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CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CALL OF THE SERVANT
OF GOD RFC MASCARENHAS AND THE CHARISMATIC LIFE
OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS OF THE EXTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
ABBREVIATIONS	ix
GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1

CHAPTER THREE

MSGR. RAYMOND FRANCIS CAMILLUS MASCARENHAS: A MESSENGER OF GOD’S COMPASSION

INTRODUCTION.....	9
3.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CITY OF MANGALORE.....	10
3.2. A MILIEU OF THE FAMILY OF MSGR. RAYMOND	12
3.3. A BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE	13
3.4. THE INSPIRATION TO PLANT BETHANY	16
3.5. SPIRITUALITY AND SENSE OF MISSION	18
3.5.1. <i>Msgr. Raymond: A Contemplative Missionary</i>	19
3.5.1.1. Msgr. Raymond: A Man of Prayer	19
3.5.1.2. Man of Undaunted Faith.....	22
3.5.1.3. Drawn to the Mystery of Incarnation	25
3.5.1.4. The Eucharist: The Core of Msgr. Raymond’s Spirituality	27
3.5.1.5. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.....	30
3.5.1.6. The Patron Saints.....	33
3.5.1.7. Compassionate Endurance in Suffering	36
3.5.2. <i>Mission of Msgr. Raymond: A Compassionate Act</i>	40
3.5.2.1. A Compassionate Pastor.....	40
3.5.2.2. A Man of God for the Kingdom of God.....	44
3.5.2.3. An Educationist	47
3.5.2.4. An Advocate of Social Advancement	51

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

3.5.2.5. A Comforter of the Afflicted.....	55
3.5.2.6. A Compassionate Spiritual Father.....	58
3.6. A MYSTIC AND PROPHET.....	61
CONCLUSION.....	64

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPASSION AS THE CHARISMATIC HALLMARK OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE OF “THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY”

INTRODUCTION.....	67
4.1. THE CHARISM OF THE BETHANY CONGREGATION.....	68
4.1.1. <i>Bethany’s Charism and Spirituality: The Symphony of Three Models.....</i>	71
4.1.1.1. Lived Compassionate Fiat of Blessed Virgin Mary	71
4.1.1.2. Life Surrounded by Love: St. Therese, The Little Flower .	74
4.1.1.3. Compassionate Friendship at Bethany Family in the Gospels.....	76
4.2. MEANS TO GROW IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.....	77
4.2.1. <i>Evangelical Counsels: Path to Live the Charism</i>	78
4.2.1.1. Consecrated Chastity	79
4.2.1.2. Evangelical Poverty.....	81
4.2.1.3. Redemptive Obedience.....	83
4.2.2. <i>Life of Prayer: Growing in Compassionate Love</i>	85
4.2.3. <i>Eucharist: Core of Compassion.....</i>	87
4.2.4. <i>Fraternal Life in Community: A Sign of God’s Compassionate Love</i>	89
4.2.5. <i>Formation: A Configuration unto Christ.....</i>	92
4.3. CONCRETE WAYS OF LIVING COMPASSION: APOSTOLATES	94
4.3.1. <i>Pastoral Care: An Art of Faith Formation</i>	95
4.3.1.1. Pastoral Care Within the Family	97

TABLE OF CONTENTS OF THE EXTRACT

4.3.1.2.	Home mission.....	100
4.3.2.	<i>Transformative Education for the Fullness of Life</i>	102
4.3.2.1.	Boarding Homes: A Home of Love	105
4.3.3.	<i>Care for the sick and the Aged</i>	107
4.3.3.1.	Healing Ministry: A Compassionate Touch	108
4.3.3.2.	Home for the Senior Citizens: Care for the Aged and the Dying.....	110
4.3.4.	<i>Social Apostolate</i>	113
4.3.4.1.	Women Empowerment: A Compassionate Act.....	114
4.3.4.2.	Compassionate Embrace to the Victims of Women- Trafficking.....	116
4.3.4.3.	Compassionate Assistance to the Migrants	119
4.3.4.4.	Prison Ministry: Compassionate Listening to Those behind the Bars.....	122
4.4.	BETHANY LAY ASSOCIATION: PARTNERS IN THE LIFE OF BETHANY	124
4.5.	CHALLENGES IN LIVING THE CHARISMATIC IDENTITY OF BETHANY SISTERS	127
4.5.1.	<i>Prayer Life</i>	128
4.5.2.	<i>Evangelical Counsels</i>	128
4.5.3.	<i>Formation</i>	129
4.5.4.	<i>Community Life</i>	129
4.5.6.	<i>Compassion in the Mission</i>	130
4.6.	OPPORTUNITIES AND PROPOSALS TO LIVE THE CHARISMATIC IDENTITY OF COMPASSION	131
4.6.1.	<i>Deepen the Divine Joy and Mercy</i>	131
4.6.2.	<i>A Missionary-Disciple Community</i>	133
4.6.3.	<i>Transformative Formation: To Grow unto the Image of Christ</i>	135

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

4.6.4. <i>Compassionate Missionaries in the Style of Msgr. Raymond</i>	136
4.6.5. <i>Ecological Dimension of Our Missionary Life</i>	139
CONCLUSION	141
GENERAL CONCLUSION	143
BIBLIOGRAPHY	151
1.0. SOURCES	151
1.1. SACRED SCRIPTURE.....	151
1.2. MAGISTERIAL DOCUMENTS.....	151
1.2.1. <i>Documents of the Vatican Council II</i>	151
1.2.2. <i>Papal Documents</i>	151
1.2.3. <i>Pontifical Council Documents</i>	154
1.2.4. <i>Synodal Documents</i>	156
1.2.5. <i>Documents of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany</i>	156
2.0. SECONDARY LITERATURE	164
2.1. BOOKS.....	164
2.2. ARTICLES	181
2.3. WEBOGRAPHY	188
TABLE OF CONTENTS OF THE DISSERTATION	191

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CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i>
AAS	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i>
AL	<i>Amoris Laetitia</i>
BS	Bethany Sister
BLA	Bethany Lay Association
BSC	Bethany Sister's Constitution
BSFC	Bethany Sister's First Constitution
C	Contemplate
CICLSAL	Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life
CP	<i>To All Consecrated People</i>
CV	<i>Christus Vivit</i>
DM	<i>Dives in Misericordia</i>
EA	<i>Ecclesia in Asia</i>
EE	<i>Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life</i>
EG	<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i>
EN	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i>
ET	<i>Evangelica Testificatio</i>
EV	<i>Evangelium Vitae</i>
FC	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i>
FLC	<i>Fraternal Life in Community</i>

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

FT	<i>Fratelli Tutti</i>
GE	<i>Gravissimum Educationis</i>
GEE	<i>Gaudete et Exsultate</i>
LF	<i>Lumen Fidei</i>
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
LS	<i>Laudato Si</i>
MM	<i>Misericordia et Misera</i>
MR	<i>Mutuae Relationes</i>
MV	<i>Misericordiae Vultus</i>
NGOs	Nongovernmental organizations
P	Proclaim
PC	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i>
PI	<i>Potissimum Institutioni</i>
PF	<i>Porta Fidei</i>
QA	<i>Querida Amozonia</i>
R	Rejoice
RD	<i>Redemptionis Donum</i>
RFC	Raymond Francis Camillus
RMiss	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i>
SAC	<i>Starting Afresh from Christ</i>
SC	<i>Sacramentum Caritatis</i>
VC	<i>Vita Consecrata</i>
VDQ	<i>Vultum Dei Quaerere</i>

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Call to consecrated life and the mission it entails, come to us in a concrete life situation which needs our response. Our answer demands consistent journey with him who called and consecrated us for a specific mission. In the case of a family of consecrated life, it begins with a gratuitous gift God gives to a particular person through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to partake in the life and mission of his Son Jesus Christ.¹

Consecrated life has its theological foundations in the Gospel, in the *magisterium* of the Church and in the approved constitution of each institute. To make consecrated life ever more relevant and effective in the Church, its cardinal nuclei of vocation, consecration, communion, and mission need constant theological updating.² The task of the consecrated person is to take part in the mission God's compassion revealed and offered in Jesus Christ. The world in which we live is diminishing in its capacity to value compassion. Being conscious of the uncertain and painful situation of our suffering brothers and sisters Pope Francis urges the Church "to heal these wounds, to assuage them with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity and vigilant care."³ Pope Francis reminds mercy is "the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life" (*MV* 1). Thus, "mercy is the very foundation of Church's life" (*MV* 10). In this context especially with reference to India, the time has come to examine on the value of compassion. It is a matter of urgency, given the way the millennium - old ethos of tolerance and profound respect is being eroded in our times.

¹ *Mutuae Relationes* presents it as an "experience of the Spirit," transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened, and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth: Cf. CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND FOR SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Mutuae Relationes* (14 May 1978), n. 12. Henceforth cited as *MR* within the text; Cf. C. NWAKWUE, *Answering and Understanding the Call of God for Your Life*, iUniverse, Inc, Bloomington 2013, 1-4.

² Cf. SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life*, n. 48. Henceforth cited as *EE* within the text.

³ FRANCIS, Bull of Indication of the Extraordinary Jubilee of mercy *Misericordiae Vultus* (11 April 2015), n. 15. Henceforth cited as *MV* within the text.

1. As Response to live Compassion

Today a whole lot of human beings experience hopeless situations due to catastrophes created by the humans, war, devastating earthquakes, tsunamis, calamities, and epidemics, as the current Covid-19 pandemic. Often, these sufferings of our brothers and sisters do not enter our concerns unless it touches us in first person. As Juliet Benner states: “Our eyes have the capacity to perceive, but they do not observe; they may believe, but they do not question; they may receive, but they do not search.”⁴ It reminds us of our inability to see the depth of reality before us. However, those who are God oriented will be attentive and awake at the core of their heart to question, in order to search for the truth, to see others and the situations with empathy and understanding and respond to them with God’s love and compassion.⁵ The Church, conscious that the word “mercy” is losing its real sense, prompted by the Spirit, has declared and lived intensely a year of mercy to contemplate merciful face of God in Jesus Christ (cf. *MV* 15). The consecrated persons were called in a special way to live and to proclaim the compassionate love of God which is the heart of the Gospel, and the very essence of their mission (cf. *MV* 12).⁶ By declaring a Year of Consecrated Life, the Vicar of Christ invited the consecrated persons to re-centre their identity and mission in the Church. These events were powerful stimuli for institutes of religious life to revisit their charismatic nature and scope to reaffirm their presence in the Church. The impulse behind this research too is such stimuli.

Being a thesis done in the context of specialization in the theology of consecrated life, the whole study has a backdrop all the impulses and orientations that emerge from the Conciliar and post-Conciliar magisterium on consecrated life. Particularly, *Perfectae Caritatis* has already pointed out five principles of a genuine renewal of consecrated life: to make the Gospel the rule of life, to go back to the original spirit of the Institute and the founder, to share in the life of the Church by promoting biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, and ecumenical matters, to read and to act according to the signs of the time, and finally to be an authentic witness of Christ by being faithful in living the evangelical counsels (cf. *PC* 2). For the Bethany Sisters who just celebrated the centenary year of their foundation, this is an apt time to evaluate whether

⁴ J. BENNER, *Contemplative Vision: A Guide to Christian Art and Prayer*, IVP Books, Illinois 2011, 33.

⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶ It is significant that the “Year of Mercy” was immediately followed by “the Year of Consecrated Life”.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

their consecrated life corresponds to the mind of their founder, Servant of God Raymond Francis Camillus Mascarenhas (Msgr. Raymond).

Catherine M. Harmer points out that we are living in a society where “compassion seems to have died out in the whole section of our contemporary society.”⁷ It is the need of the time to understand that the other is my brother and sister and I am responsible for their wellbeing. Modern means of communication update us with information from all around the globe: death due to wars, assassinations, earthquakes, droughts and floods, famines, epidemics, human trafficking, victims of crimes and violence, and other forms of human sufferings. Due to the advance of mass media, some of the painful and personal events are telecasted on live programmes. Being consecrated persons who freely choose to live for Christ and his Gospel, the Bethany Sisters have the responsibility to act for this suffering humanity. Ruled by the God of compassion the pain of the suffering humanity must become the pain of every Bethany Sister. The cry of the people of Israel (cf. Ex 3: 7) echoes even today in those suffering people. Therefore, the Bethany Sisters are called to follow the Lord not only into the desert and onto the mountain to pray but also into the valley of tears, where help is needed, and onto the cross, where humanity is in agony. Time has come to examine whether consecrated persons, particularly the Bethany sisters, are ruled by the God of compassion. Do they identify themselves with these wounded hearts of our brothers and sisters in the world?

Particularly in the Indian scenario, the consecrated persons undergo numerous challenges due to religious and political conflicts, misinterpreted notions of conversion, unhealthy competition, misuse of the means of communication that spread misinformation about Christian values, and the declining number of vocations to consecrated life. Further, at times, the consecrated persons who are called to transform the world according to the Gospel values are being transformed by the world. Being aware of the human sufferings of the people often we “end up in being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own” (EG 54). As St. Oscar Romero says: “We must not seek the child Jesus in the pretty figures of our Christmas crib. We must seek him among the undernourished children who have gone to bed at night with nothing to eat, among the poor newsboys who will sleep covered

⁷ C.H. HARMER, *The Compassionate Community: Strategies that Work for the Third Millennium*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene 2005, xvi.

with newspapers in doorways.”⁸ There is, hence, an urgent need of reviving the spiritual and apostolic spirit to be authentic followers of Christ, the revelation of God’s compassionate heart.

2. The Particular call of the Bethany Sisters

The Bethany Sisters realize that to hear the cry of the poor and to do something as a concrete response, is both challenging and demanding. As contemplative missionaries, they respond to the misery of the world, the wounds of their brothers and sisters who are denied human dignity. Like Abraham who moved on without knowing where he was going (cf. Heb 11: 8), the Bethany Sisters are motivated to move towards the periphery (cf. Wis 18: 3) knowing that their exodus requires radical obedience, trust, and faith.

The inspiration behind every founder or foundress is Jesus of Nazareth, the One “who went about doing good and healing all” (Acts 10: 38), and his Gospel message. They seek different ways to spread the Gospel in the context in which they lived. This inspiration could be the informal beginning of a particular charismatic family and its specific reason of consecration. God’s intervention, according to the context of the person, takes place in the life of each founder and foundress in different ways and means. However, their absolute docility to God’s Spirit creates the visible and effective form to establish an institute of consecrated life to make known the person of Jesus in the lives of the other.⁹ It is in this context we try to make a study of the life and mission of Msgr. Raymond, a priest of the twentieth century in the diocese of Mangalore, India, the founder of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany, known as Bethany Sisters, who was identified as a man of compassion.

3. Specific Motivation

The specific purpose of this research is to deepen the understanding of the consecrated life of the Bethany Sisters as a call to live compassion and its relevance of the Church in the contemporary Indian context. In the Church, they are called to bear witness to the Gospel values and to be the heralds of mercy for others (cf. *MV* 25) in the complex and changing context of India.

⁸ Cited in, J. NELLIKUNNEL, “The Face of Mercy and the Face of the Poor”, in *Jeevadhara* 270 (2015) 45, 16.

⁹ Cf. FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *to all Consecrated People on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life* (21 November 2014), n. 2.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The consecrated life called to “wake up the world”¹⁰ configuring oneself to the person of Jesus Christ, seems to swing in our times between rhetoric and reality. On the one hand, we are living in a society influenced by consumerism, hedonism, sadism, technocracy, religious bigotry, and the like. On the other hand, from within, the consecrated persons are struggling to live the principles of the Gospel which are the very roots of their life. To come alive with the Gospel realm, we need to focus our attention to the examples of persons who lived their consecration as *Missio Dei* in deep conformity with the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ. They have bequeathed their life, the rich inheritance of their spirit and vision in bringing Gospel message to the world around. Our intention is to study such a figure who has left a legacy in the history of the Church and in the society in which he lived: Msgr. Raymond. Hence, we will try to articulate God’s intervention in the life of Msgr. Raymond and through him in the life of the Institute of the Bethany Sisters. We will do so recognizing him in the long line of those specially called and anointed to bring God’s compassionate love to humanity.

4. Scope of the Study

This study makes attempt to understand the nature and the dynamics of the revelation of God’s compassionate love to humanity through chosen intermediaries who become channels of his compassionate love to humankind. From these biblical testimonies, we intend to examine a few selected figures in the history of consecrated life from desert fathers to some known spiritual figures of our own time. We will analyse how they opened to the world the vast horizon of God’s love. We will then focus on the charismatic personality of Msgr. Raymond, the founder of the Congregation of the Bethany Sisters who lived the compassionate love of Christ in the multicultural and pluralistic religious society of India. From the founder, our research will examine how the Congregation of Bethany lives this compassionate love bequeathed by the Founder, which he drew from Jesus Christ, his Master, and handed over to his spiritual daughters. Finally, introspecting the concerns of the Congregation expressed in the General Chapters and elsewhere, we intend to articulate some proposals to make the presence of the Bethany Sisters meaningful in the contemporary world.

This study is the fruit of personal responsibility as a member of the Congregation of Bethany to deepen my own knowledge of the Founder Msgr. Raymond, in order to imbibe and articulate the richness of the charism he has

¹⁰ FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *to all Consecrated People on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life* (21 November 2014), n.2.

entrusted to the Congregation of the Bethany Sisters meaningfully in my spiritual and apostolic journey. In sum, this study is also a personal journey toward a deeper discovery of my identity as a consecrated person a call to be a ‘woman of compassion’.

5. Arguments and Limits

Being aware that we are commissioned by the Lord to announce the mercy of God, this study makes an attempt to analyse two research questions: (1) Amidst the realities of the challenging world, to what extent the charismatic hallmark of “compassion” is lived by the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany? (2) In what way do our study can help the Congregation to live the charism of compassion effectively and concretely? In evaluating the life of the Bethany Sisters we also recognize that the allurements of the world has influenced and blocked them in their path of being totally available to and be rooted in Christ’s merciful love. We will focus on some of their concerns in this regard based on the study of the three General chapter decrees. We will try to offer a few proposals that may help for the renewal of the life of the Bethany Sisters.

The themes ‘consecrated life’ and ‘compassion’ are vast topics. Thus, our research is limited to analyse some of the core essentials of compassion in rapport to consecrated life. Within the framework of the revelation of the compassionate nature of God that reveals in the salvation history through his chosen instruments, and that culminates in the incarnation and the Paschal mystery of his incarnate Son Jesus Christ, we study the call-response dynamics of the consecrated life. We focus our attention on the essential nature of consecrated persons as carriers of God’s compassion in deep conformity with Jesus, the incarnate Son of God. This study, while examining the diverse spiritual figures in different periods of the Church’s history, hopes to draw insight for today’s consecrated persons in manifesting God’s compassionate face to the world. In exploring these historical figures of the history of consecrated life in the Church, our interest is to look at them as icons of God’s mercy. Because of the variety of such examples, we limit our study to some significant persons in the vast realm of consecrated life. The research will then focus on compassion as understood, lived by Msgr. Raymond, and which, as founder, he handed over to the *Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany* (Congregation of Bethany). to inherit and interpret by their consecrated life. The study will serve also as an attempt to rejuvenate the spiritual and apostolic life and to renew the values of the Bethany Sisters as they have just completed a century of its grateful history.

6. Sources of the Study

The main source of this study is the Sacred Scripture, the teachings of Church's on Consecrated Life and its theological interpretations, and the documents from the archives of the *Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*, on the life and teachings of the founder, the early and revised Constitutions, Statutes, and the Directory. In the fourth chapter, we draw from the General Chapter decrees and other significant interpretative and orientative literature on Bethany life. To study the person of Msgr. Raymond, his spiritual and apostolic life, our sources are mainly his published and unpublished discourses. We will make use also relevant books and articles according to the theme of our study.

7. Method and Structure

This study follows the analytic, historical-descriptive, and deductive methods. We do so within the theological setting of the biblical idea of compassion. In explaining and exploring the consecrated life we will follow the historical- descriptive method. The analytical-critical method is followed in studying and understanding the realities of the congregation. To state the relevance of the Congregation in contemporary time, our approach is deductive.

The study is organized in four chapters. The first chapter deals with the nature of consecrated life as a call to God's compassionate love in the light of a few biblical intuitions and magisterial accents. The main thrust of this chapter is to understand the biblical and theological foundation of consecrated life and their existence in the Church. It explores the terminology and theology of compassion, its biblical foundation, and magisterial elucidations. Here we will learn the essential scope of the call and consecration as the continuation of God's compassionate love for humankind revealed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The second chapter focuses on the elements of consecrated life as a witness to God's compassion: an essential historical enquiry. This chapter is a historical journey in identifying those persons who lived, testified, and witnessed God's compassion. This historical overview begins from the 3rd century up to the modern time. It is an effort to uncover the richness of consecrated life as a witness to God's merciful love.

The third chapter is an attempt to study God's intervention in the life of Msgr. Raymond. It deals with the historical situation in which he lived, and his charismatic personality. We also will analyse how his mission has been of

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

being a channel of compassion, and the subsequent foundation of the *Congregation of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*.

In the fourth and final chapter, we will try to synthesise the theological dimensions of compassion enshrined in the foundational writings of the Bethany Sisters. The kernel of our final chapter is an attempt to answer our research questions, whether the charismatic hallmark of “compassion” is lived by the Bethany Sisters and to verify in what way our study in the above chapters can help the Congregation to live the charism of “compassion” effectively and concretely. Accordingly, we unfold the spiritual, charismatic, formative, and apostolic thrust of the Bethany Sisters in mirroring and radiating the merciful face of God. We analyse some of the challenges that the Bethany Sisters are facing today in the contemporary world. We wind up this chapter by finding some of the opportunities and proposals in the light of the study that we have undertaken to live their charismatic identity of compassion in its fulness.

CHAPTER THREE

MSGR. RAYMOND FRANCIS CAMILLUS MASCARENHAS: A MESSENGER OF GOD’S COMPASSION

Introduction

Everything that exists in the world has its own beginning, purpose, and history.¹¹ Likewise, as a part of God’s plan, every birth on this earth has its own purpose. For this reason, each person is born to make history and they leave indelible footprints on the sands of time. Their legacy is not limited to a particular time, but it transcends from generation to generation as they leave a great impression on the world around. Similarly, we find in the history of the Church that God inspired certain men and women according to the need of the time. These charismatic persons devoted their lives exclusively to seek the face of God in contemplating God in the heart of the world.¹² God in his mercy continues to inspire such charismatic persons even today as various religious founders and foundresses. Our concern here is to learn about the Servant of God Raymond Francis Camillus Mascarenhas (Msgr. Raymond) who is the founder of the *Congregation of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany* (Bethany Congregation).

This chapter, divided into six subtitles, is a journey into the life of Msgr. Raymond. The chapter begins with a passage towards a historical background of the city of Mangalore in India. This is followed by the family milieu and a short profile of the life of Msgr. Raymond. Then it speaks of the founding of the *Congregation of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*. Next, it unfolds his spirituality of contemplation and action, and the glimpses of his contribution to the Church and to the society. Finally, we attempt to find the traits of mystical and prophetic ways of Msgr. Raymond. Thus, let us examine here the magnificent footprints he has imprinted in the hearts of many as a messenger of compassion.

¹¹ Cf. D.P. BOGUNOVIC, *Heavenly Wisdom: Talent, Imagination, Creativity and Wisdom*, Author House, Bloomington 2013, 1.

¹² Cf. FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei Quaerere* (22 July 2016), n. 2. Henceforth cited as *VDQ* within the text.

3.1. Historical Background of the City of Mangalore

Mangalore is a city in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, situated along the coast of the Arabian Sea. It was known throughout history as an important port on the west coast of India. This coastal city of Mangalore was ruled by several major powers including the Alupas, Hoysala kingdom, and Vijayanagara empire. Under the Vijayanagara rule, Mangalore developed as a major maritime trade center and harbour. They engaged not only in coastal trade but also trans-oceanic trade. Its contacts with the foreign countries resulted in the growth of indigenous technology of trade.¹³ In the 16th century, the Portuguese launched their campaign of monopolizing the sea trade in Mangalore causing great suffering to the people. The port town of Mangalore suffered at the hands of the Portuguese.¹⁴ They furiously entered the town and killed many without the discrimination of men and women, the old and the young. The town was set on fire and many residents were killed. The Portuguese monopoly over the trade of Mangalore continued relentlessly.¹⁵ At the same time, the Portuguese sent Franciscan missionaries for conversion activities. Originally the portion of the South Canara belonged to the Archdiocese of Goa, and the religious needs of the Catholics of Canara were looked after by the Goan Clergy. These Franciscan missionaries who accompanied the Portuguese reached Malabar, which became part of their apostolic field of labour. In 1660, Canara was relieved of Goan jurisdiction, and Fr. Thomas de Castro was appointed as the Vicar apostolic of Canara and Malabar. After the death of Fr. Thomas de Castro, Canara was once again under the authority of Goa till the year 1838.¹⁶

After the decline of Portuguese power, Hyder Ali, the ruler of Mysore, marched his cavalry into Canara and captured Mangalore in 1763.¹⁷ Being a shrewd diplomat and a military genius, he soon launched brisk trade activities

¹³ Cf. K.V. RAMESH, *A History of South Kanara*, Karnataka University, Dharwar 1970, 149; Cf. G. BUDHYA – S. BENJAMIN, “The Politics of Sustainable Cities: The Case of Bengare, Mangalore in Coastal India”, in *Environment & Urbanization* 12 (2000) 2, 27.

¹⁴ Cf. B.S. SHASTRY, *Studies in Indo-Portuguese History*, IBH Prakashana, Bangalore 1981, 100.

¹⁵ Cf. G.M. MORAES, *Mangalore: A historical Sketch*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi 1927, 7.

¹⁶ Cf. CATHOLIC DIRECTORY OF INDIA – 1925, *75th Annual Issue of The Madras Catholic Directory and Annual General Register*, The Catholic Supply Society, Madras 1924, 83. South Canara is a Southern coastal district of Karnataka State. The district is bound by sea in the West and Western Ghats in the East, Udupi district in the North and Kerala State in the South. Mangalore is the district headquarters of South Canara.

¹⁷ Cf. G.M. MORAES, *Mangalore: A historical Sketch*, 41.

with Europeans. As a result, Hyder Ali permitted the British to export rice from Mangalore. The frequent visit of the British to Mangalore disclosed to them the natural wealth of the region and they captured Mangalore.¹⁸ During this time Mangalore, the community was well-organized and flourishing economically. Hyder Ali had favourable attitude towards Christians. His successor Tippu Sultan took control of the area in 1784 and he showed himself insensitive towards Christians. Sensing the support of the Christians to the British, the priests were banished from the kingdom. Learning that the Christians were leaderless, many were taken as captive to Srirangapatna (Seringapatam). As soon as the Christians heard about the news of captivity, many who were able fled away. This event was a great disaster for the survival of the Christian faith in South Canara, for, the priests were exiled, churches were destroyed, Christians were hunted, and many fled to save their skins. Some of the wealthy Christians from Mangalore escaped from captivity offering a heavy bribe to the officials. Those who were taken in captivity were poor Christian families who were tenants, artisans, and labourers. Tippu brought inhuman misery and torture to these captured Christians and their life at Srirangapatna was not a pleasant memory. Men, women, and children were torn from their homes to work. They were forced to accept Islam, and those who refused had to face brutal torture and even death. The *Krista Puran* deepened their faith and gave solace to persist in their religious beliefs. The reign of Tipu Sultan was considered as the dark period for Christian communities due to the persecution of Christians by Muslims. Women and girls were forced into Muslim seraglios. Dark days of agony came to an end after the fall of Srirangapatna in 1799, hence, the captive Christians returned to Mangalore. Canara was passed in the hands of the British and there was peace. But the unfortunate Christians who were in captivity lost everything. It was a horrific experience for the Christian community who were uprooted from their land, position, and family to an atmosphere of misery. Their captivity paralyzed the community, as they lost their Churches and fertile estates, and they had to start from the beginning.¹⁹

In 1838, Pope Gregory XVI again separated Canara from the Goa diocese, and Canara was under the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly in Kerala. Under the repeated supplications made by the Catholics

¹⁸ Cf. L. WILLIAM, *A Collection of Treaties: Engagement and Others of Importance relating to British Officers in Malabar*, Asian Educational Services, Madras 1989, 67-68.

¹⁹ Cf. I.B. WATSON, *Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India 1659-1760*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi 1980, 47-48; Cf. T.W. VENN, *Mangalore*, British Cochin, Mangalore 1945, 124. *Krista Purana* is an epic poem on the life of Jesus written in Konkani by Fr. Thomas Stephens S.J. It is believed to have been published in 1616.

of Canara, Holy See erected Canara into a new Vicariate where Msgr. Bernardine of the Carmelite Order was appointed as the Pro-Vicar-Apostolic of Mangalore. But Mangalore remained under the control of Verapoly until it attained separate administration in 1853, and Bishop Michael Antony of St. Louis Gonzaga, a Carmelite, was appointed as the first Vicar Apostolic. In 1878, Pope Leo XIII transferred the authority of Vicariate of Mangalore from Carmelite fathers to the Society of Jesus. In 1887, Mangalore was raised to the dignity of Diocese where Malabar was part of it and Msgr. Nicholas Mary Pagani, S.J. was chosen as the first Bishop. In 1923, the diocese of Mangalore was divided from the district of Malabar, and there emerged the diocese of Calicut. Consequently, Msgr. Paul Perini was transferred to Calicut and Msgr. Joseph Pais was nominated as the Administrator Apostolic of the diocese of Mangalore. Later, an additional charge was given to Msgr. Paul Perini who was appointed as the Administrator Apostolic of the diocese of Mangalore. In that era, the political control of Mangalore was passed into the hands of the British and it continued under their control till 1947.²⁰ The administrative and commercial activities of the British Government and the multifarious engagement of various occupational groups and Christian missionaries led to unprecedented growth in the sphere of trade and craft, education, and industry. In 1956 Mangalore was merged into a unified Karnataka state.²¹ Most people of Mangalore speak at least five languages: Kannada, Konkani, Tulu, Hindi, and English.

3.2. A Milieu of the Family of Msgr. Raymond

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many Catholic families from Goa fled to the Canara region due to Maratha invasions, persecution of Christians, and other calamities. Msgr. Raymond's family roots can be traced from the several families that emigrated from Goa to Mangalore in the 18th Century. It was said that the emigrants from Goa settled down at Moodbidri. Later, they moved to Bondel where Msgr. Raymond's great grandfather Antony John Mascarenhas I, lived. His family was among the Christians who were taken captive to Seringapatam (Srirangapatna) during the time of Tippu Sultan. Under the torture of Tippu, many lost their lives. Among them Anthony John Mascarenhas I died leaving his three children: Paul, Annie, and

²⁰ Cf. CATHOLIC DIRECTORY OF INDIA, 1925, 75th *Annual Issue of The Madras Catholic Directory and Annual General Register*, The Catholic Supply Society, Madras 1924, 84.

²¹ Cf. I.B. WATSON, *Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India 1659-1760*, 48; cf. T.W. VENN, *Mangalore*, 124.

Regina.²² They drew strength from the daring journey of their parents and remained strong in faith in the face of persecution and death. Paul, who had been taken as a mere child in captivity returned to Mangalore after fifteen years along with his sisters in 1799. They had lost their ancestral property due to the attack of Tippu.²³

The Christians who survived the captivity were given support by Thomas Munro who was the collector of those times. They were given loans to begin their agricultural operations. The misery that they have encountered did not suppress them, but they were active in every walk of life. Among them, there were merchants and cultivators, and the poor engaged in handicrafts and agriculture. As a result, the cultivation of jasmine and other sweet-scented flowers, chilies, ragi, hill rice and sweet potatoes was rapidly widespread. Indeed, as time passed Christians resettled in South Canara after the captivity.²⁴

A benevolent Catholic Family of Bosthu Saldanha generously helped Msgr. Raymond's family get settled in the village of Karandhadi in Mangalore. Gradually Paul, the great grandfather of Msgr. Raymond set up his own timber trade and flourished in his business and helped the community that returned from Seringapatam. Paul married Maria, the only daughter of Bosthu Saldanha, and they had six children. After the death of Paul Mascarenhas, Domingo I, grandfather of Msgr. Raymond took up the timber trade.²⁵ Domingo married Nathalia Coelho and had six children. Their eldest son Lazarus, who was an employee in the office of the Deputy Commissioner, was the father of Msgr. Raymond.²⁶

3.3. A Biographical Profile

Msgr. Raymond was born on 23 January 1875 in Shimoga, in the South Canara District of Karnataka. He was born in a God-fearing family on the feast of St. Raymond of Penyafort on Saturday. He was baptized at Sacred Heart Church at Shimoga and was named Raymond Camillus with the family

²² Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die: A Brief Sketch of the Life of Monsignor RFC Mascarenhas*, Mangalore Publications, Mangalore 1981, 2.

²³ Cf. Archive: F: 101.1/01, F.X. MASCARENHAS, "Family of Paul Mascarenhas Prabhu and Genealogical Tree with Short Notes", 1940, vi.

²⁴ Cf. P.F. PINTO, *History of Christian in Coastal Karnataka (1500-1763 A.D.)*, Samanvaya, Mangalore 1999, 199-201.

²⁵ Cf. Archive: F: 101.1/01, F.X. MASCARENHAS, "Family of Paul Mascarenhas Prabhu and Genealogical Tree with Short Notes", vi.

²⁶ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 3.

name Mascarenhas. He was the seventh among thirteen children of Lazarus Mascarenhas and Joanna Castelino.

The parents of Msgr. Raymond were from Mangalore. For some years, the family settled in Shimoga since his father was rendering service at the government office. After the retirement of his father, the whole family returned to Mangalore. His early education was at Milagres Church School, Mangalore, and he passed his matriculation brilliantly from St. Aloysius College, Mangalore.²⁷ Msgr. Raymond grew delightfully in his family in an atmosphere of strong faith, and good habits, under parental discipline. He inherited compassion, generosity, charity, love for the poor, and a spirit of endurance from his mother. At the same time, from his father, he imbibed daring nature and courage to venture into the new and unknown project in life.

The devoted family came together every evening to pray the rosary. His parents encouraged the children to go for daily Mass, and his father used to gather the children after the Sunday Mass and ask them to repeat a sentence from the sermon. Msgr. Raymond's father was impressed to see his son Raymond, who would repeat almost the whole sermon. His parents played an important role in forming their children. As he learned about the trials and sufferings that his ancestors had gone through during the captivity of Tippu Sultan, this instilled in him a deep faith and increased his love for the Church. From his childhood, he had the desire to be a priest, which was reflected in his childhood games. Often, he would call his friends and brothers to play. In the game he would be the priest and his friends would be assisting him. As a result, his brother often teased him calling him 'future priest'. His desire to be a priest made him to be around the priests and he would ask them many questions beyond his age. Seeing his unique way of life, one of the lady visitors remarked about Msgr. Raymond to his mother. Your son can be an instrument of either a deal of good or a great deal of evil. Overhearing the remark of the lady he said to himself: "Why should I be the instrument of evil? I would rather go about doing good". This was reflected in his life, as he went on doing good to others till the end of his life.

Msgr. Raymond's ardent desire to be a minister to the Church enabled him to forgo the brilliant careers in the world. He resisted the pressures of his family and relatives to go in for higher education and he willingly responded to the inner voice of God to become a minister to the Church to bring Good

²⁷ Cf. Archive: F: 101.1/01, F.X. MASCARENHAS, "Family of Paul Mascarenhas Prabhu and Genealogical Tree with Short Notes", vi.

News to the poor. He entered the St. Joseph seminary in Mangalore on 23 February 1891. The seminary was managed by the Society of Jesus. It was a favourable atmosphere to grow in spirituality, the practice of virtues, and intellectual pursuits. As a seminarian, he was fervent and followed the rules and regulations of the institute. He was very brilliant and everyone in his class admired his intelligent questions and his retentive memory. One of his professors Fr. John G. Pinto noticed his ability to memorize about three hundred lines of Latin poetry within two days. In addition to it, Fr. M.F. Barboza, his professor, marvelled how he could remember the whole lessons on Church history almost word for word. Above all his prodigious memory and sharp intelligence one could approach him at any time for help regarding the study. Everyone noticed that humility was the core of his life, which was established solidly on God.

At that time, the seminarians were not allowed to have visitors often. But his mother would find means and ways to meet him at the gate of the seminary with homemade favourite sweets. Knowing the pain of his mother and remembering the rules of the seminary, he tried to forgo the ordinary comfort and joys of meeting his mother.²⁸ He often thought: "It was on the lap of my mother that I had learned the first lessons of self-discipline, self-control, and self-denial."²⁹ During the holidays of seminary life, he spent time with the family as well as he would give a helping hand to the parish. He would gather the neighbouring children and with great enthusiasm, he would teach them catechism. As a result, children were happy and were extremely fond of him.

In preparation for his priesthood, he gave more attention to growing in virtues and attainment of knowledge.³⁰ One can grasp the seriousness of his preparation through his letter to one of his nephews in the seminary. He wrote: "Lay up a large fund of virtues now, it will stand you in good stead when you are a priest."³¹ After nine years of preparation for his priesthood, he was ordained by Rev. Abundius Cavadini S.J., Titular Bishop of Mangalore on 4th March 1900, for the diocese of Mangalore. He rendered his service at Milagres church, at his own home parish, and at Mount Rosary Church, Kallianpur. In 1903, at the age of twenty-eight, he was appointed as the pastor of Udyavar church and in 1910 he was sent to the church at Agrar. As a young priest, he won the hearts of the young and old through his vibrant mission in

²⁸ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 7-13.

²⁹ V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 12.

³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 13.

³¹ Archive: F: 130- 2, *Brief History of Msgr. Raymond FC Mascarenhas*, 4-6.

the parishes. He enthusiastically devoted himself to the service of the poor and needy in sharing God's compassionate love. In 1914, at the request of the people, Msgr. Raymond was appointed as the first parish priest of St. Sebastian church, Bendur, in the city of Mangalore. Through his 17 years of pastoral ministry with the fire of compassionate love, he turned the place, known as barren land, into a fruitfulness one.

At this juncture, the fire of divine love inspired him to begin a women religious Congregation to work for the downtrodden people of his time. Motivated by the words and encouragement of his Bishop Msgr. Raymond laid the cornerstone of the religious community on 16 July 1921 with four young lady teachers. Enthused by Msgr. Raymond's solid piety and exceptional talents Bishop V. R. Fernandes appointed him as the Vicar General in 1931. Apart from his sacred ministry, he was also the president of the Konkani Catholic Truth Society. He was a member of the Municipal Council. In 1931, he was chosen as the president of the Catholic Association of South Canara, and Vice-president of the Catholic Board of education.³² He was recognized as a dynamic pastor, as a vibrant preacher, builder of churches and schools. His commendable activities in the sphere of pastoral, educational, and social level raised him to get the honour of 'Domestic Prelate' from Pope Pius XII in 1955. After his retirement from office as the Vicar General, he dedicated his life to the growth of his spiritual daughters at Bethany mother house. After having spent his life for the holiness of the Church and for the welfare of his daughters, Msgr. Raymond went to his eternal abode on 23 December 1960.³³

The forthcoming session deals with how God worked in Msgr. Raymond to begin the *Congregation of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*.

3.4. The Inspiration to plant Bethany

At the origin of every religious institute, there is a history to be elaborated. It is the story of God's hand in choosing the charismatic persons to partake in his mission of compassion. The Spirit of God indelibly imprinted in the hearts of such persons the zeal to translate the Gospel into a particular way of life, responding to the need of the Church and the society.³⁴ "God meets people not in a vacuum, but in their concrete life situation, in their life

³² Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 14-48.

³³ Cf. J. D'SOUZA, *If Only I knew: Encounters with Mgr. RFC Mascarenhas*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 2012, 16.

³⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life* (21 November 2014), Part I, n. 1.

journeys.”³⁵ God who had seen the misery of his people in Egypt (cf. Ex 3: 7), moved Msgr. Raymond to enter the pain of his people neglected in the remote villages. Msgr. Raymond recognized that the pressing need of the time was to provide a Catholic education for the poorer classes, especially for girls. His deep spiritual insight enabled him to perceive the genuine vocation of young women who were not able to join the existing Congregations because of the requirement of higher education and exorbitant patrimony. He was alarmed by the important need of his time to provide opportunities for young girls who desired to dedicate their lives to God in the state of religious life. Msgr. Raymond, living amidst his people in the remote villages, encountered their pain and suffering. Knowing that religious life has a vital part in the Church and the world³⁶ and his passionate desire to communicate God's mercy to these marginalized people brought him a divine thought to begin a religious institute to enter directly into the life of the people.³⁷

Prasad George points out: “The one who has experienced God in his personal life can never sit idle.”³⁸ It is true of Msgr. Raymond. He conveyed his thoughts and the inspiration of God to his Bishop Paul Perini, S.J. in all humility: “I speak as if in foolishness...” But the Bishop recognized the hand of God in his inspiring words and replied: “Act if you have the inspiration to do so, making use of the opportunities”. Encouraged by the bishop and strengthened by his prayerful discernment, Msgr. Raymond responded positively and prophetically to his inner voice. Indeed, the work of God was marvellous through various episodes in the life of Msgr. Raymond as a pastor of St. Sebastian Church, Bendur, Mangalore, in the State of Karnataka, India, and as the manager of the parish school. He made use of the God-given opportunity to communicate his desire of beginning a religious community to Flora Mathias who wished to be in the service of God. She became God's channel in extending and communicating Msgr. Raymond's vision to her younger Sister Alice Mathias. Marceline Menezes being a good friend of Flora Mathias discovered the secret desire of her friend and she too decided to be in the project of Msgr. Raymond. Msgr. Raymond, having known the desire of Regina Gertrude Gonsalves unveiled his plan to her. God of mercy

³⁵ G. CAMPESE, “Walk Humbly with Your God! Notes on a Spirituality for Missionaries with Migrants”, in *Missiology: An International Review* 25 (1997) 2, 134.

