers of nations and race – all these are, for better or for worse, in hope or towards disaster, elements of interdependence. An abuse or a waste in one part of the world has an effect in other parts and can change the quality of life of people who are often unaware of the situation and without fault . . . From now on, with interdependence must go mutual responsibility; for a community headed into the future must be united.

In Pope Paul's view, interdependence is a fact of life, to be creative of good or ill insofar as it is approached with responsibility.

For the westerner and especially for the american, this expansion of a sense of responsibility is not in continuation of but rather is opposed to some of the most deep-seated myths of our history. Man the master of his fate, man the dauntless pioneer, man the feller of trees and builder of cities, has had this achievement challenged and comes off with the sorry title: man the polluter. In pursuit of a dream of freedom and of equal opportunity and of hard work, western man and particularly american man finds himself designated: man the exploiter.

Our enterprise of 'making the world safe for democracy', and even our entry into the world-struggle against totalitarianism, allowed us to see ourselves and to be seen as disinterested saviours and heroes.

Yet our anti-personnel bombs and our defoliation in Vietnam indict us before the world as accused of genocide and ecocide (the destruction of a people, the destruction of a whole natural environment). Our national temper called for an end to this war: but in order to secure the release of our prisoners of war rather than to stop the killing of vietnamese.

The dispossessed of the earth are rising like spectres to retell the history of our country. The progress of the frontier registers as neither so brave nor so right when retold through the ballads of the american indian. Our ethnics are finding that the great 'melting pot' gave them their mess of pottage but

robbed them of their cultural roots. To the mexican americans, the United States of America proffered not opportunity but poverty and powerlessness. The Blacks have most forcibly insisted upon the rewriting of the script of the real life-story of american ideals.

The picture of the self-sacrificing, mother-bountiful missionary has faded before the features of the 'ugly american', and we religious find it ever more difficult to get and keep a permanent visa. In Latin America the 'Alliance for Progress' has been everywhere disillusioning, as the profits returned to the United States have surpassed the monies allotted to the various countries. Dr Julius Nyerere has stated the problem for the whole world:

> Poverty is not the real problem of the modern world. For we have the knowledge and resources which could enable us to overcome poverty. The real problem – the thing which creates misery, wars and hatred among men – is the division of mankind into rich and poor . . . The significance of this division between the rich and the poor is not simply that one has more food than he can eat, more clothes than he can wear and more houses than he can live in, while others are hungry, unclad and homeless. The significant thing about the division between rich and poor nations is not simply that one has the resources to provide comfort for all its citizens, and the other cannot provide basic services. The reality and depth of the problem arises because the man who is rich has power over the lives of those who are poor, and the rich nation has power over the policies of those which are not rich.

In the United States in 1968, per capita incomes surpassed $4,000, whereas half the world's people live on less than $250. About 80% of the wealth of our planet is absorbed by less than 20% of its people. Yet throughout the world and in the United States the tragic gap between rich and poor is ever widening.

There is no need to multiply examples. Reality is clear. Technologically, the planet is one, the means of feeding and clothing and housing the world populations is technically available. What is needed if the american myths are to regain any validity is, as Pope Paul indicated to the Stockholm Conference, 'a radical change of mentality', and the acknowledgment that man himself 'is the first and the greatest wealth of the earth'.

If we search for common threads in the way that generations of americans, even acting with high ideals, have betrayed their heritage, we find them in the limitation they placed upon 'man'. It was 'my kind of man', 'my colour of man', 'my class of man', and the failure to take this 'other man' into account. The second mark of betrayal is the continued substitution of profit, monetary gain, consumer items for human values. In our wealthy countries we have achieved affluence but not fulfilment. Our consumerism, as Abbé Houtart expresses it, costs us a 'massive loss of personality'. We become passive as we merely receive what is offered by those who have already decided 'what is good' for us. A passive indifference easily develops among

the poor. But 'passiveness detracts from the well-to-do-also'. Houtart insists: 'A consumer society is precisely killing creativity in man and woman. The mass murder of human creativity has left a deep trauma in human society'.

