PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT: EXPERIMENTATION

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THE FOLLOWING PAGES are the result of a recent enquiry held among Superiors General of religious Institutes (men). We shall deal first with the new structures themselves, then with their apparent advantages and disadvantages, and finally with the genesis and evolution of participation.

I. THE NEW STRUCTURES

Here we shall consider the three levels successively: central, provincial or regional, and local. The same tendencies, though with many different expressions, are found at every level. There has been a radical change in perspective. Authority — responsibility is no longer a one-way traffic.

Participation on a central or general level

The first point to note is that religious are being more heavily represented at chapter meetings. The number of ex-officio members has decreased, that of elected members has grown; one-third of the former and two-thirds of the latter seems to be the golden mean. Whereas in the past even significantly important vice-provinces and mission territories were not directly represented (the delegate or delegates of the province to which they belonged acted as their representatives), today these bodies usually have direct representation.

The same is true of the presence of non-priest religious in both general and provincial chapters of sacerdotal Institutes, even those of the most ancient Orders. Nor must we forget the presence of experts. Even though they do not vote, their work contributes to a wider participation.

In the preparation for the general chapter whose purpose is to draft new constitutions after some years or experiment, capitulars have been elected some eighteen months before the chapter. They are assisted by a five-member commission, who take soundings, organize enquiries, plan procedure, etc. It is the business of the capitulars, who are in continual contact with this commission, to stimulate research in the communities within their own province. This method clearly demonstrates that participation is not a matter of simply transferring structures which work well on one level on to another. There must be continual exchange of ideas from summit to base and base to summit, with the horizontal traffic constantly crossing the vertical. In this

way the general chapter is seen to be the concern of everyone, with all religious making known their ideas, desires and criticisms. The result is that the chapter has a rich documentation at its disposal. Each problem is already in its proper context and can be considered from all angles. The organizers of the chapter can find the right place for each question on the agenda, and indicate the principles or options for chapter discussion.

The General and his council

Formerly, the General had absolute power; he was not obliged to follow the advice of his counsellors. Today, in many Institutes, the latter are usually responsible with him for the conduct of affairs. In some cases the experimental constitutions specify what decisions must be made collegially. Some congregations have been inspired in their *aggiornamento* by secular forms of government. Here one can distinguish legislative (general chapter), executive (generalate) and judiciary (generalate, assembly or general chapter, as the case may be). Others, in the interests of efficiency, have turned to industrial and commercial societies. They employ the model of executive and management councils.

There are various criteria governing the nomination and role of the general assistants and counsellors: geographical (regional or linguistic), functional (studies, apostolate, finances, etc), or a mixture of the two. The present tendency is towards the functional rather than the geographical. With regard to the assistants general, and their relationship with the General himself, the 'team' concept is increasingly the rule.

In recent times, some general councils have been feeling the need to arrange meetings for the *ex professo* study of the problems of religious and apostolic life as such, in some cases every two weeks, in others every three months — but then for several days (in addition to those devoted exclusively to juridical or administrative concerns — dispensations, professions, finances, etc.). There is a recognition here that administrative problems tend to crowd out discussion of more fundamental matters. The need is also being felt (by assistants and General) for real and frequent contacts with the Institute as a whole. There is, for example, one general council which meets four times a year for two weeks, to discuss matters of special importance, future plans and strategy. During the remaining time, the assistants are given a special function (training, apostolate, finances) for visiting the provinces. In other Institutes, the assistants no longer live in the generalate but in their own regions — though without becoming provincial superiors or super-provincials. The General has only two assistants to help him with current problems; and in more difficult questions he seeks the advice of the others by letter. Once a year all the assistants come together. The advantages and disadvantages of this type of organization are clear enough. Assistants who live in the regions lose to some

extent their awareness of the Institute as a whole; and there is the risk that the constant presence of central government in a province may prove too overpowering. To increase contacts between the centre and the periphery, general councillors (or the General himself) attend provincial chapters or other provincial and inter-provincial meetings. The point needs to be made that they are not present to judge or to decide, but to listen, understand and get to know the provinces and their difficulties.