³⁶ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Fraternal Life in Community*, n. 1. Henceforth cited as *FLC* within the text.

³⁷ Cf. *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*, Bethany Publication, Mangalore 2005, 155-156. Henceforth cited as *BSC* within the text.

³⁸ P. GEORGE, “Constantly in the Desert”, in *In Christo* 24 (1986) 3, 158.

worked through these vibrant lady teachers and consequently, Msgr. Raymond began to see the plan of God in his life.

Msgr. Raymond dedicated his time to instructing his spiritual daughters about religious life and their faith was strong enough to place everything in the hands of God. Msgr. Raymond, with indomitable courage along with the four lady teachers, Marceline Menezes (Sr. M. Martha), Flora Mathias (Sr. M. Clare), Alice Mathias (Sr. M. Lourdes), and Regina Gertrude Gonsalves (Sr. M. Gertrude), sowed the seed of the Institute to spread God's compassionate love to the Church and society. According to the need of the time, the indigenous Bethany Congregation was founded in the diocese of Mangalore on the feast of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel.³⁹ Msgr. Raymond launched into the unknown responding to the need of his time with a triple mission: to provide a Catholic education for the poor in particular to the girls; to support and to provide opportunities for young girls who desire to devote their lives to the service of God as religious, and to embrace everyone irrespective of status in society to inculcate Christian formation in the schools as well as to the rural areas of the parishes.⁴⁰ The dream of Msgr. Raymond began to actualize through the instrumentality of Bethany.

3.5. Spirituality and Sense of Mission

Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God to grow in conformity with God. The person who is in touch with God is well aware of this enlivening Spirit in one's daily life. This God's enlivening Spirit is powerfully present in the flow of ordinary human experience. According to Augusto Guerra Sancho, spirituality is a path of the Spirit. It directs towards a window of the infinite field of the Spirit.⁴¹ For Juan Esquerda Bifet, "spiritualità significa vivere e camminare secondo lo Spirito cioè camminare nell'amore."⁴² *Redemptoris Missio* asserts that the person who is God-oriented feels Christ's burning love for souls. This zeal for souls is expressed in charity in the form of concern, tenderness, compassion, openness, availability in entering the life of the least and the poorest.⁴³ Because

³⁹ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 29-32.

⁴⁰ Cf. M. VIOLETTE, *The Vine that he Planted: A Brief History of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*, Kodialbail Press, Mangalore 1988, 5.

⁴¹ Cf. A.G. SANCHO, "Spiritualità", in T. GOFFI – A. PALAZZINI (eds), *Dizionario Teologico della Vita Consacrata*, Editrice Ancora Milano, Milano 1994, 1690-1691.

⁴² J.E. BIFET, "Missione", in E. ANCILLI, *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Spiritualità*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 1990, 1613.

⁴³ Cf. J. PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), n. 89. Henceforth cited as *RMiss* within the text.

spirituality is a way of life according to the prompting of the Spirit.⁴⁴ The same traits of spirituality and prompting of the Holy Spirit can be found in Msgr. Raymond. His life consisted of contemplation and action.

3.5.1. Msgr. Raymond: A Contemplative Missionary

RM explains: "Unless the missionary is a contemplative, he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way" (*RMiss* 91). Msgr. Raymond was aware that contemplation without action is an escape from concrete reality and action without contemplation is a mere activism without having transcendent meaning. Thus, true spirituality requires a missionary contemplation and a contemplative mission. In Msgr. Raymond, we discover that God-centeredness was the characteristic of his life, and he was a man deeply in touch with God. Here we observe that Msgr. Raymond as a man of prayer epitomized mainly on the mystery of Incarnation, the Eucharistic Lord, and the Blessed Virgin Mary. The life of saints brought transformation in him, even in his name. Having union with God, he loved silence, simplicity, a life hidden in his work for the salvation of souls. His contemplation of the divine and his constant union with God enabled him to take the challenges of life in the spirit of endurance. One of the salient features of his spirituality is his union with God, expressed in his prayer life.

3.5.1.1. Msgr. Raymond: A Man of Prayer

The lamp of faith that was lit in the heart of Msgr. Raymond by his parents was kept alive in and through his life of prayer and mission especially as a priest of God.⁴⁵ He lived a disciplined life following a regular schedule of prayer and work. Gradually prayer became the kernel of his life that befitted him to be an open book in the eyes of the people who witnessed him as the man of prayer. Fr. Mark Fernandes, an assistant parish priest at Bendur who often visited Msgr. Raymond relates: "Msgr. Raymond was a man of God and of prayer as well as a good administrator, a man of iron will-power, and a man of broad vision."⁴⁶ Similarly, Msgr. Alexander F. D'Souza articulates: "He was a venerable figure and a man of solid faith and deep prayer."⁴⁷ When Fr. Gerald Saldanha observed him praying for long hours

⁴⁴ Cf. J.E. BIFET, "New Evangelization and Missionary Spirituality at the Beginning of the Third Millennium", in *Mission Today*, 3 (2000) 3, 401-402.

⁴⁵ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 2.

⁴⁶ Archive: F.135.3.A/02, M. FERNANDES, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 31.08.1976.

⁴⁷ Archive: F.137.4.A/03, A.F. D'SOUZA, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 17.06.2002. Rt. Rev. Msgr. Alexander F. D'Souza was an assistant parish priest at Bendur. He knew Msgr. Raymond when he was residing at Bethany.

before the Blessed Sacrament, reciting his breviary devotedly, praying the rosary with filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he described Msgr. Raymond as: “An exemplary man of prayer, a great devotee of the Blessed Virgin Mary the Mother of God and above all a gentle human person.”⁴⁸ James D’Souza, a parishioner of Bendur who had close contact with Msgr. Raymond stated: “Whenever I found him he was walking on the veranda of his room, with the breviary in his hands, engrossed in prayer and meditation.”⁴⁹ As a servant of God, his parishioners were edified to witness a praying priest, kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament or seated on a pile of construction stones for the Church, praying his rosary or breviary. These actions showed them that Msgr. Raymond was truly a man of prayer. Many of his spiritual daughters noticed him in the choir loft of the Motherhouse chapel or on the veranda outside his house, meditatively walking with his rosary in hand and head bowed deep in recollection. In his later years when he was unable to climb the steps towards the chapel, he was found sitting under the tree facing the chapel window through which he would gaze at the Tabernacle light.⁵⁰ The outcome of his union with God resulted in this advice to his spiritual daughters:

Our ordinary, everyday life should supply our interior life with constant nourishment. External things and circumstances should serve not to break down but rather build up the union of the soul with God and to act as so many opportunities for virtue rather than for weakness and imperfection. In doing good never seek applause from the world or approbation from superiors and companions but do it solely and exclusively for God.⁵¹

In Msgr. Raymond, we find a person who was deeply in touch with God, who lived solely for God, and consequently prayer constituted his entire life. His personal touch with God did not remain in vain but he articulated it in his writings. His profound experience of the divine inspired him to express it in the form of two lovers who would admire, talk, and share their happiness in silence and solitude. In a like manner, he compares it to mystical

⁴⁸ Archive: F.137.4.A/10, G.A. SALDANHA, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 02.08.2002. Fr. Gerald A. Saldanha had grown up under the shadow of Bethany Convent since his parental house was in the vicinity of Bethany at Bendur. He had close association with Bethany Sisters and Msgr. Raymond.

⁴⁹ Archive: F.137.4.C/15, J. D’SOUZA, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 13.08.2008; Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/28, M. MACRINA, *Memories of Founder*, 07.06.2002.

⁵⁰ Cf. V. D’SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 25-69.

⁵¹ V. D’SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 68.

matrimony between the soul and Jesus.⁵² Here his silence was not barren but overflowing with love and pregnant with meaning. Having experienced the love of God, he recommended that the sisters are never to act with a view to please the world, others, or self; act only to please God. He desired to do everything for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. He instructed his daughters to practice frequent acts of spiritual communion during the day to keep our Lord constantly within them.⁵³ In the interview with Judith Mascarenhas who is the Godchild of Msgr. Raymond and who was a deputy mayor of Mangalore Corporation remarks: "He was a holy and great man of God. The long hours he spent in prayer, very serene appearance. He was soft-spoken. He listened more, looked deep, and spoke less."⁵⁴

Saint Faustina Kowalska points out: "Love endures everything, love is stronger than death, love fears nothings" (*Diary* 46). Similarly, Msgr. Raymond endured everything in love. He knew that suffering is part of one's life and in this valley of tears, the cross is an inevitable portion of life.⁵⁵ Sr. Humiline verbalizes: "When he was under pressure of trials, I have found him sitting alone in his room before the Crucifix in prayer."⁵⁶ Here we recall the words of Pope Francis in his talk during the General Audience on 10th June 2020, a true prayer is a 'fight' with God in which those who think they are strong are humbled. As a man of prayer Msgr. Raymond believed that God pours his graces in abundance on the humble, and humility is the foundation of sanctity. The overflow of his prayer made him utter: "All for Jesus, man of sorrows, through Mary, Mother of sorrows, for Bethany, close to Calvary and Gethsemane."⁵⁷ It gives us a clear understanding of how he lived the words

⁵² Cf. R.F.C MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: The Joys of Heaven, 17.12.1940", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder: A Collection of Exhortations and Reflections of Msgr. RFC Mascarenhas*, Bethany Publications, Mangalore, 1996, 69. From 1921 till 1960, i.e., from the foundation of Bethany Congregation till his death Msgr. Raymond had given number of exhortations to his spiritual daughters. Unfortunately, all of them were not written down. Only the exhortations which were given from 1940 to 1943 had carefully penned them down by Sr. Mary Bertha. All these exhortations and conferences are compiled, edited, and published in a book known as *From the Lips of the Founder*. Sr. Bertha was closely associated with Msgr. Raymond nearly thirty years, first as a parishioner at St. Sebastian Church at Bendur, Mangalore thereafter as a member of the Congregation of Bethany.

⁵³ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 67-69.

⁵⁴ Interview with Judith Mascarenhas, in *Compassionate Pastor* 2 (2014) 7, 33.

⁵⁵ Cf. R.F.C MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: The Hidden life of Jesus, 15.02.1941", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the lips of the Founder*, 126.

⁵⁶ M. BERTHA, *From the lips of the Founder*, 307.

⁵⁷ MIRIAM, *A Treasury of Pearls: Sayings of Mgr. Raymond F.C Mascarenhas*, ATC Publishers, Bengaluru 2018, 38.

of St. Therese of Lisieux that “prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned towards heaven, it is a cry of recognition and love, embracing both trial and joy.”⁵⁸ Being a man of God, he knew that prayer is a weapon that one can hold at any moment of life. He instructed his spiritual daughters: “You are the sisters of Bethany. Bethany is close to Gethsemane. Go constantly in spirit to that garden of Olives and see Jesus there agonizing for you and for sinners. It is your garden, where you should resort to frequently, to pray, and gain strength in your spiritual warfare.”⁵⁹ In his time of spiritual warfare and at the evening of his life his constant prayer was: “Sweet Sacrament we, Thee, adore, O make us love Thee more and more.”⁶⁰

Msgr. Raymond testified to his sisters that prayer is a primary phenomenon, the heart, and the central gesture of religious life.⁶¹ He left a testament of unshakable faith and undaunted confidence in God. He shared through his life that the soul of prayer is faith, the heart of faith is love, and the core of love is service. Above all, he was a man of prayer who lived his priestly life in fulness. Thus, Msgr. Raymond became a messenger of the Gospel to his people and to the Church.

3.5.1.2. *Man of Undaunted Faith*

Pope Francis in his encyclical letter *Lumen Fidei* writes magnificently: “Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey.”⁶² This lamp of faith guided Msgr. Raymond in his journey for the extension of the Kingdom of God. With the guiding lamp, he leaped into the unknown situation driven by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We find him leaping into the unknown through his daring act of founding the *Congregation of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*. The presence of the Institute of Bethany remained a big question mark in the minds of many. Because the people of his locality were familiar with the religious congregations initiated from European culture, having financial and personnel back up. It was strange for them to see the origin of a religious congregation from their own native soil. The action of Msgr. Raymond was like the faith of Abraham leaping into the unknown trusting in

⁵⁸ Cited in, CCC, n. 2558.

⁵⁹ R.F.C MASCARENHAS, “Exhortation: The Example of Jesus – Obedience, 21.12.1940”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the lips of the Founder*, 105.

⁶⁰ V. D’SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 70.

⁶¹ Cf. C. LAUDAZI, “Preghiera”, in E. ANCILLI, *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Spiritualità*, vol. 3, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 1990.

⁶² Cf. FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* (29 June 2013), n. 57. Henceforth cited as *LF* within the text.

the providence of God. Like Abraham, Msgr. Raymond's profound faith in God sheds light on the depth of his being that enabled him to realize that his life is not a chance, but is a personal call and personal love of God (cf. *LF* 11). Indeed, he walked ahead with undaunted faith.

The favourite poem of St. Teresa of Avila is vividly portrayed in Msgr. Raymond. Nothing disturbed him or frightened him because he believed that God alone suffices. This unshakable faith and undaunted courage of Msgr. Raymond enabled him to utter confidently: "Raymond and a couple of rupees can do nothing; but Raymond, a couple of rupees and God can do everything."⁶³ Msgr. Raymond had begun the construction of churches, convents, and schools under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. He encountered numerous problems such as financial crisis and criticisms from people but his confidence in the power of God was strong. For instance, the High School at Kulshekar building collapsed due to heavy rain, and the headmistress of the school was distressed. But Msgr. Raymond had a positive energy to remain serene. At this painful situation he could respond calmly to her: "My child, if the Lord does not want it, we do not want it either. Let us see what he wants from us. Let us offer this collapsed building brick by brick."⁶⁴ Such was the nobility of his faith.

The people of his locality doubted the survival of Bethany after the death of Msgr. Raymond raised some disturbance among his sisters. At this juncture, Sr. Bertha recalls the response of Msgr. Raymond to her companion who expressed her doubt about the continuity of the Congregation: "Do not be anxious over this my child. I have begun this work trusting in Mary, our Mother. As long as she is with us, Bethany will not cease to be."⁶⁵ Likewise, Sr. Macrina who was the superior general reiterates the words of Msgr. Raymond: "Child, do not be afraid in this matter. This Congregation is going to last as long as its mission is fulfilled- so has our heavenly Mother assured me."⁶⁶ Sr. Esperie reminisces his endless confidence about the survival of Bethany. "Bethany is built in the heart of Mary; the roots of Bethany are deep down in her heart, and I am not anxious about Bethany."⁶⁷ In his anxious moment of criticism, he was well aware that often Jesus allows storms in

⁶³ V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶⁵ M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A Prophet*, Bethany Publication, Mangalore 2007, 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁷ M. ESPERIE, *Bethany My Joy and Crown*, Bethany Publications, Mangalore 2003, 33.

one's life, just because he may allow one to show one's trust in him. Encountering his severe torture by ridicules and criticisms, his spiritual daughters were troubled. Being one with him in his acute pain of suffering Sr. Francis expresses to him, "Father, how much have you to suffer for Bethany's sake?" Calmly he replied, "I don't mind it. My unshaken faith in Jesus and Mary has made me thick-skinned, you know."⁶⁸ It shows his docility to the will of God. This indomitable faith empowered him in the acute suffering of his faith journey. Because he knew like Saint Faustina Kowalska that "true love is measured by the thermometer of suffering."⁶⁹

A vital event had taken place in the life of Msgr. Raymond when he was asked to choose between the double responsibilities: to be the director of Bethany Congregation or to continue the post as the Vicar General. Implanted by the thought to live for others, he made a retreat under the direction of his confessor and consulted some of his friends. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he relinquished all his titles, offices, honours, even that of Vicar General to dedicate his life and his God-given potentialities for the sake of his spiritual daughters. Many were confused by the daring step of Msgr. Raymond. His own friend ridiculed telling him to begin some other projects for the extension of the kingdom than wasting his time for the Bethany Sisters.⁷⁰ But Msgr. Raymond gave a confident immediate reply: "Yes, yes. I think I would give up my life for them. They are the crown of my labours for God's kingdom."⁷¹ He desired that the congregation should attain Pontifical right because the seed that he planted in the soil of Mangalore should not die under the local difficulties. The formalities were done during the time of Bishop Peres but unfortunately, he died on his way to Rome. After the death of the Bishop, those documents did not get Rome from the diocese of Mangalore during the lifetime of Msgr. Raymond. In those times the ecclesial authorities were against Msgr. Raymond and Bethany Congregation. Though it was painful to know his authorities were against him, his unwavering faith enthused him to continue courageously to manifest God's compassionate love through his spiritual daughters. As Msgr. Raymond desired that Bethany should be placed firmly in the lap of Holy Mother, the Church. Bethany

⁶⁸ M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 59.

⁶⁹ M. TARNAWSKA *et alii*, *Sister Faustina Kowalska Her Life and Mission*, London Veritas Foundation, London 1989, 455.

⁷⁰ Cf. M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 50-51.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

attained Pontifical right in 1971 after eleven years of Msgr. Raymond's death.⁷²

Sr. Violette who had close contact with Msgr. Raymond gives a clear picture of his steadfast faith in Blessed Mother through a letter received from him while he was under the pressure of criticism. She received this letter while she was in the USA as she was pursuing her doctoral study. She recalls his brave words of faith: "Don't worry that I am suffering. I am not alone. Our Blessed Mother is helping me. I am indeed at the foot of the Cross. She has promised to be with me till the end. She has assured me that finally, I will die in peace, and she herself will come to take me."⁷³

According to St. Thomas Aquinas: "Faith is the act of the intellect assenting to a Divine truth owing to the movement of the will, which itself is moved by the grace of God."⁷⁴ This same grace of God enlightened the mind of Msgr. Raymond to realize the truth of the supernatural gift of faith. The truth of the lamp of faith became a movement of the will and a light for his way. This lamp of faith moved Msgr. Raymond to be in the hands of Jesus and Blessed Mother to spread God's compassionate love to his people.

3.5.1.3. Drawn to the Mystery of Incarnation

God's intervention in history has taken various forms of manifesting his salvific plan for humankind. He had made himself especially known to humanity through human mediators and finally through his Son, Jesus Christ. The centrality of redemptive incarnation is the most decisive fact in the history of salvation.⁷⁵ The incarnation is considered to be a mystery of God's intervention as compassion to humanity. This mystery of incarnation captivated the life of Msgr. Raymond. For him, the incarnation was a mystery of love where Jesus was passionate in love for humankind and so he assumed a human nature.⁷⁶ Msgr. Raymond compared this mystery of God as: "A Brahmin turning into an outcast in order to work among the outcasts."⁷⁷ He

⁷² Cf. M. ESPERIE, *Bethany: My Joy and My Crown My Memories of Msgr. RFC Mascarenhas*, Bethany Publication, Mangalore 2003, 19.

⁷³ Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/22, V. D'SOUZA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, undated.

⁷⁴ T. AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 2, iv. a.2, 9, Benziger Bros., New York 1948, 45.

⁷⁵ Cf. B. STUDER, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church*. T & T Clark, London 1993, 32.

⁷⁶ Cf. R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: The Incarnation: The Lesson of Love, 20.12.1940", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*: 88.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

was amazed by the mystery of incarnation as God leaped from heaven into the womb of a humble virgin.

Jesus remained hidden in the enclosure of the virgin's womb. Thereafter, he took another leap into a shed, on a manger among the cattle and the sheep. The following leap was into the humiliating prison and then to the infamous gibbet of the cross. From the cross, the final leap was breaking himself into helplessness and nothingness, hiding his divinity and humanity in the form of a small piece of bread which one can hardly hold, which can be blown off not only by the wind but even by a single breath. This is the greatness of the mystery of incarnation, intensely loving humankind though fragile.⁷⁸

Msgr. Raymond was kindled by the mystery of incarnation where the Word became flesh in the womb of Mary and then became flesh by pitching his tent and taking residence among us in this world. For him, the mystery of incarnation was God's highest form of the madness of love for humanity even though he knew that the people would be ungrateful to him, would despise him, even brutally put him to death, yet he willingly sent his Son into the world to mend the brokenness of the world. Imbued by this mystery he explains that we cannot fathom the mystery of God with our finite minds. To grasp this mystery of incarnation, one requires a strong faith.⁷⁹ Msgr. Raymond in one of his exhortations to his spiritual daughters on the theme of the nativity of our Blessed Lord states:

Jesus was God himself. God could have selected a royal family, a great city such as Rome or Babylon to be born in or could have appeared as a great king of a vast kingdom with many nobles around him. But God shed all titles of nobility and human comfort and chose a lowly manger outside, in the city of Bethlehem. God had every opportunity to choose for himself every circumstance of his birth, but he chose what was poor and lowly, he chose Mary and Joseph, a lowly manger to be laid in, a cave outside the city, the cold wintry night, with no facilities for ease and comfort.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, "Sermon delivered by RFC Mascarenhas- in Konkani, 29 December 1938", in L. D'SOUZA – BERTHA – THERESINE (trs), *Souvenir of the First Diocesan Eucharistic Congress*, Codialbail Press, Mangalore 1940, 140.

⁷⁹ Cf. R.F.C MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: The Incarnation: The Lesson of Love, 20.12.1940", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 84-89.

⁸⁰ R.F.C MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: The Incarnation: The Lesson of Love, 20.12.1940", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 89.

In the humble birth at Bethlehem, Jesus gives us the lesson of humility and poverty. He could have transformed the stable or cave of Bethlehem into a magnificent palace, but he wanted to show to the world a lesson of love identifying oneself with all of humanity.⁸¹ The more Msgr. Raymond pondered on this mystery of incarnation, he put on the face of love, compassion, and humility. The letter to the Philippians states that Jesus Christ who was God took the form of a slave, humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death (cf. Phil 2:7- 8). God's sovereign love made him lower himself to the status of a slave. The incarnate Word (cf. Jn 1:1) reached its culmination on the cross for the salvation of all of humanity in sharing his compassionate love at the cost of his life. This incarnate compassionate love was at the very heart of Msgr. Raymond and the core of his spirituality and of his apostolic ministry.

3.5.1.4. The Eucharist: The Core of Msgr. Raymond's Spirituality

St. John Vianney exclaims: "I throw myself at the foot of the Tabernacle like a little dog at the foot of his master."⁸² The same spirit of St. John Vianney was visible in the life of Msgr. Raymond. The presence of Jesus in the Eucharist was his magnetic power, and he was delighted to be at the foot of the Tabernacle. He was captured by the way Christ offered himself on the cross in his natural form as a man, undergoing physical pain and shedding his blood unto death. Through his death on the cross, he brought redemption to humanity. But Christ offered himself on the altar as a priest. He pondered in Christ, death on the cross once, but he dies several times on the altar as many times as the priest consecrates the Holy Eucharist.⁸³

St. John Paul II affirmed: "There can be no Eucharist without the priesthood, just as there can be no priesthood without the Eucharist."⁸⁴ Msgr. Raymond's personal love for the Lord manifested in his devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the fervour and zeal at the Eucharistic celebration, and profound adoration to the Blessed Sacrament.⁸⁵ Msgr. Raymond as a minister

⁸¹ Cf. R.F.C MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: The Incarnation: The Lesson of Love, 20.12.1940", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 93.

⁸² J.H. ADELS, *The Wisdom of the Saints: An Anthology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1987, 56.

⁸³ Cf. R.F.C MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, 26.11.1940", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 53-54.

⁸⁴ J. PAUL II, *Gift and Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of my Priestly Ordination*, Doubleday, New York 1996, 77-78.

⁸⁵ Cf. M. LILLIS, *First Mangalorean Servant of God, Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas, A Brief Biographical Sketch: 50th Death Anniversary (23 December 1960 – 23 December 2010)*, Prasad Printers, Mangalore 2010, 13; Cf. M. LILLIS, *Il Primo Servo di Dio dal*

of God offered the Holy Eucharist in great reverence, with the eyes of faith, finding meaning in the great sacrifice of the Lord. Eucharist was the heart and vital center of his priestly life and in his ministry. It was rightly said by Mr. Alex Pais, the advocate of the High Court, Bombay. He happened to be at the Udyavar Church in Mangalore when he first encountered the young priest Msgr. Raymond at the altar offering Mass. He explains Msgr. Raymond's devotion to the Holy Eucharist: "The celebrant at the altar was saying his Mass with such earnestness, such deliberation, and such absorption that the picture still remains before me. No other priest at the altar since has produced on me an impression akin to it."⁸⁶

To cultivate a love for the Blessed Sacrament Msgr. Raymond advised his spiritual daughters never to leave the house without paying a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, as well as first paying a visit to the Blessed Sacrament when one returns home. He also advised the members of Bethany to make a short visit to the Eucharistic Lord after every meal or coffee break. Immersed by the mystery of the Holy Eucharist he communicates to his daughters that a great God is present in a humble form of bread which can be blown off by a little puff of wind. The doctor who knows his patients cannot eat or digest ordinary food gives them the essence of that food through vitamin tablets or other tonics. Likewise, our God gives himself completely in his divinity and humanity in the form of a small piece of bread.⁸⁷ The greatness of God's love has reduced him to such a little humble state to communicate his love for humankind.

The spiritual daughters of Msgr. Raymond witnessed his ardent love for the Lord. Mother Gemma, one of the ex-superior generals reminisces: "Father founder used to spend a long time before the Blessed Sacrament either before the Mass or after it as well as in the evening. In his old age, he continued this habit until he found it difficult to climb the staircase leading to the chapel."⁸⁸ Sr. Mary Theresine recalls: "Every day after Mass, I have seen him spending quite a long time in thanksgiving before the Blessed Sacrament. Even in his eighties, I have seen him seated in an armchair at the rear end of the chapel

Mangalore, Raymond F. C. Mascarenhas, Un Breve Profilo Biografico: 50° Anniversario della Morte (23 Dicembre 1960 – 23 Dicembre 2010), Assisi Press, Mangalore 2019.

⁸⁶ Archive: A. PAIS, "Rev. RFC Mascarenhas: An Appreciation of Msgr. RFC Mascarenhas", 22 December 1949; Cf. M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 28.

⁸⁷ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 31-69.

⁸⁸ M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 37.

in rapt contemplation before the Eucharistic Lord every evening.”⁸⁹ On one occasion his spiritual daughters expressed their difficulty in keeping awake during the night adoration, he advised them: “If you feel sleepy, sleep there by all means like a watchdog fast asleep before its master.”⁹⁰ Because he desired that his spiritual daughters should be a sanctuary lamp burning before the Blessed Sacrament. For this reason, he introduced perpetual adoration in the Bethany community, Mangalore, on 28 October 1935.⁹¹ His aspiration was his spiritual daughters grow in devotion to the Blessed Sacrament which was brought out visibly in the Constitution written by him. Constitution number 118 states: “Our Lord in his Sacrament of love will be the principal object for their love and adoration and service.”⁹²

Mgr. Raymond knew that a missionary should be contemplative (cf. *RMiss* 89). Thus, he drew strength from the Eucharistic Lord and said to his spiritual daughters:

I have to give you Christ, teach you how to love Christ, and send you out to the villages to witness Christ by your life. If I should give you this love, it is necessary that I should have it within me in full measure. Therefore, I go to the Blessed Sacrament to fill my heart with love. I should be a cistern of God's love, if I am to give this love to others through various channels. Without this, my apostolate in Bethany will be ‘like a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal’ as St. Paul says (cf. I Cor 13:1).⁹³

Mr. Castelino who heard about Msgr. Raymond from his family members writes in his memory: “During the holy hour his meditation and sermons had a profound effect on the people and the glow on his face revealed the love he had for the Blessed Sacrament.”⁹⁴ He vividly manifested the ardent love for the Eucharistic Lord by organizing the First Eucharistic Congress at Mangalore and he preached heart-touching sermons on the mystery of the Eucharist. Even today the tremendous success of the First

⁸⁹ M. THERESINE, *Memorable Msgr. Mascarenhas: Reminiscences*, Bethany Publication, Mangalore 2009, 18.

⁹⁰ M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 37.

⁹¹ Cf. *Diary (Log) of the Congregation*, entry on 28 October 1935.

⁹² *Constitutions of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*, Codialbail Press, Mangalore 1932, n.118. Henceforth cited as BSFC within the text.

⁹³ M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 13.

⁹⁴ Archive: AGBM- A.135.4.D/08, A. CASTELINO, *Memory of Msgr. RFC Mascarenhas*, 25.07.2002.

Eucharistic Congress lingers in the hearts of many which brought the whole diocese of Mangalore to join together to worship the Eucharistic Lord.⁹⁵

The passionate desire to be in the presence of the Lord we find even during his days of illness in the late eighties. His spirit remained alert, and he constantly requested to be carried to the chapel, to be at the foot of the Blessed Sacrament. He would repeat: “O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament divine, all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.”⁹⁶ When the time approached that he no longer could go to the chapel, his hunger for the Blessed Sacrament was insatiable. Often, he said: “I cannot see the Blessed Sacrament from here, but I am keeping watch with the sanctuary lamp which I can see.”⁹⁷ Msgr. Raymond found his spiritual joy in being a man of the Eucharist and we find in him that the Eucharist was the principal reason for his life as a priest. The thought of the Blessed Sacrament constantly lingered in his mind. It was very visible towards the end of his life when he requested of the assisting sister saying: “Sr. Poma, go and call the Blessed Sacrament.”⁹⁸ Msgr. Raymond even in his last days of life was alert to inform the superior general Sr. Macrina of his desire to have the perpetual adoration in Bethany. Though he was unable to speak well he uttered the words: “Adore, adore Adoration.”⁹⁹ In Msgr. Raymond, we see a man who lived the Eucharist and who inspired others to live the life of the Eucharist. The holy man obsessed by the love for the Holy Eucharist went to his eternal abode leaving the legacy of his life of the Eucharist to his people.

3.5.1.5. *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*

The image of the Blessed Virgin Mary is, foremost, a symbol of the privileged position of women in the Catholic Church. In Mary, we find an amazing grace as God’s gaze fell on her, a humble village girl to partake in his mission. She is the most revered individual woman; not only she is the Mother of Christ, but also, she is the mother of all. She became a mediatrix between God and his people as well as the co-redemptress who played a significant role in the history of salvation.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Cf. Archive: F.137.4.A/05, E. C. PINTO, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 26.06.2002.

⁹⁶ V. D’SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 101.

⁹⁷ M. ESPERIE, *Bethany: My Joy and my Crown: My Memories of Msgr. RFC Mascarenhas*, 41.

⁹⁸ M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 39.

⁹⁹ Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/28, Macrina, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 07.06.2002.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. G.D. CHRYSSIDES, *Christianity Today*, Continuum, London 2010, 111.

Msgr. Raymond cultivated a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in his childhood through his mother. He affectionately called Mary 'Mai' (mother) as he addressed his mother Joanna in his mother tongue, Konkani. As a man of God, great was his faith and confidence in the Blessed Virgin Mary in all vicissitudes of his life. He gave birth to the *Congregation of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*, on the feast of our Lady of Mount Carmel. He recommended the four founding members under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary saying: "O Blessed Mother, protect these children whom you have entrusted to me in all confidence, for the extension of your Son's kingdom."¹⁰¹ He considered: Bethany is the garden of our Lady, and he is only the gardener for the time being. Mary herself has planted various kinds of plants and nurtured them. Whenever she is inclined, she plucks some choice flowers and presents these precious flowers to her Son Jesus. The plants that are worm-eaten she uproots and throws away.¹⁰² His filial trust in the Blessed Mother was so great that he would tell his spiritual daughters: "When we feel weary of life's problems, let us pick up the rosary and pray it meditatively."¹⁰³

The habit that he practiced at the home of 'praying the rosary' became part of his life. His spiritual daughters frequently observed him, rosary in hand, head bowed down in recollection or breviary in his hand. In his free time or while travelling one could see him praying the rosary. It happened that one of his spiritual daughters asked Msgr. Raymond: "Father, how far is Calicut from Mangalore? Father answered: I don't know exactly the distance, but I can recite 15 or 16 rosaries from Mangalore to Calicut if I don't have a travel companion."¹⁰⁴ Sr. Bertha reveals an incident about the power of the rosary. Once Msgr. Raymond was returning from Gadenahally along with one of his spiritual daughters. As usual, he was engrossed with his rosary. Unfortunately, the bus suddenly rammed into a huge tree, but the people were safe without any injury. Having witnessed this miracle the driver informed the conductor that there must be someone holy in this bus. The conductor noticed the rosary in the hands of Msgr. Raymond and replied amazingly that there is a sanyasi in a white garb praying with his beads. This incident was considered a miracle as they were saved without any injury.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 33.

¹⁰² Cf. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 50.

¹⁰³ V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 71.

¹⁰⁴ M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 2-3.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 1.

Msgr. Raymond desired that his spiritual daughters should speak and act according to the mind of Mary. He enabled them to ponder the life of Mary at Bethlehem, when she was repulsed from door to door, she did not grumble why God has placed her in these circumstances. From the depth of her heart, she uttered: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord” (cf. Lk 1: 38). Her *fiat* continued while she fled by night to Egypt, when she lost her child Jesus in the temple, during the public life of her Son when her Son was rejected by his own people when her Son was called a lunatic when her Son performed miracles when her Son Jesus was dying on the cross. Her *fiat* gave her the power to stand by the cross as God’s humble handmaid. This mystery of annunciation of her *fiat* stirred the heart of Msgr. Raymond. He was seized by the mystery of the annunciation as well as the mystery of the incarnation. Msgr. Raymond contemplated on the God of compassion in the Gospel of John, and he was captivated by a God who pitched his tent among us (cf. Jn 1: 14), through the humble woman Mary with her powerful *fiat*: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Lk 1: 38). Imbued by this mystery of the Annunciation, Msgr. Raymond pondered on Mary who became the new tent, the human dwelling place of the Lord. Msgr. Raymond desired that the ideal and motto of his spiritual daughters be absorbed by the life of Mary in her enormous *fiat*.¹⁰⁶

Fr. Godfrey Saldanha in his personal experience with Msgr. Raymond communicates that in his boyhood he had the opportunity to have a close relationship with Msgr. Raymond as an altar boy. He was delighted to be with Msgr. Raymond when he was offering a private Mass in his residence. Along with the other altar boys, he had many occasions to sleep in his cottage, as the young boys were afraid to return to their homes at night after the midnight Mass on the events of Christmas and Easter. As a young boy, he admired the exemplary holy life of Msgr. Raymond and his filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fr. Godfrey Saldanha had an unforgettable memory of the picture of Msgr. Raymond reclining on his armchair with his rosary in his adorable hands and for him, the rosary was his powerful instrument.¹⁰⁷

Msgr. Raymond at any circumstances of decision making would say: “We shall see what our Blessed Mother has to say.”¹⁰⁸ It is fitting to recall the words of Saint Francis de Sales: “Let us run to Mary, and, as her little

¹⁰⁶ Cf. R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Points for Recollection – *Fiat*, 05.09.1943”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 255-257.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Archive: F: 137.4.A/10, G.A. SALDANHA, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 02.08.2002.

¹⁰⁸ V. D’SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 72.

children, cast ourselves into her arms with a perfect confidence.”¹⁰⁹ Likewise, Msgr. Raymond abandoned himself into the arms of Blessed Virgin Mary with absolute confidence. On another occasion, when the bills of the collapsed building were due, he bravely said: “We always draw from our bank in heaven. Our Lord and his Blessed Mother are very rich, and their wealth is ours for asking.”¹¹⁰ He confidently held the hands of Mary when he was criticised and abandoned, and at the peak moment of his agony he could say courageously: “Our Blessed Mother is with me. It may be Calvary, but that is where our Lord and his Blessed Mother are, and I am content to be where they are.”¹¹¹ Msgr. Raymond passionately believed that Bethany is built in the heart of Mary; the roots of Bethany are deep down in the heart of Mary. He desired that he wanted to be at the foot of our Lady even after his death. Consequently, this love for his Blessed Mother made him prepare a crypt for himself under the grotto of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Bethany mother house.¹¹²

In Mary, we find a pure knowledge of the mystery of God's mercy. “No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh” (MV 24). Mary has entered the sanctuary of divine mercy as she participated intimately in the mystery of his love for humanity. Hence, for Msgr. Raymond the mystery of the incarnation and the mystery of annunciation are the two sides of the same coin. These mysteries shaped his entire life and his ministry, being the compassionate pastor in serving humanity in love.

3.5.1.6. *The Patron Saints*

Saints are our brothers and sisters who not just listened to the Gospel, but they lived the Gospel by walking the path of the beatitudes. They cheer us to choose humility, meekness, mercy, and purity of heart to grow in passion for heaven rather than the world.¹¹³ Msgr. Raymond had special piety for the saints particularly, St. Joseph, St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier, St. Raymond of Penyafort, St. Camillus, etc. In his dialogue to his spiritual daughters, he mentions that to become a doctor one should have a

¹⁰⁹ F. De SALES, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Longmas, Green, and Co., London 1891, 123.

¹¹⁰ V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 77.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹¹² Cf. M. ESPERIE, *Bethany: My Joy and my Crown: My Memories of Msgr. RFC Mascarenhas*, 33-37.

¹¹³ Cf. FRANCIS, “Angelus on the Solemnity of all Saints, 1 November 2018”, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 45/257 (9 November 2018), 12.

certificate with the title MBBS or MD. Whereas, the qualification to become a saint one must be possessed by the Gospel beatitudes: to be poor in spirit, to be meek, merciful, peace makers, etc (cf. Mt 5: 3-10). As a result, the saints get the title 'Beatae' which means happiness.¹¹⁴

The tradition of naming children with a saint's name was widespread in the later Middle Ages. The intention was to create a special bond between the child and the spiritual patron, and the patron saint became the role model of the child.¹¹⁵ In Msgr. Raymond, we encounter the role of saints in his spirituality and mission. We notice the name of Msgr. Raymond comprises the names of three saints i.e., Raymond, Francis, and Camillus. Therefore, we focus here on these saints who influenced his life. Msgr. Raymond was born on the feast of Saint Raymond of Penyafort and his devoted parents inspired by the significance of the day named him Raymond Camillus with the family name Mascarenhas. In fact, the day was dedicated to Mary, and that influenced his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary throughout his life.¹¹⁶ Msgr. Raymond admired the great tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary possessed by Saint Raymond of Penyafort. She played a vital role when St. Raymond of Penyafort was a preacher on the Island of Majorca during the time of King James. St. Raymond learned that although the King was a man of qualities, he was ruled by passions, and therefore, he advised the King to give up his wrongdoings. Seeing that the King did not keep up his promise, St. Raymond decided to return to Barcelona. Consequently, he was forbidden to leave the Island, and the King would punish any ship captain who would try to help St. Raymond. Trusting in the providence of Mary and with the sign of the cross fearlessly he took off his *cappa* (the long cloak worn by Dominicans over the white tunic). He spread it on the water and stepped on his cloak with his walking staff and miraculously sailed to Barcelona. This great deed of God's compassionate love and the merciful hands of Mary over his spiritual patron St. Raymond of Penyafort captured the heart of Msgr. Raymond.¹¹⁷ The life of St. Raymond of Penyafort inculcated in him a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. His devotion to St. Raymond of Penyafort is visible in his letter to late Bishop Rene Feuga regarding the

¹¹⁴ Cf. R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: The Feast of All Saints, 31.10.1941", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 147.

¹¹⁵ Cf. A. CHAPMAN, *Patrons and Patron Saints in Early Modern English Literature*, Routledge, London 2013, 10.

¹¹⁶ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 1.

