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**RELIGIOUS CONSECRATION TODAY IN THE
LIGHT OF MAR IVANIOS' VISION OF
RELIGIOUS LIFE AS *SARVĀṆGA HOMAYĀGA*
(HOLOCAUST) WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
THE CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY OF THE
SISTERS OF THE IMITATION OF CHRIST**

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Romae, die 31 Ottobre 2024.

To
My Beloved
Congregation of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ
on the Occasion of the Centenary Year

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ABBREVIATIONS

Reference Works and General

| | |
|----------------|--|
| <i>AAS</i> | <i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i> |
| <i>ABD</i> | <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> |
| <i>CCEO</i> | <i>Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium</i> |
| <i>CIC</i> | <i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i> |
| <i>CICLSAL</i> | Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life |
| <i>DPL</i> | <i>Dictionary of Paul and his Letters</i> |
| ed. | Editor |
| et al., | Editors |
| <i>ET</i> | <i>Evangelica Testificatio</i> |
| HR | Holy Rule of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ |
| Il | Illinois |
| <i>LG</i> | <i>Lumen Gentium</i> |
| LXX | Septuagint |
| Mal. | Malayalam |
| MI | Michigan |
| <i>MR</i> | <i>Mutuae Relationes</i> |
| <i>NCE</i> | <i>New Catholic Encyclopedia</i> |
| <i>NDBT</i> | <i>New Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i> |
| <i>NDCS</i> | <i>The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality</i> |
| <i>NICOT</i> | <i>New International Commentary on the Old Testament</i> |
| <i>NIDB</i> | <i>The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> |
| <i>NIDNTT</i> | <i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> |

| | |
|-------------|--|
| NJ | New Jersey |
| NY | New York |
| <i>PC</i> | <i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> |
| RB | The Rule of St. Benedict |
| <i>RC</i> | <i>Renovationis Causam</i> |
| <i>RD</i> | <i>Redemptionis Donum</i> |
| ST | <i>Summa Theologiae</i> |
| <i>TDOT</i> | <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> |
| <i>TDNT</i> | <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> |
| Trans. | Translated |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| VC | <i>Vita Consecrata</i> |

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The research undertaken with the title “Religious Consecration Today in the Light of Mar Ivanios’ Vision of Religious Life as *Sarvāṅga Homayāga* (Holocaust) with Special Reference to the Charism and Spirituality of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ”, is an attempt to study the core of the consecrated life lived, founded and propagated by Venerable Mar Ivanios (1882-1953), the first metropolitan archbishop of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church.

In every age, Jesus invites people to leave everything and follow him; an invitation wholly unmerited, gratuitous gift. Jesus awakens in the hearts of those who are invited the inner longing to belong solely to him and to live as he lived. This constitutes the fount of religious life and leads one to a total sacrifice of self for Christ and his Church. It is laying down one’s life in order to serve others for God’s sake for finding life in abundance (cf. Mt 10, 39). Hence, consecrated life involves “leaving everything” to follow Christ and “losing” one’s life to find its sense and direction with him. The apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* reaffirms that the Son, who is the way which leads to the Father, calls all those whom the Father has given to him to make the following of himself the whole purpose of their lives. But of some, those called to the consecrated life, he asks for a total commitment, which involves leaving everything behind (Mt 19, 27) to live at his side and follow him wherever he goes (VC, 18).

The *Code of Canon Law* presents religious life as “a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, to the building of the Church and the salvation of the world” (CIC 573§1).¹ Before the Second Vatican Council the religious life was considered as state of perfection. Now it is considered as an “objectively superior” form of ecclesial life because it is “the most radical way of living the Gospel on this earth” (VC, 18). The objective excellence of religious life does not imply that the consecrated persons are necessarily better than those who lead married or single life. However, the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience which the religious profess, involve the renunciation of everything that the human beings prize most: possessions, marriage, power and the like. The single-minded and exclusive devotion to Christ makes religious life special. For this reason, St. Thomas Aquinas writes that in those who dedicate themselves to God,

¹ See also in CCEO c. 410.

the attachment to external goods is removed by the vow of poverty; the concupiscence of sensible pleasures, chief among which are venereal pleasures, is removed by the vow of chastity; and the inordinateness of the human will be removed by the vow of obedience. Those who thus give themselves up entirely to the divine service, he compares as offering a holocaust to God.²

A Reserach on *Sarvāṅga Homayāga*³

Since the inception of the Church, there have been men and women who, in unique ways, have served humanity as God's instruments and helped their fellow believers grow spiritually. Venerable Archbishop Geevarghese Mar Ivanios is recognised as one of them. He is drawn toward the monastic form of consecrated life in the oriental Church, especially with its deep roots in the life and teachings of St. Basil, matured in the thought and life considered a life totally given to God as *sarvāṅga homayāga*— a total self-immolation before God. Mar Ivanios was a man of God chose to lead the Malankara Church to communion with the Catholic Church with a dynamic and prophetic mission. He was a great visionary and a charismatic person who committed his whole life to the spiritual renewal of the Malankara Church and its people. He chose to uplift the Church and its members through *sanyāsa*⁴ – monasticism, a way of God-experience and Self-realisation. His life, visions and actions are founded on *sanyāsa*. He says, “The Church within the Church – the small “Church”, which is the heart of the holy Church, is the religious community”.⁵

Mar Ivanios founded in the Malankara Church: *Order of the Imitation of Christ* for men and *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ* for women. These two congregations are popularly known as Bethany.⁶ He wanted the members of these two religious congregations to follow the Indian way of religious life, that of *sanyāsa*. He was an ascetic and a man ahead of his time, whose teachings on the necessity of the indigenous character and the inculturation of religious life for the spread of

² Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 186, a.7, 1.

³ *Sarvāṅga* is a Sanskrit compound consisting of the terms *sarva* and *aṅga* ; *sarva* means entire, whole or every and *aṅga* refers to one's limbs of the body, which means the whole body. *Homa* is a Sanskrit word that refers to any ritual in which making offerings into a consecrated fire is the primary action. *Yāga* literally means an offering, a sacrifice, or an oblation and refers to any ritual before a sacred fire in Hinduism. So, the word *sarvāṅga homayāga* can be translated into Holocaust (offering one's whole being on the sacred fire), a term that carries profound significance as it denotes a complete burning on the altar.

⁴ *Sanyāsa* in Sanskrit is a composite word of *saṃ*, which means together, all, *ni*, which means down, and *āsa* from the root, meaning to throw or to put. A literal translation of *Sanyāsa* is thus to put down everything (total renunciation).

⁵ MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, trans. S. Thaikoottathil, Cause of Canonization of Mar Ivanios, Catholicate Centre, Trivandrum 2006, 29.

⁶ Because of the significance Mar Ivanios applies to the consecrated lifestyle of the congregations he founded, we will use this term to refer to these religious families.

the Gospel are enshrined and emphasised in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.⁷ A hermeneutic reading and interpretation of this understanding of consecrated life as a total offering of oneself as a holocaust, in my opinion as a member of the *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ* (SIC), will bear much fruit for my own congregation and the understanding of consecrated life at large. My specific interest is to deepen the understanding of the person of Mar Ivanios as a monk and his vision of *Sanyāsa* as a *sarvāṅga homayāga* (burnt offering/holocaust, offering of one's whole being). I would like to study this concept and evaluate it in the context of biblical, magisterial, and theological understanding of religious life.

The Theme: Rationale of the Choice and Originality

Religious life today functions as an attempt to “return to the origins” (*PC*, 1) according to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. In a society where absolute freedom, the right of self-determination and self-realisation, sexuality and pleasure, wealth and possession are objects of worship, it becomes challenging for people to renounce all these and consider obedience, chastity, and poverty as precious and promising values. Thus, today's culture challenges any austere way of life that a religious congregation espouses and proposes. In such a society, is a life of renunciation and self-sacrifice worthwhile? How can we lead a renounced and detached life amid today's scientific and technological advancement, where the value systems constantly change? All these challenges and questions motivate me to concentrate on the religious vision of Mar Ivanios, our founder, who communicates the value of total renunciation and sacrifice in the religious life to foster and live in union with God. He wrote, preached, and persuaded his followers that the world needs to get closer to God, who always shares the good news of true love and life in Jesus, the Messiah. Who else can Jesus depend on to make himself known, if not on his *sanyāsis* (consecrated persons), to persuade everyone that self-denial is the way to pure love? Are they not his own *sanyāsis*, vessels of his own Spirit, grace, and power, and who believes that he is the only reason for their existence?⁸

Reading the life and writings of Mar Ivanios, one finds that his visions and teachings are closely related to the teachings of the Catholic Church. As *Perfectae Caritatis* notes, the religious commit their entire lives to serving God through the profession of vows, considering Christ “the

⁷ Cf. S. CHARIVUPURAYIDATHIL, *Religious Life as Imitation of Christ*, Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, Vadavathoor, Kottayam 1991, 91.

⁸ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 29.

only thing necessary, and seeking God alone before everything else” (PC, 5). In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI underlines that the lives of the religious demonstrate their complete availability for the cause of the gospel. The silent witness of abnegation, purity, and self-sacrifice involved in the religious vows can become an eloquent witness capable of touching everyone.⁹ The document *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life* teaches that the profession of vows or consecration is the basis of religious life. It emphasises that God’s initiative and complete surrender to him are the central tenets of religious life.¹⁰ These twin aspects of religious life are highlighted and interpreted in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*. The statement posits that an individual is drawn to God by an overwhelming and potent experience of His love, which compels them to give their entire life to Him, both present and future (VC, 17). Being a daughter of the Church and a member of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ, I desire to understand and deepen the theology of religious consecration.

So far, no serious and systematic study has been done on the teaching of Mar Ivanios’ concept of religious consecration as *sarvāṅga homayāga*. Interpreting it in the light of Biblical, magisterial, and theological understanding is also in view of going back to the original spirit of the founder, to assimilate the life and message that he communicated in the beginning. Besides the novelty of considering the religious consecration as *sarvāṅga homayāga* and its rich spiritual and theological implications for the understanding of consecrated life at large, this return to the founding charism and original vision will indeed contribute to understanding and living the nature of consecration in the religious family of the *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ* in an authentic and witnessing manner in today’s world.

Method and Limits

The teachings and writings of Mar Ivanios are on a vast range of themes distributed in several writings by him and on him. In this reflection on the charism of the orders he founded, we limit ourselves to the study of the charism as received, understood and lived by the SIC (*Sisters of the Imitation of Christ*). The methods we use are historico-critical and theological-analytical. The

⁹ POPE PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelisation in the Modern World, 8 December 1975, AAS 68 (1976) 5-76 # 69.

¹⁰ SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND FOR SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate* (31 May 1983) (St. Paul Publications, Boston, 1983) # 5.

historico-critical analysis will help us to understand and evaluate the vision and teachings of the Mar Ivanios and the Church about religious consecration. The theological-analytical method helps us to understand and apply theological meaning to it.

Sources

The primary sources of this work are published and unpublished writings of Mar Ivanios. This paper uses two primary sources that directly express the life of Mar Ivanios and his teachings on religious life: his autobiography *Girideepam* (Mountain Lamp) and his *Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*. On the other hand, the writings by various authors on Mar Ivanios serve to present an objective picture of his life, spirituality, and vision of religious life.

To understand the biblical background of the sacrifice, the Holy Bible, biblical dictionaries, encyclopaedias and commentaries are used in the first chapter. For the magisterial teachings, I referred to the conciliar and post-conciliar documents, encyclicals and exhortations, and the messages on consecrated life by Roman Pontiffs. Moreover, I used the congregational magisterium as the main stream of study and research to understand how consecration is understood in the charism and spirituality of the congregation of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ. In addition, various books and articles on the theme served as supporting sources and means.

Procedure

The work will unfold in two parts, which consist of three and two chapters, respectively. In the first part, we examine the biblical and Indian understanding of sacrifice offered to God as they constitute the religious and cultural background of Mar Ivanios, which will evolve as his understanding of religious life as *sarvāṅga homayāga*, as a total holocaust offering to God. The three chapters of the first part will serve as background and development of the entire dissertation as it studies the Scriptural understanding of sacrifice, followed by the historical testimonies and magisterial understanding of consecrated life as an offering of one's entire self and life to God.

In the first chapter, we shall study the biblical understanding of sacrifice in both Testaments, its meaning and purpose. We shall try to see how the Old Testament ritual practice of sacrifice assumes its full significance in the teaching and totally sacrificial life of Jesus, who immolates himself on the Cross for love. The second chapter will concentrate on the lives and ascetical teachings of some monastic fathers who greatly influenced Mar Ivanios. On the other hand, to understand the earliest concept of renunciation in religious life, we will look into the lives and

teachings of some important monastic founders and reformers. The third chapter will discuss the important magisterial teachings on religious consecration as a total offering of self.

The second part, which consists of two chapters, will focus on the life and vision of Mar Ivanios, the founder of two indigenous religious orders: *Order of the Imitation of Christ*¹¹ (also known as “Bethany Fathers”) for men (23 August 1919) and *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ* for women (21 September 1925). *the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ*¹² (also known as “Bethany Sisters”). His life and vision of religious life, especially his concept of religious consecration as a *sarvāṅga homayāga* will be the subject matter of the fourth chapter. Therefore, in the fifth and last chapter shall reflect on the charism and spirituality of the SIC especially around the Founder’s concept of *sarvāṅga homayāga* in today’s context. The concluding part of this chapter will address a few significant practical challenges to leading a detached life in today’s context and propose some remedies to live a meaningful consecrated life in today’s context of questioning and challenging consecrated life.

¹¹ Hereafter: OIC

¹² Hereafter: SIC

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

CONSECRATION AS TOTAL SELF-OFFERING: A BIBLICAL RETROSPECTION

Introduction

According to the Old Testament, sacrifice was a keyway to access, worship, and interact with God. The term “sacrifice” refers to renunciation of some kind, usually involving the destruction of something valuable in order to obtain something more valuable. Sacrifice was the divinely ordained means of approach to God, the means of grace whereby the covenant relationship of Israel with Yahweh was maintained. When the ancient Israelites performed sacrifices, they gave God what God had given them, expressing their close relationship with God and seeking to deepen that bond. In the Hebrew Bible, sacrifice always involves transformation. One of the most common ways to transform something as a sacrifice is to destroy it. Destruction removes the animal from the ordinary realm to a transcendent one.

Animal sacrifice that had been practised for centuries ended with the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple in Jerusalem by Roman forces in 70 CE. Jerusalem was the focal point of the actual sacrificial rites practice. Therefore, the average Jew needed to find alternatives to actual sacrifice. The Rabbis found scriptural authority in the prophets and the Psalms regarding repentance, prayer, fasting, charity, good works, and studying the Torah as equivalent to sacrifice.¹³ Consequently, the Rabbis changed the instructions for offering gifts and animals in the Temple into guidelines for living in accordance with God’s will. The Jewish people converted sacrifice into a daily self-offering to God.¹⁴ While rejecting material sacrifice in a temple, the early Christians learned from and took over this Jewish idea of spiritual sacrifice. The early Christians “Christologized” the sacrifice in Jewish tradition by describing Jesus’ crucifixion as the pinnacle of self-giving. We see in a number of passages in the New Testament which reflect the spiritualised concept of sacrifice: Rom 12, 1; Heb 13, 15-16; 1 Cor 5, 7-8; Phil 4, 18. Worship, thanksgiving, gifts of money and self-denial are all described in sacrificial terms.¹⁵ For the individual Christian,

¹³ Cf. F. M. YOUNG, “New Wine in Old Wineskins. XIV Sacrifice”, in *The Expository Times* 86/10 (1974-1975) 307.

¹⁴ Cf. D. L. WEDDLE, *Sacrifice in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, University Press, New York 2017, 70.

¹⁵ Cf. R. J. DALY, *Sacrifice Unveiled. The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice*, T&T Clark International, London 2009, 2-3.

offering oneself was the supreme sacrifice. For them, martyrdom was, at first, the ultimate self-offering. However, with the end of persecution, it was replaced by monasticism, withdrawal from the world and its passions and desires considered as a means of offering oneself as a pure sacrifice to God.¹⁶ Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss say that every sacrifice entails a consecration; through a sacrifice, an object is consecrated and moves from the common to the religious realm¹⁷, which can be compared to the total self-offering of oneself in religious life. The ritual sacrifice in the old has now changed into a spiritual sacrifice, namely the total offering of self. Therefore, in this chapter, we will focus on the Israelite practices of sacrificial offerings outlined in the Old Testament and how those sacrificial practices were understood and adapted in the New Testament writings. In the last part, we will look at how the sacrificial ritual practices of the Old Testament changed into a spiritual sacrifice in Christianity to get the background for Mar Ivanios' concept of *sarvāṅga homayāga* (Holocaust) in religious life.

1.1 The Terminology of Sacrifice in the Old and New Testaments

The Old Testament has a very extensive technical vocabulary related to sacrifice. The term “sacrifice” is used interchangeably but is not well defined. Several types of sacrifice can be indicated by one, and the same word and numerous terms can be used to describe one type of sacrifice. The most important elements are: ‘*ōlā*, *burnt offering or holocaust* (Lev 1), the most prominent and frequently mentioned sacrifice in the Old Testament. The word comes from Greek roots (*holos* means, “whole,” and *kaustos*, means “burnt”) and refers to an offering that has been completely consumed by fire. *Zebah* signified an *animal offering* and usually included the festive sacred meal (Lev 3). The term *minḥā* means the *cereal offerings* (Lev 2), a complementary sacrifice usually offered in conjunction with the ‘*ōlā*. The *ḥaṭṭā’t* signifies *sin offering* (Lev 4), and ‘*āšām* means *guilt offering* (Lev 5, 14-25; 7, 1-7).¹⁸ In the Hebrew Bible, *qorbān* is the frequently used general term signifying offering or oblation. The word *qorbān* is a verbal noun of the form *qitlān* or *qutlān* from the verbal root *qārab*, which means to bring near, to present as a gift. It never signifies a gift from one person to another but is always a gift from humans to God. The term *qorbān* does not specify the material offered; rather, it is intended to state the act of

¹⁶ Cf. F. M. YOUNG, *Sacrifice and Death of Christ*, SPCK, London 1975, 62.

¹⁷ Cf. H. HUBERT – M. MAUSS, *Sacrifice. Its Nature and Function*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1964, 9.

¹⁸ Cf. R. J. DALY, *Christian Sacrifice. The Judaeo Christian Background Before Origen*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 1978, 12-13.

offering as a fact and establish a connection between those making the offering and whatever is offered.¹⁹

The Greek word for sacrifice is *thuō*; the basic meaning is “to sacrifice.”. The LXX uses it for sacrifices both to God (Gen 31, 54) and to alien gods (Ex 34, 15), while the New Testament uses it only for pagan sacrifices (Acts 14, 13; 1 Cor 10, 20). In connection with burnt offerings, the word also means “to immolate,” then “to slay” (cf. Lk 15, 23; Acts 10, 13). It is used for killing the Passover lamb in Mk 14, 12 (cf. 1 Cor 6, 7: Christ, our paschal lamb, has been slain). The word *thusía* means the act of sacrifice, literally, both pagan and Old Testament (cf. in the New Testament Lk 2, 24; 1 Cor 10, 18), and figuratively for the death of Christ as an offering to God (Eph 5, 2), and the Christian life as an offering of the self (Rom 12, 1), whether in gifts (Phil 4, 18), praise (Heb 13, 15-16), or sharing and doing good (Heb 13, 16).²⁰

1.2. The Background of Sacrifice in Ancient Israel

The idea and practice of sacrifice are prominent throughout the biblical narrative. The canonical biblical account states that offerings and sacrifices have been a part of biblical history since the days of Cain and Abel (Gen 4). Cain offered agricultural products as the first known sacrifice, and Abel offered some of his flock’s firstborn animals along with their fat portions (Gen 4, 3-5). The term *minḥā*, which generally denotes a gift of honour or reverence to a superior (e.g., Ex 43, 11, 15, 25-26; Judg 3, 15, 17-18), applies to both offerings. *Minḥā* later became a technical term for a ‘grain offering’ in the Israelite sacrificial system (Lev 2, 12).²¹

As stated in the Bible, ‘Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking of every clean animal and every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar’ (Gen 8, 20-21). Genesis indicates that the Lord accepted the sacrifice: he anthropomorphically ‘smelled the pleasing aroma’ and established a covenant with them and all other living creatures (9, 8-17). Ultimately, Noah’s offering of thanks also served as a covenant sacrifice. The Israelite sacrificial system would later adopt several significant paradigmatic elements, some of which were first introduced by Noah’s sacrifice. These consist of the following: the use of an altar; the category of “burnt offering” as a tool for simple worship that can serve multiple purposes; the limitation of sacrificial victims to clean or pure

¹⁹ Cf. H. J. FABRY, “*qorbān; qurbān*”, in *TDOT*, XIII, 152-153. See also in P. A. NORDELL, “Sacrifice and Worship”, in *The Old Testament Student* 8/7 (1889) 258.

²⁰ Cf. J. BEHM, “θύω, θυσία, θυσιαστήριον”, in *TDNT*, III, 180-181.

²¹ Cf. R. E. GANE, “Sacrifice and the Old Testament”, in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology* (20-02-2024).

creatures; and the fragrant effect of sacrificial smoke.²²

1.2.1. Age of the Patriarchs

Abraham and the other patriarchs built altars and presented offerings (Gen 12, 7-8; 22, 13), Jethro offered burnt and peace offerings on behalf of Israel (Ex 18, 12), and Moses ratified the covenant at Sinai using burnt and peace offerings offered on a solitary altar constructed there (Ex 24, 38).²³ The same terminology used for sacrifice in the Torah can mean something different in each book. Thus, Cain and Abel each brought a “gift” (Gen 4, 4), which was usually of a cereal nature, as brought by Cain (Lev 2) could also refer to an animal offering (1 Sam 2, 17; 26, 19). Noah offered a burnt offering (Gen 8, 20) and the pleasing odour of the sacrifice is stressed. The Patriarchs Abraham (Gen 12, 8, 13-14; 21, 33) and Isaac (Gen 26, 25) are normally said to have “called the name of the Lord.” the association of this phrase with the building of an altar shows that it refers to the approach to God through sacrifice. Job is also depicted as making burnt offerings periodically (Job 1, 5) and for specific purposes (Job 42, 7-9).²⁴

1.2.2. From Moses to Samuel

The covenant sacrifice inaugurating the relationship between the Lord and his people (Ex 24, 3-8) is not paralleled by specific rituals in the Mosaic liturgy. Burnt and peace offerings were first offered, and then the blood from them. In Canaan, the Israelites offered sacrifices at places like Bochim (Judg 2, 1-5) and Ophrah (Judg 6, 24-26). The main centre for sacrificial ritual was at Shiloh (1Sam 1, 3), where faithful Israelites came for an annual festive offering.²⁵

1.2.3. The Monarchy

During the period of the united monarchy, the Israelites offered sacrifices at various ‘high places’ before the construction of the temple as the centralised location for worship. Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father, David. As such, Solomon sacrificed many burnt offerings on the altar at the great high place at Gibeon (1 Kgs 3, 2-4).²⁶ Under Saul, the main worship centre was evidently Nob (1 Sam 21, 1), though private offerings were made at Shiloh (2 Sam 15, 12). With the dedication of Solomon’s Temple,

²² Cf. GANE, “Sacrifice and the Old Testament”, in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology* (20-02-2024).

²³ Cf. R. E. AVERBECK, “Sacrifices and Offerings”, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament. Pentateuch*, 706.

²⁴ Cf. A. RAINEY, “Sacrifice”, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, XVII, 643.

²⁵ Cf. RAINEY, “Sacrifice”, 643.

²⁶ Cf. GANE, “Sacrifice and the Old Testament” (20-02-2024).

Jerusalem became the focus of the sacrificial ritual (1 Kg 8, 5; 2 Chr 5, 6; 7, 4-8). Jeroboam I of the northern kingdom established shrines at Dan and Bethel (1 Kg 12, 28-29). Various references show that sacrifices were offered regularly at Jerusalem (2 Chr 13, 10-11; 24, 14; 2 Kg 12, 5-17). Sacrificing on the high places was also tolerated in Judah (2 Chr 15, 17; 20, 23); Hezekiah abolished many of them (2 Kg 18, 4) and seems to have reconstituted the Temple as a sacrificial centre (2 Chr 29, 21-35; 32, 12).²⁷ People can establish, uphold, or restore order in time, space, and social relationships amidst the chaos of their world and collective lives by participating in rituals. Thus, the ritual system of ancient Israel was created to promote meaningful and active engagement with God, the world, and people.

1.3. The Origin of Israelite Sacrificial Ritual

Whenever Israel came before the Lord to worship Him, praise Him, thank Him, and ask His forgiveness, they did it through its sacrificial rites. However, the Old Testament does not give us a definition or a theology of sacrifice. Israel did not initiate its various rites, but they used the same basic rites as their Canaanite neighbours. However, Israel's sacrifice was not simply an exact imitation of the traditional Semitic rites; it had its own distinctive character. Yahweh was not the same as other gods and should not be worshipped as they were doing.²⁸ Therefore, the question is whether Israel's neighbours practised similar forms of sacrifice in the past, and if so, whether Israel adopted their rituals from the neighbouring Semitic peoples' cultural heritage. To answer this, Ronald de Vaux, in his monumental work *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, compares the rites used in Israelite sacrifices with the rituals of Mesopotamian sacrifice, sacrifice among the ancient Arabs and Canaanite sacrifice and draws certain conclusions regarding the origin of the sacrificial ritual practices of Israel.

1.3.1. Mesopotamian Sacrifice

The normal term for sacrifice in Akkadian is *nequ*. The meaning of *nequ* is a 'libation' of water, wine, beer and so on, made with a sacrifice. The sacrifice was, first and foremost, a meal offered to a god. The altar was the god's table, and every food people ate was laid upon it. In Mesopotamia, the blood of victims was used only in a minor way: it is doubtful whether it was

²⁷ Cf. RAINEY, "Sacrifice", 643.

²⁸ Cf. J. S. HOMLISH, "Sacrifice in Israel", in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, XII, 510.

ever used in the ritual, for there is no explicit reference to libations of blood in normal sacrifices.²⁹ The sacrifice is a meal of the god, from which the king-priest, clergy, and temple personnel receive their part. However, referring to these offerings as “communion sacrifices” would be incorrect because the person making the sacrifice got nothing in return; instead, the people running the cult kept everything for themselves.³⁰

In ordinary sacrifices, no part of the victim was burnt upon the altar, and the essential forms of Israelite sacrifice, namely the holocaust and the communion sacrifice, did not exist in Mesopotamia. Similar customs are mentioned only for particular occasions: an animal was wholly or partly burnt in certain ceremonies of purification and consecration, which sometimes included anointing with blood. In short, there may be some tenuous and secondary contacts between the sacrificial system followed in Israel, and that followed in Babylonia, but apart from these, the two systems are very different from each other and certainly independent of each other.³¹ Therefore, there may be some contact between the sacrificial systems of these two nations, but the two systems are very different and independent of each other.

