

THE RELIGIOUS IN THE DOCUMENTS OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

On a first glance, orders and religious communities only seem to have played a minor role in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Their importance for the conciliar and post-conciliar Church is only to be recognized on a second glance. But then it shows how artfully the role of the orders was integrated into the ecclesiastical structure. In introducing the theme, I would like to offer two aspects. First we have a look at the persons : How much have religious shaped the proceedings of the Council ? In what capacities did they have a decisive influence ? And then I would like to clarify in a few selected examples what has changed for the orders through the Council.

Members of Orders as Council Fathers and Council Theologians

There were 2448 Council Fathers in the first and 2625 Council Fathers in the fourth session of the Council¹. More than a third of them, altogether 1108, belonged to religious communities. Their numbers varied between 877 in 1962 and 944 in the fourth Council period. 108 religious participated in only one single session, 142 in two, 198 in three and 660 in all four sessions. A substantial percentage in the change of representatives was due to new elections into the leadership of the orders. From the range of general superiors and abbots, 27 took part in one session, 23 in two, 24 in three and 79 in all four sessions. This adds up to 153 Council Fathers who as ordinaries of orders, monasteries and religious communities participated in the Council.

The above mentioned 1108 Council Fathers were members of 116 different religious communities. The order with most representatives was the Franciscans with 97, and then the Capuchins with 60 Council Fathers. In the third place were the Jesuits with 59, then the Benedictines with 54, the Spiritans and Salesian Fathers with 51, the Africa Missionaries or White Fathers with 48 dignitaries. They represented above all the non-European Churches. There was a considerable representation of bishops who were expelled from Communist China, among them 14 Franciscans. Also the South American countries were to a substantial part under the leadership of ordinaries from religious communities. For instance, 7 out of the 11 Chilean bishops belonged to religious communities.

¹ www.catholic-hierarchy.org/event/ecv2.html.

Brazil had 89 ordinaries from 35 communities. Focus countries for certain communities could be established. Out of the 39 Council Fathers from Canada, for instance, 11 belonged to the Oblates of the Immaculate Virgin, and there were also 11 Jesuits among the 59 Council Fathers from India. The indigenisation of the episcopate had also started already among the Council Fathers, however the origin of the majority of the ordinaries was Europe and North America.

The numbers by themselves, of course, do not give us any information about the influence of the orders. This was to happen by way over the commissions. In the phase of the preparation of the Council, members of orders were represented as members and consulters of commissions in an unproportionally high number. Of the 37 members of the commission for the discipline of the sacraments, 15 belonged to orders ; 24 out of 59 members of the commission of the liturgy ; for the Eastern Churches 32 out of 54 ; for the theological commission 38 out of 68 ; of the 26 members of the secretariat for the unity of Christians, 12 belonged to orders ; and, of course, in the commission for the missions were 34 out of 45, and in the commission for the orders 45 out of 54 were members of orders.

The scene changed during the time of the Council. Whereas among the *periti*, members of religious communities were strongly represented – 197 of the 469 theological experts –, in the commissions, however, the bishops from the diocesan clergy were in the majority. But in the commissions for the missions (17 of 29) and for the orders (19 of 33) as well in the theological commission (10 of 34), Council Fathers from the orders were able to maintain their influence. However the perspectives of members of religious communities had hardly any bearing on the commissions for the laity (2 of 27) and for the clergy (2 of 26).

Enough of numbers. They do not say very much about the actual influence of members of religious communities during the Council. They give however an indication from where the majorities resulted. Members of religious communities were active as *periti* within the commissions and were involved in the formulation of the texts, not in a specific direction, but in the full range of theological schools. One could formulate as a thesis : The voting was determined not only by one's theological formation and by convictions gained during the Council but also by solidarity to a local Church and by belonging to a religious family. Here is much space in order to confirm the Council as an event.

The Reform of Religious Life through the Council

Pope Pius XII had initiated a reform of religious life on a big scale during the last years of his pontificate². Starting from the great Roman Congress of Orders in 1950, the formation of the religious was in the foreground, especially among the women religious. Pius XII took the initiative for the reform of female religious communities as well as the fostering of superiors' conferences and the federation of less viable communities. He introduced the Secular Institutes as a new form of consecrated life. Theologically, Pius XII maintained the priority of consecrated life to married life.