Most Institutes these days have a general secretary, whose role differs from one Institute to another. In one he is fairly subordinate: his responsibilities are scarcely greater than those of the head of a typing pool. Elsewhere he is the mainspring of the general curia: he prepares the subjects to be discussed, organizes the work, holds a senior position in the curial council, and is in all things the General's right arm. There are also highly organized general secretariates which are extremely powerful in their different sectors: pastoral, studies, social questions, etc. The 'technicians' who compose it ensure an exchange of ideas between base and summit. Here one ought to ask about the continuing role of the assistants. There is the risk of becoming a 'technocratic society'.

Another fairly common innovation is the 'enlarged council' (extraordinary plenary council, general conference, synod and other titles are used). Between two general chapters, there is a meeting of all the provincials, or a group of them, depending on the size of the Institute. These assemblies vary very much from one congregation to another: from a mere information-seeking assembly of several days, to a deliberative assembly where current problems are discussed and resolved. Normally, however, these extended councils have a purely consultative role. They are a fairly recent development whose function has still to be clearly defined.

With regard to consultative vote and deliberative vote, a crucial change is taking place, which is as important at central level as at the regional and local levels. With participation structures as they are seen to exist today in many Institutes, the distinction between deliberative and consultative voice (essentially juridical) can no longer be interpreted as narrowly as it used to be. A council may have purely consultative power canonically; but psychologically it is becoming harder for superiors to oppose even a consultative vote, particularly when it is the result of research which has brought the members of a council or community into close relationship with each other and, by gradual stages, to a conclusion.

We may note also the increasing frequency in meetings of special groups: local superiors, formation personnel, bursars, etc. Often, those attending these meetings are chosen by those whom they represent rather than appointed from 'the top'.

Participation on the provincial level

First, many new procedures have been devised for electing the provincial. But in all of them we find the same principle: wider consultation and more equitable representation. Privileged electors (former provincials, for example) have been abolished. Where a provincial is nominated for election by the central government, the members of the province are now consulted as a whole. Sometimes, even the temporarily professed have their say. In many Institutes, appointment is by election. In others there is a mixture of nomination by the General and of election. Or again, preliminary consultation within the province produces three names; and the central government chooses one of the three. There is also the reverse procedure, where the General proposes three candidates, from whom the province makes its choice. There are also cases of a provincial 'troika', where the government is shared by three religious conjointly. Or again there is the provincial whose only task is to teach the local superiors and communities to get along without a provincial.

Normally, provincial chapters have come into their own. Even in Institutes which until quite recently had no chapter, the experimental constitutions have made the chapter the instrument of provincial government. It used to be the custom in some Institutes for the provincial chapter (once the provincial superior was elected) simply to elect four delegates or definitors to help the provincial to study problems and make decisions. Now the chapter itself does this. The definitors and the provincial come in only at a second stage, to make the general assembly's conclusions more effective. They are allowed to take the decisions necessary to this end, but they may not go against a chapter decision. Some Institutes give their provinces great freedom of manoeuvre — even in procedural matters — in the appointment of local superiors. And it is not uncommon nowadays for new legislation to provide for specific provincial directives to be drawn up by the province (though usually to be submitted to the General for approval). Provincial councils are more representative than hitherto; and such councils now feel that when sensitive issues or important problems come under consideration, a section of the province, or even all the religious, should be called into consultation. A typical scheme for involving the whole province would be the following:

1. The provincial presents the problem to all the communities and invites information and discussion.
2. All the communities must hold discussions and submit a detailed result of their views.
3. The provincial meets with all local superiors to study the matter afresh in the light of the investigation at local level.
4. The provincial council makes its decision.
5. All the religious are notified in writing of the replies from the various communities, and are given an account of the provincial meeting.

This last point is important. It is becoming more and more common to send out reports of councils. 'Everything must be said. . . . ' What has happened to the rule of secrecy which was once such an important element of government? However, in more difficult or sensitive matters, this type of procedure is subject to a large variety of qualifications. There can be written or *viva voce* consultations of various kinds, enlargement of the council by delegates, experts or religious who are particularly concerned with the issue, and so on. All stress the positive value of such consultation. Some go so far as to say that assemblies like these have given the provinces a new lease of life.

