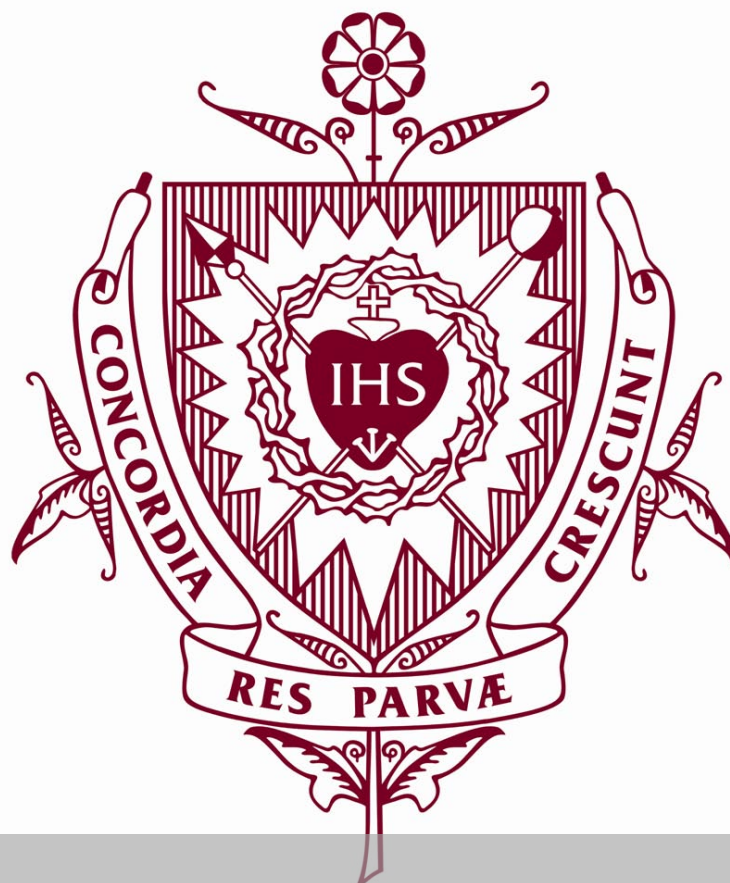


June 2012



XAVERIAN
BROTHERS

XAVERIAN CHARISM PROJECT

Working Papers on Xaverian Spirituality, Life Form, Ecclesiality & Mission

XAVERIAN CHARISM STUDY
WORKING PAPERS ON XAVERIAN SPIRITUALITY, LIFE
FORM, ECCLESIALITY & MISSION
JUNE 2012

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F O R E W O R D



Xaverian Brothers Generalate

4409 Frederick Avenue • Baltimore, MD 21229 • USA

15 June 2012
Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
Xaverian Foundation Day

Dear Brothers, Xaverian Associates and Collaborators,

At our 26th General Chapter in 2007, we endorsed a directive on Mission Formation which called us “to continue to promote the study and explication of our Founding Vision and Charism and its on-going implications for the life and mission of the Congregation.” For the past five years we have been involved in a Congregation-wide study of our **Charism**. This study included research on the Founder and our early history conducted by Brother Regj Cruz. His research formed the basis of Charism Conferences that he and I conducted in all regions of the Congregation. In addition, Brother Regj conducted modified conferences for the chief administrators of Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools in the United States and for those in XBSS who are responsible for conducting faculty formation. At various times during each year we also provided resources to help further our study and reflection. These included the introduction of Founder’s Week - those seven days between the anniversary of the death of Theodore James Ryken on 27 November and the Feast of St. Francis Xavier on 3 December - and the publishing of reflection resources for the Advent and Lenten seasons.

In December 2010, the General Council and I also created two permanent commissions to continue the study of our Congregational Charism: a Commission on Congregational History and a Commission on Xaverian Spirituality. It is our hope that these Commissions will further our ongoing study and explication of our Founding Vision and Charism.

Now, with the publication of these “Working Papers on Xaverian Spirituality, Life Form, Ecclesiality, and Mission” we present additional resources which should assist us in rearticulating our Charism for Xaverian life as we approach our next General Chapter in 2013 and the 175th Anniversary of our Foundation in 2014. While these Working Papers provide theological and contextual background for our study of charism, my hope is that they will serve as a resource for each of us to reflect on our lived experience of the Xaverian Charism and to dialogue our lived experience with the foundational aspects of the Charism that are presented here.

On this Feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, one of the major feasts of our Congregation since our foundation, may we rededicate ourselves to re-presenting the Sacred Heart of Jesus through our participation in the passion and compassion of God for all of God’s creation.

Sincerely, your brother,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Lawrence' followed by a horizontal line.

Brother Lawrence Harvey, C.F.X.
General Superior

F O R E W O R D

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit is an admirable artist. He is bound by neither rules nor models, and He works where and how He wills. Of the winds we do not know where they are going. It is quite the same with the Divine Spirit. In order to detect the origin of this congregation down to the deep roots, these same roots become as thin as very thin hair, so that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find their first germ.
(Theodore James Ryken, *Autobiography*, ca. 1871)

In Consecrated Life, **charism** refers to a phenomenon that is intrinsic in every religious congregation that can claim its origin in the Spirit’s (com)passion. It has always been there, even before postconciliar theologians of Consecrated Life appropriated the term. Generally speaking, each of God’s faithful has a Personal Charism, that **gracious gift God gratuitously gave not for the benefit of the receiver but for the sake of the Church:**

The Holy Spirit distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts, He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks advantageous for the renewal of the Church. These charismatic gifts, whether they be the more simple and widely diffused or the most outstanding, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation.¹

Among these “outstanding” charisms were those entrusted to “founders who were raised up by God within His Church.”² It was the council that appropriately gave founders a pivotal place in understanding the deeper call of the Spirit to their congregations. It also insisted that consecrated women and men “let their founders’ spirit and special aims [which] they set before them as well as their sound traditions - all of which make up the patrimony of each institute - be faithfully held in honor.”³ A few years later, Paul VI – the first pontiff to use the term charism with explicit reference to founders – underscored that “in this (insistence, the Council) finds one of the principles for the present renewal and one of the most secure criteria for judging what each institute should undertake.”⁴

Despite this invitation, religious congregations faced difficulties in coming up with a compelling articulation of their respective charisms. At the heart of the problem is that it has taken decades to come up with a well-developed framework for discussing the phenomenon. Initially, most (if not all) congregations centered their study solely on the Founder’s Charism. It was in-

¹ *Lumen Gentium*, §12.

² *Evangelica Testificatio*, §11.

³ *Perfectae Caritatis*, §2b.

⁴ *Evangelica Testificatio*, §10.

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evitable that such would happen as many congregations lacked a painstaking study of the life and works of their founders in the 1960s. However, many saw the founder as the end-all of the study and fixed the understanding of charism according to the socio-historical conditions of the founding moment. Jesuit Fr. John Carroll Futrell, cofounder of the Institute of Religious Formation, saw this act of “defining” charism as very problematic:

*The charism of the founder cannot be fixed in an abstract, verbal definition. To attempt to do so is to attempt to identify living, individual communities on the level of theoretical ‘natures’. But religious communities, like persons, are living organisms actualizing their own individuality through their own unique way of experiencing life and of integrating relationships...**The founder’s charism, as shared and lived by the members of the community today is a mystery, as is anything which is dynamic and alive. It cannot be defined. It can only be described.***⁵ (emphasis supplied)

The institutional church would push the issue further by affirming that charisms develop dynamically through the congregation itself. All consecrated members in an institute have a shared responsibility to “live, safeguard, deepen and constantly develop” the “experience of the Spirit” which the founder “transmitted” to them.⁶ They do this through the personal charisms they bring with them, which now “are intended for the enrichment, development and rejuvenation of the life of the institute.”⁷

The next two decades witnessed a profusion of conferences, articles and theses on the phenomenology of charism. Unfortunately, the variety of approaches to the phenomenon was rather disconnected and by the beginning of the 1990s the waters became murkier when ideas like “refounding congregations” or “reweaving narratives” became *au courant* among religious leadership and membership. It did not help that writings which not only questioned but also negated the very existence of charisms appeared in journals and books on consecrated life. Spiritan Fr. Anthony Gittins lamented that “the term charism has been widely used, but not always with finesse. It has become a lazy and an irritating word, a catch-all term which hardly bears scrutiny.”⁸ Quite appropriately, the 1990s was heralded by a powerful three-point declaration from Dominican Sr. Elizabeth McDonough addressed to religious as the millennium approached:

First, either a religious community has a charism or it does not. If a community does not have a charism, it is not going to survive. Second, if a community has a charism, the members understand it or they do not. If a community has a charism but the members do not understand it, the community is not going to survive. Third, if the

⁵ John Carroll Futrell, “Discovering the Founder’s Charism,” *The Way Supplement* 14 (1971): 64-65.

⁶ *Mutuae Relationes*, §11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, §12.

⁸ Anthony J. Gittins, “Sows’ Ears and Silk Purses: The Limitations of Charisms and Communities,” *Review for Religious* 43 (1984): 707.

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community has a charism and understands it, the members can either strive to live it or they can decline to do so. If a community has a charism and more or less understands it but the members decline to live it, then that community is not going to survive. More pointedly: if any community lands on the negative side of any of the above disjunctive assertions, then it probably does not merit survival. But note again: this assessment is not directly concerned with the foibles and failures of human endeavors; it is concerned with the importance of the charisms of consecrated life as such. Precisely because charisms are gifts of the Spirit to and for the church, they are too precious to be left indefinitely in the trust of people who are heedless of a charism's inherent value or unmindful of their personal responsibility to embrace and live its practical consequences.... As disconcerting as this statement may be for the adherents of some contemporary trends, it bears noting that no one can actually reweave or re-create a charism of religious life.... I would suggest that – rather than refounding or reweaving or re-creating a charism – if anything, religious receive it and respond to it.⁹

Three decades of debates and confusion eventually took its toll. By the third millennium, the fatigue of religious over the issue became manifest through the oversimplification in their explanation of their congregational charism. In websites of religious congregations, charisms were reduced to statements and catch-phrases, inadvertently mimicking the marketing strategies of the business world to recruit young candidates in our attention-deficit society. Ironically, this has taken place when most religious have come to accept that charism is so intrinsic to the consecrated life that no one could simply wishfully ignore its existence.

Given this present-day situation, it is incumbent to clarify first and foremost the phenomenon of charism. In so doing, we hope that we could provide a solid foundation on which we could establish the framework that would “provide a compelling articulation of Ryken’s vision, his choice of Francis Xavier as patron, and our congregational identity for our use in programs in initial and on-going formation.” Here are some points regarding how a charism should not be articulated:

1. A charism cannot – and should not – be reduced to one phrase or sentence or even a paragraph. In our Late Modern society, there is always the temptation to present a congregational charism in its most minimal form. However, we must resist falling into this temptation. To condense the articulation of a charism into “bullet points” is not only wrong; it perverts its deeper meaning.
2. Charism and ministry are not the same. The ministries embraced by a religious institute spring from its understanding of its congregational charism.
3. The Founder’s Charism is not the totality of the Congregational Charism. The Founder’s Charism is basically a Personal Charism enriched by a graced capacity for deep

⁹ Elizabeth McDonough, “Charisms and Religious Life,” *Review for Religious* 52 (Sept.-Oct. 1993): 650-51.

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insight, foresight, and initiative. Without a doubt, the Founder's Charism is a crucial point of reflection for every religious congregation. But bear in mind that it is just one aspect of the Congregational Charism and not its totality.

4. A charism cannot be fully described through theology and history alone. Spirituality, anthropology, sociology, formation science, and psychology have contributed to its further and deeper understanding.

Now let us look at the elemental points for understanding the phenomenon of charism:

1. Charis (χάρις) signifies "gracious gift" and "gracious disposition." By gracious, we understand the theological understanding of "grace" as "God's unmerited favor toward humanity."
2. Charizomai (χαρίζομαι), the verbal form of charis, is construed as "to give" in the basic sense. The phenomenon of Charism does not suggest an "inactive thing" but an action involving agency.
3. Hence, Charism should first be understood as the Spirit of God's gracious Self-giving to the world, whether human beings ask/seek for it or not, out of passion and compassion [hence, **(com)passion**] for all creation.
4. The (com)passion of the Spirit is actualized in human history by imperfect women and men who powerfully perceived it despite the suffering and apathy taking place that was overwhelming their socio-historical context. They became convinced that the Spirit was summoning them to incarnate Her (com)passion to alleviate the sorrow and indifference of their contemporaries.
5. It is through these founders of religious congregations that the Spirit irrupted in human history. Through their present-day followers, however, the Spirit continues to irrupt in a here and now that is still plagued by suffering and apathy.

With the parameters of the discussion established, let us now consider the following description of a congregational charism:

The category of charism as it applies to a congregation is best understood as the ongoing "deep narrative" developed throughout the community's history with its attendant myths and symbols, outstanding events and persons, struggles and triumphs, projects and challenges, psychology and spirituality that the group has developed from its origins to the present and that has become the inner heritage of each member down through the years, generating among them a shared identity... The issue of charismatic identity is not so much one of "Who founded us?" as "What have we become together by the grace of God?"¹⁰

¹⁰ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy, and Community in Catholic Religious Life* (New York, NY/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 74-75.

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The mystery of charisms is situated within the reality of the world, in the past and within the here and now. They are located within a world not only beset by human sufferings – illnesses, ignorance, enslavement, marginalization, etc., as well as human apathy – be they social, psychological, or spiritual. Faith assures us that these overwhelming concerns in human history are present to the enduring gaze and concern of the resurrected Christ. The Gospel of John proclaims that the Self-giving of Christ to his disciples would continue even after the ascension:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always... This Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (Jn. 14:15-16; 26-27)

Thus, we believe that the Holy Spirit continues to be present with us in human history – never distant, never uninvolved but always with us, journeying with us, and impelling us. To confess belief in the Holy Spirit, then, is to acknowledge that the Spirit continually gives Herself through ineffable (com)passion for all creation, a compassion that triumphs over suffering, a passion that overpowers apathy.

However, this (com)passion of the Spirit seems less perceivable to the eyes and heart of humanity when it is engulfed in the sufferings and apathy of the times, be they local or global. It is within this constantly recurring drama that founders found the Spirit's (com)passion. **What distinguishes founders is not that they established a religious congregation but, rather, that they found the fire of the Spirit's (com)passion in the midst of sufferings and apathy while their contemporaries could not.** They allowed this Sacred Fire to captivate them so much that incarnating the Spirit's (com)passion became their life passion, the dance that captured their whole being. Now, the Spirit's (com)passion is also perceived by other men and women who seek to do good in their societies. But founders of religious congregations are distinguished from these women and men of good will because they were thoroughly convinced of a divine summons to incarnate the Spirit's (com)passion within the Consecrated Life Form, **a permanent life situation characterized by a life of contemplation, asceticism, and celibacy.** In initiating this Sacred Dance around the Spirit's (com)passion, founders facilitated the irruption of new ideas, new forces, and new energies. Through this initiative, contemporaries with unrealized religious aspirations see in the founder's visions an expression of ideas which they interpret as viable strategies though which could realize their own aims. Thus, they joined in the Sacred Dance and enriched the founder's understanding of the Spirit's (com)passion with their own gracious good will.

As this Sacred Dance continues through history, it begins to entice and captivate other persons. These new visionaries may be distanced from the culture and time of the founder and his first followers. Like them, however, they were captivated by the particular manifestations of the Spirit's (com)passion for creation as it undergoes sufferings and apathy similar to the ones experienced by the founder and his first followers. It is a sacred task for a religious congregation to appraise in these individuals the capacity for the demands of the consecrated life. When it ac-

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cepts them as members, it is committing itself to allow their personal charisms to be incorporated into the congregation and to transform the totality of the fraternity. Like the birth of a child into a family, the acceptance of new members will change the congregation. Their participation in the Sacred Dance will not destroy the group's identity, but it will modify and enrich it. When this happens, the congregation begins to understand more powerfully the deeper summonses of the Spirit which the founder and his first followers apprehended in a way that transcends how those demands were initially circumscribed by the religious, cultural, and political ideologies peculiar to the founding moment.

A congregational charism cannot be described from nothing. To arrive at its compelling articulation, we need to pay attention to the various facets that shape it. These are its COORDINATES, DIMENSIONS, and TRAJECTORY.



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COORDINATES

As an organic reality, the consecrated life is constituted by “the simultaneous presence and interaction of a number of coordinates that generate the organism with its particular dimensions.”¹¹ These coordinates are not accidental and unrelated elements. Because they intimately interact among themselves, dropping even one coordinate internally affects the others within the Life. A well-considered description of the dynamics affecting these coordinates is critical for any religious congregation which wants to apprehend its charismatic identity. There are ten coordinates which seem to be present in every shape that the Life has taken in its nearly two-thousand year old history:

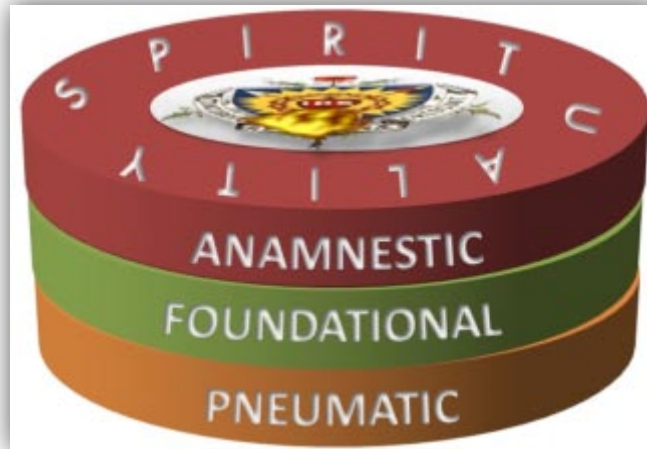
These ten coordinates could be subdivided into four sub-groups:

- 1) **SPIRITUALITY**: The deeper aspirations of a founder and his followers which they incarnate through practices designed to foster union with God and to apprehend in a better way the Spirit’s inspiration, i.e., the Spirit’s deeper summonses to the congregation that would serve the inner transformation of the religious and of the people with whom they come in touch.
- 2) **LIFE FORM**: The coordinates which enable the formation of members as vowed individuals, bind them as a sisterhood or brotherhood, and enrich them as members of a society constantly transformed by cultural exchanges. The coordinates in this sub-group are **CONSECRATION**, **COMMUNITY**, and **INTERCULTURALITY**.
- 3) **ECCLESIALITY**: The coordinates which speak about consecrated persons as part of the People of God: where they arise from; how they relate to other members of the Christian Faithful; and the dynamics of their dealings with the clerical leadership. The coordinates in this sub-group are **INTRAECLESIALITY**, **INTERECLESIALITY**, and **COMMUNION**.
- 4) **MISSION**: The coordinates which take into account the world to which the members of a religious congregation are sent by the Spirit, the desired outcome of their endeavors, and the works they take on in the light of the nine earlier coordinates. The coordinates in this sub-group are **FRONTIER**, **VISION**, and **MINISTRY**.

Further descriptions of these coordinates will be given later. However, it would be worth noting that the first of these coordinates, Spirituality, lies at the very center of the model to highlight its crucial position in any deliberation of a congregational charism. Ministry is situated at the farthest level in the model to show that the propriety of the works that a religious congregation embraces is best determined after a serious consideration of the nine earlier coordinates.

¹¹ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Text* (New York, NY/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 56.

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DIMENSIONS

Every religious congregation approaches each of these coordinates uniquely because they apprehend distinctively the dimensions of each of the above coordinates. These dimensions are three-fold:

- **Foundational:** The birth of every religious congregation came about because its founder chose to incarnate the Spirit's (com)passion in a particular way. The Foundational Dimension refers to the unique way a founder apprehended and manifested the mystery of the Spirit's (com)passion within a particular historical and cultural context. To plumb the depths of this dimension, one would have to (a) comprehend in a nuanced manner the language a Founder used, and (b) hear the narratives about the first members.
- **Pneumatic:** The origin of every religious congregation is graced mystery, one that transcends the socio-historical accidents of its birth as well as the founder's limited comprehension of its depth. The Spirit is the primordial source of the congregation's existence for it is Her Self-giving to the world that founders seek to actualize in their societies. But because they are conditioned by the social and religious worldview of the times, founders could not fully grasp the deeper call that the Spirit is communicating to them. The Pneumatic Dimension considers what is further willed by the Spirit for the congregation that the Founder could not fully grasp.
- **Anamnestic:** The Anamnestic Dimension connects the present-day members of a religious congregation to the joys and pains and the unfinished sacred agenda of their predecessors in the Life. *Anamnesis* is a religious memory that makes something past to be effectively present and active in a community today. It is different from *nostalgia*, a form of memory that bathes the past in a sentimental light and acts as an anesthetic against the difficulties of the present. Anamnesis dares religious to visit the past and

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find in that return the reasons to be inspired in the present so that they can behold the future that is still outstanding for their religious congregation.¹²



TRAJECTORY

Religious congregations pass through several discernible stages in their historical development to the present moment. The two pivotal points in their trajectory are the REALIZATION and RECONSIDERATION phases. For most nineteenth century congregations, the stages of LEGITIMATION and INSTITUTIONALIZATION come between these two phases.

Inspired by the Spirit, a founder facilitates a sudden eruption into history of new ideas, new forces and new energies. Reciprocally, individuals with unrealized religious aspirations may see in the founder's vision a new mode of expressing the Spirit's compassion for the world which seems to offer them a viable way of realizing their own aspirations. The REALIZATION of the Founding Charism becomes incorporated into the life of the religious community. However, in their quest for canonical recognition from the institutional church and society-at-large, the founder and first members may let go of aspects of the founding inspiration – be they in terms of vocabulary, ministry, practices, etc. It can also happen that this LEGITIMATION takes place after the founder's death.

At some point, the founder and first members leave behind a body of followers who have become further distanced from the founding moment. In an INSTITUTIONALIZATION mindset, their concern becomes focused on establishing the life on the legislations and compartments mandated by the institutional church and the building of institutions that would further the ends of the congregation, on one hand, and steady its finances, on the other. In December 1900, the Norms accompanying the decree *Conditae a Christo* – the *magna carta* for “institutes of simple vows” – laid down principles for congregations that sought ecclesiastical approbation which required of them drastic changes. Congregations dropped Rules written by their founders and

¹² Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading Of The Communion Of Saints* (New York: Continuum; Ottawa: Novalis, 1999), 164-67; 234.

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changed their Constitutions to suit the format sanctioned by the Vatican. Although it was not the intention, the church unfortunately brought about a leveling in religious life:

We (religious) were all leveled... First everything in our lives was of equal importance, and secondly, we might as well have been one gigantic community. We knew we were different from one another and meant by God to be different, but it was an intuitive kind of knowledge, with not much to support it. To the rest of the world we were distinguished by some aspect of our dress.... Canon law leveled us still further. There were pages and pages of canons that required religious communities to do things in a uniform way. Communities founded in the (nineteenth and twentieth centuries) ended up with virtually the same constitution as all others, with only a paragraph, or best a page which pertained to itself alone.¹³

Mindful of the problem it involuntarily brought about, the institutional church sought to remedy the institution during the Second Vatican Council. In calling consecrated men and women to honor the spirit of their founders and their special aims, the Church brought them to a phase of RECONSIDERATION. It encouraged them to convoke a special chapter that would facilitate the discovery of the congregation's "element of genuine originality and of special initiative for the spiritual life of the Church."¹⁴ But the years that followed the Council coincided with the precipitous drop in the number of religious and in the steady decline in the economic stability congregations once enjoyed. There were congregations that openly chose to embrace "the sure way" of preconciliar times once more and revert to Institutionalization. If a community desires to revitalize itself, then it should avoid taking this step. Its revival must be a re-appropriation of its Founding Charism. Somehow this procedure in conjunction with the other features of the revitalization process could re-ignite the ashes of the burnt-out Founding Charism. This resurgence of charism transforms the embers of the Founding Charism into a life-giving, spontaneous and creative force which gives the members of the religious community a restored sense of identity and purpose. When it does so, the congregation experiences a SECOND REALIZATION and focuses the energy of its revitalized (though probably fewer) members to probe deeper the summons of the Spirit and fulfill Her unfinished agenda for the congregation.

¹³ Jean Marie Renfo, "Religious Charism: Definition, Rediscovery and Implications," *Review for Religious* 45 (1986): 523.

¹⁴ *Mutuae Relationes*, §12.

XAVERIAN SPIRITUALITY

To arrive at a compelling articulation of the Xaverian Brothers' charism, we must clarify first and foremost the Spirituality of the congregation. As it is true for all congregations, this particular coordinate lies at the very center of our unique identity, the one on which all the other coordinates of a congregational charism emanate. An ambiguous and superficial exposition of the congregational spirituality would bring about a weak substantiation of the other nine coordinates, consequently creating an implausible description of the congregational charism.

The importance of locating the congregational Spirituality was upheld by the Second Vatican Council. While it invited religious congregations to “adapt to the changed conditions of our time,” the Council duly noted that “even the best adjustments made by a congregation in accordance with the needs of our age will be ineffectual unless its religious are animated by a renewal of spirit.” It accentuated this assertion by stating that this “renewal of spirit” must “take precedence over even the active ministry”¹ Without a doubt, then, articulating Xaverian Brothers Spirituality is critical to our overall project. To accomplish this, however, we need to clarify what *spirituality* implies.