When John XXIII, after the proclamation of the Council, invited the future Council Fathers to suggest themes for the Council³, the endeavours for reform of Pius XII were assessed in principle. However the problem that was mentioned most concerned the relationship of religious communities to the dioceses. Especially the old orders had many privileges, which gave them a certain autonomy with regards to the diocesan pastoral practice and this could lead to the formation of parallel ecclesiastical structures that would be detrimental to a co-ordinated pastoral practice. The bishops demanded more rights with regards to religious communities, for instance in connection with visitations and transfers from one place to the other. It was not surprising that the votes of the superiors of religious communities and the ecclesiastical universities defended the exemptions. The orders, after all, would not be directed towards a particular Church, but towards the pope. They would be of divine right according to ecclesiastical structural principles and their exemption would serve the securing of their universality.

The uncompromising defence of the orders' privileges was however not able to cover up some principled criticism. This came partly also from bishops who were members of religious communities. The Capuchin-bishop of Djibouti in Somalia, Henry Hoffmann, complained that orders and congregations had become « states within a state⁴ ». He criticised a too early decision about the state of life, a pastoral practice that was directed against the parishes and favouring the elite in an one-sided manner, being not adapted to our time, which would be reflected in the kind of dress. The Spanish Jesuit Zenón Arámburu, exiled bishop of the Chinese Wuhu, accused the orders of collective arrogance and they would not have a vision of the future of the Church⁵. Concrete reforms were

² Joachim SCHMIEDL, *Das Konzil und die Orden. Krise und Erneuerung des gottgeweihten Lebens*, Vallendar-Schönstatt, Patris Verlag, 1999, p. 93-150.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 173-217.

⁴ ADAP II/V, p. 442-444.

⁵ ADAP II/IV, p. 579-580.

demanded by many bishops, however the theological point of departure for reform did not exceed that of Pius XII. Important for the superiors of orders were the primacy of a celibate life for the vouchsafing a contemplative way of life and a clear consciousness of the contrast to the dangers of the world.

Themes concerning orders and religious communities are to be found in four places in the documents of the Second Vatican Council : the dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* stresses the symbolic character of religious life as part of the ecclesiastical reality ; the decree on the pastoral office of bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus* shows guiding lines for the relationship between the orders and the diocese ; in the decree on the Church's missionary activity *Ad Gentes*, the special tasks are described for members of religious communities in areas to be evangelized ; the decree on up-to-date renewal of religious life *Perfectae Caritatis* highlights basic principles for a differentiated renewal of religious communities.

Some examples are to clarify in what differentiated way the Council spoke about the orders and which changes this initiated.

Aggiornamento – Reform

The keyword, under which since Pius XII the reform of orders was carried out, was *Aggiornamento*. The terms that were used for this in the preparatory commission for religious summed up the differences of starting points in a nutshell. *Renovatio* was introduced by John XXIII as a proposed task for the commission : *De vita religiosa renovanda*. *Restauratio* specified the return to the sources of religious life and to the spirit of the founder. By *Accomodatio* was understood the adaptation to the challenges of the time and above all of the apostolate. *Adaptatio* was the Latin word for *Aggiornamento*⁶.

The commission found it very difficult to deal with concepts for the future. Religious life would have to be renewed in the areas of obedience and poverty. Certain forms, as for instance also dress, should be adapted to the present time. But other members of the commission realized dangers in democratic tendencies, and they objected to an activism in the apostolate, to a reduction in mortification under the cloak of hygienic or health, and to an infiltration of a worldly spirit into the orders. Discipline has to be maintained, and therefore the use of telephone, radio, TV has to be regulated and limited. The commission in

⁶ Joachim SCHMIEDL, « Theologischer Kommentar zum Dekret über die zeitgemäße Erneuerung des Ordenslebens *Perfectae Caritatis* », in Peter HÜNERMANN, Bernd Jochen HILBERATH (ed.), *Orientalium Ecclesiarum. Unitatis Redintegratio. Christus Dominus. Optatum totius. Perfectae caritatis. Gravissimum educationis. Nostra aetate. Dei Verbum*, Freiburg, Herder, 2005, p. 514.

principle was in agreement that the orders need reform, but its range was disputed. To be renewed would have been in any case inefficient and sterile archaisms, class divisions within the orders, the practice of authority, the penal right, the care for a healthy life, the daily order and the common spiritual exercises as well as a wise use of modern technical devices and the media.