Some see in all this an unnecessary multiplication of entities, an overlapping of structures: for example, when, before a council meeting, the provincial meets with local superiors to discuss the matters on the agenda. One might well ask whether this would be necessary if the superiors were sufficiently represented on the council. (Some would answer that the current trend is to decrease the number of superiors in councils and chapters, in favour of elected members; whilst there is a need to allow superiors to have a more direct say in the government of the province.) Another example of possible overlapping is where a provincial chapter is preceded by a province assembly 'democratically' elected: the scholastics and even the novices who, according to the constitutions, have no voice in the chapter, are directly represented with voting rights. There is certainly a wider, and in the judgement of many, a more representative and positive participation. However, where these sessions of such an assembly take place immediately before the provincial chapter, there is the risk of pressure being brought to bear on the chapter's future decisions. The assembly's conclusions may be effective in a way which does not correspond to the thinking of the chapter itself, the official decision-making organ. What we do seem to be moving towards is, perhaps, quite a radical change in the composition and function of provincial chapters. If the new constitutions, inspired by experiments in this field, begin to give more representational facilities and powers to provincial chapters, these parallel structures should become unnecessary.

Participation on the local level

The principle, 'what concerns the group must also concern all the members of the group', is even more relevant at the local level. What has been said about the appointment of a superior for the general or provincial government applies also to the local situation. The principles are the same. There are, however, certain divergences. For example, freedom is being given to communities to decide on the method of electing their superior. In some cases there may be no local superior at all, if the community can really assume collegial responsibility. It is at the local level that community meetings (or whatever name we give them) are having the greatest impact. They provide occasions for *everyone* to meet, share, and make a contribution. Such meetings are the root cause of the present evolution of religious life. They indicate the crucial

importance, in the modern context, of the part played by discussion and consultation in making decisions. It is here, too, that the most fundamental question needs to be faced: can the will of majority be a principle of decision in religious communities?

Participation by vote and majority has obvious similarities to the political democratic regime; which is why many speak today of the *democratization* of religious life. However, a religious congregation is not a *polis*: it is an evangelical society, in God's kingdom. The members of these evangelical communities are brothers and sisters in Christ. Participation structures are meant to give institutional form to the fraternity of which Christ speaks: 'You are not to be called Rabbi, for you have only one master, and you are all brothers'.[1] The law of democracy is clearly the law of the majority; but in religious life we are concerned with unanimity. (The same principle is at work when the Church meets in Council. Thus, at Vatican II, Pope Paul VI postponed the voting on certain issues, so as to ensure a greater unanimity, and to avoid decisions being taken on a majority basis.) Human democratic structures are not of themselves capable of expressing the government of a religious Institute, even where participation plays a large part. The same would be true of monarchical forms, the troika principle or the structures of industrial corporations. The government of a religious Institute must always transcend purely civil types of government. In practice, then, where there is participation in an evangelical community, the superior can never be satisfied with a hasty vote which represents no more than the sum of purely individual sentiments. He must make sure that the facts of the matter are known, encourage research, and initiate a discussion leading to an opinion which is as nearly unanimous as possible. In this way, there will be no psychological splitting of the assembly into majority and opposition parties. This search for unanimity is a sign of the presence of the Lord's Spirit, and a guarantee of the discovery of God's will.

It is for the constitutions to determine when the decision is to be made by the assembly, when by a deliberative vote approved by higher authority, when such a vote is merely consultative, and what the role of the superior is in these votes and in the execution of decisions then made. The majority *can* be the principle of decision in religious communities, as long as their special, primarily evangelical, nature is taken into account. This means that the search for unanimity must come first, even if it seems highly unlikely that it can be achieved; or even if, in the case in point, it is not even desirable. The search for unanimity underlines the importance of exchanging views before the vote is taken, in an atmosphere of trust and complete freedom. In this sense, the superior ought to assess the votes, or rather what is said before the vote. Besides, by ensuring that discussion and dialogue take place, he will be the more able to determine the exact moment when it is objectively possible to proceed to a vote. If the vote is deliberative, by definition the majority must

[1] Mt 23, 8.

carry the day. There is no alternative but to count the votes. At least preliminary discussions will have shed some light on the matter which will influence the execution of the decision, and the way in which the vote is taken. In this sense there will be a certain amount of 'assessment'. In the case of a consultative vote, the superior must not regard it as a purely deliberative vote and merely count heads, whatever the pressure from the assembly. He must assess the votes: that is to say, while attaching full importance to the results of the voting, he must consider the relative values of the arguments that went before, *pro* and *contra*, and also the quality of the people who took part in the discussion. In some cases, youth can be just as important as experience.

