PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES

By JEAN BEYER

IT IS A TRUISM to say that the far-reaching changes of recent times have engendered a new mentality, characterized particularly by an unprecedented insistence on the rights of the person. This mentality is much in evidence among younger people who tend to find the controversies of preceding generations largely irrelevant to their own preoccupations. This generation clash has profoundly shaken the structures of religious life, and one of our most urgent problems is so to revivify these structures as to ensure their continued operation in our own day and their survival in a world which, even a few years hence, may well be vastly different from ours. It is with the many ramifications of this problem that the following pages are concerned.

Any discussion about structures must take into account the wide variety that obtains among religious Institutes. Not all, for instance, possess a centralized organization, though in Institutes dedicated to the work of the apostolate such an organization is normal. Among the apostolic Institutes, the majority are of fairly recent foundation, and many have never possessed institutions appropriate to their spirit and charism. Rather, their structures might be described as 'neutral', in that they were not conceived as essential to the foundation or to the views of the founder. On the other hand, certain more traditional rules, such as the Rule of St Benedict, or constitutions like those of the Society of Jesus, embody not only the charism but the sustained legislative work of the founders who composed them.[1] Finally, among the various structures of consecrated life, it is evident that some are more immediately sympathetic to the mentality of today than others. Structures of a more democratic type — and there are none more democratic than those of the Order of St Dominic — would appear more in line with current attitudes than the hierarchical constitution of the benedictines or the Society of Jesus, the first centring on the person of the abbot, the latter on the general delegated by the Sovereign Pontiff for mission. In the case of Institutes founded on a non-democratic basis, the reconciling of the claims of fidelity with those of renewal may well prove a delicate undertaking.

Norms and uniformity

It is important to recognize that in one respect the influence on religious Institutes of the Code of Canon Law of 1917 has been damaging, often unbeknown to religious themselves. The intention of the law, admittedly, was

[1] The Constitutions of the Jesuits, of course, have been followed to a greater or lesser degree by a large number of recent Congregations who have not possessed either the apostolic mobility which those Constitutions imply, or the spirit and mentality essential for their correct application.

over-all reform, and to a large extent this was achieved. Nevertheless, many of the canonical norms were introduced to correct specific abuses, in the belief that those abuses could most effectively be dealt with by general legislation. Hence uniformity became the order of the day, and the majority of Institutes — if not all — have suffered in consequence. It is this that was to provoke what may be called the 'conciliar reaction'; a fundamentally healthy movement, but one which has not escaped the excesses of over-reaction.[2]

Basic to the conciliar renewal programme was the notion of the founder's charism. But the implementation of renewal was soon to take on a rather different direction, due to the technical, rather than properly spiritual, influence exercized on renewal chapters by specialists whose expertise and approach belong primarily to the field of sociology. In the light of subsequent experience, it has already proved necessary to restore the balance in favour of spiritual values, fundamental to religious life but easily overlooked by the 'technician'. Such values alone can ensure the contemporary expression of a unique charism on lines consistent with the nature of a particular Institute. This will not come about, of course, without the help of the Spirit, working through the graces and charisms of individuals and the qualities of holiness and generosity in both the superiors and members of an Institute. The whole process, however, is far from simple. With regard to the personal qualities of superiors, for instance, two shortcomings may be singled out as so common that they might have been foreseen from the outset. There are superiors who, in spite of manifest personal holiness, are plainly unequal to the responsibilities of the moment. And there are superiors of unquestionable vision but lacking in the practical ability to convert abstract values into the hard currency of action.

STRUCTURES IN QUESTION

The superior-subject relationship

One of the crucial problems the Council had to face concerned the authority-obedience relationship in the lives of the various religious Institutes. The problem was exacerbated by the over-all objective which the Council set itself: namely, the redaction of a single text (*Perfectae Caritatis*) for the direction of all Institutes, and for the circumstances of our time. To appreciate the difficulties inherent in the task, it will help to recall three distinct historical

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[2] In this connection it is worth drawing attention to the work of the Commission for the Revision of Canon Law, and particularly to the work of the study group of that Commission entrusted with the Institutes of Perfection. It is the present writer's conviction that the revised Code will both embody the authentic tradition of the Council while extending its implications into the realm of everyday life. On this, see my study in *Supplement to The Way*, 13 (Summer, 1971), pp 87-115. [A second study on the new law will appear in a subsequent Supplement. Ed.]

developments which have gone to make up the complex situation of religious life today.

First there is the long-standing monastic tradition, characterized by what may be called the superior-subject relationship. In its original context, this distinction belongs to feudal society. In essence, the dealings of the monastic *Dominus* with his inferiors were those of a feudal lord with his serfs. In marked contrast with this, stands the contemporary ideal of the community of brethren, where all share in a co-responsibility for the life and tasks of the group. But prior to this, there was an intermediate development. For the concept of monastic superior, while retaining its force even to modern times, has been accompanied — even overlaid — in recent centuries by the apostolic concept of the superior as 'mission leader', the one entrusted with the task of sending labourers to the harvest. This development is associated with the name of St Ignatius, and on a superficial view might be regarded as the hall-mark of religious Institutes founded in the last three centuries. The reality, however, is less clear-cut, for many factors have conspired to obstruct the full and general realization of the mobile and personal apostolate which this 'sending' implies. In fact, the lives of many apostolic Institutes have developed within the more traditional, conventual framework.