1.3.2. Sacrifice Among the Ancient Arabs

The most direct contact the Israelites had with the region and culture was with that of Northern Arabia. The inhabitants of this area made offerings to the gods, but we have no clear evidence. Usually, the first fruits of the harvest and an additional portion of the loot were presented to their gods. They offered no incense or perfumes; instead, they offered animal sacrifices. Since no portion of the victim was ever burned on an altar, the sacrifices were not comparable to the Israelites’ *‘ōlāh* (holocaust) and *zēbah* (communion sacrifices). They did not, in fact, have any altar like the Israelites did.³²

Southern Arabia had both sanctuaries and rituals. Dues and offerings were presented to the temples, and sacrifices were properly offered upon the altars. Animals were offered in sacrifice, and the victims chosen were usually sheep or bulls, and wild animals, such as gazelles and leopards, were also used. As far as is known, the Mesopotamian sacrificial system is less similar

²⁹ Cf. R. DE VAUX, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions*, trans. J. McHugh, Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, London 1961, 433-434.

³⁰ Cf. VAUX, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1964, 43.

³¹ Cf. VAUX, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions*, 434-435.

³² Cf. VAUX, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions*, 436-437.

to the Arabian system than it is to Israel. For instance, the significance of animal sacrifices, the necessity of sacrificing the same kind of animal, and the custom of sharing the victims' flesh. These common features confirm the view that Israelite rites were of ancient origin. However, we cannot draw the conclusion that Israel took up any of these rituals from the ancient Arabs because key components of the Israelite system are absent from Arabia: for example, all Israelite sacrifices involved completely or partially burning the victim on an altar, a custom that was absent from Arabia.³³

1.3.3. Canaanite Sacrifice

We get the information of Canaanite sacrifices from three different sources: the allusions in the Bible (the condemnations that it utters against the cult of the Baals and the Astartes when the Israelites took part in them), inscriptions from the Phoenician homeland and its colonies and the texts of Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit). According to the biblical evidence, Canaanite sacrifices do not seem materially different from those offered to Yahweh. Solomon had Moabites, Ammonites, and Sidonians in his harem, who offered incense and sacrifices to their gods (1 Kg 11, 8). Naaman offered holocausts and communion sacrifices to other gods and vowed that he would in future offer them only to Yahweh (2 Kg 5, 17). The description of the sacrifice on Carmel (1 Kg 18) tells the holocaust of the prophets of Baal is prepared in the same way as that of Elijah. Jehu is supposed to follow the Canaanite ritual in the story about the temple of Baal (2 Kg 10,18-27), and both *zebḥa* and *ʿōlāh* are mentioned there. These were offerings meant for Yahweh, but Jeremiah speaks in the same terms of the sacrifices and incense offered to Baal (Jer 7, 9; 11, 12, 13; 32, 29).³⁴

The reason the Bible condemns this cult is not because of the rituals practised within it but rather because the offerings were made to gods other than Yahweh or in illegitimate sanctuaries. According to the Bible, there was a fundamental similarity between the Canaanite sacrifice and the Israelite sacrifice, but biblical texts cannot prove that the technical terms used in connection with the sacrifice were the same among the Canaanites and the Israelites. Canaanite terminology must be sought in Phoenician and Punic inscriptions. Among the Punic inscriptions, the most important for our purpose are two pricelists, called respectively the Carthage pricelist and the price-list of Marseilles, a stone taken from North Africa. These lists fix the amount of money to

³³ Cf. VAUX, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions*, 437-438.

³⁴ Cf. VAUX, *Studies in OT Sacrifice*, 44.

be paid for each kind of sacrifice, including the portion of the sacrifice that is given to the priest and the part that is given to the person making the sacrifice; they do not, however, give a description of the rites, or do they tell us about the motives for which the various sacrifices are offered.³⁵ Therefore, we cannot conclude that Israel took all its rituals for sacrifices from Canan. However, the Israelite ritual is far more similar to Canan's ritual than that of Mesopotamia or Arabia.

Hence, De Vaux makes the conclusion that the feature which distinguishes Israelite and Canaanite rituals from those of other Semitic people is that when an animal is sacrificed, the victim or at least a part of it is burnt upon an altar. This rite did not exist in Mesopotamia or Arabia, but it did exist among the Moabites and the Ammonites, according to the allusions in the Bible. The sacrifice *'ōlāh*, in which the whole victim is burnt upon the altar, corresponds to the Greek holocaust. The custom of burning either the whole or part of the victim upon an altar was obtained in Canaan before the Israelites came to Palestine. There is no certain proof that the Israelites practised the custom when they were semi-nomads, and probably the oldest form of sacrifice they practised was the offering of Paschal lamb. This sacrifice was closely linked with the history of their sojourn in the desert: no part of the victim was burnt; blood played an important role, and the faithful ate the meat. When they settled in Canaan, they adopted the sacrifices called *zebḥa* and *'ōlāh* from the Canaanites, which were burnt upon the altar. They combined with the ancient rites about the use of blood rites, which retained their efficacy and which were not found among the Canaanites. Afterwards, they both developed their own rituals independently of each other.³⁶

1.4. The Procedure of Sacrifice

A sacrificial ritual comprises several stages, namely (i) the offerer approaches the sanctuary with the animal to be sacrificed, (ii) Lays a hand on it, (iii) slaughters it, (iv) the priest performs a blood ritual (sprinkling, pouring out and applying) (v) the priest prepares and burns the sacrifice on the altar (vi) the flesh may be eaten, and the remains are disposed of. The detailed rules for the final three stages vary according to the kind of sacrifice offered and for what reason.³⁷ It meant that the victim represented the offerer. What was about to take place in the victim's body expressed

³⁵ Cf. VAUX, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions*, 438-439.

³⁶ Cf. VAUX, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions*, 440-441.

³⁷ Cf. P. P. JENSON, "The Levitical Sacrificial System", in R. T. BECKWITH – M. J. SELMAN (ed.), *Sacrifice in the Bible*, Paternoster Press, Carisle, UK 1995, 27.

what was taking place in the offeror's mind, namely, his regret for past sins, his total surrender to God, and his desire to ascend and be united with God like the smoke rising from the altar.³⁸

1.5. The Role and Purpose of Sacrifice

Sacrifices are one of the ways that devotees of religion relate with their objects of worship for divine assistance. People from ancient cultures offered sacrifices to obtain divine favours or maintain a relationship with their objects of worship. The goal of the Israelite sacrifice was to restore the nation's relationships with God and among its members. The Sinai Covenant had created a fellowship characterised by life and order, harmony between God and people and between people and people. The community as a whole was at risk from anything that upset this order, such as sin, illness, or death, and the main way to put things right and bring peace back was through sacrifice. According to Leviticus, sacrificial blood is necessary to cleanse and sanctify.³⁹

The sacrificer substituted the victim for himself. By placing his hands upon it, he transferred sins to the animal. When the animal was killed, the sins were carried away, and the life principle was released. The blood which was shed incorporated the life principle of the victim; when this blood was poured out at the foot of the altar or sprinkled on the deity, it brought the life of the sacrificer into contact with the deity. It thus established or re-established the bond between God and his servant. This use of blood in the ritual was meant to bring about the closest possible contact between God and that part of the victim because it was held to contain the life principle, which belonged to him alone.⁴⁰ The purpose of the sacrifice was to restore the right relationship with God, which was lost due to sin. Hence, we understand that the animal represents the worshipper. Its immolation on the altar appeases God's wrath over human sin, and its death provides atonement for the worshipper.

1.6. Theories of Sacrifice

Many theories have been suggested to explain why people have offered sacrifices through the centuries. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, anthropologists, sociologists and historians of religion proposed some theories of sacrifice and offering. Three are especially helpful in understanding the underlying rationale of various dimensions of the ancient Israelite sacrificial

³⁸ Cf. HOMLISH, "Sacrifice in Israel", 513.

³⁹ Cf. G. J. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT, Grand Rapids, MI 1979, 25-26.

⁴⁰ Cf. VAUX, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions*, 449.

system.

The founder of anthropology, Edward Burnett Tylor, emphasised the gift aspect of sacrifice. The “*gift theory*” views sacrifices and offerings as gifts that express homage or thanksgiving. In general, they are means of approaching God and bearing gifts pleasing to him.⁴¹ Giving a gift to a superior was a way of showing respect in Near Eastern culture (2 Kg 5, 5; Jdgs. 3, 17). Since the Canaanites believed their gods gave life to everything that grew in the soil, they supported the idea of tribute in the gift component of Israelite sacrifice. The Israelites selected the animals and vegetables they would need for sustenance and brought them as gifts to the Lord. The distribution of the first fruits of the wheat and barley harvest demonstrated this gift-tribute aspect. As a token of gratitude, the Israelites joyfully presented the first fruits to the Lord (Lev 23, 10–11; Deut 26, 1–11). To demonstrate God’s dominion over His creation, the firstborn son and the firstborn male domestic animals were also brought before the Lord (Ex 13, 1–2).⁴² According to this theory, people present the produce of their labour in sacrifice as an expression of gratitude for the Lord’s favour.

The father of comparative religion, Robertson Smith, emphasised sacrifice’s psychological and sociological dimensions. He discovered its essence in a communion meal. He claims it is an act of social fellowship between the worshippers and the deity through a communal meal rather than just a tribute.⁴³ The general characteristics of communion sacrifice were the immolation of the victim and a subsequent sharing of the victim by God, the priests, and the offerer. This sacrificial meal symbolically renewed the personal fellowship between Yahweh and His people.⁴⁴ Sacrificing and sharing the part of the sacrificial victim symbolised restoring the relationship between Yahweh and his people.

Third, there is the “*consecration*” theory of sacrifice. French sociologists Henry Hubert and Marcel Mauss focused their research on Hindu and Hebrew sacrifice, concluding that sacrifice is a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned. According to

⁴¹ Cf. S. A. COOK, “The Theory of Sacrifice”, in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 22/88 (1921) 327.

⁴² Cf. HOMLISH, “Sacrifice in Israel”, 513.

⁴³ Cf. W. R. SMITH, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, KTAV Publishing House, New York, 1969 227. See also in A. RAYMOND, “The Origin and Significance of Hebrew Sacrifice”, in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 7/3 (1977) 123.

⁴⁴ Cf. HOMLISH, “Sacrifice in Israel”, 513–514.

them, the sacrificial victim is an intermediary between the ‘profane’ and the ‘sacred’.⁴⁵ By its very nature, every offering or sacrifice brought to the Lord was dedicated to the Lord. When presenting the offering to the Lord at the sanctuary, the one making it laid their hand on it (Lev 1, 4; 3, 2; 4, 4). It connected the giver to the offering and dedicated the animal to the Lord in order to fulfil the offering’s intended uses.⁴⁶

1.7. Various Kinds of Sacrifice

The richness of the Israelite ritual allowed for many different classes and modes of sacrifice, depending upon the nature of sacrifice, the things offered and how the sacrifice was offered.

1.7.1. Public and Private Sacrifices

Public sacrifices were offered for the community as a whole. In Lev 4, 13-21, a young bull was to be offered as a sin offering for an inadvertent fault of the people. Sacrifices offered for the alleviation of a plague (2 Sam 24, 21-25; 1 Chr 21, 22-27), for the sin of a priest having social consequences (Lev 4, 3; 16, 11), sacrifices at the consecration of an altar, at the ordination of a priest (Lev 8, 1-36), at the installation of a king (1 Sam 10,8; 11,15) and the outset or end of a battle (1 Sam 7, 9; 13, 9) were all public sacrifices.⁴⁷

The two defining acts of public worship in Israel are celebrating festivals and offering sacrifices. The sacrifices offered by Israel to Yahweh serve three important intentions in the service of the covenant between the two parties. (1) Sacrifice is the presentation of a gift, an act of recognition, generosity and gratitude toward Yahweh, the initial giver of all Israel has. Presenting a material gift of value costs the worshiper in an act that binds the worshiper to Yahweh. (2) The offering of animal and vegetable sacrifices creates an occasion for a meal, the typical social occasion of being with another in joy and well-being. Thus, the sacrifice is an act of communion wherein Israel can enjoy the company of Yahweh. (3) in Israel’s liturgical practice, there is a need for acts of expiation whereby Israel’s disobedience or violation of holiness has created a tangible impediment to communion with Yahweh. The impediment may be understood relationally as a violation of the covenant that has broken the relationship and needs to be repaired, where the material presence of Yahweh becomes impossible. Such an understanding is characteristic of the

⁴⁵ Cf. COOK, “The Theory of Sacrifice”, 328.

⁴⁶ Cf. AVERBECK, “Sacrifices and Offerings”, 709.

⁴⁷ Cf. HOMLISH, “Sacrifice in Israel”, 512.

Priestly tradition; what is unholy or unclean must be purged for recovered purity. Therefore, the “sin offering” and “guilt offering” are understood as acts of purgation or purification whereby a restored relationship is possible and the presence of Yahweh, the holy God, can again be regained.⁴⁸ The “sin offering” and “guilt offering” are the acts of purification where a restored relationship is possible with Yahweh.

Private sacrifices were offered on behalf of individuals. The sacrifice for sin had a graduated system of expiatory victims depending on the rank and public character of the offender (Lev 4). Peace offerings, communion sacrifices and holocausts or wholly burnt offerings all served as private sacrifices. In addition, offerings were made on behalf of individuals to celebrate certain personal events, such as the sacrifices offered after childbirth (Lev 12, 6-7) and at the consecration of Nazirites (1 Sam 1, 24-28).⁴⁹

1.7.1.1. The Burnt Offering (Holocaust)

The burnt offering (*‘ōlāh*) is the most important of all the Israelites’ sacrificial rituals. It contains a richness of meaning at different times and occasions and fulfils various functions far beyond any other sacrificial rite. The reason for describing the burnt offering first is that it was the commonest of all the sacrifices, performed every morning and evening and more frequently on holy days. It is followed by instructions for cereal offerings and peace offerings because they are like the burnt offering in being “food offerings” producing “a soothing aroma for the Lord” (The odour of burning flesh placates the wrath of God; Lev 1, 9, 13, 17; 2, 2, 9, 16; 3, 5, 16).⁵⁰ Moreover, the burnt offering and its associated rituals provided inspiration for numerous sacrificial concepts and themes that the early Christians adopted. Mar Ivanios, similarly, connects the Old Testament burnt offering to religious consecration as a total offering of oneself.

The burnt offering was the only general sacrifice in terms of the relationship between the devotee and his God. While the peace offering was made concerning some particular mercy of God and the trespass and sin offerings about some particular sin, the burnt offering was a general acknowledgement of the whole duty of human beings to God, especially of Israel to Yahweh. Self-surrender and self-dedication are the keynotes of Israel’s relation to God under the covenant He

⁴⁸ Cf. W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Worship in Ancient Israel. An Essential Guide*, Abingdon Press, Nashville 2005, 20-21.

⁴⁹ Cf. HOMLISH, “Sacrifice in Israel”, 512.

⁵⁰ Cf. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 52.

had made with His people.⁵¹ In the burnt offering, the animal represented the worshipper, signifying the worshipper's total consecration to God. It expresses a sincere desire to love the Lord with all of one's heart, strength, soul, and total devotion to Him. These special features of the burnt offering must be the reason why Mar Ivanios compared religious consecration with the burnt offerings in the Old Testament. Thus, to know his concept of *sarvāṅga homayāga* (sacrificing one's whole being on the altar) in religious consecration, we will see the terminology, meaning, rite, and function of burnt offering in detail.

1.7.1.1.1. Terminology of the Burnt Offering

The burnt offering, the most frequently mentioned of the Old Testament sacrifices, is usually referred with the term '*ōlāh*', but also in certain occasions by the terms '*iššeh*' (an offering made by fire), '*kālil*' (signifies whole burnt offering or holocaust).⁵² '*ōlāh*' comes from the verb '*ala*', meaning "to go up, ascend, climb." The idea that the victim rises on the altar or that the smoke goes up towards God is clearly implied in the noun. '*kālil*' signifies a whole burnt offering or holocaust. '*ōlāh*' stresses the idea of going up, whereas '*kālil*' (the word used rarely) stresses the idea of wholeness or integrity. It stresses the idea of "total" sacrifice in 1Sam 7, 9, in Deut 33, 10, and Ps 51, 21, which is the only place where '*kālil*' is mentioned in the same verse with '*ōlāh*'.⁵³ The English word 'holocaust' comes through the vulgate from the Septuagint. In the Septuagint, it is a translation of the Hebrew '*ōlāh*', from a root meaning 'to go up': a holocaust then is a sacrifice which is 'taken up' on to the altar in other words, whose smoke 'goes up' to God when it is burnt. The characteristic feature of this sacrifice is that the entire victim is burnt, and nothing is given back to the one who offers it or to the priest. This is why the Greek translates it as 'holocaust' meaning wholly burnt, and the term '*ōlāh*' has sometimes been replaced by the word '*kālil*', meaning a 'total sacrifice'.⁵⁴

1.7.1.1.2. Origins of Burnt Offering

The historical origins of the Israelite burnt offerings are obscure. The most satisfying hypothesis is that a pre-Greek, pre-Semitic people existed in the south of the Taurus Mountains in

⁵¹ Cf. S. C. GAYFORD, *Sacrifice and Priesthood. Jewish and Christian*, Methuen and Co. Ltd, London 1953, 42-43.

⁵² Cf. DALY, *Christian Sacrifice. The Judaeo Christian Background*, 84.

⁵³ Cf. DALY, *Christian Sacrifice. The Judaeo Christian Background*, 34-35.

⁵⁴ Cf. VAUX, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions*, 415.

southern Turkey. They practiced sacrificial banquet (*zepah*) and the burnt offering (*‘ōlāh*). Eventually, they were pushed out or absorbed by the Greeks and Semites, who also adopted their sacrificial ceremonies. In this way, their rites became well-established among the Canaanites (Northwest Semites). The assumption is that Hebrews adopted them from the Canaanites at the time of the settlement after Moses and Joshua.⁵⁵

Several factors suggest that the burnt offering is the most important sacrifice. It is the most prominent sacrifice during the Israelite festivals, and it has a pre-eminent position in the prescriptive lists; only male animals can be offered, and it is completely burnt (the priest cannot benefit from its flesh). It was the premier expiatory or atoning sacrifice. According to this understanding, the death of the sacrificial animal (symbolised by the shedding of blood) substitutes with the offerer and thereby ransoms his/her life, which was forfeit because of his/her sin against God. The laying on of hands (Lev 1, 4) identifies the substitute, whose death (v 5) takes place instead of the sinner and results in acceptance (vv 3-4), represented by the pleasing odour (v 9). The burnt offering is distinct from other atoning sacrifices because the burnt offering represents a gift to God. The laying on of hands identifies the gift as the offerer; no return is expected (whether atonement or eating the flesh), and the gift evokes a positive response from God.⁵⁶

1.7.1.1.3. The Sacred Fire and Its Significance

In Hindu tradition, *sarvāṅga homayāga* is making offerings into a consecrated fire or burning completely on the altar. Fire has always held a strong fascination for human beings. Likewise, the early Israelites apparently shared the general idea of the sacredness of fire with other primitive peoples. Fire was seen as a connecting link between heaven and earth, between the divine and the human. The burning of the victim was the culminating act of the most solemn and frequently practised Israelite sacrificial rite, the *‘ōlāh*. The fire was also the particular means or mode in which God revealed Himself to human beings, for instance, Abraham’s covenant sacrifice (Gen 15), the revelation from the burning bush (Ex 3, 1-6), the sacrifice of Gideon (Judg 6, 19-24), and of Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kg 18, 30-40).⁵⁷

However, beyond being a means of theophany, fire, particularly the fire on the altar, was

⁵⁵ Cf. R. J. DALY, *Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, Darton, Longmann & Todd Ltd, London 1978, 14.

⁵⁶ Cf. F. H. GORMAN, “Sacrifices and Offerings”, in *NIDB*, V, 28.

⁵⁷ Cf. DALY, *Christian Sacrifice. Judaeo Christian Background*, 62.

seen as the symbol of God's presence. During the monarchy, when the ark was kept out of sight inside the sanctuary, the people tended to see the presence of God in the altar fire and they considered the altar itself as the throne of Yahweh. The purifying and sanctifying power of the altar fire got more emphasis in the late Old Testament period, which we see in the vision of Isaiah 6. The sacred fire normally did not consume what it touched but purified and sanctified it.⁵⁸ Given this context, it becomes clear how important fire was to late Jewish and Christian conceptions of sacrifice. Self-dedication to God's will is the ultimate manifestation of dedication, symbolised by the burnt offering.

1.7.1.1.4. The Rite of Burnt Offering

The characteristic feature of burnt offering was that the whole animal was burned on the altar. However, before the animal was burned, various rituals are performed on it. First, the animal was brought by its owner into the outer court of the tabernacle or temple to the entrance of the tent of meeting. When it is brought to the entrance of the tent of meeting, the worshipper laid his hands on the animal's head. Then, the worshipper had to kill the animal on the north side of the altar. The word *shāhat* which is used for denoting the killing of an animal is a special term usually reserved for sacrificial slaughter in the Old Testament. In the burnt offering, the priests had to collect the blood in a basin as it was poured out of the dying animal. This blood was offered to God. Then, the animal was chopped up by the worshipper, and the priest burned it bit by bit on the top of the altar, beginning with the head and the fat.⁵⁹ Blood contains life; it itself is life. Therefore, humans have no right to consume blood (Gen 9, 4; Lev 7, 27, 17, 14).⁶⁰

1.7.1.1.5. The Purpose of the Burnt Offering

In ancient times, the worshipper was actively involved in the worship. The offerer had to choose an unblemished animal from his own flock, bring it to the sanctuary, kill it and dismember it with his own hands, and then watch it go up in smoke before his very eyes. After all these rituals, the worshipper gets the conviction that something very significant was achieved through these acts and his relationship with God was profoundly influenced by this sacrifice. The first point is that the victim must be a perfect male animal. In some kinds of peace offerings, slightly blemished

⁵⁸ Cf. DALY, *Christian Sacrifice. Judaeo Christian Background*, 63.

⁵⁹ Cf. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 52-54.

⁶⁰ Cf. VAUX, *Studies in OT Sacrifice*, 42.

animals could be offered, but this was never allowed in the case of a burnt offering (Lev 22, 23). Male animals were regarded as more valuable than females. For example, in the case of purification offerings, a ruler had to bring a he-goat, but an ordinary person was expected to offer only a she-goat (Lev 4, 22-31). Except for the burnt offering and reparation offerings, animals of either sex could be offered: the selection limited to male animals shows the high status of these two sacrifices.⁶¹ “The purpose of this sacrifice (*’ōlāh*) was to make atonement, to become reconciled with God. The difference between the *’ōlāh* and the other sacrifices of atonement was that it was of a widely embracing, general character, whereas the others atoned for or expiated specific sins.”⁶²

The chief goal of the sacrifice is to make peace with God. Leviticus lays down several rules, the infringement of which will mean that a sacrifice will not be accepted (7, 18; 22, 23, 25, 27). The idea that sacrifice pleases God is expressed in the phrase characteristic of Lev 1-3, a food offering for the Lord with a soothing aroma (Lev 1, 9, 13, 17). The idea is expressed in the flood story. Before the flood, the Lord saw “how extensive man’s wickedness on the earth was, and that every scheme in man’s imagination was perpetually evil” (Gen 6, 5). So, he decided to destroy human beings. After the flood, Noah offered a sacrifice. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done” (Gen 8, 21).⁶³

According to Lev 1, 4, the main goal of the burnt offering is to atone. It expiates the sins of the worshipper. In Gen 8, 21, God’s attitudes to man are reversed by the burnt offering. Instead of a flood, there is a promise that the harvest will not fail, and a covenant is made with future generations that a universal flood will never again destroy the earth. Thus, the burnt offering does not change man’s sinful nature but makes fellowship between sinful man and a holy God possible. It propitiates God’s wrath against sin. The idea that the burnt offering appeases God’s anger is expressed in many other passages. If a commandment was broken unwittingly, offering a burnt offering and other sacrifices was necessary (Num 15, 24). David’s decision to take a census

⁶¹ Cf. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 55.

⁶² W.O.E. OESTERLEY, *Sacrifices in Ancient Israel. Their Origin, Purposes and Development*, Macmillan, New York 1937, 221.

⁶³ Cf. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 56.

brought a plague upon all of Israel, and many died. It stopped when David offered burnt and peace offerings (2 Sam 24, 25; 1 Chr 21, 26). In 2 Chr 29, 7-8, we see that Ahaz's neglect of divine worship mentions that the burnt offerings were not offered. Therefore, the wrath of the Lord came on Judah and Jerusalem. These passages reveal that the function of the burnt offering was to prevent God's displeasure at man's sin from being turned into punishment.⁶⁴

More than atonement, the burnt offering could be offered as an act of obedience or thanksgiving. Gen 22 tells how Abraham was told to sacrifice his only son Isaac as a burnt offering. It was a supreme test of Abraham's faith in God's promise that his children would inherit the land of Canaan. Faced with a divine command that appeared to nullify the promise, Abraham had to decide whether to obey or not. Nevertheless, he obeyed, and at the critical moment, his son was saved, and his own faith was vindicated. Scholars say that the burnt offering was possibly chosen because it was a service in which the worshipper bore witness to his faith in God and his willingness to obey his commandments.⁶⁵ The burnt offering is a selfless submission to God's will, a life of absolute surrender to God; thus, Mar Ivanios compares the religious life with the burnt offering sacrifice in the Old Testament.

1.7.1.2. The Cereal (Grain) Offering

The Hebrew word for grain offering is *minhāh*. In non-religious usage, *minhāh* often means "tribute", the money paid by a vassal king to his overlord as a mark of his continuing goodwill and faithfulness. Transferring this secular meaning of *minhāh* into the religious sphere means a kind of tribute from the faithful worshipper to his divine overlord. When a treaty was made, the conquered nations were expected to bring their tribute to the great king. Israel, too, was bound by a covenant with God and, therefore, was responsible for expressing her fidelity by bringing her cereal offerings.⁶⁶ Leviticus 2 identifies three different types of grain offerings: (1) uncooked flour (wheat) with oil and frankincense added (2, 1-3), (2) unleavened dough (without frankincense) cooked either in an oven or in a pan (2, 4-10) and (3) the first ripened grain. The basic ritual reflects the following structure: the offerer prepares the offering at home and brings it to the priest, who turns a representative portion into smoke on the altar. The food offering provides a pleasing aroma

⁶⁴ Cf. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 57-58.