¹¹⁷ Cf. N.J. SANTORO, *Mary in Our Life: Atlas of the Names and Titles of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and their Place in Marian Devotion*, iUniverse, Inc, Bloomington 2011, 467.

commencement of a convent at Gadenahally in North Karnataka under the patronage of Mother of mercy, he writes:

I am particularly happy that the choice of the title and patron of the work so happily coincides with the feast of our Blessed Mother,I was led to the choice by considering that our Mother of mercy was the particular patron of my birthday saint, Raymond of Penyfort, that she appeared to him, directed him in the work of the redemption of captives, and that our work at Gadenahally was one to be of mercy.¹¹⁸

The inspiration of the life of St. Raymond of Penyfort becomes the impetus for Msgr. Raymond to develop strong faith and trust in the arms of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

God in his bounty blessed Msgr. Raymond with many gifts and talents but he was unable to sing a note which baffled him. His ardent desire to sing at least those parts of the Mass that the priest would be required to sing inspired him to pray for help through the intercession of St. Francis Xavier. He made the promise that if he would grant this favour, he would add the name 'Francis' to his baptismal name as a continual reminder of this favour. The prayer of Msgr. Raymond was answered and in gratitude, 'Francis' became his middle name.¹¹⁹ The words of his spiritual patron: "give me souls, take away all else" echoed in the life of Msgr. Raymond. His patron saint became a source of inspiration to be a missionary to save souls. Augmented by the zeal of saving souls and diffusing the compassionate love of God, he reached out to the poor and needy as a compassionate pastor. He was on fire by the zeal of St. Francis Xavier who moved him to be compassionate towards his flocks. As a spiritual father, he cared for the wellbeing of his people, especially at Udyavar, Agrar, Kallianpur, and Bendur.¹²⁰ In honour of his patron saint, he composed a prayer: "My most loving father and patron and apostle, thou knowest that I have always loved thee,...work solely for God."¹²¹ Energized by the compassionate spirit of saving souls after the imitation of his patron Saint Francis Xavier, Msgr. Raymond dedicated his

¹¹⁸ R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, "Letter to Bishop Rene Feuga, 8 September 1949", in *Compassionate Pastor* 10 (2017) 2, 22.

¹¹⁹ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 10.

¹²⁰ Cf. G. PAYYAPILLY – M. BENEDICT, *Fullness of Life*, Mangalore Publication, Mangalore 2003, 11.

¹²¹ Archive: ARFC-F.121.1.3/10, "RFC Mascarenhas: Prayer to St. Francis Xavier, My patron and my Apostle", undated.

work for the glory of God for the total liberation of the poor and the marginalized.

We can trace the influence of St. Camillus de Lellis whose name he received at his baptism. He found in his patron saint a man of compassion, who reached out to the sick and suffering with the balm of God's love. He esteemed the faith journey of St. Camillus exposing himself even at the risk of his life in serving his brothers and sisters who were affected by famine and pestilence.¹²² Likewise, we recognize in Msgr. Raymond a man moved by compassion reaching to his people who were affected by the epidemics of small-pox and cholera at Udyavar. In attending to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of his brothers and sisters, he manifested the compassionate face of Jesus.¹²³

Msgr. Raymond walked the path of his spiritual patrons - St. Raymond of Penyafort, St. Francis Xavier, and St. Camillus de Lellis. He followed their way of life in his faith journey as well as in his mission. He did not express his great devotion to these saints to his spiritual daughters in an enormous way, but he did express his immense love for these saints since he had these saints' pictures painted magnificently on the walls of the Bethany motherhouse chapel in Mangalore.

3.5.1.7. Compassionate Endurance in Suffering

The hallmark of Msgr. Raymond was a life saga of self-giving without wavering. His discipleship was enclosed with risks and hardships. His unbreakable bond with God was remarkable in a time of struggles and his faith was like a firm rock.¹²⁴ Bethany had undergone painful experiences in the process of its growth. At this juncture, the Gospel of John gives the right explanation to Bethany: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). The enduring spirit of Msgr. Raymond and the founding members were the life-giving examples of the grain of wheat. He had shown to his spiritual daughters through his own life that pain and suffering is the key to real joy, without this, there is no life. His life was like that of a seed that has gone through continuous death and brought new life to others. To bring forth life in hundredfold, Msgr. Raymond had to die to himself in many situations,

¹²² Cf. S. CICALLELLI – F.W. FABER (tr.), *St. Camillus of Lellis: Patron of the Sick Hospitals and Nurses*, 87.

¹²³ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 17.

¹²⁴ Cf. E. FRANK, "An Appraisal of Unravel the Pearl", in *Compassionate Pastor* 9 (2016) 1, 23.

especially to begin the Congregation of Bethany. He gave birth to Bethany in the face of warm appreciation and bitter criticism. At this challenging moment, it is admiring to see the heroic steps of daring pioneers who stood by him with unwavering faith and undaunted dedication. They broke themselves for the sake of the kingdom. Sr. Violette D'Souza rightly exclaims: "Bethany has grown into a sturdy tree in God's Garden, like a tree planted near the running stream, irrigated by the waters of sorrows and afflictions, which have ever since nurtured and fructified it."¹²⁵

The birth of Bethany Congregation seemed foolish in the eyes of many and there spread an unusual doubt: "Will it survive?" And many predicted: "Father Mascarenhas sisters will die when he dies."¹²⁶ Though these statements might have pierced his heart, his undaunting faith helped him to move according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In Msgr. Raymond the words of Aristotle were true: "Suffering becomes beautiful when anyone bears great calamity with cheerfulness not through insensitivity but through the greatness of the mind."¹²⁷ Msgr. Raymond faced the criticism of the people with the greatness of his mind. He drew strength from God in the Blessed Sacrament and through the beads of the rosary to face any reality of life.¹²⁸ Saint Faustina Kowalska who is known as the apostle of mercy firmly believed "suffering is a great grace; through suffering the soul becomes like the Saviour; in suffering love becomes crystalized; the greater the suffering, the purer the love."¹²⁹ Likewise, Msgr. Raymond knew that suffering strengthens one's spiritual life, and that one who suffers exactly as God wishes, enjoys spiritual joy.

The second world war caused scarcity of money, food was rationed, there were sickness and death. The war affected Bethany Congregation too and many of his spiritual daughters were affected by tuberculosis, typhoid and were dying. It was heart-breaking for Msgr. Raymond to face the loss of his spiritual daughters and the criticism of the people. Many parents decided to take their daughters back home. Msgr. Raymond soaked by compassion for his daughters with the help of some generous persons he had tried his best to

¹²⁵ V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 34.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹²⁷ Cited in, W. BRACKEN, *Change Ringing: Real Change Requires Continuous Learning*, Trafford, Canada 2000, 46.

¹²⁸ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.1/11, COLUMBA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 09.10.1974.

¹²⁹ M.F. KOWALSKA, *Divine Mercy in My Soul: The Dairy of the Servant of God, Sister M. Faustina Kowalska*, n. 58, Marian Press, Stockbridge 1987, 39. Henceforth cited as *Diary* within the text.

provide good food, medicine, and two specialist doctors daily for medical check-up. The rumours went about the locality that the sisters who were ill were being thrown out and left to die under the trees. It reached such an extent that people climbed the trees and walls to have the glance of the sisters who were ill and left to die in the open. Due to the great loss of the young sisters, many priests, religious, laypeople, and even the family members discouraged the candidates to enter the institute of Bethany. No one can imagine what might be the trauma Msgr. Raymond and his spiritual daughters went through this period. Since Msgr. Raymond was on the spiritual path, he could face the times of darkness which later became the tool to grow.¹³⁰ Though tears lingered in his eyes he could firmly say to his daughters who were mourning at the loss of many young sisters: “We have opened our largest branch house in heaven.”¹³¹ He believed that sanctity presupposes suffering and if the thermometer of suffering goes high our sanctity will rise.¹³²

Msgr. Raymond as a man of vision had a dream in the year 1941 or 1942 that he would be undergoing a horrifying moment when he will be abandoned by his own spiritual daughters. It happened after some years. Having stood for justice and righteousness he underwent various difficulties among Church authorities. He wrote a booklet named ‘My Apology’ on Bethany’s growth in spite of all troubles by Church authorities and lay people. In it, he wrote that some of his actions had been misunderstood by his authorities, which became the cause of enmity. Soon a counter booklet appeared known as ‘The Revenge of Monsignor Mascarenhas’ which was an attack on the character of Msgr. Raymond. As a response to this booklet, in his sorrow, he wrote another booklet called ‘Apologia Pro Vita Sua’, in which he unveiled some of the allegations made against him in the counter booklet. Due to this, the Church authorities were furious and commanded him to collect the booklets back from whomever he had sent.¹³³ While recalling this heart-rending scene one of the prominent laymen of the Milagres parish commented:

It was a sad, sad spectacle to see this 84 or 85-year-old priest going from house to house of his friends with a bag in his hand to collect that little booklet which he had sent to them. It

¹³⁰ Cf. M. ESPERIE, *Bethany: My Joy and My Crown: My Memories of Msgr. RFC Mascarenhas*, 75-76.

¹³¹ V. D’SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 86.

¹³² Cf. R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Exhortation: The Example of Jesus – Obedience, 21.12.1940”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of Founder*, 108.

¹³³ Cf. V. D’SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 92.

made us respect him more than ever, because of his humble submission to what he was ordered. If his great deeds in Mangalore won't make him a saint, certainly his humility should win him a crown of glory.¹³⁴

Many knew there was truth in his booklet, but no one dared to support him. But even at this allegation, people admired his humble submission to his authorities to collect back the booklet.

During these unbearable moments of Msgr. Raymond, the Congregation was under the control of the diocese. The order of the Bishop reached Bethany Sisters that they were forbidden to go to Msgr. Raymond. In the event of disobedience, the Congregation would be suppressed. Even he was prohibited from offering Holy Mass. It was an agonizing moment for both Msgr. Raymond as well as to his spiritual daughters. It was still harder for Msgr. Raymond when he was forsaken by his own spiritual daughters under the order of the diocese. During these times of painful moments, his spiritual daughters were helpless, and they found solace in the Blessed Sacrament.¹³⁵ Msgr. Raymond, having heard that his spiritual daughters were not allowed to talk to him or to give Mass vestments, said: "My child obey your superiors."¹³⁶ "Gold is tested in the fire, and those found acceptable to God, in the furnace of humiliation" (Sir 2:5). The awareness of the indwelling power of God gave courage to Msgr. Raymond amid severe trials and humiliation. In Msgr. Raymond, we find the meaning of the words of St. Paul, affliction produces endurance, endurance creates proven character and proven character generates hope (cf. Rom 5: 3-4). As in St. Paul, the hope never disappointed Msgr. Raymond because he was sure of God's compassionate love poured into his heart through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Msgr. Raymond discovered through faith the meaning of being a sharer of Christ's redemptive suffering. In this encounter, he recovered his own sufferings in Christ which brought new meaning in life.¹³⁷ Msgr. Raymond had found a purpose in life which assisted him to overcome any obstacles in his way. Since his goal was positive, he could endure and defeat without

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

¹³⁵ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/61, LIDWINE, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 10.07.2002.

¹³⁶ Archive: AGBM- A.135.4. B/138, M. MEDIATRICE, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 20.01.2003; Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/143, M. THERESINE, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 23.08.2005.

¹³⁷ Cf. J. PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* (11 February 1984), n. 20.

quitting. As iron is fashioned by fire in the oven, so in the fire of suffering and under the weight of trials Msgr. Raymond sacrificed himself for Bethany.

3.5.2. Mission of Msgr. Raymond: A Compassionate Act

Evangelii Gaudium exhorts: “Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus” (EG 120). It is very true in the life of Msgr. Raymond. His encounter with the Lord in the Gospel became the hallmark of life and mission. Because he was well aware that by the very vocation, he was called to a particular life committed to the integral imitation of Christ.¹³⁸ Like Chiara Lubich, he realized to love means to serve.¹³⁹ The love and service is vividly portrayed in the mystery of incarnation and annunciation. Contemplating this mystery of incarnation and annunciation motivated him to empty himself at the service of humanity to bring the compassionate love of God to the people. He experienced the agony of his people, and he heard their cry in times of their misery. As a pastor, he followed the example of Jesus, the good shepherd, filled with compassion he reached out to his flock, those close by and those physically far away. Msgr. Raymond, a compassionate shepherd to his flock, manifested in his life and mission the God of compassion.

3.5.2.1. A Compassionate Pastor

Basil the Great, said: “A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. A good deed is never lost. He who shows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love.”¹⁴⁰ This influential thought of Basil the Great was reflected in the life of Msgr. Raymond. He dedicated his life to God, sowing courtesy and planting kindness and compassion with his vivacious preaching and his life-giving examples. His obsessive desire was to have “the Gospel preached to the poor” (cf. Lk 4: 18; cf. BSC 155). Imbued by the mission manifesto of Jesus, Msgr. Raymond committed his life for his people in Udyavar, Agrar, and Bendur. As a pastor at Udyavar, he was enriched by the richness of the heart of his people though they were poor farmers and inadequately educated.

Foreseeing the spiritual needs of his people he desired to replace the small chapel of Udyavar to have enough space to accommodate his people for worship. Trusting in the providence of God, he began constructing a

¹³⁸ Cf. A. PIGNA, “Voto” in E. ANCILLI, *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Spiritualità*, vol. 2, Edizioni Studium 1975, 2041.

¹³⁹ Cf. C. LUBICH, *L'arte di Amare*, 37.

¹⁴⁰ Cited in, J. EKLUND, *The Third Testament*, iUniverse, Inc, Bloomington 2010, 117.

church and great was his faith though his income was small. Very often people of Udyavar encountered Msgr. Raymond kneeling at the site of the new church with his hands raised in prayer.¹⁴¹ The impoverished situation of his parish did not discourage him but filled with compassion he found avenues to ask for financial help for the construction of the church. Xavier Mendonca in his reminiscence of Msgr. Raymond states:

During the construction of the church, he would get up early in the morning, offer the Mass, and with one or two companions go on foot too far off areas of the parish for financial help and timber. Sometimes at noon, he would satisfy his hunger eating rice porridge, or ragi porridge dished out in a teak leaf by some non-Christian women.¹⁴²

The God of compassion did miracles in his life to complete the construction of the church through various generous hands. His sacrificing spirit as a compassionate pastor for his flock became an inspiration for many young and old. Judith Mascarenhas rightly said: Msgr. Raymond was “a deeply spiritual man of God, a multifaceted personality gifted with rare and varied talents, a profound thinker, a visionary far ahead of his time, a determined, convinced, inspired towering Giant of Action.”¹⁴³

The ardent zeal of Msgr. Raymond to make known the message of the Gospel triggered him to enter the life of his parishioners. The houses of the parishioners were located many miles away from the church, but his missionary spirit enthused him to reach to them in times of sickness and difficulty. As a good shepherd he knew his flock personally (cf. Jn 10:14), he sacrificed his time and energy for them. His compassionate heart ached for his people who were living in huts near the riverside as the monsoons washed away their huts. He was at their side with his consoling presence as well as with his request for help on their behalf as a compassionate pastor. Another tragedy that affected the people of Udyavar was the epidemics of smallpox and cholera. He as a spiritual doctor would respond to the knock on his door at any time even at midnight. Without minding the weather - sunny or rainy - he would be at the bedside of the dying persons to assist them with the Holy Viaticum. His people recognized his compassionate deeds, and he was described as ‘a good shepherd’ who had sacrificed his life for his flock. His missionary zeal and his compassionate deeds continued while he was a pastor

¹⁴¹ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 17-19.

¹⁴² Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. D/11, X. MENDONCA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 28.03.2003.

¹⁴³ Archive: F. 137. 4. C/19, J. MASCARENHAS, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 04.03.2000.

at Agrar. In fact, his mother's charitable acts of taking care of a boy who was affected with smallpox became the motivation in becoming the embodiment of God's mercy through his acts of charity even risking his own life.¹⁴⁴ One of the parishioners at Bendur recalls the kindness of Msgr. Raymond:

It requires no effort of the imagination for us who knew and loved him, to go back in spirit to those bygone days and see Father Mascarenhas walking alone the crooked streets and hidden alleyways where there was so much poverty. We can still see him entering the homes of those in need and bringing them the smile of his love and charity.¹⁴⁵

Catherine of Siena states: "To the servant of God every place is the right place, and every time is the right time."¹⁴⁶ This profound saying was accurate in Msgr. Raymond as he was appointed as the pastor at Bendur. He was attuned to the plan of God and ventured on his mission believing that wherever they sent him was the right place and at the right time. Bendur was considered a desolate place but God in his richness of mercy through the instrumentality of Msgr. Raymond transformed the barren land into a flourishing land with abundant fruits. Like a caring shepherd, his heart was for his flock finding concrete solutions for their needs, and consequently, his life was intimately tied to them. The people who gathered to worship the Lord in a small shed moved his heart.¹⁴⁷ He was concerned for his people who were not able to participate meaningfully in the liturgical services due to the use of the Latin language of the Church. He had a good command over English, Latin, and Konkani, so he used his pen for the spiritual life of the people, by his translations into their vernacular language. His intention to help the people personally participate in the liturgy meant that he had to spend a large part of his time in translating the daily missal, the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Imitation of Mary both in English and in Konkani, and the New Testament in the vernacular language (cf. BSC 163). He was a zealous pastor involved in the affairs of his people. He dedicated his time giving spiritual guidance, conducting retreats, creating opportunities for people to receive the sacrament of penance and Eucharist, enlightening their minds through his powerful sermons and through his eloquent speech, and arranging classes for religious instructions. To motivate the people to help the poor and needy of his

¹⁴⁴ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 16-19.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

¹⁴⁶ R. ELLSBERG, *Blessed Among Us: Day by Day with Saintly Witnesses*, Liturgical Press, Minnesota 2016, 245.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 20.

parishioners he began the Association of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. To make the people more active in the service of God he began different sodalities such as the Altar server's sodality, sodalities for men, women, boys, and girls.¹⁴⁸

As a compassionate pastor, he received the penitent with a loving paternal heart through the Sacrament of Confession. Many flocked to him to make their confessions and to seek his guidance. Fr. Godfrey Saldanha states: "As a seminarian, I used to visit him to seek his guidance and make my sacramental confession and his dealings with the penitent was an experience of the mercy of God who is slow to anger and ever ready to forgive."¹⁴⁹ One of his parishioners often said that he was a saintly priest, full of love for God and of divine wisdom. He was like an apostle possessed by energy and zeal in whom the love of Christ burned brightly. His zeal was like St. Francis Xavier with his dominant passion for the kingdom of God in spreading compassionate love.¹⁵⁰

Everyone admired his undaunting spirit and tireless efforts in involving the people in all the activities especially the manual work in constructing the new church. His talents were multifarious. Bendur church is a real monument of his architectural talent that shows he had expertise in erecting buildings. His building of churches was an external means of bringing people to God. His parishioners recalled his exceptional qualities of mind and heart as a great zealous lover of God in turning the desolate land into life in fullness. Fr. Joseph Peter Tauro was the parish priest of St. Sebastian Church at Bendur. He had no personal contact with Msgr. Raymond, but he recalls the words of the elderly about Msgr. Raymond as he was the parish priest at Bendur. He brings back to the memory of the people the inauguration of the new parish of Bendur on 23 August 1914. On this occasion Msgr. Raymond gave a prophetic homily recalling the words of the prophet Ezekiel who saw a great valley of dry bones and the spirit of the Lord came down and the dry bones were made alive with flesh and blood.¹⁵¹ The parish at Bendur became a flourishing Catholic community having different activities in spreading the compassionate love of God. As a result, people came from parishes near and far to listen to him, especially during the Lenten and Holy Week services.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 20-22.

¹⁴⁹ Archive: F. 137. 4. A/ 10, G. A. SALDANHA, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 2.08.2002.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 76.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Archive: F. 137. 4. A/ 19, J.P. TAURO, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 07.03.2003.

Even today the kind deeds of Msgr. Raymond are alive in the minds of many. These deeds reflect the merciful love of God that was manifested in Msgr. Raymond. As Msgr. Alexander F. D' Souza states: "He was really a saintly man, a zealous pastor, a true missionary, a person who spent his whole life doing good for others."¹⁵² Later he continued his mission of compassion through his spiritual daughters in founding the Bethany Congregation through their life and apostolates.

3.5.2.2. *A Man of God for the Kingdom of God*

Msgr. Raymond was perfectly aware of his specific vocation and mission to carry out his concrete assignment in bringing people to God. He was an instrument in discerning vocations of many young boys and girls. As a dynamic and energetic young priest, he captured the hearts of others through his God-given gifts of gentleness, joviality, simplicity, kindness, and the spirit of prayer, etc. Primarily, the compassionate ways of Msgr. Raymond attracted many and the parish of Bendur became a source of vocations to the service of the Lord. Msgr. Raymond led an exemplary life and they found in him a brave soldier of Christ, which triggered many to embrace the priestly life as well as the religious life. The Bendure parishioners witnessed many seminarians in cassock seeking fatherly blessings, advice, and guidance from Msgr. Raymond. God blessed the soil of Bendur parish giving the gifts of numerous vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Among them, three priests became Bishops namely Bishop Basil Peres of Mangalore, Bishop Mendonca of Trichinopoly, and Bishop Patrick D'Souza of Varanasi. Bishop Basil Peres jokingly addressed Msgr. Raymond as 'Bishop-maker'.¹⁵³ Regarding his zeal in fostering vocations to the kingdom of God, someone remarked: "He was not a banyan tree under which nothing else could grow. On the contrary, he was like the leaven in the bread or a hidden catalyst, whose presence inspired many persons to devote their lives to the Lord."¹⁵⁴

Msgr. Raymond was a charismatic person endowed with prophetic words and was an eloquent preacher. He was an effective preacher, and his message was alive. It alarmed, aroused, challenged many even to embrace a priestly vocation. Fr. Fred Moniz testifies that while he was a participant at the Eucharistic Congress, he heard the exceptionally fluent preacher Msgr.

¹⁵² Archive: F. 137. 4. A/ 03, A.F. D'SOUZA, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 17.06.2002. Msgr. Alexander F. D' Souza was the Vicar General of the diocese of Mangalore. He was an assistant parish priest at Bendur who knew Msgr. Raymond while he was residing in Bethany.

¹⁵³ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 23-24.

¹⁵⁴ V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 23.

Raymond. As a young boy, he was deeply moved by the giant form, flowing beard, piercing voice, imposing personality, excellent language, splendid diction, heavenly composure, and divinely inspired ideas. Msgr. Raymond left on him a deep and lasting impression. His piercing words and his personality became a remote cause in receiving a vocation to the priesthood.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, Fr. Edwin Pinto reminisces, as a teenager, he was admired by the excellent sermon preached on the theme of the Eucharist on the day of the Eucharistic Congress that brought a radical change in his life. This holy occasion became a steppingstone for his vocation to the priesthood. Subsequently, there was an intense desire to be a good preacher of the Word of God, to take the people to God.¹⁵⁶ God in a hidden way worked through Msgr. Raymond in helping the other to discover one's meaning of life and to take a courageous step in responding to the voice of God.

Fr. Archibald Albuquerque explains how Msgr. Raymond became the facilitator of God's healing hand and fostered vocations to the service of God. As a little child, he was sickly, and he was lying on his back all the time. His family was in distress and anxiety. Msgr. Raymond heard from his aunts who were Bethany Sisters, of the inability of the child to move. Requested by Msgr. Raymond, brought the child and his mother to him and he prayed over them. Miraculously, within a couple of days, the child began to turn and tried to crawl. Fr. Albuquerque heard the immense love of God worked through Msgr. Raymond and he strongly deemed that Msgr. Raymond helped him to become a priest.¹⁵⁷ Fr. Gerald Miranda speaks of the vibrant personality of Msgr. Raymond was an inspiration to embrace priestly life. He proudly announces that he was thrilled to attend the catechism classes and delighted to listen to his sermons and instructions. Msgr. Raymond as a great scholar and preacher had a great influence on him. As a young boy, he admired the zeal in which he visited the families on his bicycle and reached out to the people in need in remote places. His mission of compassion continued in promoting vocations to the priesthood and religious life through various sodalities considered as a veritable nursery for vocations to the priesthood. The seed of faith that was sown to the people of Bendur flowered richly providing many vocations to the service of God. As ministers of God, they

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Archive: F.137.4.A/26, F. MONIZ, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 12.08.2010.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Archive: F.137.4.A/27, E. PINTO, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, undated.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Archive: F.137.4.A/17, A. ALBUQUERQUE, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, undated.

reached out not only to Mangalore but to Mysore, Trichy, Hyderabad, Bombay, and several other far-flung dioceses of the time.¹⁵⁸

Living an exemplary life is an act of evangelization (cf. I Pet 2: 12). Msgr. Raymond lived this aspect in a tangible way throughout his life. Brother Philip in his testimony says that Msgr. Raymond devoted his time to the young boys and girls who sought his guidance. He knew that the life of each one is planned around God, and as a minister of God he helped them to discover their vocation in the spirit of prayer and spiritual maturity. Brother Philip was dazzled to notice Msgr. Raymond cycling towards the remote villages, with his long beard blown by the wind into halves and flowing over his shoulders. The enthusiastic young priest had brought a tremendous desire to be like him dedicating his life to the service of God. Having expressed his desire to be in the service of God Msgr. Raymond was pleased to dedicate his time teaching the first lessons in Latin Grammar.¹⁵⁹ Fr. John Cornelio as a boy of the parish of Msgr. Raymond said: “The good example he set by his own priestly life, the vigilant eye he kept and the timely advice he gave to many young men must have, no doubt, brought many vocations to the priesthood among the men of the parish in which he was working.”¹⁶⁰

Visiting the families became the foundation of promoting vocations. As a pastor, he entered into the life of the people knowing all their requirements and aspirations. Having visited the family of Mr. Sebastian Mathias, he happened to know the desire of their children to dedicate their lives to religious life. His daughter Flora was engaged in the teaching ministry at St. Joseph Asylum School for girls, at Jeppu in Mangalore. In perceiving that she would be happier to render service at the parish Church, Msgr. Raymond requested Fr. Lunazzi, S.J. to release her to her own parish school where Msgr. Raymond was the manager. Msgr. Raymond took opportune time to converse with Flora Mathias regarding his wish to begin his religious Congregation. Flora being part of the plan of Msgr. Raymond began to dedicate her time to special prayer and sacrifices. Her younger sister Alice began to notice changes in her way of life, and she persistently questioned Flora about this change, and she revealed the secret she was carrying in her heart. The transformation of her elder sister Flora became a reason to give up her idea of entering the Carmel convent of Trivandrum and she decided to

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Archive: F.137.2.A/02, G. MIRANDA, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F. C Mascarenhas*, 24.08.1976.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 23-24.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

become part of her sister's plan. They united in prayer knocking at the door of heaven with their fervour to serve the Lord.

The chain of vocations began to connect from Flora to her friend Marceline Menezes. Their friendship and working together made them change their future plans. The spirit of God enabled Flora Mathias, Alice Mathias, and Marceline Menezes to take a daring step of spending time every Friday after school hours with Msgr. Raymond to receive spiritual and religious instructions. During these occasions, God provided another woman teacher to be in contact with him. Knowing the aspiration and intention of Regina Gertrude Gonsalves, Msgr. Raymond unfolded his vision of the religious congregation. Regina Gertrude having been convinced of her genuine vocation to serve the Lord, became part of the three in their weekly prayers and instructions.¹⁶¹ God in his richness of love exposed to them that they are part of God's mission in his kingdom through the work of Msgr. Raymond.

His life of holiness fostered vocations to the priesthood and religious life even from his own family. He was delighted to see his cousins, nieces, and great grandnieces, and nephews serving the Lord in various Congregations and dioceses.¹⁶² God has blessed Bethany in ceaseless ways in bringing many young girls into the service of the Lord. The establishment of schools, orphanages, hostels, boarding homes, and Teacher's Training schools became the core of Bethany in welcoming young girls in dedicating their life to the service of the Lord through the religious life. Msgr. Raymond was blessed by God's rich grace and mercy, freely and unconditionally given, to be a blessing to the other. He strongly believed the words of St. Paul: "We are God's servants, working together, you are God's field, God's building" (1 Cor 3: 9). He tirelessly worked as the servant of God for the cause of the Gospel in capturing the hearts of the young to work in the vineyard of God's kingdom.

3.5.2.3. *An Educationist*

Msgr. Raymond as an educationist observed that many men and women Congregations like Jesuits, Carmelites, Apostolic Carmel, Ursulines, and Catholic missionaries came forward in Mangalore to provide modern and

¹⁶¹ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 29-32.

¹⁶² Cf. M. LILLIS, "Biographical Sketch of the Servant of God Msgr. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas" in *Compassionate Pastor* 1 (2008) 1, 10.

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

western education to their people.¹⁶³ He also noticed the society was patriarchal, thereby, most of the women were confined to their household work and their role was minimal and they were less educated.¹⁶⁴ Msgr. Raymond noted the reality of his people through the eyes of the Gospel and envisaged a new horizon of liberating his people from the bondage of illiteracy.

Msgr. Raymond was a visionary who knew that education is the key to the future. It is an important component in the struggles of human rights.¹⁶⁵ The heart of Msgr. Raymond moved towards the interest of the society and as a member of the District Educational Council, he exposed courageously the shortcomings of its function. He raised his voice and questioned the way the society was functioning, not meeting the basic aspiration of the poor in remote villages principally in the field of education. He gave valuable advice for the implementation of Kannada as the medium of instruction since preference was given to English medium schools, where the poor were not able to get into. Chief Minister of Madras Presidency, Dr. Subbarayan visited Mangalore in 1928. Msgr. Raymond presented a memorandum emphasizing the need for improvement in the sphere of education and the need for opening Catholic schools. As the president of the Catholic Association of South Canara and a member of the District Education Council, he undertook many struggles for the cause of establishing Catholic schools. Finally, the memorandum was accepted, and he received the Government order in 1929, permitting Catholic Schools.¹⁶⁶

Reading the signs of the time his heart was moved for the poor children especially the girls who were neglected in the area of education. In his time there were English medium schools which promoted services for the rich class and their activities were confined to the more developed towns and cities. He reflected with a compassionate heart on the existential condition of poor people who were lacking education in a remote area.¹⁶⁷ About this Fr. Joseph Peter Tauro rightly points out:

¹⁶³ Cf. M. MAS, "The Pioneers of Female Education in Canara", in *The Mangalore Magazine* 4 (1907) 3, 98.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. J. MOORE, *The History of the Diocese of Mangalore*, Codialbail Press, Mangalore 1927, 117-118.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. X. MALCOLM *et alii*, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Ballantine Books, New York 2015, 17.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 44-45.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/22, V. D'SOUZA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, undated.

He had a preferential love for the poor and his option for the poor made him start Kannada Medium Schools for girls and boys here in the Church premises of St. Sebastian and Margret Mary. He did this in the context that, Apostolic Carmel sisters and Jesuits were promoting English Medium and serving the richer class. He did this in the situation of abject poverty among the poor and in this way, he showed Christ's preferential love for the poor especially for the illiterate poor girls. He manifested Gospel values and inspired others to do so all over the diocese.¹⁶⁸

Msgr. Raymond visualized a society where everyone should be getting the opportunity for education. He was considered as an educationist par excellence, intensely concerned with contemporary problems, particularly those of education. His heart was drawn to the people who were living in remote villages that lacked transportation. Foreseeing the difficulties of these deprived people his dream was to provide facilities of education through his spiritual daughters. He knew that the presence of the schools could bring development to their surrounding villages and towns. For this reason, he stepped into the remote places, and he advised his spiritual daughters: "let us go there and give them school". Moved by these words of their spiritual father, they began to impart knowledge to the poor children under the shade of trees. Imbued by the spirit of God and filled with love to serve, they found happiness in imparting knowledge to the poor children amidst all inconveniences.¹⁶⁹

Msgr. Raymond took initiative in establishing Kannada medium schools in the remote parts of the district, Puttur, Balkunje, Bajpe, Kinnigoly, Permannur, Taccode, Bantwal, Kinnikambla, Guledgudd, Gadenahally, and Dornahally where there were no schools. He observed there was a great number of economically backward girls, women, and boys who desired to pursue their education in the city of Mangalore. At the same time, he was aware of the lack of boarding facilities. To accommodate the children, whose houses were far away, he initiated children's homes, boarding, and hostels, so that they could have access to schools. His dream was to empower the children and train them in Christian values.¹⁷⁰ In 1945, he opened a Teacher's

¹⁶⁸ Archive: F. 137. 4. A/ 19, J.P. TAURO, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 07.03.2003.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/22, V. D'SOUZA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, undated.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/55, MYRRHA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 03.07.2002.

Training School at Kinnikambala, which became a great opportunity for girls from remote areas to get empowered.¹⁷¹

Msgr. Raymond was close to God and to humanity which stirred him to be attuned to the well-being of these neglected children. In the late forties during the post-war period, Bethany was undergoing tremendous difficulty in maintaining the convent, Children's home, and the school. Msgr. Raymond's concern was to sustain poor children in the Children's home rather than running the school. At this juncture, Sr. Bertha who was in charge of the school suggested to Msgr. Raymond to close down the children's home. But his immediate reply was: "I prefer you to close down your school and run the orphanage."¹⁷² Great was his concern for the poor children who confidently came under the care of Bethany. On one occasion he advised Sr. Francis: "In a classroom situation there are children from different backgrounds, the rich and the poor, the good looking and the not so good, the bright and the dullards. As Christ's disciple, you should love more the poor, the ignorant, and the less favoured, because these are God's riches."¹⁷³ Sr. Bertha recalls an incident: It was on the day of admission at Nirmala Girl's High School in 1956. There was a queue of girls and their guardians for admission. Among them, there was a girl who was lame and was leaning on a crutch. Msgr. Raymond's eyes fell on this particular girl Vanamala and stepping into the office he requested Sr. Bertha to give admission to Vanamala before anyone else.¹⁷⁴ For him, the least and lost were his preference and he found the image of God in every situation.

Trusting in the person of Msgr. Raymond many families came forward to offer their young children in his hands to keep them under the care of Bethany to give them a good education. He kept them under the care of Bethany and desiring the welfare of these young children he wished to be amidst them seeking their aspirations. Rosa Pinto gratefully expresses that she was brought under the care of Msgr. Raymond and Bethany at the age of eight who accommodated her in the children's home to pursue her studies. Msgr. Raymond often visited them with a lot of sweets. His kind visit enthused them, and they enjoyed his company. His fatherly affection attracted

¹⁷¹ Cf. M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A Prophet*, 19.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A Prophet*, 13.

them, and they loved to be around him. In every visit, he would bless and pray for them. His departure always made them sad.¹⁷⁵

Msgr. Raymond was a caring person who always thought about the young children under the care of Bethany. When Sr. Leliola was appointed as the assistant mistress of the Children's home at Gulpur the words of Msgr. Raymond echoed in her ears: "You must look after the children as your own and show love and compassion to them. You must try to understand their needs and love them as a mother. The goal of your life should be 'love your neighbour as I have loved you.'"¹⁷⁶ He firmly advised his spiritual daughters especially sisters who were teachers that no child should ever be denied admission in the school when parents could not pay tuition fees. On the contrary, he urged them to find the poor children in the parish and to take initiative to bring them to school.¹⁷⁷ Simon Rasquinha proudly gives his testimony that he was one of the beneficiaries of Msgr. Raymond, because he received books and school fees to continue his education.¹⁷⁸

As a compassionate educationalist, he opened the world of wisdom and knowledge for many young boys and girls of his time through the medium of education irrespective of caste and religion. He passionately believed: "Education opens up the soul and sets before it knowledge. But, if there is no corresponding knowledge of God, it imbibes only one and forgets the other."¹⁷⁹ His great vision and dream for his contemporary society empowered him to be pragmatic. Therefore, he could not rest until he found some solutions for his people.

3.5.2.4. *An Advocate of Social Advancement*

Msgr. Raymond was a man of vision ahead of his time and moved according to the signs of the time. He observed that the society was possessed by differences that were creeping into religious congregations. Having seen the difference between the choir sisters and lay sisters existing in other religious congregations of his time, his constant teaching was to have only one class of Bethany Sisters. With his ardent desire for the growth of his

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Archive: F.137.4.C/03, R. PINTO, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 19.06.2002.

¹⁷⁶ Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/13, LELIOLA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 03.05.2002.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/143, M. THERESINE, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 23.08.2005.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Archive: F.137.2.C/04, S. RASQUINHA, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 13.10.1976. Simon Rasquinha received first communion from Msgr. Raymond.

¹⁷⁹ MIRIAM, *A Treasury of Pearls: Sayings of Msgr. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 7.

spiritual daughters, he wished that there should not be any distinction in the dress and no separation in the dining hall or recreation room. His preference was to embrace a simple lifestyle being sensitive to the climate, to the culture, and according to the needs of the time, and to have a simple religious habit. This vision of Msgr. Raymond became true at the Second Vatican Council as the Decree on the renewal of religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis* explained that the religious habit was to be simple, and modest and poor according to the requirements of health, to the circumstances of time and place, and the need of the ministry (cf. *PC* 17).

Msgr. Raymond was adamant to have the same colour of habit for those who engaged in schoolwork or in manual work. Later, while discussing to change the colour of their dress from black to white, there was an opinion of providing a grey dress for those involved in manual labour.¹⁸⁰ Msgr. Raymond foreseeing the disturbance that it will cause among his spiritual daughters expressed his mind to Mother Priscilla, the superior general:

When the bell rings for spiritual exercises or for meals, will those wearing the grey dresses have adequate time to change into white before entering the chapel or in the dining room. Do you want two grades of sisters in common places such as the chapel and dining hall? Do you want the visitors to these places to identify who are the manual workers and who are professional persons doing the prestigious jobs like teaching, office work etc.¹⁸¹

The above-mentioned words of Msgr. Raymond was clearly reflected in the first constitution written by him: “The congregation shall consist of one class of sisters” (BSFC. n. 7). He was attentive that his spiritual daughters should not be ranked according to their education and mission. He wanted the sisters to address one another as ‘sister’ and not to have any dissimilarity between superiors and non-superiors. The influence of the other existing congregation addressed their superiors as ‘Mother Superior’. Therefore, in the eyes of the lay people, Bethany Sisters were not genuine religious since everyone is titled as ‘sister’. In fact, the comments and criticisms of the lay people brought some disturbance among Bethany Sisters. As a result, in 1950 during the Extraordinary General Chapter, many sisters accepted to address the local administrator, ministers, novice directress as “mother” and the

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/22, V. D’SOUZA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, undated.

¹⁸¹ Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/22, V. D’SOUZA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, undated.

superior general as 'Rev. Mother'. Indeed, the aspiration of Msgr. Raymond returned after the Second Vatican Council by addressing each one "sister" without any difference between the superior general or a simple sister.

The spirituality of the life of Jesus in the house of Nazareth influenced Msgr. Raymond and he instilled into his spiritual daughters the dignity of labour after the example of Jesus known to have worked as an ordinary poor carpenter. Though he was the son of God, he embraced poverty and lived an obscure and simple lifestyle instead of choosing to be famous. He chose to earn his livelihood by the work of his hands. Msgr. Raymond entered into the lives of simple people who engaged in working to find their means for their daily living. He encouraged his daughters that though they have sufficient means to maintain themselves, manual labour will be another means of helping the poor in need and not to be ashamed of manual labour. He often quoted the teachings of St. Benedict, if one lives by the work of their hands, like the desert fathers and the apostles, then one is truly a monk. Inspired by the teachings of St. Paul he encouraged in his spiritual daughters to strive to live quietly, to mind one's own affairs and to live by the labour of one's own hands, to behave well towards outsiders and be dependent on no one (cf. 1 Thess 4: 11-12). Msgr. Raymond was keen observant in discovering the talents of his spiritual daughters and trained them in various fields according to their skills. To improve their weaving centre and their creativity in the art of crafts he sent them to different places. His thinking was ahead of his time in preparing his spiritual daughters in different fields such as preparing bridal bouquets, floral crosses, weaving carpets, tailoring, embroidery, lace making, tatting, making liturgical vestments, altar antependia, tabernacle veils, altar bread, etc. During this time, Bethany faced many criticisms because the existing congregations were engaged in white-collar jobs and not involved in the field of weaving or cultivation that cast a different idea about the Bethany Sisters.¹⁸² Msgr. Raymond encouraged his daughters using simple words: "Before God, there is no big work or small work. Whether it is work, prayer, meals, recreation, looking after the kitchen or sick people, teaching in a school or in an orphanage- to God, it is all the same."¹⁸³

Msgr. Raymond loved nature and embraced it in his heart. Sr. Esperie who had close contact with Msgr. Raymond remarks: "Fr. Founder was a great lover of nature. His love was not only for humanity but also for all the works of the Creator. He saw the beauty of the Creator reflected in

¹⁸² Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/22, V. D'SOUZA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, undated.

¹⁸³ MIRIAM, *A Treasury of Pearls*, 2018, 22.

everything.”¹⁸⁴ One of the incidents narrated by Sr. Agnus gives a clear picture of his reflective thought on nature. While he was gazing at the showers of rain, he expressed to her: “When you look at the showers of rain falling on the ground and making it fertile, think of the showers of graces God sends on you and thank him for them.”¹⁸⁵ He was a gardener in every sense and had passed on to his sisters how to love nature and to see the image of God in everything. He taught many sisters to be good gardeners. For example, when he purchased the land at Gulpur, Mangalore he wrote a humorous letter to his sisters at Lisieux convent, Puttur: “Is any of you willing to come and remain there? If you come you must know how to dig, plow, and also cut stones and build. Send me your application soon.”¹⁸⁶ It was a genuine invitation to his sisters to inculcate in them the love for nature. Today the land at Gulpur became fertile land producing fruits in abundance due to the hard labour of his sisters.