The most recent development derives its impetus from the ideal and life-style of Charles de Foucauld. It consists in a certain approach to community and a corresponding approach to the apostolate. The community or 'fraternity' knows nothing of social distinctions; the priest has no special rank, and the superior (whether priest or not) plays neither a preponderant nor a directive role. The apostolate is one of brotherhood, and derives its effectiveness from the communicative power of spiritual values and the witness of austerity, prayer and poverty. We shall return to a more detailed consideration of this form of life and the questions it raises later in this article. For the moment we may notice that, despite serious practical problems, the idea exercizes a widespread and powerful appeal among religious today.

Given these differences, to say nothing of the finer distinctions of charism and spirituality which differentiate one Institute from another, the Council's attempt to take cognizance in one and the same text of the main characteristics of every Institute was like trying to square the circle. Inevitably the resulting document abounds in ambiguities. In effect, though not in intention, the text of *Perfectae Caritatis*, with its preference for the terms *moderator* and *sodalis* to those of *superior* and *subditus* calls in question both person and the role and the authority of the superior.[3]

But relations within communities or Institutes are not the only area where the authority problem raises its head. There is the further realm of relationships between religious and the hierarchical Church. Here, too, the practical outcome of the Council has proved less than satisfactory, largely

[3] Cf Beyer J. S.J.: *Vita per consilia evangelica consecrata* (Rome, 1969), pp 146-63.

owing to its failure to recognize the inexperience of many superiors in dealing with hierarchical initiative. As a result, religious have not always escaped the adverse effects of external influence, even pressure. Two prominent features of the post-conciliar scene may serve to illustrate this. First, the Council strongly endorsed the involvement of religious in the general pastoral action of the local Church, on the diocesan or national level. Hence the importance of consultation between bishops, clergy and religious. The function of this consultation was seen in strictly pastoral terms, and its objective was unity and apostolic effectiveness. But in fact the diocesan clergy has tended to assume a directive role in the process, a tendency which the general tenor of the Council seems to confirm. For religious, then, the machinery of pastoral collaboration is essentially an external influence and in many cases its by-product has been to undermine confidence in their own structures. This effect may be seen even in Institutes which had formally been outstanding for a quality of brotherly communion grounded in the rule and the tradition which had shaped its observance. The second feature is the National Conference of Major Superiors. Again, the service rendered by these, both to religious themselves and to the Church at large, is beyond doubt. On the credit side we may note especially a growing sense of common responsibility and a growing ease and frequency of contact between religious and bishops. But this development, too, contains latent dangers for religious, now more exposed than ever to pressures from the hierarchy who tend to look to them increasingly for the maintenance and development of every form of apostolate, including that of the parish.

The concept of authority

To begin with, it may be worthwhile to consider some of the main terms of the discussion: participation, central authority (which decentralization aims to modify) and subsidiarity.

Participation may be considered in two ways. There is participation *with* authority, authority and ultimate power of decision remaining invested in the head. There is also participation *in* authority. In this sense, authority tends increasingly to be distributed among the subsidiary structures, reaching even to the 'grass roots' themselves, and enabling local or primary groups to experiment with their own spontaneous ways of living and acting together.

Of these two points of view, the first, though at first sight best calculated to safeguard the element of personal authority, may well contain the germ of an ultimate rejection of authority. The course of its development sometimes runs as follows. Authority in the Church — as indeed in every society — is a service. So if the group participates or collaborates with the person in authority, the object is to enable authority more adequately to serve the group; in the last analysis, it is the group which comes first. Hence, as the group becomes aware of its power to make its own decisions, the authority service will acquire the appearances of a redundant form of tutelage, which the group will desire

to suppress. To be sure, this approach derives from a highly over-simple interpretation of authority as service, but this is not to say that such an interpretation is uncommon. The reverse is more likely to be true. If the values of personal and communitarian participation in decision-making are highly prized by religious today, one of the reasons is that these processes are seen as a road to emancipation.

Participation in the second sense, the extension to lower agencies of powers which the higher agencies had formally reserved to themselves, is the sounder view in the long run. True, it has been the cause of serious difficulties, but these arise not from the idea itself but from the excessive haste with which the post-conciliar renewal programme attempted to implement it. Though many of the superiors elected or appointed in recent years subscribe to participation in principle, not all have been able to measure up to the implications. Their own religious life has given them neither the experience nor even the faith and patience requisite for their pastoral charge. Small wonder, then, that they prove unequal to the demands of a highly delicate type of authority role, combining the elements of a new departure with the essential traditional values of which the superior was formerly the undisputed promotor and guardian. Here lies the key to more than one aspect of the state of crisis which currently bedevils certain Institutes, monastic as well as apostolic.

Mention of the higher agencies leads us to a further distinction; there are two forms of *central authority*. In the first form, the lower agencies were organized from the outset to proceed from the centre towards the periphery. Such is the case, for example, in the Society of Jesus which began with the setting up of a central authority. The second form arises from the subsequent centralization of originally distinct foundations; it entails the withdrawal from the lower agencies of powers which ideally should always have fallen within the competence of major or general superiors for the more effective direction of the Institute. This may be termed 'central authority through co-ordination', as opposed to 'central authority through mission'.