At all events, with regard to the rhythm of community life, prayer, poverty and apostolic choices, local communities are enjoying much greater autonomy than they used to. In other fields, the amount of participation varies not only from Institute to Institute but within the same province of the same Institute. Much depends on the superior. The range is from fairly formalistic community consultation to almost complete collegiality. In all this, the task of the superior has become more onerous. The community watches him closely when he has decisions to make. Furthermore, relations between superior and religious are now totally different, and the superior must have many and varied qualities.

Local councils have taken on new shapes. Frequently they have been enlarged, often to the extent of suppressing them altogether in favour of an assembly of the whole community. In such cases, the superiors name half the councillors, the other half being elected by the community. Elsewhere, perhaps two-thirds, or perhaps the whole, is nominated by the community. Even if it is not always easy to define the difference between the local council and the community meeting, at least we can say that the desire for a wider and more representative participation of religious is evident everywhere.

With regard to the mission of the community, there is now a strong insistence on the necessity of planning, which itself demands special participation structures. Growing numbers of communities now co-ordinate their apostolic activity for a week or a month, and then ensure that the results are subsequently assessed. Authority is increasingly adopting an animating role to ensure the co-operation of the members, rather than an authoritarian approach, which hitherto informed the lower orders from a great height of its intentions and resolutions.

We cannot speak about participation without examining the question of finances. It is hardly possible to live a shared life, unless this sharing carries over into the realm of financial resources and accounts. To counter the risks of economic individualism — among treasurers on every level, local or provincial superiors — certain changes have been effected. The local bursar now tends to be elected by the community, and he keeps them regularly informed about the economic situation. The annual budget is prepared, discussed and approved at a community meeting before being sent to the provincial. Religious have a personal, very modest, budget, which in many

instances — and this is important from the standpoint of religious poverty — comes under the control of the entire community. The provincial and general bursar must regularly send accurate balance sheets to the province and to the whole society. Elsewhere, at general and provincial levels, economic councils have been set up. These not only examine the financial reports of the various houses and provinces, but must help the provincial or general councils in preparing various budgets, in financial strategy and the determination of economic responsibilities. The most urgent need has been to ensure better administration. Without doubt this has brought with it the risk of giving the financial technicians too important a place. It is up to each one to discover if the finances of the various provinces within his own Institute show up differences which no one would dare to investigate. Participation structures may unite those provinces in many spheres. Have they succeeded in breaching the walls surrounding financial policy? We should also draw attention to relations between the general chapter and central curia when the latter has had to present its accounts and ask for money. Is all in order at general headquarters?

In summary, then, the diversity of the new structures is immediately apparent: participation ranges from simple consultation to virtual rule-by-assembly. To assess this evolution, one would have to compare old and new constitutions, measure each response against the history of each religious Society. But when we look at the general picture, the impression is one of bewilderment. We see Institutes with centralist traditions taking a few tentative steps on the path of consultation, whilst others of a firmly democratic tradition are rediscovering their original structures which had become blurred by the passage of time. The bewilderment is particularly apparent in the case of Institutes whose unity was based on the strength of the central power to a greater extent than on spirituality, apostolic aim or the special style of life. All religious life is affected by the trend. Hence the urgency that it finds its proper place in the history of religious life and of the Church itself. Unlike the Church, no Institute has been promised eternal life, or, *a fortiori*, an eternal form of government. Twenty, forty years ago, when all things seemed to come from and converge on the centre of Christendom at the expense of the local churches, no one would have dreamed that the Church would be accepting so much collegiality today. Small wonder that the infusion of a large dose of participation into religious life has caused such bewilderment. There is also a real fear that an over-accentuated or a badly-planned participation will lead to a new period of excessive centralization and even authoritarianism.