Msgr. Raymond observed the sickness of the society which looked down on women and considered them as the weaker section of the society. He embraced their hopes and aspirations, joys, and sorrows, as part of his life. He established St. Martha’s Industrial School at Bendur in 1921. He aimed to empower and educate women. He began a vocational training institution for the self-reliance of poor women, involving cottage industries, especially weaving centres for school dropout girls. He began craft schools, and non-formal education centres to empower women to earn their livelihood through arts and crafts. St. Joseph Industrial School at Gulpur was another centre for manufacturing clothes. Bethany Vincent Industry at the parish of Bendur provided self-employment for the poor people. The establishment of the weaving industry in Bethany became a means for training women as well as generating income for the institute to survive and to help the people in need especially in the critical period of World War II.¹⁸⁷

The heart of Msgr. Raymond ached for the people in the villages. While pondering on their poor condition he always sought a solution for them. Sr. Justina recalls an incident with Msgr. Raymond. She was transferred from Mangalore to Mudigere in 1956. He was well aware of the palm leaves that were along the sides of the Mudigere river. In his letter to Sr. Luise, the

¹⁸⁴ M. ESPERIE, *My Joy and My Crown: My Memories of Msgr. RFC Mascarenhas*, 38-39.

¹⁸⁵ M. BERTHA, *From the lips of the Founder*, 306-307.

¹⁸⁶ M. LILLIS – MIRIAM, *To You My Daughters*, 419.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. G. PAYYAPILLY – M. BENEDICT, *Fulness of Life*, 12; Cf. *DIRECTORY OF THE DIOCESE OF MANGALORE*, Kodialbail Press, Mangalore 1964, 174-175.

superior of St. Martha Convent, he encouraged her to teach the sisters how to weave mats from the palm leaves. He desired to help these poor people to have employment and to begin trade for the womenfolk. Consequently, many village girls began weaving mats and earning for their livelihood.¹⁸⁸

Living for others was the nature of Msgr. Raymond. His God-oriented and other-oriented ways led him to look towards the benefit of others. Thus, he made his love for God visible by loving his neighbour in need.

3.5.2.5. *A Comforter of the Afflicted*

Saint Faustina Kowalska states: "Great love can change small things into great ones, and it is only love which lends value to our actions" (*Diary* 303). Msgr. Raymond as a man of God found the finger of God in love in all the works entrusted to his care. His heart went out to anyone in distress, and he would be restless until he finds a solution in helping the person in utmost secrecy. Msgr. Raymond as the comforter of afflicted "his heart would feel the pain of fatherless children, widow/widower, sick, weak, etc. He has a special love for parentless children. Downtrodden and the poor had a place in his heart."¹⁸⁹ His life was combined with a great love for the poor and the needy. Fr. Gerald Miranda who was the parishioner at Bendur writes about Msgr. Raymond's kind heart towards Monam Tauro and Jacob Correa. Realizing the sad condition of Monam Tauro, he asked him to be his cook, and Monam dedicated his service in love because he was captured by the kind deed of Msgr. Raymond. Jacob Correa from Mulki approached Msgr. Raymond at the age of twelve. He was impressed by the God-given talent of the young boy for music. He trained him to play the organ and directed him to engage in the service of the parish as sacristan. He continued his faithful service until his retirement. Realizing his poor situation, Msgr. Raymond had given him a house for a nominal rent, and he remained there until the end of his life.¹⁹⁰

Msgr. Raymond was moved with compassion for Shila Fernandes, a young boy of 12, and welcomed him as his errand boy, who could see in him a real father figure. Being faithful and reliable, he was trained to be a driver since Msgr. Raymond was gifted with a car by his parishioners at Bendur.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 48.

¹⁸⁹ Archive: F.137.11.50, M. EUPHRASIA, *Memories on Msgr. Raymond*, 23.08.2002.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Archive: F. 137.2.A/02, G. MIRANDA, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F. C Mascarenhas*, 24.07.1976. Fr. Gerald was baptized by Msgr. Raymond and he was the first priest from Bendur parish.

Compassionate ways of Msgr. Raymond made Shila Fernandes loyal to his paternal affection till the end of his life.¹⁹¹ He was a courageous person who never abandoned anyone who besought his help. It was vivid in the example of Leo, a boy whom he considered as an adopted son. As Leo had a desire to be a priest, Msgr. Raymond sent him for studies, spent a lot of money, and provided all he required. Despite Leo's lack of interest for study, Msgr. Raymond helped him to complete his SSLC. His charitable acts unfold his goodness in helping anyone at any cost.¹⁹²

Pope Benedict XVI states: "Charity is love received and given."¹⁹³ Charity is considered the movement of the soul.¹⁹⁴ This movement of love of the soul encouraged Msgr. Raymond to teach his daughters never to ignore the persons in need and never to send them away empty-handed no matter how busy a person may be.¹⁹⁵ As the shepherd who knew his sheep (cf. Jn 10: 14), Msgr. Raymond was aware of the struggles of his people. He as a recipient of God's mercy and grace extended his merciful hand to anyone in any helpless state. Sr. Columba in her testimony explains it. On a particular day, there was torrential rain. Many huts were destroyed and there was no transportation. Then, a stranger approached Msgr. Raymond for help. Seeing him completely drenched, he provided hot water, warm clothing, food, and some money. He did not consider him as a stranger, but his merciful heart moved him to help the man to reach his house in his own car. He was ruled by the Gospel message: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). As a result, he never missed any opportunity to reach out to the other in God's mercy, and great was his love and spirit of sacrifice for others. For him, everyone is equal, whether the person is rich or poor, erudite, or ignorant, fair or dark, above all he encountered the face of God in them.

For Msgr. Raymond, charity to the other was the key in expressing his compassion. He had the heart of a diligent father who cares for his children (cf. Mt 6:8). He was well attuned: "Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor" (Prov 22:9). The thoughtfulness of the other was the trait of his life. Sr. Columba narrates an incident. As he was on

¹⁹¹ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 26.

¹⁹² Cf. ESPERIE, *Bethany: My Joy and My Crown My Memories of Msgr. RFC Mascarenhas*, 79-80.

¹⁹³ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n.5.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. T. AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, IIa-IIae, q. 23, a. 2.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Archive: AGBM- A.135.1/09, EDITH – VERONICA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 07.10.1974.

a journey to Bijapur by train, he noticed a poor woman in the same compartment. At the time of their meal, he looked at his roasted chicken to be eaten. He offered his portion of food to that poor woman. When he saw the accompanied sister was in puzzle, he said that he could eat always, but who would give food to that particular poor woman? His thought would go beyond, and he acted on it immediately in the form of love and charity.¹⁹⁶

Msgr. Raymond listened to the cry of the other through the ear of his heart. Being one with the poor he advised his spiritual daughters to embrace a simple lifestyle so that the poor would never feel out of place.¹⁹⁷ Msgr. Raymond cultivated the attitude of Jesus: "Let the little children come to me" (Mk 10: 14). He loved to be around the aspirants, and he had given them the freedom to act as they are. He had a special concern for those who joined Bethany at their young age particularly to the sisters Agnella, Theresine, Pacifica, Esuria and Marie Therese. Sr. Theresine recalls that Msgr. Raymond was their comfort and solace in times of necessity and difficulty. As young children, they knew his heart would melt with them. When a sister refused to give them sweet potatoes for a particular game during their picnic, they found the solution by asking help from Msgr. Raymond. Like children who run to their father to ask favour, they freely ran to him. The idea of asking him to write on a piece of paper to give them sweet potatoes was successful. Msgr. Raymond no matter he would go to their level and would be with them to solve their silly problems.¹⁹⁸ He could not bear seeing anyone unhappy in Bethany, rather he enjoyed seeing them happy and spontaneous. Sr. Lidwine as an aspirant observed that Msgr. Raymond was not ruled by laws but by love. He could enter the minds of the young aspirants entering religious life. It happened that once the aspirants were punished for breaking the rule of silence by laughing loudly early in the morning. Young in spirit they were disturbed and decided to return to their homes. At this juncture, Msgr. Raymond was their comforter and solace, and he was with them in times of difficulty and upheld them in love. His encouraging words echo in their ears: You should not cry in Bethany but go on laughing and be cheerful always.¹⁹⁹ Having experienced the tender care of Msgr. Raymond Sr. Esuria exclaims:

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Archive: AGBM- A.135.1/11, COLUMBA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 09.10.1974.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/22, V. D'SOUZA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, undated.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/143, M. THERESINE, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 23.08.2005.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/61, LIDWINE, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 10.07.2002.

“Our life took a new turn in the new home of Bethany. He became our father, mother, guardian. We were the apples of his eyes and fondly loved and cared for.”²⁰⁰ She fondly remembers the concern of Msgr. Raymond when they were suffering from typhoid. He used to be at their bedside daily in the hospital imploring divine assistance for their speedy recovery and to listen to them. His consoling presence cheered them and comforted them in the time of their illness.²⁰¹

The life of Msgr. Raymond was admired by his own family members. His grandniece Sr. Olinda Pereira writes that his presence added a spiritual atmosphere in the house, and she recalls his soothing words of comfort and prayers at the time of the death of her grandfather.²⁰² Msgr. Raymond, being a comforter of the afflicted, captured through his kind deeds the hearts of not only his own spiritual daughters but all those who encountered him. His other-centeredness moved him to look after the lonely and the distressed.

3.5.2.6. *A Compassionate Spiritual Father*

Reflecting on Msgr. Raymond as a compassionate spiritual father one can easily find a reference in the Gospel of Mathew to describe him. “I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings” (Mt 23: 37). Similarly, Msgr. Raymond embraced everyone in the same spirit as his own daughters when they stepped into the home of Bethany. As God, who welcomes everyone under his care, so Msgr. Raymond welcomed his spiritual daughters under his wings no matter their culture, education, and status because he looked at their hearts and observed their desire to serve the Lord. He possessed the qualities of a mother in knowing and getting inside the personality of each one as a true instrument of God.²⁰³ Sr. Violette, who had close contact with Msgr. Raymond relates: “Father founder was more than a founder to me. He was a friend to confide in, a guide to seek counsel from, a boss to work for, a model to imitate, a saint to draw inspiration from, and above all, a father to love and to be loved.”²⁰⁴ Sr. Boloniya recalls that

²⁰⁰ Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/123, M. ESURIA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 22.08.2002.

²⁰¹ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/123, M. ESURIA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 22.08.2002.

²⁰² Cf. Archive: F.137.4.B/147, O. PEREIRA, *Memories of S.D. Raymond F.C. Mascarenhas*, 19.05.2004.

²⁰³ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.1/08, PHARA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 07.10.1974.

²⁰⁴ Archive: AGBM-A.135.1/03, V. D’SOUZA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 10.07.1970.

even though he appeared to be dignified while talking to them he was just like their father at home.²⁰⁵

We find in Msgr. Raymond a beacon that gave hope to those in distress. His fatherly affection attracted his spiritual daughters to reach out to him at any time of need. Sr. Columba describes an incident. One of the sisters was finding it difficult to live the community life. When she approached Msgr. Raymond encouraged the sister to look at a flowing river. In a flowing river, the stones move according to the currents, and they rub against one another. As a result, there occurs a transformation. The larger stones become smaller and take on different forms and gradually the rough ones become smooth. Such mysterious things happen in a community as each one comes from a different place, a different home, and a different culture. There arise friction and resistance just like the stones caught up in the current. In times like these, the other becomes the channel that helps one to become a saint. However, with the armour of God's help, one is urged to wage the war against this opportunity and ultimately finds one's victory.²⁰⁶

Like a child who runs to their father or mother in a time of difficulty, one would run at the side of Msgr. Raymond to receive consolation and support. Sr. Mary Avila says that coming from the background of Kerala to Mangalore, she experienced that the language was the greatest barrier of communication. The common language was English since the sisters were from different places. Seeing her red eyes Msgr. Raymond would grasp her trouble and he would console her with his comforting words. Great was his concern for each of his spiritual daughters. During those times because of ill health, the superiors decided to send many of the candidates back to their homes. Sr. Avila was one among them. Hearing that she would be sent back she clung to Msgr. Raymond and pleaded with him not to send her back.²⁰⁷ With the merciful help of Msgr. Raymond dedicated her whole life to the service of the Lord in Bethany. Many sisters found refuge under the wings of Msgr. Raymond during a crisis of vocation or when threatened to be sent home in a time of illness. For example, Sr. Leliola points out that when she heard that she would be sent home due to her illness she approached Msgr. Raymond for aid. She recalls the words of Msgr. Raymond: "My child, the

²⁰⁵ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.1/05, BOLONIYA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 14.01.1974.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.1/11, COLUMBA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 09.10.1974.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Archive: AGBM- A.135.1/11, M. AVILA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 24.04.2002.

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

God who called you will not send you back. Without my permission, nobody will send you back. Be courageous and always pray to God and our Blessed Mother.”²⁰⁸

The protecting hands of Msgr. Raymond covered many of his spiritual daughters. Msgr. Raymond having known that a religious vocation is a special gift and grace from God he decided that sickness should not be a cause of losing a vocation of any of his spiritual daughters. When his spiritual daughters pleaded to keep them safe in Bethany, he stood by them. Sr. Jane recollects the assistance of Msgr. Raymond when the doctor diagnosed that her heart was weak. The superiors were afraid of her condition and wished to send her home. Having heard about her sickness and her desire to remain in Bethany, he informed the superior general not to send her home. He assured them that if anything happens to her, he would be responsible for it. Likewise, Sr. Bernadette and many other sisters encountered the aid of Msgr. Raymond in preserving their vocations in the vineyard of Bethany.²⁰⁹

Msgr. Raymond possessed the qualities of the Lord who supports the afflicted (cf. Ps 146: 6). Msgr. Raymond recognized the meekness and humility in the personality of Sr. Camillus and Sr. Raymond. They had a great desire to be part of Bethany but unfortunately, their ill health and education became an obstacle in the eyes of the authorities. Their ardent desire to be at the service of the Lord led them to approach Msgr. Raymond personally and persistently. Their constant plea directed Msgr. Raymond to speak to the superior general to give them a chance to become sisters. The uniqueness is that they have the names of his patron saints: Raymond and Camillus, his own name. Sr. Camillus rendered her service in pleasing the Lord being a sacristan her whole life. Whereas Sr. Raymond worked like Martha welcoming the guests in the parlour throughout her life. Many of the sisters gratefully cherished in their hearts the person of Msgr. Raymond being their compassionate spiritual father in times of anguish.²¹⁰ Msgr. Raymond unfolds that it is not the education and the achievements but the simple heart longing to serve the Lord in sincerity that makes the difference. Therefore, in the Constitution written by him, he emphasized: “No sick sister shall return to her family for her health reasons” (BSFC 245).

²⁰⁸ Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/13, LELIOLA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 03.05.2002.

²⁰⁹ Cf. M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 89.

²¹⁰ Cf. M. ESPERIE, *Bethany: My Joy and My Crown My Memories of Msgr. RFC Mascarenhas*, 69-70.

The heart of Msgr. Raymond goes to the candidates who lost their parents. Sr. M. Peace and Sr. M. Hilaria and many of the sisters were strengthened by the support of Msgr. Raymond when he said that he would be their father. Such expression gave a real face of fatherly affection and thereafter they considered him as their father.²¹¹ Msgr. Raymond never let down any of his spiritual daughters who failed in exams or at their workplace. He set before them a sign of hope through his reassuring words that failure is the steppingstone on the path to success. Sr. M. Delphine reminisces the words of Msgr. Raymond when she failed in exams: "My child, look up to heaven and see the beautiful crown prepared for you. Jesus is pleased with your efforts. Do not be discouraged at your failure."²¹² He implanted in all those who experienced failure the ability to take that as the will of God and taught them that God had allowed them to practice the virtue of humility. In this regard, the words of Sr. Theresine seem worth quoting: "Father taught me to take my failure as God's plan in my life. In him, I found an understanding father, tender, kind and compassionate."²¹³

The following part describes how Msgr. Raymond's life and mission manifest solid and genuine glimpses of his mystical and prophetic life.

3.6. A Mystic and Prophet

Mystical and prophetic gifts are given to certain persons like patriarchs, Judges, Kings, and prophets, and the saints. These prominent figures communicate to the world that they have not come into this world just to add numbers. Indeed, God has created them for a greater purpose to do the right things and to be the voice of God. We find a mystical spark in their hearts and a prophetic fire in their voices. Since God has sowed the kernel of love in their hearts, their good deeds radiate with positive energy that touches the human hearts.²¹⁴ However, the person who is captivated by the mystic and prophetic attributes is tireless in pouring healing balm on brokenness, confronting injustice until wholeness and beauty is restored.²¹⁵ However, we understand that mysticism and prophecy flow together.

²¹¹ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/ 74, M. PEACE, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, 01.08.2002; Cf. M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 85-88.

²¹² M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A prophet*, 63.

²¹³ M. THERESINE – M. ESURIA, *Reminiscences*, 16.

²¹⁴ Cf. D.P. BOGUNOVIC, *Heavenly Wisdom: Talents, Imagination, Creativity and Wisdom*, 147.

²¹⁵ Cf. T.J. MORAN, "Mysticism & Prophecy flow together" in *Summer 95* (2012), 2.

God, who had chosen, prepared, called, and directed the patriarchs, judges, kings, and prophets according to the needs of the time chose Msgr. Raymond to be his instrument to the people of Karnataka. The life of Msgr. Raymond unfolds that he had two prominent dimensions in his spirituality i.e., contemplation and action. He was well aware that in silence one contemplates the mystery of God's love for humanity. In stillness, one listens to the voice of God and discerns his will and purpose for one's life. Because of his intimacy with God, he was able to say: "Silence well-kept puts the soul in a right and warm state to pray well, and also to hear God's voice speaking in the heart, both in and out of direct prayer."²¹⁶ His communion with God empowered him to be attuned to the existing social and economic situation and urged him to find means corresponding to the needs of his time. He was deeply immersed in the lives of the people and identified the anxieties and aspirations especially of the poor who lived in the remote villages. Since his experience of the love of God was profound, he prophetically communicated his experience in the context in which he lived. Like a prophet, he learned the needs of the people and took a heroic step to act on them. Consequently, the problems of society became his problems, and its needs became his needs. Firmly rooted in God he was fearless to act according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit since he was well aware of God's assistance.

The Gospel of Luke 4: 18-21 captivated Msgr. Raymond and fostered in him the desire to preach the Gospel to the poor. His meditation on the compassionate Jesus who was clearly on the side of the oppressed, the poor, and the afflicted inspired Msgr. Raymond. The overlooked people of his time were the women and the children. His people suffered due to a lack of education in rural areas especially the girls in the villages. As a prophet and a mystic, he entered into the situation of the women considered as marginalized, who were not beneficiaries of education, and burdened with many social barriers. Msgr. Raymond through his actions raised a voice against injustices and inequalities. His deep union with God stimulated him to liberate people from social barriers and their cries of oppression, through his compassionate works.²¹⁷ Recognizing that Msgr. Raymond deeply connected with God and human, Msgr. Pompeo Borgna, the Proto Notary Apostolic Domestic Prelate of Pope proclaimed: "Your founder is a man of God- Homo Dei."²¹⁸

²¹⁶ M. LILLIS – MIRIAM, *To You My Daughters*, 476.

²¹⁷ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 27-28.

²¹⁸ M. ESPERIE, *My Joy and My Crown: My Memories of Msgr. RFC Mascarenhas*, 21.

His passionate love for God and humans allowed him to take another prophetic step in founding the religious congregation. Like Jesus who welcomed all classes of people to be his disciples, Msgr. Raymond welcomed all those who had the desire to serve the Lord without any indiscrimination. For him, lack of financial means or lack of education was not an obstacle for the admission to Bethany, but he desired that his congregation should welcome all those who had a genuine vocation. Although this act of Msgr. Raymond was contrary to the practices of the existing congregations. He as a prophet knew that every Good Friday is followed by Easter Sunday. His unwavering faith in the Lord and in the Blessed Mother helped him to endure the painful moments of his life for Bethany.

Msgr. Raymond's prophetic ways envisioned that his spiritual daughters should be among the poor working in the soil and in the industrial companies to feel the pain of their daily struggles. He taught them to have the dignity of labour and he inculcated in them the spirit of humility and simplicity. He encouraged them to have a religious habit that was simple and according to the climate in which they lived, and to address everyone as 'sister' no matter if they were superior general or local superiors. In his time the sisters with shoes and socks were considered as 'Nuns' and those sisters with sandals were known as only 'Sisters'. This mark was repeated to Msgr. Raymond. But he was a practical man, he knew sandals are convenient to the climate of India. He consoled his daughters not to worry about these silly matters.²¹⁹ In this context, Sr. Bertha remembers the prophetic words of Msgr. Raymond: "I think time is not far off for us, Indian priests and nuns, to have only sandals on our feet."²²⁰ The brave act of translating the books from Latin to Konkani for helping the people to participate in the liturgy was revealed as a mystical and prophetic act. We know that these changes occurred in the Church after the Second Vatican Council but Msgr. Raymond as a visionary was ahead of his time to perceive the need of society and the Church.²²¹ At the same time, his vision for Bethany was incredible. In 1956, standing at the Vatican City he said: "God, willing, one day we will be international."²²² This prophetic word was actualized as Bethany has moved beyond India to other countries of Asia, Europe, and Africa.

²¹⁹ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/22, V. D'SOUZA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, undated.

²²⁰ M. BERTHA, *Mgr. Raymond: A Mystic and A Prophet*, 43.

²²¹ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/22, V. D'SOUZA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, undated.

²²² M. ESPERIE, *My Joy and My Crown My Memories of Msgr. RFC Mascarenhas*, 21.

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

The prophets revealed that the joy of a mission is in faith and risk-taking. In this journey of faith, the inevitable fact of their prophetic mission was life-commitment that included pain and suffering. Like prophets, Msgr. Raymond had to pay the cost of discipleship. He faced unavoidable forms of criticism, misunderstanding, opposition, and even rejection. When Msgr. Raymond was passing through a dark tunnel under the affliction of criticism, he knew it was the presence of the Lord on the cross and the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary beneath the Cross that gave him the courage to face the unbearable pain in his life. Consequently, Msgr. Raymond disclosed that it is the genuine sacrifices that make one's life meaningful, mystic, and prophetic.

Msgr. Raymond placed himself completely at God's disposal and acted according to the inspiration of God. Thus, the legacy left by Msgr. Raymond remains in the society in which he lived as well as in the Church particularly in the diocese of Mangalore. In him, we find that the chosen ones of God never acted for self-glory, but their deeds for the welfare of the other remained unforgettable from age to age.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we were trying to understand the person of Msgr. Raymond in the historical milieu of his life, his vision as an ecclesial figure, his spirituality, the missionary aspect of his life, and, above all, his being a powerful channel of God's compassionate love as often we see in the history of the Church. Msgr. Raymond, the founder of the *Congregation of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*, was a prophetic messenger of God's compassionate love, a compassionate presence in the soil of Mangalore as a priest of God. Urged by the mission manifesto of Jesus, he too chose the path of living and witnessing charity in its different expressions. Such path was often strewn with thorns and thistles. But his undaunted faith in Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary helped him to share God's compassionate love to the people of his time. His thirst to communicate God's love was never quenched, as saw the reality of his people's suffering with the eyes of God. As a man of God, he discerned God's will and listened to his promptings. As a fruit of his deep contemplation, he became a compassionate pastor, an energetic educationist, an advocate of social advancement, a comforter of the afflicted, and a compassionate spiritual father. His unfailing confidence in God led him in his vocational and apostolic journey and left no stone unturned in order to make the Christian faith active in favour of the needy in Mangalore. Thus, he contributed to highlighting the holiness of the Church and lived for the wellbeing of his people. Behind the success of his passionate and active commitment to the well-being of the people, there was always his unseen hard

CHAP. III: MSGR. RAYMOND: A MESSENGER OF GOD'S COMPASSION

work, pain, and persistence. He accomplished everything with heroic humility, undaunted obedience, and solid fortitude. His life of holiness in sharing God's compassionate love is recognized in the Church and he received the title as the Servant of God.

Msgr. Raymond who walked with the God of compassion transmitted the same spirit to his spiritual daughters in the religious family of the *Congregation of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPASSION AS THE CHARISMATIC HALLMARK OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE OF “THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY”

Introduction

Our research reaches its final scope in this chapter that studies compassion as the distinct feature of the charismatic family of *The Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany* founded by Msgr. Raymond under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as we have seen in the preceding chapter.

The dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* teaches that from the God-given seed distinctive religious families have come into existence and have grown up as branches of a tree in the field of the Lord to add holiness in the Church and society (cf. *LG* 43). These various religious families are not basically different in its fundamental nature as an ecclesial form of existence or as a particular “state of life” in the Church. They are distinct, however, by spirituality and apostolate determined by particular charism. The Synod on Consecrated Life recalled gratefully “the gift of consecrated life in the variety of its charisms”, “the many different forms of consecrated life” whose “the substance” is the same: “a radical gift of self for love of the Lord Jesus and in him, of every member of the human family” (*VC* 3&5). The preceding chapters of this study helped us to understand the nature of consecrated life as essentially a call to witness God’s compassionate love lived, revealed, and offered in Jesus, his incarnate Son. We have also analysed how Msgr. Raymond has opened himself to God’s gift of compassion in Christ and radiated to many in different ways as pastor and founder. The Bethany Sisters, who owe their reason to be consecrated persons in the Church to his passionate desire to have the Gospel of compassion preached to the people, have the God of mercy as the foundation of their spiritual and missionary existence. Moved by the Holy Spirit, they endeavour to follow Christ more closely, offering themselves to God to communicate his compassionate face to humanity.

The broader objective of this chapter is to explore and analyse the spiritual and apostolic aspects of the Bethany Sisters which radiate the merciful face of God. This is carried out with a view to answer our research questions regarding, whether the charismatic hallmark of “compassion” is lived by the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany and to verify in what way our study in the above chapters can help the Congregation to live the charism

of “compassion” effectively and concretely. Accordingly, in this chapter, we focus on the spiritual resources, fruitful presence, thrust on compassion, and the flourishing ministries of the Bethany Congregation, analysing their charism, spirituality, community life, formation, and shared mission. In short, we unfold the spiritual, charismatic, formative, and apostolic thrust of the Bethany Sisters in mirroring and radiating the merciful face of God.

4.6. The Charism of the Bethany Congregation

The word ‘charism’ derived from the Greek word *charisma*, originated from the verb *charidzomai*, means ‘to bestow a gift or favour’. Charism is a gift freely given, a spiritual capacity resulting from God’s grace (*charis*).²²³ It is the special gift of the Holy Spirit that helps one to function meaningfully according to the call that one has received. St. Paul explains these gifts in his first letter to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 12: 1-14) and distinguishes its function as one of building up the Mystical Body of the Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms: “Charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world” (CCC 799). Similarly, Fabio Ciardi states: “The Spirit gives the Church the necessary charisms for it to adequately fulfil her mission according to the needs of the times.”²²⁴ Fr. Victor Piovesan S.J. said: “A match strikes against a matchbox and a flame result. The match is the charismatic person, the matchbox is the situation, and the resulting flame is the charism.”²²⁵ Charism is a call to partake in the mission God in a particular way with particular gifts. In the accomplishment of God’s design, a charism is a gratuitous gift not solely for the person endowed, but for the whole community.²²⁶

Mutuae relationes states: “The very charism of the founders appears as an “*experience of the Spirit*,” transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened, and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ in the process of growth” (MR 11). History testifies that many religious Orders and Congregations have emerged from the way the founders and foundresses have experienced the Gospel. The power of the Holy Spirit invested upon these persons a unique gift of charism to respond

²²³ Cf. M.S. DRISCOLL, “Charism”, in M. DOWNEY (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota 1993, 140.

²²⁴ F. CIARDI, “Charism”, in F. CIARDI, *Dictionary of Oblates*, 71.

²²⁵ Cited in, V. D’SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 113.

²²⁶ Cf. P. TILLICH, *Religiöse Reden*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 1987, 114.

to the special need of the Church in its milieu.²²⁷ Pope Francis in his letter *To All Consecrated Men and Women* said the following:

Our founders and foundresses shared in Jesus' own compassion when he saw the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd. Like Jesus, who compassionately spoke his gracious words, healed the sick, gave bread to the hungry, and offered his own life in sacrifice, so our founders and foundresses sought in different ways to be the service of all those whom the Spirit sent them.²²⁸

Like any other founders and foundresses Msgr. Raymond meditated on the Gospels to discern the inspiration of God. The God he encountered through Jesus Christ in the Gospels was primarily a God of compassion. He deeply contemplated the mystery of incarnation and passionately fell in love with God whose self-emptying love to redeem the suffering humanity. The spirit of this mystery took hold of him, and he responded to the call of God to identify himself with Jesus who became poor and lived among his people. He strongly believed the words of Jesus: "He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor" (Lk 4: 18). The ardent desire of Msgr. Raymond to have Gospel preached to the poor made him dialogue with God about the existential situation of his time and entered into it through the eyes of Jesus. He was rooted in profound compassion for the poor whom Jesus loved and cared for and with whom he identified himself. He envisioned in prayer his sisters as a band of women working for the spiritual, educational, social, development of his people, particularly girls and women (BSC 160-161).

The charism and the spirituality of Bethany Congregation are founded on three rocks: "The chamber of the annunciation at Nazareth, the house of Bethany, and the cloister of Lisieux."²²⁹ Through these mysteries, he found the ideals for his spiritual daughters in the light of the Gospel. The faith-surrender of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her attitude of being handmaid in the service of God and neighbour captured him. The missionary zeal for saving souls and the little way of St. Therese of Lisieux, seized him. The integration of prayer and service demonstrated in Martha, Mary, and Lazarus at the house of Bethany attracted him. Msgr. Raymond reflected these saintly

²²⁷ Cf. M. DOWNEY, "Charism", in P. SHELDRAKE, *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, SCM Press, London 2005, 185.

²²⁸ FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (21 November 2014), Part 1, n. 2.

²²⁹ R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: On the Rocks of the Order, or the Spirit of the Congregations, 19.12.1940", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 83.

figures and he felt they were an appropriate ideal for his spiritual daughters to make their presence relevant to the world.²³⁰ Bethany Sisters began to re-read and re-interpret their charism in the light of the Gospel according to the signs of the time. They studied the past in order to interpret the present to respond to the contemporary need keeping the spirit and mind of Msgr. Raymond. The charism of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany is summarised thus:

To be a handmaid of the Lord (cf. Lk 1: 38) and to share the compassionate love of Jesus with all, especially the poor and the marginalized (cf. Mt 9: 36) by integrating prayer and service (cf. Lk 10: 38-42), imbibing missionary zeal and by the diligent practice of the little way of spiritual childhood (cf. Mt 18: 3).²³¹

The intervention of God occurs in each founder differently but ultimately the inspiration comes from the Holy Spirit.²³² However, to participate in the mission of God the charism gives a special task to founders at a specific time and space. Therefore, a charism is a dynamic power of God acting within founders or foundresses urging them to respond to certain perceived needs of the Church and its people. God bestows a particular faith-vision, a sensitivity towards a precise need, and a dynamic compassionate outlook for an action. Charism originates from the perception of the Gospel in their own particular concrete need in time, and the reflection accentuated from the particular mystery of Christ. This reflection is actualized through the works of mercy in reaching the people around.²³³ Thus, we experience that consecrated life in the Church has never been a static state. It has always been in the process of evolving to respond to the need of the times. The novelty in religious life is not for itself but always at the service of God and humanity.²³⁴

Fabio Ciardi points out that charism is something living that each generation is called to reinterpret and update. This charism is handed on to them as their inheritance and the charism of a founder becomes the charism of an institute.²³⁵ Accordingly, the distinctive traits of charism and spirituality direct Bethany Sisters to listen, receive, and contemplate the Word of God in

²³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 83.

²³¹ BSC, 166.

²³² Cf. F. CIARDI, *I Fondatori Uomini dello Spirito: Per Una Teologia del Carisma di Fondatore*, Città Nuova, Roma 1982, 49.

²³³ Cf. F. CIARDI, *I Fondatori Uomini dello Spirito*, 94.

²³⁴ Cf. J. XAVIER, "Wake Up the World", in *New Leader* 127 (2014) 22, 13.

²³⁵ Cf. F. CIARDI, "Charism", in F. CIARDI, *Dictionary of Oblates: A Collaborative Work of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate under the Direction of Fabio Ciardi*, OMI, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Rome 2000, 93-95.

their hearts as Mary did and incarnate the Word in the world of today. They strive to participate in the Kenosis that marks the mystery of incarnation inviting every Bethany Sister to live the Paschal Mystery in their daily life and surrender themselves to the will of God as Mary did in the mystery of annunciation. Trusting in the providence of God after the example of St. Therese, they endeavour to support the missionary activities of the Church through their prayer, sacrifices, and service like that of Martha, Mary, Lazarus of the house of Bethany in the Gospel. Today Bethany Sisters follow their charism without losing its identity with constant growth according to the signs of the time and keep alive the flame lit by Msgr. Raymond in reaching to the peripheries in spreading the light of the Gospel of compassion.

4.1.1. Bethany's Charism and Spirituality: The Symphony of Three Models

Charism and spirituality are an inward and outward journey in which one profoundly engages within oneself, with God, and others.²³⁶ In this inward and outward journey, the symphony of Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Therese of Lisieux, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus shaped the lives of the Bethany Sisters. Mary's faith-filled submission to the will of God that she pronounced in her *fiat* inspired Msgr. Raymond to name her as the first patroness of Bethany. He desired that his sisters should be missionaries in sharing God's compassionate love after the example of St. Therese of Lisieux. Her missionary zeal and her motto 'to please Jesus alone' prompted Msgr. Raymond to make this little sister their second patroness. He intended that his spiritual daughters be contemplative in action like Martha and Mary. Msgr. Raymond wished that the home of the Bethany Sisters be modelled after the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus where Jesus experienced love and hospitality.²³⁷ Now let us see how these models became an inspiration for living their charism and spirituality.

4.1.1.1. Lived Compassionate Fiat of Blessed Virgin Mary

The entire life of Mary was designed after the presence of mercy made flesh. She entered the sanctuary of divine mercy as she participated closely in the mystery of God's compassionate love (cf. *MV* 24). In salvation history,

²³⁶ Cf. R.M. BROWN, *Spirituality and Liberation: Overcoming the Great Fallacy*, The Westminster Press, Louisville 1988, 150.

²³⁷ Cf. THE CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Decrees of the General Chapters XV 2010, XIV 2004*, Prasad Printers, Mangalore 2010, 37-38. Henceforth cited as *Decree of the General Chapter XIV, Decree of the General Chapter XV*.

the annunciation is a central moment wherein the dialogue between God and the free response of Mary's *fiat* takes place. At this peak moment, Mary bursts forth as a spokesperson for all the humanity by her pronouncement of "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 2: 38). Calling herself a handmaid of the Lord indicates her earnest desire to do what is being asked of her and her readiness to serve in love. Her free assent in faith transformed her not only to be the mother of Jesus but to be the mother of the whole humanity. She became the chosen one of God to introduce his grace and love to humankind.²³⁸ Thus, Mary's *fiat* to God's plan is the echo of the words of Jesus: "Behold I come to do thy will" (Heb 10: 5). The mystery of the incarnation reached its fulness when Mary uttered her *fiat*.²³⁹ In the moment of annunciation, Mary touched Christ in contemplation, and she was pregnant with the God of mercy. This divine touch enabled her to touch Christ in the suffering people with compassionate love beginning with her cousin Elizabeth.²⁴⁰

The mystery of annunciation remains on the basis of Bethany's spirituality. Msgr. Raymond in his first Constitution wrote to his spiritual daughters: "The mystery of annunciation will be particularly dear to them. They will make the spirit of this mystery the ideal of their life, taking "*Ecce Ancilla Domini*" as their motto and inspiration in their service of God and neighbour" (BSFC 119). As a result, the life of the Bethany Sisters is centred around the example of Mary in her listening, receiving, and contemplating the Gospel and incarnating the God of compassion through their service to the poor and the needy.²⁴¹ Msgr. Raymond taught his sisters that their spiritual life should flow from a spirit of faith and a spirit of charity like that of Mary. He inculcated in them that their love of neighbour is the surest test of their love for God. Thereby, everyone will know that they are the disciples of Jesus if they have a love for one another (cf. Jn 13: 35). They are encouraged to imbibe the qualities of Mary's love of neighbour manifested in acts of charity and to be clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and

²³⁸ Cf. D.L. GELPI, *Life and Light: A Guide to the Theology of Karl Rahner*, Sheed and Ward, New York 1966, 263-269.

²³⁹ Cf. J. PAUL II, Encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), n. 13; Cf. M.I. MIRAVALLE, *Introduction to Mary: The Heart of Marian Doctrine and Devotion*, Queenship Publishing, Goleta 2006, 20.

²⁴⁰ Cf. J.B. MORRIS, *Jesus the Son of Mary, or the Doctrine of the Catholic Church Upon the Incarnation of God the Son Considered in its Bearings upon the Reverence Shewn by Catholics to the Blessed Mother*, James Toovey, Piccadilly 1851, 355.

²⁴¹ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XIV*, 39.

patience (cf. Col 3: 12).²⁴² Thus, Mary's mission of receiving Christ and giving him to the people became part of the Bethany Sisters.

Bethany Sisters strive to live the faith journey and compassionate deeds of Mary reflected in the Gospel episodes. The life of Mary taught them to realize that Mary lived a normal life like any of them, but the difference was she lived a faith journey. Like any mother, Mary faced unusual questions from her Son. For instance, when Jesus was lost and found in the temple, his response was: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?" (Lk 2: 49). At Cana, Jesus responded to Mary's request with these words: "Woman, what concern is that to you and me?" (Jn 2:4). Humanly speaking, these odd questions could have caused doubts to emerge in Mary, but she proved to be a woman of faith. The event at Cana explicitly shows that she believed that her Son would help them. Out of compassion for the family at Cana, her burning charity moved her to request help from her Son Jesus. Here, she unfolds the overflowing virtue of compassion and sensitivity, and she becomes the helper, an advocate to the needy at an appropriate time (cf. *LG* 62).²⁴³ In Mary, we encounter intense agony, as her Son was tortured and died on the cross. Her presence at the cross gave comfort and solace to her Son. At the cross in silence, she uttered her unfathomable *fiat* with indomitable faith. The *fiat* of the Blessed Virgin Mary led her through magnificent joys, unbearable sorrows, and finally exalted glories.²⁴⁴

Bethany Sisters believe that Mary's *fiat* strengthens them to make a total surrender of their intellect, will, and whole being to God in every moment of their lives especially in entering in the sufferings of the people.²⁴⁵ The life of Mary encourages them to follow the road of happiness and sorrow. They believe when they encounter the annunciation in their daily life, Mary gives them the courage to say 'yes' to the will of God. In times of doubt, she gives them the right way to follow.²⁴⁶ Her compassionate response at the annunciation strengthens the Bethany Sisters to reach out in love in the service of God and neighbour.

²⁴² Cf. R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, "Points for Recollection: The Religious Life, 30.04.1942", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 179.

²⁴³ Cf. J. RUPP, *Your Sorrow is My Sorrow*, St. Pauls, Bangalore 2007, 92.

²⁴⁴ Cf. J. ONDERKO, *Discover Your Next Mission from God: Saints who Found God's Will and How You Can Too*, Sophia Institute Press, Manchester 2015, 163; Cf. L.T. JOHNSON – D.J. HARRINGTON, *The Gospel of Luke*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1991, 43-44.

²⁴⁵ Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 12.

²⁴⁶ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *The Charism and the Spirituality of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*, 93-101.

4.1.1.2. *Life Surrounded by Love: St. Therese, The Little Flower*

At the commencement of the Institute, Msgr. Raymond firmly believed all he conceived was under the protection of St. Therese of Lisieux, known as the Little Flower. Being devoted to the young Carmelite saintly nun, he envisioned her spirit of the little way in his spiritual daughters.²⁴⁷ Msgr. Raymond transmitted to his spiritual daughters a fire of zeal to work for the extension of the Kingdom and to intensify their personal love for Jesus. Msgr. Raymond saw how this little sister of missionaries could inspire his sisters. His conviction enabled him to name the *Congregation of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany* even before her canonization (cf. BSC 162).

As the whole world benefited from the influence of St. Therese of Lisieux, her simplicity of life through her discovery of love as the heart of her spirituality even inspired Msgr. Raymond. He meditated how she touched the hearts of many while confined to the four walls of the Carmelite convent. How she could see the direct and personal action of the merciful love of God and a reason for loving him more ardently in all her interior and exterior trials. He realized it was her burning love for God that helped her to accept everything and transform it into pure joy. Having pondered the life of St. Therese, Msgr. Raymond helped the Bethany Sisters to make their spiritual journey after the example of St. Therese. He instilled in his spiritual daughters that for St. Therese nothing was too small or too insignificant to be a vehicle of this love. For example, her readiness even to cast into hell where no single act of love is expressed. For her love is repaid by love alone.²⁴⁸ He encouraged his sisters to learn from St. Therese to delight Jesus by their little acts of love and to make Jesus smile by their little acts of sacrifices hiding their pain for the love of Jesus. He advised them to learn to sanctify each moment of the day, to act to please Jesus alone, i.e., to scatter rose petals at the feet of Jesus through their acts of love. Because she lived on love, she breathed her last breath with an act of love on her lips: ‘My God, I love you’.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁴⁸ Cf. R.F.C MASCARENHAS, “Exhortation: The Incarnation: The Lesson of Love, 20.12.1940”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 84-86; Cf. K.J. EGAN, “Carmelite Spirituality”, in P. SHELDRAKE, *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 173; Cf. A. COMBES, *St. Therese and Suffering: The Spirituality of St. Therese in Its Essence*, M. H. Gill and Son, Ltd, Dublin 1951, 110-111.