Lay theologian Michael Downey writes that spirituality, in the broadest sense, refers to “the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms... of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one person perceives.”² For Catholics in particular, Downey’s definition implies that spirituality is a person’s (1) authentic quest for the God revealed in Jesus Christ and experienced through the gift of the Holy Spirit within the life of the Church, and (2) a person’s deliberate and progressive pursuit to realize full integration through *self-transcendence*, i.e. the act of moving beyond a life centered on the ego and characterized solely by socio-historical pulsations, survival instincts, and functional ends. This definition is consistent with the pre-conciliar understanding of *religious perfection* as “the union of the soul with God through charity.”³

Attaining self-transcendence within Religious Life is possible because of the charismatic nature of the life itself. Pope Paul VI spoke about “certain fundamental options” that are inherent in the *charism of religious life* and saw that “fidelity to the exigencies of these fundamental options is the touchstone of authenticity in religious life.”⁴ These fundamental options could be equated with the three practices that have been the hallmarks of Religious Life from its origins: celibacy,

¹ *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 2.

² Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 15.

³ Ildephonse Lanslots, *Handbook of Canon Law for Congregations of Women under Simple Vows*, 8th ed. (New York and Cincinnati: Frederick Pustet Co., 1909), 87.

⁴ *Evangelica Testificatio*, 29 June 1971, no. 12.

contemplation, and asceticism.⁵ Ideally, union with God could be achieved by a consecrated person through the faithful observance of these practices alone.

However, each religious congregation enriches these three by forming its members to deepen their baptismal consecration in a more complete conformation to Christ by “renewing their spirit and clothing them with a new self” (Eph. 4:23). It does this first through an **elucidation** of the foundation from which the spirituality would emerge. Then, the congregation roots its members in certain *dispositions* that would enable them to assume a *mode of presence* before God and to *reorient* willingly their lives toward God. **Dispositions** are *internal characteristics or tendencies, already residing within the individual, which make a person act in a specified way, as opposed to acting in accordance with outside or situational influences*. It is understood then that, in their continuing formation, religious would be able to determine whether or not their personal dispositions are consonant with those highlighted in the congregational spirituality. **Mode of Presence** refers to *the stance or spiritual posture which the consecrated individual assumes before the presence of God*. In essence, it refers to the “way of being” which is promoted and idealized in the congregation so that the religious might develop a deeper sense of God’s presence. **Reorientation** refers to how religious restructure their day for the sake of their formation in the congregational spirituality. This is done so that both the dispositions and modes of presence highlighted in the congregational Spirituality (e.g. certain modes of presence to God, self, others, time, situations, and the ordinary events of daily life) will become firmly rooted in their lives. However, it is understood that the religious willingly adopts this routinization of the day order with active direction and alertness of mind.

The Second Vatican Council pointed out that the fleshing out of a congregational charism could only happen if religious “let their founders’ spirit... be faithfully held in honor.” The three directives can be detected within the deeper aspirations verbalized and/or expressed by a founder in his quest for self-transcendence. The followers of the founder are supposed to find in his aspirations viable means to live out their own unrealized and unarticulated aspirations. However, the transcendent aspirations of both founders and followers should be seen as their attempts to apprehend the Spirit’s inspiration, not only for their inner transformation but also for that of the people to whom they are summoned to express Her (com)passion. **Thus, from the synthesis of the transcendent aspirations of the founder and his consecrated followers, and the Spirit’s initial and on-going inspiration to both founder and followers, emanate the characteristic Spirituality of the congregation.**

⁵ For further reading on these constant practices of Religious Life, see Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vol. 184 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1958); Ugo Bianchi, ed., *La Tradizione dell’Enkrateia: Motivazioni ontologiche e protologiche* (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1985); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Susanna Elm, “*Virgins of God*”: *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); James E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999).

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Let us see how the above discussions could be applied in our study of the life and thoughts of Theodore Ryken. As many of us have lamented through the years, it seems that our Founder did not communicate in a very direct and comprehensible way the Spirituality for the brothers. However, we should be consoled by the fact that he belongs to that vast group of Founders who, although they intuited and lived out a direction for their personal spirituality, were unable to articulate and consciously pass it on to their spiritual children. In such cases, their spiritual children would have to trace the *Special Spirituality* which affected the fashioning of their founders' spiritual insights. By Special Spirituality, we refer to "schools" of spirituality which originated within the Catholic religious tradition – e.g., Benedictine, Franciscan, Carmelite, Ignatian, etc. – and which are strongly influenced by the apprehensions of its founders and mystics.

We Xaverian Brothers at this point in history are quite fortunate to be doing this research at a time of renewed interest in the Middle Dutch Mystics among scholars of spirituality. Represented primarily – but not only – by the fourteenth-century mystic Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381), the movement is named as such because of the use of Middle Dutch dialects in their writing. Although Modern Dutch began to develop in the seventeenth century, it only became firmly established within the nineteenth century. And although Ryken was a man of that century, epistolary evidences point out that his thoughts were mostly written in his Brabantian dialect. Interestingly enough, similarities between his vocabulary and that of the Middle Dutch mystic Ruusbroec cannot be discounted. Both men came from the historical Duchy of Brabant, and both were familiar with the nuances of their common dialect. The research of present-day scholars on Ruusbroec and other Middle Dutch mystics invites us to plumb the depths of Ryken's thoughts as he invites his followers to embrace the *eenvoudige*, i.e. the ordinary. We should take note, however that **while the Middle Dutch Mysticism provides us with keys to understanding Ryken's insights, we must also remember that the Founder appropriated its themes according to the worldview of a nineteenth-century Dutch Catholic. The deeper challenge for us Xaverian Brothers, then, is to underscore the Founder's unique approach to the Special Spirituality which – in all likelihood – unconsciously affected his religious worldview.**

THE CALL TO ORDINARINESS AND ITS ARISING DISPOSITIONS

Five years after the birth of the brotherhood, Theodore Ryken wrote to a fellow Dutchman, G.N. Hermans, a carpenter from Helmond (Noord-Brabant). Although Hermans had previously shown interest in joining the embryonic community in Brugge, he echoed the doubts, even suspicions, raised by his confessor regarding the legitimacy of the enterprise, especially as it was neither directed by nor inclusive of clerics. The misgivings of the priest prompted Ryken to write a lengthy *apologia* in which, intentionally or not, he revealed the disposition he considered primary for his Congregation:

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Which person who has some experience of spiritual matters would desire that an angel come from heaven in order to make known God's will, when it is possible to know it by following the ordinary way (ordinaire weg)?... God does not have to give an account to anybody of His actions. If His Majesty wants to use an ordinary (eenvoudige), simple and uneducated person – yea, a sinner; if God wants to make this person turn toward Him in view of a special work; if God does not take the direction which people think He usually follows. In all this His Majesty is completely free and nobody is entitled to disapprove God's actions, let alone oppose them.⁶

Two years later, the call to ordinariness would significantly find its way into the 1846 Constitution when Ryken highlighted it as one of the five characteristics of the brotherhood's spirit.⁷

Ordinariness is a theme that is not unique to Ryken. Interestingly, it reveals in a subtle yet powerful way the spiritual worldview that affected not only the founder, but the people of Noord-Brabant who had stubbornly remained faithful to their Catholic heritage in Protestant Netherlands. Through them, the legacy and language of the Middle Dutch mystics of the High Middle Ages was preserved despite the violent upheavals of the Reformation which forced the Catholic minority to worship secretly in *schuilkerken* and *schuurkerken* for some two-hundred years. The writings and ideas of Jan van Ruusbroec, the most important of these Middle Dutch mystics, found their way into the religious language of these believers who passed it on to their children to the point that these Early Modern Dutch Catholics understood Ruusbroec in a way that non-Dutch speakers who came in touch with his writings could not. When Ryken spoke to the brothers about the *eenvoudige*, he was speaking in a religious language that is unique to his religious world.

What is the ordinary? To get to its meaning, we have to first shake away our association of the word “ordinary” with the ideas of “simple,” “plain,” or worse, “mediocre”. It would be instructive for us to know the etymology of the word in Middle Dutch. *Eenvoudige* (Ger., *einfalligkeit*) comes from two words, *een* (Ger., *ein*) and *voud* (Ger., *fält*). The first word signifies “one”, “first”, or “single” in both Middle and Modern Dutch. The second word means “fold” in Modern Dutch. *Eenvoudige* would then be akin to the English word “onefold”, rarely used when compared to related terms like “fourfold,” “manifold,” etc. *Voud*, however, was understood in Old and Early Middle Dutch as “earth”, “land”, or “field”, a word that is related to *grond* (Ger., *gront*), i.e. “ground”. Literally, then, *eenvoud* suggests to have or to be on “one ground.” All these may help us understand what Ruusbroec meant when he wrote about how “union with God beyond distinction” is achieved:

⁶ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to G.N. Hermans, Helmond, 14 November 1844, *Copy boek der brieven*, 1: 67.

⁷ The other four being prayer, asceticism, zeal for souls, and “extraordinary obedience which will dispose them to submit in all difficult circumstances and when sent on foreign missions.” Unfortunately, the first edition of the 1846 Constitution into English (1872) translated *envoudige* into “simplicity,” which carried a different set of meanings in the English-speaking Catholic imagination.

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The bosom of the Father is our own ground (gront) and our origin, in which we begin our life and our being. And out of our proper ground – that is, out of the Father and out of all that is living him – there shines an eternal brightness, which is the birth of the Son... The ordinary ground (eenvuldighe gront) of our eternal image always remains in obscurity. But the incommensurable brightness which shines out from this ordinary ground reveals and brings forth the hiddenness of God. All those who are elevated above their creaturehood into a contemplative life (scouwende leven) are one with this divine brightness, and they are the brightness itself. They see and feel and find, by means of this divine light, that they are themselves the same ordinary ground (eenvuldighe gront) out of which this brightness immeasurably shines forth without measure. [Die Geestelike Brulocht (The Spiritual Espousals), c136-39; c145-51]

The ordinary, then, is the ground where we were first located, where God had known us – and delighted in what we already were and had – before we came to know and define ourselves in another way.

What constitutes the ordinary? These are seemingly the “givens” in our life, the contingencies beyond our choosing – the time, society, and culture into which we are born; the genealogies arising from our ancestry; the realities, potencies, potentials, and limits that develop from our innate biologies and psychologies; the inevitabilities that come with being biologically human. Though “givens”, these factors of our being are not just accidents of nature or social happenstance. All of these “givens” are graced by God, the Source from which they all originate. The Source is a “common good” (*ghemeyne goet*) for, according to Ruusbroec, all human beings, despite their religious and cultural differences are graced (GB, 63-66). And since this source is common, no attribute or character in an individual or ethno-linguistic subgroup is better than others.

To return to the ordinary is to return to the “innocence” of our essential nature before we were horrified by our “nakedness”. It entails a moving away from the domestic (i.e. the house we made for ourselves) and coming back home (i.e. to union with God “beyond distinction”). It is within this idea that the theme of “rest” develops in Middle Dutch mysticism:

We keep oneness with God above our activity, in bareness of our spirit in divine light, where we possess God above all virtues in rest (rasten). For charity in the likeness must be eternally active, but oneness with God in enjoyable love will be forever at rest. And this is what it is to love. For in one now, in one instant, love acts and rests in its beloved. And the one is reinforced by the other. The higher the love, the more the rest; and the more the rest, the more inner the love. [GB, b1706-12]

Rest for Ruusbroec, however, was not understood as a state of inactivity, repose, or (worse) vegetativeness. Rather, to rest is to be intent on God, to be content with being on that “first ground”

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where He and I are one. For that reason “resting in God” is to be understood as equivalent to enjoying God, “taking God as our ultimate concern, as the sole genuine focus of our lives and attachments.”⁸ When one is restful in that “first ground”, one is truly happy, completely satisfied:

The most ordinary (eenvuldichste) persons are those who are the most satisfied and most at peace with themselves. They are the ones most deeply immersed in God (and) good works, and the most wide-ranging in the way their love flows out to all in common. They are the least hindered in love, for they are the most God-like. For God is ordinariness (eenvuldicheit) in His being, charity in understanding, and an outflowing common (ghemeyne) love in His working. The more God-like we are in these three, the more we are united with Him. And therefore, we shall remain in our ordinary ground (gronde eenvuldich) and consider all things with enlightened reason, and flow through everything with common love. [GB, b1767-76]

A crucial characteristic of one who rests in God is “simple intention” (*die eenvuldighe meyninghe*, lit. ordinary intention), a purity of heart where all of one’s actions are directed not toward one’s egoistic fulfillment but God alone:

That intention is single when it intends nothing but God and all other things in relation to God. A single intention drives out hypocrisy and duplicity. A person should retain and practice such an intention above all else in all his works, for it keeps a person in God’s presence, clear in understanding, zealous in virtues, and free of needless fear.... A single intention is the inward, enlightened, loving inclination of the spirit. It is the foundation of all spiritual life. [GB, b1539-44; b1546-48]

But this is not the state where most human beings prefer to be.

The ordinary does not attract us. In fact, the idea of being disposed to remain in one’s ordinary ground could be repulsive to most people in the “congratulatory culture” of Late Modernity⁹ – but to the extraordinary. We find ourselves dissatisfied with the “ordinary ground” and work hard to move away from it either by creating a new image for ourselves or by convincing ourselves and others that our lives are far from plain, recreating our personal narratives even to the point of “extraordinarizing” the ordinary. Ruusbroec saw that such an “uncommon” life was best (or worst) epitomized in the privileged clerical life:

In the beginning of the holy Church and of our faith, popes, bishops, and priests were common.... But now everything is just the contrary. For those who now possess the

⁸ Rik Van Nieuwehove, “Experience and Mystical Theology in the Fourteenth Century: An Examination of Ruusbroec,” in Lieven Boeve, Han Gebels, and Stijn Van den Bossche, eds., *Encountering Transcendence: Contributions to a Theology of Christian Religious Experience* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2003), 415.

⁹ The phrase was coined by American sociologist Joel Best in his book *Everyone’s a Winner: Life in Our Congratulatory Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

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inheritance and the rents which were given out of love and for their holiness are unstable in their ground. They are unappeased and manifold for they are totally turned towards the world, and they do not thoroughly consider the things or the matters which they have in their hands. Therefore they pray with their lips, but their heart does not savor what it speaks about... They do not feel it at all. That is why they are so coarse and obtuse and unenlightened in divine truth. Some seek to eat and drink well and to have bodily comfort in an unseemly fashion – and would to God that they were pure of body! As long as they live in this way, they will never be enlightened. [GB, b1116-26]¹⁰

While they are good people, Ruusbroec saw them as akin to the hired hands in Jesus' parable,

These are men who love themselves inordinately that they want to serve God only for their own gain and their own reward, cut themselves off from God and keep themselves unfree and self-centered, because they seek themselves and think of themselves in all their works. Therefore, with all their prayers and all their good works, they look for temporary or eternal things they choose only for their own comfort and their own benefit. These people are joined to themselves in a disorderly manner and therefore they always remain alone in themselves, for they lack the true love that would unite them with God and all his beloved. [Vanden Blinkenden Steen (The Sparkling Stone), 226-34]

The above, then, is the antithesis to the ordinary person. But there is hope for such an individual. When he awakens to the futility and vanity of his puffed-up self-image and self-projection, then he moves away from his delusional self to his ordinary being. **To be grounded in the ordinary, then, is to be wary of a life of privilege and entitlement, to be guarded about the compulsion to seek the limelight or be the sole center of other's attention.**

Out of the decision to choose the ordinary way arises the dispositions which the congregation seeks to instill in the hearts and minds of the brothers. These are reflected well in the Fundamental Principles:

... allow yourself to be formed by God
through the common, ordinary,
unspectacular flow of everyday life ...
Stand ready to answer God
when He asks you
If you are available for Him
to become more present in your life
And though you to the world...

¹⁰ Ruusbroec, an ordained cleric himself who consciously worked against clericalism, would write more lengthily about this issue in *Van den Geesteliken Tabernakel* (On the Spiritual Tabernacle).

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Grounded in the ordinary, a Xaverian Brother is further invited to dispose himself to a life of attentiveness, simplicity and openness to the unspectacular flow of daily life. His way is the “ordinary way.” He is invited to live in gratitude and in awe of all that which typically escapes attention or notice because of its smallness, difference, foreignness, unimportance, brokenness or insignificance. To do so, he must willingly eschew any attitude, behavior or involvement that exalts or promotes superiority, privilege, exclusivity or entitlement. He must be open and hospitable to the unknown and the unexpected, ready to listen, appraise and respond with a spirit of faith, hope and love.

MODE OF PRESENCE: TURNING TOWARD GOD

While it is the choice of a truly spiritual person to shun such illusions of grandeur, Ruusbroec and his followers believed that the summons to conversion [*bekeren*, lit. to turn (toward God)] is initiated by God himself. This happens through what he calls *blic*, sudden flashes through which God invites a person to return to the ordinary:

At times God gives people brief glimpses (blicke) into their spirit, just like lightning in the heavens. These glimpses come as a brief flash (blic) of particular brightness, shining through the person's simple bareness, and thus the spirit is elevated above itself in the wink of an eye (oghen blicke). Then suddenly, the light is gone and the person comes back to his usual self. [GB, b484-491]

Experiencing *blic* is not rare. It is also an ordinary event since “God in His free goodness calls and invites to union with Him everyone, both good and evil, without distinction, and He does not leave out anyone.” (BS, 201-02) Ruusbroec saw this general invitation to turn toward God as the manifestation of prevenient grace (i.e., divine grace that precedes human decision, one that exists prior to and without reference to anything human). It can come through a variety of external and internal ways:

Prevenient grace moves a person either from without or from within. From without: by sickness or by loss of external goods, of family or of friends; or by public disgrace; or he is stirred by sermons or by good examples of the saints or of good people, by their words or by their deeds, so that a person might come to know himself. This is God's touch from without.

Sometimes, too, a person is stirred from within, by recalling the torment and the sufferings of our Lord and on the good that God has done for him and for all; or by considering his sins, the brevity of life, the fear of death and fear of hell, the eternal torments of hell and the eternal joy of heaven, and that God has spared him in his sins and awaits his conversion (bekeeren); or he observes the marvel that God has created in heaven and on earth in all creatures.

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These are the works of prevenient grace which move a person from without or from within in many a way. Mankind also has a natural fundamental inclination towards God because of the spark of the soul (vonke der zielen) and because of his higher reason which always desires good and abhors evil. By these points, God moves all according to their needs and each one individually as he requires, so that at times a person is thereby stricken, reprov'd, alarmed, in dread, while he remains standing within himself, observing himself. All this is prevenient grace. [GB, 92-109]

Turning toward God however is done with free will (*vri toekeer dies willen*), it cannot be forced nor can its path be consciously pre-planned. **When a person is ready – “empty of ill will and of evil deeds and reprov'd and stricken and in dread as to what it should do as it turns toward God” (GB, 110-11) – then he can find himself in his proper place, i.e., his ordinary ground.**

It is within this light that we can begin to understand more profoundly how Ryken himself experienced and responded to the *blic* of God’s prevenient grace. Writing about this a few months before his death, Ryken mused that

at the age of nineteen, after powerfully being put in my place , I turned toward God, fell in love, and put myself in His service.... I became strongly inclined to works of penance and to prayer, avoided the company of worldly companions, (and) read good books which slowly and gradually came more and more into my hands. I finally felt an inclination to a solitary, penitential, and contemplative life.

omtrent myn 19 jaren, wanneer ik, door eene diepe vernedering, bekeerde en op den dienst van God verliefte wierd. Al spoedig na dit tydstip voelden ik my sterk geneygd tot werken van boedveerdigheid en gebed en allen omgang met die erelsche kammaraten te vlugten. Door het lezen van goede boeken die my langzaam, met degrein, al meer en meer in de hand kwamen, wierd ik eindelyk genegen tot eenen van het eenzaam penitentius en Contemplatif leven.¹¹

Given that none of his confreres wrote about this event when describing him, it is more than likely that Ryken hardly spoke about this “conversion”. Unlike his later biographers, Ryken did not belabor the details of the event. More than likely the reason for this lack of elaboration is that **Ryken’s “conversion” was the ordinary conversion of most people who, through a modest experience of God, even at a sundry moment, find themselves turning toward God and away from the glamour and illusions into which all human beings can be easily seduced. To be put in one’s place (*vernedering*) does not necessarily entail the experience of humiliation. Rather, as Ryken experienced it, to be put in one’s place involves becoming powerfully aware – in a moment of *blic* – of the ordinary ground on which one stands. And because Ryken was**

¹¹ T.J. Ryken, *Autobiography*. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 1.1.1.

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awakened through that *blic*, he fell in love with God and, from then on, placed himself in His service. Ruusbroec described this awakening as *werkende leven*, the active life in which an awakened person works hard at acquiring virtues and shunning the temptations and occasions that may lead him back to a life of self-aggrandizement.

While the Middle Dutch mystics see that this *werkende leven* is the graced state that most good-willed Christians could reach in their spiritual journey, they also envision that the end of the spiritual quest is a state called the *ghemeyne leven*, the common life.

The common man (ghemeyne mensch) who is sent by God down from these transcendent heights, into the world, is full of truth and rich in all virtues. He seeks nothing for himself but only the honor of the One who sent him, and therefore he is just and true in all his actions. He has a rich, mild foundation which is grounded in the wealth of God, and therefore he must always flow into all those who need him, for the living fountain of the Holy Spirit is his wealth which cannot be exhausted. He is a living, willing instrument of God with which God does what he wants, the way he wants. He does not claim this for himself, but gives the honor to God. Therefore, he remains willing and ready to do all that God commands. He is strong and courageous to suffer and bear all that God allows to befall him. [BS, 781-90]

The “common man” is an individual best characterized by the capacity to blend so well, and without distinction, the life of prayer and action.

this common man has a common life, for contemplation and action come just as readily to him and he is perfectly at ease with both. No one can have this common life unless he is a contemplative man. [BS, 790-93]

Much of this is echoed in Ryken’s hope for the congregation which he envisioned:

If it is God’s pleasure to lift our proposed plan to that very height that we intend and of which we hope that it is pleasing to Him, then the members of the congregation will have the privilege of following both the lives of Martha and Mary. In fact, by living the religious state and following its exercises, such as prayer and meditation, they follow Mary in the contemplative life, while by catechizing children and older people and working at those people’s salvation, they follow Martha in the active life. [Plan, §61]

But whether or not a person has reached this state during his life is not something that could be determined cognitively or measured scientifically. That in fact would be vanity at its best.

Throughout his life then, a truly spiritual man who has turned toward God works at living an integrated life (*werkende leven*) in order to achieve union with God in a life of both contemplation and action (*ghemeyne leven*). He freely and actively labors at grounding himself in the ordi-

nary life, the *innighe leven*. In holding fast to the “first ground” where God encountered and cherished him from the start, this individual sees that all that he needs to achieve union with God is already within him, in his ordinariness. This awareness came to a Catholic mystic of our times in her musings on the spirituality of the “ordinary people of the streets” (*gens de la rue*):

There are people God leaves among the crowds, people he does not “withdraw from the world.” These are the people who have an ordinary job, an ordinary household, or an ordinary celibacy. People with ordinary sicknesses, and ordinary times of grieving. People with an ordinary house, and ordinary clothes. These are the people of ordinary life. The people we might meet on any street.... We, the ordinary people of the streets, believe with all our might that this street, this world, where God has placed us, is our place of holiness. We believe that we lack nothing here that we need. If we needed something else, God would already have given it to us.

Il y a des gens que Dieu prend et met à part. Il y en a d'autres qu'il laisse dans la masse, qu'il ne retire pas du monde. Ce sont des gens qui font un travail ordinaire, qui ont un foyer ordinaire ou sont des célibataires ordinaires. Des gens qui ont des maladies ordinaires, des deuils ordinaires. Des gens qui ont une maison ordinaire, des vêtements ordinaires. Ce sont des gens de la vie ordinaire. Les gens que l'on rencontre dans n'importe quelle rue. Ils aiment la porte qui s'ouvre sur la rue, comme leurs frères invisibles au monde aiment la porte qui s'est refermée sur eux. Nous autres, gens de la rue, croyons de toutes nos forces que cette rue, que ce monde où Dieu nous a mis, est pour nous le lieu de notre sainteté. Nous croyons que rien de nécessaire ne nous y manque, car si ce nécessaire nous manquait, Dieu nous l'aurait déjà donné.¹²

REORIENTATION: LIFE IN COMMUNITY CENTERED ON THE WORD AND WORSHIP OF GOD

Ruusbroec was not a man oriented toward community life. In fact, his inclination to the semi-eremitic life became evident when he and his first followers quit their ecclesiastical lives in 1343 to live in hermitages in Groenendaal. And although he and his numerous followers were later consolidated into a community of canons regular in 1349, Ruusbroec gave himself more toward a solitary existence while continuing to direct those who sought his aid and counsel until the end of his life. It is true that he spoke much of the virtue of community life to the consecrated women

¹² Madeleine Delbrêl, *La sainteté des gens ordinaires - Textes missionnaires*, vol. 1 (Bruyères-le-Châtel : Nouvelle Cité, 2009), 24.

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he counseled,¹³ but Ruusbroec did not emphasize much the place of the religious community in an individual's quest for spiritual union.

This is the point of departure between Ryken and Ruusbroec. For our Founder, the life of the ordinary brother must be oriented towards the community. **Ryken saw the reorientation of a future brother toward the life in common as indispensable for nurturing the unique spirituality of his brotherhood, not simply because of the exigencies of the mission which the Spirit entrusted to the congregation, but also as the Spirit's means to elevate the ordinary beyond the mediocre.** This can be gleaned in many insights from his *Plan*:

To be alone, without any advice, conversation, or help in spiritual and corporal needs; to live in distant places far from others and often in difficult conditions, without belonging to a band of Brothers who mutually help, encourage and edify one another and work together; to live, finally, without a Rule which has been well planned and composed for this particular lifestyle – all these contain so many dangers. [Plan, §60]

Ryken foresaw the risk of forming this “band of brothers” primarily for the evangelization of the United States of America. He assessed the developing country as “a nation extremely in favor of liberty,” in which “independence is most highly praised... under all aspects.” In a frontier where a brother would be “tempted to be independent and become his own master,” he saw that the life in common could guarantee perseverance in willingly choosing the ordinary and turning toward God.