What then is this radical change of mentality which is needed? Fundamentally, it is a conversion to responsibility based on consciousness of human values and of the interdependence of all men. For the christian it is that reverence towards God and his creation which bespeaks holiness.

Religious congregations exist to help their members become holy persons. They count largely upon the climate of relationships existing within them to accomplish this. Religious might well find in this consciousness of interdependence the goal around which 'a community headed into the future must be united'. It is my thesis that such a goal would enable the religious congregations to 'build the earth' and to promote that holiness which the Church seeks from them. Both holiness and 'building the earth' presume a process in which God and man must work together.

It is God who calls all men to be holy. This call of God to all men reaches in particular intensity those – and religious are among them – who feel called by Christ to an extraordinary level of discipleship. Our very alertness to such a call presupposes an availability to the presence of the Spirit working with us. The affirmative response to Jesus's call, 'Come, follow me', implies an acceptance of his values and demands.

For many generations, these values and demands were spelled out for religious, particularly women, in terms of a culture apart. The implication was that the way of the evangelical counsels was in itself so perfect and yet so fragile a response of holiness that an almost total non-worldly culture was necessary and justified to subsume and support it. Clothing, cloister, horarium, minute regulations and customs formed the package offered by the Church to those who felt called to follow Christ who was poor, chaste, and obedient to his Father. That the Spirit continued to work within this superstructure is undeniable. That the Spirit needs such a superstructure is questionable. When we look back upon it from a vantage of only six years the structure looks stifling and unreal.

It reminds us of John Gardner's description of a primitive society:

> The man embedded in a traditional society hardly thinks of himself as separate or separable from his group. He is engulfed by his culture. He accepts the traditions, beliefs and way of life of his group so completely that he is not even aware that he is accepting them. He is a culturally defined man. For such a man, his community is for all practical purposes 'the world'. Although such embeddedness places severe limits on individuality and freedom as we think of them, the men and women involved are not conscious of these limits. Such embeddedness cannot exist unless the community enjoys some degree of insulation from other cultures.[1]

[1] Gardner, John W.: *Self-renewal* (New York), p 87.

The traditional climate which our congregations promoted was one of dependence. Poverty was seen in terms of permissions, chastity as the limiting of relationships, obedience as complete submission (save for sinful activities) to the will of the superior. The means became so all-absorbing that it frequently obscured the goal of growth in trusting expectation of God's goodness, self-abandonment to his providential will, concern for his mission. The pattern of dependency undoubtedly attracted some persons whose personality-structure rendered them indecisive, glad to be freed from the worry of decision-making, unwilling to face the ambiguity and uncertainty of life, and rejective of thoughtful concern about the great world-problems. Certainly not all religious fit this pattern; but the overall climate of our religious houses did allow the submissive, exact, careful religious to become the model of holiness. The structures engendered such a demeaning sense of guilt in those who could not conform that often a residue of bitterness accumulated, the extent and violence of which is amazing. Habits of distrust and of being judgmental became chronic. Small wonder that the emphasis of renewal on the person, the psychological insight into what a healthy person requires, and biblical research into the values and demands of Jesus, caused a revulsion against this form of religious life.

With the Vatican Council and the special Chapters which responded to it, religious congregations, particularly of women, have sought to free themselves from the values and demands of their particular culture. They must not, if they are to be true to their call, free themselves from the values and demands of their Lord. Therefore they take upon themselves the immense and exhilarating task of testing the values of the gospel alongside the values of the world, of measuring the demands of Christ to the capacities of a late twentieth-century personality, of searching for holiness in the ambiguous climate of 'the signs of the times', which includes the fact of world interdependence, of achieving that 'radical change of mentality' called for by Pope Paul.

This task has been rendered difficult by the lack of understanding of many hierarchy, clerics and laity, who have felt betrayed in their trust in religious women. And yet the pain of causing such misunderstanding and of being misunderstood is undoubtedly essential to the mission undertaken by women religious in the Church. It promotes the growth in maturity and in courage needed to combat the position of minority assigned to women in a male Church.