²⁴⁹ Cf. M. NAULAK, *Reminiscing in Tranquillity: Sr. Violette’s Memories of Mgr. Raymond F C Mascarenhas*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 2014, 23.

The ardent desire of Msgr. Raymond was that his sisters should live according to the spirit of St. Therese. For this reason, he wrote the following message on the feast of St. Therese of Lisieux: “In the garden of religious life all of us are destined to blossom as flowers of holiness varying indeed in beauty according to God’s transforming grace meted out to each of us but still all flowers of genuine sanctity.”²⁵⁰ These words were a genuine encouragement for all Bethany Sisters to strive towards a life of holiness. He motivated his spiritual daughters to live a life of holiness by following the life of humility that was the heart of St. Therese. St. Therese allowed herself to be little and her littleness is described in various ways such as being a little bird, little doctor, little flower, little brush.²⁵¹ Embedded in the littleness of St. Therese, the Bethany Sisters attempt to make the house of Bethany little, simple, and humble like the Little Flower.²⁵² St. Therese of Lisieux said: “I have only to open the Holy Gospels and at once I breathe the perfume of Jesus’ life.”²⁵³ It is an invitation for the Bethany Sisters to relive the teachings of the Gospel and to implant the spirit of the saints particularly St. Therese of Lisieux, the second patroness of their spiritual journey to get the fragrance of Jesus in the Gospels thus their life be formed after the lifestyle of Jesus’s merciful love in the Gospels.

The daring words of St. Therese, “I feel that mission is about to begin, my mission to make God loved as I love him, to teach souls my little way”²⁵⁴ stirred the heart of Bethany Sisters. They are taught through her words: “Merit doesn’t consist in doing or giving much, but rather in receiving, in loving much.”²⁵⁵ Thus, her missionary zeal became the core of the Bethany Sisters to reach out to the needy in love and compassion. And to follow the little way of spiritual childhood, a way of trust and total surrender to the merciful love of God (cf. BSC 42). Inspired by the spirituality of St. Therese of Lisieux, the patroness of the mission, they strive to be true apostles of Christ, living an authentic witness of his compassionate love in the world. Through their life

²⁵⁰ M. LILLIS – MIRIAM, *To You My Daughters*, 491.

²⁵¹ Cf. THERESE OF LISIEUX – J. CLARKE (tr.), *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux*, trans. by Carmel Publishing Centre, Thiruvananthapuram 1995, 81, 198, 206, 235.

²⁵² Cf. M. NAULAK, *Reminiscing in Tranquillity: Sr. Violette’s Memories of Mgr. Raymond F C Mascarenhas*, 23.

²⁵³ THERESE OF LISIEUX – T.N. TAYLOR (ed.), *The Story of a Soul*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids 2007, 116.

²⁵⁴ THERESE OF LISIEUX – J. CLARKE (tr.), *Story of a Soul*, 3.

²⁵⁵ THERESE OF LISIEUX – T. CAREY (ed.), *A Discovery of Love*, New City Press, Hyde Park 1994, 139.

of prayer and missionary activities, they strive to spread God's Kingdom in the world.²⁵⁶ Moved by her life they desire to live a life of love by living an ordinary life in an extraordinary way and in discovering and making God loved as the Little Flower of Jesus did.

4.1.1.3. Compassionate Friendship at Bethany Family in the Gospels

The Congregation of Bethany is founded as a home where hospitality dwells and love is shared as was the household of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus who were loved by Jesus (cf. Jn 11: 5). The home at Bethany appears to be a place where Jesus was a frequent guest, one whose hospitality he particularly enjoyed.²⁵⁷ This home offered an open-handed generosity and love in welcoming Jesus and his disciples through their kind deeds of love in service. Based on the Gospel of Luke 10: 38-42, John Cassian pictures Mary as a person who sits at the feet of the Lord and who is busy in the spiritual teachings of Jesus, whereas Martha involves herself in the holy service like the Good Samaritan. Martha and Mary represent two ways of life, active and contemplative.²⁵⁸ Thomas Keating brings the idea:

When Jesus tells Martha, that Mary had chosen the good portion, He is telling Martha that she needs to find a place in her life for this contemplative quality and that this perspective would make her good actions better. He is also warning Mary that there is something even better than the good portion. This is the union of contemplation and action.²⁵⁹

Though different theologians bring out various arguments regarding the role of Martha and Mary, the concern of Msgr. Raymond was how these models can influence the Bethany Sisters. Msgr. Raymond was enchanted by the integration of prayer and service of Martha and Mary. He was moved by the unflinching faith of Martha in Jesus at the death of her brother Lazarus (cf. BSC 162). Mary's art of sitting, gazing, listening to Jesus fascinated

²⁵⁶ Cf. V. D'SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 117.

²⁵⁷ Cf. L.N. CRUMB, "Mary & Martha: Sisters of Different Temperament", in *Living Church* 211 (1995), 12.

²⁵⁸ Cf. T.C. ODEN, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove 2003, 181-183; Cf. D.L. BOCK, *Luke*, vol. 2, Baker Books, Grand Rapids 1996, 1040; Cf. J.N. MANOKARAN, *Christ and Families: Strong Families for Global Transformation*, Centre for Contemporary Christianity, Bangalore 2011, 125.

²⁵⁹ T. KEATING, *The Mystery of Christ: The Liturgy as Spiritual Experience*, The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, New York 2008, 51.

Msgr. Raymond. Enriched by the life of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, the Congregation of Bethany is to be a home where everyone experiences friendship and hospitality.²⁶⁰ Thus, Thomas Merton points out, religious communities become beautiful when there are Marys and Marthas in them. Both are needed to make a real community because it is a blend of two aspects of a religious community i.e., action and contemplation.²⁶¹ Enkindled by these Gospel fames Bethany Sisters endeavour to master the art of contemplation in action. They realize it can be attained only by growing in interior silence and by sitting at the feet of Jesus, gazing at him, and listening to him. They strive to see Jesus in everyone who visited them and to welcome them with the spirit of hospitality after the example of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.²⁶²

Bethany Sisters implanted by the spirit of their third patroness they devote themselves to the service of God and neighbour in love and compassion and they make an attempt to be active contemplatives. Consequently, like the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus in the Gospel, they take an effort to make each home of Bethany Sisters to be a place of love where everyone is welcomed, a home of hospitality, a place of comfort, a clinic of guidance to those who approach in need. Like active contemplatives, one needs to be concerned about doing good to others to save souls.²⁶³

Thus, Bethany Sisters under the inspiration of their three patronesses they strive to sow the seed of compassion to the world by being the handmaid of the Lord after the model of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with the missionary zeal of Little Flower, through the caring deeds like the household of Bethany in the Gospel. Bethany Sisters extend a friendly smile, a kind gesture, a warm welcome, a compassionate look to spread the glow of God's compassionate love to the lonely, and the abandoned.

4.2. Means to Grow in the Spiritual Life

In every human being, there is an innate and insatiable yearning to know God. This yearning and passion are the paths towards spirituality. The pursuit of the spiritual life is not something that is a solitary project, but it is attained through God's grace. The beginning is never easy, and it is a gradual process. It involves letting go of self and demands a certain degree of ambiguity. Like

²⁶⁰ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XIV*, 38.

²⁶¹ Cf. T. MERTON, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana 1998, 258.

²⁶² Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 12; Cf. G. PAYYAPILLY – M. BENEDICT, *Fulness of Life*, 107-108.

²⁶³ Cf. G. PAYYAPILLY – M. BENEDICT, *Fulness of Life*, 37- 40.

gold is tested in the furnace, the events and circumstances transform the person towards the divine fire.²⁶⁴ The desert mother Syncletica said:

In the beginning, there is a struggle and a lot of work for those who come near to God but after that, there is indescribable joy. It is just like building a fire: at the first it is smoky and your eyes water, but later you get the desired result. Thus, we ought to light the divine fire in ourselves with tears and efforts.²⁶⁵

Likewise, Msgr. Raymond encourages his sisters to consider religious life as a training school for heaven. In this training, they are invited to offer themselves entirely to love God and love neighbour according to the spirit and charism of the institute.²⁶⁶ Subsequently, Bethany Sisters strive to live their spirit of poverty, purity, and self-sacrifice in obedience in imitating their master Jesus as a means to reach to the poor and the abandoned.

4.2.1. Evangelical Counsels: Path to Live the Charism

The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* exhorts: “Evangelical counsels is an integral part of the Church’s life and a much-needed incentive towards ever greater fidelity to the Gospel” (VC 3). *Perfectae Caritatis* teaches that the evangelical counsels invite the consecrated persons to bind herself/himself totally to the ways of the Lord. It is a special way of following Christ, who fulfilled his mission by living chaste, poor, and obedient even at the cost of his own life (cf. PC 1). Evangelical counsels guide the journey of consecrated persons towards authentic configuration to Jesus by following his ways radically and sincerely according to the teachings of the Gospel (cf. VC 30).

Bethany Sisters according to rule of their Constitution through the profession of evangelical counsels, generously vow to Christ that capacity to love, that need to possess, and that freedom to regulate their own life which is so precious to a person. By which they strive to possess the eternal values to become the messenger of compassion (cf. BSC 9; cf. ET 7). John Cassian, a Christian monk, reminds us that consecrated life is a path of conversion and service to Christ tending towards perfection.²⁶⁷ Msgr. Raymond shared the

²⁶⁴ Cf. E.V. ELDER, *Embracing the Spirit Within: Inspirational Stories and Reflections*, Friesen Press, Victoria, B.C 2012, 224.

²⁶⁵ Cited in, J. CHITTISTER, *Illuminated Life: Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll 2000, 40.

²⁶⁶ Cf. R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Points for Recollection: The Religious Life, 30.04.1942”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 179.

²⁶⁷ Cf. J.G. PAREDES, *Teologia della Vita Religiosa*, San Paolo, Milano 2000, 55-56.

similar reflection to his sisters that religious life is a state of perfection. In the life of a religious, evangelical counsels are considered to be an indispensable aspect for one striving for perfection.²⁶⁸ In one of his talks, Msgr. Raymond mentions to his sisters that God has given them a lamp, the lamp of a religious vocation, the lamp of rule, and vows. Each one of them is called to fill their lamp of hearts with the oil as the wise virgins had done. Oil is produced from some fruits. These fruits must undergo the process of crushing and squeezing. Without any effort on our part, the fruit will not yield any oil. In the same way, each religious is called to undergo some sorts of sacrifice to fill her lamp with the oil through some fruits. They are none other than the fruit of her holy rule, and the fruit of her sacrifices. Thus, this oil becomes perfumed oil with love and charity to manifest the love of God and love of neighbour.²⁶⁹

Bethany Sisters make an effort to love God more ardently, dedicate themselves to the divine service more intimately. By this, they endeavour to lead a life of charity towards one's neighbour (cf. BSC 10; cf. LG 44). The practice of evangelical counsels invites the Bethany Sisters to light up their path to love tenderly, to act justly, and to walk humbly (cf. Mic 6: 8). Therefore, they endeavour to make their life a living sacrifice in living their evangelical counsels to be transformed unto Christ in his merciful love.

4.2.1.1. Consecrated Chastity

The profession of evangelical chastity invites the consecrated persons to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is their true way of serving God (cf. Rom 12: 1). Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI referring to the fourth rule of St. Benedict reminds the consecrated persons: "Prefer nothing to the love of Christ."²⁷⁰ Reflecting on this rule, he re-joins the consecrated persons to go "to the very root of love of Jesus Christ with undivided heart, putting nothing ahead of this love."²⁷¹ Joseph Mattam points out that "the singleness of purpose, the concentration of one's forces on

²⁶⁸ Cf. R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, "Points for Recollection: The Religious Life, 30.04.1942", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 179-180.

²⁶⁹ Cf. R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: The Wise and the Foolish Virgins, 01.02.1942", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 162.

²⁷⁰ Cited in, BENEDETTO XVI, "Discorso del Santo Padre Benedetto XVI ai Partecipanti alla Plenaria della Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consecrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica, 20 Novembre 2008", in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2008, 692; Cf. T.G. KARDONG, *Benedict's Rule*, 85.

²⁷¹ BENEDETTO XVI, "Incontro con Giovanni Religiose, 19 Agosto 2011", in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2011, 119.

Christ, gives a person unity and integration.”²⁷² Therefore, “chastity is an outstanding token of heavenly riches, and also a most suitable way for religious to spend themselves readily in God’s service and works of apostolate” (cf. *PC* 12).²⁷³ Msgr. Raymond in his exhortation on the vow of chastity instructed his sisters:

Chastity makes us angelic and pure. In chastity, we renounce something dear to us, our body, and its natural inclinations. Unless we fight against our sinful inclination, we will lose the battle. The world will enter into our souls through the windows of our senses. We always carry with us our human nature. We require constant watchfulness over our senses, our imaginations, and control of the will, in order to fight against our human nature. When the body revolts and claims its rights, we have to be on the alert in order to be the pure spouses of Jesus.²⁷⁴

The first Constitution of Bethany, written by Msgr. Raymond states: “Let them always bear in mind the great beatitude pronounced by our Lord: “Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God” (Mt 5: 8). Bethany Sisters are encouraged to assure themselves more and more that their spouse Jesus Christ is the lover of chaste souls and that he is the crown of virgins (cf. BSFC 99). Bethany Sisters are invited daily to entrust their purity of soul and body to the Mother of God whose purity shines in her annunciation that is particularly dear to the life of Bethany. To offer all their affections of their heart and their entire being to the spouse Jesus Christ (cf. BSFC 87&97). It is the intimacy and union with the Lord that lead the Bethany Sisters to a life of an undivided heart for the extension of the kingdom (cf. 1Cor 7: 34-35). They reminded that the fruit of consecrated life lies when the vow of chastity blossoms into fruitful love in the atmosphere of true sisterly love in the community (cf. BSC 16-18). Msgr. Raymond instructed his sisters: “Loving the moral qualities in a person is rational to love and loving God who is an invisible Supreme Being is supernatural love.”²⁷⁵ He reminded them to “diligently watch over their thoughts and hearts and exercise a careful guard over their senses, especially their eyes and ears” (BSFC 88). Because

²⁷² J. MATTAM, *Religious Life: Within a Christian Vision of Reality*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand 1994, 82.

²⁷³ M.S. DRISCOLL, “Chastity”, in M. DOWNEY (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota 1993, 151.

²⁷⁴ R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Exhortation: The Incarnation: The Lesson of Love, 20.12.1940”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 95.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

evangelical chastity helps them “to transform their interior life from everything that has its source in the lust of the flesh” (RD 9).

The passionate love that originates from their commitment helps the Bethany Sisters to channel their love towards the effectiveness of their mission. This love prompts them to love the entire humanity in charity and love.²⁷⁶ They strive to testify to the world that in the hedonistic culture, with Christ it is possible to love God with one’s entire being, giving first place to Christ above all other love and loving everyone freely with the love of God (cf. VC 88). They are illumined by the words from the first letter of St. John: “For all that is in the world, the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches, comes not from the Father but the world. And the world and its desires are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever” (1Jn 2: 16-17).²⁷⁷ Bethany Sisters in fidelity to their charism and spirituality make an effort to live a radical life according to the spirit of the Gospel. Knowing that they carry with them the human nature of inclination, they cling to the person of Jesus to be inflamed by his love to serve humanity in love.

4.2.1.2. Evangelical Poverty

Jesus continues to repeat the same words uttered to the young rich man to all consecrated persons: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, then come, follow me” (Mt 19: 21). These words of Jesus are reflected in *Vita Consecrata* as it affirms: “Poverty proclaims that God is man’s only treasure” (VC 21). By imitating the lifestyle of Jesus, consecrated persons find their absolute security in the Father that God loves them and will save them not because of what they have, but because of his love (cf. VC 16).²⁷⁸

The first Constitution of Bethany teaches: “An earnest desire to be close imitators of Jesus Christ, their heavenly spouse, who being rich became poor for our sake, that through his poverty we might be rich (cf. 2 Cor 8: 9), will enable the sisters to love poverty as their mother” (BSFC 85). Msgr. Raymond in his exhortation after the example of Jesus instilled in his sisters the meaning of the vow of poverty. Jesus born in a humble manger could have transformed the manger into a magnificent palace, but he remained obedient in doing the will of his Father to make known the message of poverty. In the spirit of poverty, he lived in a foreign land of Egypt. At Nazareth, he grew up as a carpenter who earned his daily bread. His public life was a life of rejection,

²⁷⁶ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XV*, 13.

²⁷⁷ Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 15.

²⁷⁸ Cf. J. FUELLENBACH, *Throw Fire*, Logos Publications, Manila 1998, 181.

followed by agony, scourging, crowning with thorns, and ending with death on a cross like a criminal. All these events in the life of Jesus explain his unfathomable love to save humanity and to teach the value of poverty. Jesus instead of striving for the higher position he moves from the heights to the depth, from victory to defeat, from riches to poverty, from triumph to suffering, from life to death. Thus, we can say, from crib to the cross he walked in the spirit of poverty.²⁷⁹ Thus, the Constitution of Bethany Sisters reminds by embracing voluntary poverty of Jesus they choose to share in his poverty that they might be enriched by his poverty and to make their house of Bethany another Nazareth where they lead a simplicity of life (BSC 20).²⁸⁰

Sr. Bertha reiterates the words of Msgr. Raymond: “Poverty is the renunciation of earthly goods and possessions.”²⁸¹ For this reason, the first Constitution of Bethany reminds: “They should suffer with joy the inconveniences of poverty and the humiliations which result from their dress, food, and other things destined for their use, rejoicing in being poor for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ who for our sake became poor” (BSFC 77). Bethany Sisters in sharing the poverty of Jesus they detach themselves from created things to attach themselves to God alone to grow unto Christ. They are instructed to grow in the spirit of detachment from things, persons, places, position, and family to be available for mission.²⁸²

Msgr. Raymond reminded his sisters that “poverty is the first-class ticket to the heart of our Lord which always went out to the poor and the humble.”²⁸³ The same thought is reflected in *Evangelica Testificatio* that prompts the consecrated persons in professing the vow of poverty “to join the poor in their situation and to share their better cares” (ET 18). Bethany Sisters after the example of God of compassion they allow the cry of the poor to find a responsive echo in their hearts, loving them with Christ’s own love. They strive to be sensitive to the cry of the needy and try to ease their sufferings by their consoling presence to their suffering brothers and sisters (cf. BSC 24; cf. ET 18). Bethany Sisters strive to participate in the mystery of self-

²⁷⁹ Cf. R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Exhortation: A Study of Jesus Suffering, 21.02.1941”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 129-130 (129-135); Cf. K. BARTH – G.W. BROMILEY (ed.), *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. 4, Part 1, T.T. Clark, Edinburgh 1956, 190.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Archive: AGBM-A.135.4. B/22, V. D’SOUZA, *Memories of Fr. Founder*, undated.

²⁸¹ R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Points for Recollection: The Sermon on the Mount, 10.11.1940”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 45.

²⁸² Cf. *Decree of the XVI general Chapter*, 16.

²⁸³ V. D’SOUZA, *Unless the Seed Die*, 74.

emptying of Jesus by leading a simple life, being content with the minimum, enkindled by the spirituality that God alone suffices. Their filial trust in God enables them to find their security in God alone that empowers them to accept all the uncertainties of their daily life and apostolate with joy and serenity.²⁸⁴ Thus, the vow of poverty invites Bethany Sisters to be generous in sharing their lives and their God-given potentialities for the sake of the Kingdom and for the welfare of the other.

4.2.1.3. *Redemptive Obedience*

Consecrated persons by imitating Christ's filial obedience proclaims, "that he is infinitely beloved and loving, as the One who delights only in the will of the Father (cf. Jn 4: 34), to whom he is perfectly united and on whom he depends for everything" (VC 16). By the profession of evangelical obedience consecrated persons "wish to take the Father's will as their daily bread (cf. Jn 4: 34), as their rock, their joy, their shield, and their fortress (cf. Ps 18: 2)" (VC 91). The document *The service of authority and obedience*, the instruction published on 11 May 2008, states:

To seek the will of God means to seek a friendly and benevolent will, which desires our fulfilment, that desires, above all, a free response in love to its love, in order to make us instruments of divine love. It is along with this *via amoris* that the flower of listening and obedience blooms.²⁸⁵

Msgr. Raymond instructed his sisters how to seek the will of God through profound obedience of Jesus at the home of Nazareth. Jesus surrendered his entire life by doing the will of his Father from the very moment of his conception in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, "to the point of death- even death on a cross" (Phil 2: 8). On the cross, he revealed the true mercy of God. Msgr. Raymond instilled in his sister it is the compassionate love of God moved Jesus to obey even at the point of his death. It is a clear path for his spiritual daughters to live their vow of obedience in the spirit of love.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XIV*, 46.

²⁸⁵ CONGREGAZIONE PER GLI ISTITUTI DI VITA CONSECRATA E LE SOCIETÀ DI VITA APOSTOLICA, *Il Servizio dell'autorità e L'Obbedienza, Istruzione*, n. 4, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2008, 11.

²⁸⁶ Cf. M. BERTHA, *From the Lips of the Founder*, 97-98. Msgr. Raymond in his exhortation on *Obedience* explains: The Gospel account gives a clear picture of his obedience during his public ministry. To the crowd he said: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mk 4: 35). In the Lord's prayer, the third request is: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6: 10). Jesus says to his disciples: "My food is to do the

The first Constitution of the Bethany Sisters states: “Obedience will be to them a light yoke and a sweet burden if they always place before themselves the example of their Divine Spouse who emptied himself taking the form of a servant and humbled himself becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross” (BSFC 115). Likewise, Bethany Sisters make themselves available to the building up the Body of Christ and acknowledge in faith and in perfect liberty obey their lawfully constituted authority (BSC 31&32).

Sr. Bertha reminds the instruction of Msgr. Raymond to his sisters it is the obedient heart that brings love to the task that one has been assigned. When a person considers his/her daily assignment as a plan of God, a pure heart will guide his/her actions to become meritorious for the greater glory of God that will add their merit in heaven. Consequently, an obedient person is ready to obey even at the expense of her good name, at the expense of her own life.²⁸⁷ For Saint Benedict, “Obedience means listening to God so as to know how to respond in love to his will.”²⁸⁸ It means to be open and receptive to the other, rather than self-sufficient dependence on one’s own vision, plans, and insights.

Perfectae Caritatis urges the consecrated persons to follow the example of Jesus Christ who came to do the will of the Father (cf. Jn 4: 34) and assuming the nature of a slave (cf. Phil 2: 7) learned obedience in the school of suffering (cf. Heb 5: 8; cf. PC 14). In following the path of Jesus by the vow of obedience they strive to “reach to the essence of the entire economy of redemption” (RD 13). The obedience of Jesus unfolds the “divine listening to a divine love, a loving response to a loving mission, and a free “yes” to a free command.”²⁸⁹

will of him who sent me and to complete his work” (Jn 4: 34). In the anguished moment at Gethsemane: “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done” (Mt 26: 42). As a result, on the cross he could say: “It is finished” (Jn 19: 30). Because “the cross is true mercy, and charity the highest of all gifts”: Cf. R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Exhortation: The Example of Jesus – Obedience, 21.12.1940”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 97-98. In the opinion of Joe Mannath, obedience means listening intently to God’s voice, to follow that voice generously and sincerely: Cf. J. MANNATH, *A Radical Love A Path of Love: The Beauty and Burden of Religious Life*, Bosco Society for Printing & Graphic Training, New Delhi 2013, 47.

²⁸⁷ R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Exhortation: The Hidden Life of Jesus, 07.02.1941”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 124-125.

²⁸⁸ T.G. KARDONG, *Benedict’s Rule*, 115.

²⁸⁹ D.P. MCNEILL – D.A. MORRISON – H.J. NOUWEN (eds), *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*, 37.

The Bethany Sisters strive to grow in their faith-response, to submit their will, to let go of their impulses, and let God be God in their lives.²⁹⁰ They make an attempt to live their consecrated life radically giving prophetic witnesses to the compassionate love of God by sharing in the self-emptying spirit of Jesus to humanity. They place themselves at God's disposal to do what God wants listening to his voice attentively and intently.

4.2.2. Life of Prayer: Growing in Compassionate Love

The profound experience of God is the foundation of consecrated life (cf. VC 73). The experience of God comes from the richness of faith. According to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI: "Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy."²⁹¹ At the root of every religious life, there is a fundamental movement of faith, a walk towards Jesus to make him the centre of one's Life.²⁹² The Constitution of Bethany Sisters teaches that the first and principal duty of consecrated persons is to contemplate the divine things and to have a constant union with God in prayer (cf. BSC 38; cf. Can 663. §1). Prayer is the core of every consecrated person (VDQ 16). Prayer being an integral part of consecrated life they strive to live a life of holiness. *Vita Consecrata* exhorts: "Call to holiness is accepted and can be cultivated only in the silence of adoration before the infinite transcendence of God" (VC 38). According to Teresa of Avila: "Prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God."²⁹³ Bethany Sisters recall the words of their founder: "Let prayer be our principal duty, the first and chief concern of our life. We should learn to pray well despite the difficulties we experience in prayer."²⁹⁴ Prayer springs forth from the irrepressible yearnings of the soul. It is the visible loving expression of a whole person's movement towards being in union with God.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁰ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XIV*, 47.

²⁹¹ BENEDICT XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* (11 October 2011), n. 7.

²⁹² Cf. CICLSAL, *Contemplate: To Consecrated Men and Women on the Trails of Beauty*, n.11.

²⁹³ ST. TERESA OF AVILA – J.M. HOUSTON (ed.), *St. Teresa of Avila: Life of Prayer*, Victor Books, Colorado Springs 2006, 85. St. Teresa of Calcutta says: "Listen in silence because if your heart is full of other things, you cannot hear the voice of God: Cf. MOTHER TERESA – B. BENENATE (ed.), *In the Heart of the World, Thoughts, Stories & prayers*, New World Library, Novato 2010, 20. Simon Tugwell considered prayer as an expression of mind's readiness to submit one's plans to God and to acknowledge that all good comes from him: Cf. S. TUGWELL, "Radical Spirituality", in G.S. WAKEFIELD (ed.), *The SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, SCM Press, London 1983, 378.

²⁹⁴ R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: The Example of Jesus – Obedience, 21.12.1940", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the lips of the Founder*, 108.

²⁹⁵ Cf. F.K. NEMECK, "Poverty-Oraison", in F. CIARDI, *Dictionary of Oblates*, 745.

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

Bethany Sisters take an effort to make their houses a house of prayer by recalling the words of their founder:

A convent does not become a house of prayer by means of its material building or the inanimate chapel it contains, but it is made so by the life of prayer. Prayer therefore should be the breath of the soul of every sister in the convent. Each sister should begin the day with a prompt prayerful answer to the first call of the morning bell and close it with the final prayerful repose at the last sound of the night bell.²⁹⁶

Vita Consecrata points out: “In every age consecrated men and women must continue to be images of Christ the Lord, fostering through prayer a profound communion of mind with him so that their whole lives may be penetrated by an apostolic spirit and their apostolic work with contemplation” (VC 8). Msgr. Raymond exhorts his sisters in a similar line: “Prayer should animate our work. Only work without prayer is like a body without a soul. Our apostolate should be an overflow of our spirit.”²⁹⁷ Likewise, St. Teresa of Calcutta affirms: “Prayer is as necessary as the air, as the blood in our bodies, as anything keep us alive to the grace of God.”²⁹⁸ We find the same thought in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the Word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless” (cf. EG 262). Our genuine mystical union with God opens our hearts to the mystery of the other.²⁹⁹ Saint Vincent de Paul loved to say that “when one is obliged to leave prayer to attend to a poor person in need, that prayer is not really interrupted because one leaves God to serve God” (Cited in VC 82). *Vita Consecrata* states eloquently: “Serving the poor is an act of evangelization and, at the same time, a seal of Gospel authenticity and a catalyst for permanent conversion in the consecrated life” (VC 82). In this regard, Msgr. Raymond affirms that every action of religious is a prayer. By which every religious become ever more fully an image of Christ and their communities become true schools of prayer.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ M. LILLIS – MIRIAM, *To You My Daughters*, 475.

²⁹⁷ R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Exhortation: The Spirit of Bethany, 01.08.1943”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 253.

²⁹⁸ MOTHER TERESA – B. BENENATE – J. DUREPOS (eds), *No Greater Love*, World Library, Novato 1997, 14.

²⁹⁹ Cf. M. KARECKI, “Mission Spirituality in Global Perspective”, in *Missiology: An International Review* 40 (2012) 1, 27.

³⁰⁰ Cf. R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Exhortation: Sanctification of Our Souls, 20.09.1940”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 32.

The Constitution of the Bethany Sisters urges them to make Jesus the centre of their spiritual journey. They venerate the Blessed Virgin Mary as their ideal and live the spirit of the mystery of the annunciation in the service of God and neighbour. They grow in deep union with Jesus by the enriching examples of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. They strive to live a life of intimacy and friendship with Jesus through their acts of contemplation in action. In St. Therese of the Child Jesus, they find the little way of trust and confidence and absolute surrender to the will of God. They allow God of compassion to mould them by participating devotedly in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and by devoting adequate time for meditation on the Word of God and personal prayer. Moreover, they are spiritually nourished by praying together with the office of the hours and reflective spiritual readings, through frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the daily examination of conscience, monthly recollections, annual retreats, and through the sacrament of reconciliation (cf. BSC 39-48).

Encouraged by the teachings of the Constitution and their founder Bethany Sisters are invited to make every opportunity an occasion of uniting themselves to God. Being the soldier of Christ (cf. 2 Tim 2: 3) Bethany Sisters are called to put on the armour of God to be strong in the power of God (cf. Eph 6: 10-18) by combining both models of Martha and Mary to reach out to others in communion and compassion as the handmaids of the Lord. They strive to be more loving, more forgiving, and more compassionate and to have a better relationship with God and one another in the service of God.

4.2.3. Eucharist: Core of Compassion

The Eucharist is a celebration of the self-forgetful and self-giving love of God. The epiphany of God's love is made visible through the person of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.³⁰¹ The Word made flesh in the mystery of Incarnation continues to love us in the mystery of Eucharist. *Sacramentum Caritatis* affirms: "Jesus continues, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, to love us "to the end", even to offering us his body and his blood."³⁰² "In the Eucharist, the Word made flesh gives himself to us as our spiritual food" (SC 43). Every Eucharist, therefore, proclaims: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3: 16).

³⁰¹ Cf. G. THERUKKATTIL, *Eucharist Energizer of a Spirituality for the Third Millennium*, Jeevamrutha Publication, Aluva 2000, 17.

³⁰² BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), n. 1. Henceforth cited as SC within the text.

Lumen Gentium affirms that Eucharistic sacrifice is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life (cf. *LG* 11). In the same way, *Vita Consecrata* upholds that Eucharist is at the centre of the consecrated life. Those who have embraced evangelical counsels choose Christ as the meaning of their life and they establish greater communion with him by sharing daily in the Eucharist (cf. *VC* 95). Msgr. Raymond advises his sisters regarding the richness of Eucharist: “If we receive Holy Communion with a pure heart detached from all transitory things what genuine saints, we will become! We receive in Holy Communion not only grace but the source of all graces.”³⁰³ Likewise, the recent young saint Carlo Acutis exclaims: “If we get in front of the sun, we get suntans. But when we get in front of Jesus in the Eucharist, we become saints.”³⁰⁴ The same passionate love Msgr. Raymond tries to pass on to his sisters through these words: “Our Lord is present on our altars not only to be the object of our adoration but also to be our food. This divine food maintains in us the life of grace.”³⁰⁵ There is nothing in the Church more sublime than the Holy Eucharist. As *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* affirms, “in Eucharist we have Jesus, we have his redemptive sacrifice, we have his resurrection, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have adoration, obedience, and love of the father.”³⁰⁶

Enhanced by the mystery of Eucharist Msgr. Raymond teaches that there is nothing more precious than the most Holy Sacrament of the altar. The Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is a continual sacrifice and a life of continual love where God’s richness of mercy makes unceasing acts of boundless love for humanity.³⁰⁷ The first Constitution of the Bethany Sisters states: “Our Lord in his Sacrament of love will be the principal object for their love and adoration and service” (BSFC 118). Bethany Sisters are encouraged to grow in intimacy with Jesus and endeavour to make Eucharist the source and summit of their lives (cf. *CCC* 1324; cf. *LG* 11, cf. *VDQ* 22). They realize that the effectiveness of their life and mission is rooted in the celebration of the Eucharist and profound adoration of Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament. The Bethany Sisters partake in the Holy Eucharist remembering

³⁰³ R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Exhortation: The House of Nazareth, 16.01.1942”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 159.

³⁰⁴ Vatican News: in <https://www.vaticannews.va/it/vaticano/news/2018-10/sinodo-giovani-2018-carlo-acutis.html#play> (accessed on 20 March 2021).

³⁰⁵ R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Exhortation: The Holy Eucharist, 05.05.1942”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 202.

³⁰⁶ J. PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), n. 60.

³⁰⁷ Cf. R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, “Exhortation: The Feast of the Sacred Heart, 01.06.1943”, in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 245.

that they are spiritually brought back to live the Paschal mystery of Christ (cf. VC 95). Their frequent encounter with the God of mercy in the Eucharistic Lord purifies their hearts to grow in openness in relationship with God and one another.³⁰⁸ Infused by the mystery of Eucharist the Bethany Sisters go forth on a mission to bear fruit for the Lord by touching the hearts of the poor and the needy (cf. CCC 1332). They make an effort to treasure and savour the Eucharist in its daily celebration with the eyes of faith. In receiving him devotedly into their hearts they strive to be the bearer of Christ's compassionate love. In the celebration of the Eucharist, they receive a special grace and vigour in communion with Christ to offer themselves to serve the Church by reaching out to the needy in sharing the merciful face of the Lord.

4.2.4. Fraternal Life in Community: A Sign of God's Compassionate Love

Religious communities are formed on the model of the early Church, who were of one heart and soul, living in the spirit of prayer and communion and the breaking of the bread, living the acts of charity (cf. PC 15; cf. Acts 4: 43-46; cf. Acts 4: 32-37). For early Church, the breaking of the bread by the apostles, with whom Jesus broke the bread, in memory of Jesus was the expression of their communion (cf. Acts 2: 47).³⁰⁹ The Bethany communities are called to be the model of the Jerusalem community where it has its foundation on the Eucharistic Lord. The Bethany Sisters treasure the words of Msgr. Raymond who wrote to his sisters at the Lisieux community, Puttur on the feast of Corpus Christi in 1930:

On this day, you must contemplate how the Eucharistic bread, which becomes the Body of our Lord, is composed of many different grains which are ground together, mixed, and baked and thus become one bread. This is a model to you, my dear children. That you may be one with our Lord, your hearts must be ground together, mixed, and baked, so that you become one heart and one soul.³¹⁰

The Constitution of the Bethany Sisters reminds that by the religious profession, a sister receives a community as a home where she feels accepted and cared for. Their fraternal love in the community is nourished by listening to the Word of God, participating in the celebration of the

³⁰⁸ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XIV*, 41; THE CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Directory*, Prasad Printers, Mangalore 2005, 5.

³⁰⁹ Cf. E. LAVERDIÈRE, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1996, 104.

³¹⁰ M. LILLIS – MIRIAM, *To You My Daughters*, 361.

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

Eucharist, being supported by mutual prayer, praying in common, and sharing of faith. United in Christ by their very consecration they devote themselves to constitute a vibrant community of faith, hope, and love (cf. BSC 53-55). Sr. Bertha encourages the sisters through the words of Msgr. Raymond:

In our convent life, we should try to forget our own sufferings, privations, hardships, needs, and be concerned about the needs of our neighbour. In fact, in the convent 'she' or 'you' comes before 'I'. In that case, we repeat the words of Saint John the Baptist, who said, "He must increase, and I must decrease" (Jn 3: 30). This is perfect charity, and it should reign in a community. Having such ideals, I must live my life for God and for others. When such a spirit reigns in the convent, the community will become a paradise on earth.³¹¹

The Eucharist is the source through which one can experience forgiveness and communion with God and the other. Forgiveness is the heart of the Eucharistic community. Msgr. Raymond reminds his sisters:

In the community, great patience is required since the members belong to different families, come from different cultures, education, countries. When these characters interact with one another, problems are caused. We need a lot of forgiveness and patience in this case. We have to forgive and forget the hurts received.³¹²

St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians affirms: "There is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (I Cor 10: 17). The believing Christian communities continue to gather around one altar where "each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world" (SC 88). Thus, *Redemptionis Donum* encourages the Consecrated persons to make their religious community a place nourished by the teachings of the Gospel, by the sacred liturgy, and above all by the Eucharist (cf. RD 15).

Bethany communities are gifted with sisters from different cultures and languages. To enter into a deeper union with another they take responsibility to know each other and respect one another's culture, language, customs, traditions, and celebrations to grow in the interpersonal relationship in the community. The document *Fraternal Life in Community* underscores to live

³¹¹ R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: The Hidden Life of Jesus, 15.02.1941", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 127-128.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 128.

in sisterly affection in community “a true journey of interior liberation is necessary” (*FLC* 21). Thus, the study of the sixteenth General Chapter revives Bethany Sisters to partake in the daily Eucharistic celebration together to deepen their fraternal relationship and to make their communities truly formative where the young feel accepted and loved, and the elderly feel respected and cared for (cf. *EG* 108). Consequently, the way they live and work together in the community through which God’s compassion becomes present amid the broken world.³¹³ *Vita Consecrata* points out that community is the primary place of formation where the person is involved in the hardships and the joys of the community. In living a fraternal life each one learns to accept the giftedness of each one along with their differences and limitations (cf. *VC* 67). Henri Nouwen states: “Community is like mosaic. Together in the one mosaic, each little stone is indispensable and makes a unique contribution to the glory of God.”³¹⁴ Their communion in community life becomes silent testimony to the world to bring harmony to society.³¹⁵ Thus, the fifteenth General Chapter reminds that in making the Bethany communities a school of love, each member is responsible for the other, and each one contributes to creating in the community an atmosphere of sharing, understanding, unity, and mutual help. A true religious community exists when the members begin to make sacrifices of their independence and relate to each other personally on the level of loving and being loved in total sharing of oneself to the other.³¹⁶

The Constitution of the Bethany Sisters exhorts them to care for one another, bear one another’s burdens. They are sent forth to be broken and shared, to manifest the love of God to humanity through their fraternal love shared in the community. They are challenged to be a leaven of communion at the service of the mission of the universal Church (cf. *BSC* 50; cf. *VC* 47). *Vita Consecrata* recaps us that the consecrated persons are called to promote constantly fraternal love in the community after the example of Trinity so that they can change mere human relationships to a new type of solidarity (cf. *VC* 41). The study of the fourteenth General Chapter encourages the Bethany Sisters to make their communities a replica of the Trinitarian community permeated by love, communion with God, self, and one another. The goal is to be eloquent witnesses to the Trinity because the community becomes the

³¹³ Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 17-19.

³¹⁴ H.J.M. NOUWEN – R.A. JONAS (ed.). *The Essential Henri Nouwen*, Shambhala, London 2009, 143.

³¹⁵ Cf. J. PAUL II, Post- Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (6 November 1999), n. 44. Henceforth cited as *EA* within the text.

³¹⁶ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XV*, 14.

graced reflection of God who is a Trinity of Love. Bethany Sisters take an effort to accept the uniqueness of each other and recognize their giftedness, they accept the diversity in unity, giving space to grow into the fullness of life in the service of the community. To make their community home of peace they foster an art of listening and forgiveness. They encourage constructive dialogue to grow in freedom, love, trust, and mutuality. Faith sharing is one of the ways in which the members of the community reinforce interpersonal relationship. It helps them to build self-esteem and recognize the self-worth of the other.³¹⁷ Bethany Sisters endeavour to make their community a place of formation and a sign of God's love and compassion.

4.2.5. Formation: A Configuration unto Christ

Religious formation fosters growth in consecrated persons from the earliest stages until the religious meets the Lord ultimately in death. The formation is a learning process that involves change, growth, and transformation and it is not achieved at once (cf. *EE* 48). In the Old Testament the book of Jeremiah, speaks about a potter who was making a vessel on his wheel (cf. Jer 18: 3). When the clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, until the vessel seems to be good to him (cf. Jer 18: 4). The reading retells us that a religious is clay in the potter's hand. It is only when the religious allow themselves to be shaped by their lives and circumstances that God can achieve divine artistry with them and turn them from lumps of clay into useful pieces of pottery, to function precisely as God intends. To reach to its completion a product must undergo a continuous breaking, remoulding until it reaches its perfection.³¹⁸

The Directives on formation, *Potissimum Institutioni* points out "formation is a global process of renewal which extends to all aspects of the religious person and to the whole institute itself" (*PI* 68). Thus, *Vita Consecrata* presents formation as "a sharing in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions the inner attitudes of the Son in the hearts of young men and women" (*VC* 66). Similarly, Amedeo Cencini defines formation in terms of "ministry" and "a mystery" that "the Father carries out with the power of the Spirit, to mould in those whom he calls, the image of the Son."³¹⁹ In short, formation is the process of identification with the

³¹⁷ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XIV*, 49-51.