But Ryken understood that the life in common by itself is not an adequate safeguard for disposing his brothers to such a mode of presence. To serve properly the plan of “His Majesty,” Ryken called each of them

to forcefully work at their own perfection (note: union toward God through charity), for how will they inflame others if they themselves are not afire? Indeed, one usually produces that which is similar to oneself. [Plan, §18]

The Founder stressed this matter more weightily when he wrote *The Scheme* a year or two later:

It (must) be well-established... that the Brothers have sufficient time for their own perfection and spiritual exercises, and therefore not undertake any new house or mission unless it is possible to do so according to the above established way. This is indeed an important item, which should be given special attention. [Scheme, 10th means]

¹³ See his works *The Spiritual Tabernacle*, *The Seven Enclosures*, *The Seven Steps in the Scale of Spiritual Love*, and *The Twelve Beguines*.

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Ryken wisely foresaw that for a brother in mission “there is a great danger of losing sight of (this means).” For that reason, he entreated his brothers that in the congregation’s then-unwritten Constitution, “wise stipulations be made in order to maintain the above mentioned item, #10, because it is indeed important.” This point was so central to his vision that Ryken maintained that the brothers “should request the spiritual authorities, to whom it belongs to change our Constitution, not to make any change with regard to this item, not even under the pretext of doing good or of whatever necessity there may be.” It was his firm belief that a brother’s life of union with God, of profound spirituality is just as valuable as his life in dedicated ministry:

Look at Jesus Christ himself spending thirty years in solitude and only three in preaching... One should not tell us that we do not need all this so badly... Let us keep all this in mind, even when we have a good number of such Brothers, so that the care for one’s personal perfection may remain constantly alive. I do believe, indeed that a soul who has worked during many years for itself in a solitary corner, and gathered much spiritual riches, will afterwards convert many more souls than, perhaps one hundred others would do. [Scheme, 11th means]

In terms of ascertaining this life of intense union with God, Ryken would provide the praxes a few years after the congregation’s birth in 1839. In the summer of 1841, he composed the community’s first “Rules” – which in essence was more of an elementary Constitution. In it, Ryken specifically mandated everyday practices for reorienting a Xaverian Brother’s daily life:

Art. 6. Everyone shall use with the utmost zeal in the Lord the time which is prescribed to examine his conscience twice a day, as well as to pray, to meditate and to read, and also to renew often during the day the affections of the morning’s meditation.

Art. 7. Let them, together, hear Holy Mass every day with proper devotion and, in addition, the sermon or spiritual reading when they will be performed in church or house. (1841 “Rules”)

To these, the 1872 Constitutions would add the provision that “outside of recreation, (the Brothers) shall observe silence” (art. 31). From the onset, then, Ryken highlighted spiritual exercises which would see to the daily rooting of his brothers in the dispositions and modes of presence he aspired for: common prayer, self-examination, meditation, spiritual reading, silence, and community Mass – all quite ordinary exercises.

As the Congregation evolved in time, other spiritual exercises would be introduced to the Brothers. With the implementation of the Manual of Customs and Advice, devotional prayers were introduced which, at times, would offset the ordinary exercises of the Brothers. Most of these would eventually fall away from the common practice of the brothers, probably because the Spirituality embedded in the Congregation spontaneously weeded them out. However, there

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were advices in the Manual that sought to deepen the practices of reorientation recommended and lived by Ryken and the early brothers:

Take the monthly retreat seriously, Brothers; it is the prop of your labors. Remember, you are first spiritual men; teachers secondly. The teaching depends upon the man, the man depends upon the spirit, and retreats will foster that spiritual growth... (Advice IX.12)

...See that prayers are said with due reverence, check any tendency toward hurry. "Haste," says St. Francis de Sales, "is the destroyer of all devotion." (Advice XI.9)

... The time devoted to the prescribed and to private spiritual reading is of such great importance for the spiritual nourishment of the souls of the Brothers. (Advice XI.19)

... The Religious who is well-read in things spiritual nurtures his inner life, heard God's voice, stores up thoughts for the time of meditation and prayer, and likewise becomes better equipped to instruct his students to become better Christians. (Advice XI.21)

It is the atmosphere of silence that distinguishes the religious from the secular home. (Advice XIV.5)

The religious man is one who is united to God in heart and soul, and this union is effected by silence. Where there is no silence, there is no Religious. As silence is necessary for intense mental work, so it is necessary – even more so – for God to work upon the soul. Distraction in prayer, the inability to meditate, may well come from the want of union with God due to the lack of a silent heart. (Advice XIV.6)

Twice daily you are reminded in the examen of conscience that you should often elevate your heart to God, and sanctify your labors by offering them to Him. Lead a life of devoted prayer for, dear Brothers. (Advice XVII.8)

The Constitutions do not permit extraordinary exterior mortifications without permission because, through a mistaken fervor, some might injure their health, or be led away by self-love to think that they do more than their Brothers. This prohibition... ought to show the Brothers that they should practice, as much as they can, interior mortification. (Advice XX.3-4)

Making mention of these advices would hopefully help present-day brothers to see not only the constants in the congregation's spiritual exercises but also considerations for living a common life that is truly "centered on the word and worship of God."

XAVERIAN LIFE FORM

Life Form refers to a permanent life situation which an individual freely chooses to embrace.¹ In the Catholic tradition, these lasting situations include marriage, celibate single life in the world, clerical celibacy and consecrated celibacy. A person's growth in spiritual life cannot happen unless his chosen life form effectively expresses his unique *life call*, that is,

*the mystery of all-embracing divine call; a call that covers the unique being of my whole life in all its aspects; a call that enables me to surpass as spirit self each finite temporal and concrete situation in which I find myself here and now; a call that articulates itself during my life in many specific calls.*²

As a participation in the life form of the consecrated religious, the life of the Xaverian Brothers is characterized by the “fundamental options” of celibacy, asceticism and contemplation. But living these fundamental options is not enough. Congruence between the life call of the individual and the congregational life form must also be present, for no brother can live an authentic spiritual life if he does not see and live the Xaverian Life Form as an expression of his unique life call.³

As it has evolved after more than a century of existence, the brotherhood uniquely developed the particular coordinates of the Xaverian Life Form. These coordinates are *consecration*, *community*, and *interculturality*.

Consecration refers to how the congregation envisions the outcome of a brother's free choice to vow for obedience, chastity and poverty. While it seriously takes into consideration the canonical demands of the coordinate – for it is, after all, an ecclesiastical juridical act – the congregation also apprehends consecration from the experience of Ryken and its evolution through time.

Community speaks of the envisioned way of relating among the Xaverian Brothers. Because it emerges out of the *charism of religious* life, the coordinate takes into consideration the call to *relationality*. Thus, it invites each brother to have a sense of a common stake in the fulfillment of the congregation's deeper call and the realization of its outstanding future. Community also considers the *associative structure* within the congregation. Evolving understanding of the expectations of congregational leadership and membership must always arise out of an ever-growing awareness that both leaders and members are co-responsible for the promotion and fulfillment of the Spirit's deeper call for the brotherhood.

¹ Adrian van Kaam, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Self Direction* (Denville, NJ: Dimension books, 1976), 70.

² *Ibid.*, *In Search of Spiritual Identity* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1975), 146.

³ *Ibid.*, 153-54.

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Interculturality, meanwhile, acknowledges that the Congregation of Xaverian Brothers, in its relatively long history, has developed its own *culture*,

*the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning.*⁴

The ground on which the Xaverian culture developed was initially sown through “seeds” which contained the socio-historical contingencies of Ryken and the first members who faithfully followed his vision. Later on, the ground was further nourished with the assimilation – mostly unconscious – of features of Belgian, English, and American cultures. It does not mean that harvests from this ground are all good. Some of them may actually foster attitudes that subvert the congregational Spirituality. In such cases, the Brothers are called to weed them out with deep insight and intentionality. It should be noted also that in recent times Xaverian culture has further evolved just as every other culture has. At the center of this evolution is the welcoming of other indigenous realities to the Life Form through the perpetual profession of members from Africa and Asia. Likewise, the momentous changes – i.e., paradigm shifts⁵ – in the societal mentality during the congregation’s history inevitably affected further change. Fostering the interculturality of Xaverianism does not mean the acceptance of everything that these social shifts and indigenous cultures offer to the brotherhood. What should happen, instead, is the appropriation of what are true, beautiful and good within these shifts and cultures, and to sow them in the ordinary ground of Xaverianism.

CONSECRATION

Years before the congregation was officially founded, Ryken already understood that the Spirit had summoned him “to establish a congregation of Brothers who live under a religious rule.”⁶ In his Plan, the Founder was even more spirited in his assertion that

*We intend to elevate this Congregation to the religious state. Our spirit is overflowing with joy and inclined to embrace this very state. One reason is the great goods that are inherent to the religious state itself. But the other motivation is its necessity for the American mission.*⁷

⁴ Daniel G. Bates and Fred Plog, *Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 7.

⁵ A *paradigm* is “an entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community.” When a paradigm is replaced by a newer one, a paradigm shift or paradigm change occurs. [Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 175]

⁶ Report, par. 22.

⁷ Plan, §59.

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In speaking of the problems of the American mission, Ryken particular highlighted its people's individualistic propensity and indifference to celibacy:

America is a large and extended country, where often missionaries are at great distances one from the other. Consequently, he who works alone is too much left to his own self. Being without any rule, superiors and confreres who look after him, he is in the greatest danger to suffer shipwreck, living among all kinds of worldly people. Among these people he hears hardly anything except that which is harmful. Moreover, since the nation is much inclined to the matrimonial state and has no knowledge of the value of celibacy, these people detest those who remain unmarried and often urge them to marry, telling them in earnestness that this is more in agreement with reason. This is the more dangerous for spiritual persons who are not bound to God by perpetual vows the more it is covered by the mantle of something that seems to be good, since it gradually gains influence on man's heart because of the examples and continuous temptations. Indeed, the devil entertains a greater hope in those cases in which he can attack with the mask of virtue on his face. Such an opportunity he has not, however, when he finds the door locked and the persons bound by a rule. If in that case he has to propose quite ugly things, which would frighten that soul, and if he would do this slowly, such an action is soon detected by the superior and the confreres and counteracted by them... The person who is working in the missions, without the bond of obedience, is tempted to be independent and become his own master, encouraged by the examples of those around him and by his own corruption, and again under the cover of something that seems to be good.⁸

For Ryken, a life of public consecration would enable his brothers to focus attentively on the mission of living “in view of the education of Indian (child), and also of other children; to train them to become perfect Christian people, which training would include ...whatever is useful for man in secular society.”⁹ He particularly spoke at length about obedience because of the strong drive to live individualistically in the United States of America.

*Supreme care must be taken not to dispense any Brother, however old or learned or necessary to the Congregation he may be, from acts of mortification or humiliation through which all Brothers are constantly compelled fully to break their own will by obedience, and to submit in everything at the first sign of the superior. This point is very important, for **we have to fear this danger more than an order in which the superior is a priest** (emphasis supplied). In fact, when a Brother has been a superior, or when he is a learned professor or a man of experience and great age in the religious life, or of good birth, or when he is much needed in this or that field because*

⁸ Plan, §59-60.

⁹ Report, par. 22.

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there is no substitute for him so that he can hardly be missed – be careful, then, for he himself will be in great danger and, through him, the community will perhaps be in an even greater danger, if he is not very mortified and submissive. In fact, it will be very hard for him, yea, he may deem it to be impossible to submit himself to a Brother superior who has not so great capacities as he himself has, so that he can abandon, at the first sign of the superior, the methods and opinions which are his own with regard to the school or other matters. Possibly the superior is cowardly enough to fear him and rather, as the expression goes, to allow a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater, not understanding that from this cowardice results such a great evil that perhaps many souls will be lost because of it and that this same cowardice undermines and destroys the religious life like a cancer, which is at work slowly but steadily. In fact, such a self-complacent and unmortified creature is capable of throwing down, by his cunning, the very ramparts of the religious life.¹⁰

Later on, the first Constitution of the congregation would highlight “extraordinary obedience” as a characteristic of the congregation “which will dispose (the brothers) to submit in all difficult circumstances and when sent on foreign missions.”¹¹ The severity in the counsels of Ryken should be seen in terms of his insight into the individualistic tendency in American culture. It is not a fear without merit, for the recent history and experience of the congregation has shown that the danger was real and has significantly hurt the spirit of the congregation. We would see later on that Ryken could see that there was a difference between *an individualistic life* – which he abhorred – and *an individuated life* – which he truly wanted his brothers to attain. As a brotherhood which continues to assess our fidelity to the Founding Vision, we know that we continue to struggle with differentiating these two forms of living.

Based on the above exposition, one can argue that, during the Foundation period, Ryken envisioned the vows as a means to safeguard for the *ad gentes* mission of the congregation. In so doing, he may not have plumbed the depths of the Consecration coordinate for his congregation. However true this may be, one has to also appreciate Ryken’s prophetic insights into *perpetual vowing*. He and other founders in the early 19th century would have been aware that such a form of consecration was reserved only for monastic and mendicant orders whose members professed *solemn vows*, a more strict, perfect and complete consecration to God which, by its nature, is indissoluble.¹² Because of the lower esteem for the Life Form envisioned for these apostolic communities, the Church limited the commitment of such religious to *simple vows*. In spite of this, Ryken and the first brothers insisted upon a consecration that would be perpetual in nature so that they and future members could spend their vowed life in *volmaaktheid en goestelijke*

¹⁰ Scheme, 12th means.

¹¹ 1872 Constitutions, art. 4.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 88, art. 7.

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oeffeningen (perfection and spiritual exercise).¹³ In Ryken's vision of Consecration, the brothers would be perpetually vowing for such a life. But this permanent commitment was richly understood by the early brothers as not being one-sided. In their letters of testimony of lifetime affiliation, the brothers underlined the corresponding perpetual commitment of the brotherhood to them:

I, the undersigned, hereby testify as follows:

1) to have bound myself with my free will and full knowledge to the vows and obligations thereof in the Congregation of the Xaverian Brothers;

2) to be disposed to live up to the obligations, contained in the vows, rules, and customs of the said congregation;

3) to be willing to render all my services for the pure love of God...

4) to be ready to accept willingly any charge or office which might be assigned to me...

5) that I know that I am bound to the Congregation by virtues of my vows and the obligations thereof for life;...

*6) that **I am aware that the Congregation binds herself to me** to provide for all my necessities either in sickness or in health...(emphasis supplied)¹⁴*

Eventually, the desire of the first brothers was legitimized by Bishop Johan Joseph Faict of Brugge when, during the General Chapter of 1875, he authorized members with proven dedication to the Life to make the *vow of stability* which attaches them "in a more stable and intimate manner to the Congregation."¹⁵

It is Ryken's original moment of conversion sheds light on the significance for him of perpetual commitment. This moment is constituted by three significant components: *turning toward God, falling in love with God*, and *putting(himself) in God's service*.

Turning toward God can be seen as the deeper call of our *vow for obedience* as a Xaverian Brother. In perpetually committing ourselves to the very action of our founder, we may understand more profoundly the deeper call inscribed in our Fundamental Principles:

Your obedience is the openness to listen and respond to God's will wherever and however it may be expressed.

Falling in love with God may be the underlying summons when we *vow for chastity* as a son of Ryken. This deeper call also finds a profound expression in our Fundamental Principles:

¹³ Scheme, 10th means.

¹⁴ These letters can be found in the individual folders of early missionary brothers assigned to the United States which are currently stored as the "CFX Xaverian Brothers Records" at the Archives of the University of Notre Dame.

¹⁵ *Minutes of the General Chapter, 1875; Constitution and Holy Rule of the Xaverian Brothers, 1900, ch. 5, art. 1.*

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Your celibacy is the desire to open yourself totally to God's love and to share it with others.

The very act of vowing was, in fact, ingrained in the minds of the early brothers as a powerful affective commitment in these words of the 1900 Constitutions: "The Brothers... are espoused to Jesus Christ in virtue of Profession."¹⁶

Finally, *putting oneself in the service of God* could be seen as the more profound call when we brothers *vow for poverty*. Disposed to an ordinary life because of our free choice to foreswear privilege and entitlements, we could understand the deeper meaning in this call of the Fundamental Principles:

Your poverty is to recognize that all you have and are comes from God.

Summoned to rely on the Providence of a loving God while in touch with and living the personal gifts He entrusted to us, we may identify ourselves in the following story of our origins in Ezelstraat:

For a short time the new community of Mr. Ryken in Ezelstraat consisted of seven members who did not possess any material means for their daily support. Hence, they depended entirely upon Divine Providence and the goodwill of their friends. House furniture of any kind and ordinary home comforts were luxuries. They did not have even the necessities of life. The floor was their bed; old clothes their covering; an old box their table; old bed sheets their curtains; an empty stove their warmth; old cabbage leaves with potato peelings mixed with fat their dinner; dry bread with black coffee their breakfast; boiled peas or beans with dry bread their supper, cold water their beverage. Their clothes were scanty and poor. But in spite of this wretched poverty, no murmurings or complaints existed. Each and all were contented and happy. The members of the community were differently employed. Mr. Ryken made shoes for the public. Another [Lambert Smisdom] was a weaver by trade and was employed in weaving; another [Willem Duchateau] was a tailor. These three were the only support of the house. The other members were employed in household duties and study....Such were the beginnings of the new Institute. It was no wonder that it had become the laughing stock of both the clergy and people of Bruges. The members were looked upon by many as Freemasons. In the midst of poverty, many difficulties, and severe trials, Mr. Ryken never lost his courage but ever trusted in Divine Providence to help him to surmount all difficulties.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Constitution and Holy Rule of the Xaverian Brothers*, 1900, ch. 5, art. 3.

¹⁷ John Seghers, *Memorandum*.

COMMUNITY

To consider well the Xaverian Life Form requires a further reflection on the recurring and developing sense of *place* and *space* in Ryken's life and in the life of the congregation. Ryken described his primordial experience of the Spirit's irruption in his life as one of "powerfully being put in my place." Here the word *place* is used not so much in the sense of a physical/geographical location but – as discussed in the previous paper – as the ordinary ground where we were first located, and to which we are called to return. Ryken comprehended this very well and articulated it in his *Report*:

*There is nothing in this world that the Creator loves so much as that one of whom He says: With eternal love I loved you.... His wisdom usually works steadily and softly, and at the same time strongly and in a hidden way.... One should plunge into confidence in the goodness of God.*¹⁸

Situating oneself in the ordinary ground entails a transformation of one's consciousness and sense of relationship and belonging. Ryken's sense of being put in one's place, no doubt, referred to a fresh experience of his relationship with God and from this initial and ongoing experience arose the aspirations and inspirations that gave form to his life as well as to the foundation and development of the Congregation: "It is this communion with the living God which is at the heart of your life as son of the Father, disciple of Jesus, witness of his Spirit, quickened member of his Body and brother to the world."¹⁹

This initial experience of being put in one's place gradually found a home among a group of men who gathered with Ryken as a community of "like-spirited" individuals. He welcomed a diverse, rather simple and lackluster band of followers. In choosing to live in community, however, these men were being invited to become "a band of brothers who mutually help, encourage and edify one another and work together."²⁰ Ryken's equally profound concern was that these men understood that they were being called to re-locate themselves within an engaging *space*²¹ that was much larger and more mysterious than their own self-interests.

Out of concern that his band had the ability and willingness to live harmoniously with one another as brothers, Ryken imparted to them two particular understandings of the life in common.

¹⁸ Report, par. 1-2.

¹⁹ Fundamental Principles.

²⁰ "(Een) band der Broeders die elkanderen helpen, opwekkenen, stigten, en gezamentlyk werken." Plan, §60.

²¹ As "a medium through which social relationships are negotiated," *space* should not be understood as a cold and neutral void but rather as a dynamic area enlivened by relational energy which causes it to expand as it holds the place that contains it together. [Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Women Religious* (London: Routledge, 1994), 150; see also Henrietta L. Moore, *Space, Text and Gender: An Anthropological Study of the Marakwet of Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Shirley Ardener, *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps* (Oxford: Berg, 1993)]

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The space they were to create would entail a form of engagement which would enable them to help each other to discover their inherent gifts – their personal charisms:

*One will try to detect every person's character and temperament, his natural and supernatural gifts. His weaknesses should also be known so that, in a balanced manner, measures can be taken so that the profitable capacities to which he is well-inclined would be promoted instead. On knowing his capacities, everything should be ordered in such a way that these may be developed so that he may successfully fulfill the tasks that are assigned to him. In so doing, the little members of this whole body as well as the great, the weak as well as the strong, may act harmoniously with each other. Through this, powerful works may then be produced through this body.*²²

Thus, a Xaverian community is called to be a space of *individuation*.

Ryken was however attuned to the inclination of mistaking *individuation* for *individualism*. As they would be missioned in a frontier where “independence is most highly praised under all aspects,” he warned his brothers against the temptation “to be independent and become (one’s) own master.”²³ And so Ryken counseled them:

*You who are called by God to this state, we compare you to a small diamond which wonderfully glitters and is an adornment in a golden ring. Yet on its own and apart from the ring, it is not so much appreciated because it is not in its properly noble place. It could easily be lost and trampled under people's feet. In that same way, if you remain alone, outside your center, you would be little appreciated in your mission, produce little fruit, and dangerously get lost. Be incorporated into the assembly of the Brothers, for which your form was shaped and to which you are called. You will give a great light and shine wonderfully if you are in the ring of the Congregation, and you will serve as an ornament and great aid for the Church.*²⁴

In the Founding Vision, the individuation of each brother would serve the immediate needs of the brothers. Ryken was no stranger to surviving by the sweat of his brow – whether as a licensed shoemaker in Nieuwkuijk (1816-23) or an oil hawker in New York (1833-34). Out of these personal experiences and his own personal disposition, Ryken wanted to impart to his brothers a deep appreciation for hard work. He thus envisioned a congregation unlike those already established, one in which “the brothers should... have such capacities that they can provide the house with temporal means.”²⁵ Their communities would comprise of small groups of two or three

²² Plan, §13.

²³ Ibid., §60

²⁴ Ibid., §69.

²⁵ Ibid., §19.

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brothers who would live and work together “further in the woods.”²⁶ To prepare them for the mission, they “will be instructed in handicrafts and agriculture and other useful activities so that, during their stay in America, they can partly provide for the material needs of the house over there.”²⁷ Once the Ezelstraat community began, he, Duchateau, and Smisdom put this vision into practice. Eventually, the *modus vivendi* of the first brothers, as well as their extreme poverty, elicited an unfavorable reaction from the clergy of Brugge who dismissed them as “Freemasons.” In time, the brothers realized that, no matter how noble was the plan, what they earned from their handiwork could not sustain the growing community and gave it up altogether. However, knowing this part of the vision of Ryken could be valuable as we look in our current Reconsideration phase for more creative ways to sustain the entire brotherhood through the fruits of our labors.

The Founder understood that leadership plays a crucial role in making sure that the Life Form is well-established in the heart of the brothers. It is known to all of us that once power became solely concentrated on him, “Ryken himself fell short in the implementation of the ideals he had fostered.”²⁸ But this should not prevent us from hearing the underlying wisdom in his counsels about congregational leadership:

*The superior will consider the Brothers as being like a water reservoir under a fountain. The more water is flowing into it, the more water is running out from the reservoir. Yet the reservoir remains filled with water and only gives from its own abundance. The same is true for the Brothers. According to the measure in which they themselves are filled with devotion and divine love, they will pour these out into their fellow men. For if they themselves are not afire, how will they set afire others? Further, if the reservoir is not built on solid ground, it will collapse and become unfit to give any more water. Therefore, a constantly vigilant eye will be kept on it, so that it does not collapse and does not break down; consequently, care will be taken to give it a good foundation*²⁹

Gradually, the brothers’ sense of living in community took on a congregational character and their sense of spatiality was colored by the shapes and practices of religious life as it was understood and lived in their day: the forms of private and communal prayer; the experience and practice of living the evangelical counsels; the forms of communal living; the understanding of ministry and mission; the forms of government and relationship to the wider Church. And so into our day, we Xaverian Brothers are faced with the challenge and opportunity to find our place in the world today – to actualize the Xaverian Life Form in a manner that acknowledges the gifts and

²⁶ Ibid., §34.

²⁷ Ibid., §10.

²⁸ Harold Boyle and Jan Devadder, *The Xaverian Brothers: 1839-1989*, (Twickenham: Xaverian Brothers Generalate, 1989), 24.

²⁹ Plan, §38.

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limits of our present situation, and reaffirms our commitment as Brothers in community to follow Christ wherever He leads:

You are called
to a life of constant searching.
Let the developments and changes
of your times
be a source both of confidence and challenge to you...
may you discover
in God's own time
ways to incarnate anew
the vision of Theodore James Ryken
and the charism of the Brothers of Saint Francis Xavier
in the life of the world.³⁰

The Xaverian Brother is called to live a common life. His attention and concern should address what is shared and held in common by all persons – their humanity, giftedness and sinfulness. In a particular way, he is called to share with his Brothers a life lived in common. This common life involves not only the willingness to worship and pray together, to collaborate, to share responsibilities, to enjoy companionship with one another, but even more deeply, a desire to nurture a sense of co-responsibility and communion. The common life is an invitation to each Brother to offer generously the uniqueness of his life (gifts and limitations) for integration within the life of the Congregation.

Living a common life by its very nature involves the Brothers in the ongoing process of integrating and harmonizing diverse and sometimes disparate elements of life in an attempt to gradually realize a more and more consonant form of life. A life lived in common challenges any movement toward grandiosity and individualism. Each day and age; each stage of human life; each culture and tradition provides unique challenges to living the ordinary and common form of Xaverian life. To be unaware of these tensions and to fail to appraise and address (alone and in common) their formative and deformative impact, will lead to patterns of living that will either promote or inhibit the harmony and consonance of Xaverian Life and the witness value of that Life in the lives of others.