2. ASSESSMENT OF THE NEW STRUCTURES

On balance, there seems to be general agreement that the advantages emphatically outweigh the disadvantages. The advantages can be summarized as follows:

1. An increased sense of responsibility among religious and in councils on all levels, and consequently a more aware and freer acceptance of the decisions made.
2. A greater capacity for tackling new problems which arise at a greatly accelerating rate, and hence less risk of becoming fixed in outmoded apostolic methods and behaviour.
3. A good apprenticeship for preparing young religious for their future responsibilities.

Let us be more explicit. Solidarity is lived at a deep level both in the local community and in the higher echelons. *Esprit de corps* and a sense of the general good, a more lively awareness of 'belonging' to the Institute: all these have developed considerably. The majority of religious are more concerned about the evolution of their own congregation when they can set it in a wider and truer perspective. Those who wish to take part in this evolution have the opportunity to do so. Religious who once took no interest in their community life because they felt that it was entirely directed by the superior (an office they had never held) or by the chapter (in which they could not take part) now make an effort to put across their opinions and to air them in front of their brethren — a considerable step forward. Local communities feel less dependent on their superior, more responsible to themselves, more adult and better understood by the provincial or general authority. Relations with higher authority are no longer what they were. Authority appears less paternalistic and provokes fewer defensive reactions. At the other end of the scale, authority now has more numerous and more precise reasons for having confidence in the base which now appears less passive and more serious-minded. In short, relations are becoming simpler, truer and more personal. It follows from this that horizons become broader and discussions more profound. Decisions are considered more carefully, they are more detailed and more effective. The central government can be more sure that it knows what the real problems are.

There are advantages also for superiors. They feel less isolated, they have more idea of what their religious are thinking, they have their finger more accurately on the pulse of their community, and they are better able to judge how far they are in the latter's confidence. With a better knowledge of the reactions of both sides — separately and *vis-à-vis* each other — the General can, when he needs to, put pressure on or encourage superiors. Finally, many grounds of complaint have simply disappeared. Even where there is tension, there is an environment for the relationship between community-members and

superiors which is more favourable to genuine solutions. In short, authority is changing its face, and the image of the superior is being 'demythologized'.

Religious themselves appear to be gaining in maturity, balance, dynamism and devotion. Personally committed, and responsible in their reflections and the execution of decisions, they feel that authority understands them better, takes them more seriously and listens to them. Previously, if one asked them for an opinion on one question or another, they would wonder to what extent they would be held accountable for their replies. Taught by experience, they learned to keep their mouths shut. Today, through the mere existence of structures of participation, notice is taken of their initiatives, their opinions and their potential. Hence fewer tensions and less animosity. In general, religious feel they are collaborating in a new creation. They are developing a taste for initiative; they are more open. A new hope inspires them.

The disadvantages

Though decentralization loosens bonds and puts the unity of the Institute at risk, participation gives religious a stronger feeling for the well-being of the congregation. The question is whether this new sense of unity and totality is solid and durable, or is it an ephemeral thing, an expedient for the purposes of the special chapter and for the drawing up of new constitutions: in sum, no more than a flash in the pan. If we examine the reactions of the religious themselves, it must be said that in all the experiments, especially as regards meetings, congresses, community discussions, there is generally an initial burst of enthusiasm, fervour and commitment to collaboration. But, as the experiment loses its novelty and becomes normal and ordinary, interest in it declines. Lack of interest and apathy take over. It is quite common for projects to be abandoned because of the indifference and apathy of the religious. For example, those who once insistently demanded regular publication of the Institute's financial state have lost all interest now that this has become obligatory. There are other examples of a similar lack of follow-through, but with more serious consequences. Requirements which a year or two ago were being loudly proclaimed as vitally necessary are now being dispensed with. There is also the waste of time (all those meetings!).