Already in the dealings of the central commission, it was obvious that the preparatory commission did not go far enough⁷. Cardinal Döpfner criticised that, among the fundamental criteria for renewal, the concept of « signs of the time » resp. *Kairós* was missing⁸. Cardinal Léger found that there was no explicit Christological anchorage. The importance of the person of Christ as a source and an example for religious life would hardly be mentioned. If one would talk of perfection, it should build on love of neighbour (charity). Renewal, so the tenor of an intervention of the South African bishop Hurley, must not exhaust itself in juristic formulas.

The basic questions for reform brought out in the Council⁹ the contrasts between the persevering tendencies of the commission for religious life and with a broadened vista that had been proposed especially by Cardinal Döpfner, in cooperation with his theological adviser Father Friedrich Wulf, sj¹⁰. Döpfner, after the first session, demanded a broadening of the biblical and theological basis, a more positive view of the world and a bigger scope for the communities, in order to carry out the process of renewal. Karl Rahner, in an expert opinion of early summer 1963, endorsed this concern. The orders would have to move out of their often so narrow mentality into a bigger world. His question was : Why would Catholic movements of renewal, especially the Biblical and Liturgical movement, find no expression in the documents.

The commission for religious life only started to move, after Cardinal Döpfner, on the 13th of January 1964, sent « adnotations », in which he demanded a renewal and adaptation according to the three guiding lines : the genuine meaning of the evangelical counsels, established from Holy Scripture, the spirit of the founder, which is not necessarily identical with the letter of the rules, and the challenges and problems of the time. The result of this intervention was a radical shortening of the draft, however no clear improvement yet. Evidence for this was the voting on the 14th of November 1964 after two days of discussions in the Council Hall. The preamble and numbers 1-3, which dealt with

⁷ Joachim SCHMIEDL, *Das Konzil...*, p. 299-317.

⁸ ADP II/II, p. 707-708.

⁹ Joachim SCHMIEDL, *Das Konzil...*, p. 402-478.

¹⁰ Ludger SCHULTE, *Aufbruch aus der Mitte. Zur Erneuerung der Theologie christlicher Spiritualität im 20. Jahrhundert im Spiegel von Wirken und Werk Friedrich Wulfs sj (1908-1990)*. Würzburg, Echter, 1998.

the principles of renewal, did not find a majority. 871 voted *yes*, 77 *no*, 1005 made their agreement dependent on *modi*. This work was completed to the satisfaction of the Council Fathers in the phase between the third and fourth session. The final voting about the different numbers of the document, which was headed *Perfectae Caritatis*, resulted in : for the preamble and article 1 an agreement with 2163 *yes*, 9 *no*, and for article 2 a result of 2112 *yes* and again 9 *no* votes.

What had changed ? The Council had tuned down its target. The text did not claim to give an answer to all the questions. It was satisfied to provide general principles for the renewal of the consecrated life. More specified provisions of implementation should be left to a particular law. With this the multi-format of religious life was taken into consideration. Renewal cannot be ordered in a uniformed way, but renewal had to take the characteristics of the various institutes into consideration and had to be inspired by them.

The categories, according to which renewal is to be assessed, were specified in *Perfectae Caritatis* 2. While in the draft, which had been discussed during the third session of the Council in November 1964, gospel, imitation of Christ, intention of the founder and character of the institute were side by side in an unrelated way, a clear ranking order was now established¹¹.