⁶⁵ Cf. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 58.

⁶⁶ Cf. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 69.

for Yahweh (Lev 2, 2, 9).⁶⁷

The official daily burnt offering was always followed by the cereal offering (Num 28). The burnt and cereal offerings are often mentioned in the historical books (Josh 22, 23, 29; Judg 13, 19, 23; 1 Kg 8, 64; 2 Kg 16, 13, 15). It is, therefore, natural that the cereal offering is placed immediately after the burnt offering in Leviticus. It is also one of three sacrifices (the burnt offering, Lev 1, and the peace offering, Lev 3, are the others) that produce a “soothing aroma to the Lord” (1, 9, 17; 2, 2, 9, 12; 3, 5, 16). However, unlike the burnt and peace offering, it is not an animal sacrifice but a cereal offering. Similarly, only a handful of the cereal was burned in the fire, the rest being given to the priests to eat, whereas, in the burnt offering, everything except the skin was burned.⁶⁸

The priest offered a “handful” of the grain offering on the altar as a “sign offering” or memorial to the Lord, along with the salt of the covenant (Lev 2, 13). The remainder of the grain offering was ‘most holy’, so it was to be consumed only by the priest within the tabernacle precincts (Lev 2, 3; 6, 16-18; Num 18, 9). The only exception was when grain offerings brought by the priests for themselves, which were to be consumed entirely on the altar (Lev 6, 19-23).⁶⁹ Flour and oil were the principal ingredients of the cereal offering. Salt had to be added to every cereal offering. The importance of adding “the salt of the covenant of your God” to every grain offering is emphasised in Lev 2, 13. Wenham explains the importance of adding salt in cereal offerings as follows: “It suggests that salt symbolised the covenant. Greeks and Arabs had eaten salt together when they concluded covenants. In the Old Testament, salt is connected with covenants on two occasions, and in both, a covenant of salt means an eternal covenant (covenant commitment of the Lord to provide for the Aaronic priests Num 18, 19; and the Lord’s covenant commitment to the dynasty of David and his descendants 2 Chr 13, 5). To add salt to the offering was a reminder that the worshipper was in an eternal covenant relationship with his God. This meant that God would never forsake him, and the worshipper had a perpetual duty to uphold and keep the covenant law.”⁷⁰ The nature of salt as a preservative emphasises the enduring nature of the covenant bond between the Lord and his people.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Cf. GORMAN, “Sacrifices and Offerings”, 23.

⁶⁸ Cf. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 67.

⁶⁹ Cf. AVERBECK, “Sacrifices and Offerings”, 714.

⁷⁰ WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 71.

⁷¹ Cf. AVERBECK, “Sacrifices and Offerings”, 714.

The cereal offering was considered to be a gift by the worshipper to God. As we saw above, it usually followed the burnt offering. God has granted forgiveness of sins through the burnt offering, and the worshipper responded by giving God some of the produce of his hands in the cereal offering. It was an act of dedication and consecration to God as Saviour and covenant King. It expressed not only thankfulness but also obedience and willingness to keep the law. Like the burnt offering, the cereal offering was a sacrifice repeated often in the worshipper's lifetime. Humans' sinful nature requires seeking repeatedly divine forgiveness and renewing their dedication to God and his covenant vows.⁷²

The cereal offering symbolised dedicating man's life and work to God. He brought his normal food to the priest and declared his willingness to keep the law. These attitudes should also be proper of the Christian: Paul urged the Romans "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to god, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12, 1). The writer of Hebrew says, "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb 13, 15-16). In ancient Israel, the cereal offerings were presented morning and evening at a specific time (1 Kg 18, 36; 2 Kg 3, 20). A Christian is called to be as regular and diligent in rededicating himself/herself to Christ's service as the people of ancient Israel.⁷³

1.7.1.3. Peace Offering

The peace offering follows the burnt offering and the cereal offering because, like them, it is one of the offerings that are burned to produce a *soothing aroma for the Lord* (Lev 3, 5, 16; 1, 9; 2, 2). It did not form part of the regular daily offerings in the temple, whereas the burnt and cereal offerings were brought every morning and evening. The worshipper was allowed to eat part of the animal in the peace offering. Some animal was burned in the peace offering, and the rest was returned to the worshipper for his own consumption. Therefore, the peace offering is a festive meal in or near the sanctuary. Female and male animals could be used in the peace offering.⁷⁴ In a peace offering, the worshipper demonstrated his complete fidelity to the Lord of the covenant. It

⁷² Cf. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 71-72.

⁷³ Cf. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 72.

⁷⁴ Cf. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 74-75.

was certainly offered occasionally when the covenant was being ratified or renewed.⁷⁵

The peace offering was an optional sacrifice a man could bring when he felt like it. This offering epitomises that sacrifice is a communal meal between God and humans. The occasion for such a sacrifice could be thanksgiving for a blessing received, the completion of a vow to the Lord, or simply the free offering of a glad heart.⁷⁶ The distinctive nature of this offering was the communal celebration of the worshipers, occasioned by the sharing of the meat of the offering. It was a “fellowship” or “communion” offering that indicated the fact that there was “peace” between God and his people. The peace offering could be of cattle, sheep, or goat. As with the other sacrifices and offerings, the animal has to be with no defect, but in contrast with the burnt offering, it could be either male or female (Lev 3, 1). The common people could eat only the meat of the peace offering (Lev 7, 11-36). In addition, Lev 17, 11 explains why no one in Israel was to eat the blood of any peace-offering animal: ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for your lives on the altar, for it is the blood that makes atonement for the life’ (Lev 17, 14). The eating of the fat was also prohibited (Lev 3, 16-17). Both the fat and the blood belong to the Lord alone: the fat because it was reserved for making a ‘gift’ to the Lord (Lev 3, 11) and the blood because it was reserved solely for the purpose of ‘making atonement’ (Lev 17, 11).⁷⁷

1.7.1.4. Purification/Sin Offering

In Hebrew, the word *hatta'th* means both sin and the rite does away with sin (Lev 4,1-5; 6, 17-23). A purification offering was made for unwitting sins committed or specified impurity states (childbirth, skin disease). The type of victim depended on the rank of the person who had sinned. A bull was to be offered for a sin of the high priest, the ‘anointed priest,’ for his guilt defiled the entire people; a bull was also prescribed when the people itself had sinned; a he-goat was to be offered for the sin of the ‘prince’, the lay head of the community. The poor could offer two turtle doves or two pigeons instead of these expensive victims: one of the birds was used as a sacrifice for sin, and the other was offered as a holocaust. The poor could also offer flour instead of any of these animals.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Cf. WENHAM, *Book of Leviticus*, 77.

⁷⁶ Cf. D. G. REID, “Sacrifice and Temple Service”, in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 1038.

⁷⁷ Cf. AVERBECK, “Sacrifices and Offerings”, 715-716.

⁷⁸ Cf. VAUX, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions*, 418-419.

The ritual for these sacrifices is distinguished from that used in another sacrifice by two things: the use to which the blood is put and how the victim's flesh is disposed of. The blood played a more important part in this sacrifice than any other. When the sacrifice was offered for the high priest or the entire people, there were three successive rites: the priest who was performing the sacrifice first collected the blood, entered into the Holy place, and sprinkled the blood seven times against the veil which curtains off the Holy of Holies; then he rubbed blood upon the corners of the altar of incense, which stood before the veil. Thirdly, he poured out the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar of holocausts. These were the only animal sacrifice in which part of the victim was carried inside the Temple building. These rites underline the value of blood in expiating sin; it can be used to expiate sin because it is the means of life: the life of the flesh is in its blood. The blood contained life; for the Hebrews, the blood was life (Lev 17, 11, 14; Gen 9, 4; Deut 12, 23).⁷⁹

1.7.1.5. The Sacrifice of Reparation

The other kind of expiatory sacrifice is called an *asham*. The word means an offence, how the offence is righted, and finally, a sacrifice of reparation. This offering is prescribed for unintentional violations and sins of sacrilege regarding any of the Lord's holy things against the Lord's commands or for sins against one's neighbour. This sacrifice was offered only on behalf of private individuals, and as a result, the blood was never taken into the Holy place, and the victim has never burned away from the sanctuary; secondly, the only victim referred to is a ram (male sheep without defect); thirdly, in certain cases, the sacrifice was to be accompanied by the payment of a fine (Lev 5, 14-16, 21-26): if the rights of God or a man had been infringed in a way which could be estimated in terms of money, then the guilty person had to offer a ram for reparation and to restore to the priests or to the person whom he had wronged the monetary equivalent of the damage, plus one fifth.⁸⁰

1.8. Fundamental Features of Israelite Sacrifice

Sacrifices and other oblations are gifts humans offer to God, and God prescribes their type, occasion and manner of presentation. The offering of a sacrifice implies a personal cost and intentionality on the part of the one who offers. Sacrifices involving the slaying of an animal evoked a strong sense of representation or substitution of the animal's life for the person or

⁷⁹ Cf. VAUX, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions*, 419.

⁸⁰ Cf. VAUX, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions*, 420.

community, particularly symbolised in the action of placing hands on the head of the animal. The shedding of blood had particular atoning significance. Israelites were reminded that “life is in the blood” and blood was not to be consumed (Lev 17, 11; Deut 12, 23) but was reserved for God alone, the giver and Lord of life. Where the sacrifice is offered for particular or generalised sins, it is implicit that the animal is paying the price for an offence committed by the person or community offering it.⁸¹ One strong emphasis in the offering of sacrifices is the concept of perfection. Sacrificial objects are expected to be perfect. It implies that the sacrificial objects are expected to be devoid of physical deformity. In the sacrificial system of the Jews, all animals offered in sacrifice to God had to be the best available. In fact, only offerings free of blemish and defect are acceptable; failure to meet these requirements rendered a sacrifice inefficacious (Lev 22, 17-22).⁸²

Therefore, for sacrifice to be perfect, the Jews had three conditions: (1) The thing offered must be the personal property of the sacrificer: “of thy flock”, “of the fruit of thy ground” (Ex 22, 29; 23, 16; Lev 1, 2; Deut 12, 6). This means that it is not the intrinsic value of the gift that God regards, but it is the cost to the giver. The self-sacrifice in the gift makes it precious in his eyes. Then, all sacrifice, so far as it is worth anything in the sight of God, is self-sacrifice.⁸³ (2) The offerings chosen were the staple articles of daily food: oxen, sheep, goats, pigeons and field produce, corn oil and wine (Ps 4, 7). The Hebrew sacrifices are strictly confined to the articles of daily food that support daily life. The sacrifice was making a gift which very closely represented himself. (3) All kinds of food were not offered in the sacrifices. Wild birds, fish, and the natural produce of the land that grew wild, such as wild fruit, milk, and honey, though used as offerings by other Semitic races, were not admitted to the list of Jewish offerings. In a pastoral or agricultural community, this would imply the personal labour of the sacrifice in the rearing of the victim. If it did not represent his personal labour directly, he must pay for it with money.⁸⁴ Thus, in Israel, an offering to be perfect demanded some sacrifice from the offerer: self-oblation.

However, as we all know, the prophets, especially the seventh and eighth centuries B. C., harshly condemned the practice of relying on sacrifices when it was separated from the social

⁸¹ Cf. REID, “Sacrifice and Temple Service”, 1036-1037.

⁸² Cf. M. A. OGUNEWU, “The Perfection Emphasis of Sacrifices in the Old Testament as Value for Quality Christian Worship”, in *Baptist College of Theology* 10 (2017) 256.

⁸³ Cf. S. C. GAYFORD, *Sacrifice and Priesthood. Jewish and Christian*, Methuen & Co. Ltd, London 1953, 18.

⁸⁴ Cf. GAYFORD, *Sacrifice and Priesthood. Jewish and Christian*, 20-21.

righteousness necessary for Israel to have an appropriate relationship with God. Amos declares that God will not take delight in the burnt offerings and sacrifices of the people (Amos 5, 21-24). “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings” (Hos 6, 6) is the message of Hosea. Isaiah denounces the Temple treading of men whose hands are full of blood and cries: “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or lambs, or he-goats” (Is 1, 11). In a well-known passage, Micah asks whether Yahweh will be pleased with thousands of rams or in ten thousand rivers of oil, but what He requires is ‘to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God’ (Mic 6, 7-8).⁸⁵ The prophets’ teaching forcefully and constructively protested the system’s obvious abuses rather than rejecting it. They emphasised moral behaviour and humanitarian concerns rather than cultic rituals. Having dealt with the Old Testament concept of sacrifice, let us move on to the New Testament understanding of sacrifice and see how it is spiritualised in Christianity.

1.9. Sacrificial Concepts in the New Testament

The New Testament says little about sacrifice and cult, apparently because most of them grew out of the nomistic rather than the cultic line of Jewish religious thought. The New Testament presents, as a whole, far more affinities to Pharisaism and Hasidism than with the priestly line of thought. The books of Revelation, which focus on worship in the celestial Jerusalem, and Hebrews are the only two New Testament books that go into great detail about the Jewish sacrificial cult and how it was replaced by Christian worship.⁸⁶

1.9.1. Jesus and the Synoptic Tradition

Surprisingly, there is little about the actual performance of sacrifices in the Jesus tradition. In the *infancy narratives*, Mt 2, 11 uses technical sacrificial terms to describe the gifts, especially frankincense, which the Magi offered. Zechariah’s vision about John the Baptist’s future birth occurred as he performed the morning incense offering in the temple (Lk 1, 8-23). Some texts imply a favourable attitude toward sacrifice based on the teachings and activities of Jesus. Chief among these is, “If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your

⁸⁵ Cf. V. TAYLOR, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, Macmillan & Co Ltd, London 1955, 61.

⁸⁶ Cf. DALY, *Christian Sacrifice. The Judaeo Christian Background*, 208.

brother and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5, 23). This expresses the basic Christian conviction that a proper relationship with one’s fellow beings is absolutely necessary for any proper relationship with God and to make offerings.⁸⁷

We see in the Gospel of Mark the sacrificial term *Corban*, which is used to describe one’s responsibility towards parents: “But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, whatever support you might have had from me is *Corban* (that is, an offering to God) then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother” (Mk 7, 11-12). Some accounts of Jesus’ teachings seem to criticise sacrifice. His defence of the disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath (Mt 12, 1-8) clearly implies Jesus’ superiority to the temple and thus helps Christians avoid the temple cult. In the cleansing of the temple (Mk 11, 15-19) pericope Jesus quotes from Is 56, 7 only the zeal for the purity of the temple is stressed, “these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Is 56, 7). He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? (Mk 11, 17). Both imply criticism and spiritualising thrust; Jesus shows explicitly that the temple is, first and foremost, a place not for the sacrificial cultus, which is so easily open to corruption, but for prayer to God. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10, 29-37) implies a strong criticism of the cult, for priests and Levites were expected to keep away from any “defiling”, which would temporarily disqualify them from participation in public worship.⁸⁸

According to the gospel traditions, Jesus never formally repudiated sacrifice, but he did adopt the prophetic point that morality is of far greater importance, ‘I desire mercy not sacrifice’ (Mt 9, 13). In the eyes of Jesus, the scribe who said that love of God and one’s neighbour was more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices was not far from the kingdom of God (Mk 12, 33-34). He rigidly applied the principle that the right attitude is necessary when sacrificing – offering sacrifice without the love of a neighbour makes a sacrifice invalid (Mt 5, 23-24).⁸⁹ For Jesus, seeking reconciliation between fellow beings is the *sine qua non* of true worship. When Pharisees complained that Jesus was guilty of defilement by eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus replied: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick, ‘I desire

⁸⁷ Cf. DALY, *Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 54.

⁸⁸ Cf. DALY, *Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 54-55.

⁸⁹ Cf. YOUNG, *Sacrifice and Death of Christ*, 47-48.

mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call righteous, but sinners” (Mt 9, 12; Mk 2, 13-17). “Sacrifice,” the highest form of Israelite worship, stands for keeping the Mosaic law, which demanded separation from anything defiled as a prerequisite for worship. However, Jesus makes the radical point that what defiles is not the formal association with sinners but the heart which lacks mercy. Humane considerations take precedence over formal observance of the letter of the law.⁹⁰

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of the renunciation required to be his disciple. Addressing all his disciples, Jesus declares: “None of you can be my disciple without giving up all that he owns” (Lk 14, 33). The word in Greek is *apotassetai*, which means “to separate from” someone or something; here, it refers to the act of mind and heart by which the disciple is prepared to renounce everything. This is not the prerequisite to becoming a disciple but the indispensable means to be a disciple.⁹¹ Jesus demands in the gospel, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” (Mt 16, 24-25). Indeed, Jesus repeatedly exhorted his followers to take up their cross and follow him: “Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 10, 38-39). Again, he says, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life (Jn 12, 24-25).⁹² This and the similar words of the Lord clearly reveal the need for sacrifice and mortification in the lives of the followers of Christ. Jesus communicated to His disciples that life would not be simple for those who followed Him; losses and sacrifices would be part of it.

1.9.2. Jesus’ Death on the Cross – The Ultimate Sacrifice

The innocent death of the servant of God on behalf of the many (Is 53, 12) was regarded as a sin offering (Is 53, 10). The martyrdom of the Maccabees was believed to be a means of atonement for the people’s sins (2 Macc 7, 37). For the Jews the vicarious surrender of life has

⁹⁰Cf. C. BROWN, “Sacrifice, First Fruits, Altar, Offering”, in *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, III, 428-429.

⁹¹ Cf. X. L. DUFOUR, “To Lose One’s Life”, trans. J. E. Cunnen, in *Cross Currents* 38/3 (1988) 343.

⁹² Cf. P. MOLINARI – P. GUMPEL, *Chapter VI of the Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium on Religious Life. The Doctrinal Content in the Light of the Official Documents*, trans. M. P. Ewen, Tipografia Poliglotta della Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome 1987, 64.

sacrificial significance. It is a theological key to interpret Jesus's death as a fulfilment of the Old Testament sacrifices and their atoning effect.⁹³ In the sin offering of the Old Testament, by laying hands on the animal's head in the ritual of sacrifice, sinners identified themselves with the animal, indicating that the animal now represented the sinner in his/her sin. Consequently, the sinner's sin was identified with the animal, and its life became forfeit – just as Christ identified himself with human beings in their fallenness (Rom 8, 3) and was made sin (2 Cor 5, 21). Many New Testament references to Christ's sacrifice as a fulfilment of Old Testament types represent him as a lamb, an animal used for various sacrifices. He is represented as the slain lamb of God, whose precious blood takes away the sin of the world.⁹⁴

The gospels often do not use the word sacrifice but rather make use of sacrificial terminology. Mk 10, 45, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many", is one of the great sacrificial sayings of Jesus. Here, the Greek term used is *lutron*; in the LXX, it refers to the ransom money paid for freedom (Ex 21, 30; Lev 25, 51-52; 27, 31); in that sense, it is not a sacrificial term. In Mark, *Lutron* is not referred to as money but as life. In the New Testament, offering one's life has a sacrificial connotation.⁹⁵ The most important Synoptic teaching on sacrifice is contained in the description of the Last Supper. The account of the institution of the Eucharist clearly shows Christ's act to parallel the sacrificial establishment of the covenant at Sinai. In this context, the Death of Christ, narrated in the Gospels, is sacrificial. Particularly in Luke, the Passion and death of Christ are closely linked with the rejection and ultimate destruction of the Old Testament place of sacrifice, Jerusalem (Lk 23, 45). John's Gospel complements the Synoptics on this point by connecting Christ's death on Calvary with the slaying of the paschal victims in the Temple (Jn 19, 14, 36).⁹⁶ The aim of sacrifice is a restored fellowship; its medium is a representative offering; its spiritual condition is the worshipper's attitude; its rationale is the offering of life; its culmination is sharing in the life offered by means of the sacred meal.⁹⁷

According to Don Fleming, the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament could not remove sin,

⁹³ Cf. H. J. KLAUCK, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (NT)", in *ABD*, V, 887.

⁹⁴ Cf. R. T. BECKWITH, "Sacrifice", in *NDBT*, 760.

⁹⁵ Cf. X. P. B. VIAGULAMUTHU, *Offering Our Bodies as a Living Sacrifice to God. A Study in Pauline Spirituality Based on Romans 12, 1*, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma 2002, 255.

⁹⁶ Cf. B. J. COOKE, "Sacrifice in Christian Theology", in *NCE*, XII, 515.

⁹⁷ Cf. TAYLOR, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 295.

but they showed that sacrificial death was necessary for its removal. The one sacrificial death that has achieved what all the Old Testament sacrifices could not achieve is the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, because in his sacrifice the offerer and the victim are not distinct but same. Unlike animal sacrifices, Christ's sacrifice removes sin, cleanses the conscience, brings total forgiveness, and secures eternal redemption.⁹⁸ Jesus offered a sacrifice for sins. He was sinless and did not need to offer such a sacrifice for Himself, but He offered his sacrifice to the Father on our behalf. Christ, in his obedience and holiness, reveals the true meaning of priesthood and the true meaning of sacrifice, namely, offering of self. He came not to be served but to serve (Mk 10, 45; Mt 20, 28). He is the sacrifice par excellence, the model of holiness and obedience. We are invited to share in Christ's life and live as a living sacrifice.⁹⁹

1.9.3. The Johannine Writings

John presents Jesus as substituting Jewish institutions like ritual purification, the Temple, and worship in Jerusalem (Chapters 2-4) and Jewish feasts like the Sabbath, Passover, Tabernacle and Dedication (Chapters 5-10). According to the gospel of John, Jesus travelled several times to Jerusalem to celebrate principal Jewish feasts (2, 13; 5, 1; 7, 14; 10, 22-23). He suffered death on the cross the day before the Passover (18, 28; 19, 14, 31) at the same hour the lambs were being slaughtered for the Passover meal in the forecourt of the temple. He gives himself (3, 16) as the Passover lamb of the new covenant (19, 36) for his own (10, 15; 13, 1) and for the life of the world (6, 51; 11, 50; 18, 14).¹⁰⁰

In 1 Jn 1, 7, we read that the 'blood of Jesus' cleanses us from all sins. This assumes that blood has an atoning effect (Lev 17, 11) brought about by the sprinkling of the sacrificial animal's blood on the altar's horns. Later on, in 1 Jn 2, 1-2 says, "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 Jn 2, 1-2). Atonement, according to the Old Testament, is accomplished through bloody sacrifice. So, 1 John applies the terms of sacrifice strictly to Jesus. The Christian's existence is incorporated into the self-giving of the Lord.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Cf. D. FLEMING, "Sacrifice", *Bridge Bible Dictionary*, 384-385.

⁹⁹ Cf. X. DEBROECK, *Becoming a Priestly People. A Biblical Theology of Liturgical Sacrifice as Spiritual Formation*, A Dissertation Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 2017, 224.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. KLAUCK, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (NT)", 889.

¹⁰¹ Cf. KLAUCK, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (NT)", 890.

In Revelation, the heavenly sanctuary speaks of is modelled after the temple at Jerusalem. The heavenly ritual is patterned on the liturgy of the temple. Twenty-eight times, Christ is mentioned as a “Lamb.” There are several references to “the blood of the Lamb” and the fact that the lamb was slaughtered (Rev 5, 6, 9, 12; 13, 8), making it an obvious sacrificial symbol. The lamb figures in early Judaism as a sacrificial animal par excellence.¹⁰² “The Lamb” is frequently used as a Christological title for the crucified and glorified Lord, who now appears in heaven as a sacrificial lamb.¹⁰³ In John’s writings, the sacrificial Lamb of the Old Testament is replaced by Jesus. Therefore, Jesus appears in the gospels as a new sacrifice; he is the victim and declares that he has come to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10, 45; Jn 10, 10). Jesus establishes a new covenant by offering himself as the new sacrifice and spilling out his blood to atone for sins (Lk 22, 20; Mk 14, 24; Mt 26, 28).

1.9.4. The Pauline Theology of Sacrifice

Paul uses the verb *thuo* (θύω) thrice (1 Cor 5, 7; 10, 20¹⁰⁴) and the noun *thusia* (θυσία) four times (Rom 12, 1; 1 Cor 10, 18; Phil 2, 17; 4, 18). The uses of these terms refer to four kinds of sacrifices: the sacrifice of Jesus (1 Cor 5, 7), the sacrifice of Israel (1 Cor 10, 18), the pagan sacrifice (1 Cor 10, 20), and the sacrifice of the Christians (Rom 12, 1; Phil 2, 17; 4, 18).¹⁰⁵ In 1 Cor 5, 7, Paul identifies Christ with the paschal lamb, ‘for Christ, our paschal lamb has been sacrificed’, affirming that the death of Jesus is a sacrifice. He sometimes speaks of that sacrifice in general terms; Ephesians 5, 2 says that Christ loved us and “gave himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God”. Sometimes, he may select one specific sacrifice; for example, in 1 Corinthians 15, 20, 23, he mentions Christ as the “first fruits”, an expression that refers to the first sheaf of the harvest which was brought to the temple and offered in sacrifice to God (Lev 23; Dt 16). For Paul, Christ had offered the perfect sacrifice that put away sins once and for all, and because of this, there was no longer a place for any of the customary offerings.¹⁰⁶

Paul uses the terminology of sacrifice to teach important truths about Christian living. In Rom 12, 1, Paul sees the Christian life as a sacrifice: “I appeal to you therefore, brethren by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is

¹⁰² Cf. KLAUCK, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (NT)”, 890.

¹⁰³ Cf. DALY, *Christian Sacrifice. The Judaeo-Christian Background*, 307.

¹⁰⁴ In this verse, Paul uses the verb *tuo* twice.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. VIAGULAMUTHU, *Offering Our Bodies as a Living Sacrifice to God*, 268.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. L. MORRIS, “Sacrifice, Offering”, in *DPL*, 856.

your spiritual worship”. It is life, not ritual, which is now the true sacrifice of the people of God.¹⁰⁷ “Living sacrifice” suggests whole-hearted devotion. Bodily motivation, self-interest and pride are to be sacrificed, signifying giving up something desirable.¹⁰⁸ In Pauline theology we could see that in such sacrifice God is fully pleased in the offerer because the worshipper offers everything to God leaving nothing for himself. A total self-giving or self-surrender is the fundamental character of this sacrifice. Similarly, in religious profession one who offers oneself to God renounces everything, and comes to God with all that he/she has, all that he/she is: “Behold I come,” keeping nothing back. This is what it means to be a living sacrifice, to offer a holocaust.¹⁰⁹

For Paul, Jesus’ death is not interpreted by metaphors drawn from the law court but within the history of God’s covenant with Israel. The cross of Christ can be understood as substitutionary within the matrix of the Old Testament conception of Sacrifice. Christ gave himself up for us so we might live in him (1 Thess 5, 9-10; Rom 8, 3-4).¹¹⁰ The Lord’s Supper appears connected with sacrifice in 1 Cor 10, 14-22. However, Paul does not think of the actual performance of a sacrifice but of *koinonia*, the fellowship formed by participation in the common meal that forms the climax of the sacrifice. For Paul, Jesus’ self-offering on the cross becomes a reality in the Lord’s Supper. However, it does not mean that the Church offers any sacrifice in the Supper except in a metaphorical or ethical sense. In 2 Cor 2, 14-16, Paul borrows two sacrificial terms, ‘saviour’ and ‘aroma’, and applies them to gospel preaching.¹¹¹ Paul thus gives new meaning to the concept of sacrificial ideas from the temple practice.