Certainly, one consequence is the weakening of the superiors' authority. In certain circumstances, they feel constrained to accept the assemblies' conclusions even if the vote is only consultative. Firm guidance is much more difficult. There is the feeling that the 'demythologizing' of the superior may lead to his demise: that he can never be anything but second fiddle in a community which wants to govern itself collegially. And dialogue is always two-edged. It tends to become monologue, provokes incidents, so easily becomes manipulation. The techniques of participation — there are countless examples — allow those who have studied them to impose their views even when they are in a minority. The conclusions of the dialogue are

untrustworthy. Should one count the votes or assess their strength? Some stress the necessity of having as heads of commissions religious whose worth and uprightness are known to authority and generally recognized. Others feel that there can be no true participation if the leader does not come from within the group. The difficulties of dialogue are high-lighted by the tensions and conflicts existing between the young and the old (the age- or mentality-gap). In many cases, participation has effected some *rapprochement* between the two. In some cases, however, the opposition between young and old has been rekindled. The old, trained in the mystique of God's will — 'Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do or die' — and ignorant of modern techniques, cannot bring themselves to accept the requirements of multiple dialogue or (especially) decisions made by the community. They refuse to abandon the principle that responsibility is the exclusive right of the superior. They are confused.

One must also wonder about the depth and authenticity of religious life during the time we have spent in improving structures. At any rate, we are faced with serious problems about celibacy, and deep uncertainty about obedience and poverty. Against these misgivings stands the obvious truth that participation must result from and be itself the expression of community life and true brotherhood. It must in no wise encourage selfish demands or opposition. And this communion must extend to the sharing of faith: The following example is by no means a rarity. A provincial superior summons his council to consider the problems brought to them. At this stage there is no question of reaching a decision but simply of looking at the situation in the round. The provincial makes his report, then invites the councillors to pray for three-quarters of an hour. Next he asks each one for his thoughts on the subject. There is no argument; no further discussion is found to be necessary.

What must be stressed here is that, on the whole, Institutes were not really ready for 'democratization' on such a scale. Nor were those who planned and set up these structures really equipped to do so. Belief in the value of one's own opinion and that of others, knowledge of how to exchange, share, decide together, unwillingness to acknowledge confidentiality as the true condition of government, readiness to open many doors and windows and to submit to a majority decision: all these are factors which until recently scarcely figured at all in training. If we are to be able to use such an instrument we need a technique and a training and a habit of mind. In a word, we need conversion.

3. THE GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF PARTICIPATION

In what direction should participation move if it is to be more effective, taking account of new outlooks and the individual characteristics of each Institute? This question is particularly important, and involves further ones: Why do we want this structure? To placate current fashion? For *a priori* reasons? To silence dissenters? Was the desire for it spontaneous, or was it

the result of experiments which by degrees gave it its present form? There are so many questions about the origin of these structures. It is for each one to review whatever type of participation he knows and pursues, and to discover what influences brought it about and what has coloured and shaped it. Otherwise we will be unable to shape the future.

Many Institutes now possess an enlarged general council. Its origins are diverse. Sometimes it was the complexity of the problems of which everyone suddenly became aware, together with the need to re-discover each other, help each other, be less alone. In other cases there was deep distrust of the central government: 'Since you have no confidence in us', said an assistant-general at his chapter, 'then come regularly to the generalate, take part in the general council, make known your difficulties and your criticisms; come and help us'. A limited personal enquiry leads us to believe that such an institution may be a response to a general need. One cannot help noticing that this type of council emerged at almost the same moment in very different Institutes, and without reference to each other. This has been less true recently; some have simply imitated others. Imitation *may* be at the root of new structures — which is not necessarily a gauge of success.

Sometimes there had been unofficial participation in practice before it became institutionalized: life precedes thought. Here is one typical reflection: 'None of the participation structures was entirely new. All had been used to some extent before the general chapter. For example, we have always had meetings between the major superiors and the general administration. We had already introduced consultation concerning the appointment of provincial superiors, and had accepted the same principle in the appointment of local superiors. There was already a tendency to increase the powers of the major superiors. In other words, the special chapter confirmed and institutionalized tendencies in which interest was already manifest'.