³¹⁸ Cf. A. VIBERG, "Steadfast Love", in *The Living Pulpit*, 22 (2013) 3, 2.

³¹⁹ A. CENCINI, *The Sentiments of the Son: A Formative Journey in Consecrated Life*, Pauline Publications, Mumbai 2005, 14.

attitude of Christ (cf. VC 65), and of transforming oneself into the compassionate face of Jesus.

The Constitution of the Bethany Sisters gives a structured and detailed account of Bethany formation programme. Through the formation programme a formee is gradually made aware that knowing and loving Jesus is to be the centre of her life. During this period, she develops an understanding that formation is a continuous process that transforms her gradually into the person of Jesus Christ. At the different stages of formation, a person is given sufficient time to be with the Lord in solitude to grow in intimate communion. She is given the opportunity to know about religious life, and about the charism and spirituality of the Institute. Their programme of studies gives special attention to biblical, dogmatic, spiritual, pastoral theology, and in particular, to the deepening of a doctrinal understanding of consecrated life. In all stages of formation, they adapt the syllabus according to the current situation in order to conscientize the formees of the social, political, environment, and other changes in the society. The spiritual accompaniment helps the formee to grow in human and spiritual maturity and live on the path of fidelity to the Gospel. It enables her to re-order her value system, bring her needs, attitudes, and desires in line with the values of Christ.

During formation, a formee is sent to different communities to experience the beauty of living together and to be in touch with the mission of the sisters in the community. It is also a time to know her adaptability in community living, her intention, suitability, and her openness. In order to grow in human maturity and emotional stability, and making sound judgments, a formee is given different programmes such as inputs on human development, classes on spiritual and psychological development, vocational accompaniment, group dynamism, counselling (cf. BSC 78-86). Thus, *Vita Consecrata* reminds that formation has to involve the whole person, in behaviour and intentions. In all respects, it aims at the transformation of the whole person (cf. VC 65). By this, a formee is allowed to discern her vocation and to respond to it with sufficient responsibility and freedom.

The fifteenth General Chapters emphasised the importance of formation where formee is called to imbibe the vision and mission of Jesus who is compassionate and love. In order to deepen her love for God in serving humanity, the village exposure program is arranged as part of their formation. The formee is made aware that she is called to be with Jesus and to be sent out (cf. Mk 3: 13-14). These experiences enable her to immerse herself in the situations of society and to be touched by the lives of the people. She cultivates the habit of seeing God's hand in the daily situation of life in faith

and grow in the compassionate love of God. During the formation, each Bethany Sister realizes that her goal is to surrender herself to the will of God in faith as his handmaid, in giving Jesus to the world.

The Bethany Sisters knowing that their formation is an ongoing process continue the spiritual journey with a sense of responsibility and perseverance throughout their lives. To commit themselves passionately to Christ and to be rooted in the compassionate love of God they adopt suitable measures for their self-formation such as spiritual direction and maintain a spiritual journal, give sufficient time for prayer, study, reflection, attend seminars, input sessions, sharing of spiritual and apostolic experiences.³²⁰ When a sister is growing in age and cannot participate actively in the apostolic ministry, she is assisted in living her life with serenity, accepting it as full participation in the paschal mystery of Jesus. She is encouraged to understand that her suffering has a salvific value of abandoning herself into the hands of God and preparing for her final union with her beloved.³²¹

The Bethany Sisters being aware that the quality of consecrated life and mission depends upon the quality of formation received with all openness move them to be formed into the stature of Jesus. Enkindled by the God of compassion they make an attempt to share the richness of God's mercy with the people, especially the poor and the marginalized, through their apostolates.

4.3. Concrete Ways of Living Compassion: Apostolates

The decree *Ad gentes* has opened a new prospect that the Church is a missionary by its very nature.³²² Accordingly, *Mutuae relationes* urges the consecrated persons to be "faithful to their vocation and in harmony with their distinctive character as women, seek out and propose new apostolic forms of service in response to the concrete needs of the Church and of the world" (*MR* 49). Further, *Vita Consecrata* teaches that infused by the Holy Spirit the founders and foundresses were open to the working of the Spirit of God and they interpreted the signs of the times successfully in responding wisely to the new need of the epoch (cf. *VC* 9). In this regard, the Bethany Sisters make an attempt to seek out and propose new apostolic endeavours according to the need of their time. The Bethany Sisters, knowing that the effectiveness of their apostolate depends on God's grace and their testimony of God's love,

³²⁰ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XV*, 16-17.

³²¹ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XIV*, 68-72.

³²² Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes* (7 December 1965), n. 2.

strive to be the heralds of the Gospel in fidelity to their commitment and the witness of genuine sisterly love (cf. BSC 64). Partaking in the apostolic mission of the Church, they communicate God's merciful love to the world through their apostolates of faith formation, education, medical, social activities.

4.3.1. Pastoral Care: An Art of Faith Formation

Pastoral care originates from the biblical image of the shepherd. These shepherds are called to tend the flock of God (cf. 1 Pet 5: 2-4) for the building up of the body of Christ (cf. Eph 4:10).³²³ In the understanding of a Christian community, pastoral care is a cure-of-soul's tradition. It is not merely healing of the soul but an animation of a person's personal life in relationship with God and the other. Indeed, pastoral care involves a conversation with persons or groups who seek interpersonal, moral, or spiritual guidance.³²⁴ A.V. Campbell points out pastoral care is like an umbrella that caters to specific care to all categories of people. It involves faith formation, skilled advice, counselling, preparation for the Sacraments, charitable work, social action, and the simple acts of comfort, support, and encouragement.³²⁵ According to Oden Thomas C., "True shepherding cannot function without compassion. In fact, true shepherding draws its sustaining life-breath from compassion: a paradigm opens to men and women of all professions and all times."³²⁶

Msgr. Raymond wrote in his first Constitution to his spiritual daughters that to devote themselves to teaching Christian doctrine in parish Churches and instructing Catechumens and Neophytes (cf. BSFC 2). The first four pioneers were the living examples of catechizing and preparing the children for liturgical and sacramental life and participating in other pious organization in the parish.³²⁷ Though the four were engaged in pastoral care, Sr. Gertrude had a special gift in faith formation in parishes. She was committed to spreading the message of the Gospel. She testifies:

³²³ Cf. W. OATES, "Pastor", in W. CARR *et alii*, *The New Dictionary of Pastoral Studies*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan 2002, 251.

³²⁴ Cf. L.O. MILLS, "Pastoral Care", in R.J. HUNTER (ed.), *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, Abingdon Press, Nashville 1990, 836.

³²⁵ Cf. A.V. CAMPBELL, "Pastoral Care", in W. CARR *et alii*, *The New Dictionary of Pastoral Studies*, 252.

³²⁶ T.C. ODEN, *Pastoral Theology Essentials of Ministry*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York 1983, 51.

³²⁷ Cf. M. THERESINE – M. ESURIA, *The First Four of Bethany*, Assisi Press, Mangalore 2016, 114.

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

I readily offered myself to work among neo-Christians and for seven years, I continued it, visiting them in their huts, washing and dressing up their children, teaching them to read, write, sing, and imparting them religious instruction. I also undertook to prepare the children for the first communion and to train the altar boys.³²⁸

According to the legacy left by the founding members, today, the Bethany Sisters in responding to the need of the time devote themselves to teaching Christian doctrine in the parish communities and in instructing catechumens and neophytes (cf. BSC 4). The religious constitute a community within the larger community of the parish, in the same way as does each family. They are responsible as individuals and as a group for the life and the mission of the Church as they announce the goodness of God to the people (cf. FLC 1). The sisters, following the Statutes of the Congregation and in collaboration with the diocesan norms, communicate the God of compassion to Catholic children, youth, and families with the vision of deepening their faith in the person of Jesus. They guide them to live their Christian commitment with fidelity and to receive the sacraments frequently with great devotion. They organize retreats, recollections, scripture study, prayer services, etc (cf. Statutes 47-48). The fifteenth General Chapter of the Congregation has noted that the Bethany Sisters give special attention to adequate training in pastoral theology, youth animation, basic counselling skills, Scriptural and Catechetical course, etc. They use innovative methods to teach catechism to children and to inculcate in them Christian values of faith, love, and compassion. They involve in promoting and building up basic Christian communities as spaces of experiencing God's mercy, and of growing in faith and reciprocal compassion. These groups have a better chance of becoming spiritual surrogate families rich in values.³²⁹

Christus Vivit teaches young people to trust the memory of God because his memory is not like a hard disk that saves and archives all our data. His memory is a heart filled with tender compassion.³³⁰ The sixteenth General Chapter of the Bethany Sisters highlighted the concern of youth who are being led astray due to the complexity of problems mainly emerging from the baneful influence of mass media, the lack of role models, allurements of fundamentalists' ideologies and sects. In view of invigorating young people,

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 113-114.

³²⁹ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XV*, 19.

³³⁰ FRANCESCO, Esortazione Apostolica Postsinodale *Christus Vivit*, n. 115, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2019, 30. Henceforth cited as CV within the text.

the Bethany Sisters give special attention to them knowing that they are the strength and power of society.³³¹ They strive to help the youth to nurture their faith through different associations such as the Young Student Movement (YSM), Young Catholic Students (YCS), Indian Catholic Youth Movement (ICYM), Kerala Catholic Youth Movement (KCYM), and the Jesus Youth. For this reason, in each community, a sister is trained as a youth animator for organizing youth activities.³³² Consequently, the Bethany Sisters strive “to make the Church the home and the school of communion.”³³³

The Sisters engage in animating pious associations like Mothers Association, Legion of Mary, Vincent De Paul, Christian Life Community (CLC), Catholic Student League (CSL), Holy Childhood, Little Way Association. Their other involvements are preparing Altar boys and girls, teaching children and adults for the reception of the sacraments of reconciliation, first holy communion, confirmation, preparing adults for baptism, and marriage, and liturgical activities of the parish along with youth animation. During the months of May and October, they pray rosaries with the neighbouring families.³³⁴ *Familiaris Consortio* empowers consecrated persons “to open their own houses for simple and cordial hospitality, so that families can find there the sense of God’s presence and gain taste for prayer and recollection and see the practical examples of lives lived in charity and fraternal joy as members of the larger family of God” (FC 74). Today the Bethany according to the desire of Msgr. Raymond, they reach far and wide, sowing the seed of compassion in the hearts of the young and the old. They realize that in the present changing scenario of society the major concerns are to focus on families, broken with problems of single parents, single child, the youth, the neglected aged parents.

4.3.1.1. Pastoral Care Within the Family

Lumen Gentium teaches that family is the domestic Church, and it is the vital cell of society and the Church. The parents and children are the first evangelizers and parents become the first heralds of the Gospel as they pray

³³¹ Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 33.

³³² Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Report: Bethany Generalate*, “Annual Meeting on various ministries from August 10 to 19, 2017”, 31.08.2017.

³³³ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines*, (28 October 2002), n. 15, Pauline, Boston 2003, 17.

³³⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Report of Southern Province January 2020 to December 2020*.

and read the Word of God with their children (cf. *LG* 11). Many of us learned to whisper our first prayer at the laps of our parents or grandparents. For example, when a mother teaches her little child to give a kiss to the statue of Jesus or Our Lady, at that particular moment the heart of a child becomes a place of prayer.³³⁵ Because the parents are the first teachers, they have a special role to teach, instruct, mould, and direct their children in Christian values, inculcating in them a strict standard of domestic morality and a high moral relationship with those outside the home.³³⁶ The family is recognized as a school where the Word of God is heard, a place where there is personal, community, and liturgical prayer. For this reason, parents become the first messengers where the spark of faith is set alight in the hearts of their children.³³⁷ Therefore, *Amoris Laetitia* considers family as the “first school of human values” (*AL* 274).

The consecrated persons live in a society where the families face several difficulties due to addiction to alcohol, drugs, divorce, psychological, physical, sexual violence, and abuse. These situations may lead to disunity and the breakdown of families.³³⁸ Touched by the brokenness of many families, the Bethany Sisters make an attempt to reach these families to reveal God’s, tender love.³³⁹ In this context, the responsibility of the Church is to create the Church as a house of the father, with doors always wide open to receive them with a compassionate heart (cf. *EG* 47) that permits them to feel that the Church is truly a family of God’s children. Indeed, they need person who can listen and support them. Family counselling is an essential part of pastoral care in bringing healing to these wounded hearts. Pope Francis in his encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* points out that silence and careful listening are disappearing in the world, and as a result the world is becoming deaf. He

³³⁵ Cf. FRANCIS, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (19 March 2016), n. 287. Henceforth cited as *AL* within the text.

³³⁶ Cf. THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL LIFE CONFERENCE, *The Christian Family Apostolate: The Catholic Social Life Conference*, Canadian Catholic Conference, Ottawa 1960, 16-17.

³³⁷ Cf. J.B. BIFET, *Pastoral for a Missionary Church*, Urbaniana University Press, Rome 1993, 209; Cf. C. BERNARD, “Family & New Evangelization”, in *New Leader* 127 (2014) 9, 13.

³³⁸ Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, III Extraordinary General Assembly (5-19 October 2014), *Instrumentum Laboris: The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2014, 31.

³³⁹ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Report: Bethany Generalate*, “Annual Meeting on various ministries from August 10 to 19, 2017”, 31.08.2017.

urges everyone not to lose the capacity of listening.³⁴⁰ Perceiving the needs of the time the Bethany Sisters are trained in the field of family counselling. This art of genuine listening is an effective channel of comforting people by which they experience the power of God's merciful love.

The Apostolic Letter *to all consecrated people* encourages the consecrated persons to go forth to the people who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, young people without a future, people who are looking for a purpose in life, and who are thirsting for divine touch (cf. *CP*, Part II, n. 4). The Bethany Sisters ignited by the life of their founding members followed the same passionate missionary spirit in advocating the families. They travelled to remote areas where they felt their services were required to help the family and to proclaim the Good News to strengthen the faith of the people. Sr. Annette wrote:

Life was hard for sisters. Often, they went hungry, sleeping in the cowsheds of the people that were infected with mosquitoes, rats, snakes. Daytime they were teaching in the school, the evening they went visiting families, catechizing them, comforting the sick and the lonely, and enlightening them on social evils, they were among the poor, they lived for the poor and served the poor to offer them the fullness of life.³⁴¹

The sixteenth General Chapter inspires the sisters to visit the families in the parishes to encourage them to be together for few minutes before the living God to give thanks for all the blessings received, to communicate their worries and ask grace for the need of their family, to pray for others who experience difficulties in life. They persuade family members to make a frequent confessions, spiritual direction, and occasional retreats. Seminars and retreats are conducted for couples to encourage them to partake in the life of the parish community and society. The sisters happily involve themselves in preparing couples for the sacrament of matrimony, help them to receive the sacraments worthily, and to make a solid beginning of life as a family. They commit their lives to bring the family united in love through their compassionate words of touch.³⁴² The deep-rooted love of God triggered the

³⁴⁰ Cf. FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), n. 48. Henceforth cited as *FT* within the text.

³⁴¹ M. ANNETTE, *The Saga of Bethany in North Karnataka*, Prasad Printers, Mangalore 2004, 15.

³⁴² Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 30; Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Report of Southern Province January 2020 to December 2020*.

Bethany Sisters to take the hardship in reaching the peripheries of the people. The same missionary spirit continues even today in reaching the families of remote places through the means of home mission.

4.3.1.2. Home mission

The home mission is one of the aspects of pastoral care through which the family is helped to grow into its fullness and to be an authentic member of the Church. The home mission is a process that aims at renewing the holiness of the family. In this process, special attention is given to the individual. It is a chain that extends from an individual to the family, and the family to the parish, and parish to the diocese and the diocese to the entire Church. The main goal is to know them individually and their concerns. The sisters render service to help the disturbed and broken families by listening to the family members to foster their family bonds, to deepen their relationship with God and one another, and to build a joyful family. The home mission is not a casual family visit but a healing ministry where one touches the heart of the individual with God's love and care.

The coordinator of the home mission visits the particular parish a month before and gives a presentation of the home mission to the parish priest and the members of the parish councillors with a detailed explanation of its function. Consequently, the arrangement is done in collaboration with the parish priest and the parishioners. Each family is given a home mission prayer to be prayed in the family and the prayer is said after every Eucharistic celebration. A group of sisters is assigned to a particular parish. Before the mission, they spend an hour before the Blessed Sacrament praying for the families and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the team, followed by the sacrament of confession of the sisters. These sisters remain with the families in the parish. During this home mission a group of sisters and parishioners will be in the Church praying before the Blessed Sacrament. After the morning Eucharistic celebration, the parish priest blesses each sister, and gives each a Benedictine cross and a lighted candle and prays over them before they set out for their mission two by two. They will be led to the assigned families and spend two hours or more as each case demands. In each home, all family members are to be present. They meet together as a family with a prayer, and they listen to them individually and as a family. A friendly conversation enables the family members to be open in sharing their struggles and if needed they give more attention to the one who is in need of help. After listening to each one, they conclude with a prayer offering all their concerns with an appropriate Scripture reading, and each one in the family is blessed with a Benedictine cross. By evening, the home mission team members along

with the coordinator and the parish priest evaluate the day and share the concerns of the families. They make a special note of the individuals and families who need special care, and a follow-up is given. The home mission is considered to be a great help for the parish priest to give special pastoral care to the families in need of assistance.³⁴³

The Bethany Sisters entered the field of the home mission under the guidance of the Congregation of the Holy Family in Kerala, India. Bethany Sisters knowing that the family is a cradle of society, reach out to the families keeping in mind the teachings of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that “the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates” (EN 71). The apostolate of home mission enables the Bethany Sisters to realize that it is not a mission of the sisters who have no work in the convent or the mission of the retired persons, but everyone is called to be involved in this mission with a great dedication in sharing God’s compassionate love to the people around. They are enthused to make the family a sacred place where the flame of life is transmitted as they enter the life of each individual to spread the spark of faith.

The home mission became an effective channel for the Bethany Sisters to enter into the lives of the young. Having close contact with the young the sisters understand that many young people are forced to live by committing crimes, acts of violence, addiction to drugs, and abuses.³⁴⁴ As Pope Francis has said: “Young hearts are naturally ready to change, to turn back, get up and learn from life” (CV 12). In today’s world, young people desire to be heard, acknowledged, and accompanied. Many of them find that neither their voices are heard, nor are they considered worthwhile and useful in society and the Church.³⁴⁵ The home mission enabled the Bethany Sisters to realize that listening is the key element in pastoral care particularly to the young.

Visiting families and entering into the lives of each individual enlightens the minds of the Bethany Sisters to discover and address various issues. In particular, the loneliness of the elderly at home when their children are abroad due to work, children who are alone while their parents are away for their jobs, the loneliness or anguishes of single parents, the young who are misled by the values of the world. Having come across various issues Bethany

³⁴³ Cf. PUSHPA, *Home mission*, Holy Family Publication, Palakkad, Kerala 2014, 1-2.

³⁴⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Report of Southern Province 31 January 2018*.

³⁴⁵ Cf. SINODO DEI VESCOVI, XV Assembles Generale Ordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi (3-28 October 2018), *Instrumentum Laboris: I Giovani, La Fede e Il Discernimento Vocazione*, n. 65, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2018, 26.

Sisters enthusiastically involve themselves in pastoral care particularly through the home mission with the vision of strengthening love and togetherness within the family. It is a process of accompanying families with compassion and sensitivity, and it is a way of bringing healing to their wounded hearts.

4.3.2. Transformative Education for the Fullness of Life

Saint Pope John Paul II in his message for the eleventh world youth day stated: “The future of the world and the Church belongs to the younger generation.”³⁴⁶ The profession of teaching leads the consecrated persons to create holistic growth in young people in bringing harmonious development to physical, moral, psychological, intellectual, social, spiritual aspects of life (cf. Can 795). The declaration on Christian education *Gravissimum Educationis* reminds the consecrated persons to create a school of community animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity.³⁴⁷ Thus, the consecrated persons help the young people to understand their identity, inculcate in them the thirst for authenticity, honesty, mercy, love, fidelity, truth, consistency, happiness, and the fullness of life.³⁴⁸

The Bethany Sisters stepped into the interior villages bequeathed by the spirit of Msgr. Raymond and the pioneers imparting knowledge to poor children through formal and non-formal education. They launched out of Mangalore to Waynad to the diocese of Calicut in Kerala, crossing the boundaries of language and culture. Sisters learned the local language, Malayalam, and involved in the life of the people. As the number of sisters increased in the Congregation eventually, the Bethany Sisters stepped into strange lands without knowing the language and culture in the North and Northeast, South of India, and abroad spreading Gospel values.³⁴⁹

The preferential option for the poor is at the centre of the Bethany educational programmes. It is directed towards the poor and the marginalized, especially women, through formal and non-formal education irrespective of caste and religion (cf. Statutes 50-52). The fifteenth General chapter of the Bethany Sisters highlighted that education is not merely the gaining of

³⁴⁶ J. PAUL II, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life: Message of Pope John Paul II for the XI World Youth Day, 26 November 1995”, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 49/1419 (6 December 1995), 4.

³⁴⁷ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis* (28 October 1965), n. 8. Henceforth cited as *GE* within the text.

³⁴⁸ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines*, n.18.

³⁴⁹ Cf. M. ANNETTE, *The Saga of Bethany in North Karnataka*, 3.

knowledge, but it is the acquisition of wisdom, discovering the deeper meaning of life, establishing a harmonious relationship with God, self, others, and nature. They are encouraged to go beyond result-oriented education to a transformative and value-based education (cf. *GE* 8).³⁵⁰ Ignited by the sixteenth General Chapter the Bethany Sisters lead the young people to discover, unearth, and enrich their creative potentials.³⁵¹

The Bethany Sisters take risks in moving from their comfortable and well-structured atmosphere in schools to the remote areas, slums, colonies looking for the neglected unschooled children particularly those of migrant families. They seek out dropout students who are unable to complete their studies due to the impoverished situation of the family. Commencing the ‘Open School’ scheme of the government was a great help for many young people to complete their SSLC exam for them to advance in life.³⁵² The Bethany Sisters with compassionate hearts move to children roaming around while the parents worked in brickfields, factories, roadwork. After establishing a rapport with the parents, the children are gathered and given non-formal education. They teach them to write and read and later enrolled them in a formal school in their villages. Today Bethany Sisters continue to search for the lost and the marginalized walking miles and miles, crossing the rivers, climbing the mountains.³⁵³

We are in an era where the parents are craving for the academic excellence of their children, but they are forgetting to bring them up in human values. In such a situation Family visits become the means to identify the various kinds of poverty. They come across children living with a single

³⁵⁰ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XV*, 20.

³⁵¹ Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 31. *The Congregation for Catholic Education* reminds every teacher that, “education, right now, is like a metaphor of the Good Sower who is busy sowing without always having the possibility to see the fruits of his work: CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, “Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion”, in *World Congress on Catholic Education*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2015, 58. Pope Francis said: Educating is not a profession but an attitude, a way of being, in order to educate it is necessary to step out of ourselves and be among young people, to accompany them in the stages of their growth and to set ourselves beside them. Give them hope and optimism for their journey in the world. Above all with your life be witnesses of what you communicate: FRANCESCO, “Discorso del Santo Padre Francesco agli Studenti delle Scuole Gestite dai Gesuiti in Italia e Albania, 7 Giugno 2013”, in *Insegnamenti di Francesco*, Libreria Editrice Vatican, Città del Vaticano 2015, 293.

³⁵² Cf. L. FLORA, “The Caring Touch that Blossoms”, in S. PRIYA, *Bethany in Frontier Mission*, ATC Publishers, Bangaluru 2020, 138-139.

³⁵³ Cf. M. DOREEN, “‘U’ Turn of Life: A Blessing in Disguise”, in S. PRIYA, *Bethany in Frontier Mission*, 147.

parent, children come from the disturbed atmosphere such as drunkenness, drugs, domestic violence. The Bethany Sisters assist these children with tenderness and love and they strive to acquaint themselves with the parents to build a good rapport.³⁵⁴ With the help of the parents, the Bethany Sisters strive to bring out the best from each individual, develop critical thinking, enhances the greatness of personality, prepares the individual to become citizens of the world; and enables them to embrace a career in line with their interest to fulfil one's duty towards family and society.³⁵⁵

Bethany strives to procure government scholarships available for scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, backward classes, and other deserving students. Catholic children are helped to grow in faith through Bible classes, catechism classes, retreats, prepare them for the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation and Eucharist. The students belonging to other faiths are given values-oriented classes for their spiritual, and moral formation. Along with this, the sisters and the teachers are trained in counselling, child/youth psychology, personality development, human development, and media education. They are encouraged to continue to update themselves on the knowledge and to use new teaching methods through effective audio-visual teaching aids, environmental studies, and research. Teachers are empowered through seminars and classes to integrate the values of love and compassion to become the channels of truth, peace, and harmony because students today are more exposed to a culture of opposing values under the baneful influence of the media.³⁵⁶

In light of the sixteenth General Chapter, the Bethany Sisters introduced human rights education in all schools³⁵⁷ to help the students know their own rights and to respect the rights of others. Students learn the importance of value-based leadership and they are trained to face competitive examination

³⁵⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Annual Report of Southern Province January 2020 to December 2020*.

³⁵⁵ Cf. THE BETHANY EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY, *Third BES Convention: Transformative education for Fullness of Life*, Bethany Publication, Mangalore 2008, 28.

³⁵⁶ Cf. THE BETHANY EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY, *Second National Convention: Education for Fullness of Life*, Part II, Bethany Publication, Mangalore 2001, 6-19.

³⁵⁷ Bethany Sisters in view of communicating the compassionate love of God they hold Degree Colleges 2, Senior Secondary School /Pre-University Colleges 19, Teacher's Training School 1, High School 58, Higher Primary Schools 57, National Open Schools and study centres 12, Community Colleges 4, Nursery/ Kindergarten Schools 35, Balwadi/ Non-formal Educational centres 21: CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Bethany Lay Association: A Handbook of Guidelines for Animators and Members*, Bethany Publication, Mangalore 2018, 13. Henceforth cited as *BLA* 2018.

from the initial stages to instil confidence.³⁵⁸ Moved by the zeal of Msgr. Raymond, his spiritual daughters continue to impart knowledge to the young minds and care for the less privileged poor children particularly the girls in providing free education and accommodation in their boarding homes. Thus, the boarding home becomes a place where the young mind is educated to live in the world with the integrity of mind and heart.

4.3.2.1. *Boarding Homes: A Home of Love*

Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* teaches that the consecrated persons are called to holiness and to be a prophetic witness to the world through their self-giving love for everyone particularly the poor and the least in society (cf. *EA* 44). Similarly, Msgr. Raymond responded to the need of the time that prompted him to provide a home for the girl children who were living in remote villages. Eventually, these homes became a place to dedicate their time to academic knowledge, to explore their potentialities, and to grow in creativity through various recreational programmes. Among the four pioneers, Sr. Gertrude was the first boarding home directress. She performed her duties with love, dedication, and enthusiasm. She played the role of a mother to these children. Every child was a child of God for her. Thus, she loved the children and treated them with fairness, justice, and equality. She cared for them irrespective of their family status whether they were of rich or poor parents.³⁵⁹ Sr. Lilliola who rendered service at the boarding home recaps Sr. Gertrude's concern for the children. "Sr. Gertrude loved the poor orphan children so much that she spent some time with them every day teaching them catechism and coaching them in their lessons. Besides this, she prayed with them and taught them how to pray."³⁶⁰

The Congregation for Catholic Education instructs consecrated persons to instil in young hearts a grain of a vocation. Consecrated persons are to be aware that they can place an invitation in the minds of the young to discover their special call and to guide them to interpret their existence in the light of God's plan.³⁶¹ This is reflected in the first Constitution written by Msgr. Raymond:

³⁵⁸ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Decree of the General Chapter XV*, 21.

³⁵⁹ Cf. M. THERESINE – M. ESURIA, *The First Four of Bethany*, 113-115.

³⁶⁰ M. THERESINE – M. ESURIA, *The First Four of Bethany*, 118.

³⁶¹ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines*, n. 55.

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

Let the sisters remember that it is in their schools and boarding houses particularly that the seeds of growth and prosperity of their Congregation are sown. Out of those whom they form therein will in great part be drawn those sisters whom in the future our Lord will associate with them or give them as successors in the work which they do for his love and service (BSFC 299).

It is very true in the life of the Bethany boarding ministry that it became the seedbed for vocations to religious life from the very beginning of the Congregation. The attraction towards religious life crept into the hearts of many young girls through the inspiring lives of genuine sisters.³⁶² Sr. Liliola having close contact with Sr. Gertrude relates that Sr. Gertrude being the first boarding directress captured several young girls to work in the vineyard of God through her life example, instructions, and prayers. Further, Sr. Ellen confidently explains that Sr. Gertrude was a vibrant vocation promotor of both religious life and priestly life. She not only recruited vocation through her words but through her exemplary life and prayers.³⁶³ In highlighting boarding homes as places of vocation, Mother Gemma reminisces:

I had applied to Government Teacher Training Institute for Teacher Certificate Higher (TCH). Having been called for selection examination I stayed at Bethany Boarding house for a week in March 1932. It was then that I met Mother Martha and enjoyed her love, kindness, and hospitality. This attracted me to join Bethany.³⁶⁴

Redemptoris Missio points out that the world today is in need of good witnesses. The world is not interested in teachings but in witnessing life (cf. *RMiss* 42). Likewise, Pope Francis through *Gaudete et Exsultate* reminds that consecrated persons are called to be holy by living their lives with love and by bearing witness in everything they do, and by living out their commitment with joy.³⁶⁵ Similarly, the first four Bethany Sisters touched the hearts of many young girls through their life witness particularly fraternal love that reigned in the community. Even today, the touch of God's finger continues to ignite many girls to be in the service of God through the exemplary life of

³⁶² Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Decree of the General Chapter XIV*, 57.

³⁶³ Cf. M. THERESINE – M. ESURIA, *The First Four of Bethany*, 118.

³⁶⁴ M. THERESINE – M. ESURIA, *The First Four of Bethany*, 36.

³⁶⁵ Cf. FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (19 March 2018), n. 14. Henceforth cited as *GEE* within the text.

many Bethany Sisters.³⁶⁶ The Constitution gives the following guidelines to every Bethany Sister that by their commitment to consecrated life they shall inspire the hostellers to live a true Christian life and answer the call of God to follow Jesus” (BSC 54). The sisters are encouraged to be in the place of a mother to these children with tender care and love by inculcating in them the principles of good behaviour and virtuous life (cf. BSFC 303).

The sixteenth General Chapter upholds that the responsibility of the boarding directress is to make the boarding house a home away from home, where one feels accepted, loved, and cared for. The Bethany Sisters guide these children with maternal affection since they are away from their families. They dedicate their time to giving faith formation through regular catechism classes, giving them value education and spiritual animation. They give the young girls sufficient awareness of different issues of present scenarios. The girls are prepared for the future life with a high motivation to be educated and well-placed in society. They accompany them through attentive listening and dialogue keeping in mind their family environment, knowing their personal history, discovering their potentialities and skills.³⁶⁷ Bethany Sisters strive to create a joyful atmosphere in boarding homes where intellectual progress harmonizes with spiritual, religious, emotional, and social growth through their dedicated services. They make an attempt to live their consecrated life in fullness becoming a sign of God’s tender love to the young in the boarding homes through their loving care and support.

4.3.3. Care for the sick and the Aged

It is in imitation of Jesus the mighty healer and compassionate Saviour that the Church ventured out into world of mercy among the sick and suffering human being.³⁶⁸ The council document *Gaudium et Spes* teaches that God, the Lord of life has entrusted the human being a noble mission of safeguarding life in a worthy manner.³⁶⁹ “The Church has established many religious institutions within her with the specific aim of fostering, organizing, improving, and increasing help to the sick.”³⁷⁰ In the opinion of Bryan P. Stone: “Compassionate ministry is a humanizing ministry; it is an expression of and a recovery of the image of God. To be compassionate is not only to be

³⁶⁶ Cf. M. THERESINE – M. ESURIA, *The First Four of Bethany*, 16.

³⁶⁷ Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 33-34.

³⁶⁸ Cf. T. JOSE, “The Call of Compassion”, in *Indian Currents* 27 (2015) 6, 21.

³⁶⁹ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), n. 51.

³⁷⁰ J. PAUL II, Apostolic Letter “Motu Proprio” *Dolentium Hominum* (11 February 1985), n.1.

human but to restore the humanity of others.”³⁷¹ Patricia Benner and Judith Wrubel suggest that caring is a “way of being in the world.”³⁷² *Vita Consecrata* points out: “The elderly and the sick have a great deal to give in wisdom and experience to the community if only the community can remain close to them with concern and the ability to listen” (VC 44). Thus, the Church needs people whose presence gives hope and comfort particularly to the sick and the aged. The sick and the aged are waiting for a merciful look, and a compassionate touch, and an ear to listen. The Bethany Sisters enkindled by the compassionate deeds of Jesus dedicate their lives in caring for the sick and the aged to share his merciful touch to the world.

4.3.3.1. *Healing Ministry: A Compassionate Touch*

A significant portion of the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ ministry is devoted to his caring for the sick and Jesus is presented as a compassionate healer (cf. Mt 8: 16, 28-34; cf. Mk 1: 34, 6: 7-13; cf. Lk 4: 16-21, 7: 2-10). For Jesus, healing the sick was intrinsic to his salvific mission. The Gospel records give priority to curing and caring for the sick (cf. Lk 10: 29-37).³⁷³ Jesus touched the people at the deepest level of their existence and sought their mental, physical, and spiritual healing (cf. Jn 6: 35, 11: 25-27).³⁷⁴ In the Gospel of Luke, we read: “Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases and sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal” (Lk 9: 1-2). By the very profession of healthcare, the Christian shares this solemn commandment of Jesus: “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (Jn 13: 34). This invitation is given particularly to all consecrated persons, and it is a clear link to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel through loving, caring, and healing.

³⁷¹ B.P. STONE, *Compassionate Ministry: Theological Foundations*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll 1996, 142. Pope Francis in his message on the world day of the sick points out Jesus allows himself to become involved in the sufferings of people. His gaze is not one of indifference, rather, it embraces people in their entirety, each person in his or her condition, discarding no one, but rather inviting everyone to share in his life and to experience his tender love: Cf. FRANCIS, “Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the XXVIII World Day of the Sick 2020, 11 February 2020”, in https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/papa-Francesco_20200103_giornata-malato.html (accessed on 06 April 2021).

³⁷² P. BENNER – J. WRUBEL, *The Primacy of Caring*, Addison Wesley, Menlo Park 1989, xi.

³⁷³ Cf. D.C. DUNCOMBE, “Sick, Pastoral Care”, in R.J. HUNTER (ed.), *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, 1167.

³⁷⁴ Cf. J.F. MORRIS, *Medicine, Health Care, and Ethics*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 2007, 2.

Jesus the compassionate healer motivates the Bethany Sisters to share in the healing ministry with great love and dedication. They see the face of Jesus in the sick and the ailing while attending to their physical, and emotional needs. Consequently, they make an effort to manifest Christian love as the animating principle of their ministry (cf. BSC 56). *Vita Consecrata* exhorts them to give special care to the poorest and the most abandoned sick, to the marginalized, terminally ill, victims of drug addiction, contagious diseases (cf. VC 83). Accepting this invitation, the Bethany Sisters go out to the outskirts where they open dispensaries and clinics. Keeping in mind preferential options for the poor, the Bethany Sisters provide affordable healthcare to the people in slums and villages. They touch the lives of the people by providing medicines, dressing their wounds, listening to their struggles. By rendering loving services to the HIV/AIDS victims and drug addicts they live the experiences of the shepherd having the smell of the sheep (cf. EG 24). As healthcare professionals, they smell the alcohol from the alcoholics, they feel the pain and hopelessness of the HIV/AIDS patients, experience the anguish of the dying patients, and the distress of the bereaved family. The teachings of *Vita Consecrata* to give “testimony in word and deed” (VC 83), impels the Bethany Sisters to make their presence visible by giving hope, life, and light through their kind words and compassionate touch. They attempt to bring holistic healthcare through their merciful deeds in the remote villages in the eight provinces in India and the delegations abroad.³⁷⁵

The consecrated persons partaking in this ministry of healthcare transforms it from mere occupation to vocation, a call from God to a specific way of witnessing to the truth of faith in their personal life and professional life to protect human life.³⁷⁶ This is why Thomas Merton said: “Each vocation has for its aim the propagation of the divine life in the world.”³⁷⁷ The healthcare profession enlivens to have the attitude of the Good Samaritan. This parable gives the lesson that “no one can help anyone without entering with his whole person into the painful situation, without taking the risk of becoming hurt, wounded, or even destroyed in the process.”³⁷⁸ This expression goes beyond the mere profession of care to live a life of testimony. Moved by the *mission manifesto* of Jesus (cf. Lk 4: 18), the Bethany Sisters nurse the sick with understanding and they bring solace and comfort in

³⁷⁵ Cf. S. PRIYA, *Bethany in Frontier Mission*, 152-153.

³⁷⁶ Cf. E.D. PELLEGRINO – D.C. THOMASMA – D.G. MILLER, *The Christian Virtues in Medical Practice*, Georgetown University Press, Washington 1996, 75.

³⁷⁷ T. MERTON, *No Man is an Island*, Harcourt, New York 1955, 153.

³⁷⁸ E.D. PELLEGRINO – D.C. THOMASMA, *The Christian Virtues in Medical Practice*, 87.

praying with them in assuring confidence in holistic healing. They prepare the Catholic patients to receive the Sacraments and help them to realize the redemptive value of their pain and suffering (cf. BSC 56). The Bethany Sisters knowing the moral risks involved in their noble profession they make their faith commitment an explicit part of ethical decision making. They equip themselves with the knowledge of the growing trends in medical fields and medical ethics. They are animated to respond to the challenges of the directives of the Church and with ethical principles. Thus, the Bethany Sisters particularly in the healing ministry renew themselves guided by the ethics of compassion, justice, and charity (cf. BSC 57-58).³⁷⁹

The Bethany Sisters are urged by the awareness of God's call to transform their profession into a vocation not only to bring efficiency but spiritual fervour and love towards the sick, the terminally ill, the aged, and the differently-abled, bringing to them Christ's soothing presence.³⁸⁰ The Bethany Sisters in serving the sick realize that compassionate love is the concrete evidence that the virtue of charity is at work in the healer. Rejuvenated by the teachings of St. Paul, "love never wrongs the neighbour, hence love is the fulfilment of the law" (Rm 13: 9-10), the Bethany Sisters make their lives a canticle of sharing the merciful face of the Lord to the sick and the aged.

4.3.3.2. Home for the Senior Citizens: Care for the Aged and the Dying

A human being created in the image and likeness of God assumes inherent dignity, and everyone is guided by the supreme concept of the sanctity of human life.³⁸¹ The face of old age is an unavoidable fact in the life of every human being. Generally, families hold their elderly members in deep esteem and care (cf. AL 48). They prevent the elderly from loneliness by keeping them in the company of their grandchildren, by praying and eating

³⁷⁹ Embedded by the desire to communicate the compassionate love of God Bethany Sisters extend their loving service joyfully to other institutes, Government, and private hospitals.

³⁸⁰ Cf. M. JYOTI *et aliae*, *Let it Grow Let it Flower Let it Bear Fruit: Centenary Document*, Assis Press, Mangalore 2020, 105. Bethany to unfold the merciful love of the Lord they render services in four hospitals and nine dispensaries. At the same time, the sisters are trained in community medicines through which they reach out to the poor and the needy in cooperation with the social work centres. Sisters are trained in Siddha, (Siddha medicine is one of the most ancient medical systems of India) homeopathy, Ayurveda medical systems, physiotherapy, and in assisting the physically and mentally differently abled people

³⁸¹ Cf. P. KRAUSS, "Sick and dying, Jewish Care", in R.J. HUNTER (ed.), *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, 1170.

together, sharing daily happening. Consequently, the aged serves as a link between generations by passing on the experience of their life and faith to the young.³⁸² The book of Sirach affirms: “Rich experience is the crown of the aged” (Sir 25: 6). The richness of many years is a richness of each person who has many years of life, experience, and unique history behind them. The elderly are considered a unique source of enrichment for the family and society.³⁸³ Respect for the aged is not only a biblical tradition but a custom to be practiced. It is related to the concept of “honouring your father and mother” (Ex 20: 12; Lev 19: 32). The book of Deuteronomy understands old age as an age of wisdom: “Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you” (Deut 32: 7). The first letter to Timothy points out: “Do not rebuke an older man harshly but exhort him as if he were your father” (cf. 1 Tim 5: 1).³⁸⁴

Vita Consecrata affirms that “the elderly have a great deal to give in wisdom and experience in a community if only the community can remain close to them with concern and an ability to listen” (VC 44). The expression of merciful love for the aged should begin first in religious communities. The Bethany Sisters realizing that “many years teach wisdom” (Job 32:7) take care of the aged sisters in the community with reverence and love. Acknowledging that in “old age they still produce fruit, they are always green and full of sap” (Ps 92: 14) the younger members of the community seek their advice and ideas. Timely visits of the members of the community bring smiles to their faces and they feel they are wanted. Encouraging them to write their experiences, biblical reflections, and discussing the matters of the Congregation make them feel that they are part of the institute. They are spiritually fed by providing opportunities for the timely reception of the Sacraments (cf. BSC 61).³⁸⁵

Unfortunately, today many elderly are abandoned and forsaken in society. *Fratelli Tutti* points out that we are living in world where “persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled” (FT 18). The words of the

³⁸² Cf. S.S. PAUL – J.A. PAUL, *Humanity Comes of Age: The New Context for Ministry with the Elderly*, WCC Publications, Geneva 1994, 46.