Ryken was very much aware of some of the tensions involved in trying to live the religious life that he envisioned. For example, far from being discouraged about the difficulties involved in harmonizing the active and the contemplative aspects of his envisioned form of life, he rejoiced that his Brothers would have the “the privilege of following both the lives of Martha and Mary,” i.e. the opportunity to participate in both the active and contemplative life.³¹ The

³⁰ Fundamental Principles

³¹ Plan, §61.

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Xaverian Life Form has always been faced with the challenge of harmonizing the simplicity of contemplative presence (prayer) with more active forms of private and public prayer as well as with the opportunities and challenges that arise as a result of our participation in community and in ministry.

The Congregation has always welcomed men of simplicity and integrity who evidenced a capacity and willingness to share the uniqueness of their own lives by living in community, in service of a common vision – a vision that includes personal and communal formation as well as the witness value of a life lived in common by men of diverse talents, temperaments, nationalities and cultures. Hospitality and brotherhood have been consistent hallmarks of the Life Form.

The Xaverian expression of the life of the evangelical counsels has always included a consciousness of living ordinary lives in common. Our sense of poverty inspires us to live ordinary lives, appreciative and grateful for the gifts of creation with a consciousness of living with less rather than more so as to share in the prodigality of God’s love: “The gift you have received, give as a gift.”³² It challenges us to care for the gifts that we hold in common and to carefully confront any movement toward preoccupation with possessiveness and autonomy. Our spirit of consecrated celibacy calls us to live as Brothers to one another in community as well as to all whose lives we touch. This fraternal love invites us to appreciate the fundamental uniqueness of each person and to challenge any movement toward exclusivity, manipulation or possessiveness. It calls us to attend to the lessons that are taught in the experience of solitude and aloneness and to the formative influences that come through the challenges, joys, and sufferings that constitute a life lived in common. The spirit of obedience invites us to listen attentively to the directives that arise in the course of our ordinary, everyday lives – some within our own consciousness; some as a result of our interactions with others; and some that emerge from the situations that we encounter and from the world in which we live. This same spirit of obedience invites us to appraise these directives both individually and communally and to let these appraisals guide us toward decisions and actions that will promote and serve the life and mission of the Congregation. The mission and ministry of the Xaverian Brothers have always been directed toward ordinary people. We continually face the challenge of finding ways to have our life in common (and not so much our talents and resources) be the witness to the Gospel that we offer to those we serve. To live in solidarity and availability among those we serve, we need to live ordinary lives that share in the common elements of life – gifts and limitations, grace-fullness and sinfulness. We need to actually live as Brothers in order to give an authentic witness to those we serve.

To give a contemporary articulation of the Xaverian charism, it is necessary to be explicit about some of the challenges that we face as Brothers today. In Europe and the United States we face diminishing numbers, increasing age, the diversity in understanding and practice of our ministries, the reduction in number of larger communities; the diminishment in opportunities for and willingness to engage in ongoing formation. In Africa we face the alternative challenge of

³² Fundamental Principles.

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growth and development. The entire Congregation faces a serious and challenging financial situation. In many cases, our sense of communal prayer is no longer found in our religious community but in a local parish or other alternative setting. Our spirit of poverty and communal life have changed dramatically and brought to light concerns that deal with the Brother's growing sense of autonomy, individual ownership, lack of connection and concern with the larger congregation. A centralized and efficient government structure has had an effect on our sense of fraternity, diminishing quite powerfully our sense of "belonging to a society of Brothers who mutually help, encourage and edify one another and work together." While the need for a sense of connection among the Brothers has grown, financial constraints, the ability to travel due to age, and distances between Brothers has made it difficult to provide opportunities to experience fraternal contact and consciousness. Lacking a sense of community, a sense of home and belonging, there has grown among the Brothers problems with overwork; with concerns for family and friends, with proper life and relational boundaries. Our ministries have diversified and become less visible as shared communal ventures. Less and less do we have the experience of being Brothers who "help, encourage and edify one another and who work together." As our lives become more and more individualized, independent and autonomous, our fraternal, communal consciousness diminishes and any request or opportunity to serve the wider Congregation is taken as an imposition and burden. All these challenges face us as a Congregation and, in the spirit of the Founding Vision, they need to be addressed in common. They are daunting challenges that involve the future of our Congregation. Still, if we are faithful to and hopeful in the call that we have been given, and to the Xaverian charism that is the gift entrusted to us, they can lead to renewed life for ourselves and those whose lives we touch.

You are called
to a life of constant searching.
Let the developments and changes
of your times
be a source both of confidence and challenge to you.
For as your Founder wrote:

The Holy Spirit
does not let himself be bound
by rules and models
but works where and as He wills.³³

³³ Fundamental Principles.

INTERCULTURALITY

Internationality or Interculturality? Internationalization entered our congregational vocabulary toward the beginning of this millennium. At that moment, it was a byword for many religious congregations which, given the decline in the number and aging of European and American members, strongly felt the need for increased involvement of members coming from the developing world in the work of the congregation. The move also envisioned a broader representation of members in the level of governance in the hope that the issues of members from Africa, Asia, and Latin America could be better heard and addressed. Given the ambiguous future of their congregations, many religious felt that some hope could be provided if their international character were more visible and maximized.

That the Xaverian Brothers have an international character cannot be disputed. Our current roster shows that we number not only professed brothers from Belgium, England and the United States but also from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, and the Philippines. It is true that there was a long period when only the first three countries accounted for our membership, but that was not the case in our first fifty years of existence. The General Register shows that then we numbered men from the Netherlands, Germany, France, Ireland, and Canada.³⁴ It can be attributed to Ryken's zeal for inviting any man from any place who was ready to bring the Good News *ad gentes*. Tragically, that internationality disintegrated after jingoism poisoned the fraternity of brothers missioned in Kentucky in the 1870s:

This period, 1870-1873, made a lasting impression on me. The Franco-Prussian War was on. In our community the German Brothers were in full sympathy with Germany. The Superior, Brother Peter (Klyberg), who was either a Belgian or a Hollander (note: he was Dutch), was a hot French sympathizer. I, of course, as a German favored the German cause, but I made no demonstration one way or the other. We were of several nationalities but we were religious living together as one family. Although I was with the youngsters I did notice the hot discussions. At one time I was almost scandalized. The table was hammered now by a German and now by a French sympathizer. Finally the Superior commanded silence. This display of nationalism and its consequent effect on the American Province made such an impression on me that forty-seven years later at the beginning of the World War, I forbade any discussion. I was then the Provincial.

At the Institute in 1870 the German Brothers unfortunately regarded the Superior, who was violently pro-French, as the mouthpiece of the Congregation. Discontent brewed and defections followed. From fifty-three members in 1870 we dwindled to

³⁴ "When, at the end of 1855, the 100th candidate was registered, among these 100 people there were representatives of six different nations: German, Dutch, Belgian, Irish and French, the Germans ranking first with forty-two names." Boyle and Devadder, 15.

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twenty-seven in 1873. One of the first to leave was a Brother George, novice master and counselor to the Superior. One by one others followed; in June, 1871, several left at one time. Some of the German Brothers went to Cincinnati to join the Franciscans or to organize a teaching group within the regular Order. Shortly after Brother George left, he visited Father Leander, pastor at St. Martin's, where I was teaching. The pastor called me out of class and after extolling the priesthood told me that if I aspired to that state he would furnish the means. I told him that I had no such aspirations and that I was sure that I could do equally good work as a religious teacher. Then he told me that Brother George was over in the parsonage awaiting my answer. I told him to tell Brother George that I had selected my state of life and that with God's help I would persevere. In due course Brother George who joined the Black Franciscans was ordained. In 1891 or 1892 when I visited Louisville, I went to see him. He encouraged me to persevere and not to act as foolishly as he had done. Of the offer Father Leander made to me I never told anyone. For some reason he became displeased with the Brothers, and in 1874 they left his school.³⁵

The tragedy of the brothers' failure to live harmoniously indicates the inherent weakness in the process of internationalization. It supposes that people primarily identify themselves through their nationality. Sociologically, a nation is "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."³⁶ Most nation-states emerged during the 19th and 20th centuries. A century or two would not be enough for people to construct their primary identity on this basis. People with shared qualities value other deeper realities far more than national identity. Those from Flanders, for example, define themselves more through their Flemish heritage than their being citizens of Belgium, a nation state which was formed in 1831. Within the last decade, also, nationalist studies have been increasingly displaced by ethnicity discourses. The phenomenon is especially noticeable in multiethnic United States, a place where the term "hyphenated American" was once used disparagingly to refer to those born in a foreign land and exhibiting allegiance to it.³⁷ Whereas the prevailing idea a generation ago was that America was a

³⁵ Isidore Kuppel, *Autobiography*.

³⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. and extended ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

³⁷ The expression was widely-used in the United States from 1890 to 1920. President Theodore Roosevelt represented the sentiment in a speech he gave to the Knights of Columbus in 1915: "There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism. When I refer to hyphenated Americans, I do not refer to naturalized Americans. Some of the very best Americans I have ever known were naturalized Americans, Americans born abroad. But a hyphenated American is not an American at all... The one absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin, of preventing all possibility of its continuing to be a nation at all, would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities, an intricate knot of German-Americans, Irish-Americans, English-Americans, French-Americans, Scandinavian-Americans or Italian-Americans, each preserving its separate nationality, each at heart feeling more sympathy with Europeans of that nationality, than with the other citizens of the American Republic... There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American. The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else." ("Roosevelt Bars the Hyphenated," *New York Times*. 13 October 1915, p.1.)

“melting pot” of cultures, today there is more willingness to value one’s hyphenated identity. Finally, while non-Western religious could appreciate the enthusiasm of their European and American confreres for their representation in the central government, they also fear that it would end up as tokenism. Participation in the governance of a congregation entails a sense of connectedness to the life of the congregation beyond ministry and finance. It is something that non-Western religious – many accepted out of the functional and institutional exigencies of the congregation – feel they still do not possess because of a lack of access to the congregation’s symbolic sites and deeper appreciation for the congregation’s history. Appending the initials of the congregation to one’s name or contributing and/or sharing in the congregation’s finances are not enough to make a brother feel connected to the life.

Our desire for actual collaboration among the brothers of our multiethnic congregation cannot be simply addressed through national representation as it would tend to highlight the things that differentiate us. Individuals commit themselves to a group with whose history, values, and customs – all constitutive elements of culture – they can identify. *Despite our varied ethnic roots and our generational divides – and also in spite of the non-spiritual motives behind our choice to become and remain as consecrated men – each of us made the conscious decision to cast our lots with each other in this Xaverian congregation for, by the grace of God, we recognize a sharing – imperfect as it may be – in consciousness, behavior, rituals and symbols with the other brothers.* The coordinate of interculturality challenges us to point out what these are.

“*Shared consciousness*” primarily arises from the congregation’s deep narrative – the sacred stories that “cannot be fully and directly told, because they live.... in (our) arms and legs and bellies.”³⁸ Even though we cannot tell or remember all of them, they are embedded in our collective consciousness and continually inform us about our deeper identity as sons of Ryken. It contains congregational stories that past brothers transmitted to us and whose depths we continue to plumb and cherish. Understandably, many of them would and should be about Ryken; but they also include those of his immediate and later followers. These narratives need not be historically provable, as in the story of the watermelon meal which our first missionaries in America shared. There are stories that inform how we locate ourselves in society-at-large, like how the people of Brugge called our pioneers *Pap Frères* (“porridge brothers”) during the Years of Hunger (1847-49) because they provided food to their poor students using their meager means. They also include narratives of “turning points” that still mesmerize us, like the decision of Brothers Stephen Sommer and Francis Xavier Dondoff to remain in Louisville in 1858 despite the recall of their confrères to Europe and the difficulties they had with Bishop Spalding. There are those that are unqualifiedly poignant, like the death in 1934 of Belgian Provincial Bro. Clément Quaegebeur aboard a ship that would have brought him to Congo, a mission so dear to his heart, and his eventual burial at sea. We also have heroic and prophetic episodes, like the secretive work of

³⁸ Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” in Lewis P. Hinchman, Sandra K. Hinchman (eds), *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 30.

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Brothers Isidore Kuppel, Simeon Jolivet and Bede Rouse to give formal classes to African-American sisters in complete violation of Maryland's segregation laws. There are narratives that elude us, like the evolution of the title "*de Frères*" which people in Flanders, in spite of their strong anti-French sentiments, endearingly call the brothers.³⁹ We also have our own share of *narratives of holiness* about brothers like Peter Kelly, Gregory Turlik and Joris De Groote whom we knew were far from being perfect. These are many others stories that have been transmitted to us verbally or through the reading of the Menology. Eventually, these stories have penetrated our collective consciousness, becoming part of our deep narrative. The question is will these stories continue to stir and ennoble us, especially our younger generation to whom these stories have not been well-communicated.

Even if these narratives lie so deep in the congregation's shared consciousness, the brothers have gathered from them characteristics for the archetypal Xaverian. Overtly or not, every congregation envisages such an "ideal religious," even if it would be rare for a religious to embody all these qualities. Still, the imagination of the archetype would cause a congregation to present an ethos that it would encourage its religious to embody so they could share fully in the life. Having this "*shared behavior*" does not entail that the brothers would think and act alike. It rather suggests that the brothers, being of "one mind and soul," develop a way of being present to each other and before the world.

The majority of brothers alive today would have learned this shared behavior through the *Manual of Customs and Advice*. Tracing its origins to Bro. Vincent Terhoeven in 1867⁴⁰, "(it) prescribes everything in proper order and in detail"⁴¹ and underwent few revisions until it had its final form in 1954. Implementation of the Manual ceased after the Council, more than likely as a reaction to several counsels that compromised the healthy social and psychological formation of

³⁹ The appellation strangely combines the Dutch article "de" and the French word "Frère." None of our Belgian brothers can explain its origin. Bro. Roger Demon narrates the following: "When I was a young man living at the formation house in Torhout, an old man asked me: 'In what convent do you live?' I answered, '*Bij de Broeders* (with the Brothers).' His immediate reaction was 'What brothers?' Thereupon I gave him the address and he said "*Ah, bij de Frères!*" Asked in 2010 about this enduring appellation, Scheutist Frs. Jan Swyngedouw and André De Bleeker, both proud Flemings who had known the brothers well in their youth, offered the following explanation: "The De La Salle Brothers, *les Frères*, were always associated with the French-speaking Flemish bourgeoisie. The Xaverian Brothers, on the other hand, were associated with the Flemish-speaking lower classes. There was this strong sentiment among the Flemings that the Xaverians were 'our Brothers,' because they have placed poor Flemish students on the same level as those from the higher classes who were taught by the De La Salles."

⁴⁰ Terhoeven prefaced *The Xaverian Brother's Manual, containing Rules and Instructions on Divers Subjects* with the following exhortation dated 8 October 1867: "My dear Brothers: Receive this little book in a spirit of faith as if your Guardian-Angel presented it to you, saying on God's part: DO THIS AND THOU SHALT LIVE. The life of the congregation depends, indeed, upon the faithfulness of its members to the observance of the rules, without neglecting a single point however insignificant it may apparently be. Your perseverance and salvation equally depend upon it. Be therefore attached to these holy rules, as firmly as a vessel to the anchor which renders it immovable in the midst of the tempests."

⁴¹ *Manual of Customs and Advice*, Advice, I.9.

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the brothers.⁴² In spite of these, several provisions fashioned a way of living that has come across to the brothers and those who work with them as Xaverian:

*Although we cheerfully undertake extra-curricular activities, we strenuously try to avoid “night work” or any supererogatory work which is detrimental to community life.*⁴³

*In their necessary contacts with the novices and postulants, the professed members must act with great gravity and recollection.*⁴⁴

*The Brothers shall not, by writing or otherwise, make known, except to the Superior, what takes place, nor the inconveniences they may have experienced, in other Houses where they have been placed previously. They will especially remember this rule when they come to a central House.*⁴⁵

*The Brothers shall never speak of the troubles that have occurred among themselves, or in their schools, except to their Superior or confessor, and even to the latter only with prudence and after having taken sufficient time for mature consideration with God.*⁴⁶

⁴² Here are some examples:

It is not customary to talk about the good or bad qualities of ex-members, but rather to let their memory die out. (Customs, 37)

Superiors should be vigilant in preventing any particular friendships between Brothers. Such friendships are always dangerous in themselves, and opposed to the spirit of the community. (Advice, II.3)

During recreation you must not seek to be always with the same Brother. If you feel a greater affection for one than for the others, do not let it be perceived. Refrain from all affectation and indiscreet confidences. Let your friendship be grave, modest, simple and edifying to all. (Advice, XII.9)

Do not converse with your Brothers on your trials, your aversions, your temptation, your difficulties; you must speak of them only to your confessor or your Superior to receive their advice. (Advice, XII.10)

(Out of the practice of humility, the Brothers should) learn to esteem themselves as nothing, to love their own littleness, to treat themselves with contempt, to desire to be forgotten, and valued as nothing in the eyes of the world. (Advice, XVII.2)

The Brothers should not speak of themselves, their relations, of what they did in the world, or of the advantages of fortune for which they might have hoped. (Advice, XVII.3)

⁴³ *Manual of Customs and Advice*, Customs, 32.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Customs, 34.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Customs, 35.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Customs, 36.

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That they may teach by example as well as by word, let (Superiors) not take for their own use things that are better than those common to the members of the community.⁴⁷

The Brothers should ever be mindful that they are essentially religious educators.... (They must be) men of culture, men of principle, and men of attractive simplicity.⁴⁸

When he enters upon his first mission, the young Xaverian should be careful not to look upon the new freedom in the accidentals of life as a release from the more completely regulated program of the Novitiate and Scholasticate. The essentials of Community life remain the same on the missions as in the houses of formation. The chief difference is that the responsibility for the use of time is now placed more directly on the individual. He will do well, then, to remember that it is not the presence of the Superior but the presence of God that must guide him in his conduct.⁴⁹

As the proper use of time is very important for growth in the teaching profession, (a Brother) should plan an orderly schedule, reserving therein suitable time not only for his class preparation but also for useful reading and study.⁵⁰

At the beginning of his active career the Brother is at an age when his mental and physical energies are most active. This may create in him a strong desire to press his opinion on others; but if he is humble and prudent, he will grant that it is the better part of wisdom to learn from the experience of others before establishing himself as an authority. If God has blessed him with special endowments, he may be certain that they will be recognized in due time.⁵¹

In the classroom a good teacher aims to interest the pupils in their studies rather than in himself personally. If he seeks to draw appeal to himself, he will fail to inspire lasting ideals and can expect disappointment in his work.⁵²

The Brothers should be careful to inspire their students with confidence, respect and attachment without, however, making themselves familiar with them. There is always danger in familiarity.⁵³

⁴⁷ Ibid., Advice, II.5.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Advice, VI.7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Advice, VI.9.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Advice, VI.12.

⁵¹ Ibid., Advice, VI.10.

⁵² Ibid., Advice, VI.15.

⁵³ Ibid., Advice, VII.9.

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*Understand fully the dignity of your holy state, and never transgress it so as to occasion you to blush or bring disgrace upon yourself or your Congregation. Never seek to be alone with any of your pupils.*⁵⁴

*Close your ears to the vain conversations of the world; take no part in the affairs and quarrels of others; avoid those who would converse with you respecting them; do not listen to them nor become their confidants, but openly testify that you especially desire peace, and as far as possible be on good terms with all.*⁵⁵

*(Brothers on foreign missions) should always be kindly in their dealings with the pupils and the people. They should be considerate, guarding their tongue and temper. They should show breadth of outlook by not unduly criticizing local social customs, remembering that nothing is dearer to a people than its traditions. Courtesy will aid them in regulating their impetuosity to change things and will also deepen their understanding of the good sense of many customs.*⁵⁶

*If we regard the spiritual exercises of the community as the heart of the spiritual life, we may regard the recreations as the backbone... A pleasant recreation is a tonic to the soul, and tends to foster a love for community life. Beware of heated arguments. They generally descend to personalities, and charity is thereby broken. Do not wound the sensitive by making them the butt of a joke.*⁵⁷

These are just a handful of excerpts from the *Manual of Customs*. Many of our older brothers may point out other provisions which affected the way they have learned to behave as a Xaverian. Some of the articles quoted may not have had the same impact on some brothers as it did on others, yet the role of the *Manual of Customs* in this charism project shows that there was (and is) an imagined way of behaving as a Xaverian, a somewhat amorphous yet clearly imagined archetype that is beyond *je ne sais quoi*.

The place of “*shared ritual*” in a religious congregation cannot be underestimated. Their presence indicates that the vowed members honor the place of the *symbolic order* in their life of consecration. Rituals attempt to convey deep realities that scientific and logical reasoning cannot fully explain. “The function of a ritual,” according to Joseph Campbell, “is to give form to the human life, not in the way of a mere surface arrangement, but in depth.”⁵⁸ However, these acts do not come out of nowhere and cannot be simply imposed. ***Rituals and their attending symbols derive from a reality beyond the activities of a group and epitomize its members’ fundamental***

⁵⁴ Ibid., Advice, VII.10.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Advice, VII.31.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Advice, VII.31.

⁵⁷ Ibid., XII, 1-4.

⁵⁸ Joseph Campbell, *Myths to Live* (New York: Bantam, 1973), 43.

*relations to God (spirituality) and the world (shared behavior).*⁵⁹ If there is a disconnect between the deeper realities of the group and its rituals, then the latter will easily wither away.

Before the Second Vatican Council, the daily life of religious was characterized by ritual acts. Congregational Directories prescribed them on religious from the moment they woke up to the time they slept. However, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century congregations simply borrowed them from other religious life traditions, regardless of how these rightly expressed the spirituality and shared behavior inscribed in them. Likewise, since promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution *Conditae a Christo* and its Norms in December 1900, congregations increasingly invested meanings on every part of their religious habits even if these originally did not exist. Because the rituals and symbols in their congregation failed to speak to them about its deeper realities, many Western religious easily did away with them after the Council. Autonomy from the community worsened the situation because it pulled many to view Religious Life as a *private, individual and voluntary*⁶⁰ option without the need for public externalization. The drive to modernize without proper appraisal brought into many congregations the tendency in secularized societies to dismiss the place of the sacred:

*In modern Western society, we tend to think of ritual as a matter of special activities inherently different from daily routine action and closely linked to the sacralities of tradition and organized religion. Such connections encourage us to regard ritual as somewhat antiquated and, consequently, as somewhat at odds with modernity.*⁶¹

During the last twenty-five years, however, Late Modernity – with its discontents with Enlightenment metanarratives – has valorized the place of rituals in human life. Much of this was brought about by postcolonial discourses and mission studies which saw rituals beyond structuralist lenses and toward the cohesion they create – good or bad – in non-Western communities. As a result, many religious, especially women, have reconsidered and refashioned community rituals to mirror more clearly their deeper realities. However,

⁵⁹ Catherine Bell, “Ritual, Change and Changing Rituals,” *Worship* 63 (1989): 35; Robert Cummings Neville, *Religion in Late Modernity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 139.

⁶⁰ In his monumental work, Massimo Rosati saw these as the characteristics of “Protestant spiritualization and interiorization” in which “religious action is de-sacramentalized, de-ritualized, and ‘the stress is on faith, an inner quality of the person, rather than on particular acts clearly marked ‘religious.’” [Massimo Rosati, *Ritual and the Sacred: A Neo-Durkheimian Analysis of Politics, Religion and Self* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 53; see also Robert N. Bellah, “Religious Evolution,” in Steven M. Tipton, ed., *The Robert Bellah Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 42] The experience is also well-described by the American educator and drama critic Tom F. Driver: “During the first part of my life, ‘ritual’ seemed a dreary subject. That this has recently changed, that it has turned around at the very time when my social and religious ideas have become not more conservative but more radical, is for me a source of amazement; ... I realize today that I grew up in a milieu that did not encourage such thought, being too Protestant, too middle class American, too much involved with having the right ideas, and too little interested in, even wary of, the things we learn through performance.” [Tom F. Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 6]

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 138.

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*if ritual is not to be merely a reflection of secular social life, if its function is partly to protect and partly to express truths which make men free from the exigencies of their status-incumbencies, free to contemplate and pray as well as to speculate and invent, then its repertoire of liturgical actions should not be limited to a direct reflection of the contemporary scene.*⁶²

The above discussions reflect much of what has happened with the shared rituals and symbols of the Xaverian Brothers before Vatican II. We have at least two of these that withstood the test of time and do speak much about our shared consciousness: the motto “*concordia res parvae crescunt*” and the salutation *Proficiat*.⁶³ All our other rituals and symbols, mandated in the *Manual of Customs*, were derived from practices that were either generic in preconciliar Religious Life or culled out of other congregational customs. Thus, several of them disappeared after 1969:

*The Brothers appointed to call the rest of the Community says in a tone of voice loud enough to be heard by others, “Benedicamus Domino,” to which they will reply, “Deo Gratias.”*⁶⁴

*The Way of the Cross as a community exercise in our own chapels terminates with the recitation of five Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glorias while the arms are extended in the form of a cross. This is not done if the Way of the Cross is made while pupils are present.*⁶⁵

*At meals the dishes are handed according to seniority, beginning with the Superior.*⁶⁶

A few survive, in one way or another, with little resistance from those who do not follow them anymore:

*At funerals of the Brothers, after the officiating clergy have thrown some earth on the coffin, the older Brothers present do likewise.*⁶⁷

There are those, however, whose place in life today have become so highly contested that, to preserve harmony, successive General Superiors since 1969 have just turned a blind eye to them. Whatever one’s stand is on the habit, there are several things that cannot be contested:

⁶² Victor Turner, “Passages, Margins and Poverty: Symbols of Communitas,” *Worship* 46 (1972): 391.