1.9.5. The Epistle to the Hebrews

In the New Testament writings, the letter to the Hebrews provides the most systematic treatment of the sacrificial cultus of the Old Testament. The author of Hebrews was concerned with contrasting the Levitical sacrifices with the sacrifice of Christ. The contributions of Hebrews regarding sacrifice can be summarised under two broad categories: first, the fulfilment of the Old Testament ritual sacrifices in the sacrifice of Christ; second, the role of obedience in his sacrifice.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. BROWN, “Sacrifice, First Fruits, Altar, Offering”, 432.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. S. FINLAN, “Spiritualization of Sacrifice in Paul and Hebrews”, in C. A. EBERHART (ed.), *Ritual and Metaphor. Sacrifice in the Bible*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2011, 87.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. D. C. MARMION, *Christ the Ideal of the Monk. Spiritual Conferences on the Monastic and Religious Life*, Sands & Company, London 1934, 111.

¹¹⁰ Cf. J. B. GREEN, “Death of Christ”, in *DPL*, 207-208.

¹¹¹ Cf. KLAUCK, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (NT)”, 889.

These two categories are intrinsically connected: his sacrifice, unlike the rituals of the Old Testament, is offered in perfect obedience.¹¹² According to the author, all the Old Testament sacrifices had been replaced by Christ's unique, efficacious and eternal sacrifice on the cross. The mortal and sinful priests of Israel are substituted by Christ, the Son of God, who was without sin (Heb 7, 11-8, 6). Nine times in Hebrews, Christ is called our High Priest. On the Feast of the Atonement, the High Priest offered the annual sacrifice for his and the people's sins (Lev 16, 1-34). Now, it was Christ who had assumed this priestly function. He was the one who had expiated the sins of the people. The blood of Christ had replaced the blood of goats and calves.¹¹³

Jesus was the high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, signifying in himself the end of the Old Testament priesthood and its fulfilment. Jesus, the high priest, was also the offering and the offerer in the new cult. He carried out this sacrifice perfectly, once-for-all, fulfilling and superseding all other sacrifices – physically and spiritually in obedience to the will of God.¹¹⁴ Thus, Christ is the High Priest and the sacrificial victim *par excellence*, and no further sacrifices are necessary to maintain fellowship with God. The Day of Atonement was fulfilled on the cross. Heb 10, 5-10 sees the coming of Christ is anticipated in Ps 46, 6: "Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure" (Heb 10, 5-6). Then he added, "See, I have come to do your will. He abolishes the first to establish the second. And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all" (Heb 10, 9-10). The sacrifices (v 5) in the Old Testament offered according to the law are fulfilled and transcended in the perfect self-offering of Christ. Unlike the purificatory rites of the old covenant which required constant repetition, the offering of Christ effects the sanctification of believers once and for all.¹¹⁵

The author of the Hebrews asserts that animal sacrifices provided no atonement. Therefore, it was proper for Christ to pronounce God's displeasure upon them and replace them with the offering of his body. Christ's death fulfilled the expiatory rites of the Old Testament, and his blood was a means of purification. He clearly distinguishes the Old Testament sacrifices from the death

¹¹² Cf. BROECK, *Becoming a Priestly People*, 202.

¹¹³ Cf. HOMLISH, "Sacrifice in Israel", 515.

¹¹⁴ Cf. DALY, *Origins of Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 71-72.

¹¹⁵ Cf. BROWN, "Sacrifice, First Fruits, Altar, Offering", 433-434.

of Christ: the blood of bulls and goats could only purify the pollution of the flesh, whereas Christ's sacrifice could deal with the conscience of the worshippers. According to F. M. Young, the epistle's author seems to be referring to the fact that only unintentional infringements of the law could be cleansed by sacrifice. In contrast, Christ's death deals with deliberate sin and disobedience. The blood of Christ had this efficacy because it was the blood of one who was consciously obedient to the will of God. Repeated sacrifices were necessary under the old covenant, but Christ's sacrifice was offered once and for all. Once the conscience was cleansed, there was no need for further sacrifice.¹¹⁶ The sacrifices that remain for the Christian are those of praise and good living: "Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb 13, 15-16). Linking praise with practical living shows that such sacrifice extends beyond liturgical worship.¹¹⁷

1.10. In the Early Church

After the return from the Babylonian exile and the building of the second temple, the Mosaic law of sacrifice was again put into practice in Jerusalem. In the lifetime of Jesus, this observance continued. Jesus offered sacrifices to God at his presentation in the temple, at his last Passover, and presumably on those other occasions when he went up to Jerusalem for the feasts. After his death and resurrection, the apostles continued to frequent the temple, including even Paul, who went up to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost and, on that occasion, offered the sacrifices, which included sin offerings, for the interruption of Nazirite vows (Acts 18, 18; 21, 23-26; Num 6, 9-12). Despite this outward continuity through the New Testament period, the teaching of the New Testament shows that everything had changed. The sacrifices on which it concentrates attention are not those of the temple but the atoning sacrifice of Christ and the spiritual sacrifices of Christians. In principle, the Mosaic sacrifices were now unnecessary. While the temple stood, Jewish Christians felt some duty to observe its ordinances, but by the destruction of the temple in AD 70, the offering of sacrifice came to an end.¹¹⁸

As Christianity spread outside Jerusalem, the importance of sacrifice and the Temple worship naturally decreased. The Church modelled its worship on the Jewish synagogue rather

¹¹⁶ Cf. YOUNG, *Sacrifice and Death of Christ*, 71.

¹¹⁷ Cf. BROWN, "Sacrifice, First Fruits, Altar, Offering", 434.

¹¹⁸ Cf. BECKWITH, "Sacrifice", 759-760.

than the Temple cult, so there was no sacrifice. Paul used sacrificial language as a means of understanding the death of Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews amounted to a rejection of Jewish sacrifices *on principle*, which asserts that Christ's sacrifice had replaced all the sacrifices in the Old Testament. It tells the fact that the whole Old Testament sacrificial law had been fulfilled and annulled by the sacrifice of Christ.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the Christians gave a spiritual meaning to Old Testament sacrifices. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul regards acts of charity as a suitable alternative to animal sacrifice. He describes the financial help sent to him by the Philippians as a 'fragrant offering' (using the Old Testament phrase, a 'soothing aroma', a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God Phil 4, 18). Christians were to be holy and faultless in a moral sense, just as the sacrificial victims had been without blemish, according to the Law (Phil 2, 15-17). In the light of early Christian convictions, the saving rites of the Old Testament were fulfilled and superseded in the person of Jesus.¹²⁰

The Epistle to the Hebrews contains the fullest New Testament discussion of the Old Testament sacrifices. The sacrifice of Christ is not only foreshadowed in the Old Testament but also prophesied. The New Testament identifies Jesus with the suffering servant of Isaiah 52-53, who is to be a guilty offering for others (Is 53, 10). Many New Testament references to Christ's sacrifice as a fulfilment of Old Testament types represent him as a lamb, an animal used for various sacrifices (burnt offering, peace offering, and sin or guilt offering). He is represented as the slain lamb of God, whose precious blood takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1, 29, 36; 1 Pet 1, 18-19; Rev 5, 6-10; 13, 8). Similarly, some passages give emphasis on atonement; the blood of his sacrifice is said to cleanse from sin (Heb 9, 13-14; 10, 19-22; 1 Pet 1, 2; 1 Jn 1, 7), and he is said to have been sent by God to be a propitiation for our sins (Rom 3, 25; 1 Jn 2, 2; 4, 10; 2 Cor 5, 21).¹²¹

The Old Testament sacrifices provide providential categories for interpreting Christ's sacrifice: for the blood of animals, we have the blood of the man Christ Jesus (Heb 10, 4). For spotlessness, we have sinlessness (Heb 9, 14; 1 Pet 1, 19). For a sweet-smelling odour, we have true acceptability (Eph 5, 2). We have forgiveness for sprinkling our bodies with blood (Heb 9, 13-14; 1 Pet 1-2). For symbolic atonement, endlessly repeated, we have real atonement, once and

¹¹⁹ Cf. YOUNG, *Sacrifice and Death of Christ*, 50.

¹²⁰ Cf. YOUNG, *Sacrifice and Death of Christ*, 54.

¹²¹ Cf. BECKWITH, "Sacrifice", 760.

for all (Heb 10, 1-10).¹²² The sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament had limited effectiveness in their time because the blood of bulls and goats could not really take away sin, and the cleansing produced was external. They are now replaced by the fully effective sacrifice of Christ, which can bring “perfection” to the worshipers.¹²³ So, it is the conviction that Old Testament sacrifices are fulfilled in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and Christians no longer require literal observance of sacrifices but live worthy of the gospel.

1.11. The Christian Significance of Burnt Offering

A certain transformation occurred when the Israelites touched the sacrificial animal. A transfer from the Israelite to the creature, a transference of the responsibility of the Israelite to make atonement for the sins. By laying his hand on the animal, the offerer accentuated that he was giving this animal to God as a gift and offering and dedicating himself, his entire being, to God as a sacrifice.¹²⁴ In all the offerings, the ultimate offering must be our own self. It is because of this that St. Paul says: “I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12, 1). Absolute selflessness is the kind of sacrifice that God demands. Like the whole burnt offering, where everything is offered to God, God expects his children to give themselves entirely and undividedly to him as a burnt offering. As the burnt offering dominated the life of Israel, our giving of ourselves, our hearts, and our everything to God must dominate our existence. Our offering of ourselves to God as a burnt offering implies that our entire existence must be oriented upwards, just as the entire burnt offering was directed towards heaven and went upwards.¹²⁵

Another aspect of burnt offering is the continual fire, found in Leviticus 6, 1-5 and Exodus 29, 38-39, 42. You shall offer this upon the altar: two lambs a year old, day by day continually. You shall offer one lamb in the morning and the other in the evening; it shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet and speak with you. The burnt offering meant that fire must be constantly kept on the altar. Perhaps it symbolised and stressed that the dedication of Israel to the Lord must be constant and

¹²² Cf. BECKWITH, “Sacrifice”, 761.

¹²³ Cf. I. H. MARSHALL, “The Letter to the Hebrews”, in *Concise New Testament Theology*, 249.

¹²⁴ Cf. C. V. DAM, “The Burnt Offering in its Biblical Context”, in *Mid-American Journal of Theology* 7/2 (1991) 202.

¹²⁵ Cf. DAM, “The Burnt Offering in its Biblical Context”, 202-203.

uninterrupted.¹²⁶ According to S. H. Kellog, for Christians today, the burnt offering with the continual fire can show that constant and continual consecration to God is necessary. It cannot be done now and then. The fire must be kept burning continually for God.¹²⁷

In the New Testament, the sacrificial blood of Christ is expiatory. It is foreshadowed by the sacrifices of the Old Testament, which are fulfilled and annulled by his greater and more efficacious sacrifice.¹²⁸ The holocausts were fulfilled in Christ. His sacrifice was a complete self-offering of obedience. His body and soul were offered to God as a gift sacrifice of worship.¹²⁹ With the death of Christ, the only sufficient “burnt offering” was offered once and for all, and therefore, the animal sacrifices which foreshadowed Christ’s sacrifice were made obsolete. Hence, Christians no longer have to bring their lambs to the altar to receive forgiveness of sins. But bringing a sacrifice involved praising God for his grace and declaring one’s intention to love God and keep his commandments. Now that animal sacrifice is obsolete, praise and good works constitute the proper sacrifices expected of a Christian. Shedding Christ’s blood was the payment of the perfect ransom price. He has borne the Father’s wrath for us, just as the bulls and lambs in the Old Testament did. The pattern of Old Testament sacrifice may thus provide a pattern of truly Christian worship.¹³⁰ The sacrifices in the Old Testament only foreshadowed the perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. His death on the cross ends the Old Testament sacrificial system, for He is the perfect Lamb without blemish.

1.12. The Sacrifice of a Christian

Sacrificial language began to be reinterpreted in terms of Israel’s devotional behaviours and attitudes following the temple’s destruction. The New Testament, however, is where it develops to the greatest extent. The sacrifice of Christ has fulfilled atoning sacrifice and made ceremonial sacrifices obsolete. Christians no longer have to offer literal sacrifices, for Christ has fulfilled and thus ended the Old Testament sacrificial system. His sacrifice has introduced the age of the Holy Spirit when all acceptable worship must be spiritual, that is, Spirit-inspired (Jn 4, 23-24; Phil 3, 3), and the ‘spiritual sacrifices’ of Christians (1 Pet 2, 5; Rom 15, 16) include acts of worship, such as praise and prayer (Heb 13, 15; Rev 5, 8; 8, 3). This also include acts of witness and service,

¹²⁶ Cf. DAM, “The Burnt Offering in its Biblical Context”, 204-205.

¹²⁷ Cf. S. H. KELLOG, *The Book of Leviticus*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1891, 61-62.

¹²⁸ Cf. YOUNG, *Sacrifice and Death of Christ*, 72.

¹²⁹ Cf. YOUNG, *Sacrifice and Death of Christ*, 80.

¹³⁰ Cf. WENHAM, *The Book of Leviticus*, 65.

such as evangelism, gifts to the ministry and gifts to the poor (Rom 15, 16-17; Phil 4, 18; Heb 13, 16), and comprehensive attitudes and expressions of devotion, such as faith (Phil 2, 17), the consecration of one's life to the will of God (Rom 12, 1) and the laying down of one's life for the sake of the gospel (Phil 2, 17; 2 Tim 4, 6; Rev 6, 9).¹³¹ So, what is the core reality of Christian sacrifice? The responses provided by Edward Kilmartin, who states,

Sacrifice is not something that is an activity of human beings directed to God and then reaches its goal in response to divine acceptance and the bestowal of divine blessing in the cultic community. Rather, sacrifice in the New Testament understanding and thus in its Christian understanding involves three 'moments'. The first 'moment' is the self-offering of the Father in the gift, the sending of his Son. The second 'moment' is the unique 'response' of the Son, in his humanity and the Spirit, to the Father and for us. The third 'moment', and only then, does Christian sacrifice begin to become real in our world. It consists of the self-offering of believers in union with Christ by which they share in his covenant relation with the Father. The radical self-offering of the faithful is the only spiritual response that constitutes an authentic sacrificial act according to the New Testament (Rom 12, 1).¹³²

Though the sacrificial language and imagery run through the New Testament, it is mostly related to the sacrifice of Christ. The New Testament authors spiritualised the term: "Therefore, brethren, since we have the confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus" (Heb 10, 19). Therefore, living a life in accordance with God's will and exhibiting Christian virtue is regarded in the New Testament as a sacrifice that pleases God.

Conclusion

Given the scope of this work, a thorough discussion of sacrifice is impossible; thus, we have considered only brief summaries of the expositions pertaining to sacrifice in the bible. The analysis of the Old Testament sacrificial system offered important points which inform the understanding of sacrifice in the New Testament as it pertains to the life and death of Christ and the life of the Christians. In summary, the Pentateuch reveals that sacrifice, although expressed in various ways and by different terms, is a ritualised action for the gift of self, offered out of love, to restore the covenantal communion with God. Considering the Old Testament account, it is quite clear that the practice of sacrifice developed very early in humanity's relationship with God. The concept and practice of sacrifices were later initiated and developed along with Israel's covenant relationship with God. Solemn sacrifices accompanied the establishment of the covenant between Israel and

¹³¹ Cf. BECKWITH, "Sacrifice", 761.

¹³² Cf. E. J. KILMARTIN, *The Eucharist in the West. History and Theology*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1988, 381-383.

Yahweh. Thereafter, a series of sacrifices and offerings were ordained by God for various purposes, and these became part of the daily life of worship for Israelites. As we have seen, five types of sacrificial offerings were ordained. Each of these sacrifices, however, has its meaning and purpose. The burnt offering was for the atonement of sin. It is an offering of consecration. The cereal offering was to express thankfulness and dedication to God; the peace offering was for fellowship with God; the sin offering dealt with a situation where purification was needed, while the trespass offering expressed salvation over sin.¹³³

The sacrificial system was thus an integral part of Israel's religion until the advent of Christ. However, Christian theologians make us understand that all the Old Testament sacrifices were only a shadow of the Supreme sacrifice which Christ was to offer on the cross. In the Old Testament period, each sacrifice had its religious significance, but this meaning only became fully clear in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross. According to Christian theology, therefore, the sacrificial death of Christ put an end to the Mosaic sacrificial system. Consequently, Christians need no other sacrifice in their fellowship with God.¹³⁴ Thus, the early Christians spiritualised the idea of sacrifice, so the Christian sacrifice is not primarily a ceremony or ritual that we "do" or "give up" but is a total self-giving. Jesus' remarks regarding the widow's small offering (Mk 12, 43; Lk 21, 3) serve as a reminder that the true worth of an offering is not determined by its quantity but rather by the giver's attitude of selfless personal giving in unity with Christ. We have seen in the beginning that martyrdom was the ultimate self-offering. However, with the end of persecution, it was replaced by monasticism, withdrawal from the world, and its passions and desires considered a pure sacrifice to God. Therefore, in the next chapter, we try to see some of the heroic persons who dedicated themselves to God diligently at the cost of everything in the history of the Church and Mar Ivanios was inspired by for the foundation of his indigenous congregation.

¹³³ Cf. OGUNWU, "The Perfection Emphasis of Sacrifices in the Old Testament", 254-255.

¹³⁴ Cf. OGUNWU, "The Perfection Emphasis of Sacrifices in the Old Testament", 255-256.

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGIOUS CONSECRATION AS TOTAL OFFERING OF SELF: A FEW MONASTIC TRADITIONS

Introduction

Monasticism is a life of separation from the world and commitment to the spiritual pursuit toward perfection according to the Gospel revealed and lived by Jesus, the incarnate Son of God. Asceticism, contemplation, and service to God and humanity, all markedly varied forms and degrees, are part of the monastic life. The beginning of a monastic life was expressed by the renouncement of goods and the abandonment of the earthly city. In the second and third centuries, before the emperor Constantine's conversion, martyrdom was the ultimate expression of Christian commitment. The martyr chose death rather than conformity to the Roman way of life. With the peace that ensued in the fourth century and the concomitant influx of new members, Christians got royal patronage to enjoy worldly powers and benefits. In this new environment, the monastic life partly developed as a statement against this growing conformity with the world. When Constantine granted freedom to the Church by the Edict of Milan in 313, as the age of the martyrs came to an end, monasticism emerged. The monk replaced the martyr as a Christian hero, as the one who chose to die for a secular lifestyle. These men and women, who were in the world but not of the world, became the earthly embodiment of the heavenly communion of saints.¹³⁵ In this chapter, we shall briefly study those monastic figures who exercised particular influence on Mar Ivanios' understanding of religious life and his teachings. To focus better later on the holocaust nature of consecrated life bequeathed to the religious families founded by Mar Ivanios, we shall gather some ideas also two monastic figures Armand Jean Le Bouthillier de Rancé and Thomas Merton.

Mar Ivanios's religious life was deeply rooted in Serampore, where he was a professor from 1913 to 1919. There, he dedicated himself to contemplation, a fervent study of different religious orders and congregations in the Catholic Church, and the lives of the saints. He was greatly influenced by the spirituality of Saints Antony, Basil, Francis of Assisi, Therese of Avila,

¹³⁵ Cf. J. E. GOEHRING, "Monasticism", in *Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity*, II, 769-770.

Alphonsus Liguori and Ignatius of Loyola.¹³⁶ Thus, in this chapter, we focus on the virtues practised by these saints and some other models of monastic life who renounced everything and everyone for the sake of Christ and his Gospel. To understand the earliest concept of renunciation and total dedication in religious life, we try to see the life and teachings of some of the early desert fathers and a few monastic figures who made a difference in their lives and gradually in the society. Within the limits of our topic, we examine their ascetical teachings and practices in monastic life also to understand the Bethany type of consecrated life as part of a continuum with its particular charismatic colouring.

2.1. The Origins of Christian Monasticism

Evidence from the documents found at Qumran testify to the existence of a society of Jews separated from the mass of the people who led a more fervent life in the observance of the law with the expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is not certain that there ever was a “monastery” at Qumran.¹³⁷ However, we can see the roots of Christian monasticism in the Old Testament. The great prophetic and desert figures such as Elijah, Elisha and John the Baptist were living in great austerity. Christ himself, in his withdrawal into the desert at the beginning of his ministry, in his celibacy and in the radical claims in the gospel to abandon everything to follow him and especially his own paschal suffering, death and resurrection is seen as the primary model of the Christian monastic way. The Qumran community also bears a resemblance to Christian monasticism. In the early fourth century, monastic life was established in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Syria.¹³⁸ The desert is a typical place for fleeing from worldliness, breaking with everything that impedes God’s way, making a radical choice of celibacy, exclusive dedication to God’s praise and communion with him, listening to his Word with attention, perseverance, and uninterrupted prayer.¹³⁹

Those who embraced the monastic life wanted to follow Christ and live the Christian life in full. They carried out this with special consideration for Jesus’s hidden life, acknowledging his need for times of seclusion and keeping in mind his custom of withdrawing to pray.¹⁴⁰ In the

¹³⁶ MAR IVANIOS, *Speech at the First Reunion Anniversary*, Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth, Pune, 1931, 5.

¹³⁷ Cf. L. BOUYER, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, Burns & Oates, London 1960, 303.

¹³⁸ Cf. R. HALE, “Monasticism”, in *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 445.

¹³⁹ Cf. A. J. ROBIN, “The Word of God in the History of Religious Charism”, in *Sanyasa Journal of Consecrated Life* 4/1 (2009) 62.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. M. B. PENNINGTON, “Monasticism, Monastic Spirituality”, in *NDCS*, 665.

Gospels, Christ proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom of God. He called those to follow him not to an easy life but to a life of self-renunciation and discipline. This involves the sacrifice of their former ties, absolute loyalty to Christ, and a singleness of purpose. It responds to his words: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mk 8, 34). St. Paul insists on spiritual self-discipline and renunciation to “crucify the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5, 24). Thus, the distinctive motive of Christian asceticism is conformity to Christ’s sufferings out of the desire for union with Him and service to humanity. The Christians of the first centuries continued, in their peculiar circumstances, to pursue the ideal of Christian self-discipline proposed by Jesus in the Gospels. The principal ascetical discipline was physical martyrdom, regarded as the supreme form of Christian perfection. Spiritual martyrdom, in which the celibates lived a sacrificial life of prayer and penance, coexisted with physical martyrdom. However, some Christians felt that the Church was losing the Scripture-proposed vision of authentic Christianity as a result of its institutional acceptance in the Roman Empire. Thus, the Christian ascetics began to move from the city to the desert of Syria, Palestine and Egypt for solitary life, self-denial, and prayer, striving toward a complete subduing of the passions on the path to union with God.¹⁴¹ Thus, physical martyrdom was considered the supreme form of self-sacrifice, but with the end of persecution; it was replaced by monasticism, withdrawal from the world and its passions regarded as pure sacrifice to God. To understand the earliest concept of monastic life, we shall consider a few of the monastic figures and their ascetical teachings on total renunciation.

2.2. St. Antony of Egypt (251-356)

Thanks to *Vita Antonii* (The Life of Antony),¹⁴² written by Mar Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria and the great defender of the catholic faith against Arianism, we have both a narration of the life of Antony the Great, called ‘The Father of Monks’ and the ideals of Christian monastic life. Antony was born to Christian peasant family in central Egypt in about A.D. 251. In c. 269, he heard the Gospel reading in a church: “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Mt 19, 21). Following these words of Jesus literally, at the age of 20, he sold everything he had, gave a portion of it to

¹⁴¹ Cf. J. LACHOWSKI, “Asceticism in the New Testament”, in *NCE*, I, 776.

¹⁴² Cf. S. PHILIP, “NPNF2-04. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters”, in *CCEL*, 188-222.

his sister and the rest to the poor and followed Jesus radically (c. 270 AD). He was also inspired by the daring example of the first Christians, who sold their possessions and brought the proceeds to the apostles' feet for distributing to the poor (Acts 2, 43-47). He started a life of asceticism under the guidance of a recluse near his village. In c. 285, he went to the desert and lived in complete solitude. His reputation attracted many who settled near him, and in c. 305, he came out of his hermitage to act as their spiritual father. Five years later, he again retired into solitude. He died at the age of one hundred and five.¹⁴³

Antony had never loaded his memory with worldly knowledge nor sought instructions other than the Holy Scriptures; thus he knew most of verses by heart. They had impressed themselves so deeply upon him that he knew them by heart. Athanasius says that while uneducated, Antony absorbed what he heard from scripture readings, so memory took the place of books for him.¹⁴⁴ By following in the footsteps of saints and demonstrating unwavering devotion to Christ, Antony toiled relentlessly to achieve unparalleled excellence in every virtue; he surpassed everyone in practising Christian virtues. The villagers referred to Antony as a "friend of God" after witnessing his amazing ascetic life. When Satan saw Antony a young man with a strong sense of purpose, the tempter started to whisper to him alluring things about his wealth, food, lust, and leisure, all in contrast to the hard work and self-control needed to develop the virtues of the ascetic life in the desert. The goal was to get Antony to give up on his goal. However, Antony's mind was filled with Christ and the nobility inspired by Him, rendering the enemy helpless in the face of his resolve and steadfastness in persistent prayer. Instead of satisfaction, St. Antony's triumph over the Devil via Christ prompted him to even stricter discipline. He thus retired to a tomb to gain a deeper understanding of his own life. He committed himself to a life of severe asceticism in the tomb, observing fasts, abstinences, and restless nights.¹⁴⁵

2.2.1. Ascetic Self-denial in St. Antony's Life and Teaching

In his book *Desert Christians*, William Harmless quotes St. Athanasius about the asceticism practised by St. Antony. He says that the routine adopted by Antony was as physically demanding as any athlete. First, he spent the day doing manual labour (weaving baskets) to support himself.