The Church has defined religious almost totally in terms of holiness, seeing them as 'a shining witness and model of holiness'.[2] We have become so acclimatized to materialism that the tendency is to equiparate 'witness' with visibility of material forms, and 'model' with that which is fixed, on a pedestal. Our aim must be to provide 'witness' by breathing the gospel spirit into contemporary cultural forms, and to become a 'model' of holiness by letting the Spirit hold sway over us.

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[2] *Lumen Gentium*, 39.

Holiness is not something we put on like a garment. It is something that shines through from the disposition within. It springs from and is dependent upon a gift of God, a relationship with him which allows us to share his life and his goodness. The call to religious life is then seen as the adoption of that life-style which helps us, to whom it is given, to be most fully available to God and his gifts for the good of the neighbour. This life-style must conform as closely as possible to values and demands made explicit in Christ's life on earth, but incarnated in forms adapted to our times. It presupposes, therefore, a docility before the scriptures and a listening to needy neighbours, for:

> The God whom we know in the bible is a liberating God, a God who destroys myths and alienations, a God who intervenes in history in order to break down the structures of injustice and who raises up prophets in order to point out the way of justice and mercy. He is the God who liberates slaves (Exodus), who causes empires to fall and raises up the oppressed (Luke 1,52).[3]

Religious women are painfully aware of the dangers and difficulties inherent in such an approach. How present is the possibility of striving so hard for the adaptation of form that the delicate attention to the Spirit basic to divine interdependence may be neglected. But how possible is the danger of becoming so introverted in the guardianship of our holiness that we neglect our call to mission: Christ not only said, 'Come, follow me', but also 'Go, go forth to all nations', to all the cultures of our universe. Fr John Harriott has pointed out that the Church today 'has become a side-show . . . without any direct bearing on the shaping of society'.[4]

If we are to be a witness and a model we must eschew our isolationism, physical, psychological and emotional. But at the same time we must be 'the kind of person who embodies the gospel'.[5] Religious congregations have by no means found all the ways to accomplish this end; for 'the more the apostle moves into the market place, the wider his knowledge of the kinds and conditions of men, the more vulnerable he becomes and the more his received ideas are challenged'.[6] Our congregations must then intensify the search for apostolic spirituality, common prayer which will support and motivate to human service. We must become aware that the Spirit has been breathing in other places as well as in our cloistered halls, and must humbly open ourselves to ecumenical and non-christian insights. In theory we accept this; but in concrete application do we tend to be critical or reserved toward the research of the Council of Churches, the programming of Church Women United, the prayer of pentecostalism, the aids of yoga to contemplation? Can we be as broad-minded as John, and recognize not only that 'God is love' but that 'anyone who lives in love lives in God and God in him'?[7]

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[3] *The Radical Bible* (ed. Eaglesen, J. and Scharper, P., New York, 1972), p 81.
[4] 'Apostolic Presence', in *The Way*, vol 12, No 1 (January, 1972), p 39.
[5] *Ibid.*, p 45. [6] *Ibid.*, p 44. [7] 1 Jn 4, 16.

If we religious are to live the values of Jesus in diverse cultures we must personally assimilate them. Certainly the architects of the religious life were not mistaken when they emphasized among these values the simple sharing and non-acquisitiveness of Jesus, his celibate love and his constant concern to do the will of his Father. But submission to the Spirit, preaching the Good News, the joy experienced in friends, honesty, the peace he blessed and imparted, the importance of persons over things and ritual, prayerfulness, and numerous other values, contend with one another as we bring an open mind and heart to the study of sacred scripture. Fundamental is the value of love, and Jesus's answer to the question, Who is my neighbour?

Persons earnest about holiness must try to live according to the demands Jesus made of his disciples: faith, action on behalf of justice, confidence in his Father, a 'being with' him, sharing his fate. His life ended in failure, with his blood 'poured out for many'.[8] He phrased his demand clearly: 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me'.[9] This demand required that his disciples bear the sufferings inherent in life in union with him as redemptive; and that they risk all, even if it meant failure and a violent death, for the other. His death and his disciples' mission point to the future, with hope, hope on earth for 'the many', hope beyond the earthly.[10] The all-out need to risk for 'the other' implied in this interdependence with Christ, means that we shall be living with a heavy sense of existential guilt, as we ponder the injustices of our past and present world. Yet this sense of guilt need not be demoralizing. It should, in the words of William Kraft, enable us 'to be constantly restless and unsatisfied', a state which 'pushes (us) to grow into holiness'. Through such self-confrontation we impart meaning to our lives, as we recognize God as the ground of our existence and the basis of relationship with all other persons. Dr Kraft notes that 'A holy person does not harm or do violence to his fellowmen, but he sees his fellowmen as brothers who are oriented toward each other and toward the Holy'.[11]