⁶³ “Felicitations on great feasts and the feast of a Brother are expressed by the greeting *Proficiat*.” (*Manual of Customs and Advice*, Customs, 31) Oddly enough, most brothers today are unaware that the greeting – simply understood as the third-person subjunctive of the Latin word *prōficere* (“to advance”) – is the common Dutch expression for “Congratulations”. It is then our most enduring link to Ryken’s home culture!

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Customs, 2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Customs, 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Customs, 29.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Customs, 15.

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1. For several years since we were founded on 15 June 1839, the brothers were dressed up like laypeople and took jobs to support each other. Because they externally did not show that they were religious, the clergy in Brugge dismissively called them “Freemasons”.⁶⁸ The situation continued even after Bishop François-René Bousсен formally approved our existence in the Diocese of Brugge on 1 October 1840.
2. The first vestition took place at Het Wallekje on 3 December 1843. Ryken wanted it to take place “to make it quite clear that his brotherhood was a religious congregation.”⁶⁹
3. Previous to the vestition, however, the Founder struggled very hard to find the means to purchase cloth for the habits. Thus he wrote to one his earliest benefactors in September: “At the time that I was passing through Verviers, your foreman wanted me to buy enough cloth to make habits for all our Brothers, but I took only some samples for we are poor and unable to pay ready cash as he wishes.”⁷⁰
4. We are not completely sure how the habit used during the first vestition looked since there was no contemporaneous report about it. In 1923, using unknown sources, Bro. Isidore Kuppel described how it looked: “A cassock, the main feature, was readily agreed upon but there was less unity regarding a suitable collar. One of leather was proposed, but lost on a vote, a broad linen collar was protested by the Redemptorists, one of tiny white beads from six to eight layers was adopted for some time, but that caused great inconvenience when a string would break and beads would fall, finally a linen collar of about an inch wide was adopted. During the first year the brothers wore a scapular as the Alexian and Brothers of the Sacred Heart.... On account of inconvenience this also was discarded.”⁷¹
5. The first time the habit was described definitively was in the 1931 *ad experimentum* Constitutions.⁷² The revised *Directory* printed that same year was the first congregational document to discuss the symbolism behind each part of the habit.⁷³

⁶⁸ John Seghers, *Memorandum*.

⁶⁹ Jan Devadder, *Rooted in History: The Life and Times of T.J. Ryken, Founder of the Xaverian Brothers*, vol. 1, *The Vision* (Twickenham: Xaverian Brothers Generalate, 1985), 460.

⁷⁰ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Raimond Biolley, Verviers, 2 September 1843. *Copyboek der brieven*, 1: 1.

⁷¹ Isidore Kuppel, *Brother Francis X Dondorf, C.F.X.*, Cyrenian, no. 2 (Baltimore: St. Mary’s Industrial Press, 1922), 10-11; see also *ibid.*, *Brother Stanislaus, C.F.X. (Peter Leonard Hubert Lucas)*, Cyrenian, no. 5 (Baltimore: St. Mary’s Industrial Press, 1924), 8-9.

⁷² “The habit of a Xaverian Brother consists of a black cassock (sewed one-third up in front, ten buttons in honour of the ten years’ missions of St. Francis-Xavier), with a white collar attached, and an ordinary belt of the same material as the habit. A Rosary is hung at the left side of the belt, and a crucifix partly visible is worn at the breast. The novices shall wear the same habit as the Professed.” [*The Constitutions of the Brothers of St. Francis Xavier or Xaverian Brothers* (1931), ch. IV, art. 40].

⁷³ “Our habit teems with symbolism, destined to keep before us the purpose of our being religious. The symbolism is traditional with us. Its color is black, reminding us of death. By dying to the world and worldly things, we die ahead of time.... The habit is surrounded by a small white collar, denoting the beautiful lily of purity that blooms on the black stem of mortification.... The cincture reminds us that we are bound to the service of Christ – it is as the wedding ring in the marriage ceremony.... At the left side, the chaplet of our Blessed Mother hangs. It is as the sword of the officer in the army, warding off through the rosary the attacks of the evil one – Mary’s sworn enemy and ours. Weighting the chapel is a medal. On one side is the image of our Immaculate Mother – through whom all graces

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6. Within the chapter on the habit of the 1931 constitution came the first overt permission for Xaverian Brothers to wear the clerical shirt (“Roman collar”), although “it should have an opening in front, at the middle.”⁷⁴

In presenting the above, we hope to provide some historical background to substantiate a healthy discussion concerning the need – or not – for “an outward mark of consecration to God”⁷⁵ that does befit our spirituality and shared behavior. The same is true for the call to reimagine our community rituals (Rites of Profession, Liturgical Calendar, Funeral Rites, etc.).

All of the preceding discussions become pressing when we consider the problematic divide not only between our Western and non-Western brothers, but also those born before the Second Vatican Council and those after. The Western preconciliar brothers could find themselves in a totally different social and ecclesial awareness from the more ritual-oriented non-Western confrères who could easily dismiss them as profane and anti-communitarian. On the other hand, we cannot ignore that many of our non-Western and postconciliar members, being detached from the *shared consciousness* and *shared behavior* of our preconciliar Western brothers, are being swayed toward two directions that could compromise Xaverian culture. On one end is the pull toward strong clericalism (in both consciousness and behavior) that is noticeable in non-Western Catholic communities and in postconciliar Catholicism itself. On the other end is the pull toward individualism (in both consciousness and behavior) that is noticeable in urbanized and technologically-networked brothers who were born between the late 1970s and 2001, part of a demographic called the *Millennial Generation* or *Generation Y*.

Despite the differences between these sub-groups of Xaverian Brothers, we venture to say that we are all attracted, albeit in varying ways and degrees, to a Xaverian narrative and ethos that partly constitute the congregation’s culture. Its components initially came from what are good, true, and beautiful in the cultures that our Founder and early brothers brought with them. They shaped this nascent fellowship within the Religious Life Form, which from its origins has a countercultural character that resists uncritical conformity with accepted ways and behaviors in both Church and society-at-large. The diversity of our first members and the clarity they had about the *ad gentes* nature of the mission ensured that cross cultural dynamics influenced the emergent congregational culture and prevented its being shaped by the worldview of one ethnic group alone. Despite the terrible events in the 1870s, the development proceeded until an inchoate yet discernible Xaverian culture appeared before the brothers and the people they worked for and with. Having said this, ***we should not think that Xaverian culture developed without flaws.***

come – on the other is depicted St. Francis Xavier. In poverty and suffering he died; in richness and glory he lives. On our breast – near the heart – reposes the crucifix, the symbol of the Author and inspiration of our labors. ‘Through him, and with Him, and in Him’ we began the labor, and hope, likewise, to end it.” [*Directory, Rules and Customs of the Xaverian Brothers* (1931), ch. VIII].

⁷⁴ *Constitutions* (1931), ch. IV, art. 40.

⁷⁵ *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 17.

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There is no perfect culture – even those that are essentially religious – because its members could highly romanticize shared narratives, rigidify shared behavior and devitalize shared rituals.

As Xaverian culture was lived out in Belgium, England, and the United States for a very long time, it consequently had a very Western guise. Brothers from these three countries would typify Xaverian culture to the brothers from Africa and Asia. At times, unfortunately, what was conveyed to the non-Western brothers was that Xaverian culture was solely oriented toward the northern hemisphere and that it cannot be recast in any other reality. We have to move away from this mentality:

Although the process of incorporation is asymmetrical in that it is not the congregation, which has a well-defined identity and a long history predating the arrival of the candidate, that is apprenticing itself to the candidate but vice versa, it is nevertheless a two-way process in which both partners in the new relationship change.⁷⁶

We accepted men from Congo, Kenya, and the Philippines to profess in the congregation after we assessing that they have the capacity to live the demands of the Consecrated Life and that there is congeniality between their personal charism and the charism of the Xaverian Brothers. In incorporating them into our Life, the congregation commits itself to allowing the personal charisms of the African and Asian brothers to be incorporated into the congregation and to transform the totality of the brotherhood. But we should not be assimilating everything they are bringing, for the culture of these brothers also has flaws. What we identify with and take in are features of their cultures that are life-giving and consonant with the congregation's identity. Thus we continue what has been true from the beginning – a cross cultural exchange through the planting of the seeds of the good, true, and beautiful in the cultures of our Congolese, Kenyan, and Filipino brothers in the current field of Xaverian culture. In this way Xaverian culture can continue to be enriched and recast for the sake of the Spirit's still unfinished agenda for us in the world.

⁷⁶ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy, and Community in Catholic Religious Life* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 72.

XAVERIAN ECCLESIALITY

The Consecrated Life is an *ecclesial reality* not simply because of the actuality of our presence in the Church but because it is an essential element of the Church. But it was a long time before the Church came to this realization, and even though we are now most certain about the place of the Consecrated Life in the Church, religious are still struggling to understand how ecclesiality affects the totality of their congregational charisms.

At the root of the problem is the lay origin of the Consecrated Life. Historically, it began with the choice of Christians in the Early Church to follow Christ more intimately by embracing celibacy, asceticism, and contemplation:

Religious life began in specifically lay form. It sprang from the desire of some faithful Christians to harvest the abundant fruits of their baptismal grace and to free themselves... from the obstacles which might have distanced them from fervent charity and the perfection of divine worship.¹

As shown in the lives and writings of Syriac ascetics in the 2nd century, Egyptian ascetics in the 3rd, Pachomius in the 4th, and Cassian in the 5th, one of these strongly perceived obstacles was the clericalization of monks:

Our father Pachomius did not want any clerics in his monasteries, for fear of jealousy and vainglory. Very often, indeed, he would talk to them on this subject; “It is better not to seek after such a thing in our koinōnia, lest this should be an occasion for strife, envy, jealousy and even schisms to arise in a large number of monks, contrary to God’s will.”²

The monk ought to flee women and bishops. Brethren, do not let yourself be drawn to the diabolical temptation of seeking clerical office out of a desire to bring spiritual help to others.³

There are monks who through mad ambition obtain clerical rank. They are straight away inflated with pride and exalt themselves, not only over their worthier equals but even over their elders – mere youths who for their juvenile vanity ought to be put in their place and whipped!⁴

¹ John Paul II, “Discourse to the plenary session of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes,” 24 January 1986.

² *Bohairic Life of Pachomius*, 25

³ Cassian, *Instituta*, XI, 18; *Collationes*, I, 20.

⁴ *Vita Patrum Jurensis*, 21.

It must be emphasized, however, that there were early movements of the Consecrated Life – such as those initiated by Saints Basil, Augustine, and Benedict (who, it must be noted, was a layman) – which, *proficiente porro doctrina divina* (because of the progress of the church),⁵ allowed the ordination of its monks or the acceptance of clerics within their ranks. But even in these cleric-friendly monasteries, the founders emphasized that the primordial obligation for the ordained lies in their monastic calling.⁶ Saint Benedict himself had reservations about the acceptance of priests in his monasteries: “If any ordained priest should ask to be received into the monastery, permission shall not be granted too readily.”⁷ He however permitted the ordination of monks with the following stringent counsel:

*If an Abbot desire to have a priest or a deacon ordained for his monastery, let him choose one who is worthy to exercise the priestly office. But let the one who is ordained beware of self-exaltation or pride; and let him not presume to do anything except what is commanded him by the Abbot, knowing that he is so much the more subject to the discipline of the Rule. Nor should he by reason of his priesthood forget the obedience and the discipline required by the Rule, but make ever more and more progress towards God.... He must understand that he is to observe the rules laid down by deans and Priors. Should he presume to act otherwise, let him be judged not as a priest but as a rebel.*⁸

The *status quo* gradually changed during the Early Middle Ages. Throughout the Merovingian and early Carolingian eras, the ordination of monks began to intensify. By the 9th century, Charlemagne and his successor Louis the Pious vigorously promoted it to the point that the practice became normative.⁹ Consequently, this brought about the shift in opinions regarding the place of clerics in the Consecrated Life.

In spite of this development, conflicting perspectives regarding the place of Consecrated Life in the Church emerged up to the 20th century. The cause of the discrepancy in opinions was the issue of the conscious distancing of the first religious from the ecclesiastical leadership. If the Life was conceived as separate from Church leadership, could it not be posited that the Life is not part of the church’s divine structure? The Second Vatican Council affirmed the constituent place of Consecrated Life in the ecclesial reality:

⁵ “Proficiente porro doctrina divina, sub sancto et cum sancto Augustino in monasterio Deo servientes, Ecclesiae Hipponiensi clerici ordinari coeperunt.” (Possidius, *Vita Augustinae*, ch. 11.1)

⁶ Terrence G. Kardong, *Pillars of Community: Four Rules of Pre-Benedictine Monastic Life* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 45-60, 147-66.

⁷ *Regula Sancti Benedicti*, ch. 60.

⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 62.

⁹ For a fuller treatment of this story, see Otto Nussbaum, *Kloster, Priestermonch und Privatmesse* (Bonn: Peter Hansteln Verlag, 1961).

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*Although the religious state constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the church, nevertheless it belongs inseparably to her life and holiness.*¹⁰

Years later, Pope John Paul II elucidated the deeper implications of this conciliar statement:

*This means that the consecrated life, present in the Church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of her essential and characteristic elements, for it expresses her very nature.... The idea of a Church made up only of sacred ministers and lay people does not therefore conform to the intentions of her divine Founder, as revealed to us by the Gospels and the other writings of the New Testament.*¹¹

In the life of the Church, then, the Consecrated Life is a specific state of life complementing the Clerical Life and Lay Life. Together, these three states of life are “at the service of one another, for the growth of the Body of Christ in history and for its mission in the world.”¹²

By virtue of their baptismal consecration, religious, clerics, and laypeople constitute Christ’s faithful. And although each group partakes of Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and royal function in its own way, all receive a common call “to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world, in accord with the condition proper to each.”¹³ Religious undertake this mission and “relate” to the other members of Christ’s faithful in a conspicuously unique way because of the inherent complexities in their state of life. Confounding though they be, these intricacies are recognized and respected by church’s leadership, safeguarded even by canon law. From these complexities of the Life Form arise the three coordinates which each congregation uniquely comprehend: *intraecclesiality*, *interecclesiality*, and *communion*.

Intraecclesiality essentially invites religious to assess how their particular state of life exists within the Church’s structure. Before the Second Vatican Council, there was a mistaken yet widely held notion that non-ordained religious were located between the clergy and the laity in the ecclesiastical hierarchy:

Prior to Vatican II, the Church, whatever its official theology might have maintained, was a clergy-centered as well as a clergy-dominated institution.... Religious in this clergy-centered Church were sociologically quasi-clergy.... Although women and nonclerical men Religious could not celebrate the sacraments (a restriction that, in the popular imagination, was due to sex rather than ecclesiastical position and which

¹⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 44; CIC, can. 207 §2.

¹¹ *Vita Consecrata*, no. 29.

¹² *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³ CIC, can 204 §1.

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therefore made Brothers a bit of a puzzle to most Catholics) they were for all practical purposes second-class clergy rather than (even first-class) laity.¹⁴

The Council clarified the location of religious within the ecclesial reality with the following statement:

*The religious state of life is **not an intermediate state between the clerical and lay states**. But, rather, **these faithful of Christ are called by God from both these states of life** so that they might enjoy this particular gift in the life of the Church and thus each in one's own way, may be of some advantage to the salvific mission of the Church.¹⁵ (emphasis supplied)*

Thus, while religious are within a state of life that is unique on its own, they are primarily called out of either the clerical or lay states. This renewed ecclesiology challenged non-ordained religious on two fronts: first, to valorize the “lay character” of their personal vocations and, second, to examine how their own congregations understand this “lay character,” embedded in their charism, and how it is lived in the congregation.

Unfortunately, the examination of this character was restricted in many congregations to the functional level. At the roots of this delimitation was the Church's own functional definition of the role of the laity in the Church:

The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God.¹⁶

John Paul II sought to go beyond this definition by stating that the laity responds to the universal call of holiness

in listening and meditating on the Word of God, in conscious and active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, in personal prayer, in family or in community, in the hunger and thirst for justice, in the practice of the commandment of love in all circumstances of life and service to the brethren, especially the least, the poor and the suffering.¹⁷

However, in that same paragraph, the pope acknowledged that all that he mentioned apply to “every baptized person.” From the canonical point of view, the distinction of laity from clerics rests solely on the fact that they are not ordained:

¹⁴ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 210-11.

¹⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 43b.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁷ *Christifidelis laici*, 30 December 1988, no. 16.

By divine institution, there are among the Christian faithful in the Church sacred ministers who in law are also called clerics; the other members of the Christian faithful are called lay persons. (emphasis supplied).¹⁸

There must be more to being lay than simply being non-ordained. To this day, there is a very strong notion that the Church is still grappling with the question of stating the difference between clerics and laity *beyond ordination*.

The question may be answered by understanding how the early religious – laypeople in all probability – perceived their difference from the men who occupied the clerical offices and their fellow non-clerics in the Early Church. The early religious sought a form of *sequela Christi* that was deeply attuned to the calls of the Gospel, but away from an emerging ecclesiastical leadership which was increasingly becoming privileged and entitled at the same time that it was being absorbed into the imperial system, especially during the Constantinian era.¹⁹ In spite of this chosen distancing from Church leadership, the early religious did not equate being “set apart” with being closer to God than other members of Christ’s faithful. Like other believers, they committed themselves to a life of *kerygma* (proclamation), *leitourgia* (worship), *diakonia* (service), *koinonia* (ecclesial communion), and *martyria* (witnessing even at the risk of martyrdom).²⁰ However they added celibacy, asceticism and contemplation to these five commitments. It was these that set them apart from other Christians. Unfortunately, the Consecrated Life has been saturated through the centuries with “narratives of specialness” that instilled in religious – ordained and non-ordained – a sense of ontological elevation from their fellow priests and especially from the laity. Interecclesiality calls religious “to recognize and overcome certain temptations,” including that which, because of “deeper spiritual formation... lead consecrated persons to feel somehow superior to other members of the faithful.”²¹ ***Intraecclesiality summons non-ordained religious to examine their lay character vis-à-vis the “narratives of specialness” that entered the congregation, and assess the tension between them in the light of its Founding vision and deeper narratives.***

Interecclesiality strongly correlates with intraecclesiality. It speaks of the model/s of relationship which the congregation fosters between its consecrated members and non-consecrated members of the Church. At the heart of this coordinate is the intrinsic distinctiveness of religious

¹⁸ CIC, can. 207 §1.

¹⁹ William H.C. Frend, *The Early Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 188-97; idem, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 574-79; Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 61-88.

²⁰ Angelo Amato, “Verbi revelati ‘Accomodata Praedicatio’ Lex omnis evangelizationis” (GS n. 44): Riflessioni storico-teologiche sull’inculturazione,” *Ricerche Teologiche*, 2 (1991): 101-24; Cf. Jean Daniélou and Régine du Charlat, *La catechesi nei primi secoli* (Leumann, Turin : Elle Di Ci, 1982); Elisabeth Germain, *2000 ans d’éducation de la foi* (Paris: Desclée, 1983).

²¹ *Vita Consecrata*, 38.

from other members of Christ’s faithful, including and especially those from whose state of life they emerged. One may simply assume, for example, that because non-ordained men arise out of the lay state, their vocation is *secular* in character. This would be a misconception.

*Secular and lay are not synonymous terms. Lay means nonordained and includes most seculars (those who are not ordained, i.e., everyone but the diocesan or secular clergy) and many Religious (all nonclerical ones, i.e. Sisters and Brothers). In other words, nonordained secular Christians and nonordained Religious Christians share the lay state when the Church is looked at from the standpoint of hierarchical organization. Therefore, the terms secular and Religious... are parallel or lateral terms describing a type of characteristic stance in relationship to the secular order. The secular Christian has the primary or fundamental relationship to that order while the Religious Christian has a qualified relationship.*²²

Remember that religious belong to a state of life that is unique from the clerical and lay states. Because of this, “the state of consecrated life by its very nature is neither clerical nor lay.”²³ In determining where such consecrated men are situated in the ecclesial reality, the Second Vatican Council was not inferring that they are to take on the vocation which is particular to the laity. In the mind of the Church, the laity “imbue and perfect the order of temporal affairs with the spirit of the gospel... in exercising secular duties.”²⁴

In saying this, however, we are not implying that religious could simply move away from secular concerns. Because of their lay character, it is not difficult for non-ordained religious to find themselves in *liminal* spaces within the ecclesial reality. This means that they live their public consecration within the world while not being part of the hierarchical structure and being in a “qualified relationship” to the secular order. As a liminal calling, lay religious life is a threshold experience, i.e. to both settle and move in the “betwixt and between” in order to provide a “mirror-image” in which people can see reflected their own searchings, struggles, and hopes for a more meaningful existence.²⁵

Many times, unfortunately, this liminality of their experience has confused religious regarding how to strike a balance between living the “fundamental options” in their consecrated life and living efficaciously in the secular order where they find employment. This issue is very much among the concerns of the Church:

²² Schneiders, 223.

²³ CIC, can. 588, §1.

²⁴ CIC, can. 225, §2.

²⁵ For further discussion on liminality, see Diarmuid Ó Murchú, *Consecrated Religious Life: The Changing Paradigms* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 159-71.

The urgent need for appropriate and necessary training can turn into a frantic quest for efficiency, as if apostolic service depended primarily on human means rather than on God. The legitimate need to be familiar with today's society in order to respond to its challenges can lead to a surrender to passing fashions, with a consequent lessening of spiritual fervor or a succumbing to discouragement....The praiseworthy desire to become close to the men and women of our day, believers and non-believers, rich and poor, can lead to the adoption of a secularized lifestyle or the promotion of human values in a merely horizontal direction. Sharing in the legitimate aspirations of one's own nation or culture could lead to embracing forms of nationalism or accepting customs which instead need to be purified and elevated in the light of the Gospel.²⁶

The presence of associate programs in religious congregations also bring to the fore the necessity of a serious consideration concerning a congregation's interecclesiality. In the passage of time, many religious have come to the realization that while lay associates may partake in the Spirituality and Mission of the congregation, there are other coordinates that cannot be easily shared with them because of the difference in their states of life. ***Interecclesiality invites non-ordained religious to consider well the dynamics of their involvement with the secular order and with non-members who are appropriating their Spirituality and Mission in the light of the congregation's Founding Vision and deep narratives.***

Communion takes into consideration the dynamics of relationship that have developed between the congregation and the church leadership. We have already noted that the Council affirmed that while the religious state of life is part of the life and holiness of the Church, it does not belong to its hierarchical structure. Religious congregations, primarily those that have pontifical status, possess an autonomous character that the ecclesiastical leadership (universal and local) must recognize, keep and protect:

The Church is concerned that Institutes should grow and develop in accordance with the spirit of their founders and foundresses, and their own sound traditions. Consequently, each Institute is recognized as having a rightful autonomy, enabling it to follow its own discipline and to keep intact its spiritual and apostolic patrimony. It is the responsibility of local Ordinaries to preserve and safeguard this autonomy.²⁷

The "distance" that each religious congregation establishes in its relationship with the ecclesiastical leadership is among the most subtle aspects of congregational charisms, especially in non-clerical institutes. In fact, this dimension can significantly differentiate one religious congregation from another. In some institutes, the relationship between religious and the church leadership is so tight that episcopal sway on the governance of the institute is expected by the religious themselves. In others, the relationship is so distant that the religious spurn even the slightest

²⁶ *Vita Consecrata*, 38.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

manifestation of clerical incursion into their space. The majority of non-clerical congregations, however, locate their institutes' communion within the wide spectrum that lies between these two extremes. Years of experience in the art of negotiating spaces have molded this unique character of the congregational charism in each institute. Some founders were so aware of the need for establishing a clear working distance between their institute and the hierarchy that they nurtured such a consciousness among their first followers. Some founders, on the other hand, were so vague about this aspect that later generations of religious would describe it themselves.

Given the many issues that have developed between religious and bishops since the end of the Council, there is always the temptation for consecrated men and women to have fewer dealings and associations with the church's leadership. But our canonical autonomy should not be construed as giving us the license to operate at will without *sentire cum ecclesia* ("thinking with the mind of the Church") and thus disregarding it completely. What is the sense then of being part of the Catholic Church if this were to happen? Communion is primarily about the mutual support religious congregations and the church leadership render to each other under the guidance of the Spirit. It is for this reason that ***the coordinate of communion calls religious to consider how their Founding vision and deeper narrative call and inform them on how to live interrelatedly with the leadership of the church, an ecclesial reality it cannot live without.***

INTRAECCESSIONALITY

Theodore James Ryken was a layperson and never lost sight of this fact. One of the more intriguing aspects of the Founder's life is that he never showed any inclination to be a priest – even if there was one in his lineage – or sought to be ordained. Perhaps this was how he understood the “ordinary way” – that it directs him (and his followers) to be grounded in a form of humility which a priest in his “higher” state may not attain:

If the priest is in a higher position, through the dignity of his ministry, on the other hand the layman will have more reasons for humility. Let him, then, not complain about his state since, through it, he possesses an easier and more certain way to exercise that which is the most noble and best means for the conversion of souls, because humility can do what dignity and science are unable to perform: it can move God to move souls.²⁸

But Ryken saw this vertical relationship between priest and layman in a uniquely qualified way. To him,

²⁸ Plan, §65. It would be worth noting here that the full title of this Founding document is “Plan of the Institute of Lay People for the education of Children in particular those of the Indians and for other Services in America.”