³⁸³ Cf. J. PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), n. 46. Henceforth cited as *EV* within the text.

³⁸⁴ Cf. I.H. FISHBEIN, “Older Persons, Jewish Care and Counselling”, in R. J. HUNTER (ed.), *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, Abingdon Press, Nashville 1990, 807.

³⁸⁵ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Annual Report of Southern Province January 2020 December 2020*.

psalmist “do not cast me off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength is spent” (Ps 71: 9) is the cry of many (cf. *AL* 91). They are gripped by fear and loneliness and suffer the most terrible poverty of the unloved (cf. *EG* 52). *Evangelium Vitae* exhorts: “Human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation, it is an indivisible good. We need then to “show care” for all life and for the life of everyone. Indeed, at an ever-deeper level, we need to go to the very roots of life and love” (*EV* 87). Thus, the Bethany Sisters ventured into the ministry of caring for the aged and dying in the homes for the aged.³⁸⁶

The Bethany Sisters, sharing the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the suffering people of our time, welcome the aged and the destitute to their care regardless of caste and creed. The study of the statutes of the Congregation revitalizes the Bethany Sisters in their commitment to making their home for the aged a home of love where the inmates feel loved, accepted, cared for, and protected. They help the aged to accept their old age joyfully and gracefully (cf. Statutes 65). They create fraternal solidarity that dispels the feeling of solitude and despair and dedicate their time joyfully to make them feel at home by accompanying them physically and spiritually. The presence of the sisters gives happiness to them as they together partake in the Holy Eucharist, pray the rosary with them, prepare them for the sacrament of reconciliation, read the Word of God (cf. Statutes 64). On the occasion of birthdays, special prayers are offered, and the day is celebrated to make them feel that they are wanted. They encourage their family members to make frequent visits and telephone calls to make the aged feel that the family cares for them. On various occasions, the visits of parishioners, neighbours, youth associations, and other associations bring a smile to the faces of the aged with their different recreational and entertainment programs that enhance the life and happiness in the hearts of the aged.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁶ According to the vision of Msgr. Raymond and in responding to the need of the time Bethany launched into the ministry for caring for the aged and dying to witness to the compassionate love of Christ. The home for the aged became a means to manifest the merciful face of Jesus in love in India and Abroad. Some of the sisters are engaged in community geriatric nursing by giving nursing care in the houses of the elderly as per the need. Bethany venture into this mission and accepted to render service in Abroad from the year 1973. At present they have three old age homes in India. The sisters are not confined only to their institutes, but they generously share the compassionate love of God to other institutes, wherever they are entrusted: Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Report of the Medical apostolate of Delegation Abroad* 2020.

³⁸⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Annual Report of Bethany Santhwanam 2019-2020*; Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Report of the Medical apostolate of Delegation Abroad* 2020.

The words of St. Teresa of Calcutta that being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, and forgotten by everyone are the most terrible forms of poverty motivate Bethany Sisters to strive to wipe away the drooping spirit of their inmates by their simple gestures of touch, smile, and attentive listening.³⁸⁸ They also help the aged to accept their illness and transform their pain into an act of redemptive love. They prepare them to accept death as openness to life in God and an encounter with the Risen Jesus. The presence of the sisters at their death bed supporting them with prayers gives comfort and consolation as they return to their eternal home (cf. Statutes 65).³⁸⁹ The ministry of caring for the aged and the dying touches the heart of each Bethany Sister as they experience the pain of the aged, their hunger for love and care. This mission gives a special message to each one of them as seen in the book of Sirach: “Do not disdain one who is old, for some of us are also growing old” (Sir 8: 6). Thus, this field of mission brings a sense of fulfilment and joy as they touch the lives of the aged with love finding the face of Jesus in the aged.

4.3.4. Social Apostolate

Today in society we find an increasing number of crises such as family breakdown, crimes, alcohol, drug addiction, divorced couples, motherless children, single parents, children of unmarried mothers, homeless people, downtrodden women, domestic violence, dowry system,³⁹⁰ juvenile offenders, people tormented by poverty and unemployment, illiteracy, human trafficking. Encountering these issues, the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* advocates everyone to have compassion for the outcry of the poor, to weep with their pain, and to be one with them and feel that it is each one’s responsibility to lift them from the gutter of pain and anguish (cf. EG 54). Thus, Donald P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison, Henri J.M. Nouwen point out: “Compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there.”³⁹¹ Capturing the original spirit of Msgr. Raymond and the four pioneers, the Bethany Sisters move to the frontiers of society, restoring human dignity to the less fortunate,

³⁸⁸ Cf. Cited in, L.C. SLAVICEK, *Mother Teresa: Caring for the World’s Poor*, Chelsea House Publishers, New York 2007, 60.

³⁸⁹ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Report of the Medical apostolate of Delegation Abroad 2020*.

³⁹⁰ Dowry system refers to the durable goods, cash, gold, and movable properties that the bride’s family gives to the groom as a condition of the marriage.

³⁹¹ D.P. MCNEILL – D.A. MORRISON – H. J. NOUWEN (eds), *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*, 27.

reflecting on the compassionate face of Jesus.³⁹² The words of God to Moses at the misery of his people “I have seen the misery of my people” (Ex 3: 7) echo even today. The Bethany Sisters according to the recommendations of the fifteenth General Chapter, share God’s liberating compassionate love especially with those who are victimized, vulnerable, and abandoned.

4.3.4.1. Women Empowerment: A Compassionate Act

In the past, women in India were confined to household work and taking care of their children. They were devoid of the responsibility of earning income for the family. In such a situation, most women were illiterate and economically dependent on men in the family. In some cases, women were dehumanized, exploited, harassed, sexually used, abused, and regarded as inferior beings who were forced to be subordinated to male dominance.³⁹³ With the advent of industrialization and technological development, the lifestyle of the people changed. Gradually women started to think independently and began to pursue an education on equal terms with a male. Today, they are involved in every walk of life: politics, sports, medical, engineers, IAS officers, IPS officers, bank officials, etc.³⁹⁴ On the other side, there are cases of female infanticide, dowry system, and denial of education for girls, domestic violence, that discriminated against the role of women in society.³⁹⁵

In the Gospels, we encounter how Jesus treats women as dignified human persons. He had no prohibition in approaching women though he lived in a patriarchal society where women occupied a subordinate position to men. Jesus went freely to the mother-in-law of Peter to heal her from a severe fever (cf. Lk 4: 38-40). He allowed the bleeding woman to touch him (cf. Lk 8: 43-48). He had discourse with a Samaritan woman and made her the first missionary to bring the entire village to him (cf. Jn 4: 4-42). Mary Magdalene became an apostle to the apostles. Jesus appreciated the faith of a Syrophenician woman and her wider vision of his ministry to include all people and not only the chosen race (cf. Mk 7: 24-29). In a culture where women have no freedom to decide for their lives, they see Mary, the mother

³⁹² Cf. S. PRIYA, *Bethany in Frontier Mission*, xii-xiii.

³⁹³ Cf. M.J. MANANZAN, “Refining Religious Commitment in the Philippine Context”, in V. FABELLA – S.L. PARK (eds), *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women*, Asian Women’s Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, Hong Kong 1989, 109.

³⁹⁴ Cf. COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS INDIA, *Liberation of Women*, Patna CRI Unit, Bihar 1982, 10-14.

³⁹⁵ Cf. D.S. KUMAR, “Socio-Cultural, Biblical and Theological Basis of Families in South Asia”, in *VidyaJyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 81 (2017) 7, 510.

of Jesus who makes a crucial decision by herself (cf. Lk 1:38). In the country where the women were confined to homes, these women became the model of empowerment of women in society.³⁹⁶

The life of Msgr. Raymond and the four pioneers inspire each Bethany Sister to reach those who were discarded at the fringes of the society, to those who feel discarded, valueless, and powerless. Sensing the needs of the time and hearing the cry of the many women, the Bethany Sisters launched the mission of bringing awareness into the minds of these women. Today they give various awareness programs on diverse issues on atrocities against women, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POSCO Act), legal knowledge, Constitutional and human rights education, gender justice, leadership skills, responsible parenthood, sexual harassment, settlement of family disputes, moral values, cleanliness, herbal/home remedies, rainwater harvesting, issues about human trafficking, migration, etc. Therefore, the Bethany Sisters make efforts to create awareness to prevent women and children from being the victims of exploitation. Women are trained in different spheres and encouraged to start into self-employment such as tailoring shops, pickle sales, grocery shops, dairy farming, agriculture, garments sales, tea stalls to bring economic improvement to their families.

The coordinator along with the other social workers make regular visits to groups in the villages. Women actively partake in group discussions, and they freely express their opinions and difficulties. On particular occasions, women take the initiative to organize different programs in their respective villages. This opportunity enables them to gain confidence and courage to speak or question. The sisters are trained in counselling and are made available to students, families, couples, and individuals. Some cases related to property and marital disputes are settled with the help of lawyers. Through counselling they render service in healing the broken families. God of compassion leads the Bethany Sisters to enter the red-light areas and listen to the agonies of women who were forced to this fact of life. This experience helps the Sisters to take a daring step to protect many women from this human trap.

The Bethany Sisters networking in collaboration with Government and non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). This collaboration enables them to gain different experiences and knowledge. The Bethany Sisters provide an

³⁹⁶ Cf. M. DEVANANDA, "Women in the New Testament Times", in *God's Image* 23 (2004), 41-42.

open door to assist students from different colleges, schools, and organizations in their fieldwork experiences, particularly for the empowerment of women.³⁹⁷ Imbued by the teaching of *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Bethany Sisters strive to live their lives in its fullness and to meet every challenge like a leaven of Gospel witness as they incarnate themselves into different cultures, languages bearing fruits of compassion and love (cf. *EG* 75). In responding to the needs of the time, the Bethany Sisters discover new possibilities to give life and light to the broken hearts of individuals embarked on the challenging mission of combating the trafficking of persons.

4.3.4.2. Compassionate Embrace to the Victims of Women-Trafficking

In the book of Genesis God asks two questions after man sinned. The first question to Adam “where are you?” (Gen 3: 9). The second question to Cain is, “where is your brother?” (Gen 4: 9). These questions of God to Adam and Cain are directed to each one of us today by calling our names: “Where are you” and “Where is your brother?” (Gen 4: 9) or “where is your sister?” These questions urge us to search for the people who are trafficked, those who are trying to escape from their agonizing situation and looking for a serene and peaceful place.³⁹⁸ Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI stated: “There is a desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love.”³⁹⁹ We find this desert of abandonment and loneliness among the victims of trafficked persons particularly women and young girls. Unfortunately, the human trafficking issue continues to evolve into one of the greatest contemporary threats against human dignity and human rights. Through this evil act of human trafficking, human beings are sold as commodities and they are discarded once they are ill and weak and useless.⁴⁰⁰ The United Office on Drugs and Crimes defines human trafficking as the “recruitment, transportation, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud

³⁹⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Annual Report of the Activities of the Bethany Social Service Trust, 2018-2019*.

³⁹⁸ Cf. FRANCIS, “Homily: Visit to Lampedusa, 8 July 2013”, in *Lights on the Ways of Hope: Pope Francis Teaching on Migrants, Refugees, and Human Trafficking*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2018, 51.

³⁹⁹ BENEDICT XVI, “A Service to God’s Joy: Homily of Pope Benedict XVI, 24 April 2005”, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 17/1891 (27 April 2005), 8.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. L. GASPARI, “The International and European Legal Framework on Human Trafficking: An Overall View”, in *Deportate, Esuli, Profughe (DEP)*, 40 (2019), 47.

or deception, of the abuse of power for the purpose of exploitation.”⁴⁰¹
According to Pope Francis:

Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ. It is a crime against humanity. The very fact of our being here to combine our efforts means that we want our strategies and areas of expertise to be accompanied and reinforced by the mercy of the Gospel, by closeness to the men and women who are victims of this crime.⁴⁰²

To some extent, being in our comfort zone, we have entered into the hypocrisy of the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Perhaps we may feel for the person, but it does not affect us, and we became inactive.⁴⁰³ Awakened by the insight of the Statutes of the Congregation, Bethany Sisters “work for the weaker section of society, especially the women and the female children to restore their dignity of human life and equity (Statutes 61). The study of the sixteenth General Chapter stirred the hearts of the Bethany Sisters to search for their lost brothers and sisters in the interior villages as they entered into the peripheries of the people. Consequently, some of the Sisters are directly involved in the act of rescuing but most of them are partially involved in the mission of taking care of the trafficked women who are abandoned on the streets, forsaken by their families, or have escaped from gangs. In collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations, they render services for these victims.⁴⁰⁴ Listening to the lives of these unfortunate people, their struggles become the pain of the Sisters and they find means to lift them from their brokenness. The Bethany Sisters accommodate these women in their Short Stay homes. Women are empowered to join in fighting against trafficking agents. They are taught self-defence skills to protect themselves. They are encouraged to seek out alternative employment and skills development. Knowing that their impoverished environment led them to this way of life, Sisters introduce training in the following areas in order to support themselves: embroidery,

⁴⁰¹ UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIMES, *Legislative Guides for the Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol Thereto*, United Nations, New York 2004, 269.

⁴⁰² FRANCIS, “Address of Pope Francis to Participants in the International Conference on Combating Human Trafficking, 10 April 2014”, in *Lights on the Ways of Hope*, 94

⁴⁰³ Cf. FRANCIS, “Homily: Visit to Lampedusa, 8 July 2013”, in *Lights on the Ways of Hope*, 51.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Report of Southern Province January 2020 to December 2020*.

garment making, beauty culture, production skills, paper bag making, leaf plate making, incense sticks making, weaving, nursing care, culinary skills, receptionist, accountancy, candle/pickle/ Vaseline making, etc. They are helped through enforcement, rehabilitation, and reintegration. The family is made aware of the trapped situation of their daughters, and they are sent back to their family safely. Those who are abandoned by their family members, with the help of the government, are given dignified jobs.⁴⁰⁵

Human trafficking happens due to several reasons around the globe, such as poverty, demand for labour, low educational status, rapidly growing sex industry, migration.⁴⁰⁶ Being well-aware of these root causes and the unsafe places of slums and construction sites, the Bethany Sisters go to these vulnerable places to look for the young girls and women to warn them about the possibilities of being trapped and the evil of human trafficking. To create an awareness among the women themselves Bethany Sisters organize different programs such as street play, seminars, workshops, lectures, documentaries, and personal sharing by the victims of trafficked persons. Envisioned by the desire to alert the people about the issue of human trafficking, they conduct these programs with the school staff and students, men and women in the villages, migrant workers, domestic workers, youth. Particularly, young boys and girls are made to know the issues concerning their growth and given awareness on being victims of trafficking and peer pressure. They are enlightened through the input sessions on human rights, value education, personal hygiene, friendship and infatuation, responsible and prudent use of media, self-defence skills. Having motivated the people about the social evils prevailing around them, the Bethany Sisters give responsibility to the village people to take care of their women, girls, children in their villages and slums. Thus, village vigilant committees are formed in the villages and slums. These committees keep watching for unknown persons visiting their villages and slums.⁴⁰⁷ The Bethany Constitution reminds:

In fidelity to the spirit of our founder, we will let the cry
of the poor find a responsive echo in our hearts, loving them with
Christ's own love. We will be sensitive to their needs and try to

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. S. PRIYA, "Bethany's Contribution", in S. PRIYA, *Bethany in Frontier Mission*, 53.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. E.K. DAS, "Human Trafficking in North-eastern Region: A Study with Global Perspectives", in *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 21 (2016) 3, 9.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. S. PRIYA, "Bethany's Contribution", in S. PRIYA, *Bethany in Frontier Mission*, 50-57.

alleviate their suffering and strive to awaken consciousness to the injustices prevailing in society (BSC 24).

Accordingly, the Bethany Sisters strive to hear the cry of suffering brothers and sisters to bring awareness in every human heart about the injustices prevailing in society. The Bethany Sisters knowing that “human trafficking is a crime against humanity”⁴⁰⁸ reach to schools, parishes, and the villages with a glimpse of light striving to dispel the darkness of human trafficking. They endeavor to uphold the victims of trafficking with compassionate love assuring them that they are created in the image of God and endowed with the potentials for the fullness of life.

4.3.4.3. Compassionate Assistance to the Migrants

Human beings migrate from their homes to other cities, states, or countries, seeking jobs, shelter, or other reasons. Migration has helped several people to improve their living situations. However, we know that all migration does not bring positive environments. Sometimes people willingly move due to impoverished living situations or unemployment, taking the risk of leaving their homes to create better opportunities for themselves and their families. There are times when people are forced to migrate or taken as captives. Unfortunately, some of them become prey to the person who offers a better job but ends in forced labour, some of them become trapped by gangs of antisocial activities.⁴⁰⁹

Almost every day the new papers and television carry news of refugees fleeing from hunger, war, and other grave dangers. In India, a larger segment of the population migrates looking for employment opportunities and education. Many people from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh migrate to Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Delhi, in search of jobs. The migration movement in some parts of North India is seasonal as they have only one crop season a year. During the off-season, they migrate to other places in search of employment. In North-Eastern states, floods during the monsoons in the rural areas are frequent. Consequently, people look for a safer place to work and to sustain their livelihood. Due to their impoverished situation, they cannot afford a better place, and they end

⁴⁰⁸ FRANCIS, “Address to the New Ambassadors Accredited to the Holy See on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Letters of Credence, 12 December 2013”, in *Lights on the Ways of Hope*, 79.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. D.T. IRVIN, “Theology, Migration, and the Homecoming”, in E. PADILLA – P.C. PHAN (eds), *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2014, 17.

up living in slums. Indeed, they often have no roof over their heads and are forced to live on the streets and in slums.⁴¹⁰ In this context, the words of Pope Francis addressed to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Mozambique are significant: “These people need us to share in their pain, in their anxieties, in their problems. They need us to look at them with love.”⁴¹¹ They set out their homelands, with a suitcase full of fears and desires, to undertake a hopeful and hazardous trip in pursuit of more humane living conditions.⁴¹²

Vita Consecrata upholds that “those who follow Christ on the path of the evangelical counsels intend to go where Christ went and to do what he did” (VC 75). The sixteenth General Chapter invites the Bethany Sisters to enter the slums, huts, and villages to look for the migrant people and to learn their painful situations. They take a brave step in learning their language, adapting to their culture and lifestyle. Having built a good rapport with the people the sisters realize that the people lack basic housing facilities, health and sanitation, and the required documents such as ration cards, Aadhar cards, and other documents which deprive them to procure Government services and benefits. In collaboration with the local government help to register them for various schemes like old age and widow pension, maternity benefits, driving cards. They are provided with safe drinking water, domicile, health, electricity, drainage, and sewage facilities. As a good shepherd searches for the lost ones, the Sisters reach out to the slum areas to bring the children and to create awareness about the advantage of education. Through the help of the government, these deprived children are provided with a scholarship for their further study.⁴¹³

The Bethany Sisters encounter several tribal girls and women who have migrated for livelihood to the cities to work as daily wage workers in construction companies, in the fish industry, in brick factories to be

⁴¹⁰ Cf. S. PRIYA, “Bethany’s Contribution”, in S. PRIYA, *Bethany in Frontier Mission*, 78.

⁴¹¹ FRANCIS, “Address to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Mozambique on their “Ad Limina” Visit, 9 May 2015”, in *Lights on the Ways of Hope*, 196.

⁴¹² Cf. FRANCIS, “Message for the 101 World Day of Migrants and Refugees: Church Without Frontiers, Mother to All, 3 September 2014”, in *Lights on the Ways of Hope*, 128.

⁴¹³ Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 34-35; CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Annual Report of the Activities of the Bethany Social Service Trust, 2018-2019*. The Bethany Sisters walk together in networking and collaboration with the governmental and non-governmental organizations constantly tackling the issues of anti-human trafficking and safe migration in India, Italy, and Mauritania in East Africa in 114 organizations: Cf. S. PRIYA, “Bethany’s Contribution”, in S. PRIYA, *Bethany in Frontier Mission*, 59.

employed, as a housemaid in urban middle-class families. Some of them have horrifying stories to narrate. Despite the no limit on working hours, they become the victims of low wages besides violence, physical and sexual exploitation, lack of health services. Being compassionate towards these abandoned people Bethany Sisters courageously reach out to them in educating them on various government organisations available for migrant domestic workers, construction workers, and insurance schemes for daily wage earners.

The Bethany Sisters who witnessed the death of migrants while crossing the Atlantic Ocean in a small inadequate boat stirred the heart of the Sisters to go to these people at Nouakchott in Mauritania. In networking with the International Organization for Migration, they are able to provide food, medical care, and accommodation. They opened a counselling centre to help them to ease the problems they face financially and psychologically. The counselling centre became a great venture to broaden their view and understand the complex world in which they are apart. They have come across the migrants who fled due to war and natural calamities looking for a better lifestyle, women victims of human trafficking, the children who are abandoned and sold. Having heard their life story, to find their own self-employment they conduct professional training courses such as cooking classes, tailoring and embroidery, and computer courses. They conduct language courses in English, French, and Arabic for the migrants to communicate with the local people keeping in mind to help them to be self-sufficient. Sisters who are working in collaboration with Caritas San Benedetto, Italy, encounter daily a number of migrants who lack basic necessities. They render services in counselling, distribution of food articles, medical care, and short-term accommodation. The collaboration of Caritas Mauritania, Caritas San Benedetto, Non-Governmental Organization, and International Organization for Migration became a great source in equipping their knowledge and skills in partaking in different training programs to grow in their apostolate.⁴¹⁴

The encounter with the migrants helped the Bethany Sisters to enter into their exodus story and their courageous leap into the unknown. Rendering loving services to the migrants is a heart-touching experience for the Bethany Sisters as they work in India and abroad. They strive to communicate the

⁴¹⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, Delegation Abroad, *Annual Report of Delegation Abroad, Social Apostolate 2017-2019*; Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Annual Report of Southern Province January 2020 to December 2020*.

compassionate touch of God as they touch the human misery of their people. The Bethany Sisters strive to “foster a solid spirituality of action, seeing God in all things and all things in God” (VC 74).

4.3.4.4. Prison Ministry: Compassionate Listening to Those behind the Bars

Every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, all become children of God (cf. Gen 1:27). Whatever the reality, both sinner and saint belong to God, and they are called to a life of holiness (cf. *LG* Chapter 5). Every person is often troubled and clouded by many situations causing pain and sadness particularly to those who are imprisoned. Pope Francis assures that “there is no corner of our heart that cannot be touched by God’s love.”⁴¹⁵ Pope soothes the heart of the inmates of prison through his homily that when a person makes a mistake, God’s mercy is all the more present to transform the person towards repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace.⁴¹⁶ In partaking in the mission of Christ, the Church approaches the inmates of prison with the attitude of Christ who came to offer freedom to the captives (cf. Lk 4: 18; cf. Mt 25: 36).

Many of the prisoners suffer from a poor self-image. They are easily overwhelmed by isolation, shame, and rejection. They tend to view the world as threatening and untrustworthy. They regard the other as a stranger.⁴¹⁷ Prompted by the fifteenth General Chapter the Bethany Sisters took a challenging step in prison ministry to become the heralds of God’s merciful love.⁴¹⁸ Launching into this ministry the Bethany Sisters realize that the greatest gift they can offer to the inmates in prisons is not money, their training, their skills, nor letters but their presence. Bethany Sisters through an organized team consisting of laypersons, religious men, and women reach out to the inmates in prison. They are allowed to conduct prayer sessions including everyone without any discrimination of caste and creed. Through their kind presence, they gained their confidence and trust. Their frequent visits made the inmates feel free to unfold their life stories. The Sisters take

⁴¹⁵ FRANCESCO, “Discorso del Santo Padre Francesco ai Partecipanti al Convegno Nazionale dei Cappellani delle Carceri Italiane, 23 Ottobre 2013”, in *Insegnamenti di Francesco*, Libreria Editrice Vatican, Città del Vaticano, 2015, 415.

⁴¹⁶ Cf. FRANCIS, “Broken Chains: Homily of Pope Francis for Jubilee for Prisoners, 6 November 2016”, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 45/2471 (11 November 2016), 12.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. W.R. GRAHAM, “Prisoners and Prison Chaplaincy”, in R.J. HUNTER (ed.), *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, 953.

⁴¹⁸ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XIV*, 59.

the initiative to visit the families of the inmates and it results positive energy in the inmates to feel confident that they are still part of their family.⁴¹⁹

According to the needs of the inmates and with permission of the authorities they provide clothing, food articles, and conduct health camps, recreational programs, give various talks to motivate, and celebrate different religious festivals with the inmates. They provide legal assistance to redeem the innocent victims and help them to rehabilitate and reintegrate into their families. They create a positive environment to lead a normal life by making them feel that they are loved and cared for. The Bethany Sisters networking with different organizations make effort to provide opportunities in tailoring, and other skills to those inmates who are not accepted by their families. They assist them to set up a trade or business for their livelihood. A follow-up is done to those released helping them not to end up making the same mistakes.⁴²⁰

The words of Pope Francis to all participants of the national congress of chaplains are very significant to all who are involved in prison ministry: “You are a sign of the closeness of Christ to these brothers who are in need of hope.”⁴²¹ Accordingly, the Bethany Sisters strive to become a beacon of hope as they render services in the central prisons of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. Knowing the challenges of this mission in a foreign land they took a heroic step to help the innocent victims. They have encountered persons who are victims of drug, alcohol, robbery, invalid documents of residence, and travel. The sisters are like a ray of hope in the hearts of many inmates, and they wait for their visit. Through the help of different organizations, innocent victims are helped in providing legal aid. In entering into prison ministry sisters experience joy in becoming the voice of the voiceless, standing for justice and truth in releasing the innocent victims and easing the pain of many wounded hearts through their compassionate listening.⁴²²

⁴¹⁹ Cf. M. DOMINICA, “Amazing Grace Behind the Bars”, in S. PRIYA, *Bethany in Frontier Mission*, 194-195.

⁴²⁰ Cf. S. PREETHI, “Set the Prisoners Free”, in S. PRIYA, *Bethany in Frontier Mission*, 134.

⁴²¹ FRANCESCO, “Discorso del Santo Padre Francesco ai Partecipanti al Convegno Nazionale dei Cappellani delle Carceri Italiane, 23 Ottobre 2013), in *Insegnamenti di Francesco*, 415.

⁴²² Cf. A. MARTIS, “Bethany: Combating Human Trafficking and Promoting Safe Migration in Mauritania, Africa”, in S. PRIYA, *Bethany in Frontier Mission*, 38.

Prison ministry aims to connect the inmates to the merciful love of God, the love that can change their hearts, giving them a chance to transform their lives. This transformation impacts the world of crimes with the world of love.⁴²³ Bethany Sisters through their kind deeds light a small candle of hope within the inmates in times of their darkness, isolation, and rejection. They strive to create in them happiness and an attitude of hope towards life. Although they experience hardship and pain in standing for the innocent and suffering victims, they find joy in rescuing their brothers and sisters.

4.4. Bethany Lay Association: Partners in the Life of Bethany

The early Christian Church communicates the great deeds of many men and women in the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that men and women assembled for prayer and Eucharist and they embraced an evangelical life of service to others, they unfolded fraternal love and charity (cf. Acts 2: 42-47).⁴²⁴ Likewise, desert fathers and mothers such as Antony, Pachomius, Evagrius, Theodora, Sarah, Syncletia, and several other fathers and mothers had unfolded the Christian spirituality of laypersons.⁴²⁵ The laity associations were promoted during the early monastic period in the monastic orders like Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Carmelites.⁴²⁶ These lay associations are known as third orders and their members are called tertiaries. These members live in close association with a particular religious order.⁴²⁷ Gradually, the Second Vatican Council brought a turning point to discover the spirituality and role of the laity in the Church and their universal call to holiness through the dogmatic Constitution of *Lumen Gentium* and the decree on the apostolate of laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. Impelled by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council many religious Congregations desired to have lay associations to share their spirit and apostolic endeavors. The Council has opened the eyes of many lay people to realize their role in

⁴²³ Cf. S. VADAKUMPADAN, “Radiating God’s Hospitality: A Perspective from the Prison Ministry”, in *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life* 9 (2015) 2, 143.

⁴²⁴ Cf. D. ORSUTO, “Lay Spirituality”, in T. CARSON – J. CERRITO (eds), *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Thomson Gale, London 2003, 413.

⁴²⁵ Cf. E.C. SELLNER, “Lay Spirituality”, in M. DOWNEY (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota 1993, 590-591.

⁴²⁶ Cf. K.A. SMITH, “Lay Brothers and Lay Sisters”, in W.M. JOHNSTON (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, vol. 1, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, Chicago 2000, 747.

⁴²⁷ Cf. K.R. BARRON, “Third Orders”, in M. DOWNEY (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 960.

the Church and to dedicate their lives to the service of God by being part of the particular religious Congregations or Orders.⁴²⁸

The onset of the Bethany Lay Association was precisely the inspiration of the fourteenth General Chapter 2004. Accordingly, Bethany initiated Bethany Lay Association on 16th July 2007 and this event added new annals to the Bethany Congregation. Impregnated by the mission mandate of Christ (cf. Mk 16: 15) the Bethany Sisters welcome the lay associates to be their partners in their missionary endeavours in becoming the light, the salt, and the leaven to the world (cf. Mt 5: 13-14).⁴²⁹

The Bethany Sisters welcome membership to Bethany Lay Association to those above the age of eighteen. The candidates are introduced into the way of Bethany Congregation through prayerful discernment over one year and are enrolled as members. The members of the association share in the spirit of the religious institute in which they belong. While living a secular life, they lead an apostolic life, and strive to live a life of holiness under the direction of the same institute (cf. Can 303). The Church reminds the institute that it is their duty “to assist them with special care so that they are imbued with the genuine spirit of their family” (Can 677 §2). Thus, the vision of the Bethany Lay Association is “to promote the glory of God by the holiness of the members through prayer and service.”⁴³⁰ According to Michael Downey, “the spirituality of the lay people is rooted in the gift of the Spirit given in Baptism by which they become members of a people, a holy people, a royal priesthood (cf. 1 Pet 2: 9), sharing in the mission of Word and Spirit, becoming a sacrament of communion and justice in the world.”⁴³¹ Consequently, the members of the Bethany Lay Association strive to promote the values of Christ in their own lives, in their families, in society, and the Church. Infused by the spirituality and charism of the Bethany Congregation they commit their lives having the attitude of Mary the mother of Jesus in the mystery of the Annunciation. They follow the path of the Spiritual childhood and missionary zeal of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, and they are empowered by the contemplative and active life of Mary and Martha of the Gospel.

⁴²⁸ Cf. E.C. SELLNER, “Lay Spirituality”, in M. DOWNEY (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 591.

⁴²⁹ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Bethany Lay Association: A Handbook of Guidelines for Animators and Members*, Bethany Publication, Mangalore 2007, 4-5. Henceforth cited as *BLA* 2007. Bethany is having 1589 Bethany Lay Associates (BLA) in 99 units in India and Abroad.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴³¹ M. DOWNEY, “Lay People and Spirituality”, in P. SHELDRAKE (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, SCM Press, London 2005, 400.

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

During their preparatory time are instilled in them, the spirituality and charism of the institute, they are guided to live a committed Christian life according to one's state of life. Bethany Sisters guide the lay associates to carefully ponder God's Word in the pages of the Bible, day by day and to spend time in personal prayer, to partake in the Eucharist daily as far as possible. Along with the Congregation, they extend their loving services to the poor and the needy participating in the charism and spirituality of the Congregation. The members are gathered at least once a month for common prayer, reflection, and the evaluation of their spiritual journey. According to the guidelines, the lay associates make their annual retreats for three days, they adhere to simple ascetical practices, join the local communities on the special occasion of the Congregation and of the Church. They renew annually the promise on the foundation day of the Congregation on 16th July at the feast day of Mount Carmel.⁴³²

Bethany Lay Associates are invited to partake in the mission of Bethany Congregation as per their aptitudes and capacities being in one's own family according to their state of life. They endeavour to lead a good Christian life to become the messengers of love and hope to the wounded hearts. They enter the following ministries such as pastoral care of the families through 'home mission' and they visit the families regularly. They are enthusiastically involved in the faith formation activities like teaching catechism, animation of youth, children's faith formation in the parishes. They render their services in counselling, they visit the sick in the families and hospitals and pray with them. They visit the elderly in their families and in the homes for the aged. Their loving services in prison ministry, palliative, and geriatric care are significant. To make them more equipped in their spiritual and missionary journey different syllabuses are arranged each year.⁴³³

Bethany Sisters deem that Bethany Lay Association is a group of people who have banded together to follow Christ in living the Gospel radically in carrying out his mission of compassionate love. Following their state of life in the spirit of the institute, "they exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardour of the spirit of Christ."⁴³⁴ Thus, the Bethany Congregation extends its spirituality and charism to spread the glory of God through the lay association. Bethany Sisters in collaboration and partnership with the Bethany Lay Association move towards creating Spirit-filled and

⁴³² Cf. *BLA* 2007, 12.

⁴³³ Cf. *BLA* 2018, 19.

⁴³⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (18 November 1965), n. 3.

Gospel-based local Churches and families partaking in the mission of God of compassion.

4.5. Challenges in Living the Charismatic Identity of Bethany Sisters

In the preceding section we have explored and analysed the spiritual and apostolic journey of the Bethany Sisters which radiate the compassionate face of God in view of answering our first research question, whether the charismatic hallmark of “compassion” is lived by the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany. However, the above given analysis might give a feeling that its communities, missions, associations, and movements, have become an “oasis of mercy” and its members are already perfect proclaimers of the joy and mercy of the Gospel as Msgr. Raymond did in his times. The proposals of the sixteenth General Chapter and the survey conducted by the Congregation have highlighted some space for introspection upon various aspects of consecrated life and the hope of possible changes for transformation. The Chapter emphasises the importance of revitalizing the element of compassion to the world in the spirit of their charism, the urgency of deeper prayer life, transparency, accountability in all aspects of consecrated living, genuine love in the communities, authentic commitment to mission, and a determination for a generous following of Christ’s way of life.⁴³⁵

According to Origen “we have a destiny which cannot be fully achieved here: we are on a journey; we have come into this world that we may pass from virtue to virtue, not to remain on earth for earthly things.”⁴³⁶ Thus, the challenges are an opportunity for growth, and it is an evitable aspect in life. Hence, the General Chapter invites members of Bethany Congregation to become merciful like the Father by achieving an interior transformation through the prolongation of the mystery of God’s love in our communities and by living the ‘fire’ that we have inherited from Msgr. Raymond, in the context of socio-cultural and economic changes of the society. Thus, we analyse some of the challenges faced by the Bethany sisters (in their life and in mission) in living and radiating the “compassionate face of the Father” as indicated in the three previous General Chapters of the Congregation and also on my own personal reflection and dialogue with the other members of the Congregation.

⁴³⁵ Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 9; Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 13.

⁴³⁶ Cited in, B.R. HEFFNER, “Meister Eckhart and a Millennium with Mary and Martha”, in *The Lutheran Quarterly* 5 (1991), 172.

4.5.1. Prayer Life

The statutes of the Congregation of the Bethany Sisters recommend that they spend daily an hour before the Blessed Sacrament and partake in the Holy Eucharist as far as possible with love and devotion. They spend sufficient time in appropriate spiritual reading particularly the Word of God (cf. Statutes 25). To a certain extent, the Bethany Sisters have manifested through their lives the experience of love, grace, and joy received from God and have made known that God is the core of their lives. However, the study of fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth General Chapters, after authentic study and evaluation, have brought out some concerns about the members regarding deficiency of prayer life, the need to treasure God-experience, the importance of bearing credible witnesses to God's merciful love, and the necessity of rooting oneself in Christ at all vicissitudes of life. The Chapters invited the members to be rooted in the person of Christ, to have an intense meditation over the Word of God and to apply it to one's personal life. The growing tendency among the members to give higher priority to the mission aspect at the cost of sacrificing spiritual matters is a major concern.⁴³⁷ At times, the forces and pressures of the modern world consume them, drain their spirit, and dry out their hearts, even though they externally participate in the spiritual exercises daily. It results an imbalance in their faith journey as consecrated persons and as a result many fail to live their life of compassion in its fulness.

4.5.2. Evangelical Counsels

The document of the sixteenth General Chapter has brought out some important concerns regarding the practice of evangelical counsels in the personal and community life the members of the Congregation. Some of the are: a) lack of single-minded devotion to the Lord through contemplation; b) reduced interior freedom to love and serve others with joy; c) failure to be prudent and transparent in building an authentic and healthy relationship in the community and elsewhere; d) growing tendency to be attached to things, money, persons, places, positions, and family; e) failure to accept God's will in all aspects of life by finding sufficiency in God; f) lack of personal responsibility to one's commitment with transparency and authenticity; and g) configuring oneself with the values of the material world.⁴³⁸ While acknowledging and appreciating the initiatives of the Bethany sisters in their

⁴³⁷ Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XV*, 8-11; Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 13; CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Southern Province Work Paper for VI Provincial Chapter 5th-9th August 2021*.

⁴³⁸ Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 15-16.

attempt to give themselves fully to the Lord through spousal union, the Chapter invites them to take stock of the abovementioned realities as well to live their consecrated life radically in total commitment.

4.5.3. Formation

The goal of formation is to bring transformation unto Christ i.e., knowing, and loving Jesus as the centre of life, and to grow in intimacy with him. The study of the sixteenth General Chapter has shown that there is space for growth in formation. The Chapter document highlights the lethargic attitude of the members in pursuing personal formation. Lack of personal responsibility and accountability in ongoing formation is also a concern, since it is, at times, reduced to the level of attending certain theological courses devoid of reflection, personal transformation and revisioning among the members.⁴³⁹ The assessment of the Congregation has indicated that there is growing tendency of self-centredness, lack of motivation, emotional immaturity, lack of fervour to live one's commitment, desire for comforts, and lack of fraternal bond in the communities which makes members to seek safe haven outside the communities. These have brought about in serious lapses in one's commitment to Jesus and subsequently results in the loss of religious vocation.⁴⁴⁰

4.5.4. Community Life

Though Bethany Sisters strive to make their communities after the model of Trinitarian and Eucharistic pattern, the sixteenth General Chapter locates some of the weeds such as lack of communion, inability of sharing one's talents and abilities for the common good, growing individualism, and deficiency in genuine love. Lack of proper communication, withdrawal from interpersonal relationship, failure in fostering the art of listening and the rumour culture are also to be taken into account. At times, the use of mobile phones hampers the relationship within the communities and promotes the tendency to settle in one's own personal world. In fact, the Bethany communities are gifted with members from different languages and cultures. However, occasionally they fail to respect the diversity of cultures and the uniqueness of each individual to keep the community united, joyful, and

⁴³⁹ Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 22.

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Southern Province Work Paper for VI Provincial Chapter 5th-9th August 2021*.

dynamic.⁴⁴¹ The obscured “busy-ness” of the modern society has directly or indirectly affected Bethany communities as well. In the busy schedule of the communities, the elderly and bedridden sisters are not given sufficient attention which results in their loneliness.⁴⁴²

4.5.6. Compassion in the Mission

In the present Indian context, consecrated persons are living in a cultural framework of communal disharmony, deterioration of moral values, violation of human dignity, fundamentalism, inequality, injustice, human trafficking, and migration. In such a stark context, to reflect the compassionate face of Jesus is a great challenge. It demands prophetic courage and undaunted faith in God. Felix Podimattam reminds that in this age, the credibility of the consecrated life in the eyes of the people depend upon a perception of consecrated persons as primarily God-centeredness. Sometimes consecrated persons in their hectic activities forget that the first mission entrusted to them is the mission within: to experience the reality of Christ’s presence and to witness to that experience.⁴⁴³ At times, though Bethany sisters strive to make known the compassionate love of Jesus, the tendency to secure themselves in the institutional services at the cost of sacrificing the ministries at the peripheries, villages, and with downtrodden. Such a tendency alienates them from the people. Reduced missionary thrust, availability, quality of life of the members along with the trend of insensitivity to the suffering humanity are to be taken into account. Proficiency in local languages is to be improved. Among the communities having multiple apostolates, there is a growing tendency to give an over-emphasis on ‘my mission’ (individual dimension) rather than ‘our mission’ (communitarian dimension), which leads to unhealthy competition among the sisters.⁴⁴⁴ The document of the fifteenth General Chapter has pointed out that they lack attentive and compassionate listening, which culminates in self-centredness. The quality of gentleness in communication,

⁴⁴¹ Cf. *Decree of the XVI General Chapter*, 19; Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Annual Report of Southern Province January 2020 to December 2020*.

⁴⁴² Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Annual Report of Southern Province January 2020 to December 2020*.