In the early days of post-Vatican renewal (and we are still really in them!) a massive move began in our congregations for independence and freedom within religious life. It was broadly accepted that before a person could honestly take on the costly burdens of discipleship, she had to be a free person. And free persons, psychologists assured us, had to form themselves by making decisions for and about themselves. In some communities, a certain anarchy developed as permissiveness unleashed rebellious individualists. In others, a prolonged and devastating conflict arose between the old power complex and the new liberationists; and in others, still, a tense but positive re-ordering of legal structures strove to meet the psychological demands with a less canonical, more biblical theology. The Council documents stress the biblical idea

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[8] Mk 14, 25. [9] Mt 16, 24.

[10] Ratzinger, J.: 'Jesus's fate and the Church', in *The Church Today* (Chicago, 1968).

[11] *The Search for the Holy* (Philadelphia, 1971), pp 175–6.

that 'authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image in man; a person's dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice, personally motivated and prompted from within'.[12] Such freedom, closely identified with self-discipline, promotes a self-actualization. Religious life needs persons of this kind of independence, persons so free that they can confront themselves and radically assess all the rationalizations of which they are capable. As Paul Tillich writes, 'The courage to affirm one's self must include the courage to affirm one's own demonic depth'.[13] This demonic depth reveals itself frequently in the unconscious or semi-conscious substitution of goals. But a goal of freedom made into an absolute becomes self-preoccupation, causes the person to reject limits, and frequently leads to the imposition of controls upon others. Freedom and self-fulfilment, normally the ground and fruit of holiness, can, when conceived as absolutes, readily become displacements of holiness. Hence the independence to be valued is that which makes the person capable of taking responsibility for herself and her actions, and of assessing reality (including the divine) honestly.

A religious congregation which tries to make its members holy by insisting upon dependent relationships will hardly produce the mature christians needed for an effective mission to our many cultures and pressing world-needs. A religious congregation which finds its reason for being in promoting the individualistic freedom of its members is self-destructive; for it is thereby displacing its primary goal, which is the formation of mature holy persons.

The only viable approach for a religious congregation to foster the growth of each member in holiness, and at the same time to make of the congregation an instrument of Christ's mission in the world, is to promote a spirit and structure of interdependence. The member admitted to the congregation must possess a basic personality healthy enough to confront herself and allow herself to be confronted by others, within and outside the community-structures, in growth-producing situations which lead her to ever broader commitment to God and to other persons. The novice member must have as her first goal to achieve self-identity, 'become her own man'. She becomes conscious of herself as autonomous in the sense that ultimately – before God – she is responsible for herself; she cannot allow herself to be absorbed into or dominated by another; she possesses an inner private world where she encounters God and where only he has access. This self-autonomy she acquires, however, through 'openness' to others, a growing consciousness of the feelings and needs of others, the ability to understand and share others' burdens. Self-fulfilment (St Thomas's *desiderium plenitudinis essendi*) results from the process of going out to others, promoting their well-being. Thus she realizes over and over the words of Jesus, 'Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it'. It is from within the depths of a person's autonomy, nurtured by healthy inter-personal relation-

[12] *Gaudium et Spes*, 17.

[13] *The Courage to Be* (New York, 1952), p 122.

ships and the group-goal of service of God and man, that a commitment to religious life can come. The person prevents herself from being dwarfed and immature by directing herself outwards and upwards. When commitment is entered into she engages herself to take the community 'into account' in whatever decisions she makes, just as the community pledges itself to take her 'into account' in whatever decisions it makes for her.