¹⁴³ Cf. B. WARD, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. The Alphabetical Collection*, Mowbrays, London, Oxford 1975, 1.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. ATHANASIUS, *The Fathers of the Church. Early Christian Biographies*, R. J. DEFERRARI (ed.), The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC 1981, 137.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. ATHANASIUS ALEXANDRINUS, *The Life of St. Antony*, 26.

First, he spent the day doing manual labour (weaving baskets) to support himself. Second, he practised “watchfulness”, spending whole nights without sleeping in vigilant prayer. Third, he maintained an austere diet: bread, salt, water, no meat and wine. Fourth, he practised the “weighing” of his “thoughts,” a technique of introspection that enabled him to attend to them without being seduced by the flood of feelings and memories that might divert him from his single-minded purpose. Fifth, Antony “prayed unceasingly”.¹⁴⁶ For Antony, the life of an ascetic or *monachos* was a constant struggle for self-knowledge and self-purification and through these, the soul’s return to unity with God. According to him, true knowledge - *gnosis* - is a return to one’s original state, and once this is achieved, the individual may eventually aspire to union with God.¹⁴⁷

Antony teaches that, let us not think, as we look at the world, that we have renounced something great because the whole earth is very small compared to heaven.¹⁴⁸ Antony fulfils Jesus’ call to the rich young man to sell all he has (Mt 19, 21); he fulfils St. Paul’s admonitions about praying incessantly (1 Thess 5, 17) and about the necessity of work (2 Thess 3, 10). In renouncing all for Christ, Antony fulfilled Paul’s admonition, “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead (Phil 3, 13). Paul’s saying in 1 Corinthians 15, 31, “Every day I face death”, forms the centrepiece of Antony’s spirituality. In his address to the monks, he says that by “dying daily”, the monk learns to wean himself of cravings, of possessions, of grudges, of sin; he comes to see each day as a gift of God’s providence and to “forgive all things to all people”.¹⁴⁹ Antony attempted a stricter way of life to detach himself from the attractions of the world to have a union with the Lord.

2.3. St. Pachomius (292-348)

Pachomius was a convert. He is considered as the “founder of cenobitic monasticism”. He was born to pagan parents in 292 in upper Egypt, south of Thebes. In 312, at the age of twenty, he was drafted into the Roman army. Initially, he and other new recruits were locked up in a prison and “sunk in deep affliction”. Some local Christians visited him in the prison and gave the conscripts to eat and drink. Pachomius was impressed by the charity of these Christians at Thebes,

¹⁴⁶ W. HARMLESS, *Desert Christians. An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, Oxford University Press, New York 2004, 61-62

¹⁴⁷ Cf. M. DUNN, *The Emergence of Monasticism. from the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages*, Blackwell Publishers, Malden, Mass 2003, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. ATHANASIUS, *The Fathers of the Church*, 151.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. HARMLESS, *Desert Christians. An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, 70.

and he promised himself that if he escaped from conscription, he would devote himself to the service of others and consecrate himself to the God of Christians. This experience of charity would come to define Pachomius's view of Christianity in general and of monasticism in particular. He served in the army for about a year but was discharged after the defeat of Emperor Maximin Daia. He returned to Upper Egypt and settled in the village of Šeneset (Chenoboskion), where he was baptised.¹⁵⁰

2.3.1. The *Koinonia*: Asceticism in favour of Community

Moved by God's love, Pachomius sought to become a monk. He apprenticed in the anchoritic life with a neighbouring hermit, Palamon. According to Pachomius's biography, *First Greek Life*, on his way to Tabennesi, he heard a voice telling him, "Stay here and build a monastery, for many will come to you to become monks."¹⁵¹ He built a little enclosure with his hands where he could gather some companions.¹⁵² He convinced Palamon about the call and he moved to Tabennesi. Gradually, people came to join him, and the community began to expand.

Pachomius used the Greek word '*Koinonia*' (fellowship) to describe his federation of monasteries. It is said that there were monasteries contemporary with his, such as Šeneset and Tmoušons. But he brought together a collection of monasteries into a regulated whole with a single head, an ordered hierarchy of offices, and an intricate rhythm of work, prayer and spiritual formation.¹⁵³ It soon became apparent that primitive monasticism, under the form of complete freedom, brought material difficulties, many risks and a considerable falling-off. As a result, because of a lack of regulation, an authority imposed on all, monasticism risked losing itself in fantasy, in illusions and degenerating from the very fact of its own development. So Pachomius, to facilitate the material organisation of the life of his future disciples, came to impose a detailed rule on them to organise them into a community under a undisputed authority of a superior.¹⁵⁴

Pachomius says humans can't get any rest in this mortal flesh unless they please God by their dedication to a good life. Those who utterly renounce this world do need to deny themselves completely. Monks should avoid all idle and worldly meetings and meaningless conversations and

¹⁵⁰ Cf. HARMLESS, *Desert Christians. An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, 118.

¹⁵¹ G. PETERS, *The Story of Monasticism. Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary Spirituality*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, 45.

¹⁵² Cf. BOUYER, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, 321-322.

¹⁵³ Cf. HARMLESS, *Desert Christians. An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, 122.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. BOUYER, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, 322.

associate seriously only with those who are members of Christ. His important contribution was that he housed the monks and created a genuine fellowship; he drew up the first rule with the spirit of community, uniformity, poverty, obedience and discretion.¹⁵⁵ Some aspects of the Pachomian monastic way of life were constant in their monastic form. The practice of renunciation is one such example. It included giving up honours and titles out of concern that they would cause schism or jealousy in a big community. In his rule, however, he stated that he wished to maintain a deep detachment while still being compassionate and mindful of family relationships.¹⁵⁶ Thus, he became the founder of cenobitism, a monastic life destined to spread throughout the world and survive to the present. He lived a life entirely focusing on God with extreme austerity and total dedication to God.

2.4. St. Aphrahat (280-345) and “Coveneted Life”

Aphrahat was born ca. 280 A.D. on the Persian border with Syria. He wrote in Syriac twenty-two discourses or demonstrations on Christian doctrine and practice in the form of letters to a friend. The fourth-century ascetic institutions rely on Aphrahat’s *Demonstration* 6, composed in 336/7. The proper behaviour of those who have made ascetic vows is a major topic of discussion. In the early days of Syriac Christianity, there were organised ascetic groups like the “Sons of the Covenant” (*benai qeiāmā*). It is known as “Proto-monasticism” because this way of life and similar groups existed before classical Egyptian monasticism. The term *benai qeiāmā* (‘son/daughter of the covenant’) is used by Aphrahat in his treatise. The sixth demonstration of Aphrahat, ‘On Covenanters,’ portrays the ideals, orientations, life patterns and spiritual goals of this Syriac proto-monastic ‘Sons of the Covenants.’ By the vow, they dedicate themselves to leading a life without marriage in the model of Christ for effectively imitating him.¹⁵⁷

The goal of these ascetics is to imitate Christ, whereby Aphrahat used the term *ihidāyā* ‘solitary, single’, as a synonym for *bar/ba(r)t qyāmā*, *ihidāyā* being also the term for Christ, ‘the Only-Begotten One’. The *bnay/bnāt qyāmā* were solitaries who followed the way of the *Ihidāyā*.¹⁵⁸ It is said that no single English word is apt to carry the full meaning of the Syriac

¹⁵⁵ Cf. J. QUASTEN, *Patrology* III, The Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland 1960, 154.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. M. GRACE, “*Koinonia* Revisited”, in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 27/2 (1992) 120.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. T. KOLLAMPARAMPIL, “Syriac Spiritual, Ascetical and Mystical Legacy”, in *Journal of Dharma* 36/1 (2011) 42-43.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. E-GEDESH, “*Bnay Qyāmā*, *Bnāt Qyāmā* sing. *bar qyāmā*, *ba(r)t qyāmā*”, in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage. Electronic Edition*.

concept of *iḥidāyā*. Hence, different words are used, such as Unique One (Lk 7, 12; 8, 42; 9, 38), Single, singular, unique (in the sense of celibate), Single-minded (in relation to God), Unified, integrated, undivided as a follower of Christ. In the Syriac version of the New Testament, Christ is called the *Ihidāyā*, the “only-begotten”. Thus, being “single” equated to being like Christ.¹⁵⁹ The term “*iḥidāyā*” was applied to the ascetically oriented baptised disciples and followers of Christ.¹⁶⁰ In Syriac ascetic texts, “*iḥidāyā*” refers not only to the idea of singleness as a sign of religious celibacy but also to the person’s purpose and the claim that being single is a product of asceticism and that the single person has a special relationship with Jesus the Christ, the Single One, the only Son of God the Father (Jn 1, 14, 18; 3, 16, 18).¹⁶¹

For Aphrahat, *iḥidāyā* functions as an equivalent of ‘son/daughter of the covenant’, a more defined group of ascetics in the local church.¹⁶² It is a small group that voluntarily interprets and practices the Christian life according to ancient traditions. In monastic communities across the Eastern region, these believers dedicated their lives to the daily service of the Lord. They achieved this through unselfish devotion to God, demonstrated by their giving up of private belongings, free time, and relationships with people outside of their community to devote themselves to Christ, their King (Dem. 6.2). The most important aspect of the life of the members of the *qeiāmā* is virginity and continence. In all their strife, these ascetics identify themselves with their participation in the passion of Jesus. Privation and abstinence are a weapon against Satan and a shield that stops all the arrows of the enemy.¹⁶³

Fasting occupies a vital place in their ascetical practices. According to Aphrahat, fasting is a weapon against evil and a shield that repels the enemy’s arrows. However, he views this term as all-inclusive, representing the essence of a genuine life devoted to God: fasting encompasses not only abstinence from food and drink, meat and wine, but also holiness and virginity, the renunciation of worldly possessions, grieving, and mourning. The true prayer was interpreted in

¹⁵⁹ Cf. KOLLAMPARAMPIL, “Syriac Spiritual, Ascetical and Mystical Legacy”, 44.

¹⁶⁰ T. K. KOONAMMAKKAL, “Ephrem’s Ideas on Singleness”, in *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 2/1 (1999) 61.

¹⁶¹ Cf. S. H. GRIFFITH, “Monks, Singles and the Sons of the Covenant. Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology”, in E. CARR (et al.), *Eulogema. Studies in Honor of Robert Taft*, 110, Studia Anselmiana, Roma 1993, 143.

¹⁶² Cf. B. MCNARY, “The Indwelling Spirit of Christ and Social Transformation. The Case of a Late Antique Syriac Christian Community”, in *Mystics Quarterly* 31 3/4 (2005) 111.

¹⁶³ Cf. A. VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient I*, Secretariat Du Corpus SCO, Louvain 1958, 198-202.

terms of pure sacrifice. He writes that even in attitude, the ascetics' way of life had to make their devotion and consecration visible.¹⁶⁴ He says that anyone who loves possessions should let him/her retreat from this life; for those who renounce themselves totally, the contest is suitable because they do not remember anything left behind them and do not retreat to it.¹⁶⁵

2.5. St. Ephrem (c. 303-373)

Ephrem was born in 303 in Nisibis, Mesopotamia and received baptism in his youth. He became a 'teacher' and a poet who served the bishops of Nisibis as a catechist, biblical exegete, and liturgical composer for almost seventy years. When Rome handed over Nisibis to Persia in 363, Ephrem was forced to leave the town and move some hundred miles west to Edessa, where he served Abraham, the bishop of Edessa. It is the opinion that St. Ephrem was not a monk but an unmarried man, but a 'single' person (*ihidaya*) dedicated to the service of God.¹⁶⁶

The details of Ephrem's life, which can tolerably be ascertained historically, are very scanty. Wālāgeš, bishop of Nisibis narrates Ephrem-as a man who since his youthhood lived as an ascetic, and later became a priest, preacher and lecturer in the exposition of Scriptures and considers him as a person who stood in the front rank among his ascetic fellow brothers. Regarding the character of Ephrem's learning, all the reliable sources agree that Ephrem was well-versed in Syriac language and literature but was untouched by Hellenistic knowledge.¹⁶⁷ What is known about Ephrem's life during the last ten years is that, while he lived in seclusion in his cell in the Edessa mountains, he was not completely isolated from society. He kept in touch with the needs of the Edessa Christian community.¹⁶⁸ He wrote hymns against the heretics of his day. Ephrem became one of the first to introduce songs into the Church's public worship as a means of instruction for the faithful, hence earning him the title "Harp of the Holy Spirit." Ephrem preferred a simple, austere life, living in a small cave in Edessa. It was here that he died around 373.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. A. VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient. A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East III*, Aedibus E. Peeters, Lovanii 1988, 19-20.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient III*, 23.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. S. H. GRIFFITH, "A Spiritual Father for the Whole Church. The Universal Appeal of St. Ephraem the Syrian", *Hugoye. Journal of Syriac Studies* 1/2 (1998) 203.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. A. VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient. A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East II*, Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, Louvain 1960) 86-87.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient II*, 90.

2.5.1. Ephrem's Concept of Asceticism

Ephrem describes monasticism as the institution of penance, equating life in the desert with the animals as the site of penitence and citing biblical examples of those who found the path to repentance by eating grass and roots in the wilderness.¹⁶⁹ Anchoritism is the monastic lifestyle he envisions. Life of solitude holds significance for him. He compares these dwelling places with the quiet of a tomb, where one is surrounded by utter silence and removed from all social interactions. It is a life of complete deprivation and poverty resulting from the radical abnegation of this world and everything in it.¹⁷⁰ Ephrem states that a person who lives in constant fear of God sleeps little. He asserts that prayer and communion with God should occur at night. He proposes ideal living conditions for the monks: caves serve as their palaces, rocks serve as their bedrooms, heights serve as their balconies, ledges serve as their homes, and the herbs found in the mountains serve as their dinner table.¹⁷¹

According to Ephrem, life is death for the monk: everyone who bends his neck for monastic life and serves in this institution is regarded as dead. The idea of mortification is fundamental to the concept of asceticism in Ephrem. First, he uses the concept of suffering and makes it the heart of the Christian life. The hallmark of the monks is suffering. It permeates the whole monastic life and becomes its nature. Jesus died to the world so that no one should live to the world, and He existed in a crucified body so that no one should walk sensually by it. He died to our world in His body so that He may make us alive by His body. He mortified the life of the body so that we may not live carnally by flesh. He is made the Master, a teacher, by his own suffering. He Himself first tasted the bitterness. Thereby, He showed us that no one could become His disciple by name but through suffering.¹⁷²

Moreover, Ephrem uses the concept of the cross to give it a meaning that aligns with monastic theology. About the core principles of monasticism, he states that the “glory of the monk is on the cross.” In explaining the idea that everyone must face the cross, Ephrem contends that each person must affix themselves to the cross, with ascetic practice as the nails and observance of the monastic commandments as the thorns. Hence, the body is subjected to crucifixion through

¹⁶⁹ Cf. VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient II*, 92.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient II*, 94-95.

¹⁷¹ Cf. VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient II*, 96-97.

¹⁷² Cf. VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient II*, 97-98.

vigils, hunger, thirst, and other austere practices. According to him, monasticism aims at embracing the riches of the cross, carries its pain, and seeks its glory and shame. The monks achieve the same goals through mortification, just as the martyrs did through suffering, torture, and destruction in their body.¹⁷³

2.6. St. Basil of Caesarea (330-379)

Basil the Great is considered the ‘Father of Eastern Christian monasticism’, and he is of particular influence on Mar Ivanios. His father was a professor of rhetoric and had come from a well-off family in Pontus. His first teacher was his father, who had offered him elementary education but he lost him early in 345. So, the home lessons in rhetoric were ended, and he went to school in Cappadocian Caesarea, where he met Gregory of Nazianzus. In 355, he returned home and taught rhetoric for a year. Then he visited monasteries in Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Egypt.¹⁷⁴ He was moved and amazed by the lives of monks in the places he visited. They demonstrated what it means to live here on Earth and be a citizen of heaven through their unwavering faith in God, perseverance through hardship, strength in prayer, and control over hunger, thirst, cold, and nakedness.¹⁷⁵ He was inspired by the lives of the monks to pursue his plans for a religious life. He testifies in one of his letters about his vocation: “The Gospel illustrate the great means of attaining perfection was to sell one’s possessions, to share them with others who are in need and to disengage oneself completely from the cares of this life without keeping any attachment of soul to the good things of this earth and I found some who had chosen this way to succeed in crossing the surging floods of this short life”.¹⁷⁶

A second influence was his own study of meditation on the Scriptures. The personality of Eustathius of Sebaste, the first organiser of cenobitic asceticism in Asia Minor, also seems to have played a significant role in Basil’s involvement in organising ascetic life.¹⁷⁷ It can be asserted that the development of true coenobitical monachism, receptive of both sexes and all classes, was substantially the work of St. Basil. He insists upon a reasonable standard of corporal austerity, outlawing thus the spectacular rivalries in ascetical rigour which characterised Egyptian

¹⁷³ Cf. Cf. VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient II*, 99-100.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. F. W. NORRIS, “Basil of Caesarea (330-379)”, in *Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity*, I, 169-170.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. ST. BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, trans. W. M. Monica, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C 1970, 8.

¹⁷⁶ *Epistle 223*, 2. Quoted in BOUYER, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, 336.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. P. J. FEDWICK, *St. Basil the Great and the Christian Ascetic Life*, PP. Basiliani, Toronto, RM 1978, 205.

asceticism.¹⁷⁸ Before Basil was baptised, he travelled around the great monastic areas, searching for the real monastic spirit and life being developed there.

2.6.1. Principles of Community Life

Giving a strong theological foundation, Basil treated the monastic life as a response to the double commandment of God – love of God and love of neighbour. He integrated the solitary life of St. Antony and the community life of Pachomius and emphasised an active contemplative life. Sanctity, according to St. Basil is social in character. Love of God and love of neighbour find full expression only in community life where all cooperate toward perfection. This enthusiasm for the common life rests upon his conviction that a life of seclusion from one's fellow beings offers no scope for humility and obedience and is opposed to the law of charity. The Scriptures are the firm basis of Basil's entire monastic doctrine. He presents continually Scriptural support for his ascetical teachings and their application. Basilian coenobia is established in towns instead of in desert wastes to provide people with a model for true Christian living. All acts of benevolence toward a fellow being and the entire monastic discipline - work, silence, mortification- have one end in view: union with God.¹⁷⁹

2.6.2. St. Basil's Teaching on Ascetical Discipline

St. Basil says that, first and foremost, the monk should own nothing in this world, but he should have as his possessions the solitude of the body, modesty of bearing, a modulated tone of voice, and a well-ordered manner of speech. He should hold his tongue in the presence of his superiors; before those wiser than him, he should hearken to their words. He should love his equals and keep aloof from the wicked, the carnal and the officious. He should think a lot but say little, not speak out loud or engage in pointless discourse, not be easily amused, have a respectful demeanour, keep his eyes downcast and his spirits high, avoid responding to contradictions with contradictions, and be submissive. In addition to working with his hands, he should be sober and vigilant to prevent evil thoughts, joyful in hope, patient in adversity, and ceaselessly prayerful. He should also give thanks for everything, be humble towards everyone, and detest pride. Refrain from speaking negatively about others, avoid engaging in gossip, and not be quick to trust

¹⁷⁸ Cf. BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, 9.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, 11.

unfavourable rumours about others.¹⁸⁰ According to Basil, the best rule for a well-disciplined life is to be indifferent to the pleasure or pain of the flesh.¹⁸¹ Thus, he says, any emotion savouring of this world may not defile one who would reserve himself for God. All that springs from the passions defects in some way the purity of the soul and impedes attaining the divine life. Therefore, one who has given up the world must focus on God alone.¹⁸²

2.6.3. St. Basil's Teachings on Renunciation

Basil the Great highlights renunciation as a pre-requisite for entering the monastic life. One who is strongly seized by the desire to follow Christ can no longer be concerned with anything pertaining to this life. Our Lord says, 'If anyone comes to me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' (Mt 16, 24). Again, he says, 'whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple' (Lk. 14, 33). So, this precept involves several necessary renunciations. He who is crucified to the world and to whom the whole world is crucified for the sake of Christ (Gal 6, 14) can no longer have any part in worldly concerns. Our Lord Jesus Christ depicted hatred of one's life and self-denial in their most vivid form when He said: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16, 24) and "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14, 26).¹⁸³ A monk is a Christian who makes every effort to correspond to these divine invitations, says St. Basil.

St. Basil insists on that an existence completely dedicated to God requires forsaking all the impediments, distractions, and occupations which fill ordinary life. The great advantage of the ascetic life of renunciation is that it makes possible the uninterrupted practice of the presence of God and the imitation of Christ.¹⁸⁴ In his exhortation on the renunciation of the world, he says, when you renounce the goods you possess, be adamant in your resolve, convinced that you are merely dispatching these goods to heaven in advance.¹⁸⁵ The right environment for practising union with the Lord is solitude. Following Christ entails a life of self-denial, but the worldly

¹⁸⁰ Cf. BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, 33-34.

¹⁸¹ Cf. BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, 211.

¹⁸² Cf. BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, 209.

¹⁸³ Cf. BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, 253.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. E. F. MORISON, *St. Basil and his Rule. A Study in Early Monasticism*, Oxford University Press, London 1912 27.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, 18.

atmosphere is inimical to repentance and penance, and in the world, the soul is easily dispersed and forgets God.¹⁸⁶ Thus, he proposes that anyone who wants to follow Christ and uphold the gospel's mandates must remove all ties to the world.

According to Basil, perfect renunciation consists in detaching oneself from all external goods: property, vainglory, life in society, and useless desires, after the example of the Lord's holy disciples. James and John left their father Zebedee and the very boat upon which their whole livelihood depended (Mk 1, 20). Matthew left his counting house and followed the Lord, leaving behind the profits of his occupation and undermining the dangers that would result from it. St. Paul says, "Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, so that I may gain Christ" (Phil 3, 7-8).¹⁸⁷ So, like St. Paul and the other apostles, anyone who deeply moved to follow Christ should stop worrying about anything related to this life. If we reserve any earthly possessions or perishable wealth, the mind sinks into mire, and the soul inevitably becomes blind to God and insensible to the desire for the beauties of heaven and the good things laid up for us by promise. Hence, St. Basil says that unless we attain the likeness of Christ, we can't achieve a way of life in accord with the Gospel of Christ.¹⁸⁸

Basil states that the practice of continence is essential for one who leads a religious life. It is not only complete abstinence from food but also from pleasures that aim to thwart the will of the flesh to attain the experience of God. Therefore, consecrated persons who lead a self-indulgent life are bound to abstain from pleasures of any kind. Perfect continency sets limits for the tongue and boundaries for the eyes and enjoins the ears, avoiding curiosity in the use of hearing.¹⁸⁹ One who masters every passion and feels no excitement from pleasure can be free from all sin. Continency destroys sin, quells passions, and mortifies the body's natural affections and desires. It marks the beginning of the spiritual life, leads us to eternal blessings, and extinguishes the desire for pleasure within itself.¹⁹⁰

Basil is renowned in both the East and the West for his contributions to the moderate

¹⁸⁶ Cf. G. M. COLOMBÁS, "The Ancient Concept of the Monastic Life", in *Monastic Studies* (1964) 98-99.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, 254.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, 256.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, 270-271.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, 272.

cenobitic form of monasticism. He introduced a monastic life emphasising prayer, a liturgical life and study, work and social service. The central idea that stands as the basis of his ascetic philosophy is *agape* or love for God and love for humans. It is total love for God that leads to the monastic ideal. Basil's vision and rules of monasticism harmoniously blended the eremitic spirit of St. Antony and the organisational principles of Pachomius. Basil's monastic theology combines the spirit of the Holy Scriptures with the ethos and experience of the early Church. His rule emphasises a Church-oriented monastic life conducted in the spirit of the Apostolic Church with its enthusiasm and commitment to a faith manifested even in martyrdom. It is attained through the sacrifices of the body for the welfare of the soul.¹⁹¹

2.7. St. Augustine (354-430)

Augustine was born in the town of Thagaste in A.D. 354. After attending primary school at home town, he went to school at Madaura at the age of eleven for classical studies. At seventeen, he went to Carthage to study rhetoric. Carthage was an advanced and dissipated city, and he was influenced by the environment of pagan beliefs and practices. During this time the most influential sect was Manichaeism which emphasis more on magic and numerology. It held that the world was divided into two opposing categories: Light or Good and Darkness or Evil, ruled over by God and Satan, respectively. The Manichees defended the New Testament by repudiating the Old Testament, which pleased him since Old Testament stories of scandalous actions had repelled him.¹⁹² Like his teenage companions, Augustin was also attracted to sexual impurities and various current philosophies propagated by Manichaeism.

The Manichees could not answer some of his questions regarding natural science, which led him to lose confidence in Manichaeism. In A.D. 383, he left Carthage and went to Rome. In the autumn of 384, he moved to Milan, where he came in contact with St. Ambrose. He listened to the preaching of Ambrose, and it made him acquainted with the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures and the weakness of the Manichean Biblical criticism.¹⁹³ Augustine learned about saints who had conquered sexual temptation by surrendering themselves to God, which would help him overcome his bodily desires for the love of God.

¹⁹¹ Cf. D. J. CONSTANTELOS, "Basil the Great, St. c. 329/30-379", in *Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, I, 116.

¹⁹² Cf. M. T. CLARK, trans., *Augustine of Hippo. Selected Writings*, Paulist Press, New York 1984, 45-46.

¹⁹³ Cf. CLARK, *Augustine of Hippo. Selected Writings*, 47.