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*the layman who belongs to this Congregation... is nearly the equal of the priest. Both, indeed, see a large field that is widely open for their zeal; both have manifold motivations which inflame their hearts, urged by compassion, to start with the work.*²⁹

While Ryken accepted the “higher position” accorded to priests in the ecclesiology of his times, he saw that his Brothers were “near” equals because the intensity of their dedication to the mission God entrusted them was similar. It is because of this breaking of distinctions that Ryken was so enthusiastic in his invitation to laymen who were drawn to the same fire of the Spirit’s (com)passion:

*Rejoice, O layman, because the Supreme Being found a means to satisfy your zeal for souls and to make you rich in merits. If you feel a call for the conversion of souls and the religious state, then you will find in this Congregation the object of your destiny and a goldmine of merits.*³⁰

Because of his growing awareness of the Spirit’s inspiration regarding the “lay character” of his followers, Ryken envisioned a congregation that would be purely nonclerical. In the Constitution he wrote, the Founder stipulated this unambiguously:

*The congregation consists of lay Brothers (leeke Broeders) who are not priests and who consecrate themselves to Our Lord Jesus Christ by the three religious vows in the manner fixed and determined in this Constitution...*³¹

*The congregation has a Superior General who is not a priest and must be one of its members.*³²

It is important to state that Ryken did not disregard the importance of the clerical priesthood for the enterprise that the Spirit entrusted to him. It is known to all of us that for years he collaborated with Fr. Martin van Beek and came under the guidance of Jesuit Fr. Isidoor Van de Kerckhove. In 1848, Ryken toyed with the idea of forming a body of priests which would attend to the spiritual and sacramental needs of the brotherhood:

*What do you think about this affair, namely that some priests would live with us so that they would administer the Sacraments to us and to the children and at the same time be religious themselves?*³³

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Plan, §46.

³¹ 1846 Constitution, art. 5. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 2.2.1.2.

³² Ibid., art. 6.

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However, he had no desire to incorporate them with the Xaverian Brothers or, worse, to direct them as their superiors.³⁴ In his vision, these priests would constitute a body completely separate from the government of the brothers and having nothing to do with their government. The plan did not materialize, however, and by the late 1850s, “the idea of an autonomous Xaverian Congregation for priests had become one more of T.J. Ryken’s unfulfilled dreams.”³⁵

In the archives of our congregations in Brugge are several letters written by Ryken addressed to applicants questioning the possibility of being ordained at some point while being a member of the congregation. In all these cases, Ryken answered in the negative. In one instance, the Founder was particularly emphatic: “In our congregation, nobody is admitted to the Priesthood.” (emphasis in the original text)³⁶

Still, it appeared that the question of having ordained members within their ranks persisted among a few brothers. The underlying reason for this opinion cannot be verified, but it must have held sway among enough brothers that it found its way in the agenda of the First General Chapter (5-11 August 1869). But the majority of the brothers in the chapter, including those that brought about his forced resignation a few years earlier, were in complete accord with the Founder on this point. During the session held on 6 August, the capitulants judged that a clause should be inserted in the formula of vows, namely, that by his profession the Brother “renounced the priesthood.” Two days later, Bishop Johan Joseph Faict made an explicit intervention with regard to this motion. The minutes of the chapter recorded his response tersely: “His Lordship answered that this (proposal) seemed to be superfluous.” Afterward, he delivered the following address:

The desire which reveals itself in Brothers to become a priest is nothing but a fraud of the devil. For, first, wherefore do they want to become a priest? Is it to do more good? Not at all, for I know no priest who should want to do what you do. Is it because priests alone will go to heaven? Still less, then I should be obliged to make you all priests. The deacons whose place you take, St. Lawrence, St. Stephen and many others, are very high in heaven. God, who is infinitely good in all his works, only gives the grace of his vocation one time, generally speaking; now, could a religious who, after many prayers and serious examen, finally knows the will of God and who

³³ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Rev. F. Mühren, Langenhort (Germany), ? February 1848. *Copy boek der brieven*, 2: 155-56.

³⁴ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Rev. Leopold Ottman, Bischeber (France), 8 July 1848. *Copy boek der brieven*, 4: 232-33.

³⁵ Jan Devadder, “The Question of the Priesthood in the Congregation: Our Founder’s Spirit and Intent,” *Chapter Soundings in preparation for the Nineteenth General Chapter, Second Session* (dated 16 March 1969). CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 3.1.20.2.3.

³⁶ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Mr. Behrens, Münster (Germany), 15 March 1854. *Copy boek der brieven*, 6: 53.

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has felt all the sweetness of the religious state, could he still doubt whether God called him to that state?

But, one will ask me: can it never happen that God calls somebody from the religious state to the priesthood? Hereupon I answer: yes, but it is an extraordinary case. What then has that Brother to do, who feels that desire in his heart? He must throw away that idea. If it comes back, throw it away again, yes, until three, four times; meanwhile he must fulfill very faithfully his duties as a religious and go to God with a simple heart. If this idea continues to come up in his heart in spite of all his efforts to throw it away, he must tell it to his confessor and afterwards write his idea to the Bishop who, together with the confessor, will conclude if this idea really comes from God or if it is not really a temptation of the devil, what is the case 99 times out of 100. The priesthood is more brilliant in the eyes of men than the state of a simple religious, and it is that which seduces many persons, but it is not of greater merits. When a priest's post is vacant, look, several present themselves to fill it; but tell me, who will take the place of a Brother who would leave his duties?... It often stems from a failing of esteem for his state if a Brother leaves it to become a priest. So, the better the Brothers will know their state, the better they will esteem it; it is therefore your duty to take care that the novices you prepare for their vows are well instructed about the elevation and dignity of their state.³⁷

Almost 100 years from this event, the issue forcefully came back during the Second Session of the Nineteenth General Chapter (7 July-2 August 1969) held in Malden, Massachusetts. This was not the first time that the issue was brought to the attention of a general chapter. That took place during the Sixteenth General Chapter (30 March-7 April 1953) in Rome, concluding with the ordinance that “since our constitutions are explicit on the subject and state that the Brothers are not priests, neither may they aspire to the clerical state. The matter should not be further discussed.”³⁸ Despite this, the issue kept coming back. Exponents of the proposal found a justification for it when the Second Vatican Council itself opened the possibility:

The sacred synod declares that there is nothing to prevent some members of religious communities of brothers being admitted to holy orders by provision of their general chapter in order to meet the need for priestly ministrations in their own houses, provided that the lay character of the community remains unchanged.³⁹

Unlike in the First General Chapter, the majority of brothers by March 1969 signified that they favored the proposal. However, by the time it ended in early August, the chapter decreed that “it

³⁷ Address of Johan Joseph Faict, bishop of Brugge, to the capitulants of the First General Chapter, 08 August 1869. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 3.1.2.

³⁸ Minutes of the Sixteenth General Chapter. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 3.1.17.

³⁹ *Perfectae Caritatis*, 10 b.

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does not deem it opportune at the present time to introduce the priesthood into the congregation.”⁴⁰

In all likelihood, what turned the tide dramatically was the dissemination in March of the paper “The Question of the Priesthood in the Congregation: Our Founder’s Spirit and Intent.” Using documents written by the Founder himself, Bro. Jan Devadder showed Ryken’s “way of thinking concerning the lay character of the Xaverian Brothers” without explicitly writing the obvious conclusion. In letting the Founder speak for himself, the paper brought to the attention of the brothers – many of whom were not fully in touch with his life and letters – a Founding Vision that was lost during the congregation’s period of Institutionalization. In reviving the awareness of the lay character that Ryken envisioned, the chapter inadvertently realized the Council’s call that religious “let their founders’ spirit and special aims they set before them... be faithfully held in honor.”

INTERECCLESSIALITY

What obfuscated the vision of his brothers? Primary among the reasons was that, like most religious in preconciliar times, the Xaverian Brothers were detached from the Founding Vision of the Founder while wholly dedicated to the ministry of education that earned them the praise of Christ’s faithful. It does not mean that the Founding Vision ceased to pulsate in the consciousness of the brothers – the congregational call to *missio ad gentes* was heard once again in 1929, during the generalate of Bro. Paul Scanlan, when the congregation’s collective energy was thoroughly focused in its schools in Belgium, England, and America.

But the congregation’s mode of presence before the People of God was one that reflected the embourgeoisement of the Consecrated Life from the late 19th century until the Council took place. In a word, we lost sight of our unique vocation and took on a quasi-clerical appearance to the people we served and to ourselves as well. We exhibited external practices that stripped us of any “lay character” and got caught in a religious worldview that made many of us to expect entitlements and privileges. A case in point was raised by Bro. Jan Devadder in the last address he gave before capitulants of a general chapter:

From his earliest plans, and all the way through his extensive correspondence, Ryken had insisted upon the necessity for his Brothers to be and to remain lay religious.... (But) it was a challenge for Ryken and his early Brothers to remain true to their vocation as lay religious. Yet, the very term “lay religious” became a cause of tension between the poles of “lay” and “religious.” Perhaps during the breaks, you

⁴⁰ Decree no. 10, Enactments of the Nineteenth General Chapter, Session 2. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 3.1.20.3

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*will walk along Ezelstraat, in this very neighborhood. If you do so, it may be good to remember that, during the two years in which our predecessors lived in that street, they never wore a religious habit. After the move to Het Walletje (note: 1841), it took two more years before the religious dress was worn and religious names were taken. The layman disappeared, so to speak, in the Xaverian habit.*⁴¹

Stating this matter should not be equated as a castigation of the habit. Rather, it invites us to questions arising from the interecclesial coordinate of our congregational charism.

Ryken unequivocally comprehended that the Spirit had asked him to form a “band of brothers” who would publicly consecrate themselves with religious profession. During the difficult period after his forced resignation in 1860, Ryken was plagued with dread about the future direction of his brotherhood without him at the helm. He wrote several letters to Bishop Jean Baptist Malou of Brugge to express his morbid fears as well as doubts about the capacities of Vincent Terhoeven, the successor he once favored. Most of these hastily written and unfocused letters could come across as rants, the desperate attempts of a failed leader to influence his congregation further. But several of them also revealed his deepest yearnings for the brotherhood he gave birth to:

It was my very first idea and intention to establish a religious community because I myself had been summoned to Religious Life.... Consequently, what I established in 1839 must remain an authentic religious society.... The spirit that the Xaverian Congregation must have is the Religious spirit... According to the spirit and the intention of its Founder, the Congregation must always remain a religious body... This is the whole community's calling as intended by the founder for himself and all those who wish to associate with him. Therefore it is and should be the calling for all and nobody should dare to enter the congregation without primarily striving after the same religious spirit... If its concerns are focused mainly on financial and professional problems, the congregation would be reduced to a ridiculous association of teachers. Thus, its good spirit would be completely lost. (emphasis in the original text)⁴²

But Ryken also understood that his vowed “band of brothers” were to retain their lay character. As men deprived of privileges and entitlements accorded to clerics and already-existing religious congregations, he envisioned that they would live by the sweat of their brows: “The Brothers should have such capacities that they can provide the house with temporal means.”⁴³ Because

⁴¹ Jan Devadder, Address to the 23rd General Chapter, 23 July-3 August 1989. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 3.1.24.2.

⁴² TJ Ryken, *Apologia* addressed to Bishop Jean Baptist Malou, 1864. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 3.5.1.4.

⁴³ Plan, §19.

they worked in simple trades for their keep, they were labeled as “Freemasons.”⁴⁴ But the desire to be legitimated by the diocese of Brugge – given the fact that the band “had become the laughing stock of both the clergy and people of Brugge” the moment they occupied the house in Ezelstraat – made him forego elements of his audacious vision of the Life and pursue the standards of acceptability for consecrated men of his times. Thus, from the small quarters of Ezelstraat they moved to spacious Het Walleetje – even if was beyond his means – and from being clothed as the common folk to wearing a habit expected of religious.

We are at a different place in terms of our existence as a congregation within the Church. We have come to a re-awakening of the fundamental “lay character” of our vocation and grappling with what this *externally* and *internally* demands of us in this third millennium. But we continue to avoid certain questions arising from our intraecclesiality: Does the habit of the congregation – one which was not modified since it took its final shape in 1843 – and other clothing we use obscure the “lay character” of the Brothers? If it does, how should it be modified in such a way that, as religious men who are not seculars, we continue to have “an outward mark of consecration to God” that is becoming and true to our “lay character”?⁴⁵ What works should the brothers take to provide for the temporal means of the congregation while being true witnesses to the Life? How can we responsibly appraise modes of functioning in our workplaces that may compromise the “fundamental options” of Consecrated Life?

The recent participation of secular laity in the life and spirit of the congregation as associates presents us with newer challenges. Ryken is seemingly mum about this issue. And this is understandable given the religious worldview of his time. He saw that the work entrusted to us by the Spirit is one which the brothers – laymen that they are in his mind – could address on their own. The inclusion of lay teachers in our schools was legitimized after the move was approved by the 17th General Chapter (30 March – 4 April 1959) due to the felt need for it in the Belgian Province.⁴⁶ But the decline of our numbers and the much needed valorization of the laity in the life of the Church directs us to questions Ryken had no answer for.

In spite of this, the story of the brotherhood through the centuries provides us with further indicators about our intraecclesiality. We are a congregation with men of blessed memory who, by the grace of God, became thoroughly in touch as “a band of brothers” with the deeper call arising from our spirituality of ordinariness. A case in point is the junction between our narrative and that of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first religious congregation founded in the United States for women of African heritage:

A new and imperative question arose during the Mother Mary Frances (Fieldien)’s administration, one that was not easy to answer at first, namely, how to

⁴⁴ John Seghers, *Memorandum*.

⁴⁵ *Perfectae caritatis*, §17.

⁴⁶ *Minutes of the Seventeenth General Chapter*. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 3.1.18.

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obtain the higher training necessary if the Oblate Sisters of Providence were to keep abreast of the times and fit themselves for teaching accredited high school courses. In this emergency, Mother Frances, as early as 1917, appealed to Brother Isidore (Kuppel), provincial of the Xaverian Brothers. Brother Simeon (Jolivet) came over to the convent to offer his services as a consequence of this.

Brother Simeon, then sixty years of age, was a man of varied gifts. Born in Quebec, Ludger Jolivet by name, he had been a practicing physician, having graduated from the University of Paris. But at the age of forty-two, he gave up his practice and entered the Xaverian Brotherhood, being professed in 1901. He was assigned at one time to teach at Mount Saint Joseph's College in Baltimore. It was while he was stationed there that he undertook the work of organizing a summer school for the Oblate Sisters...

Brother Simeon continued his summer school work, assisted by some Sisters of Charity and Benedictine Sisters, until he was transferred to Detroit in 1921 where he died shortly afterwards. His work was taken up by Brother Bede (Rouse), who conducted summer classes at the mother house until 1926.⁴⁷

While the above incident manifests an interrelationship with fellow religious, it still reveals the liminality of our lives as Xaverians. The call of the ordinary, even when it was not articulated as such, beckoned – and continues to beckon – the brothers to situate themselves in the ground of the poor and the marginalized. The move to Het Walletje may have been caused by Ryken's desire for legitimation, but it was also a move which befitted the band of poor "Freemasons" for they found themselves situated in Sint-Gillis, the district of Brugge where 80% of the population lived in wanton misery. In our later narratives, we hear the many instances when our brothers – institutionalized as their life was – opened schools with the explicit purpose of educating the economically and socially marginalized. Perhaps this was the reason why the postconciliar summons for the "preferential option for the poor" found its way easily in the consciousness of the majority of our brothers – it had always been there. But our presence among the poor and marginalized – a sector to whom Ryken undoubtedly missioned his brothers – is not that of secular men but of consecrated laymen enamored with God:

It is through your life of gospel witness lived in community with others that God desires to manifest care and compassionate love to those who are separated and estranged, not only from their neighbors, but also from their own uniqueness; to those who suffer from want, neglect, and injustice: the poor, the weak, and the oppressed of this world. They too are called to experience, express, and share the love of God with the world through their own giftedness. In this life of following Christ, allow

⁴⁷ Grace Hausmann Sherwood, *The Oblates' Hundred and One Years* (New York: MacMillan, 1931), 193-94.

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*yourself, therefore, to be given away, together with your sisters and brothers, as nourishment for others, as bread that is broken.*⁴⁸

COMMUNION

At times we dismiss Ryken too easily as an ultramontanist. There is no doubt that his loyalties were with Pius IX, at that moment in history when European nation-states and monarchies were openly breaking away from the control and influence of the papacy. Given that the pope was being assaulted by other temporal powers, it was easy to deduce where the sentiments of solid Catholics like Ryken would have gone. But such was the case for most founders and religious at that time, especially those who understood that the calls of the Spirit bade them to go *ad gentes*. In being missioned to the world, they understood that they were to work at the behest of the “*pontifex universalis*” and not of one diocesan bishop, influential as he or his diocese may be. Thus, Ryken’s fervent desire for his congregation to receive pontifical right should not be simplistically seen as a manifestation of his ultramontanism. At its core was a strong conviction that a “band of brothers” who would mission beyond Belgium should rightfully serve under the church’s universal pastor.

Ryken knew all too well that diocesan bishops could circumscribe a congregation’s vocation for the universal church. This was at the heart of his conflict with Bishop Martin Spalding. The tension was a manifestation which reflected the history of religious life in the early and mid-nineteenth century. Rome was reluctant to recognize the canonical character of non-cloistered communities who were professing simple vows. As a result, many founders and general superiors found themselves in conflict with local ordinaries who were arbitrarily claiming as their own a religious community established in their dioceses. It was for this reason that St. Julie Billiart moved her Sisters of Notre Dame generalate from France to Belgium. It also brought about the subdivisions of many German congregations of Franciscan and Dominican Sisters in the United States. In some cases, a local ordinary would mandate the cessation of communications between religious communities in his dioceses and their motherhouses, even by threatening excommunication.

Ryken deeply understood that freedom from the totalizing control of a bishop was essential were his brotherhood to fulfill its missionary vocation. It was for this reason that he was baffled – and perhaps even alarmed – by one part of the letter of Bishop Spalding in late January or early February 1853 which counseled him to “adapt your institute to the country.” The issue of autonomy became a more immediate issue for Ryken when that summer, just a few months before the departure of the first brothers for America, Bishop Johannes van Hooijdonk of Breda stopped the Brothers of St Aloysius Gonzaga in his diocese from getting directives from their motherhouse

⁴⁸ Fundamental Principles (as adapted for use with XBSS & Associates).

in Oudenbosch and refashioned them as his own congregation (Brothers of the Immaculate Conception of Breda). This was the context behind the letter that Ryken sent to Bishop Malou:

Monsignor Spalding says that we should seek his advice – something which he already insisted with me and which he even put in writing. This insistence on seeking his advice makes me fear that difficulties will emerge. In fact, I do not understand how he sees the seeking of advice. Usually when people desire that advice be sought, they also desire that the advice be followed. In general, it is no longer an advice but rather an order, in particular when the advice is given in a forceful manner. Some priests and other people might make plans in our regard and suggest these to the Bishop. They will ask this way, especially if they know that we are obliged to follow the plans, proposal, and interventions of the Bishop concerning the government and regulation of the Congregation.

Yet, the Congregation will only flourish and produce great fruit if it is concerned with the preservation of its vocation which, it seems to me, has been proven by clear signs and consists, I think, in laboring at the formation of a good and Christian coming generation for the whole Church. In order to reach that lofty purpose, it seems to me that it is most necessary, within the limits of recognition and respect for the canonical rights of the Bishop, that we have freedom to act, so that we can work and live according to the spirit of our foundation and Constitution; that we are not hampered nor that our hands are bound; that we do not pursue the well-being of one diocese and are not obliged by a bishop, who is usually only concerned with the good of his diocese, to bind ourselves to the local well-being. If we did so, we might forego the vocation of the Congregation and of its individual members.⁴⁹

Malou wrote to Spalding about Ryken’s request and asked his fellow bishop to extend to the brothers coming to his diocese his “support and generous and enlightened cooperation” so that “they could succeed in their important and difficult mission.” Spalding may not have liked the way Ryken questioned his authority before Malou. This may explain why on the arrival of the brothers in Louisville on 11 August, he “gave them his blessings and nothing more”⁵⁰

It was not the first time that Ryken asserted the need for a government centered on the office of the superior general and free from any outside clerical sway. In 1845, amid the ever-growing financial burdens in the “Years of Hunger” with which Flanders was stricken, Ryken was seeking ways and means to save his congregation from complete extinction. He was even willing to leave Brugge and move anywhere that his young community could receive better pay in their teaching work. However, even for the sake of survival, Ryken would not think of surrendering

⁴⁹ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Bishop Jan Baptist Malou, Brugge, 28 June 1854. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 3.5.1.3.

⁵⁰ Julian Ryan, *Men and Deeds: The Xaverian Brothers in America* (New York: MacMillan, 1930), 18.

anything of the authority, spirit and purpose of his brotherhood to outsiders, even well-intentioned priests. In the deanery of Hasselt, Ryken was negotiating with Fr. Théodore Spaas about the establishment of a pay-school which the brothers would run. But in spite of the promising beginnings of the project, it became clear to Ryken that the dean sought to interfere with the guidance not only of the school but also of his congregation. Thus he wrote in confidence to Francis Xavier Dondorff, then studying at the normal school in Sint-Truiden, to seek the intervention of Fr. Constant Joseph Bogaerts, the diocesan school inspector:

When you go to Hasselt, tell Rev. Bogaerts as follows, that I feel from the words of the Rev. Dean that it is his plans to have our affair much under his administration, and to do away with our activity for America.... In this I see a danger not to be able to follow our first intention, spirit, and vocation, which I could not allow at all.... In the meantime we reach our purpose of winning time and to make our Rules and Constitutions so stable that they cannot be easily changed by an outsider.⁵¹

Ryken grasped the wideness of the frontier that the Spirit intended for the congregation. For that reason, he was most unwilling to compromise this mission. The Hasselt project never materialized, but others would eventually be given to the care of his brothers. Ryken willingly placed himself and the congregation at the service of the local churches through their clerical leadership, even though if his poor French – the language of the Belgian clergy and upper-class – did not necessarily make him a welcome guest in their circles. But he was steadfast in his belief that his brothers are to mission *ad gentes* and never let go of this vision despite his dedication to the local churches.

The mission in America would not be launched until the middle of the nineteenth century. While waiting for the realization of this congregational vocation, he sent his brothers to England, a suitable place to further the work of evangelizing marginalized youth and to hone the language skills of possible missionaries to the United States. By the time he sent his brothers to England, Ryken could already communicate to its bishops, with both respect and resolve, the non-negotiables of the brotherhood:

The English Brothers when incorporated in the Society will be bound to the English mission. I wish to retain the power of recalling any brother in extraordinary circumstances. If your Lordships refuse to the Superior a freedom of control over the Brothers it would have an injurious effect on the latter and materially impair the salutary influences of the former. Their minds would be distracted between two powers and thus their vocation would be endangered, the spirit of obedience which they had acquired in the parent house would be weakened and their zeal and ardor in the cause would surely be cooled. And thus many scandals might arise to the detriment of reli-

⁵¹ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Francis Xavier Dondorff, Sint-Truiden, 29 September 1845. *Copy boek der brieven*, 2: 28-29.

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gion and education. A Superior from the knowledge he possesses of all the members of the Society and who thoroughly understands all its workings, must be admitted the best judge of all matters which concern it.

It is desirable also that the Superior have the power to remove a brother from one school to another as many evils might arise for the want of it, By it he might be enabled to check an evil in its commencement which if neglected might lead to serious consequences. Being fully aware of their different characters, he will be able to place them to the best advantage and remove them from a danger to another place where they would not be exposed to it. If the Brothers knew that the Superior had not the power of removing, they would strive more to please the Priest with whom they were (illegible) than to labor in the spirit of their vocation. Thus they would acquire the favor, and support of the Priest whose representation would naturally meet the approbation of a Bishop and thus an evil would remain unredressed and incalculable evils might follow. Thus the Superior would have the grief to see his cherished members falling away and the whole body weakened for the want of this power. But I need not dwell on this subject longer as I feel sure that your Lordships will admit the propriety of this power remaining in the hands of the Superior.⁵²

Two years later, the parish priest of Hull inquired the viability of separating the Brothers in England from Brugge. Clear in his vision, the Founder responded:

To your... enquiry if a branch of the Society could be separated from the parent stock I beg leave to reply that no circumstances could induce me to consent to such a separation. To whatever part of the world the members may be sent or however numerous they may become it is absolutely necessary that they remain under the direction of one general head. Until the Order has received the approbation of Rome we must continue to be dependent on the Bishop of Bruges and the Superior of the Society. When that approbation is obtained it will of course be subject to the Holy See and the Superior of the order.⁵³

Nearly seventy years later, the English brothers, then unable to communicate with the generalate in Brugge because of the First World War, would themselves uphold the vision of the founder when they resisted the plans of Bishop Peter Amigo of Southwark to establish them as a separate congregation.

The above discussion may enlighten us about the communion coordinate of our charism. We are a congregation called by the Spirit through our Founder to be at the service of the universal

⁵² Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to the Bishops of England, 03 July 1848. *Copy boek der brieven*, 4: 226-28.

⁵³ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Rev. Michael Trappes, Hull (England), 17 August 1850. *Copy boek der brieven*, 5: 32.

church. In saying that, it should also be clear that this universal church has a hierarchical structure so integrated into it that none of us can just wish it away. Ryken placed himself at the service of God through a hierarchy of bishops and clergymen who either supported him wholeheartedly, or belittled him as an ambitious foreigner with little education and poor communication skills, or – as in the case of the celebrated Jesuit missionary Fr. Pierre-Jean De Smet – were thoroughly hostile to him. Ryken knew he would never have a hierarchy completely in accord with him and the inspiration entrusted to him, but that did not matter for him. What did matter was that the brotherhood remains true to its “first intention, spirit and vocation.” He knew, however, that this could not be fulfilled if he were to shut the congregation away from the church’s leadership. Because of this he interrelated with them – both those who were for him and those against him. He would listen to their counsel, mostly heeding their advice. But he would also be forthright and uncommonly brave when his dignity and that of his brothers were assaulted. This was unambiguously demonstrated when he spoke the following words “in a strong and firm tone” before the dismissive Jesuit Provincial Fr. Peter Van Lil: “God...is...not...obliged...to give...an... account...to...man...for...what... He...does.”⁵⁴ Even when he struggled to let go of the brotherhood in 1860, Ryken must have understood at some point that the congregation was not his own creation but that of the Spirit. The charism of the congregation was not for him or his brothers to keep, but one that has to be shared with the Church – through and in spite of its clerical leadership – so that its mandate from the Spirit could be realized for the sake of the renewal of the People of God.