It does not always happen that way. Some structures have arisen out of what seemed to be an inspired thought. Someone, for example, suggested that there should be a kind of permanent committee on the provincial ladder, with a mandate to gather suggestions and criticisms at grass-roots level and present them to the provincial authorities. Others objected that they did not need such an organism: the provincial council was enough. The promoter countered all the objections and finally his idea was adopted. Two years later, it was observed that the committee had never functioned, had never even been properly established, not even in the province of the man who inspired it; he had meanwhile become provincial. Doubtless it was a good idea, but it was not followed up. And where participation is concerned — firm commitment makes heavy demands on people — theories are not enough. It is not for nothing that our constitutions are for the moment *ad experimentum*. Furthermore, in an Order which has the reputation of being among the most democratic, a text does not have legal force unless it has been approved by three consecutive general chapters: the first proposes the new text. There is no further discussion,

but the idea is given time to take root in the mind. The next chapter, if it wishes, decides on how the text may be put into practice before the following chapter. If the experiment is positive, this third chapter gives it legal force. Experience alone governs participation.

The growth of many new structures may be attributed to fear: fear of dispute, the desire to dam up certain currents, the official consecration of an informal organism which was just going to come under attack. Given such a genesis, these structures run the risk of being short-lived, or of not being taken sufficiently seriously by those whose job it is to set them up. Participation structures may well have other origins. But we have said enough to illustrate the importance of an analysis such as this if the structures are to have a viable shape in the future.

The factors in evolution

They may be reduced to three: the mission of the Institute within the Church, its unity, and its training in participation. In these three we appear to find the criteria or co-ordinates which both justify participation and bring about its growth.

1. *Mission of the Institute within the Church.* Let us think of the apostolic plan. On the one hand we have Institutes which are deeply rooted in the local church (canons regular, for example); on the other, Institutes whose members are by definition more mobile, capable of initiative and creativity, always prepared to leave one region to go and spread the word somewhere else (the missionary congregations, for example). Among the former, the basic unit will be the monastery or the house; there will be intense activity at the local level but very little coming from the province or the Institute as a whole. There is a minimum of centralization. In the other case, the basic unit will be the province, if not the Institute; there will be a developed participation at the level of Province or Institute, with a correspondingly stronger centralization. Styles of participation also seem to differ according to the 'prophetic role' of each Institute. Religious wish to be particularly sensitive to the requirements of others. Many of them see this as an aspect of their charism. Now by definition such requirements are discovered in real, concrete places and therefore they belong to the local level. To take one example, we may think that the way in which the Order of St Francis lived at various periods of its history was at variance with the 'prophetic role' desired by its founder. That is to say, the type of participation has a large part to play in how an Institute remains faithful to its own particular prophetic role.

In the fraternal life too, the young are especially attentive to this 'prophetic' element. The *cor unum, anima una* which inspired all the founders, demands dialogue, exchange of views and sharing: in a word, participation. The witness of the fraternal life which has sprung from our new-style communities is indeed worthy of admiration. A truly deep communion can be expressed in the different kinds of participation which in their turn nourish this communion. Whatever

be their own prophetic role, religious Institutes depend on the Church which, as the council reminded them, regulates their laws and watches over their development.

2. *Unity of the Institute.* Participation highlights the problem of the Institute's unity. We must ask whether these new structures respect that unity without which the members of an Institute cannot be faithful to their own vocation within the Church. In searching for the answer here, historical, juridical and sociological considerations are inadequate; and purely practical and expedient solutions even more so. What is urgently needed is a theological investigation of the characteristic unity of a religious congregation. If the Church is communion, then a religious community, a province, a congregation are also communion. The problem of unity has for too long been considered from an institutional and juridical standpoint only. What we need is to deepen the sense of religious life as communion, which can be done only by considering each Institute in the context of the Church and in the context of its own mission. In the light of this theological reflection, the modalities of participation can more easily be determined.