The supreme guiding principle is : orientation at the imitation of Christ as it is placed before us by the gospel. With this, *Perfectae Caritatis* was in line with the biblical turning point of the Council, which is to be realized in all the documents and finds its expression in the high esteem that was given to the dogmatic constitution on Divine Revelation in the totality of the Council. A fundamental revision of the constitutions was linked to this criterion ; until the Council, the revision had consisted to a great part in juristic and ascetical regulations. Now there is a change of paradigm. The constitutions of the institutes should be interpreted and changed in the light of the gospel. Common to all is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The particularity of each order and community only takes the second place. It is expressly affirmed by the Council. Three marks of orientation should be kept in mind. The « spirit of the founder » has first to be established in many communities, and this shows in the historical research of the orders after the Council up to today, and not only in institutes of the 19th and 20th century, but especially also in old orders. To be joined to this, according to *Perfectae Caritatis* 2b, are the « sound traditions » (*propria proposita*) ; attention should be given to a timely translation of their charisma and of their mission by the religious communities. The third mark of orientation are the actual forms of life, as they

¹¹ Joachim SCHMIEDL, « Theologischer Kommentar... », p. 514-516.

have developed in the course of history, but now they have to be assessed and formed in creative loyalty in accordance with the challenges of the present time.

The third criterion of renewal takes up the complaints that were presented against the orders in the fore field of the Council. They were dealt with in detail in the decree on the pastoral office of bishops in the Church. *Perfectae Caritatis* demands of the orders to participate actively in the life of the Church and to make total or particular ecclesiastical intentions their own. The examples refer to divine service, to proclamation and theology (Bible, dogmatic and pastoral practice), explicitly to ecumenism, but also to mission and charity. The Council Fathers demanded a stronger inclusion of the orders into the structures of the ordinary pastoral – and with this they complemented the demands for greater possibilities of supervision. *Perfectae Caritatis* 2d takes up the category of understanding, which had been stressed by the pastoral constitution of the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* 4 and 11 : « Institutes should see that their members have a proper understanding of men, of the conditions of the times and of the needs of the Church, this to the end that, making wise judgements about the contemporary world in the light of faith, and burning with apostolic zeal, they may be able to help men more effectively. » With this the triad of the Young Christian Workers « see – judge – act » has been explicitly recommended to the orders. The criteria for action for the apostolate also have to be gathered from the intentions of world and Church.

The last criterion for renewal is the spiritual aspect. The concern remains always the renewal of the spiritual dimension of the order.

The changes that happened to the concept of reform in the years between 1960 and 1965 are an example for the character of the Council as an event. The sharing of experiences and perspectives, together with the shifting of crucial points in theology through the discussions in the general congregations had the effect that more confidence was granted to the order's own initiative. The reform was not dictated in a petty way and prescribed in detail, but orientation should be taken from the big guiding lines. The special chapters that were carried out after the Council took up these guiding lines. The orders formulated their statutes and constitutions in orientation by Holy Scripture, by harmonizing them with the life of the Church, but especially by spiritual texts, which reflected impulses of their founders. The orientation by the « signs of the time » and the relation to the world were keynotes of renewal, which however for this reason were entailed by the times. The crises of the orders during the past fifty years, as also the crises of the Church as a whole, are therefore part of the system. For, in the measure that the Church does not understand itself as the impregnable « City on the Mountain » but as God's pilgrim people, and the orders do not conceive themselves as a « special society », they are subjected to the « acceleration of the time ». The contrast between the dominant opinion at the beginning of the preparations of the

Council – the whole matter would be finished with a few cosmetic reforms – and the challenges to a permanent reform cannot be conceived on a bigger scale. This contrast is also manifested in concrete areas of consecrated life, of which in the following some are to be presented as examples.

Viable Institutes

The big number of religious at the beginning of the 1960s must not blind us to the fact that there were many small monasteries and hardly viable institutes, which however often belonged to a greater spiritual family. It was therefore discussed in the preparation phase if smaller communities should not join bigger ones to some degree. The terms chosen for this were *fusio*, *foederatio*, *confoederatio*, *associatio* or *concociatio*, their range was therefore from an institute being completely integrated into another one to a greater coordination, above all, in the common apostolate. The reasons for a merger could be different : closeness and even identity of the spiritual orientation, lack of members, or also economic difficulties. There was a basic agreement in the commission that amalgamations should be fostered, but they must not be forced. New foundations should therefore be thoroughly examined before granting approbation to them.