⁵⁴ T. J. Ryken, “Beschrijving van den tesamen handel die ik ondergetekende gehouden heb, met den Ew Pater van Kerckhove,” (Description of the dealings that I, the undersigned, have had with Father van Kerckhove) 1871. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 1.1.5.

XAVERIAN MISSION

Although the world has grown smaller in our highly networked Late Modern society, a narrow understanding of mission continues to linger among many Catholics. Those who have not had extensive study of missiology – consecrated people included – continue to regard mission as the Church’s work for the salvation of souls, carried out mainly by priests and religious (mostly from Europe and America) for the benefit of the pagans abroad, with the financial and spiritual support of the laity back home, and achieved through the planting of the Church (*plantatio ecclesiae*) in these places.¹ Such notions of mission prevailed in Catholicism before the Second Vatican Council. However, even the Church, slow as it is in embracing change, has actually moved beyond this understanding of mission.

Dramatic shifts in the Catholic understanding of mission happened as a result of the Council. For one, we recognize now that the Church does not possess a missionary character just because several of its members have gone to “the ends of the earth” to bring the Gospel. Rather, the Church is “missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.”² Being *missioned* – being sent to do ministry – flows out of Jesus’ great commission “to proclaim the kingdom of God” (see Lk. 9; also Mt. 10):

*The person and ministry of Jesus was the catalyst that triggered the Christian impulse for mission. Through the power of the risen Christ and his Spirit, the disciples were commissioned to bring his kingdom ministry to the world. Luke-Acts provides one of the most comprehensive reflections on the universal mission in all of the New Testament. The prophetic ministry of Jesus is again the model. His Spirit-anointed mission of mercy and justice is replicated in the expanding ministry of the post-Easter church. The community’s mission was to go to the end of the earth.*³

Thus, mission is the basic – if not the most urgent – task of the Church, for to profess faith in Christ is to become part of His life and vision of the world.

We have also reconsidered the end of mission. Before the Council, “missionary work was usually understood in terms of the salvation of individuals through baptism and the establishment of the institution of the church in ‘mission lands’.”⁴ Jesuit Church historian John W. O’Malley

¹ Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 32.

² *Ad gentes*, § 2.

³ Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhmüller, *The Biblical Foundation for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983) 318-20.

⁴ Roger P. Schroeder, *What Is the Mission of the Church? A Guide for Catholics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 90.

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pointed out that the word *mission* was generally not used in our contemporary sense until the sixteenth century: “Instead of missions and missionaries, the traditional expressions were ‘propagating the faith’ or ‘journeying to the infidel’.”⁵ Thus, in the first official document of the Jesuits, the word *mission* was first used as a synonym for “propagating the faith” to designate travel for the sake of ministry. This was also Theodore James Ryken’s understanding of mission, as can be clearly seen in his *Report* (1834-35), *Plan* (1837-38) and *Scheme* (1838-39). His missionary work in the United States (April 1831 - August 1834; November 1837 - June 1838) occurred during the Second Great Awakening, a Christian revival movement which brought about the conversion of millions to various Protestant denominations. Within this context Ryken, a passionate anti-Protestant like many Catholics of his times, “conceived a plan to establish a Congregation of lay people in order to avoid to some extent that great loss of souls and, through that foundation, to propagate the faith and extend the Church.”⁶

The understanding of mission which the early Jesuits (including St. Francis Xavier) and our Founder shared significantly differs from what conciliar and postconciliar teachings impart to us. It is true that mission *ad gentes* that is directed to “‘peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ,’ ‘who are far from Christ,’ in whom the Church ‘has not yet taken root’” still has the right to be referred to as “missionary activity proper.”⁷ However, it is no longer seen as “journeying to the infidel” and converting them to Catholicism. In the proper sense, mission *ad gentes* directs itself to “peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups.”⁸

Our outlook on the trajectory of mission and its actors has also undergone a transition. From seeing it as mostly a movement *ad extra*, we now acknowledge that mission also entails an *ad intra* direction. One does not necessarily need to travel to far-distant lands to find men, women and children living in this Late Modern society for whom Christ is unknown. In Europe and America, there are countless people for whom “God is completely or partially left out of life and human consciousness,” where many of the baptized “lead totally un-Christian lives and more and more persons maintain some links to the faith but have little or a poor knowledge of it,” easily succumbing to “temptations to superficiality and self-centeredness, arising from a predominating hedonistic and consumer-oriented mentality” centered on the “cult of the individual.”⁹ Their need is one of re-evangelization – a *New Evangelization* as the Church puts it today. However, unlike in times past, it is not a small group of specially-commissioned priests and religious who would

⁵ John W. O’Malley, “Mission and the Early Jesuits,” in *The Way Supplement* 79 (1994): 3.

⁶ Plan, §9.

⁷ *Redemptoris Missio*, §34.

⁸ *Ibid.*, §33.

⁹ *Lineamenta “New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith,”* §6, 9.

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accomplish this work. “Missionary activity,” wrote John Paul II, “is a matter for all Christians, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations.”¹⁰ Consequently, this implies that all religious, including those living within cloisters, participate in the Church’s mission of proclaiming that the kingdom of God is both “here and not yet,” just as Jesus himself did. Thus, the whole world – not just pockets of it – is the field of the church’s universal mission and its evangelizers are all the faithful:

Mission happens wherever the church is; it is how the church exists. Mission is the church preaching Christ for the first time; it is the act of Christians struggling against injustice and oppression; it is the binding of wounds in reconciliation; it is the church learning from other religious ways and being challenged by the world’s cultures. ‘Missions’ exist in urban multicultural neighborhoods, rural Ghanaian villages, Brazilian favelas, American universities, in the world’s cyberspace. Mission is the local church ‘focusing not on its own, internal problems, but on other human beings, focusing elsewhere, in a world that calls and challenges it.’¹¹

However, mission does not happen without intentionality. In our globalized Late Modern society where a plurality of religions exists, it begins with “genuine friendship with those living on the other side of the border.” Mission then transpires through a fourfold dialogical activity:

a. The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. b. The dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. c. The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values. d. The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance, with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.¹²

Let us now move to a consideration of the three coordinates of mission: *frontier*, *vision*, and *ministry*.

Whether apostolic or monastic by nature, every religious congregation receives the summons of Christ to “go out to the *world*.” **Frontier** takes into account how a congregation understands the particularities of the *world* to which its members are sent. This coordinate has three aspects,

¹⁰ *Redemptoris Missio*, §2.

¹¹ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 9; quote from Lucien Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), xii.

¹² Phan, 138.

and of these the most overt is *locality-spatiality*. Most consecrated persons engage directly with the sufferings and apathy of the world. The locus for their activities could be confined to a diocese or a country, or geographically boundless. Those living cloistered lives may not appear involved with the pains of society, like their apostolic counterparts. Yet in the Internet age, these monks and nuns also find themselves engaged with the world, albeit virtually. In both cases, it is as a congregation – not as individuals – that consecrated persons assess where the Spirit summons them to go. When it proceeds this way, the congregation incorporates the world within the spaces it legitimizes for its members. Done otherwise, the world remains nothing more than a place, disconnected from the engaging spaces of a congregation. *Inhabitation* considers the people “dwelling” within a congregation’s frontier who could benefit from its mission. In spite of the universal scope of Jesus’ mandate, many congregations generally tend to concentrate their mission within a subset of localized societies – determined by age, well-being, social status, etc. – or even the global village – determined by ethnicity, faith traditions, etc. – and in light of their historical origins. *Marginality* acknowledges that when a congregation determines its Frontier, it inadvertently constructs its margins. Even for those with boundless loci, there could be “moral” boundaries that they do not encourage their religious to cross. Awareness of the presence of these margins helps a congregation to discern its deeper call because it opens the eyes of its members to the existence of people beyond the Frontier. It can help these consecrated persons to determine and assess – both honestly and humbly – the limits of their compassion or impel them to push beyond or widen their determined Frontier and reach out to the people in these margins.

Vision clarifies a congregation’s aspiration for what its members may achieve as they involve themselves with the sufferings and apathy of the inhabitants of its Frontier. The coordinate enables the members not only to have a direction for their current ministries but also to behold possibilities for future congregational enterprises. However, this Vision could not and should not be reduced to a social enterprise. Because of the pneumatic origin of every religious congregation, Vision finds its origins in *kerygma*, the proclamation of the Good News of God’s saving activity in the life, teaching, death, and Resurrection of Jesus which is the “duty of the Church... always and everywhere.”¹³ As “those who have received the Good News... can and must communicate and spread it,”¹⁴ *kerygma* lies at the heart of *evangelization*, that process which seeks to announce the Gospel throughout the world, far or near. It should not be seen as adjunct or accidental to the work of a religious congregation, but rather as its “deepest identity,” the *raison d’être* for its very existence.¹⁵ Evangelization, then, is the very purpose of a congregation’s missionary activities (whether in a far-off country or a nearby high school classroom) and therefore inseparable from its Vision.

¹³ *Ubiqumque et Semper*, 21 September 2010, introduction.

¹⁴ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, §13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, see §14.

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Ministry refers to the congregational activities which actualize its Vision. Many religious persist in confusing congregational charism with congregational ministries. However good and socially beneficial are the works that a congregation undertakes, they do not – and should not – define the very essence of the congregation’s being. After taking into account the nine previous coordinates, a congregation would hopefully be better equipped to evaluate the validity of the ministries that its members are engaged in, determine what they could let go of, and open themselves to newer enterprises.

FRONTIER

Without a doubt, our brotherhood finds its roots in Ryken’s discernment of the Spirit’s directive to go *ad gentes* in America. It was borne out of his reading of a booklet in 1825 on Fr. Charles Neerinckx (1761-1824), a fellow Brabantian and missionary in Kentucky, and was deepened after his encounter and conversations with Fr. Friedrich Rese (1791-1871), a German missionary in Michigan and future bishop of Detroit, during his pilgrimage to Rome in 1827. It would be important to remember that Ryken, although enthused with the idea, declined Rese’s invitation to accompany him back to his mission because “he only wanted to go to America as a member of a religious community.”¹⁶ On returning to the Netherlands, however, he followed the unwelcomed advice of a priest to enter the Trappist monastery of Notre Dame d’Oelenberg in Reiningue (France). In spite of this, he never lost sight of the summons so that, after the monastery was dissolved by French authorities in September 1830, he heeded the counsel of the abbot of Mariastein “to go (as a layman) to America and to teach.”¹⁷ Ryken’s enthusiasm to go *ad gentes* could also be seen as his own willing participation in the revived missionary enterprises of the Catholic Church, which were being vigorously promoted by the newly elected Pope Gregory XVI (reigned 1831-46). Thus, one finds in his actions a clear response to Christ’s basic mission command to “go and teach all people.”

In March 1831, Ryken set sail for the first time to the United States of America. Acknowledged by universal law as a constitutional republic in 1783, the emerging country was then a new geographical frontier. In the 1830s it was still considered as a mission territory, part then of the margin of the Church at that time. Not long after arriving in New York, Ryken headed to what were then the western borders of this new frontier – the states of Ohio and Indiana and the incorporated territory of Michigan. Looking at where our Founder chose to bring the Good News, then, one would see that he situated himself at *the margin of the margins*. He chose not to settle in the civilized areas of eastern United States but in those parts that were still in need of development.

¹⁶ Archief Bisdom Brugge, C. 390, 1864, *Cahier N° 2*. Copy in CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 1.2.3.

¹⁷ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Ephrem van der Meulen, abbot of Oelenberg, Reiningue, 22 March 1853. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 1.1.4.

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Ryken entertained the notion of further expanding this locus once the congregation was established. He understood clearly that his sons would have to heed the summons to “go out to the world” just as he did. In the *Plan*, in fact, Ryken wrote about sending them “deeper into the wilderness”¹⁸ in order to do the work of God therein – not to go where civilization has already been established, but to where it had yet to be developed. Furthermore, there is sufficient evidence that he did not intend to limit the congregation to the United States. This was quite plain in the congregation’s earliest prospectus which unequivocally stated that he would not “admit any member who is not disposed to go to whatever country he will be sent.”¹⁹ Thus, Ryken understood that the Frontier set for his congregation would not be restricted to just one diocese, as it was for most diocesan congregations of brothers founded around the same time. What the Spirit was asking from his brothers was very clear to him: to stand ready and be willing to move beyond the comfortable borders of the country of one’s birth.

To emphasize this point, Ryken purposefully chose the name for his congregation. For Ryken Francis Xavier was not simply an intercessor for the brothers and a model of holiness. More importantly, his choice of patron was never meant to indicate that the spirituality of his brothers was to be rooted in the Ignatian tradition. In bearing the name of the missionary *par excellence*, Ryken hoped that his brothers would consistently remember the *ad gentes* directive of the Xaverian mission:

*The name of this insatiable laborer for souls will indicate, with one word, what is intended with the Congregation. According to his example one will not listen to this voice: “You can also do good here in this country.” Rather they would listen to this one: “Go throughout the world and teach all peoples.”*²⁰

He further punctuated the ecclesial and universal nature of this summons by stressing that the future of the congregation would lie in its fidelity to “laboring at the formation of a good and Christian coming generation for the whole Church.”²¹ (emphasis supplied) The congregation he founded, with its international membership from the very beginning, would not only be the first missionary congregation founded in Belgium but also the first congregation of brothers with an explicit *ad gentes* purpose.

The first and even second generation of brothers in the congregation clearly understood that they were consecrated men who were missioned *ad gentes*. Although the congregation has remained rather small, yet it is unique in being intentionally founded with a worldwide outreach.

¹⁸ Plan, §36.

¹⁹ *Congrégation de Saint François Xavier ou des frères dits Xavériens* (Sint-Truiden, ca.1841-42). CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 1.2.3.

²⁰ Plan, §67.

²¹ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Bishop Jan Baptist Malou, Brugge, 28 June 1854. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 3.5.1.3.

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The missionary demand on the brothers bordered on the heroic as shown in our first Constitution:

*The spirit of the members of the Congregation shall be a spirit of prayer, ordinariness, mortification, great zeal for souls, and, above all, an extraordinary obedience, which will dispose them to submit in all difficult circumstances and when sent on foreign missions.*²²

What is interesting is that the pioneer Brothers took this article of the first constitutions very seriously. When, for example, Brother John Segers received his first assignment sending him to the United States, there was for him no problem because he knew what was entailed in the vow of obedience he had embraced – a willingness to go wherever he was needed. Our early Brothers had a very spontaneous conviction: wherever they were being asked to go, they embraced the summons, even if it was painful to be uprooted from their homeland. That is not necessarily something that occurs today; but it is an interesting disposition to be aware of, a disposition that was in the very fiber of the consciousness of the early brothers.

There can be little doubt that in the Founder's lifetime the majority of the candidates joined the congregation because of its missionary character. It should be noted that the concept of "missionary" at that time embraced not only non-Christian lands but also remote areas where the Church was struggling to establish and consolidate itself in the face of Protestantism and indifferentism. Likewise, there was a decided militancy in the Catholic missionary enterprise, one that is most evident in Ryken's anti-Protestant diatribes. The American mission excited almost as much interest as Asia among European Catholics, a fact revealed in the reports of the *Annales* of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith. However, it is a good question how much the limitation to the "American mission" hampered the full development of the congregation's missionary identity.

There are times when we find ourselves wondering about the missed opportunities for the congregation to expand its Frontier. Thrice the brotherhood received invitations to go to Asia, and thrice we could not respond favorably because of lack of personnel (as in the invitation of Bishop Patrick Carew to go to the apostolic vicariate of Bengal in 1849²³) or administration in-fightings (as in two invitations in 1863 to go to Hong Kong²⁴ and Mumbai²⁵). When the Belgian, English, and American provinces were created in 1875, the missionary character of the Congre-

²² Constitution of the Congregation of St. Francis Xavier, 1846, art. §4.

²³ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Francis Xavier Dondorff, Langenhorst, 20 December 1849. *Copy boek der brieven*, 4: 411.

²⁴ Letter of Bishop Giovanni Raimondi, apostolic prefect of Hong Kong, 30 May 1863. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 3.5.2.4.1.

²⁵ Letters of Bishop Walter Steins, apostolic vicar of Bengal. 24 June 1863 and 09 June 1864. Archief Bisdom Brugge, C. 390. Copy in CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 1.2.3.

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gation for all practical purposes became inoperative. Each province concerned itself with its own internal development. Still, so long as the United States and Great Britain were mission territories of the Church, there was still a sense of congregational fidelity to the *ad gentes* directive. But all that changed with the promulgation of the Constitution *Sapienti Consilio* (29 June 1908) when these two Xaverian missions (as well as the Netherlands) ceased to be under the control of the Propaganda Fide. The congregation lost its missions in the process and reduced the meaning of the word to refer to the school assignment of the brothers. In the first article of the 1900 Constitutions, in fact, the phrase “even on foreign missions” from the 1846 Constitutions was dropped. These developments coincided with the Institutionalization of the congregation which saw the establishment of more schools but the loss of its *ad gentes* character.

Still, the Holy Spirit continued to remind the brothers of the original call transmitted to Ryken. This call irrupted most powerfully in late 1929 when Bro. Paul Scanlan initiated the mission to the Congo while reminding the brothers that “our work is to keep up the spirit of our holy Founder... that animated all his actions.” In 1931 the Belgian Province opened a mission in the Congo and sent out the first missionaries in more than half a century. Interestingly, the phrase “even on foreign mission” was substantially restored in Article 4 of the 1931 Constitutions approved by Rome. In 1949 the American Province opened its first foreign mission in Uganda and from there expanded its work to Kenya. In 1953 the English Province opened a mission in Nyasaland (present-day Malawi) which continued for eight years. In 1962, two years after the split of the American Province, the American Central Province opened a mission in Bolivia, leaving the East African field to the American Northeastern Province. In 1989, the congregation established its presence in Haiti; a year later, it did the same in present-day South Sudan. However, it remains to be seen whether or not the revival of interest in foreign missions reflects a conscious and determined effort to return to the congregation’s *ad gentes* vocation.

To whom are the brothers being sent by the Spirit? In his *Report*, Ryken indicated which particular “distressed souls in America” (*zielenood in America*) deserve the “worthy compassion” (*medelyden waardigen*) of each Brother who, like Jesus, would “give (his) life for the sheep” (*ik geef myn leven ten besten voor myne Schaapen*). In his own words:

Ons Plan is naamenthjk om eene Congregatie op te regten van Broeders die onder eene Relegeuzen Regel leven tot het opvoeden bezonder van Indiaane toch ook andere kindere de zelve op te leiden tot eene volmaakten Christene mensch daar onder begrepen het oude onderwijs in de letter konst studie opleiding tot den priester stand of Broeder voor deze Institut als ook in handwerken, ambagten, de landbouw, ezv. dienstig voor een mensch in de werelse saame leving.²⁶

[Our Plan is namely to establish a congregation of Brothers who live under a religious Rule for the education in particular of the Indian (child), yet also other chil-

²⁶ Report, par. 21.

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dren, to form them as perfect Christians, which training would include the teaching of literature, education for the priesthood or to become a Brother in this institute, also instruction in handicrafts, trades, agriculture, etc., all of which are useful for a man living in secular society.]

The specificity in Ryken's statement speaks much of the socio-religious culture of his times. Single-sex education was normative for much of the West during the early nineteenth century. And even when coeducation became more and more acceptable, it mostly remained a taboo in Catholic primary and secondary education until the 1970s. In all likelihood, the Founder's plan was swayed by his reading of Nerinckx's letter concerning the need for "a religious community of laymen who would commit themselves to the education of young men and boys, especially orphans and those belonging to the lower classes"²⁷ in the American mission. But in choosing to situate himself in the margin of the margins, Ryken became far more attentive to the audacious design of the Spirit for the congregation he would found.

It was clear to Ryken from the onset that the congregation's special predilection was the Native Americans. His brothers were called by the Spirit to mission to peoples who at that time (and until now) experienced discrimination and powerlessness, even terrorism. It is worth noting that the Founder's predilection was for a people whose annihilation was called for by "the Dean of American letters" of that century:

The extermination of the red savages of the plains should take place soon enough to save (the) peaceful and industrious people whom they have harassed for hundreds of years.... The red man... is a hideous demon, whose malign traits can hardly inspire any emotion softer than abhorrence.²⁸

This is a very important point for consideration as we try to appropriate this predilection in the third millennium. Despite the mistakes he committed in the process, Ryken DID mission among one of the most discriminated sectors of American society and accepted the physical and social risks it had entailed. To choose to throw one's lot with their children, according to Ryken, is "but the presentation of the best of all goods to the weakest and most defenseless of all people, and

²⁷ "Zyne hoogw. onzen Bisschop (Benoît Joseph Flaget) begeirt en aenzoekt, dat het instituet ook in 't werk gelegd werd voor de jongmans en knegtjens, door het opregten eener geestelyke gemeynte van mans, die aenhoudelyk beneerstigen zoude de opvoedinge van het mannegeslagt, bezonderlyk der gemeyne classen en weezen, die meermaels door gebrek van dezen middel verhindert worden van voordeeligh te wezen aen Staet en Kerk." *Nagelaten brief van den weleerw. Heer Carolus Nerinckx*, ('s Gravenhage: 1825), 11.

²⁸ William Dean Howells, "A Sennight of the Centennial," *Atlantic Monthly* 38 (July 1876): 103.

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this through a motion of perfect love that goes together with inconceivable pain and difficulty.”²⁹ To him, the call “to mission among the poor and the marginalized”³⁰ was no empty rhetoric.

It should be noted that Ryken-the-young-visionary (as opposed to Ryken-the-rigid-adult) demonstrated a degree of flexibility with regard to the marginality of the congregational Frontier. True, he clearly specified that the brothers would primarily evangelize Native American children and youth. However, he had also envisaged the possibility of extending their work to older individuals, regardless of ethnicity: “They will teach the adult Indians to lead a Christian life, and... instruct the civilized people who are living in the woods at a great distance from a church.”³¹ In his early years in power, Ryken still showed a capacity for pliability, even beyond physical margins. Ryken was drawn to Father van Beek’s forward-looking ministry to the deaf-mute. He envisioned his Brothers conveying the Word of God to those who could not physically hear it. There were several Brothers who actually went to Father van Beek’s institute in order to learn sign language and his pedagogical techniques. To whichever group the Brothers are sent, Ryken insisted that the Brothers must have “a capacity for learning foreign languages” so they can effectively communicate with the people they will serve.³² Judging by weakness in his own skills, Ryken may not have expected that his brothers perfectly master the language of the people they serve. What mattered for him is that they could go beyond the language barrier and, through their works, convey efficiently the Good News.

The preceding discussion does not imply that Ryken – and indeed his first followers – showed total readiness to push further the margins of the congregation. The quest for Legitimation prevented our early predecessors from breaking away completely from mentalities accepted in both church and society. At the First General Chapter held in 1869, an interesting debate arose among the delegates after Bro. Peter Klyberg, superior of Louisville, revealed “that the ecclesiastics of the town had recently insisted that the Brothers be allowed to prepare black girls for first Holy Communion which he had permitted conditionally.”³³ While there were those that favored it, “many (were) against it” because it would violate the restrictive provision in the 1841 Rule that “the aim of the congregation is to promote...the salvation of souls, especially of children of the male sex.”³⁴ The debate produced a clear mandate: the Brothers were to minister to boys only.

The Founder himself, despite many insights that can be rightly called farsighted, was captive to the anti-Protestant sentiments of many Dutch Catholics. The extremeness of his position could

²⁹ Plan, § 55.

³⁰ Calls of the 24th General Chapter (24 July - 6 August 1995). CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 3.1.25.2.

³¹ Plan, §10.

³² Ibid., §17.

³³ Minutes of the First General Chapter (5-11 August 1869). CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 3.1.2.

³⁴ Rules of the Brothers of St. Francis Xavier, 1841, art. 1.

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be seen in his uncharitable and injudicious dealings with the Lutheran family of one of our first brothers. Julius Schröder had just converted to Catholicism when he became a candidate in September 1852. On receiving the habit on the feast of St. Francis Xavier, he took the name Celestinus. Ryken did not allow him to communicate to his brother and widowed mother, even chiding a Catholic relative for writing harshly to the novice:

I was amazed that you, a Catholic, wrote the way you did.... How can you threaten Julius with the curse of his mother because he is not writing to her.... The ecclesiastic who accepted Julius into the Catholic Church... prohibited him to write to his mother, and I think that this was prudent.... If Julius' mother were a Catholic, writing to her could be allowed to some extent... but now I see a danger in such correspondence.³⁵

Celestinus may have been sick at the time Ryken wrote that letter because he was allowed to make profession *in articulo mortis* in May 1853. He died not long after on 29 June 1853, at the age of 22. But the bigger tragedy is that Ryken did not inform the Schröder family of his death until two years later! When he finally did write to Mrs. Schröder, he excused himself by saying that “I was not in possession of your address and found it rather difficult to get it.” Quite unbelievably, Ryken did not express a single word of sympathy for her grief. Instead he wrote a lengthy attack against Martin Luther and ended his correspondence with “the hope that someday God will grant you, and your whole family, the grace to become Roman Catholics and to join the true church after which Julius longed so much.”³⁶

We may find ourselves consoled with the fact that later generations of brothers would respond to the Spirit's inspiration better than Ryken and our early brothers. Our Brothers in Bury and Manchester served and taught the poor, whether they were Catholic or not, and gave a witness to their faith by their way of life. The Brothers in Mount Saint Joseph College provided formal education to the Oblate Sisters of Providence with clear knowledge that they were violating the “Jim Crow” laws of Maryland. Not that long ago, several of our Brothers openly showed their care and solidarity for students discriminated against for their sexual orientation. But if one digs deeper into congregational and cultural issues, there are actually some margins that we are still afraid of crossing. Sometimes some of us would say, “Oh, let's not go there!” By reacting thus, we are preserving margins. But it would be important to ask: “Why are we not going there?” If we are being sent out into the world, why do we feel that we are not supposed to cross certain margins? This is a valid question to ask. Its answer would demand prayerful, prudent, and collaborative discernment.