Of these two forms the second owes its inspiration to the first, and under the unifying influence of the common law and the pressure of events, the two have become effectively identical. The result has been a kind of blue print for a centralized religious Institute. This schema, however, is little more than a skeleton in cases where attitudes and practice do not correspond to the true juridical forms.

Finally, a word on the *principle of subsidiarity*. The principle was first advocated by the Church in the context of civil and political life, with a view to widening the basis of government and other functions of human communities. Making as it does for greater freedom and bringing into focus the responsibility of the individual in society, this sharing in authority was recognized by the Church as a natural right. Inevitably the principle of subsidiarity has come profoundly to affect the Church's own life, bringing about in the Church a form of social structure very different from the prevailing order of recent centuries, and

probably more evangelical.[4] But this is not to say that the first attempts to structure this principle have always been either the best in themselves or the most suitable for every situation.

Words like 'participation', 'centralization', 'subsidiarity' (along with many others) do not possess a definite and univocal meaning. Each means different things in different circumstances and the use of them as slogans has served in various ways to divert attention from the most basic question of all: *what is the nature and source of authority in religious life?*

The problem is not an easy one to resolve. Perhaps the first point to notice is that discussion on the subject takes place on various and quite distinct contextual levels. In the context of the inner relationships of communities and Institutes, two questions tend to be dominant. Who has the right to the last word? What is the specific characteristic which makes this sort of service distinct from any other? On this level, the psychological influence of the *paterfamilias* or *dominus* model, coveted by some and rejected by others, is an important factor underlying the widely different answers — authoritarian as well as the opposite — which these questions receive. No doubt this is an easy comment to make. But it is essential to recognize that the current questioning of the superior's role, in whatever sector of religious life, is not always rooted in principles of spirituality or theology, still less in the search for an ever-deepening fidelity to the founder and to the particular character he wanted to bestow on his foundation. The basic question which lies at the root of the problem of structures and participation is the nature of religious authority. Is it strictly a participation in the authority of the Church, the delegation of a power proper to the Church's hierarchy and exercized as a power transmitted, received and hence essentially subordinate and inferior? Or is such authority founded rather on communion in the common call and common charism which give rise to a free association in the Church, one which does not pertain to its hierarchical structure? If an association of consecrated life is a human brotherhood, it would seem to possess its own existence, ruled by God in the election and mission of the founder himself, and hence have the right to organize itself as a group and to decide for itself its form of government. Again, a charismatic group within the People of God and approved as such by the hierarchy is a visible and effective sign of *love*. Is such a group, in virtue of its democratic nature, itself a 'people', endowed with its own ultimate

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[4] While it was clearly the wish of the Council to see the principle applied throughout the structures of civil life, in its own ecclesiology the Council leaves the matter undefined. The principle is implicit, of course, in the collegiality of the hierarchy and in the role accorded to the laity. Even so, it should be noticed that the principle is cited in two documents only, and in each case in regard to civil society: *Gaudium et Spes*, 86 and *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3. It would seem that the principle was first applied to the Church in an article by W. Bertrams S.J.: 'De principio subsidiaritatis in Jure canonico' in *Periodica*, 46 (1957), pp 3-65. It will be formally invoked in the 'Principles for the Revision of the Code', approved by the first Synod of Bishops.

authority, empowered to set up its own structures and to choose its own leaders? Or is there no place in the People of God for a 'democracy' of this sort? (It has been observed that, historically, the example of religious life has played its part in the emergence of the modern parliamentary democracies; in our own time, then, might not religious life itself, lived in the spirit of Christ, provide the most flourishing democracy of all?[5]) Nor, finally, should we forget that in certain periods of the Church's history the abbot, as pastor and leader of the local Church, exercized full jurisdiction equal to that of bishops, and that similar rights were sometimes enjoyed by abbesses. It was their exemption, entailing as it did a participation in the Church's jurisdiction, that gave autonomy and consistence to the great conventual and monastic orders. Thus the collective history of the charisms in the Church poses a question: is it true to say that their communion, their common action and their communitarian life demand such insertion — by ecclesiastical right — into the hierarchical structures of the Church?

The problem has not yet been seriously tackled on this level, largely because of abuses in the recent past, and the strongly negative reaction that these have provoked today. The abuses were certainly serious. In feminine religious life especially, authority was often, at best, an enlightened despotism. 'Disponibility', submission and humility were fostered in such a way that 'subjects' were no more than pawns on a chessboard, almost entirely passive, waiting to be 'moved'. (Nor have those days completely gone. It is the survival into our own time of these outmoded attitudes that makes religious life painful indeed for those who have grasped the spirit of the Council and see its directives widely ignored.)