In the late summer of 386, Augustine heard a child's voice while sitting in a garden in Milan, "Take it and read it; take it and read it." He opened St. Paul's epistle to Romans 13, 13-14, where he read: "Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires". Thereupon, he was given the grace to will wholly what he commanded, which was his conversion to God.¹⁹⁴ About this experience, he testified that, at once, a light of serenity flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled. Finally, he was convinced that it was possible to realise the ascetical life. Renunciation lies at the heart of his story. It is not only he renounced marriage and sex but also renounced all his philosophical ideals and thoughts. All these combined together to make his conversion to Christian orthodoxy a decision to live as a monk.¹⁹⁵

2.7.1. Augustine's Asceticism

He accepted the Christian faith and was baptised at the age of thirty-two. Following his conversion, Augustine returned to Africa and, with the help of friends, established a monastery at Thagaste in North Africa (Algeria) in 388, where he remained for two and a half years. They were called the 'society of brothers' and spent long hours praying and contemplating. Augustine's ideal of the Christian community echoes the picture of the earliest Christians in Acts 4, 32: "The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common".¹⁹⁶ Those people are of one mind and one heart who have achieved simplicity of heart by detaching themselves from the stream of temporal, transient things and who dedicate themselves entirely to God. Augustine explains the word monk as a vocabulary of the Jewish-Christian morality of simplicity of heart. Simple persons are those whose hearts are undivided, who avoid dissipation in their lives and activities; they are of one piece, and they know how to bring unity into their lives by dedicating themselves totally to the service of God. This striving for inner unity makes a person a monk.¹⁹⁷

Augustine's ascetical teaching is best summarised in the "Rule": "To the extent that your health allows, subdue your flesh by fasting and abstinence from food and drink. Do not allow your

¹⁹⁴ Cf. CLARK, *Augustine of Hippo. Selected Writings*, 47-48.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. H. CHADWICK, *Augustine of Hippo. A Life*, Oxford University Press, New York 2010, 29-30.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. G. ROD, "The Thought of St. Augustine", in *Churchman* 104 /4 (1990) 341.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. T. J. VAN BAVEL, *The Rule of Saint Augustine with Introduction and Commentary*, trans., R. Canning, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, MI 1996, 43-44.

clothing to attract attention; seek to please not by your clothes but by your life.”¹⁹⁸ For Augustine, asceticism means denying oneself something lawful, with the intention of strengthening oneself, so that one can offer resistance to disordered desires and avoid becoming prey to longings for the unlawful. So, for him, voluntary religious poverty involves relinquishing material goods and the desire for them.¹⁹⁹ In his early years, he aspired to become wealthy and well-known. However, following his conversion, he dedicated his life to serving God. Despite having lived for several years with a woman he loved dearly and having a son named Adeodatus, he devoted himself to Christ and the Church and led a life of reflection and detachment from worldly concerns. Thus, he provides a model for men and women of all walks of life to aspire to.

2.8. St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-c. 547)

Benedict is the founder of the Benedictine Monastery at Monte Cassino in Italy, the author of the principal monastic rule in the West and considered the father of Western Monasticism. In the *Dialogues*, Gregory testified that Benedict was born in Nursia, northeast of Rome, around 480 AD. He was sent to Rome for his education, but seeing the dissolute lifestyle of his peers, he abandoned his literary studies, family and inheritance and sought to please God alone. This led him ultimately to a cave in Subiaco.²⁰⁰ The central idea of Benedict’s monastic vision is to establish a way of life that allows monks to grow and maintain a consciousness of God.²⁰¹

2.8.1. Benedictine Asceticism

Benedict envisioned a balanced life of prayer and work as the ideal. According to Benedict, all things eating, drinking, sleeping, reading, working, and praying should be done in moderation. Benedict places his asceticism primarily in the renunciation of self-will. So, in his rule, he writes that we are forbidden to do our own will (RB 5, 1); we must abandon it (RB 5); we must hate it (RB 4); we must not through love of our own will take pleasure in carrying out our own desires (RB 7, 2) and it is not lawful for monks to have either their bodies or their will at their own disposal (RB 33). Renunciation of one’s own will is a fundamental ascetic practice based on the example of Christ. According to St. Benedict, it is the overcoming of self, the elimination of selfishness or

¹⁹⁸ G. PETERS, *The Story of Monasticism. Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary Spirituality*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, 57-58.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. VAN BAVEL, *The Rule of Saint Augustine with Introduction and Commentary*, 66.

²⁰⁰ Cf. T. FRY et al. *The Rule of St. Benedict. In Latin and English with Notes*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 1981, 76.

²⁰¹ Cf. B. GREEN, “Benedict of Nursia, St. c. 480-c. 547”, in *Encyclopaedia of Monasticism*, I, 129.

self-denial, which is the root of the spiritual life: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16, 24). For him, the purifying of spirit is the object of asceticism.²⁰²

Benedict emphasises the value of humility in the seventh chapter of the *Rule*. He says that awareness of God inevitably leads the monk to humility, a true appreciation of the relationship between the creature and the Creator. Obedience, likewise the first step in humility, is a response of love and generosity to God. Although he often uses military images, depicting the monk as battling for Christ and constantly talks of monastic life as a service of God and the community, Benedict sees the monk mainly as a listener in the school of the Lord’s service.²⁰³ According to St. Benedict, the way to be humble is to obey without hesitation. This is a natural trait for people who value Christ above all else; they obey their superiors’ orders with the same promptitude as if they were direct orders from God. Such individuals immediately set aside their personal issues, give up on their own desires, and set down whatever they are working on unfinished (RB 5, 1, 4, 7).

St. Benedict equates religious consecration with sacrifice. The document contains the promise the novice places on the altar with his own hands to combine the real and tangible evidence of his commitment to the gifts offered to God as a sacrifice. The monk unites his own immolation with that of Christ Jesus. The monastic profession is indeed an immolation, and this immolation derives all its value from its union with Christ’s holocaust. In contemplating the sacrifice on the cross and taking the immolation of Jesus as our example, we shall learn the qualities that the offering of ourselves in a profession ought to have.²⁰⁴ St. Paul addresses these words to Christians: Rom 12, 1: “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”. Given that we are all fallible, following God’s commands requires a certain amount of self-abnegation. A person who makes a religious profession gives himself to God and renounces everything; he brings everything to God, including himself, and gives everything to God without holding anything back.

²⁰² Cf. C. BUTLER, *Benedictine Monasticism. Studies in Benedictine Rule and Life*, Longmans Green and Co., London 1919, 49-50.

²⁰³ Cf. GREEN, “Benedict of Nursia, St. c. 480-c. 547”, 130.

²⁰⁴ Cf. MARMION, *Christ the Ideal of the Monk*, 108. Holocaust means the whole thing is burned up; nothing remains. Religious profession is a holocaust means everything is for God. The victim of the holocaust is offered up in pure homage to the Creator of all things, to the source of all that we have.

This is the meaning of offering a holocaust, of being a living sacrifice.²⁰⁵ Benedict summarises whole ascetic spirituality in three simple words, “truly seeks God” (RB 58, 7).

2.9. St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

St. Bernard is a French Cistercian reformer and theologian. He was the third son of the knight Tescelin and Aleth, born at Fontaine-les-Dijon in France. Even from his childhood, he began to practice mortification in things of the world. He was unaffected by worldly things, for he loved to be alone and away from the turbulent life of the world, and instead of not talking about the pointless pursuits of the world, his mind was focused entirely on God and divine things. This single-minded devotion enabled him to spend his boyhood and youth unsullied by the allurements of life in the world.²⁰⁶ For him, attaining ultimate fulfilment would come from departing from this world. Thus, he started searching for places where he could rest assuredly under the guidance of Christ without any hindrance to his complete acceptance of this yoke. When his family members learned that Bernard was thinking of leading an austere lifestyle, they tried to persuade him to reconsider and dedicate himself to the study. These suggestions did indeed impede him; however, on his way to assist his brothers, who were under the Duke of Burgundy's command to lay siege to Grancey-le-Château, he deviated into a church to pray. During this prayer, a resolve to leave the world miraculously revived, and it never again relinquished its grip on his will.²⁰⁷

The Cistercian order was founded in 1098 by St. Robert Molesmes to return to the foundations of the Benedictine Rule. During that time, many Benedictine monasteries had deviated from the Rule by becoming involved in societal and political affairs, adopting excessively elaborate liturgies, and accumulating significant land and wealth while the Rule of Saint Benedict prescribed a balanced life of prayer and work. For twenty-five years, Abbot Stephen served as its abbot. His holiness, devotion to a more faithful application of the Rule of Benedict, and administrative prowess allowed the newly established Cistercian order to flourish quickly. At the age of 23, Bernard entered the new monastery at Cîteaux in 1113, along with over thirty other companions. It was a small, impoverished, inconsequential place hidden from the outside world. His goal in travelling there was to live in hiding and be forgotten by creatures so that he could

²⁰⁵ Cf. MARMION, *Christ the Ideal of the Monk*, 111.

²⁰⁶ Cf. G. WEBB – A. WALKER, trans., *St. Bernard of Clairvaux. The story of his life as recorded in the Vita Prima Bernardi by certain of his contemporaries, William of St. Thierry, Arnold of Bonnevaux, Geoffrey and Philip of Clairvaux, and Odo of Deuil*, A. R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, London 1960, 16.

²⁰⁷ Cf. WEBB – WALKER, *St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, 20-24.

focus solely on God. In 1115 AD, Bernard was appointed to found a new monastery, Clairvaux, which soon became one of the most significant monastic hubs of the Middle Ages. Bernard was well-liked in Clairvaux for his holiness and pioneering monastic reform.²⁰⁸

2.9.1. The Teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux

Bernard stressed the importance of humility and encouraged his followers to seek a deep personal relationship with God. He says true knowledge of God consists of a profound experience of Jesus Christ and his love. For him, humility is self-knowledge: seeing oneself as one truly is. It is an appreciation of divine power and consciousness of personal weakness.²⁰⁹ Self-control, self-restraint, and self-discipline help one to progress towards perfection.²¹⁰ He says to those who come to join the monastery: before you enter, you must leave outside the bodies which you have brought from the world, for only hearts and minds may come in since the flesh will not help you. He meant to convey that they should give up their fleshly cravings and inclinations like they gave up worldly clothes.²¹¹

According to Bernard, the goal of monastic life was to experience an experiential union with God. Discipline, asceticism, and austerity are integral components of his spirituality.²¹² He was never expected to spare himself from suffering; he was so rigorous in his practice of mortification that he effectively deadened both the senses that sparked the desires of the flesh in him and the desires of the flesh that penetrated his mind through his senses. All his aspirations and goals were focused on God, and his mind was completely devoted to contemplating spiritual matters that, even though his eyes were open, he could not see what was going on in front of them or hear about anything significant that the others would consider important. He was so mortified that his senses had almost stopped reacting, so he could not taste the food before him.²¹³ Hence, he imparts the importance of mortification and self-denial for unity with God.

²⁰⁸ Cf. MY CATHOLIC LIFE, *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*.

²⁰⁹ Cf. J. R. SOMMERFELDT, *The Spiritual Teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, MI 1991, 53-55.

²¹⁰ Cf. SOMMERFELDT, *The Spiritual Teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, 134.

²¹¹ Cf. WEBB – WALKER, *St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, 37.

²¹² Cf. M. CASEY, *Reading Saint Bernard. The Man, The Medium, The Message, A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, B. P. MCGUIRE (ed.), Brill, Leiden, Boston 2011, 97.

²¹³ Cf. WEBB – WALKER, *St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, 38.

2.10. Life of St. Francis of Assisi (1182 – 1226)

Saint Francis of Assisi was born in 1182, the only son of Pietro Bernardone, a wealthy cloth merchant in central Italy. The education that Francis received had the usual limitations of the times.²¹⁴ His father was a prosperous and well-known silk trader. Francis was thus born into the lap of luxury and spent his childhood without wanting for anything. He was well-known for leading a hedonistic lifestyle, having been an excess kid in his early years. According to his earliest biographer, Thomas of Celano, Francis led a dissolute youth life, enjoyed singing and dancing, and was popular among the young people of Assisi.²¹⁵ After participating in a war between his hometown Assisi and Perugia in 1202 and being held captive for a year after a lengthy illness, he underwent a conversion during the years 1204–1207. Francis wished to go to Apulia to get knighted by a certain Count gentile. But after the start of Apulia's journey, he felt unwell upon arriving at Spoleto and was apprehensive about the journey. During his sleep, he heard a voice asking, 'Who do you think can best reward you, the Master or the servant'? 'The Master' answered Francis. "Then why do you leave the master for the servant, the rich Lord for the poor man"? Following this, he was confused; his thoughts were transformed at daybreak, and he abandoned his plans to travel to Apulia.²¹⁶

Francis heard the voice again in Spoleto, interrupting his quiet prayer in front of a Byzantine crucifix in the tiny, deserted church of San Damiano. The voice said, "Francis, go repair my church; it is falling apart, as you can see". Francis chose to live in poverty by giving up material possessions and family relationships. He repaired the church of San Damiano, renovated a chapel dedicated to St. Peter the Apostle, and then restored the now-famous little chapel of St. Mary of the Angels, the Porziuncola. He gradually withdrew from the tumult of earthly things and applied himself secretly to receive Jesus Christ into his soul.²¹⁷ He committed himself to prayer and seclusion in order to discern God's will for his life. Through prayer and contemplation, he was able to accept lepers and outcasts as brothers and sisters, even though he had previously found them repulsive and disgusting. In his testament, Francis recounts an ascetically motivated

²¹⁴ Cf. M. A. HABIG (ed.), *St. Francis of Assisi. Writings and Early Biographies*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, II 1973, 230.

²¹⁵ Cf. J. M. POWELL, "Francis of Assisi, St. 1181-1226", in *Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, I, 497.

²¹⁶ Cf. HABIG (ed.), *St. Francis of Assisi*, 894-895.

²¹⁷ Cf. J. LECLERCQ – F. VANDENBROUCKE – L. BOUYER, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages*, Burns & Oates, London 1968, 288.

encounter with lepers that was extremely unpleasant and repugnant to him. When he left the lepers, God transformed that bitter disgust into a sweetness filling both body and soul, after which Francis felt himself to be a new person free of sinfulness.²¹⁸

Francis made a radical change in his life. It was a conversion from material and immaterial poverty, to the unconditional love of others and a literal imitation of Christ. He then took up the rebuilding of churches. But he made the mistake of using his father's money for the purpose. Francis' behaviour was annoying to his family and friends. In an application to the local magistrates, his father chained him to his cellar. However, the magistrates referred the case to the bishop. Francis yearned to surrender all of his possessions, as the bishop advised. So, then and there, he solemnly renounced all his possessions, stripped himself of his clothes and renounced even his sonship, "having no longer any father but Him who is in heaven". While attending Holy Mass in the chapel of St. Mary of the Angels, he was moved by the Gospel reading: "Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the labourer deserves his food. And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it, and stay with him until you depart" (Mt 10, 9-11). This was a decisive moment in his life, and he devoted himself wholly to a life of apostolic poverty. Then he cast aside his staff, removed his shoes, put on a rough tunic, and started preaching about repentance.²¹⁹

Francis committed his entire life to serving God and considered his life to be of no consequence. While many ridiculed him as a crazy man, others were moved to tears upon witnessing how swiftly he transitioned from worldly ostentation and vanity to love for God.²²⁰ After his separation from his first life, Francis had also given himself a uniform, that of the hermits: a raw tunic with a capuchin, a leather belt, sandals on his feet and a travelling stick.²²¹ Francis sought to follow Christ's words and imitate his life as perfectly as he could. Above all else in Christ, what caught Francis' attention was Christ's total renunciation and his absolute poverty.²²² The kingdom of heaven is said to be the possession of those who keep nothing of the goods of the world through their own will but their inclination toward spiritual things and their desire for eternal

²¹⁸ Cf. W. A. LÖHR, "Francis of Assisi", in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, II, 341.

²¹⁹ Cf. LECLERCQ – VANDENBROUCKE – BOUYER, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages*, 289.

²²⁰ Cf. HABIG (ed.), *St. Francis of Assisi*, 911.

²²¹ Cf. B. ROSSI, *San Francesco E il Suo Tempo*, San Paulo, Milano 2003, 43.

²²² Cf. HABIG (ed.), *St. Francis of Assisi*, 1542.

things.²²³ Franciscan spirituality motivates a way of following Christ based on the gospel. The more he embraced the Gospel, the more the “poverty and humility of Our Lord Jesus Christ absorbed in his life. Francis, called the second Christ, still motivates everyone, especially today’s youth and sets an example for us to follow, just like Jesus did, by leading a simple life and loving all creation.

2.11. St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556)

St. Ignatius of Loyola was born in the ancestral castle of the noble Loyola family. When he was about fifteen, he was sent to be trained for court life in the house of Juan Velázquez, the high treasurer of King Ferdinand and Isabella. There were likely to be occasions of loose morals and worldliness in that setting, but there were also likely to be elements that would encourage piety. He took part in military expeditions when occasion required. In 1521, he suffered a severe leg wound while defending a fortress against French forces at Pamplona, Spain. During his recuperation, he asked for books of chivalry to pass the time, but the only books available were Ludolph of Saxony’s *Life of Christ* and a collection of saints’ lives.²²⁴

In reading those books, the thirty-year-old soldier Ignatius experienced a profound religious conversion and became a wandering ascetic for the sake of Christ. As his healing progressed, he discovered that his fascination with saints’ lives had surpassed his interest in chivalrous tales. He began to examine his past life and reflect upon the need to do penance for it, which resulted in his decision to undertake a penitential pilgrimage to Jerusalem as soon as he recovered and spent his life in the service of Christ. It had been the custom for new knights to enter their chivalrous service to earthly lords by a prayerful vigil of arms. But Ignatius stealthily stripped off his fine clothing, replaced it with a pilgrim’s tunic, and prayed the night before Our Lady’s statue. Ignatius himself gave us a summary of his life from birth to Pamplona in his autobiography by saying, until the age of twenty-six, he was “a man given to the follies of the world, and what he was enjoyed most was a warlike sport with a great and foolish desire to win fame”. In 1522, he left Loyola for a new life dedicated to serving the Eternal King under Mary’s protection.²²⁵

The religious work most particularly struck Ignatius was the *De Vita Christy* of Ludolph of

²²³ Cf. HABIG (ed.), *St. Francis of Assisi*, 1550.

²²⁴ Cf. G. E. GANSS, *Ignatius of Loyola. The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, Paulist Press, New York Mahwah 1991, 14.

²²⁵ Cf. GANSS, *Ignatius of Loyola. The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, 15.

Saxony. This book influenced his whole life, inspiring him to devote himself to God and follow the example of Francis of Assisi and other great monks. Following the customs of chivalry, he went to the Benedictine shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat, made a general confession, and knelt before Her altar for the entire night in vigil. He gave away all of his elegant clothing to a poor man, left his sword and knife at the altar, and changed into rugged clothing, sandals, and a staff. From Montserrat, he walked on to the nearby town of Manresa (Catalonia), where he lived for about a year, begging for his keep and eventually doing responsibilities at a local hospital in exchange for food and lodging. For several months, he spent much of his time praying in a nearby cave, where he practised rigorous asceticism and formulated the fundamentals of his *Spiritual Exercises*.²²⁶

For Ignatius, nothing mattered more than living in total obscurity and concealing his heritage and previous way of life. He was dressed in cheap woven clothing and equipped with a staff and a rope for a belt. Because, in his worldly career, he had been too interested in grooming and preening himself, he wanted to make up for this excessive attention with thoroughgoing neglect. So, he left his hair, which he had worn in the fashionable style of that day, loose and uncombed. In addition, he gave himself stinging scourging three times each day and spent seven hours in prayer, kneeling continuously on the ground. He survived on bread and water, abstained from meat and wine at all times, fasted everyday but Sunday, and fortified himself with Holy Eucharist. He was so relentless in his quest to subjugate his body that he actively ran away from anything that could provide him with any physical pleasure.²²⁷

In 1523, Ignatius decided to go to Jerusalem and live the rest of his days serving people there, just as Christ and his disciples did. The hostility of the Turks prevented the fulfilment of his original plan to remain in the Holy Land. So, he returned to Europe and studied Latin, philosophy and theology to win people for Christ and reform their lives. After completing his theology and Latin studies, he enrolled at the University of Paris in 1534. He met the six men who would later form the foundation of his order, the Society of Jesus, while pursuing his studies. On August 15, 1534, he vowed to live in poverty and chastity and to go to the Holy Land with six companions. The six vowed to follow Loyola's vision of a "secular order" of priests who would defend the faith

²²⁶ Cf. GANSS, *Ignatius of Loyola*, 27.

²²⁷ Cf. P. DE RIBADENERIA, *The Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, The Institute of Jesuit Sources, Saint Louis, Missouri 2014, 23.

and propagate the Catholic message in Jerusalem; if this were not feasible, they would do whatever good they could for the pope and the Church. The war between Venice and the Turkish Empire prevented them from going to Palestine and engaging in missionary activities. He and the others concluded that God had other plans for them and that they could not serve as ministers in Jerusalem, but they should submit their services to the pope. At this time, Ignatius resolved to make their association permanent.²²⁸

Loyola and his companions met each night to discuss different aspects and options for their new institute. Loyola was tasked with drawing up their proposals in five chapters and presenting them to Paul III for approval. It differed greatly from the practices of previous religious orders in two points. First, the priests did not recite the divine office collectively because they believed that protracted chanting would constrain Jesuits and limit their capacity to minister to God and their neighbours by travelling, preaching, hearing confessions, and carrying out other duties. Second, there were no set rules regarding physical penances; instead, each person was free to choose his own level of zeal and discretion. On September 3, 1539, Paul III orally approved the Society of Jesus at Tivoli, saying, “The Finger of God is here”.²²⁹ Pilgrimage and discipleship were inseparably linked for Ignatius. To enter upon the voluntary exile of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem meant to leave one’s country, family and source of livelihood to follow Christ in a life of apostolic service (Mt 19, 27-29).²³⁰ He often used the phrase *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, Latin for “To the greater glory of God”. Thus, consecrated persons are called to abandon everything for the greater glory of God.

2.12. St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Teresa of Avila was one of the most important religious writers, mystics and catholic monastic reformers of 16th-century in Europe. She was both a product and a shaper of the deeply religious culture and pervasive formal religious institutions of 16th-century Spain. As she recounted in her famous spiritual biography *The Book of Her Life* (1565), it was already as a young girl that she and her brother, inspired by saint’s lives, dreamed of seeking martyrdom in the Holy Land or at least of living the life of the desert hermits. Eventually, these traditional monastic

²²⁸ Cf. C. DE DALMASES, “St. Ignatius of Loyola”, in *NCE*, VII, 312-313.

²²⁹ Cf. J. P. DONNELLY, *Ignatius of Loyola. Founder of Jesuits*, Longman, New York 2004, 74-75.

²³⁰ Cf. R. W. DUNPHY, *Placed with Jesus Bearing His Cross. A Study of Jesuit Identity in the Light of St. Ignatius Loyola's Life of Grace, as Based upon the First Jesuits' Understanding of their Relationship to their Founder*, Institutum Spiritualitatis Teresianum, Roma 1983, 263.

metaphors of martyrdom and the desert played a strong role in defining Teresa's life when she entered a Carmelite order in 1535 at the age of 20.²³¹ In 1537, at the age of twenty-two, she was professed as a member of Carmel. The origins of Carmel are lost in the mists of Jewish and Christian history, going back to Mount Carmel in modern-day Israel and a community of hermits who lived lives of intense rigour in the early twelfth century. As Teresa was making efforts to live a spiritual life, she realized that constant prayer and poverty should be the hallmarks of the Carmelite life.²³²

After experiencing a spiritual awakening in 1555, Teresa led the Carmelite Reform and the order's return to its original austere practices, which included poverty and isolation from the outside world despite her weakened health. She established new convents throughout Spain under the reformed order in spite of some opposition, the first of which was established in 1562. She wanted to form a small group of Christians who would be good friends of the Lord by striving to follow the evangelical counsels as closely as possible and living a life of prayer for preachers and theologians, the defenders of the Church; thus, a life in the service of the Church and service of Christ. But a group of women dedicating themselves to a life of prayer and contemplation in that age looked upon with caution. In those times, women were considered inferior to man, and there were interpretations of genetic laws which claimed that women were a mistake of nature, a kind of unfinished man. This thinking influenced the scholastic theologians, and some conservative theologians criticised Teresa's idea of mental prayer. They doubted how it could be possible to kneel before the Tabernacle for two hours and think of God since God is invisible. This was the skeptical environment in which Teresa founded a monastery of women who would dedicate themselves to prayer and intimate friendship with God.²³³

2.12.1. St. Teresa's Teaching on Detachment

In her book *The Way of Perfection*, she says that by "detaching ourselves from the world," we must become "detached from our own selves and renounce our self-will." The detached person cares nothing for one's own pleasure or reputation. In detachment, we completely surrender our wills to God. The happy result of detachment is inner freedom, freedom from worry about bodily

²³¹ Cf. T. DANDELET, "St. Teresa of Avila, 1515-1582", in *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, II, 1242

²³² Cf. M. T. MALONE, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY 2015, 73.

²³³ Cf. TERESA OF JESUS, *The Way of Perfection*, in trans., K. Kavanaugh – O. Rodriguez, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila II*, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington, D. C. 1980, 24-25.

comfort, honour, and wealth.²³⁴ She says that if we have really started to serve the Lord, the least we can do is give Him our lives.²³⁵ She proposes three practices for a life of prayer: love of neighbour, detachment, and humility. Since they touch upon the ties in one's relationship with others, the world, and oneself, they free the spirit.²³⁶

In the guidance for her Carmelite nuns, she regards detachment as caring for not any created things, and "it includes everything else for created things, and she says of detachment that "it includes everything else" in the sense that "if we care nothing for any created things, but embrace the Creator alone, His Majesty will infuse the virtues into us". In the same book, she writes that if we practice detachment with perfection, it includes everything because if we embrace the Creator and care not at all for the whole of creation, His Majesty will infuse the virtues. Our only concern should be to give ourselves entirely to Him without reserve. According to her, one who is not detached is unhealthy and will not possess freedom of spirit and complete peace. The soul who embraces the good Jesus our Lord with determination can detach from everything in this world, for everything is found in Him, and everything is forgotten. The traditionally recognised obstacles to detachment are selfish desire, wilfulness, a lack of humility and self-centeredness.²³⁷ She emphasises the importance of detaching oneself from everything that hinders the love of Jesus. Because of her deep divine wisdom, she was the first woman to be promoted to Doctor of the Church in 1970.

2.13. Alphonsus de Liguori (1696 –1787)

Alphonsus de Liguori was born on 27 September 1696, the eldest son of Giuseppe de Liguori and Anna Cavalieri, in Marianella, then a country suburb of Naples. His father, Don Giuseppe, wanted him to be a lawyer. By the end of October 1708, in his thirteenth year, Alphonsus registered as a law student at the university of Naples. In January 1713 he graduated as a Doctor of Laws. His membership of the *Congregazione dei Dottori*, under the guidance of his Oratorian confessors and directors, entailed practical work of charity among the poor of the city. Modern hygienic methods and the advance of medical science have reduced the unpleasantness and danger of washing the sick, feeding the helpless, making beds and so on, but in those days, voluntary service

²³⁴ Cf. TERESA OF JESUS, *The Way of Perfection*, 30.

²³⁵ Cf. TERESA OF JESUS, *The Way of Perfection*, 82.

²³⁶ Cf. TERESA OF JESUS, *The Way of Perfection*, 28-29.