VISION

³⁵ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Mr. (?) Schröder, Münster, 07 February 1853. *Copy boek der brieven*, 5: 418.

³⁶ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to the Widow Mrs. Schröder, Brandenburg an der Havel, 02 June 1855. *Copy boek der brieven*, 6: 188.

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A search for the Xaverian Vision during the founding period would end up in an articulation that nineteenth-century congregations commonly held – the salvation of souls. The phrase could be found all over our foundational documents and preconiliar constitutions and manuals. Upset at the ability of New York Presbyterians to house and educate wayward children, including those baptized as Catholics, Ryken complained that “if we were not lacking money and people, we could do similar things in order to save these innocent sheep from losing their souls.” Earlier on, he lamented: “Oh! How many thousands of children die without Baptism!”³⁷ Captive to a certain eschatological worldview, the Founder and most preconiliar Catholics were convinced that salvation was at stake for both the unbaptized and lapsed since outside the church there was none - *extra ecclesiam non salus*. In this eschatological vision, the end of a consecrated person’s ministry was not the present well-being of the ones he served but their deliverance from eternal damnation:

To save souls, to preserve them from the fire of hell, is the strongest proof that we love our neighbor. To save souls ought to be the business of life. It was to save souls that Our Lord came down from heaven. It was to save souls that he established His Church. It was to save souls that the saints, the religious, the clergy of every age and time, made so many sacrifices, and still make them, even suffering martyrdom for it-self.³⁸

Thus, in his *Plan*, Ryken indicated that “the only purpose of the Congregation is to promote the salvation of souls.”³⁹

Significant changes from both outside (in theology and society) and within (through renewed collective consciousness and altered demographics) periodically impel a congregation’s members to articulate the Vision in a manner suitable to the time. As a result, a congregation tends not to merely reiterate the Vision articulated during the Founding period. However, it is important that its present articulation should disclose further the Pneumatic dimension of the charism. To do so, it would be important to read more closely and critically the writings of the Founder. Although he did not fully grasp or actualize the Spirit’s deeper summonses for his congregation, Ryken may have captured, albeit peripherally, the essence of this deeper call.

In spite of a limited formal education – or perhaps because of it – Ryken exhibited an acute sensitivity to pedagogical issues. Not long after he “put himself at the service of God” as a catechist in Nieuwkuijk, he observed that “children did not grasp or understand anything from that

³⁷ Report, par. 5.

³⁸ Brothers of the Christian Schools, *Catechism Lessons on Vocation* (New York: La Salle Bureau, 1920), 212.

³⁹ Plan, § 18.

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which was taught to them in a mechanical way.”⁴⁰ In later years, he encountered the same problem in Brugge and lamented about it to church authorities:

It seems to me that the children are not thoroughly instructed by mechanical memorizing for which a horse’s effort is needed in order to obtain some results. Pastors usually leave this slavish labor to the so-called Chapel Ladies, who hammer these texts into the children in a disgusting way, leaving neither time nor place for the perception and understanding of these valuable truths. I feel that this is most harmful for a more thorough knowledge of the truths of religion.... Because of this slavish memorizing, the children become disgusted with Christian instruction – a feeling that perhaps will remain throughout their lives.⁴¹

Ryken’s insights reveal that he possessed an organic intelligence despite his economic and educational deprivation. On becoming aware of the grace given him, he developed it by poring over works of pedagogues like Fr. Bernhard Overberg (1754-1826) and learning methods employed in Belgian, English, and German schools. However, Ryken sensed that the Spirit was asking more than simply rectifying flawed teaching methods. He felt that something in these children needed stirring: “Their intelligence is sleeping and becomes incapable of fathoming these beautiful truths (of the faith), and this is most regrettable for their future and consequently, for Christianity.”⁴² Awakened by the grace of God to his graced potentials, the Founder hoped that those to whom he and his brothers missioned would ultimately come in touch with their own giftedness. Ryken did not want the people in the congregational Frontier to be dependent upon the brothers. The brothers would form and enable them to discover and develop their personal charisms. Once they had, Ryken hoped that those the brothers served would eventually stand on their own ground and contribute in their own way to the on-going work of evangelization.

It is not only the “sleeping” gifts of the people of the Frontier that Ryken believed should be brought to the fore. He believed that his brothers would also be at the service of God if they were in touch with the gifts with which He had graced them. Thus, in his *Plan* and early actions as General Superior, Ryken showed concern for the religious and professional training of his brothers. He did not hesitate to disburse their limited finances in order to send them to normal schools and to purchase pedagogical references for them to read. However, as discussed in an earlier paper, he believed that the realization of each brother’s personal charisms should take place within the milieu of a community and in the company of supportive and engaged brothers. While he desired the individuation of the brothers, Ryken refused to allow their detachment from the life of

⁴⁰ Autobiography. CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 1.1.1.

⁴¹ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Msgr. Joannes Scherpereel, vicar-general, Brugge, 15 May 1856. Archief Bisdom Brugge, C. 390, 15 May 1856.

⁴² Ibid.

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the congregation, even if it were for the purpose of fully discovering, developing, or employing their personal charisms. This for him was a *conditio sine qua non*.

In our days, church authorities, congregational leaders, and members themselves hold that the complete dedication of a religious to his work “for the people” justifies separation from his bigger community. Beneath this rationalization, however, is the belief that functionality outweighs spirituality. Foreseeing the “great danger of losing sight” of spirituality in apostolic activities, Ryken enjoined that

it be well established, by the Constitution... that the Brothers have sufficient time left for their own perfection and spiritual exercises, and therefore not undertake any new house or mission unless it is possible to do so according to the above established way. This is indeed an important item, which should be given special attention.... One should refrain from starting a new mission if one wants to avoid destroying the whole Congregation and perhaps promoting the loss of souls rather than their salvation. Since this is so, one should quote important arguments which should convince those who would try to disaffect us from this viewpoint. By humble petitions we should request the spiritual authorities, to whom it belongs to change our Constitution, not to make any change with regard to this item, not even under the pretext of doing good or of whatever necessity there may be.⁴³

In the Founder’s vision of the life, the brothers fully understand that they are not only missionaries, but that, above all, they are religious. First and foremost, they were to be religious and then, and only then, missionaries proclaiming the Gospel to those to whom the Spirit sends them. To be religious meant that one would be dedicated to the ongoing development of his own interior spiritual life through prayer and contemplation. Habitual interfacing with God, his transcendent Source of life and love, would enable him to be an authentic and effective missionary. In a word, the emphasis of Ryken was on personal religious formation. As long as he is alive, a Xaverian Brother seriously pursues his formation as a consecrated man more than as a professional.

He also challenged each brother to develop into what one might term “a good community man.” He commits himself to the growth and development of community life through active and loving engagement with those with whom he lived.⁴⁴ Hopefully, such engagement in community-building would result in the cultivation of good, Christ-like friendships among the brothers, not only within the local community, but also within the broader community of the congregation, and beyond:

⁴³ Scheme, 10th and 11th means.

⁴⁴ “Religious life...continues the mission of Christ with another feature specifically its own: fraternal life in community for the sake of the mission. Thus, men and women religious will be all the more committed to the apostolic life the more personal their dedication to the Lord Jesus is, the more fraternal their community life, and the more ardent their involvement in the institute’s specific mission.” *Vita Consecrata*, § 72.

X A V E R I A N M I S S I O N

Cultivate a sincere friendship
and a warm affection for your brothers,
for it is in the manifestation
of honest fraternal concern and love for each other
that you and they will show
you are sons of Ryken and disciples of Jesus.⁴⁵

Brothers who continually attempt to integrate prayer and contemplation with growth in friendship within community and are on fire with Spirit-driven apostolic zeal would be powerful, mission-oriented witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The integration of these elements was essential.

The preceding discussions show that graced giftedness lies at the center of the congregational Vision. Ryken saw the intertwining of its awareness and development in both the brothers and the people they serve as vital “means” for realizing the Spirit’s summonses to the congregation:

The first means is that the brothers forcefully work at their own perfection, for how will they inflame others if they themselves are not afire? Indeed, one usually produces that which is similar to oneself.

The second is that the members are in possession of such knowledge that goes together with the zeal of teaching others the first principles of the Christian religion and that, besides this, they have the ability to educate children in the ways of virtue.

The third means is that the members have knowledge of the language of the people they have to educate;

The fourth means is that the Brothers have the necessary capacities to guide the Indians and their children, so that they can learn how to work for their own livelihood. By doing so, they will also help them to lead a regular life, to assure the salvation of their souls and to render their conversion more stable.

(The fifth means is that) the Brothers should also have such capacities that they can provide the house with temporal means.

Although these means are nearly all interconnected, yet the first numbered is of a more lofty nature and more efficacious to reach the proposed goal, while the others are less necessary.⁴⁶

The Fundamental Principles rewove these counsels of the Founder in a language and mentality appropriate for the postconciliar Church. In so doing, it encapsulated the congregational Vision in this manner:

⁴⁵ Fundamental Principles.

⁴⁶ Plan, § 18-19.

X A V E R I A N M I S S I O N

Your Founder's vision was unique.
He intended to form a community of laymen
who, as religious brothers,
would be sent as missionaries to the world.
As vowed members of the people of God,
sealed in baptism and confirmed by the Holy Spirit,
they would participate
in the Church's mission of evangelization
through a life of gospel service
lived in solidarity and availability
among the people.

It is through your life of gospel witness
lived in community with others
that God desires to manifest
care and compassionate love
to those who are separated and estranged,
not only from their neighbors,
but also from their own uniqueness;
to those who suffer
from want, neglect, and injustice:
the poor, the weak, and the oppressed
of this world.

They too are called
to experience,
express,
and share
the love of God with the world
through their own giftedness.⁴⁷

MINISTRY

Ryken firmly believed that the best way to bring out the giftedness in an individual was through education. During his two years of mission work, he came to the conclusion that the "great loss of souls" in the United States would come about through "the education in particular of the Indian (child), yet also other children" who would produce "excellent good... in the envi-

⁴⁷ Fundamental Principles.

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ronment in which they will live in later years, in particular among their parents and relatives.”⁴⁸ Before embarking for his second sojourn to the United States, he reiterated his conviction that the need of its church was “best provided for by promoting the religious education of youth” and that it was “the more powerful means to form (there) a flourishing Christianity.”⁴⁹ Later on, he elucidated further:

If education is so great before God, so useful to the Church, and so good in itself in countries where the young have so many teachers and other spiritual help, what shall it be to perform this in a land where they are nearly deprived of help..... How much more agreeable will it, then, be to God, and how more perfectly will it fulfill the desire of our Mother, the Holy Church, to offer our help where it is most required and where there is a greater need.⁵⁰

But things did not work out according to Ryken’s original plans. In 1838, the Jesuits in Missouri refused to cooperate in the project of a “strange fellow” who is “quite a fanatic and has a strong imagination,” “loves to be flattered, full of his own person, very little mortified, addicted to the bottle and to the joys of a good table – a man who gets angry and upset as soon as he is contradicted.”⁵¹ At the beginning of the following year, assured of the possibility of working with Bishop Joseph Rosati of Saint Louis, Ryken paraphrased the proposal for his incipient congregation:

The purpose is to establish a Congregation of laymen... (who) will devote themselves in particular to the children of the male sex, and among those especially to orphans and the deaf and dumb. As to the first named, they will work at their education by religious instruction and by teaching them handicrafts, arts and languages so that these children will be given back to the Church, the religious state or society as perfect Christians; by the same token Christianity will be sanctified and improved through them. As to the second named, they too should become good Christians and be given to society or to the Institute. Moreover, they will apply themselves to the teaching of catechism to other children, also in schools, and give religious instruction to prisoners, here in Europe as well as in other countries, but especially in America in those places where this can be done.⁵²

Historical circumstances and missed opportunities unfortunately caused the shelving of the American project. The brothers were not fazed and, until it could become a reality, they actual-

⁴⁸ Report, par. 21-22.

⁴⁹ Plan, §1.

⁵⁰ Ibid., §58-59.

⁵¹ Letter of Pierre Jean De Smet, Saint Louis, to Auguste Gilliodts, Brugge, March 1838, Archief van de Jezuieten, Noord-Belgische Provincie, Brussels. Copy in CFX Generalate Archives, KADOC (Leuven), 1.1.5.

⁵² Scheme, introduction.

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ized the Founding vision in the most accepted and conventional manner. On 12 July 1843, they entered into the field of regular teaching with the modest opening of the Xaverian free infant school (*xaveriaanse bewaarschool*) at Het Walletje to educate disadvantaged boys, aged two to six, from the parish of Sint-Gillis. Nearly five years later, the brothers began their first overseas mission in England, largely as a preparation for future work in America. On 1 May 1848 they opened a grammar school at the Parish of Sainte Marie in the cotton mill town of Bury to educate the sons of poor Irish immigrants. Finally, Bishop Spalding of Louisville invited the brothers on 11 August 1854, and five days later they opened grammar schools in the parishes of St. Patrick (for the sons of poor Irish immigrants) and the Immaculate Conception (for the sons of poor German immigrants). However, by the time the Founder realized his dream to send missionaries to America, the landscape has changed. The expansionist policies of the American government drove the Native Americans farther into the West. Meanwhile, the massive flow of Irish and German immigrants to America (as well as of Irish immigrants to England) in the mid-1840s created one of the great needs of the Church in the nineteenth century and determined the shape of the congregation's ministry. Throughout most of the nineteenth century the typical Xaverian school in both England and America was the primary school in the immigrant parish.

Ryken showed deep concern with the regular classroom work of his brothers. He held schools in extremely great esteem since he saw in them adequate means for the realization of his stated purposes: "the religious education of youth", the formation of "perfect Christians", and the promotion of "a flourishing Christianity". Some of his contemporaries describe Ryken himself as a most talented teacher and they underline the fact that, in spite of his duties as general superior and his many travels, he used to visit the classrooms frequently and assiduously. Extensive references could be produced about the ways he tried to improve the methods of his brothers, the travel he undertook for that purpose, his interest in books and reviews dealing with education, etc. Sadly, the interest for an adequate training of the candidates dwindled away as the Legitimation period proceeded. The need for brothers to staff the increasing number of schools went hand in hand with the desire for ecclesiastical approval for the congregation's existence. Thus, with little or no formation at all, young Xaverians were assigned to classrooms. And the situation unfortunately prevailed long beyond Ryken's term as general superior. Fortunately, Bro. Isidore Kuppel directly addressed the issue during his term as provincial (1907-25) by insisting on the professional training of the brothers in America and the expansion of their work in secondary schools.

In the *Scheme*, Ryken explicitly provided that his brothers "will restrict themselves to... teaching or similar educational work" and "will not devote themselves to the service of the sick, the insane or old men," in the narrow sense of custodial assistance.⁵³ However, while he viewed schools as the most effective means to realize his vision, he viewed the congregation's educational ministry rather broadly. From the beginning, Ryken had envisaged the possibility of ex-

⁵³ Ibid.

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tending educational services to adults. He even underlined the need for a well-organized form of “social life” as a necessary basis for a “flourishing Christianity.” He hoped that his brothers would contribute to this, even by the “construction of houses and the (material) formation of villages.”⁵⁴ Ryken also considered – albeit theoretically – engagement in direct catechetical work, adult education, and educational activities with a conspicuous social dimension – as in the case of the social project for Brugge during the Years of Hunger to which he gave heartfelt support. It was not always his fault when they did not materialize. Direct catechetical work outside the classroom was the very first apostolic activity the brothers undertook in Brugge. The brothers integrated this catechetical work to *sodalities* – a kind of youth movement which has developing into modern forms in our days – which they also organized. The early brothers also dedicated much of their energy to adult education, even among prisoners, particularly in evening and Sunday schools conducted in England. As for educational activities with a social purpose, the most striking example would be the rather utopian project which Ryken shared with Father van Beek, for the creation of Catholic agricultural cooperatives. His proposed collaboration with the projects of the Redemptorists in establishing “St. Mary’s Colony” in Pennsylvania in 1845 and of the German association *Bonifatiuswerk* in 1851 were other expressions of Ryken’s sensitivity and response to the “need of his times in the Church.”⁵⁵ Although consumed with realizing the American mission, Ryken still had his eyes on the needs in Europe as seen in his attempts to establish several types of schools (e. g. schools for deaf-mutes, normal schools, trade schools) in Belgium and Germany.

However, by focusing so much energy on the American mission, Ryken was undoubtedly responsible to a great extent for the subsequent failure of the congregation to move beyond schools. The ministry the brothers exercised in America differed in no way from that of the many other teaching communities that came to the country in the nineteenth century, congregations that made no claim to being missionary. Likewise, the congregation’s subsequent development not only in America but also in England and Belgium differed little from teaching brotherhoods without an *ad gentes* orientation. This is perhaps the principal reason for the “identity crisis” that has arisen in our history. It might be argued that in a negative sense an “alien” element crept into the congregation when the separate provinces turned in upon themselves and concentrated upon their own development and expansion.

Nonetheless, Ryken’s deeper pedagogical and social concerns were directed towards the needs of the whole Church. These needs were, of course, different from those of today. Present-day social awareness cannot forego such universal issues as the problems of hunger, violence, war and peace, and an active co-responsibility in environmental and ecological questions. Xaverians are, hopefully, still flexible enough to adapt themselves once again, extending their

⁵⁴ Plan, §34.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, §1.

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attention and efforts to all the educational needs of today's industrialized and technological society as well as to those who may be victims of our sophisticated modern way of life.


Once there was a debate among pedagogues in the United States concerning the root of the word *education*. Some say that "education" comes from the Latin word *educare*, which signifies *to instruct* or *to nourish*. Others would argue that it derived from *educere*, meaning *to lead out*.⁵⁶ Most pedagogues would say that education is about both. We educate when we are instructing people as well as leading them out from ignorance to enlightenment. We are educators not because we have mastered a vast amount of knowledge but because we continue to be awed by realizations about ourselves and the world around us. We are awed by our graced being, by our individual giftedness and that of others. Throughout our life we will discover more and more the depths of our giftedness and behold our gifts with the disposition of awe. Seeing our gifts with arrogance will prevent us from actually and effectively sharing the transcendent roots of that giftedness with others. We will be doing things just for ourselves, just for our own recognition.

It is true that it is easier to become an educator when one is in a classroom setting. But can we not become educators in other ministries? For example, could brothers called to work as animators of basic Christian communities or as healthcare workers also become educators? The decline in the number of the brothers, entrustment of Xaverian schools to lay administrators, and deeper sensitivity to and acceptance of the congregation's *ad gentes* vocation have brought about a collective willingness to explore ways of becoming educators beyond the classroom setting. When we take into consideration some of the ministries that we are being called to, perhaps these two questions could help us in our assessment:

- 1) In the ministry I feel called and competent to do, where does education take place?
- 2) How does this ministry reflect the congregational Vision which the Spirit continually invites us to realize in response to "the need of the times in the Church"?

⁵⁶ Robin Barrow and Ronald George Woods, *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 115.

CONCLUSION

 n embarking in this journey to our roots, our past – remote and proximate – reappeared before us – times of exultation and times of despair, moments of hope and anger, crises and crossroads, partial failures and successes. When we behold these glimpses of the past in anamnesis, we begin to see how they are interconnected with the deeper narrative of the brotherhood... and perhaps this interconnection begins to show us what our past and present are for, the deeper calling within them, and what our outstanding future as a brotherhood could be. Thus we gradually discover that our life has been going somewhere, however unaware we have been to its direction and however unhelpful to it we ourselves may have been. We find in anamnesis a connective thread that has been forming beneath the surface of our lives, revealing the congregational charism that has been trying to establish itself in our existence.

We Xaverians are sons (and daughters) of a man who beheld within him – once and continually – the crucible of human experience: certainty and uncertainty of one’s deeper calling; fidelity and infidelity to one’s resolution; satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the real.

Brother Ryken came to an awareness of a life direction for him (and his followers) – the non-dichotomized life of Martha and Mary, the *ghemeyne leven* – and aspired to achieve that lofty purpose. Incarnating that aspiration occurred, however, within the ground of his graced humanity. It was an “ordinary” graced humanity in two ways: (1) self-determined to be without privilege and entitlement, and (2) open to the constant yet quiet irruptions of God in the unspectacular flow of daily life.

The first way to ordinariness was a resolution he took on. It was difficult to make, but Ryken resolved to take it with “single intention”; the second way to ordinariness was the mystery he would be summoned to turn toward through all his life. It was difficult to make but Ryken was undoubtedly self-disposed to stand ready before the inscrutability of God’s ways and to rest in adoring them: “*O Heere, ik kan Uw wegen niet begrypen, maar moet die aanbidden.* (O Lord, I cannot understand your ways, but I must adore them.)”¹

The (com)passionate fire of the Spirit which beguiled Ryken would be actualized over time by ordinary men like him. By living the vowed life in communities centered around the Word and worship of God, freely choosing an ordinary life that foregoes privilege and entitlement, and turning constantly toward God, these men would become a band of brothers in touch with and responsible for their giftedness and transformed into common men who would lead truly contemplative lives and who would mission beyond their comfortable worlds, locate themselves at the margin of the margins, and form the inhabitants of these margins to discover their own giftedness.

¹ Letter of T.J. Ryken, Brugge, to Marie-Jeanne de Knyff, baroness d’Osy, Deurne, 20 September 1843. *Copy boek der brieven*, 1: 4.

The six men who helped Brother Ryken realize the Spirit's deeper summonses and persevered in the Life to the end were unmistakably ordinary as he was. In 1855, Joannes Baptista Broeders (the former Brother Nicolaus) wrote the following assessments on each of them:

Br. Alphonsus (the 39 year old Belgian Dieudonné Tomballe)... He was born of well-to-do parents... For some time he was the Superior of our house in England. At present he is director of the boarding section in Nieuwstraat, Bruges, and full-time teacher in the second highest class of that same school. He is endowed with a good intellect, an extraordinary memory and great prudence. However, he is melancholic and faint-hearted. In general he approaches everything with apprehension and he hardly dares to undertake anything. He has a reasonable knowledge of teaching and education. He also has a relatively good command of the French, Flemish and English languages as well as of the method for the instruction of deaf-mutes. On the other hand his pronunciation is not clear, because of his weak chest.

Br. James (the 38 year old Dutchman Petrus Joseph Antonius Schmitt)... He is of average intellect, gifted with a very good memory and, in general, well educated. He has little courage and looks at the dark side of things. It is hard for him to overcome difficulties and he needs support and encouragement in all circumstances. He has a good command of the Flemish language and knows French and English relatively well. Moreover, he is very capable in drawing, mathematics, bookkeeping, etc. Unfortunately, he is not talented for the instruction of children. His vocation is firm. He is very pious and has a good spirit. The only problem is that he is easily upset because of his melancholic character.

Brother John (the 33 year old Belgian Leopold Franciscus Segers)... He is in charge of the junior classes, has a relatively good intelligence, an average memory, and is highly gifted for dealing with children. He is gentle, but obstinate and sticks to his opinion. He has a profound inclination for piety, loves prayer and has a great zeal for the salvation of souls but wants to do things his own way.

Brother Paul (the 36 year old Dutchman Martinus Van Gerwen)... He served in England before being assigned as the Superior in America. By nature he is gifted with a good intellect but he has neither a penetrating judgment nor presence of spirit. His memory is good and his temperament is very gentle. He has little formal education but great capability for a large number of subjects. He is strongly attached to his own opinion and cannot easily be brought to change his mind. He is very concerned with economy. This makes the situation painful for those who are subject to him since he hardly gives them what they need. He really is not well fit for being a superior because he has no compassion with the weaknesses of others and is inexperienced in the guidance of souls.

Brother Stanislaus (the 38 year old Belgian Peter Lucas)... At present he is the Superior in England and teaches the intermediate class. Of average intellect, he has a

good memory and an excellent teaching method. He is very gentle and is well liked by everybody. In the church it is he who plays the organ. He also gives lessons of chant to the children. He has a great zeal for souls, but is absent-minded, has little courage and no common sense.

Brother Ignatius (the 39 year old Dutchman Antonius Melis)... He has an average intellect, a good memory and much zeal for further study. He already spent 6 years in England, where he taught the senior class. At present he is in charge of the highest classes in the English school in America. He is very punctual, even scrupulous. He is afraid and hesitant in everything. This is the major reason why he was not appointed as superior in a branch house. Thanks to his efforts he became quite capable in English, mathematics and geometry, etc., but his knowledge of religion and history is really outstanding. He is very pious and patient. He possesses a very good spirit, but he is too punctual and must be guided in everything like a child.

It is with these ordinary men that we, present-day sons (and daughters) of Ryken, find our life narratives intertwined. From their stories and of the men who followed them – those whose memories we continually bless as well as those whose memories are continual warnings – we find the reasons for what we have become today as a congregation. What was true for our predecessors is true for us too, for we remain that band of brothers summoned by the Spirit to go out to the world, crossing boundaries, widening frontiers, educating within spaces both familiar and unknown. Their history, thus, is our on-going story....