The majority of the bishops and *periti* of the Council understandably reacted strongly against this situation. Their first concern was to defend the adult person against subjection to an unlimited and unchallenged authority. But in retrospect we may ask whether some fundamental considerations were not overlooked. It was assumed, for instance, that most religious were spiritually and psychologically equipped for the sudden change of structure: which they obviously were not, if the now familiar concomitants of participation — manoeuvring, pressures and manipulation — are anything to go by. More seriously still, in some quarters, the language of the Council, in its rejection of the despotic style of religious authority in the past, far from redressing the balance, has been used to call into question the traditional constituents of consecrated obedience: gift to God, dedication to the Institute, service of the Church in union with Christ's obedience even to the cross. Confusion is compounded by the ambiguity of the document itself, in its attempt to compromise between different positions. The task with which we are faced is to construct a new theology of obedience, to define exactly the mediatory

[5] On this point the reader is referred to the masterly study by Leo Moulin: 'Aux sources des libertés européennes. Reflexions sur quinze siècles de gouvernement des religieux', in *Les Cahiers de Bruges, Récherches européennes*, 6 (1956), pp 91-140.

nature of authority, to establish a synthesis between tendencies which the Council was content simply to set in juxtaposition. But this synthesis must not be sought on the general and abstract level beloved of the great theologians of religious life in the past. The problem needs to be approached by each Institute, in the light of its own vocation and the tradition of the founder.

Brotherhood and communication

Mention has been made of the notion of brotherhood among the Little Brothers of Jesus. Since their style is frequently adduced as an existential reason for re-appraising, and if necessary changing, the structures of government and communication in religious life, it may be well to consider this model a little more closely.

We have seen that the dimensions of both apostolate and community are involved. With regard to the apostolate, the brotherhood introduces into religious life a strongly 'local' character, while at the same time retaining a fluidity of community membership. Only the group on the spot can assess a situation, adjust to it, decide on the work to be done, and in the case of remunerative work, choose an employer. At the same time, the unskilled nature of the work chosen readily admits of changes of members from one fraternity to another. Community life is characterized by a concern to retain as far as possible a vertical rather than a horizontal structure, and since the superior has neither to direct nor to organize the apostolate, many aspects of his traditional role disappear. This, to be sure, does not make him redundant. Within the community, he represents a person — the major superior or the equivalent, the Institute — with its particular demands, the Church — which approves the Institute and watches over it, and the Lord — in whose name the group is gathered together. Nevertheless, to safeguard the fraternal quality, groups tend to be as horizontal as possible, and whatever savours of superiority introduces an inhibiting vertical dimension. Hence in many respects the superior is a first among equals.

In each region or zone containing small groups of this sort, there is also a regional superior or president. His charge is to be at the service of these groups without being part of them, to visit them in their houses, help and counsel those in difficulty. But his role, though vital, is often ill-defined and hard to fulfil. Of necessity he is continually on the move; if superficial contacts come easily, deeper relationships based on first-hand knowledge of the personalities and life-situations of individuals is harder to achieve. Hence, though the more fragile groups tend to look to the regional superior as their true centre, the place of the local leader remains fundamental. Where he succeeds in meeting the demands of his task — and these, too, are delicate — it is he who provides the community with its true leadership.

Various considerations have commended the imitation of these small communities. In the first place they appear well adapted to modern social and psychological needs, offering a more human scale of group-living, more

authentic contacts, and a more effective and spontaneous neutral support than was possible in the larger communities of the past, in which many complained of isolation. Furthermore, the younger generation, we are told, finds the burden of solitude harder to cope with; and small communities appear to meet the need both for a rooted presence in a particular locality and for a more authentic style of poverty, aligned to the manner of life of ordinary people in the neighbourhood. Indeed it is often in the poorer areas, and among the least privileged elements of the population, that these small communities have been established. Thus the brotherhood has come to represent a model programme for pastoral action within the poorer milieux.

But to admit the validity of these considerations is not to concede all the inferences currently drawn from them. For one thing, these experiments are too recent for their lasting effects to be apparent; one could wish, in any case, that their forms covered a more varied range. It must be emphasized that the fruitfulness of this type of life demands fidelity to values which do not come easily. As well as involvement in economic poverty, there must be the qualities of austerity and adoration central to the life of de Foucauld himself. Communities must be inspired by the spirit of detachment and true charity. They should not be founded on the basis of personal attraction, the corollary of which is ostracism. Failure to keep in check an inherent repugnance for the 'vertical' has already proved a source of difficulty in establishing fraternities, whilst the role accorded to the regional superior seems to suggest that the small groups are less autonomous than may appear at first sight. A wider concept of community is already at work, which might in time become more explicit.

Nevertheless, the effect of these groups on religious Institutes in general is already apparent. Together with the more communitarian and fraternal life-style goes the search for a new type of structure, in which the group is responsible for every member and vice-versa. Thus, by their very existence, these communities of little brothers and sisters, and the rapidly proliferating small communities within other Institutes, constitute a challenge to the more traditional type of structure and the values of brotherly communion as formerly accepted in the larger community. This influence, already considerable, will certainly spread. It is therefore necessary to keep in view the realities and difficulties of this development.

The Institute as a responsible body

Here there are two requirements of paramount importance: improved communication and the provision of substantial information. This is true of modern society at large, where information provides the acknowledged basis of collective awareness and public opinion. The right to information is a fundamental principle, and the control of information — however benevolently exercized — by those in power is seen as inadmissable. Such

principles as these have now found their way into the Church, and consequently into religious Institutes.[6]

This should not surprise us. As a community established in the mystery of Christ across space and time, the Church adjusts to each succeeding generation according to the rhythm of history; so that communication and the provision of information, though apparently new aspects of ecclesial life, belong to her very nature. They may be seen as expressing a growing awareness at every level of her communitarian nature. The exchange of information is an exercise of her collective response to the impact of events.