The discussions during the Council broadened the spectre of themes as unfolded in the final draft of the decree on orders in the numbers *Perfectae Caritatis* 19 and 21-23. Here it becomes obvious how the development has progressed in the meanwhile.

Perfectae Caritatis 19 warns against new foundations that have no prospect of being of greater profit for the Church, and demands an inculturated religious life in areas where the Church has recently been established. New communities that have emerged in former missionary areas during the past fifty years are spiritual movements as well as new congregations. The spiritual movements often include members of all ecclesiastical states, they start with apostolic activities, but in the course of time tend towards developing more coherent community structures. If new foundations in the newly established Churches of Africa and Asia are truly inculturated, is something to be examined. They take their orientation usually from the forms of life of European foundations, whose fields of activity they gradually take over in view of a dwindling missionary activity.

Perfectae Caritatis 21 prohibits the acceptance of new members by very small communities or an amalgamation with other convents. *Perfectae Caritatis* 22 applies the same to communities of an identical or similar tradition and includes also institutes that are working in similar fields of the apostolate. These two articles are probably the most topical of the whole decree on religious, keeping in mind the shrinkage of members that has been experienced especially by orders in

central Europe during the past fifty years. On account of the small numbers of vocations, of leaving and of aging the numbers of religious sisters in Germany has dwindled from about 100 000 in the year 1960 to less than 18 000 according to the last statistics. Every year there are about 1000 sisters less. Some communities are preparing very consciously for their termination. Fusions of institutes have never been the rule, but the consolidation of various German provinces into one and of provinces of different countries.

Perfectae Caritatis 23 provides for a cooperation of the orders on the level of leadership. The national and continental associations have become since then an indispensable instrument in the apostolate and in the juridical and economic representation of interests with regards to dioceses and the state. The orders practice in this way the communio-theology of the Council, without getting in hierarchical dependence of each other. The constantly emerging difficulties with local, national and curial supervisory authorities, which are fed not at least by the self-consciousness of exempt and papal acknowledged institutes, show that the orders in their cooperative instruments live a kind of collegiality that could serve as an example for the whole Church. What in the preparatory phase of the Council had been thought as a seemingly small matter developed to an institutional strength of the orders. And this although in the central commission the South African bishop Hurley, himself being religious, had warned against such meetings (associations) and denounced them as «A.B.C.» (Anti-Bishops' Conference).

The Tension between Obedience and Co-determination

The foundation of a theology on religious life is the so-called evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. In the discussions on the dogmatic constitution on the Church, it was requested time and again to identify the Christological, ecclesiological, soteriological and eschatological character of the counsels. The counsels as a sign of a special form of the imitation of Christ, as individual or in community, are presented in *Lumen Gentium* 44,3 as an example for a Christian calling. The unfolding of the contents of the counsels is given in *Perfectae Caritatis* 12-14. At this point only, the counsel of obedience should be dealt with.

Obedience is in a close relationship to the exercise of authority. In the history of religious life, authority has been misused time and again, in order to humiliate and degrade members. Obedience was understood as the breaking of self-will – and with this the education in religious communities was the direct continuation of pedagogy within families and schools. In the preparatory commission, the interpretation of obedience was formulated as «holocaustum» of

one's own will. Pope Paul VI, in his address to various religious communities of the 23rd of May 1964, picked up this expression : « Religious obedience is and must remain a holocaust of one's own will which is offered to God. A Religious makes this sacrifice of self with a view of humbly obeying lawful Superiors (whose authority, of course, should always be exercised within the confines of charity and with due regard for the human person), even though our times summon Religious to the performance of many and heavy burdens, and to carrying out these duties more cheerfully and more promptly. » That three numbers in *Perfectae Caritatis* were devoted to the evangelical counsels is owed to this path breaking address of the Pope, in which he also gave precious hints to the way in which the reform was to be carried out.