²³⁷ Cf. TERESA OF JESUS, *The Way of Perfection*, 71-75.

in the *Incurabili* (a name given to similar hospitals in nearly every Italian city in those days) often demanded real courage and heroic charity. It was the most practical form of the lay apostolate. Alphonsus maintained his work among the poor of the *Incurabili* for over eight years; it was here that he first experienced real happiness in God's service and during this time, a desire to become a priest developed in his mind.²³⁸

Alphonsus was successful in his career as a lawyer. Once, Alphonsus lost an important case because a judge was bribed. He left the courtroom in disgust, never to return despite the pressure of his father and friends. While attending the sick in the 'Hospital of the Incurables', Alphonsus heard the voice of God calling him to leave the world and give himself to God's service. From this moment of his conversion, he moved away from the world of prestige and power into which he was born and towards the world of the most marginalised citizens of his age.²³⁹ But Alphonsus was confused about his future, haunted by a desire for the priesthood, which he had confided to his many clerical confidants and going through a period of adolescent scruples in sexual matters. During Holy Week in 1722, Alphonsus made an enclosed retreat with the Vincentian Fathers in Naples, where he was determined to abandon his legal career and become a priest. While working among the outcasts of Naples, he heard a voice calling him to leave the world, whereupon he knelt before the statue of Our Lady of Mercy in the Church of Our Lady of Ransom. At once, he ungirded his sword and placed it at Our Lady's feet as a symbol of dedication to her and of his resolve to become a priest. Gradually, he informed his parents and family of his decision to abandon his profession as a lawyer. No arguments from his mother or father could shake his resolve.²⁴⁰

Alphonsus spent most of the summer months of 1723 in prayer and discernment of his future. While working at the *Incurabili*, the thought of the vanity of the world came home to him with startling clarity. The gospel words "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?" (Mt 16, 26) seemed to resound in his ears. He was ordained to the priesthood on 21 December 1726 in the Cathedral of Naples at the age of thirty-one. His favourite devotion was the Forty Hours Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. He spent long hours on his knees, hidden in a quiet corner. In the introduction to his book *Visits to Jesus in the Blessed*

²³⁸ Cf. F. M. JONES (ed.), *Alphonsus de Liguori. Selected Writings*, Paulist Press, New York, Mahwah 1999, 17.

²³⁹ Cf. M. TERRENCE, "Alphonsus Liguori. Preacher of the God of Loveliness", in *The Way* 36/3 (1996) 246.

²⁴⁰ Cf. JONES (ed.), *Alphonsus de Liguori. Selected Writings*, 18-20.

Sacrament, he writes that where have souls who love God found the courage to make important resolutions if not before the Blessed Sacrament was exposed? Parties, banquets, theatres, and amusements are nothing but futility, and they are the main attractions the world has to offer but attractions full of bitterness and thorns.²⁴¹

In 1729, Liguori took up residence at the Chinese Institute in Naples, and there he began his missionary experience in the interior regions of the Kingdom of Naples, where he found people who were much poorer and more abandoned than any of the street children in Naples. From 1729 until the end of 1732, he was taking efforts to assemble a group of missionary priests to dedicate their lives to the preaching of the Word of God to the most abandoned souls of the kingdom of Naples, especially those living in the countryside.²⁴² On 9 November 1732, Alphonsus and some companions gathered in Scala to find the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer or Redemptorist Fathers, dedicated to preaching the word of God to the most abandoned, especially the rural poor. Sister Maria Celeste Crostarosa told him that it had been revealed to her that he was the one God had chosen to found the congregation. The particular ministry to which the Redemptorists dedicated themselves was evangelising those with the least access to the Church's ministry. They actualise it through the parish mission.²⁴³

2.13.1. Spirituality of Alphonsus de Liguori

For Alphonsus, the sanctity of life was more ascetical than mystical; it does not necessarily entail the gift of contemplation. The highest perfection, according to him, was that it is a result of ascetical endeavours under God's grace; one achieved total conformity with the will of God.²⁴⁴ He says that the spiritual journey begins with conversion from sin and ends with the spiritual heights of union with God in perfect detachment.²⁴⁵ He insists on detachment from creatures and union with God as the practical manifestation of one's love of God. Union with God, the highest achievement of charity, means total indifference, the abandonment of oneself to God in every circumstance: "I have no other wish than what God wishes for me".²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ Cf. F. M. JONES, *Alphonsus de Liguori. The Saint of Bourbon Naples (1696-1787)*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1992, 33.

²⁴² Cf. JONES (ed.), *Alphonsus de Liguori. Selected Writings*, 25-26.

²⁴³ Cf. TERRENCE, "Alphonsus Liguori. Preacher of the God of Loveliness", 247.

²⁴⁴ Cf. JONES (ed.), *Alphonsus de Liguori. Selected Writings*, 42.

²⁴⁵ Cf. JONES (ed.), *Alphonsus de Liguori. Selected Writings*, 45.

²⁴⁶ JONES (ed.), *Alphonsus de Liguori. Selected Writings*, 47.

In his doctrine of detachment in chapter 17 of the *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, Liguori writes that God often uses aridity to draw his most cherished souls close to himself. Attachment to our inordinate inclinations is the greatest obstacle to true union with God. Therefore, when God intends to draw a soul to his perfect love, he detaches the soul from all affection for created things. Through these losses, troubles, neglect, bereavements and infirmities, he wipes out all earthly attachments so that the affections may be centred on him alone. Thus, Alphonsus insists on frequenting sacraments, denial of self and prayer for sanctification.²⁴⁷ To acquire divine love, one must detach oneself from human attachments. There is no place for the love of God in hearts full of earth; the more there is of earth, the less there is of the reign of the love of God. When the love of God takes possession of souls, they no longer consider those things the world considers highly valuable.²⁴⁸

Those who give their material goods in alms, their blood in mortification, and their food in fasts only give a part of what they have to God. But those who give the will give Him everything. He writes, in *the practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, that the most difficult thing of all is to accept the will of God in those things which are agreeable to us and in things which are not. In good times, even sinners know how to unite themselves with the will of God, but the saints unite themselves with God's will even in those things which are disagreeable and displeasing to them. It is here that our quality of love of God is demonstrated. We should unite ourselves to the will of God not only in sickness, the desolation of spirit, poverty, the death of loved ones and so on, but also in contempt, loss of our good name, injustice, robbery and all kinds of persecution. On such occasions when we are offended by someone in our reputation, our sense of honour, although God does not will the sin of the one who injures us, He will that we should learn humility, poverty, and self-denial from these experiences.²⁴⁹ He teaches that to conform our will to God's will in all the circumstances of life, which are agreeable and disagreeable, is a great act of love and consecration to God. We consider the teaching of the following pair from monastic tradition for further clarity on the concept of consecrated life as a total oblation of one's life to God.

²⁴⁷ Cf. JONES (ed.), *Alphonsus de Liguori. Selected Writings*, 48.

²⁴⁸ Cf. JONES (ed.), *Alphonsus de Liguori. Selected Writings*, 60-61.

²⁴⁹ Cf. JONES (ed.), *Alphonsus de Liguori. Selected Writings*, 72-73.

2.14. Armand Jean Le Bouthillier de Rancé (1626-1700)

Armand Jean Le Bouthillier de Rancé was a French abbot, reformer of the Cistercian Order and founder of that of the Trappist monks. He was the second son of Denis Le Bouthillier, Lord of Rancé and Councilor of State. After the death of his elder brother, even without a vocation, he was initiated into an ecclesiastical career to keep his family from the numerous benefits that had become vacant. He was originally intended for the Knights of Malta. At twelve, he published a translation of Anacreon with Greek notes. On the death of his brother in 1637, he became canon of Notre Dame de Paris, abbot of La Trappe Abbey, and several other places, which gave him a revenue of about 15,000 pounds. In 1651, he was ordained priest by his uncle Victor Bouthillier, the Archbishop of Tours, and embarked on a career as a court abbot. In 1652 his father died, leaving him a further increase in estate. At the age of twenty-six, he was left with practically unlimited wealth.²⁵⁰

Rancé's uncle appointed him as one of the archdeaconries of his diocese. The next year, in October 1655, he employed all his influence to send him as a delegate to the Assembly of the Clergy, meeting in Paris. Rancé served on various commissions, apparently playing a quite active part in proceedings. The death of the Duchess of Montbazon in 1657 gave him the first serious thought leading to his conversion. In 1660, he assisted at the death of the Duke of Orléans, which made so great an impression on him that he said: "Either the Gospel deceives us, or this is the house of a reprobate". After having taken counsel, he disposed of all his possessions, repudiated ambition and luxury and began to look for a new, spiritual basis for his life.²⁵¹ The death of Madame de Montbazon on April 28, 1657, made him see how empty, fleeting, and pointless the things of the world and all that up to then he had passionately sought, causing him to lose God. As a result, Rancé's passionate drive was not destroyed, but it changed direction. It passed from one extreme to the other and directed toward God as vigorously as it once had been toward creatures. Thus, he said: "My ambitions and hopes are reduced to eternity alone" and "One must give oneself to God as much as one once gave oneself to the world". In renouncing the world and its pleasures, Rancé reacts directly against all he had done in his previous life. A kind of inner compulsion drives

²⁵⁰ Cf. A. J. KRAILSHEMER, *Armand Jean de Rancé Abbot of La Trappe. His Influence in the Cloister and the World*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974, 4-8.

²⁵¹ Cf. KRAILSHEMER, *Armand Jean de Rancé Abbot of La Trappe*, 9-11.

him to the limit of self-denial.²⁵²

“Forsake all and follow me” was not an easy call to obey literally in the seventeenth century for someone in Rancé’s position. He could not give away his material possessions because he had obligations to other family members. In 1663, April, he had finally made up his mind and took the irrevocable step of accepting a monastic vocation in the Cistercian Order. He formally took the Cistercian habit on 13th June as a simple monk in the company of his personal servant Antoine Noël Gelanne and, from that moment on, regarded himself as dead to the world he had left.²⁵³

2.14.1. The Ascetical Teachings of Armand Jean Rancé

Rané withdrew to his abbey and instituted a strict reform after rising to the rank of regular abbot in 1664. It was a need for him to introduce his own reform to go further. Since he believed that mitigations had many flaws and that practising what is imperfect is a difficult way to achieve perfection, the reform at La Trappe had to be absolute. The monk would be completely cut off from the outside world at La Trappe, receiving no news from outside and living in constant silence. The monk should die in this transitory world. His life was hidden in God alongside Christ; he ought to live as though he were in his tomb, anticipating the return of Christ to rouse him and welcome him into the beatitudes. He has solemnly vowed to give up the world and everything that comes to pass through the senses to live solely for God and be concerned only with eternal things. Armand Rancé writes, “From the moment one wants to belong to God and be separated from men, life is fit only to be destroyed, and we should consider ourselves merely as lambs for the slaughter”.²⁵⁴

Rancé’s reform essentially centred on penitence. It prescribed hard manual labour, silence, a meagre diet, isolation from the world, and renunciation of most studies. The hard labour was in part a penitential exercise, in part a way of keeping the monastery self-supportive so that communication with the world might be minimal. Rancé’s instructions are simple and applicable to all; however, they are hard to practice. He says one must die to the self and the world; once liberated from the earthly bonds, the spirit must live for eternity.²⁵⁵ The general chapters’ statutes

²⁵² Cf. A. LUCIEN, “Rancé’s Spirituality. Total Service of God”, in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 35/1 (2000) 48-49.

²⁵³ Cf. KRAILSHEMER, *Armand Jean de Rancé Abbot of La Trappe*, 15-17.

²⁵⁴ LUCIEN, “Rancé’s Spirituality. Total Service of God”, 49-50.

²⁵⁵ Cf. KRAILSHEMER, *Armand Jean de Rancé Abbot of La Trappe*, 330.

document the order's progressive shift away from poverty and the monastic way of life and towards involvement with the outside world. Richer abbeys suffered from interference by both ecclesiastical and secular authorities. By the 15th century, the Cistercians were no longer a spiritual force in the Church. Later, in England and elsewhere, monasteries were suppressed after the Reformation. There were reform movements within the order. This resulted in the division of monasteries into regional congregations, each responsible for monastic discipline. Under increasing pressures to be "useful," many houses took responsibility for schools and parishes. In some monasteries, especially in France, there were movements toward a more austere lifestyle, effectively dividing the order into "Common Observance" and "Strict Observance." The most effective of the reformers was Armand-Jean de Rancé (d. 1700), abbot of La Trappe. His followers received the name Trappist.²⁵⁶ Realising the transitoriness of this world, he renounced his rich wealth and lifestyle to live solely for God and his service.

2.15. Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

Thomas Merton was born to artist parents in France in 1915, was orphaned at age of fifteen, educated in France, England and the United States, converted to Roman Catholicism at twenty-three, entered the Cistercian Monastery of Our Lady of Gethsemani on December 10, 1941. Merton, like his fellows, experimented with the ideals and panaceas of his time – communism, psychoanalysis, Lawrentian sexuality, jazz, and alcohol. In the end, like some other intellectuals of the 1930s, the solution of Catholicism, for he underwent a dramatic conversion while a student at Columbia. He gave up smoking – no mean task for a man accustomed to over forty cigarettes a day as well as heavy drinking and began to avoid girls. His deepest concern from the time of his conversion onward was the deepening of his relationship with God.²⁵⁷

In January 1938, Merton graduated from Columbia with a B.A. in English. In June, his friend Seymour arranged a meeting with Mahanambrata Brahmachari, a Hindu monk visiting New York from the University of Chicago. Merton was impressed by him, believing the monk was profoundly centred on God. While Merton expected Brahmachari to recommend Hinduism, instead, he advised Merton to reconnect with the spiritual roots of his own culture. He suggested Merton read *The Confessions* of Augustine and *The Imitation of Christ*. Merton read them both

²⁵⁶ Cf. M. CASEY, "Cistercian Spirituality", in *NDCS*, 180.

²⁵⁷ Cf. M. FURLONG, *Merton. A Biography*, Collins, London 1980, 14-15.

and experienced a profound conversion. He was received into the Catholic Church on 16th November 1938. His desire to become a priest started following several discussions with his friend Bob Lax and after studying St. John of the Cross. He made a retreat at the Trappist monastery in Gethsemany, Kentucky, and decided to join them on the second visit. He gave his books to the Franciscans and his clothes to blacks in Harlem. He entered the monastery in Gethsemany on December 10, 1942. It is said that Merton died by accidental electrocution in December 1968 in Thailand while attending an interreligious conference on monasticism and contemplation.²⁵⁸

2.15.1. Merton's View of Asceticism and Sacrifice

According to Merton, the monk is a man who completely renounces the familiar patterns of human and social life and follows God's call to enter into "the desert," that is, into the land unknown to him and unfrequented by other people. Negative reasons cannot account for the monastic journey into solitude. Monastic renunciation is the answer to a positive call from God.²⁵⁹ In entering the monastery, Merton not only felt he was leaving the world and giving up "everything"; he was also leaving behind a certain "Thomas Merton," with all his anxious desire to "be somebody," his demanding ego, his tendency to sarcasm and scorn for people who didn't meet his standards. With the anonymous monks in their white habits, he intended to drown in the world, to be invisible, a nobody. As he wrote in a letter to his abbot, "I want to be a forgotten and unknown saint, hidden in God alone".²⁶⁰ He considered renunciation of the world is necessary for liberating man from the illusion that he had wrapped around himself like a bandage. He uses the term "world" precisely in the New Testament sense. In *No Man is an Island*, he says, "The world in the New Testament is the collective name for all those subjected to the desire of temporal and carnal things as ends in themselves."²⁶¹ In *Climate of Monastic Prayer*, he writes that a "monk is a Christian who has responded to a special call from God and has withdrawn from the more active concerns of worldly life in order to devote himself completely to repentance, conversion, renunciation and prayer. The monastic life is one of prayer where ascetical practices fill the space

²⁵⁸ Cf. T. MERTON, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Harcourt. Brace, New York 1948, 193-198.

²⁵⁹ Cf. E. MALITS, *The Solitary Explorer. Thomas Merton's Transforming Journey*, Harper & Row Publishers, San Francisco, NY 1980, 21.

²⁶⁰ T. MERTON, *The School of Charity. Letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction*, P. HART (ed.), New York Farrar, Straus, Giroux 1990, 12.

²⁶¹ T. MERTON, *No Man is an Island*, Dell Publishing Co., Inc. New York 1963, 85.

created by the abandonment of other concerns”.²⁶²

Merton says that the grace of the Holy Spirit must guide self-denial. The light of His grace teaches us the distinction between what is good and evil in ourselves, what is from God and what is from ourselves, what is acceptable to God and what merely flatters our own self-esteem. The perfection of Christian renunciation is the total offering of ourselves to God in union with the sacrifice of Christ. The meaning of this sacrifice of ourselves is that we renounce the dominion of our own acts, of our own life and our own death into the hands of God so that we do all things not for ourselves according to our own will and desires, but for God, and according to His will. Further, he adds that to offer this sacrifice perfectly, we must practice asceticism, without which we cannot gain enough control over our hearts and their passions to reach a degree of indifference to life and death. We must indeed become indifferent to the things we have renounced in the effect of love for God, in whose honour we renounce them. With detachment and indifference, it does not make us indifferent to the value of the things in themselves. On the contrary, only when we are detached from created things, we can begin to value them.²⁶³ Thus, for him, perfection and interior purity are renouncing and uprooting all our unconscious attachments to created things and our own will and desires.²⁶⁴

According to Merton, nothing that we consider evil can be offered to God in sacrifice. We give Him the best we have in order to declare that He is infinitely better. Thus, he says that we should give Him all that we prize to assure Him that He is more to us than our “all”. One of the chief tasks of Christian asceticism is to make our life and body valuable enough to be offered to God in sacrifice. We sacrifice ourselves to God by the spiritualisation of our whole being through obedience to His grace. The only sacrifice He accepts is the purity of our love. The peace of a soul detached from all things and from itself is a sign that our sacrifice is truly acceptable to God.²⁶⁵ According to him, the essence of monastic vocation is precisely leaving the world with all its desires, ambitions, and concerns to live not only for God but also by Him and in Him.²⁶⁶ Thus, he inspires us to give up everything we value most in our lives to be in union with the sacrifice of Christ to live only for God and have God's realisation - the essence of religious life.

²⁶² T. MERTON, *The Climate of Monastic Prayer*, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, MI 1969, 29

²⁶³ Cf. MERTON, *No Man is an Island*, 112-113.

²⁶⁴ Cf. T. MERTON, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, New Directions Book, New York 1961, 256.

²⁶⁵ Cf. MERTON, *No Man is an Island*, 115-117.

²⁶⁶ Cf. MERTON, *No Man is an Island*, 148.

Conclusion

While the Gospel clearly states that the path and measure of following Christ is total renunciation, the tradition of the Church, as we have seen briefly, bears witness to those who gave away everything in order to make a total gift of oneself to imitate him. In his book, *The Monk and the Martyr*, Edward Malone highlights that “the mere renunciation of worldly property was not enough for the monk. The true follower of Christ must renounce all that is superfluous – all superfluous speech, actions, and even all superfluous and vain thoughts. It must include the complete renunciation of self”.²⁶⁷ Bouyer points to the three types of renunciations they undergo to follow Christ and to live in union with him, according to the Scripture and according to the fathers of the monastic tradition: 1) rejecting all worldly pleasures and riches; 2) renouncing ourselves, our vices, our bad habits, and all the wild passions of the spirit and the flesh; and 3) withdrawing their hearts from everything temporal and visible, focusing solely on the eternal and invisible.²⁶⁸ In the figures which we studied, we noted how the things of this world once greatly impacted them, once they were touched by the message of Christ, led to a complete renunciation of everything else to live it. We also observed how, consequently, their lives assume an austere style in complete surrender to God. Their entire manner of living now models on Jesus the incarnate Son of God. They go on making an impact in the history of the Church, attracting persons for a radical response, as in the case of Mar Ivanios, to renounce everything, including one’s life and its dreams to follow Christ and live the values he lived, to partake in the mission for which he was incarnate. Life specially consecrated to God as a total gift of self will go on assuming greater clarity in the teachings of the Church, especially since the celebration of the Vatican Council II. To understand Mar Ivanios’ life and teaching as a holocaust offered to God better and deeper, in the next chapter, we shall try to gather the main ideas on our theme in the ecclesiastical magisterium.

²⁶⁷ E. E. MALONE, *The Monk and the Martyr*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC 1950, 22.

²⁶⁸ Cf. BOUYER, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, 327.

CHAPTER THREE

RELIGIOUS CONSECRATION AS TOTAL OFFERING OF SELF: SOME RELEVANT MAGISTERIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Introduction

Religious consecration is understood as a dedication of self and the living out of a commitment based on the consecrating power of Baptism. The first millennium's monastic life did not specify the profession of the evangelical counsels. It was adopted later, confirming that the characteristic aspect of religious life is the total commitment to God - the complete self-giving to God in the way of a pact. It was not until the 12th century that the self-abandonment to God adopted the three vows. The three vows were not understood in a restricted way but as a way to express the self-offering of the whole person, in the way of a sacrifice of the holocaust.²⁶⁹ According to St. Thomas Aquinas, in the religious profession, a person offers to God not something distinct from himself/herself but his/her very self. Religious self-oblation has traditionally been called a sacrifice or a holocaust.²⁷⁰ Pope Benedict XVI underlines that the essence of the consecrated life is the "concrete dedication of the consecrated persons to God and their brethren." Because of this, consecrated life is an eloquent sign of the presence of God's Kingdom.²⁷¹ In his article *Consecration for Mission*, Paul Molinari says there is no religious life without the constant and radical despoilment of self. However, the Lord's effective relationship with his disciples makes this despoilment possible and joyful. In this relationship, the religious count everything as nothing to share the life of Jesus, whom they love above all else.²⁷²

In the previous chapter, we tried to see early fathers' lives and teachings on total renunciation. In this chapter, we will concentrate on some key magisterial teachings, particularly those found in the Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis*, which speak specifically about the importance of religious life in the Church. We will also look at a few key post-conciliar documents and some key papal speeches and letters which exclusively speak of total

²⁶⁹ Cf. A. T. CANO, "Theology of Consecrated Life. The Christological and Existential Nucleus", in *Fecha* (2018) 5.

²⁷⁰ Cf. THOMAS, *De Perfectione Vitae*, c. XI, *Summa Theologica* II-II, 186-1 Quoted in J. M. O'CONNOR, *What is Religious Life? A Critical Reappraisal*, Dominican Publications, Dublin 1982, 111.

²⁷¹ Cf. F. GUSTILO, "The Thought of Benedict XVI on Consecrated Life", in *Landas* 25 (2011) 185.

²⁷² Cf. P. MOLINARI, "Consecration for Mission", in *The Way Supplement* 17 (1972) 9.

consecration in religious life. The term consecrated life is quite recent. It became popular with the promulgation of the Latin Code of Canon Law and with the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*. In the documents of Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* has the title ‘religious’, and *Perfectae Caritatis* discusses the need for a “renewal of religious life.” We use consecrated life and religious life interchangeably in this paper.

3.1. Religious Life as a Total Dedication to God

The religious is a Christian who consecrates his/her self to God by observing the evangelical counsels. Although every Christian is consecrated through baptism, religious consecration is considered an act of surrendering oneself totally, absolutely, and immediately to the love of God. Thus, the life of the religious acquires significance and brings a seal of immediate belonging to God.²⁷³ Vatican II clearly indicates that baptismal consecration is indispensable to any subsequent Christian consecration. However, the consecrated character of religious life as a ‘special consecration’, which is grafted on the Baptismal consecration, is expressed in *LG* 42 and 44 as well as in *PC* 5. The peculiar character of religious consecration described in *PC* 5 is that its “effect” is to facilitate a “renouncing the world”. It does not mean that the world is evil or sinful but one renounces the marriage, riches and autonomy by following the evangelical counsels for the greater good. It declares that religious consecration “provides an ampler manifestation” of gospel values than does baptism.²⁷⁴ While baptism separates Christians from moral evil in the world, the profession of the evangelical counsels separates religious from the good things of the world “for the sake of the Kingdom”.²⁷⁵

Pope Paul VI, in *Evangelica Testificatio*, speaks about a ‘particular consecration,’ which says the religious who, through the practice of the evangelical counsels, wished to follow Christ more freely and more faithfully imitate him, dedicating their whole life to God with a particular consecration, which has its roots in baptismal consecration (*ET* 4).²⁷⁶ John Paul II, in *Redemptionis*

²⁷³ Cf. M. BEVILACQUA, “Religious Consecration. Perspectives of Interpretation in the Magisterium and in Theological Reflection”, in *Consecratio et Consecratio per Evangelica Consilia. Proceedings of the International Seminar*, Rome, 1-3 March 2018, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2019, 154-155.

²⁷⁴ Cf. A. QUERALT, *The Value of Religious Consecration According to Vatican II*, in R. LATOURELLE (ed.), *Vatican II. Assessment and Perspectives*, II, Paulist Press, New York, Mahwah 1988-1989, 42.

²⁷⁵ Cf. B. COLE – P. CONNER, *Christian Totality. Theology of the Consecrated Life*, Alba House, New York 1997, 37.

²⁷⁶ Cf. PAUL VI, *Evangelica Testificatio. Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of the Religious Life According to Teaching of the Second Vatican Council*, 29 June 1971, *AAS* 63 (1971) 497-526, # 4.

Donum, while dealing with religious consecration considering the Redemption, uses the term ‘consecrated’ when referring to religious: “The Church thinks of you, above all as persons who are ‘consecrated’: consecrated to God in Jesus Christ as His exclusive possession”. According to him, the religious profession, rooted in the Baptismal consecration, entails a ‘new consecration’ which constitutes a new life for God in Jesus Christ (*RD* 7). Moreover, the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* speaks about the ‘special and fruitful deepening of the consecration received in Baptism’ (*VC* 30) as well as a new and special consecration’ (*VC* 31), rooted in Baptism and Confirmation.²⁷⁷ Thus, all these documents say that the consecration of the religious, which they make through evangelical counsels, is deeply rooted in Baptism.

3.1.1. Religious Consecration in the Conciliar Teachings

The Second Vatican Council deals with the religious mainly in the dogmatic constitution of the Church *Lumen Gentium* and the decree on the up-to-date renewal of religious life *Perfectae Caritatis*. It presented the religious life as existent in the Church, as an inevitable part of her very essence and existence.²⁷⁸ These two Conciliar documents on the consecrated life, *Lumen Gentium* (Chapter VI) and *Perfectae Caritatis* were a great challenge and an awakening call for the religious congregations. The Council challenged the status and the identity of religious in the hierarchical Church²⁷⁹, reoriented the dynamism of religious life by changing the order of the religious vows,²⁸⁰ and renewed its triple relationships - to God, to the brethren, and to the world.²⁸¹

Chapter VI of *LG* on ‘Religious’ presents the consecrated life in the context of the life and holiness of the entire Church. It highlights the various aspects and elements of consecrated life –

²⁷⁷ Cf. J. R. CARBALLO, “Consecration in Consecrated Life”, in *Consecratio et Consecratio per Evangelica Consilia. Proceedings of the International Seminar*, Rome, 1-3 March 2018, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2019, 7.