The Church, however, while she is affected by developments in civic society, does not simply imitate it. The modes of communication must be consistent with her life and fundamental structure. A difficulty peculiar to the Church — and to religious life within the Church — arises from the fact that the vertical direction belongs of necessity to her government and authority. Its main characteristics are always service and charity, but to discover the right contemporary expression of these qualities calls for prudence and wisdom. Hastily drawn parallels between the Church and civic society can only impede the process. Some religious Institutes have made precisely this mistake, and are now finding it hard to recognize their spirit in the structures which, in the last analysis, have failed to give embodiment to that spirit. This has been and remains one of the major problems for the renewal chapters.

Yet if religious Institutes share the particular problem of the hierarchical Church, the principles which establish the right of information in the Church apply also to them. In religious life, the collective awareness made possible by communication is a means of enabling the entire community to co-operate in the decision-making processes of authority. Any change, however, in this as in other matters, must take account of the vocation proper to each Institute, the graces of that vocation, as well as the need for fidelity to a unique charism and to such structures as provide for its survival and development. In practice, this means that principles valid for the hierarchical Church may not always apply to religious life without qualification. There are differences between relationships in religious life and those in the whole Church. The obedience vowed to God in religious Institutes creates demands peculiar to that life. And even though many Institutes are not committed to authority *structures* as strong or as 'vertical' as those of the Church, there is a sense in which obedience confers on religious life certain vertical characteristics of its own.

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[6] These comparatively new aspects of ecclesial life are examined in a number of studies by M. D. Chenu. See 'L'Eglise face aux exigences de ce monde', in *Pour une nouvelle image de l'Eglise* (Gembloux, 1970), pp 175-218; especially pp 204-18 on the place of public opinion in the People of God. Chenu has contributed a valuable introduction to *Le rôle fondamental de l'information et de la communication dans l'Eglise* (Paris, 1969).

REFLECTIONS ON PARTICIPATION

Participation structures in the Church and in religious Institutes

Today we are witnessing a growing participation by religious in the life and government of their Institutes as well as in the organization of the apostolate and the establishment of work-priorities. This corresponds to the spirit of the second Vatican Council. By and large, participation structures have been endorsed, if not actually suggested, by comparable developments in the local or universal Church. Collegiality and subsidiarity have found practical expression in various forms of participation and decentralization, some envisaged by the Council, others arising subsequently in response to its spirit. Thus in recent years we have seen the appearance of the synod of bishops, national and regional episcopal conferences, priests' councils with their sub-groups, laity councils and diocesan pastoral councils.

As far as priests and bishops are concerned, such structures are rooted in the sacramental order. On the other hand it is not always so clear that the charism of every religious founder provides a similar foundation. And where such a basis is lacking, to imitate an extraneous phenomenon would be spiritually precarious, to say the least. In other words, to say that a certain norm is consistent with the Council is not to claim its univocal application to all Institutes. The future, no doubt, will drive home the lesson of history: the religious Institute which does not live by its past is an Institute without a future.

The setting up of participation structures, therefore, is no light task. It is not enough to aim merely at a structure which will 'work'. There is a more fundamental task to be undertaken: the investigation into the doctrinal principles — namely ecclesiological — which provide the basis of participation in the renewal of religious life. Only then will it be possible to assess particular structures, and to distinguish between the ones which would promote and the ones which would jeopardize the renewal of a given Institute, in keeping with its true identity.

The basis of participation: a new ecclesiology

Participation, by means of existing as well as new structures, is the key to the conciliar renewal programme. We may recall the main directives of the Council in this matter:

> (a) Renewal and adaptation can be achieved only with the co-operation of every member of the Institute.[7]
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> (b) The Council recommends that, in matters which affect the interests of the whole Institute, suitable means be found for consulting all the members and hearing their opinions.[8]

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[7] *Perfectae Caritatis*, 4.

[8] *Ibid.*

(c) With regard to communities of enclosed nuns, their opinions and advice should be gathered from meetings of federations or other assemblies.[9]

(d) Chapters and Councils must give expression, each in their own way, to the participation and concern that all members should take in the well-being of the whole.[10]

(e) There should be closer bonds between all members of an Institute, and particularly with the coadjutors, with a view to enabling these to share more fully in the life and works of the Institute.[11]

(f) The Council stresses the importance of conferences of major superiors and commends the establishment of closer co-ordination and collaboration with episcopal conferences in matters regarding the apostolate.[12]

In the implementation of these directions, a practical problem arises which affects both the Church and religious life. For nothing in the way of structures was suppressed by the Council and new structures now stand alongside the old. Episcopal collegiality co-exists with the college of cardinals, episcopal conferences with provincial councils, priests' councils with cathedral chapters or diocesan consultors, pastoral councils with specialized diocesan commissions, lay councils with the more general or specialized catholic action organizations. A similar problem appears in certain religious Institutes; former structures remain in place, in some instances doubling up with the new ones.

The fundamental *attitude* underlying the new forms of participation suggested or prescribed by the Council indicates, as Fr Congar has shown, a new ecclesiology, which, after the strongly juridical approach of the last six centuries with its ever-growing insistence on the unconditional assertion of authority, has now restored the more ancient and more collegial tradition.