The very terminology of religious community bespeaks interdependence. St Paul gives us the model when he writes: 'the saints together make a unity in the work of service, building up the body of Christ. In this way we are all to come to unity in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God until we become the perfect Man, fully mature with the fulness of Christ himself'.[14] We give each other life in community and hence we live; or we are the agents of death to one another and hence to ourselves. 'Mother Church' is not to be regarded as merely the hierarchy but as we ourselves. Our congregations, as little 'Mother Churches', cannot afford to be sterile – sterile in works or sterile in begetting successors. The self-deprecation of religious communities must give way more realistically to a self-confidence about our worth in the world which in turn will prompt an active and intelligent recruitment.

Self-interest cannot be the basis of successful community, but rather the continual practice of building one another up, of capitalizing on and promoting all that is positive in the other. Fortunately, not all have the same means or qualities to give; it is the diversity, as St Paul points out so often, which makes possible the body. A community can hardly state its goal in this matter better than did St Simon: 'From each according to his ability; to each, according to his need'. Just as the person cannot grow unless she is in interaction with God and other persons, so, too, with the community. The community is not an end in itself. It exists to be available to and to help each of its members be available to persons and groups in need of fuller life.

So great is the spectrum of needs, so varied the cultural forms to be adapted to, that communities or even congregations may indeed specialize, adopt a 'theology of the limited objective'. Whether such be the case or whether a congregation opt to have its members available to diversities of works and cultures, the essential points, if the principle of interdependence is to be adhered to, are: 1) that the process for making such a basic decision be indeed corporate, a consensus of the members; 2) that it be made in active discernment of the Lord's will through adequate assessment of all needs; and 3) that it be carried out in an alert consciousness of a Church-wide, world-wide interdependence.

Whatever decision on this level a congregation makes, in other words, it must take the Church (the hierarchy as well as the body of the faithful) and so far as possible, the whole of society into account. A reciprocal taking into

[14] Eph 4, 12–13.

account of the congregation by the Church and its hierarchy is also indicated.

Such mutual 'taking into account' of the other entity by the person, by the community, by the congregation, and ultimately by the Church imposes a great burden and a complexity which sometimes appear excessive and crushing. It does not imply that we must solve all the problems of the world, but it is a recognition of limits upon our independent action which are necessary to the health of the other entity. It demands of us that 'radical change of mentality' on all levels of operation: a reverence for the rights of others, a consciousness of the possible priority of the needs of others over our desires. Whether we are teaching a third grade class in a parochial school, or carrying the message of vietnamese suffering to the world, we must be involved in helping to spread this consciousness of the needs of others and of our responsibility. In his *Apostolic Exhortation to Religious*, Pope Paul has called upon us to let the cry of the poor resound within us.[15] The Centre of Concern in Washington, D.C. has recently published *Quest for Justice*, which offers a blueprints for 'turning America around' in its recognition of and responsibility towards interdependence. So long as bullets fly and people die of hunger, a deep wound infects the human heart. This wound must be healed. Will religious pass by, or will they give leadership to our world in renewing and reviving the responsibility of being Christ's samaritans?

On this level of renewing and revival we must support one another, we must feel caught up in 'the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted'.[16] With the Church of Latin America, with which we should experience a more than ordinary interdependence, let us proclaim:

> Salvation, which is the realization of the Kingdom of God, involves a liberation of all men, the progress of each and all from a less human condition to one more human. To accomplish our goal we must become imbued with the message of Christ, in order to understand that the Kingdom of God will not reach its fulness until integral development has been achieved.[17]

Whether this integral development be within the single person, the community, the congregation, the Church, or the world, it must be the aim of our mutual dependence one upon the other. As religious we accept the Church as 'a sacrament, a sign of intimate union with God and of unity with all men', and we recognize her as 'the instrument for achieving such union and unity.'[18] The only holiness for the achievement of which we have pledged ourselves to one another and to her is that which commands, 'anyone who loves God must also love his brother'.[19]

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[15] *Evangelica Testificatio*, 17. Cf *Supplement to The Way* 14 (Autumn, 1971), p 10.

[16] *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.

[17] *The Church in the present-day transformation of Latin America in the light of the Council*, 1, p 23.

[18] *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

[19] 1 Jn 4, 21.