Participation links these two aspects of the unity of any society — the community aspect and the institutional. Through it, in fact, communion is expressed and kept alive: there is no communion without sharing, and sharing is the mainspring of communion. Further, because of participation, the Institute can no longer be identified with its summit, having no connection with the 'lower ranks' other than that of issuing commands. Thus, dialogue, pluralism and subsidiarity, the harmonics of participation, combine to reveal the sort of image necessary for each religious congregation in a given situation at a given moment. The problem of whether it is necessary to have a responsible person at the head of each community must be studied in the light of these various considerations, without giving *a priori* preference to any one of them. The whole question must be put in the context of participation. The role and place of the superior within an Institute is the best expression of the type of participation which is characteristic of that Institute and gives it its unity. Within the religious life, it is often possible to distinguish what belongs to the team (essentially the apostolate) and what is communion (prayer for example). Whatever one's views about this distinction, it is true to say that, in all its dimensions, a religious Institute goes beyond a society whose motivations and horizons are purely earth-bound.

3. *Training in participation.* It has been noticed that religious who refuse to play the participation game — through inability, ignorance or conscious refusal — soon lose whatever influence they may have had with their brethren in other structures. Further, religious who have become particularly attuned to the techniques of group work have often acquired an influence in the chapter which is disproportionate to their numbers. This is merely to stress the need

for initiation into these techniques, and therefore for special training. This is not to say that efficiency alone is important in training. Until quite recently, when the local superior was accustomed to proclaim the rules laid down for the community, those who did not obey them felt ill at ease. But the community as a whole came to no harm (provided of course that these cases were not in the majority and were not becoming the norm). Today, because of the type of community brought into being by participation, matters are no longer the same. When the community determines the framework of its own life, this bad conscience assumes a different aspect. The law-breakers, the ones who refuse to have anything to do with this new life-style, do not feel any embarrassment because of their refusal to accept the community's norms. The uneasiness is more manifest in the community at large than among the offenders. Those religious who remain on the fringes of their communities become a source of suffering to the rest. (We have all come across religious who, *a priori* and systematically, refuse to concelebrate with their brethren, even occasionally.) Obviously we have left the terrain of mere efficiency. The well-being of the community, the religious life itself, and the charity of Christ are involved here.

Throughout this enquiry we have only considered participation within the Institutes. There is scope for further research on participation with those outside the community. We know that to many people this participation seems far too limited. Those who want to live in 'small communities' are looking for ways of living which will express their solidarity with other people: for an effective and integrating participation of their whole lives with their flat-neighbours, their work-mates, the whole human milieu teeming with life and full of hope. Nor is this the whole story. Anyone who has tried to close down a school or move a religious house knows that the bonds which unite pupils and parents to our work and to our communities are not easily broken. At such times we realize the solidarity that has united us: to leave without confiding our problems to these people, or asking their advice, would be to betray this union.

It is obvious that participation structures are evolving in different directions. In one community, province or Institute, the elements opposed to the whole idea of participation grow and multiply. Elsewhere, a minority fully trained in participation techniques succeeds in imposing its views on the assembly. And in some cases, all the religious within an Institute have received adequate training of this kind.

To conclude: participation has not been invented by the Church, still less by religious in difficulties over renewal. It is the fruit of contemporary life. Within families, the authoritarian method of bringing up children has practically disappeared. In their leisure activities, young people are learning to share more. They exchange ideas and activities spontaneously. Economic, social and political life involves more and greater participation. Psychologists and sociologists tell us that in today's world men suffer most acutely from the imposition of rules in the formulation of which they have had no say. This

explains much mental stress: non-participation, the dehumanizing instrument of our time. It was the Council which opened the door to participation, dialogue and the sharing of responsibility in the Church. How would it have been possible for the ecclesial cells — the religious Institutes — not to have been affected? How could the Institutes have ignored changes which were affecting the whole of society?

By not laying down in advance the framework for the renewal of religious life (as was done in 1917 after the promulgation of the current Code of Canon Law), by asking all religious to take part in the framing of new constitutions, by giving them thereby a taste for shaping their religious life, and by basing this strategy not on expediency or fashion but on the doctrine of the essential nature of the Church, Vatican II and *Ecclesiae Sanctae* created an irreversible situation.

We do not know what the future will bring. What we can be sure of is that the rediscovery and re-establishment of participation has already had too great an impact on religious life for the latter not to be changed decisively, and in a way that will redound to the greater honour and glory of God, in the Church and in the world.[2]

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[2] This article, and Fr Beyer's, first appeared in *Supplément* (1971, no 2). They are published here in translation with kind permission.

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