> The most decisive prophetic move made by the Council in the realm of ecclesiology is to be seen in the chapter of *Lumen Gentium* on 'The People of God' and the correlative chapter on the hierarchy. It consists in acknowledging the primacy of the christian quality as such (the ontology of grace inaugurated at baptism) in relation to the Church's structure, with the relationship that this implies between the higher and lower members. What is most fundamental in the Church is the existence in every christian life of faith, hope, and charity, together with the charisms (that is, natural or supernatural gifts) ordered to the building up of the body of Christ. It follows from this that the Church is a communion of brothers in which all are living and all are active.[13]

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[9] *Ibid.*, 4. [10] *Ibid.*, 14.

[11] *Ibid.*, 15. [12] *Ibid.*, 23.

[13] Yves Congar O.P.: 'Autorité, initiative, coresponsabilité. Elements de reflexion sur les conditions dans lesquelles le problème se pose aujourd'hui dans l'Eglise', in *Au Milieu des Orages* (Paris, 1969), p 85.

Two points here call for notice: the primacy of the christian quality as the basis of a fundamental equality, and the brotherly communion existing between the members of the Church, all of them living and active. Congar goes on, however, to distinguish between this equality and a *functional* inequality, essential to the christian brotherhood as a hierarchically constituted community:

> This does not, however, do away with the functional relationship of inequality. It must be recognized in this connection that there is a way of invoking, and hence of understanding, the idea of the People of God which is not quite correct. Acts of initiative on the part of the faithful or claims to freedom of decision are often justified on the grounds that 'we are the People of God', as if the expression carried the political sense of 'People' as opposed to those in power. . . . What is lacking here is the transcendent and sacramental dimension connoted by this definition in its classical usage in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[14]

The christian community is hierarchically structured 'on a sacramental basis and at the same time a juridical basis. Not all have the same vocation, the same function, the same responsibility. Nevertheless all are involved, all are co-responsible'.[15]

These principles of ecclesiology are relevant to religious life without being directly applicable to it. They have to do directly with the Church as divinely constituted with a sacramental and juridical structure, which religious life does not possess. Since the two are qualitatively different, the Institutions of religious life cannot be assimilated to those of the hierarchical Church without qualification. We have already considered the diversity of structure which religious Institutes may possess according to their different vocations. Nevertheless, developments in ecclesial life exert an influence on religious Institutes, both in their life and institutions. To be aware of these developments is essential and it is good for religious life to be in step with them.

Hierarchy and community

From his study of the history of the Church and tradition, Fr Congar has identified two constant and co-existing principles:

> a principle of hierarchical structure, and a communitarian principle extending not only to christian life but to the exercise of authority itself.[16] This latter principle has far-reaching consequences. It was in order to express these that in 1953 I revived the word 'collegiality': I have studied the idea in one of its most audacious formulations, frequently cited in the

[14] *Op. cit.*, pp 86.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] *Ibid.*

thirteenth century: 'What concerns all should be treated of and approved by all'.[17]

One effect of the revival of 'collegiality' language is to heighten a current malaise about the idea of apostolic ministry as 'paternal'. On this subject, too, Congar has some illuminating observations to offer. St Paul, he points out, is indeed 'father' to the christians he has evangelized, but this does not mean that the latter are assigned the status of 'sons'. If Paul himself uses that word, it is 'to express tenderness, not to define a situation. For spiritual paternity produces not sons, but brothers; since it leads others to communicate in the same goods and the same life, in dependence on the one true Father'.[18]

This profound communion in Christ was the subject of vigorous debate at the Council, when the question arose of the relationship between the bishop and priest. Little by little, the relationship came to be seen by the Council as a fraternal one. In *Lumen Gentium* priests are considered 'sons and friends'[19] of the bishop. The decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* calls them 'brothers and friends'.[20] Again, the usage of the Church puts a question to religious. For each religious Institute is called to examine the spiritual meaning which the founder wanted to maintain between superiors and community, the abbot and his monks, the provincial, prior or guardian and the brotherhood, between the leader of an apostolic order and the priests whom he sends to the mission. The same caveat is necessary against taking over the general norms of ecclesiology in a manner which might put at risk the distinctive spiritual qualities elicited in the Church by the various charisms of consecrated life.

Congar goes on to elucidate further the relationship of authority to community implicit in the ideas of brotherhood and communion. 'There is the fact of the hierarchy, but the fact of the hierarchy belongs entirely *within* the brotherly communion of the baptized'.[21] Functions within this community exist, then, to organize its life. Three consequences follow from this:

(a) The hierarchy is not above the community but within it. Fr Laberthonnière puts the matter thus: 'The exercise of authority in general is only one form of the tasks we have to fulfil through one another, for one another and in view of our common destiny'.[22]

(b) A person in a position of authority remains a christian. He exercizes authority as a christian and the fundamental law of his authority is the giving

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17 *Ibid.* This *Regula Juris* has a long history. It was codified in the Decretals of Boniface VIII, and still stands in the Code of Canon Law (Canon 101, no 1, 2°). For the history, see Congar: 'Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari et approbari', in *Revue historique de Droit français et étranger*, 36 (1958), pp 210-58; M. Gaines Post: 'A Roman Legal Theory of Consent *Quod omnes tangit* in Medieval Representation', in *Wisconsin Law Review* (1950), pp 66-78.