Through the Pope, the word « holocaustum » got into the revised text. This was very much to the mind of the superior-general of the Jesuits, Janssens, who objected to a « reformed obedience » such as an arrangement between subordinates and superiors. Some speakers in the commission for the orders pleaded for a positive-liberating interpretation of obedience. But the opinion of the superior-general of the Franciscans, S epinski, prevailed, who pointed out that the Council should not only be busy with *aggiornamento*, but that it had to preserve what was worth to be preserved, especially in view of the crisis of obedience.

The discussion in November 1964 finally eliminated the controversial term « holocaustum » and replaced it with « dedication *propriae voluntatis* ». For, so the superior-general of the Marists, Joseph Buckley, in the name of 130 Council Fathers, the crisis of obedience might perhaps also be the crisis of the superiors¹². And Bishop Collin from Digne reminded the Council that also religious people are modern people and abasement of them and infantilism is out of place. « The authoritarianism in religious life has been misused. It destroys the human personality and in consequence it is a hindrance for the service of the Church¹³. »

The new accents, which, after the *modi*, had been inserted in *Perfectae Caritatis* 14, accentuate the dedication to God and the preparedness to subject oneself in faith to the superior. But the decree also states that this has to happen « in accordance with their rules and constitutions » ; it must not lower the dignity of the human person, but must lead to maturity by extending the freedom of the children of God. At the same time, the superiors are reminded to be aware of this task towards their members.

¹² AS III/VII, p. 464-466.

¹³ AS III/VII, p. 589.

The discussions about the significance and kind of obedience in religious institutes, as they were carried out during the Council, had an effect on the preparation and the execution of special chapters. This being in dialogue did not allow any more to see the chapters apparently only as a matter for a few, but demanded active co-operation and co-responsibility. The practice of obedience was therefore fundamentally revised in the renewed constitutions of almost all communities.

Where were the women ?

Sisters have been talked about and decided about since questions were addressed to the future Council Fathers. But talking with them happened only after the third session. But at no place and at no time, were they included into the process of decision-making.

The female religious life was discussed in the preparatory session of the Council under the aspect of restrictions. But at least restrictions for the reception of the sacrament of penance were dropped. No agreement could be reached about the vows (solemn or simple) and the extent of the enclosure. The decree of the Council gave an implicit answer to the question, when *Perfectae Caritatis* 15,2 abandoned the different classes within female communities. However answers according to the model that always men and women are referred to, except when it was obvious on the basis of the matter concerned that only women would be addressed, did not convince, and the longer, the less. The French Bishop Gérard Huyghe, himself a member of the commission on orders, wrote on the 30th of April 1963, the Council would have to take into account the changes of the today's world, and one of these changes, as he stated in unison with John XXIII, would be the equal rights of women. And in an orally proposed vote of the 12th of November 1964¹⁴, he demanded : « Thus may now a happy period begin, in which women, and not only of the laity but also religious, may be regarded by all as adults in the Church. »

After all, in February 1965, written votes were requested from female auditors. They were disappointed about the decree on the orders. It would continue to emphasize the aspect of separation from the world. The negative, towards renunciation orientated character of religious life, would have to be overcome in favour of a positive renewal that would have to consider the whole of the sisters' personality. However regional differences became also evident in this enquiry. The sisters from French and English speaking countries wanted a fundamental new orientation of the religious life, while the Italian superiors gave preference to a traditional concept.

¹⁴ AS III/VII, p. 472-475.

This tension remained also after the Council and determines differing concepts of religious life up to today. But in spite of this, the self-consciousness of women religious has zoomed through a more active participation in ecclesial services and offices and through an improved education and formation. Also in theological regard there were endeavours towards emancipation. The feministic theology has its origin not at least in centuries of suppression of an original contribution of women religious to the life of the Church. An unbiased assessment of the development during the past fifty years remains to be investigated.

Orders and the Mission

The Council took various starts in order to be able to formulate a decree about the missions that would be in conformance with ecclesiastical developments. It was a long way from a paternalistic view of the Church of the missions towards their qualification as « young Churches » and towards the widening of the missionary mandate to the Churches of every country (« The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary », *Ad Gentes* 2,1).