⁴⁴³ Cf. Felix PODIMATTAM, “Spirituality of Consecrated Life”, in *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life* 10 (2015) 1, 57. 41-62.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. *Decree of the XIV General Chapter*, 35; Cf. Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY, *Southern Province Work Paper for VI Provincial Chapter 5th-9th August 2021*.

and genuine spirit of care in relationship and in apostolate are deteriorating.⁴⁴⁵ The aforesaid elements block them to radiate the compassionate face of God in their mission avenues in an authentic manner.

The analysis of the above-mentioned challenges indicates that the members of the Bethany Congregation need to revitalize themselves to radiate the “compassionate face of the Father” in their life and mission. Amidst these challenges arises the relevance of our second research question: In what way do our study help the Congregation to live the charism of compassion effectively and concretely? The subsequent section is an answer to this question.

4.6. Opportunities and Proposals to Live the Charismatic Identity of Compassion

Sandra Schneiders’ explanation of the difference between religious and other Christians is logical and precise. She opines that our reason for speaking of some persons as ‘religious’ in a special sense is not that any Christian can be non-religious. Rather, this designation captures the special gift by which the religious dimension of human experience exercises a unique organizing role in their lives and brings about a permanent, active, full-time commitment to the movement generated by this special gift. Thus, she continues, “what makes religious ‘different’ is neither the specifically Christian character nor the peculiarities of lifestyles that Congregations develop but a need to respond to a particular gift, a special vocation, that consists in the absorption, for the sake of the whole community of believers, in the religious dimensions of life.”⁴⁴⁶ The most important question for our consideration is how to address the abovementioned concerns of the Bethany Congregation and develop a strategy that would truly meet the challenges of this epoch. Thus, we propose the following plan of action.

4.6.1. Deepen the Divine Joy and Mercy

The principal purpose of consecrated life to be committed God-seekers. Without a committed pursuit of God in contemplation, all kinds of good services lose all its relevance.⁴⁴⁷ We note that the charismatic identity of Bethany Sisters is to be the handmaid of the Lord and to share the compassionate love of Jesus with all, especially the poor and the marginalized

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. Cf. *Decree of the General Chapter XV*, 15.

⁴⁴⁶ S. SCHNEIDERS, *New Wine Skins: Re-Imaging Religious Life Today*, Paulist Press, Mahwah 1986, 41-42, 44.

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. INIGO, *Consecrated Life: Called to Move Beyond*, Pauline Publication, Mumbai 2019, 15.

(cf. BSC 166). Thus, in their missionary life, like Msgr. Raymond, they should nurture the habits of silence, adoration, contemplation, and discernment to become effective and passionate missionaries of the Gospel in all the seasons after the examples of Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Therese of Lisieux, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.⁴⁴⁸ Their charismatic identity defines their true nature as women of compassion and love. Over the period of time, this has got covered with ashes caused by the coldness of the atmosphere of the world which surrounds them, by their lukewarm attitude, laziness in the apostolate, and lack of initiatives. The deep concern in their spiritual life such as lack of consistency and continuity to persevere in spiritual life, failure to integrate contemplation and action, and the tendency to prioritize God's works to God himself, and the inclination to routinize their spiritual practices are also to be addressed. What is the need of the time is to rake it, fan it and add fuel with personal prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, and openness to the Spirit.

This spiritual rekindling brings its best results only to the extent of individual initiatives because the community is being formed each day under the action of the Holy Spirit, allowing itself to be transformed by the Word of God, purified by the sacrament of reconciliation, and reinforced by the Eucharistic love.

The abovementioned concerns call Bethany Sisters to a deeper spirituality, solidly based on listening to the Word and living out the Eucharistic mystery and deep-rooted personal and community prayers. This requires in them inner silence, docility to the Spirit, deep personal prayer, and humility to let God work within them. Therefore, nurturing their spiritual life is a priority to deepen the divine joy and compassion of the Gospel in their lives. For this to happen, the following proposals can be taken into account:

Line of Action

- to cultivate a habit of regular Spiritual Direction with a personal Spiritual director or Spiritual directress and record the experiences of the day in the spiritual journal.
- to spend quality time for personal prayer as prescribed by the Constitutions (cf. BSC 45) and they should cultivate a frequent reflection on God of compassion.

⁴⁴⁸ The spirituality of the Bethany sisters is founded on symphony of three models: lived compassionate *fiat* of the Blessed Virgin Mary, authentic love and simplicity of Therese of Lisieux and the contemplative and active dimensions of the Bethany family in the Gospels. For more, see "4.1.1. Bethany's Charism and Spirituality: The Symphony of Three Models".

- to carefully follow their spiritual discipline: grow in inner stillness, refrain from negative thoughts, review their life through examen of consciousness.
- To arrange recollections at the regional level once in three months, besides the monthly recollections in communities, during which their Congregational Documents to be reflected upon.
- to take all efforts to base their spirituality on the meaningful Eucharistic celebration with due preparation, the regular reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, reading and reflecting the Word of God, liturgy of the hours and daily recitation of Holy Rosary (cf. BSC 45-46).
- to encourage their members to participate in the inter-provincial retreats and the annual retreats regularly.

4.6.2. A Missionary-Disciple Community

The missionary community life of the Bethany Congregation is a response to the call of the Holy Spirit to imitate the lifestyle of Jesus Christ who was chaste, poor, and obedient to the Father. This life, with their personal limitations and differences, is a gift of the Spirit and participation in the Trinitarian *koinonia*. Their communities are born not ‘of the will of the flesh’, nor from a personal attraction, nor from human motives, but ‘from God (Jn 1:13). Thus, as a missionary Congregation, they are called to transform their communities into the houses and schools of mutual communion and sharing. “It is through fraternal life that one learns to accept others as a gift from God, accepting their positive traits along with their differences and limitations.”⁴⁴⁹

In a fragmented world, as missionaries, they have to offer the world a concrete model of fraternal living. This they accomplish by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing their individual gifts by following the model of the community of Jesus (cf. Mk 1:16-18), a reality that can be lived first and foremost in their own communities. From a theological and pastoral perspective, their communities have to become the places where God’s grace is collectively experienced, mutual forgiveness, and sisterly love shared and nurtured to help one another to grow through fraternal correction and interpersonal communication. Thus, their joyful living in the communities will become the primary proclamation of the joy and mercy of the Gospel in the present world. It is in their local communities that they can integrate the various ministries and services of each and every member.

⁴⁴⁹ CICLSAL, *New Wine in New Wineskins: The Consecrated Life and its ongoing Challenges Since Vatican II*, n. 16, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2017, 41.

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

Bethany Sisters need to grow in the awareness that community is the place where the daily and patient passage from ‘me’ to ‘us’, ‘I’ to ‘we’, ‘from my commitment to a commitment entrusted to the community’ and from seeking ‘my things’ to ‘the things of Christ’ take place. The evolving tendencies among the members such as individualism in community living and apostolic commitments, lack of sensitivity towards the general needs of the community, and numb indifferentism towards the common mission of the community are to be transcended. In fact, these symptoms are accentuated by specific factors such as prioritization of the individual projects over the community’s mission, the relegation of the divine dimension of community life to personal agendas, ideological conflicts, the generation gap.

What they need today is a clear idea about the ecclesial and congregational aims and objectives for their communities and an effort to renew them. First and foremost, they are called and consecrated as missionaries to live in their communities; it is about their ‘being’ than about their ‘doing’. Therefore, joined by the Bethany missionary vocation, they need to share their faith, life, mission, and culture with the people at the peripheries. Hence, their communities are nurtured when each of them takes seriously their individual and shared co-responsibility, periodical review of their lifestyles and living a transparent and accountable life, looking for possible ways and means of reconciliation in the community and creating favourable conditions to bring out the creativity of the members for the benefit of the community and the Congregation.

Thus, for the transformation of their communities as ‘missionary-disciple communities’ which radiate the joy and compassion of the Gospel, the following proposals can be considered:

Line of Action

- to regard their community as a ‘Divine-Human Project’.
- to centre their missionary community life on the Word of God shared and lived and in the daily meaningful celebration of the Eucharist and other liturgical prayers.
- to mould their communities after the admonition of the Apostles: “loving one another with (sisterly) affection” (Rom 12: 10), “living in harmony with one another” (Rom 12: 16); waiting and encouraging one another (cf. 1 Thes 5: 11); “be kind and tender-hearted to one another” (Eph 4: 32); and clothing themselves with humility towards one another (cf. 1 Pet 5: 5) and being hospitable to all.

- to acknowledge and appreciate the individual contributions to the community's mission and become conscious of their human weaknesses and limitations, and may nurture an atmosphere of dialogue, reconciliation, and forgiveness to live joyfully with the differences of opinions.
- Their communities being 'inter-generational', to acknowledge their individual strengths and get them involved in the missionary activities of the community they are capable of. For this end, to discern the new ideas and initiatives that come from the younger generations without prejudices and fears and will recognize their elder sisters as their mentors and wisdom figures.

4.6.3. Transformative Formation: To Grow unto the Image of Christ

The formation of the candidates for religious life is one of the important concerns of the Church. The primary objective of the formation process is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in following Christ and at the service of Church's mission (VC 65). Intellectual formation without internalization of values doesn't help young missionaries of the Congregation to be effective in the missions entrusted to them.

The formation process needs to take into consideration the changing situation of the modern time and respond to it effectively and in a timely manner. In this regard, Pope Francis speaks of four pillars of formation: *spiritual formation*, *intellectual formation*, *communitarian formation* and *apostolic formation*.⁴⁵⁰ For Bethany sisters, during their formation period, these four pillars needs be integrated interactively in their life and followed sequentially.

The chief instrument of formation explains *Vita Consecrata*, "is personal dialogue, a practice of irreplaceable and commendable effectiveness which should take place regularly and with a certain frequency" (VC 66). Every Bethany Sister needs to be convinced that to grow as a person of compassion, personal guidance is part of all the stages of religious life and a challenging spiritual directress or director can bring transformation in all the phases of life. It enables the person to grow in human maturity, integrate values, manage emotions, foster mutual relationships, handle conflicts, assume responsibilities with prudence and firmness, decide with competence

⁴⁵⁰ FRANCIS, "For a better integration of women in the life of the Church: Address of Pope Francis to the International Union of Superiors General, 12 May 2016", in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 20/2447 (20 May 2016), 7.

and consideration, and fortitude in order to share the compassionate love of Jesus to the world.

Thus, in the area of formation, we choose as a priority to concentrate on the aspect of transformation by consolidating and personalizing the entire formation process. For this to happen:

Line of Action

- to aim at the interiorization of values in the ministry of formation, to generate personal convictions among the formee. Rather than merely facilitating the students to pass through the stages of formation, formators should assist their interior journey through dialogue and constant accompaniment.
- to emphasise that the accompaniment during the initial formation includes a personal meeting between each formee and her formator to facilitate discernment and vocational growth.
- to facilitate a movement from inertia to passion, fear to freedom, mediocrity to excellence and routineness to creativity at every stage in the formative process .
- to create opportunities for persons in formation to be challenged so as to orient and to be prepared for the ministries at the peripheries of the society.
- to initiate efforts to help every candidate to know her affinitive mission in view of enhancing the missionary spirit.
- to update themselves with new trends and practices through study and interaction with formators of other Congregations.
- to make every candidate to be convinced from the beginning of the formation that formation is an ongoing process to grow unto the compassionate ways of the Lord and the life that they have chosen is not a period of time, but it is an eternal ‘yes’ to the call of God to work in his vineyard.
- to cherish the preciousness of the call of each sister, pray for them, celebrate their joys and successes, relate to them without making indifferences, accompany them and stand by them in their struggles and failures.

4.6.4. Compassionate Missionaries in the Style of Msgr. Raymond

Mission is at the centre of religious life and is our participation in the “*Missio Dei*”. In the history of the Church, we have seen that the founders

and foundresses were able to incarnate the Gospel message with courage and holiness.⁴⁵¹ Moved by their exemplary life the consecrated persons should reflect the image of Christ's compassionate face in the apostolic mission and works of charity. Compassion should be uppermost in their mind in serving their brothers and sisters (cf. VC 9).

Bethany Sisters need to feel the urge to listen and incorporate in their thoughts and in missionary outreach the integrity of the lives of individuals and people, paying particular attention to those who suffer at 'the peripheries' of the society. Their first contribution to the mission is to deepen the spiritual dimension of human life.

According to Jean Danielou "Mission appears as the self-unfolding of contemplation."⁴⁵² It is true that the experience of God brings consecrated persons closer to the essence of human persons; it forces them to hear their cries and compels them to approach the poor and the excluded as their co-travelling companions. A profound experience of God tunes their sensitivity and enables them to capture his presence in the life of the people and cultures and to place themselves at their service.

For Bethany Sisters, their option and commitment for the poor and the marginalized need to be a special aspect of their mission. They should learn God's language of compassion and need to take risk to go forward in serving humanity realizing that they are a mission on this earth, that is the reason that they are on this planet (cf. EG 273). As persons called to be the witnesses of the joy and mercy of the Gospel they need to feel deeply challenged by the situations of injustice and exclusion. Need of the time calls them to "fight for the rights of the poor, the original peoples and the least of our brothers and sisters, where their voices can be heard and their dignity advanced."⁴⁵³

Another threat that the whole world face today is the tsunami of the Coronavirus. Yesteryears, the plague wiped away millions of people, in the same way at present several people are dying in their homes, on roads, in hospitals due to Covid-19. Everyone is affected in different spheres, socially distanced, economically drained, physiological, and psychological anxieties

⁴⁵¹ Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, IX Ordinary General Assembly (2-29 October 1994), *Instrumentum Laboris: The Consecrated Life and its Role in the Church and in the World*, n. 2.

⁴⁵² Cited in, L.E. HJALMARSON, "A Trinitarian Spirituality of Mission", in *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 6 (2013) 1, 105.

⁴⁵³ FRANCIS, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (2 February 2020), n.7. Henceforth cited as QA within in the text.

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

are prevalent in many of the families. The Coronavirus pandemic, like another tragic event of death, sickness, and sufferings, has exposed our foundations-the faith and values on which we have built our lives. People have gone to the extreme of denial of God's existence due to death of their loved ones, sickness, poverty, unemployment. In these crucial moments of the world, people are looking for someone who can give them hope and consolation. The time invites the Bethany Sisters to be the face of God's mercy responding to the signs of the time having the courage to proclaim God's merciful love to the people who are lonely, distressed, and abandoned. It is a divine call for them to overcome the fear, self-pity, and responds in love with courageous good works.

To materialise their call to animate the missionary activities in the style of Msgr. Raymond:

Line of Action:

- to ensure that the Word of God is a real source of inspiration for their missionary commitment. For this, they not only read the Word of God but also internalize the God of compassion and impart it in all their pastoral activities.
- To ensure that to evolve concrete plans in their centres for ministry among children, adolescents, youth, and families with a compassionate approach other than the traditional ways.
- to take steps to reinforce their evangelizing efforts more prophetic and liberating. They should feel impelled to go in search of the poor and the excluded at the periphery. That is, their entire missionary activities need to be undertaken 'from the perspective of the poor and the needy'.
- to encourage personal and community initiatives in starting special and innovative ministries. However, to be in line with the vision and mind of the Congregation. More than individual ministries, teamwork is to be emphasized.
- to open their eyes to see the misery of the world, the wounds of their brothers and sisters by initiating new ministries for the service of the poor and suffering who are denied of their dignity as proclaimers of the joy and compassion of the Gospel.
- to revitalize their efforts to evangelize the modern world through new means of communication. To train persons to understand and use these new devices and languages for the purpose of evangelization and mission.

- to intensify their ‘shared mission’ which they have with Bethany Lay Association with whom they share the same charismatic inheritance in responding to the signs of the times finding new opportunities to serve the suffering brothers and sisters in the painful situation of the Covid-19 by taking care of the sick and the abandoned, finding possibilities to provide vaccine for the people who are vulnerable, providing material and spiritual nourishment.

4.6.5. Ecological Dimension of Our Missionary Life

The present ecological crisis clearly indicated that environmental protection is one of the pressing needs of the time. The entire creation, which is our “common home”⁴⁵⁴ is good. In the creation account, each and every part of the creation is seen by God as “good” (Gen 1:3). In the climax of his creation, God created the human beings and appointed them as the steward of his creation. For “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Gen 1: 31). However, today the Mother Earth cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her due to our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her (cf. *LS* 2). We have hurt our Mother Earth through various forms of pollution, such as the throwaway culture, the culture of waste, and global inequality. With the outshoot of the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis *Querida Amazonia* teaches us our double responsibility to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor and integrate and promote all inhabitants and enable them to enjoy good living (cf. *QA* 8).

Bethany Sisters as called to proclaim the mercy and joy of the Gospel are urged to hear the cries of the Mother Earth and of the needy. Their care for the Mother Earth affects the quality of relationship with God, with the other, and the cosmos. They are invited to a deep personal conversion in their relationship with others and with nature, which can start in their own local communities. For this reason, they need to undergo an ‘ecological conversion’ to bring about a bold cultural revolution to protect the Mother Earth.

Bethany Sisters as missionaries of Christ in these years of their spiritual journey have been enriched to open their hearts and lives to the suffering brothers and sisters of their times especially to the poor. Adding to it, the time invites them to safeguard the environment. As religious, the evangelical vow of poverty is a divine call to live a simple lifestyle, to consume and waste less, to reduce their contributions to the degradation of environment. For this kind

⁴⁵⁴ FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si* (24 May 2015), n.1. Henceforth cited as *LS* within the text.

of awareness, they need to reduce their distance from the life situations of the poor and the marginalized and more readily listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

Msgr. Raymond who was an ecologist of twentieth century, a lover of nature saw the immanent presence of God in creation. In all his teachings and instructions, he advised his sisters to respect and protect Mother Earth. To integrate spiritual approach and to protect the Mother Earth we draw the following proposals.

Line of Action

- to be merciful and compassionate towards the Mother Earth by becoming more eco-friendly and overcoming the tendency towards the ‘compulsive consumerism’ of the modern markets and the self-centred attitudes.
- to cultivate a culture of living with the minimum necessities of life as a part of their spirituality in the lifestyle of their Founder.
- to become responsible ‘ecological citizens’ by bringing changes at grassroots level: ‘such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing consumption of water, showing care for other living beings, using public transport, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights.
- to make efforts to preserve the local greenery and the ecosystems by planting more trees, by taking extreme care that their constructions without tarnishing the beauty of nature.
- to implement rainwater harvesting it minimize the possibility of drying up of wells, rivers and suitable for irrigation purpose. They should compost the food waste.

We have analyzed the various opportunities and proposals to renew the charismatic life of the Bethany Sisters. The time challenges them to be “Women of Advent” docile to the Spirit in reading the signs of the times and to respond to it concretely finding new missionary impetus by being the messenger of God’s mercy in the history of the Church. Let each Bethany Sister recall the words of St. Therese of Calcutta: “I alone cannot change the world. But I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.”⁴⁵⁵ Thus, each Bethany Sister is called to consider her little act of love today as a coin. With each new coin that is laid into account one at a time, little by little, the world can be transformed with their kind deeds unveiling the compassionate face of Jesus to the world.

⁴⁵⁵ Cited in, GRACE, “Women as Change Makers”, in *New Leader* 130 (2017) 5, 41.

Conclusion

We may conclude the research and reflections we undertook in this central part of our study espousing the observation of Phileena Heuretz according to whom consecrated life can be compared to a wheel where contemplative life is the centremost axis and active life extends out in the spokes. The spokes lose anchor without the support of centre axis and unable to support the movement of the wheel. If the consecrated persons are not connected to the centre axis (God), their existence has no significance in the world. But if connected, their presence in the world reflects greater purpose and effectiveness.⁴⁵⁶ This chapter has made an attempt to highlight the spiritual and apostolic journey of the Bethany Sisters in sharing the merciful love of God to the poor and the needy which is transmitted by their spiritual father Msgr. Raymond. As contemplative missionaries they strive to live their prayer life as 'love abides', their community life as 'love shares', their on-going growth in following Christ as 'love natures', their zeal to reach out to all prophetically as 'love overflows' and share their resources with the poor as 'love cares'. Bethany Sisters find the fulness of their charism and spirituality by abiding in Jesus the Vine and his life-giving sap, in deepening God's compassionate love in and through their consecrated life and mission.

In short, this chapter tried to study and highlight the spiritual and apostolic richness of the Bethany Sisters as an answer mainly to the question of their charismatic identity as witnesses of compassion in today's world and the spirituality that sustains and guides them. We have reflected their spiritual and apostolic life based on the study and observations of the three previous General Chapter documents. Then we moved on to explore the response on the second question of our study, in what way do our study can help the Congregation to live the charism of compassion effectively and concretely. In answering to these questions, we have tried to draw some proposals to make the charismatic presence of the Bethany Sisters relevant to the contemporary world.

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. P. HEUERTZ, *Pilgrimage of a Soul: Contemplative Spirituality for the Active Life*, Inter Varsity Press, Illinois 2010, 17-18.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

We are living in a world where humanity needs mercy and compassion. It is the need of the time to re-discover and to reflect the merciful face of the Father and to be confirmed that our life become authentic and credible. This research has been an attempt to understand theologically and charismatically the mission of the Bethany Sisters who are called and consecrated by God for the very purpose of waking up the mind and heart of humanity to the story of God's compassionate love. To delve more deeply into the implications of such a mission, we tried to study the nature of divine compassion parting from the Scripture, through the spiritual tradition of the Church, the Magisterial teachings, to the vision, conviction, and the sense of mission of Msgr. Raymond, the legacy bequeathed to the Bethany Sisters. In our study, we have seen that to be recipients and channels of God's compassion is the core of consecrated life.

In the initial part of our study, we have noted that God's heart overwhelms with compassion toward his people, and that his compassion is not something abstract or theoretical, but manifests in concrete, specific gestures by which he reaches out to everyone. He is moved by the cries of those who suffer (cf. Ex 3: 7). Like the rain that falls on the unjust and the just, the sun that shines on the good and the evil, his compassion remains ever-present, abundant, and unequivocally extended to all without exception (cf. Mt 5: 45). In this initial part of our investigation, we have also placed in evidence how God calls some specially to be carriers and prophets of his compassion for his people. In the fullness of time, he sends his own Son to reveal to humanity how much he loves them (cf. Jn 3:16). In the humanity of the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ who suffers, dies on the cross, and is risen, we see the zenith and fullness of the revelation of a God of compassion. The Church, born of the paschal event of the incarnate Son of God, is instituted as the sacrament of divine compassion. "The abiding presence of Christ in the Church is the sign that God in his merciful love identifies himself in Christ with the world."⁴⁵⁷ Hence the study explored the main pronouncements on the self-awareness of the Church of being a witness of the saving mystery of God's compassion revealed and offered in the life, passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. All these reflections were done to

⁴⁵⁷ K. RAHNER, *Studies in Modern Theology*, Burns & Oates, London 1965, 200.

understand religious life as the form of Christian life constituted by the Spirit of Christ to manifest existentially this nature and mission of the Church.

The documents of the Church pertaining to religious life affirm that the vital objective of consecrated life as configuration to the person of Jesus entrusting one's life to incarnate the very life and attitudes of Jesus (cf. *EE* 45; cf. *VC* 30). The consecrated persons, in mirroring the life of Christ witness God's love without limit. Their specific way of living Gospel values sown at baptism become a preeminent sign to the world. We have verified this theological and spiritual truth in the second chapter of our study examining some chosen representatives from the history of consecrated life, a few daring pioneers of living and witnessing to the inner life of the Church, saintly models of consecrated life who lived utterly docile to God's compassionate love and became channels of such love to others. These saints who contemplated on God's special predilection for those people who suffer in any manner, were prompted to discern the will of God for themselves and to choose adequate action to witness to this truth. They did so through their self-emptying love and service that captured effectively and positively the attention of both Christians and believers of other faiths. God's compassionate love impelled them to be at the side of the poor and the needy in the society, as persons immersed in love, they carried the world in their hearts. In our times, such persons continue to stay close to a bereaving family at the death of a beloved one, strengthen the oppressed, mitigate the hunger of the starving, try to respond to the anguish of the unemployed, to the cry of the women victims of domestic violence and of sexual exploitation, and the suffering of migrants. In such persons, humanity encounters the face of God's mercy.

It is with this backdrop that we moved on to study the life, vision, and mission of the Servant of God Raymond Francis Camillus Mascarenhas, the founder of the Bethany Congregation. We have analysed his passion for Christ and humanity, his deep prayer life, the decisive phases of his spiritual evolution, the charismatic spiritual legacy he entrusted to the religious family he founded. Contemplating the God of compassionate love, he moved to the wounded humanity and become the embodiment of God's mercy for them. He walked along the uneven streets and hidden alleys of Mangalore where there was much poverty, reached out to the rich and poor alike with the warmth of God's love. His undaunted trust in the providence of God helped him to seek and dedicate his life zealously to the service of God. His personal intimacy and knowledge of God enabled him to transmit his convictions and experience to his followers, especially to the members of the religious family

GENERAL CONCLUSION

he founded, to journey the same path of passionate loving God and neighbour. In a nutshell, Msgr. Raymond remains and will remain a source of inspiration and fount of insight to the Sisters of Bethany, his spiritual daughters.

In the fourth chapter, we focussed on the different spheres of spiritual and apostolic formation of the Bethany Sisters in the light of the preceding reflections. We have tried to understand the nuclei of their consecrated life, viz., charism, vowed life, fraternal life in community, and mission according to the vision of their founder. In the final part of the thesis, we have made an attempt to evaluate the concerns and challenges of the Bethany Sisters in today's world. Drawing from the resolutions and recommendations of the General Chapters of their Congregation, we tried to enunciate some opportunities and proposals to live the charismatic identity of the Bethany Sisters centred on compassion.

The consecrated persons are living in a world where they expect from the religious simplicity of life, the spirit of prayer, charity towards all, particularly to the lowly and the poor (cf. *EN* 76). In the history of the Church, people have witnessed many saintly religious men and women who embodied the Gospel in their lives through their word and deed. The same spirit we have delved in the person of Msgr. Raymond being the compassionate pastor, spiritual doctor to the sick and the dying. Today, people have witnessed consecrated persons more of skilled pastoral workers, competent educators, efficient administrators, expert social workers. At times, they fail to represent themselves as men and women of God or persons of prayer.⁴⁵⁸ As *Vita Consecrata* reminds, in every age consecrated persons are invited to continue to be the image of Christ, nurturing through prayer, so that their lives may be illumined by an apostolic spirit (cf. *VC* 9). And the people of “today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories” (*RMiss* 42). In this light, consecrated persons are called to be the living witnesses of Christ whose mission they continue (cf. *RMiss* 42). The God of mercy should be thus the core and urge of their consecrated life and their apostolate. The Bethany Sisters give themselves totally by the profession of evangelical counsels allowing themselves to be possessed by God and to be channels of God's love in a world governed by materialism, consumerism, hedonism.

In our times, the pandemic Covid-19 has struck and affected a whole lot of humanity with loss of life and other attendant sufferings like lockdowns,

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. M.M. VALLIPALAM, “The Impact of Consecrated Life on India Society”, in *Social Compass* 48 (2001) 2, 274.

closed borders, and travels, impossibility to take care of one's own sick, the anguish of not being able to give a dignified funeral or to the beloved deceased. In the history of the Church, when similar maladies struck the people, many have responded to it risking life. The Bethany Sisters too take to heart the words of St. Camillus de Lellis: "A good soldier dies at war, a good sailor at sea, but a good minister of the sick dies at work in a hospital."⁴⁵⁹ They bear in mind a series of inspiring testimonies like Gerard Groote, Camillus de Lellis, Francis of Assisi, Angela Merici, Chiara Lubich, St. Teresa of Calcutta, and above all, Msgr. Raymond, their immediate inspirational source.

A congregation like Bethany Sisters with a history of hundred years takes to heart the words of Jesus to Saint Faustina Kowalska: "You are the secretary of My mercy; I have chosen you for that office in this life and the next life" (*Diary* 1605). At the same time, they are encouraged by the teaching of St. John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished. Look to the future, where the spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things" (VC 110). Energized by these teachings they gratefully remember the prayerful wishes of Msgr. Raymond on the occasion of the 30th foundation day of the Congregation that Bethany *crescat, florescat* and *fructuescat* (increase and grow, flower forth and bear fruit in plenty) to continue to be messengers of God's compassion in the world according to the design of God.⁴⁶⁰ In their heart echoes the words of the Founder that they are "sanctuary lamps, and just as the sanctuary lamps burns only for God, so also they burn with his zeal alone."⁴⁶¹ He reminds them also of the style of their consecrated life: "You, the Sisters of Bethany, are to be active sisters as also highly contemplative people. Contemplation and action are to be your characteristics."⁴⁶² The integration of contemplation and action unto the Bethany style of Martha and Mary, in the simplicity of love lived by St. Therese of Child Jesus, gives the Bethany Sisters their physiognomy as the handmaids of the Lord who bear witness to the compassionate face of Jesus to the suffering humanity.

⁴⁵⁹ E. SPOGLI, *The Diakonia of Charity of the Camillian Order*, St. Camillus Study House, Dharmaram, 26.

⁴⁶⁰ Cited in, Cf. M. JYOTI *et aliae*, *Let it Grow Let it Flower Let it Bear Fruit: Centenary Document*, Assis Press, Mangalore 2020, 2.

⁴⁶¹ R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: The Hidden Life of Jesus, 03.05.1942", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 195.

⁴⁶² R.F.C. MASCARENHAS, "Exhortation: Queen Mother of Bethany, Pray for Us, 22.12.1940", in M. BERTHA (ed.), *From the Lips of the Founder*, 116.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The outcome of our study can be summarized as follows:

- Compassion is a divine attribute fundamental to God's nature. The God of compassion is still immersed and active in the history of human misery particularly through chosen human agents to heal and restore. We have his chosen ones like Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and the like. He reveals himself as the one who has compassion for the poor and the oppressed. The people of Israel experienced it throughout their fall and rise; beyond all chastisement, he remains unchangingly compassionate. God, whose love for humanity is unconditionally faithful does not allow the world and humanity simply to run headlong into disaster and fall into misery, calls some to be his interlocutors, to bring into the lives of the people faith and trust in his compassionate love and to lift them up from misery. Through them, he communicates his plans to bless and save them. Further God calls and consecrates some persons as prophets who nourish a strong tie with God, who become channels of God's compassionate love for the people, who suffer with God for their infidelities, and who summon them constantly back to their faithful God. By responding wholly to God's summons, they fulfil the mission of bringing to the people the message of his compassion.

- In the person of Jesus, God's fullness of love is made known as self-giving love, self-sacrifice, love that pours itself out for others to the point of death on the cross. Compassion motivated Jesus in his ministry. His saving love and self-giving *agape* for humanity as passionate love is for the least to the highest, for the poorest to the richest, for the most innocent and vulnerable, to the most hated and sinful. God reveals the climax of his love in the total self-giving of Jesus on the cross. The power and depth of God's immeasurable love is revealed in his Son Jesus is being announced and shared through his disciples, and through the Church by her sacraments, by the manifold apostolic ministries and activities. We have the magisterial teachings that serve as the road map for all Christians to live an authentic life of compassion. The consecrated persons belong to the life and holiness of the Church and participate in a very special way in the mission of channelling to the world the compassion of God by their total belongingness to the life and mission of his incarnate Son, Jesus.

- God invites certain persons at a specific time to play a unique role in carrying out his divine plan. Thus, his grace overwhelms Antony the Abbot, Pachomius, Basil, and the others to take daring steps to dedicate their life to witness God's love. It continues from the time of desert fathers to the great spiritual figures of our own time. They have opened to the world the vast horizon of God's love; the grace that they have received at baptism stirred

them to imitate Jesus in living the beatitudes. Each of them responded to the suffering of humanity differently, according to its need in their historical context, and which assumes different forms during the evolution of time. They lived amidst the suffering of humanity, sharing their struggles of life with love and compassion. In and through them, God entered into the life and history of the people and revealed his compassionate face.

- Accordingly, each person responds to God's mission through them and leave indelible footprints in the history of the Church. Similarly, we find in the history of the Church another charismatic person Msgr. Raymond, the founder of the Bethany Congregation, who devoted his life to seeking the face of God who is compassionate in the heart of the world. As a priest of God, he was a prophetic messenger of God in the soil of Mangalore, India. His undaunted faith in Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary facilitated sharing God's compassionate love to the people of his time. His thirst to communicate God's love was never quenched encountering the sufferings of his people. Being an innovator, Msgr. Raymond was not the one to stay on the beaten track and chose a path contrary to the interests of the world. His unfailing confidence in God led in his vocational and apostolic journey and left no stone unturned in order to make the Christian faith active in favour of the needy in Mangalore. His life of holiness in sharing God's compassionate love is recognized in the Church and he is venerated as a Servant of God.

- Further, this study highlighted the distinctive feature of the family of the Bethany Congregation began by Msgr. Raymond. They embrace the God of mercy as the foundation of their spiritual and missionary existence. As contemplative missionaries, they strive to live their prayer life as 'love abides', their community life as 'love shares', their on-going growth in following Christ as 'love nurtures', their zeal to reach out to all prophetically as 'love overflows' and share their resources with the poor as 'love cares'. Bethany Sisters find the fulness of their charism and spirituality by abiding in Jesus the Vine, by deepening God's compassionate love in and through their consecrated life and mission.

To wind up the study, with concern in living the abovementioned realities, we have tried to answer the first research question to what extent the charismatic identity of "compassion" is lived by the Bethany Sisters. We have also identified some of the challenges they face in their life and mission. In answer to the second question, we have tried to bring some proposals based on five dimensions such as Spiritual life, Formation, Community life, Mission, and some Ecological dimensions to show in what way a study like this can help the Congregation to live "compassion" concretely. Our main intention of drawing these proposals is to contribute to the efforts of the

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Congregation to bring renewal and transformation in the lifestyle of its members to live relevantly their charismatic identity of compassion as missionary existence in today's world.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS OF THE DISSERTATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ix
ABBREVIATIONS	xi
GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURE OF CONSECRATED LIFE AS CALL TO WITNESS TO GOD’S COMPASSIONATE LOVE: A FEW BIBLICAL INTUITIONS AND MAGISTERIAL ACCENTS

Introduction	9
1.1. <i>Compassion</i> : A semantic note	9
1.2. Witnesses and Harbingers of God’s Compassion: A Few Old Testament Paradigms.....	11
1.2.1. Abraham: God’s Call to be the Father in Faith	11
1.2.2. Joseph: God's Provident Provider for His People	13
1.2.3. Moses: God’s Call to be a Compassionate Leader.....	14
1.3. Prophets: Spokespersons and Carriers of God’s Compassion.....	16
1.3.1. Isaiah and God’s Saving Love.....	17
1.3.2. Jeremiah: Reassurance of Compassion	18
1.3.3. Amos: Witness of God’s Righteousness and Justice.....	20
1.3.4. Jonah: God’s Surpassing Mercy	22
1.4. Compassion: The Essence of the New Testament Revelation	23
1.4.1. Jesus: The Epitome of God’s Compassion.....	23
1.4.2. Mary, the Mother of Mercy	26
1.4.3. Apostles as Harbingers of God’s Compassion	28
1.4.4. The Church as the Sacrament (Perpetuators) of Compassion ...	30

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A CALL TO COMPASSION

1.5. Consecrated Life and the Church's Mission of Compassion	33
1.5.1. <i>Lumen Gentium & Perfectae Caritatis</i>	33
1.5.2. The Postconciliar Deepening.....	35
1.5.3. The Contemporary Magisterium	40
Conclusion	45

CHAPTER TWO

CONSECRATED LIFE AS WITNESS TO GOD'S COMPASSION: AN ESSENTIAL HISTORICAL ENQUIRY

Introduction	47
2.1. Witness to Compassion: A Few Chosen Figures.....	47
2.1.1. Antony the Great	48
2.1.2. Pachomius: From the Receiving End to the Giving End.....	50
2.1.3. Basil the Great: Evangelical Fraternity and the Hospices	53
2.1.4. Benedict: School of Charity and Hospitality.....	56
2.2. Historical Timeline of the Middle Age.....	59
2.2.1. Dominic: Saving the Soul in love and in Compassion	59
2.2.2. Francis of Assisi: Transparency of the God of Compassion	62
2.2.3. Gerard Groote: Community of Brothers of Common Life.....	65
2.3. God's Compassion Meets Human Misery at the Time of Renaissance	68
2.3.1. John of God: The Brother of Mercy	69
2.3.2. Camillus de Lellis: A Minister of Mercy	71
2.3.3. Angela Merici (1474-1540): A Woman of Action	74
2.3.4. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660): A Sign of Kindness and Charity	77
2.4. Witnessing God's Compassion: Some Contemporary Examples.....	80
2.4.1. Charles de Foucauld: From Experience to Witnessing	80
2.4.2. Mother Teresa: Universal Icon of Charity	83
2.4.3. Mariam Thresia: A Woman of Compassion.....	86

TABLE OF CONTENTS OF THE DISSERTATION

2.4.4. Chiara Lubich: Universal Communion	89
Conclusion	94

CHAPTER THREE

MSGR. RAYMOND FRANCIS CAMILLUS MASCARENHAS: A MESSENGER OF GOD’S COMPASSION

Introduction	97
3.1. Historical Background of the City of Mangalore	97
3.2. A Milieu of the Family of Msgr. Raymond	100
3.3. A Biographical Profile	101
3.4. The Inspiration to plant Bethany	104
3.5. Spirituality and Sense of Mission	106
3.5.1. Msgr. Raymond: A Contemplative Missionary	106
3.5.1.1. Msgr. Raymond: A Man of Prayer	107
3.5.1.2. Man of Undaunted Faith	109
3.5.1.3. Drawn to the Mystery of Incarnation	112
3.5.1.4. The Eucharist: The Core of Msgr. Raymond’s Spirituality	113
3.5.1.5. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary	116
3.5.1.6. The Patron Saints	119
3.5.1.7. Compassionate Endurance in Suffering	122
3.5.2. Mission of Msgr. Raymond: A Compassionate Act	125
3.5.2.1. A Compassionate Pastor	125
3.5.2.2. A Man of God for the Kingdom of God	129
3.5.2.3. An Educationist	132
3.5.2.4. An Advocate of Social Advancement	135
3.5.2.5. A Comforter of the Afflicted	139
3.5.2.6. A Compassionate Spiritual Father	142
3.6. A Mystic and Prophet	144

Conclusion	147
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CHAPTER FOUR

COMPASSION AS THE CHARISMATIC HALLMARK OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE OF “THE SISTERS OF THE LITTLE FLOWER OF BETHANY”

Introduction	149
4.1. The Charism of the Bethany Congregation	150
4.1.1. Bethany’s Charism and Spirituality: The Symphony of Three Models.....	153
4.1.1.1. Lived Compassionate Fiat of Blessed Virgin Mary.....	153
4.1.1.2. Life Surrounded by Love: St. Therese, The Little Flower.	155
4.1.1.3. Compassionate Friendship at Bethany Family in the Gospels.....	157
4.2. Means to Grow in the Spiritual Life	159
4.2.1. Evangelical Counsels: Path to Live the Charism	159
4.2.1.1. Consecrated Chastity	160
4.2.1.2. Evangelical Poverty	162
4.2.1.3. Redemptive Obedience	164
4.2.2. Life of Prayer: Growing in Compassionate Love	165
4.2.3. Eucharist: Core of Compassion	168
4.2.4. Fraternal Life in Community: A Sign of God’s Compassionate Love	169
4.2.5. Formation: A Configuration unto Christ.....	172
4.3. Concrete Ways of Living Compassion: Apostolates.....	174
4.3.1. Pastoral Care: An Art of Faith Formation	174
4.3.1.1. Pastoral Care Within the Family.....	177
4.3.1.2. Home mission	179
4.3.2. Transformative Education for the Fullness of Life	181
4.3.2.1. Boarding Homes: A Home of Love	184

TABLE OF CONTENTS OF THE DISSERTATION

4.3.3. Care for the sick and the Aged	186
4.3.3.1. Healing Ministry: A Compassionate Touch	187
4.3.3.2. Home for the Senior Citizens: Care for the Aged and the Dying.....	189
4.3.4. Social Apostolate.....	191
4.3.4.1. Women Empowerment: A Compassionate Act	192
4.3.4.2. Compassionate Embrace to the Victims of Women- Trafficking	194
4.3.4.3. Compassionate Assistance to the Migrants.....	196
4.3.4.4. Prison Ministry: Compassionate Listening to Those behind the Bars	199
4.4. Bethany Lay Association: Partners in the Life of Bethany	201
4.5. Challenges in Living the Charismatic Identity of Bethany Sisters....	203
4.5.1. Prayer Life	204
4.5.2. Evangelical Counsels	205
4.5.3. Formation	205
4.5.4. Community Life	206
4.5.6. Compassion in the Mission	206
4.6. Opportunities and Proposals to Live the Charismatic Identity of Compassion	207
4.6.1. Deepen the Divine Joy and Mercy	208
4.6.2. A Missionary-Disciple Community	209
4.6.3. Transformative Formation: To Grow unto the Image of Christ	211
4.6.4. Compassionate Missionaries in the Style of Msgr. Raymond.	213
4.6.5. Ecological Dimension of Our Missionary Life	215
Conclusion	217
GENERAL CONCLUSION.....	219
BIBLIOGRAPHY	225

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