18 Congar, *op. cit.*, p 87. Cf Mt 23, 9; Eph 3, 15.

19 *Lumen Gentium*, 28.

20 *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7.

21 Congar, *op. cit.*, p 88.

22 Cf *La notion chrétienne d'autorité* (Paris, 1955), p 34. Cited by Congar, *op. cit.*, p 88.

of love and service. Christian authority *is* love and service: these qualities are intrinsic to it.

(c) Superiors and subjects pursue the same goal and work for the same good. Christian authority does not exist for itself. It seeks and serves the truth; and the subordinate, in his active obedience, exercizes co-operation and co-responsibility. Obedience therefore, supposes dialogue. To be sure, this does not equate the superior with the brethren; his function is not simply to rubber-stamp their prior decisions. But authority itself is a matter of obedience, obedience to the realities and the values which may sometimes be revealed by those under authority. Authority and obedience take place in dialogue, though the exercise cannot be reduced to equality in dialogue.

Dialogue

In many religious Institutes dialogue extends to every area of life: personal and community life, individual and common work. Furthermore, it is this element of dialogue, in so far as it consists in seeking the will of the Lord, that makes the community itself the Lord's instrument. As a principle of life, co-ordination and permanent adaptation, dialogue will be above all the expression of fraternal charity lived out as union with God in Jesus Christ through the strength of the Spirit.

This dialogue has its theological basis in the mystery of the christian assembly, as brought to the fore by the Council, particularly in the constitution on the liturgy and in the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*.[23] The union of brethren in the name of the Lord, provided they are genuinely trying to pray, can be assured of the presence of Christ. It allows of exchange, revision, projects and plans of action in view of a deeper entry into the realm of the spirit which undergirds both life and action. This is the principle of the monastic chapter, where questions of importance are dealt with by all, and all have a voice since all are concerned. Furthermore, God frequently makes known the better way through the voice of a junior member of the assembly.

Such dialogue, however, is possible only on certain conditions, which are not always easy to realize. It requires in particular two things: the right to information and the right to disagreement. The first need not detain us; it will be generally conceded that members of an Institute or community cannot be consulted unless they have been previously and properly informed, and that the information must be sincere and not in itself a form of pressure. Confrontation, for many people an embarrassing idea and certainly one which raises delicate questions concerning truth, commitment and charity, calls for further examination. In the context of the Church, Congar has numerated four norms, whose relevance to religious life will be evident.[24]

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[23] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7; *Perfectae Caritatis*, 14.

[24] Cf Congar, *op. cit.*, pp 95-100.

1. Confrontation must not impair charity. Admittedly, to go on from this principle to ask *how* one should cope with difficult cases is not an easy step, for the demands of charity have to be reconciled with other aspects of the situation. There can come a point where unity is quite plainly destroyed, as when a group of the baptized can no longer share in the Lord's eucharistic body. On the other hand, charity must not be invoked as a reason for obliterating disagreements, refusing to take a firm stand, or diluting the quality of one's commitment. If the mean is not easy to achieve in the Church at large, it will probably be harder rather than easier to find in religious life.

2. Confrontation must not call in question the pastoral or hierarchical structure of the Church, in so far as that structure derives from the Lord's Institution. In consecrated life the same is to be said of structures essential to the charism of an Institute and inherently related to its vitality.

3. Confrontation must not deny or challenge in a hasty, unreflective or irresponsible manner articles of doctrine for which one should rather be ready to give one's life. At first sight this point may appear without application in a religious Institute. Today, however, problems of faith frequently disturb the inner life of many Institutes, especially when truths bearing directly on the end or characteristics of an Institute, or the meaning of its service in the Church, come under fire.

4. Those who disagree with ourselves must not be marked down as obdurate, irredeemable, beyond the frontiers of brotherhood. This tendency is made harder to resist today because serious and basic questions are at issue. The common, though imprudent tactic of equiparating the 'inessential' with the things a group wants to change, often results in such a pressure group imposing itself on a chapter or on the entire life of an Institute. The question arises how far a majority, even a qualified majority of two-thirds, should be regarded as the expression of the best judgement of a group. If we are going to return to a wider exercise of collegiality, we shall have to take account of the experience of the past and be willing to learn from the assemblage-procedures studied and applied in former times, when the principle of collegiality flourished. In those procedures the human and christian values which can no more be repudiated today than in the past were well protected.

The wider reach of consultation

It is becoming apparent today that participation, if it is to be genuine, cannot be confined to the exercise of authority through a college of representatives or delegates, and a growing malaise with the experience of participation has given rise to the desire — and in certain Institutes the demand — that chapters be subject to a genuine referendum, at least with regard to essentials. The

grounds for this malaise are evident. Chapter discussions, formerly concerned with secondary matters, deal today with the fundamentals and the profound options of consecrated life. With the secrecy rules mitigated or abolished, divergencies of chapter opinion, the tactics and manoeuvres employed by groups and individuals, become matters of general knowledge. It can become known that decisions were adopted under the influence of religious who were such in name only and who left the Institute shortly afterwards, bequeathing to others the obligation of living out what they had decided. In such circumstances the case for subjecting chapter decisions to a wider approval is clear. Chapter delegates might be encouraged to gain in prudence what they might lose in power, and participation would be made a more effective means to an expression of unanimity. Nor is the ideal of unanimity, at least on essentials, as hard to achieve as some would suppose — provided that on all sides there is a genuine desire to seek and carry out the will of the lord.