The problem about exemption culminates in the decree on the Church's missionary activity. This problem featured, like a *cantus firmus*, in all the sessions of the Council. The orders were concerned about their autonomy, and this not only with regard to their inner structures but also in financial and pastoral matters. The superiors of the exempt institutes regarded themselves as equals with the bishops. The bishops had hoped that the Council would give them greater influence over the orders, especially over those who had assembled many privileges, which made a comprehensive pastoral practice impossible for the bishops. The decree on the pastoral office of the bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus* had in numbers 33-35 gave them far-reaching powers over the religious that were active in their territories. Information, harmonizing of projects and works, as well as the final jurisdiction of the bishop for divine service, pastoral care, catechesis and schools were the areas that gave right of access to the bishops over the orders.

Co-operation and co-ordination are the keywords that the Council stresses for religious superiors and for ordinaries. Recommended for this are also conferences and unions of religious as well as a vivid exchange with the centres of the orders.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and Religious Life

A theme that on the first glance seems to be rather secondary should still be referred to. Can. 1256 (*Codex iuris canonici* 1917) distinguished between an official and private divine service. To an official divine service belonged performance in the name of the Church by a lawfully appointed person in a form prescribed by the Church. The preparatory commission discussed now if and under which conditions the common prayer of lay-institutes, to which also communities of religious brothers and non-monastic congregations of sisters belonged, would be public and official, since they did not recite the complete Roman Breviary, but only a shortened version or the Marian Office. Already in the preparatory commission, a view prevailed, in agreement with the commission on the liturgy, by which the use of the vernacular should be made possible. Concerning the prayer of the rosary, the members of the commission were disunited in its qualification.

When the discussions on the scheme of the orders began, the matter in question was already settled. The constitution on the liturgy had on the one side widened the concept of liturgy, but on the other hand ordered a revision of the existent texts. This meant for the hours : « All who take part in the divine office are not only performing a duty for the Church, they are also sharing in what is the greatest honour for Christ's Bride, for by offering these prayers to God they are standing before God's throne in the name of the Church, their Mother » (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 85). The reform of the liturgy contributed in this way to the levelling out of class distinctions in religious communities and broadened the circle of those who, as individuals or in community, prayed the renewed breviary completely in vernacular. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* assigns the character of a public prayer to all to them : « Any religious who in virtue of their constitution recites parts of the divine office are thereby joining in the public prayer of the Church. The same can be said of those who, in virtue of their constitutions, recite any "little office", provided it be drawn up after the pattern of the divine office, and be duly approved » (98).

After Fifty Years : The Orders in the Church and Society of Today

For the year 2015, Pope Francis proclaimed a « Year of the Orders ». The situation since the Council has fundamentally changed in many aspects. The walls of the monasteries do *de facto* not exist any more, except for strictly contemplative monasteries. The orders have arrived in the world – and the world within the orders. The use of media and means of communication have become a

matter of fact. The traditional « works » are often not any more the areas of operation, many members have become individual fighters in pastoral practice and in pedagogy, and others are employed in professions that are not connected with Church. Together with the dramatic shrinkage of members during the past fifty years after the Council, the orders are confronted with the task of a new profiling. In difference to the time after the Council when every community was called upon to rediscover and to formulate its specific charisma, the movement of today is about a new solidarity. It has to be seen if more is to happen than solidarity of helplessness. After the conflicts of modernisation, an anxiety about the future is spreading concerning the further existence of consecrated life. However orders and religious communities have proved their permanent adaptability in the course of history.

Religious orders and communities have to prove their capability to transformation in a new way. The history of religious communities knows times of break-up and times of downgrade, which some may even classify as decadence. History knows also charismatic and more functional oriented phases. In any case, orders stand in an inner connection with the respective mainstreams in society, politics, culture and Church. Fifty years after Vatican II, whose final decisions asked for a new relation between Church and World, religious orders experience the hopes and grieves, joys and sorrows of humankind. And they have to ask themselves in a new way « what it is that God and people today are asking of them¹⁵ ».

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¹⁵ POPE FRANCIS, *Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People on the occasion of the year of consecrated life*, 21 November 2014.