Subsidiarity

Participation entails not only dialogue but subsidiarity. This principle is widely invoked and implied in renewal chapters, and we have seen that it is fully consonant with the Church's nature to apply this social principle to her own life. But whether in the context of religious life the principle is always adequately understood and formulated is another matter. There is a tendency for subsidiarity to be interpreted exclusively in terms of decentralization. What is demanded for the lower agencies is to be left to their own resources not only in matters which belong to their proper competence, but in every situation which offers the remotest possibility of their being able to 'go it alone' — however incompetently. This view is one-sided and incomplete. It loses sight of a second and equally important dimension of subsidiarity, namely the duty of the higher agent to intervene when the lower (whether through negligence or want of practical means) is not in a position to meet its own needs.

The principle of subsidiarity serves not only to decentralize but to centralize. It confers on general or provincial superiors direct as well as indirect action, and provides the lower structures not only with a right of free initiative but with a right to appeal and support.

We can therefore distinguish a certain hierarchy in the decision-making process: the decisions of constituted authority, the autonomous decisions of the lower agent, and the sometimes necessary interventions of the higher agent — precisely in virtue of the principle of subsidiarity; there is the decision of the authority that presides over the participation structures, in the obediential dialogue. This latter does not have the penultimate word, which belongs to the one under authority, but possesses — at least theoretically — the last word, that of decision.

Conclusion

The following observations, which make no claim to exhaust a vast and complex subject, may serve to bring together the main strands of what has been said:

1. The apostolic power, primatial as well as episcopal, has of divine right and as supreme authority, an inalienable right of decision.

2. What holds true of the whole Church as an Institution does not necessarily hold for the free charismatic associations which the Church recognizes and approves.

3. Whether every ecclesial association carries, of necessity, a personal or oligarchic power of jurisdiction is a delicate question, and does not admit of facile solution.

4. In Institutes of consecrated life, the vow of obedience has always implied the element of personal authority, even when in matters of legislation supreme power is vested in the capitular assembly. Moreover, some orders have lost, it would seem, the sense and meaning of their general assemblies. In some case the latter has become a 'parliament' rather than a religious chapter.

5. Is it allowable to recognize that every community contains the right of decision always and in all matters? The problem is posed in its most acute form by the leaderless community. But it also arises in small communities, and is certainly going to be felt at higher levels as well. For if the referendum comes to be seen as the ideal mode of sharing in power, the representative value of the chapter is evidently called in question.

6. It is important to remember that a religious Institute often contains within its foundation not only a spiritual gift to be preserved, but particular structures inherently linked with that initial grace. It follows that particular legislation must have its force in the action of the Spirit, who not only brings into being the free associations within the Church, but guides and structures them. Further, these structures must be respected by the hierarchical authority, which does not *constitute* the groups of consecrated life but approves of them as authentic, and therefore admits them in the Church such as the Spirit wishes them to be.[25]

7. So far, no religious Institute has been founded without possessing an individual responsibility and authority under one form or another. The obedience due to this authority has various aspects and proceeds from a number of motives. There is obedience to ecclesial authority—the jurisdiction which has devolved on certain Institutes over the centuries.

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[25] Cf Lafont G. O.S.B.: 'L'Esprit-Saint et le Droit dans l'institution religieuse', in *Supplément de la Vie Spirituelle*, 82 and 83 (1967), pp 473-501; 594-639.

There is obedience to the leader whom the group has chosen as such, and obedience to the constitutions linked with a particular charism and to the person who represents them.

8. It remains to be seen whether a group can survive without a leader. In consecrated life, above all in apostolic religious life, the need for authority, responsibility and hence personal authoritative decision, would seem to arise from the personal character of the vocation itself. The bonds of association, which involve the life of the religious in its entirety, suppose the free renunciation of certain fundamental rights. This supposes, in turn, a personal dialogue, aimed not merely at finding the right direction of a professional life or a civic responsibility, but that of an intimate vocation involving what is deepest in human nature. In a completely collegial community, without a personal superior, the possibility would be lacking for the full and personal commitment that religious profession seems to entail. In my own view, this personal commitment postulates a superior who receives and accepts that commitment in full responsibility. Hence the need for a power of decision entrusted to a person who holds responsibility within the group.

9. If participation structures are to be viable, certain conditions are required. There can be no participation without real 'communion' among the brethren of a community or Institute. Hence it cannot be effective if the structures still in place, or the prevailing mentality, impede or contradict this communion. On the other hand, participation structures, as well as needing to conform to the spirit of an Institute, also call for adequate preparation and formation. The Institute which neglects this preparation may well find itself in serious trouble.

10. Finally, widening the scope of participation will not always and everywhere require a change of structures. Where renewal is truly a response to the Spirit, participation may well flourish within the existing structures of an Institute, especially if these are proper to it.