²⁷⁸ Cf. J. M. KALLIDUKIL, *The Canonical Significance of the Synod of Bishops of 1994 on Consecrated Life*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt, Germany 2003, 46.

²⁷⁹ *Lumen Gentium* explicitly attests that religious life does not belong to the Church’s hierarchical structure but to its life and holiness (*LG* 44).

²⁸⁰ Until the Second Vatican Council, the order of the evangelical counsels was obedience, chastity, and poverty. The council changed the order of the vows placing chastity first followed by poverty and obedience (*LG* 42, 43, 46, 50; *PC* 12, 13, 14). The older ordering was based on the scale of values of those things which are renounced in the life according to the evangelical counsels. But the Vatican Council, without denying but even stressing the aspect of renunciation, sought to give pride of place to the positive element, and absolute primacy to charity towards both God and all humankind.

²⁸¹ *Perfectae Caritatis* indicates three fundamental shifts aiming at the renewal – from rule to the Gospel (*PC* 2), from authority to fraternity (*PC* 15), from flight from the world to immersion in the world (*PC* 2). Cf. L. C. KOTTACKA, *Theological Perspectives on the Link Between Martyrdom and Consecrated Life*, Dissertatio Ad Lauream in Facultate S. Theologiae Apud Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomae in Urbe, Romae 2008, 130-131.

in relation to God, the Church as a community and hierarchy, the world, and the self. The evangelical counsels are the life-giving principles of the religious life. *LG* 46 presented consecrated life as a true proclamation of the life of Christ, whose mission embraced every walk of life and who did it by being concerned about every aspect of human life. This demands a special consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. In the last section (*LG* 47), the document exhorted those who are consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels to preserve and excel on the path of holiness to which they have been called and consecrated. This demands constant renewal and adaptation. Thus, the chapter on Religious paved the way for the significant conciliar decree *Perfectae Caritatis*.²⁸² Vatican II revitalises the basic act of religious life as *Deo totaliter mancipari* (to give oneself wholly to God *LG* 44), *totam vitam Dei famulatu mancipare* (to give one's whole life to God *PC* 5). By the profession of the evangelical counsels, the religious offer everything that we are and what we have, relying only on the providence of God.

In Chapter Six of the Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (1965), the Second Vatican Council, speaks about the nature of consecrated life and reminds its members of their place among the people of God and their role in the Church.²⁸³ *Lumen Gentium* deals with the nature and dignity of consecrated life according to its essence. At the beginning of *LG* 44, the essential nature of the religious life is described, which states that through vows, taken in a state-sanctioned by the Church, a member of the faithful “consecrates himself wholly to God, his supreme love. In a new and special way makes himself over to God, to serve and honour him”.²⁸⁴ By profession of the evangelical counsels, “a person gives himself over totally to God whom he loves above all else.”²⁸⁵ Through the profession of the evangelical counsels, religious renounces temporal goods, family life, and one's own will for the sake of God, which is the highest value. Through this kind of prompt abnegation on his part, he removes the impediments that retard charity, namely the threefold concupiscence (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life 1 Jn 2, 16), and acquires precious freedom for serving God and his fellow beings.²⁸⁶ *Lumen Gentium* 44 again

²⁸² Cf. KALLIDUKIL, *The Canonical Significance of the Synod of Bishops of 1994 on Consecrated Life*, 48-49.

²⁸³ Cf. P. J. GRIFFIN, “Documents of the Church for Consecrated Life”, in *Vincentiana* (2012) 335.

²⁸⁴ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, AAS 57 (1965) 5-71, # 44. Hereafter *LG*.

²⁸⁵ R. M. WILTGEN (ed.), *The Religious Life Defined. An Official Commentary on the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council*, Divine Word Publications, Techny, Illinois 1970, 27.

²⁸⁶ Cf. WILTGEN (ed.), *The Religious Life Defined*, 44.

states that a baptised Christian is dead to sin and dedicated to God, but he desires to derive still more abundant fruit from the grace of his baptism through the profession of the evangelical counsels in the Church.

Lumen Gentium states that every Christian must strive for perfection and be commanded to love God to the utmost of his/her power. However, everyone is not called to the same degree of love. The zealous Christian in the world would also practice mortification, give alms, observe evangelical counsels, and thus advance in the way of love. However, because of the religious state and the radical renunciation of the world that the profession of evangelical counsels has sealed, the life of the religious becomes a stable way of life by set rules. He or she has been freed of everything that could hinder him or her from loving spiritual goods. Therefore, a religious vocation is a vocation to greater love and a more perfect observance of the commandments, which is necessarily a closer intimacy with God and a loftier holiness.²⁸⁷ While all Christians are consecrated through baptism, religious consecration by the profession of evangelical counsel is considered an act of one's total submission to God's love.

LG 44 deals with the nature and importance of the religious profession in the first part, and the two succeeding parts discuss the meaning of the religious state in and for the Church. It answers some of the questions like what the candidate intended to do by the profession of vows, what happens in the profession, and what theological consequences the profession entails. First, by binding to observe the evangelical counsels, the candidate gives completely to God, whom he/she loves above all things, to be his own, and therefore, they wish to keep aside all that could hinder them in fervently loving and worshipping God. Through the profession of evangelical counsels, consecrated people are appointed to serve and glorify God with a special and new title that is more perfectly consecrated to God's service.²⁸⁸

Stefania Tassotti explains that the constitutive elements of consecration are outlined in article 44 of *Lumen Gentium* as follows:

God is the principal author of consecration: The acts of the council highlight the difficulty of expressing the action of consecration with a single verb, which implies different meanings; for

²⁸⁷ Cf. H. VORGRIMLER (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, I, Herder and Herder, New York 1967, 257-258. Christ's grace is not given in the same measure to all; therefore all cannot in fact attain the same degree of perfection but to each according to the free choice of God's loving will (LG 40).

²⁸⁸ Cf. VORGRIMLER (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, I, 275.

this reason, three verbs are used in the conciliar texts: *consecrare*, *devovere*, and *mancipare*. The verb *consecrare* indicates the act with which God takes possession of the person. The verbs *mancipare* and *devovere*, on the other hand, indicate the act by which a person puts himself in the hands of another. In the acts of the council with reference to this text of the *LG* it is clearly stated that the use of the verb *consecrare* indicates the action of God.²⁸⁹ Consecration is a free and gratuitous action of God who personally chooses and calls whomever he wants; he preserves the person for himself so that he may dedicate him/herself to Him in a particular and exclusive way: that is, He makes it divine, personal, and sacred and the root of religious life.²⁹⁰

Baptism: the root of religious consecration: Jesus makes every Christian a sharer in his life through baptism. This baptismal gift and the fundamental Christian consecration in which the roots of every other consecration lie. Jesus lived the consecration totally dependent on the Father, loving him above all, in total oblation to his will. All Christians share these aspects of the life of His Son. However, for the good of all, God gives some the gift of a more intimate following of Christ in his poverty, chastity, and obedience.²⁹¹ Religious consecration is inserted into baptismal consecration and expressed more fully because it touches and influences the person's whole being. Religious consecration, therefore, creates a new title of belonging to God.²⁹²

Vows: The means by which religious consecration is lived: Religious consecration is achieved through a progressive conformation to Christ through the living of the vows: chastity, poverty, and obedience. Ultimately, it is the response that the person freely and out of love gives to the call from God. With the profession of the evangelical counsels, he intends to free himself from the impediments that could distract him from the fervour of charity and the perfection of divine worship. Evangelical counsels in religious life are not the fruit of human initiative but of God's infinite love.²⁹³ Chastity is a precious gift the Father gives to certain people (Mt 19, 11-12; 1 Cor 7, 7), consecrating oneself totally without any division of heart to God alone. To be a total gift in the process of consecrating oneself to God requires poverty and obedience as complementary elements; without these two counsels, the gift would not be the total one of an

²⁸⁹ Cf. S. TASSOTTI, *La Consacrazione Religiosa. dal Concilio Vaticano II all'Esortazione Apostolica Vita Consecrata*, Edizioni OCD, Roma 2003, 32-33.

²⁹⁰ Cf. TASSOTTI, *La Consacrazione Religiosa*, 34.

²⁹¹ Cf. TASSOTTI, *La Consacrazione Religiosa*, 36.

²⁹² Cf. TASSOTTI, *La Consacrazione Religiosa*, 37-38.

²⁹³ Cf. TASSOTTI, *La Consacrazione Religiosa*, 38-39.

undivided heart.²⁹⁴

Freed from impediments, those who embrace the evangelical counsels are said to be more intimately consecrated to God, for they have made radical self-dedication as St. Thomas, who teaches it as a holocaust, that is, a whole burnt offering.²⁹⁵ In *Lumen Gentium*, the verb “consecrate” and the noun “consecration” are used to explain the meaning of self-giving and obligation to service. In this connection, the council reminds us that baptism is the fundamental consecration of every Christian, but in order to draw more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace religious make the profession of the evangelical counsels in the Church.²⁹⁶

Mediation by the Church: Consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels is affirmed as a definitive response to God in a public commitment undertaken before the Church and belongs indisputably to the life and holiness of the Church. This important affirmation of the Council regarding the charisma of religious life in the Church says that the Church is the mediator of consecration.²⁹⁷ The dedication of self to God through the evangelical counsels is the basic fact of religious life dedicated publicly to the service of God in the Church.²⁹⁸

LG 46 makes clear that the religious state is worthy of esteem in the Church, that it is not an obstacle to the genuine development of the human person, but embracing the evangelical counsels facilitates both purification of heart and spiritual freedom in those who freely follow Christ more closely and by manifesting his self-emptying in their lives. Thus, the council affirms that the undivided heart sought by consecrated chastity, which recalls the total gift of self by martyrdom, is the centre of consecrated life. The council does not treat consecrated life as a higher state of life, but it presents consecrated life as a distinct and identifiable form for some people in pursuit of that one holiness to which all Christians are called.²⁹⁹ One gives oneself to God by giving oneself to the Church. Thus, the gift of self to God is accomplished within the Church and through dedication

²⁹⁴ Cf. J. BEYER, “Life Consecrated by the Evangelical Counsels. Conciliar Teaching and Later Developments”, in R. LATOURELLE (ed.), *Vatican II. Assessment and Perspectives*, II, Paulist Press, New York, Mahwah 1989, 68.

²⁹⁵ Cf. K. MCNAMARA (ed.), *Vatican II. The Constitution on the Church*, Chapman, London 1968, 286.

²⁹⁶ Cf. J. M. LOZANO, *Life as Parable. Reinterpreting the Religious Life*, Paulist Press, New York, Mahwah 1986, 100.

²⁹⁷ Cf. TASSOTTI, *La Consacrazione Religiosa*, 40.

²⁹⁸ Cf. J. M. LOZANO, *Discipleship. Towards an Understanding of Religious Life*, trans. B. Wilczynski, Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, Chicago 1983, 284.

²⁹⁹ Cf. E. McDONOUGH, “*Lumen Gentium*’s Chapter 6. Religious”, in *Review for Religious* 52/6 (1993) 931.

to the Church.³⁰⁰

The special value of religious life consists in its being a visible expression of the common vocation to love God with one's whole heart and, in Christological terms, the common call to follow Christ, abandoning all else.³⁰¹ The renunciation proper to religious life is the abandoning of certain ties exclusively oriented toward Christ.³⁰² *PC* 5, returning to the foundation of *LG* chapters 5 and 6, reaffirms consecrated life as a fuller expression of baptismal consecration and orients members of consecrated life towards following Christ as the one thing necessary (Lk 10, 39) both for seeking God and for effective participation in the work of redemption.³⁰³ *PC* 5 states that consecration depends, above all, on the divine call and on a self-giving response on the part of a person to the God who calls. The whole person is involved and oriented towards a single end: to live only for God. This exclusivity becomes totality and radicality and implies a break with everything that is not divine. Living for God alone means putting Him at the centre of one's existence, being only of God and for God.³⁰⁴ According to *PC* 5a, those who professed the evangelical counsels have dedicated their entire lives to God's service. This constitutes a *special consecration* deeply rooted in baptism and expresses it more fully in religious consecration. They are people who have placed their whole life at God's service.³⁰⁵

Article 5 of *PC* begins by saying that by professing the evangelical counsels, the religious responded to a divine call, and by renouncing the world, they live for God alone and dedicate their entire lives to His service. The vow to follow the counsels adds a special, symbolic, and charismatically conditioned tangibility and obligation to the renunciation required of every Christian in virtue of his/her fellowship with the crucified and risen Lord, mediated through baptism. All service of God is proved genuine only by service of our neighbour and of the world, within the Church, and through her mediation. Thus, the religious offer their entire lives to God's

³⁰⁰ Cf. LOZANO, *Discipleship. Towards an Understanding of Religious Life*, 104-105.

³⁰¹ Cf. LOZANO, *Discipleship. Towards an Understanding of Religious Life*, 69.

³⁰² Cf. LOZANO, *Discipleship. Towards an Understanding of Religious Life*, 28.

³⁰³ Cf. E. McDONOUGH, "The Conciliar Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*", in *Review for Religious* 53/1 (1994) 143-144. See also in SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, 28 October 1965. AAS 58 (1966), 702-712, # 5, 6. Hereafter *PC*.

³⁰⁴ Cf. TASSOTTI, *La Consacrazione Religiosa*, 43.

³⁰⁵ Cf. G. GHIRLANDA, "The Various Meanings of the Term Consecration in the 1983 Code of Canon Law", in *Consecratio et Consecratio per Evangelica Consilia. Proceedings of the International Seminar, Rome, 1-3 March 2018*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2019, 26.

service and consecrate themselves totally to Him.³⁰⁶

The total consecration of religious to God and the service in the church through the evangelical counsels has three constitutive elements: 1) the gracious call of God, 2) man's response through profession, and 3) the acceptance of his vows or promises by the Church. The vows of profession provide "an ampler manifestation" of the fundamental and unrepeatable consecration of baptism.³⁰⁷ *PC* 6 says that let those who make the profession of the evangelical counsels seek and love God above all else who has loved us first, and strive to foster in all circumstances a life hidden with Christ in God. This love of God excites and energises that love of one's neighbour, which contributes to the salvation of the world and the building up of the Church.³⁰⁸

The three vows are listed in articles 12-14 of *PC*. The following of Jesus as chaste, poor, and obedient to the will of the Father is the basis of these articles. *PC* 12 discusses Consecrated Chastity. It says that chastity, which is practised "for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19, 12), which religious profess, is an exceptional gift of grace for it uniquely frees the human heart and causes it to burn with greater love for God and all humankind.³⁰⁹ *PC* 13 deals with the vow of poverty. By the vow of poverty, religious shares in the poverty of Christ, who became poor for our sake though he was rich, that we might be enriched by His poverty (2 Cor 8, 9; Mt 8, 20). Religious poverty requires more than limiting the use of possessions to the consent of superiors; it requires being poor in both fact and spirit and having treasures in heaven (Mt 6, 20).³¹⁰

PC 14 explains the vow of obedience. It says that through the profession of obedience, consecrated persons offer the full dedication of their own wills as a sacrifice of themselves to God; they thereby unite themselves with greater steadiness and security to the saving will of God. In this way, they follow the pattern of Jesus Christ, who came to do the Father's will (Jn 4, 34; 5, 30; Heb 10, 7; Ps 40, 8).³¹¹ Religious obedience does not diminish the dignity of an adult person but helps it towards full maturity, for it is a sublime total offering through which a person subordinates

³⁰⁶ Cf. H. VORGRIMLER (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, II, Herder and Herder, New York 1968, 343.

³⁰⁷ Cf. VORGRIMLER (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, II, 345.

³⁰⁸ Cf. M. CONFOY, *Religious Life and Priesthood. Perfectae Caritatis, Optatam Totius, Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ 2008, 197. *PC* # 6.

³⁰⁹ Cf. R. E. MASTERMAN, *Religious Life a Mystery in Christ and the Church. A Collated Study According to Vatican II and Subsequent Papal and Ecclesial Documents*, Alba House, New York 1975, 33. *PC* # 12.

³¹⁰ Cf. MASTERMAN, *Religious Life a Mystery in Christ and the Church*, 36. *PC* # 13.

³¹¹ Cf. MASTERMAN, *Religious Life a Mystery in Christ and the Church*, 40. *PC* # 14.

oneself for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, wholly to the will of Christ. Obedience is vowed directly to God, and the vow embodies the complete and unreserved self-surrender of the person to God. The intention of the one making the vow endows it with the character of self-immolation.³¹² In a variety of gifts, all those whom God calls to the practice of the evangelical counsels faithfully profess it and consecrate themselves in a special way to the Lord, following Christ who is chaste and poor and who redeemed and sanctified men with his obedience pushed to death on the cross. Thus, animated by the charity that the Holy Spirit infuses in their hearts, they live more and more for Christ and the Church.³¹³ Thus, the vows are liberating so that the religious “may be more inflamed with love for God and all humankind. Religious can, then, be able to “dedicate themselves with undivided heart to the service of God and the works of the apostolate.”³¹⁴

The phrase “*totam vitam suam Dei famulatu mancipare*” (to devote one’s entire life to the service of God) originates in the language of St. Thomas. The phrases used by St. Thomas to denote the servitude that is consecrated to God (“*servitium et famulatus*” *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 188, a. 2 ad 1), which according to the Fathers, involves the greatest possible renunciation of the world “*totam vitam suam divino servitio deputare*” (to assign one’s whole life to the divine service); “*se totaliter Deo mancipare*” (to enslave themselves entirely to God, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 186, a. 1 c. and 2; q. 188, a. 2 and 3; q. 189, a. 3 c and 3). By doing this, the religious do only what every Christian must do, but they do it through the symbolic tangibility of a life of celibacy, poverty, and obedience.³¹⁵ Thus, religious vows are not bondage but a liberating force that helps the religious person to love and serve God and others with an undivided heart.

3.2. In Post-Conciliar Documents

The post-conciliar documents that deal in some way with consecrated life intend to re-propose the doctrine of the Council, make it explicit with renewed awareness, and apply it in the ecclesial body. We excerpt from the various documents that concern consecration in its fundamental reality of religious life. The doctrine on religious life, enunciated by the Council, was taken up in the documents issued by the Supreme Pontiff and the Congregation for Religious and

³¹² Cf. VORGRIMLER (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, II, 362-363.

³¹³ Cf. P. D. CINELLI, *Commento Familiare al Decreto Perfectae Caritatis*, Centro Studi U.S.M.I., Roma 1969, 17-18.

³¹⁴ CONFOY, *Religious Life and Priesthood*, 217-218.

³¹⁵ Cf. VORGRIMLER (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, II, 344.

Secular Institutes. Here, we would like to examine how the theme of consecration is treated in important documents such as *Renovationis Causam* (1969), *Evangelica Testificatio* (1971), *Essential Elements of Religious Life* (1983), *Redemptionis Donum* (1984), and *Vita Consecrata* (1996).³¹⁶

3.2.1. *Renovationis Causam*

The Instruction *Renovationis Causam*, issued by the Sacred Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes in 1969, deals with bringing religious formation up to date. The document declares that the profession with which the members of the Institutes commit themselves to the practice of the three evangelical counsels constitutes a consecration with which one gives oneself totally to God, who alone deserves such an absolute gift from a human person (*RC* 2§1).³¹⁷ In this consecration, the vow of obedience is highlighted especially as the vow with which the religious completes the full renunciation of himself and, together with the vows of poverty and chastity, offers himself as a perfect sacrifice to God. The conciliar documents *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis* first expressly presented the chastity devoted to God. However, here in this document, we observe the tendency to privilege the vow of obedience.³¹⁸

3.2.2. *Evangelica Testificatio*

Pope Paul VI's exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*, published on June 29, 1971, is a landmark in the official theology of religious life.³¹⁹ In its content, the *Evangelica Testificatio* takes up the message of the Second Vatican Council, deepens its content, and applies it to the concrete circumstances of religious life. Christ is the point of reference of the consecrated person and the One who is imitated, perpetuated, and followed and to whom one belongs totally.³²⁰ It focuses on religious life in its evangelical, theological, and existential content, following the line traced by Vatican II. Paul VI affirms that religious life is substantially consecration to God and, therefore, religious people totally belong to Him through the profession of the evangelical

³¹⁶ Cf. J. GALOT, "La Consacrazione Religiosa nei Documenti Post-Conciliari", in *Vita Consacrata* 21 (1985) 142.

³¹⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Instruction on the Updating of Formation in Religious Life Renovationis Causam*, 6 January 1969. *AAS* 61 (1969) 103-120, # 2.

³¹⁸ Cf. GALOT, "La Consacrazione Religiosa nei Documenti Post-Conciliari", 142-143.

³¹⁹ Cf. P. F. WALTER, "Religious Life in Church Documents", in *Review for Religious* 51/4 (1992) 553.

³²⁰ Cf. TASSOTTI, *La Consacrazione Religiosa*, 57-58.

counsels.³²¹

Pope Paul VI says, within the church, religious are a “concrete sign” and “privileged witness” of a constant search for God, single and undivided love for Christ, and a fervent desire to devote oneself absolutely to the spread of God’s reign (*ET* 3§1).³²² Before undertaking the theme of updating, *Evangelica Testificatio* reproduces the conciliar idea of consecration: Through the practice of evangelical counsels, religious follow Christ more freely and imitate Him more closely by dedicating their whole life to God with a special consecration, which finds its roots in the baptismal consecration and expresses it with greater fullness.³²³ Article 7 summarises the value of consecration made to God, its ecclesial character, and its witness value: by a free response to the call of the Holy Spirit, follow Christ and consecrate total self to Him. This total self-giving through evangelical counsels is modelled after the pattern of Christ’s self-giving to His Church; like His, this offering of self is total and irreversible. It is for the sake of the kingdom of heaven manifesting to all believers the presence of heavenly goods already possessed in this world.³²⁴ Thus, it stresses the witnessing character of religious consecration, made by the profession of evangelical counsels after the model of Christ’s self-giving that shows the world a glimpse of heaven through our committed and edifying presence.

3.2.3. The Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life

This document highlights the fundamental importance of consecration. It says consecration is the basis of religious life.³²⁵ Consecration is a divine action: God calls a person and reserves him for himself to be dedicated to him in a particular way. At the same time, he confers the grace so that the consecrated person’s response is expressed through a profound and free abandonment of all of oneself.³²⁶ This consecration originates in Christ: Jesus is the one whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world in a supreme way (cf. Jn 10, 36). In him are summarised all

³²¹ Cf. E. GAMBARI, “Presentazione dell’esortazione *Evangelica Testificatio*”, in *Vita Consacrata* 8 (1972) 199.

³²² Cf. WALTER, *Religious Life in Church Documents*, 554. See also in PAUL VI, *Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of the Religious Life According to Teaching of the Second Vatican Council Evangelica Testificatio*, 29 June 1971, *AAS* 63 (1971) 497-526. # 3. Hereafter *ET*.

³²³ Cf. GALOT, “La Consacrazione Religiosa nei Documenti Post-Conciliari”, 144. *ET* # 4.

³²⁴ Cf. BEYER, *Life Consecrated by the Evangelical Counsels*, 76. *ET* # 7.

³²⁵ Cf. SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND FOR SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, 31 May 1981, St. Paul Publications, Boston 1983, # 5.

³²⁶ Cf. GALOT, “La Consacrazione Religiosa nei Documenti Post-Conciliari”, 148.

the consecrations in which he was prefigured; in him, the new people of God are consecrated, mysteriously united to him. Through baptism, Jesus makes every Christian share in his life. Thus, the baptismal gift is the fundamental Christian consecration and the root of every other consecration.³²⁷

Jesus lived his own consecration precisely as the Son of God: dependent on the Father, loving him above all, and completely given to his will. All Christians share these aspects of his life as Son. “To some, however, for the good of all, God gives the gift of a more intimate following of Christ in his poverty, chastity, and obedience through a public profession of the evangelical counsels, mediated by the Church. In imitation of Christ, this profession manifests a particular consecration that is “rooted in that of baptism and is a fuller expression of it” (PC 5). The fuller expression recalls the hold of the divine person of the Word over the human nature which he assumed. It invites a response similar to Jesus: a dedication of oneself to God in a way that he alone makes possible and witnesses to his holiness and absoluteness.³²⁸

The document highlighted the ecclesial dimension of the consecration: When consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels is lived as a definitive response to God in a public commitment undertaken before the Church, it belongs inseparably to the life and holiness of the Church (cf. LG 44).³²⁹ As a response to the gift of God, the vows are a triple expression of a single “yes” to the one relationship of total consecration.³³⁰ It sees community life as a consequence of consecration: religious consecration establishes a particular communion between religious and God and, in God, between the members of the same Institute.³³¹ The totality of religious consecration requires that the witness to the Gospel be given publicly by the whole of life. Values, attitudes, and lifestyles attest forcefully to the place of Christ in one’s life. The

³²⁷ Cf. SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND FOR SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life*, # 6.

³²⁸ Cf. GALOT, “La Consacrazione Religiosa nei Documenti Post-Conciliari”, 148-149. SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND FOR SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, # 7.

³²⁹ Cf. GALOT, “La Consacrazione Religiosa nei Documenti Post-Conciliari”, 149. SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND FOR SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, # 8.

³³⁰ Cf. SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND FOR SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, # 14.

³³¹ Cf. GALOT, “La Consacrazione Religiosa nei Documenti Post-Conciliari”, 151. SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND FOR SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, # 18.

visibility of this witness involves the foregoing of standards of comfort and convenience.³³² Thus, this document reveals the theme of religious consecration, which originates in Christ and is rooted in baptism.

3.2.4. *Redemptionis Donum*

In the jubilee year of the redemption and precisely on March 25, 1984, John Paul II promulgated the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptionis Donum* addressed to men and women religious as a broad and profound reflection on consecration, which is particularly linked to the mystery of redemption. The document presents the religious vocation as a gift from God, who always takes the first step.³³³ The exhortation is grounded in *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis* and relies on Paul VI's earlier apostolic exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*. The essential doctrine expressed in this document is: it clarifies the position of religious life as a call, as a divine vocation, as a consecration of life, a consecration operated by God, and a consecration to God; consecration which is expressed through the profession of the evangelical counsels to have perfect union with Christ. It is a divine initiative, and God consecrates the one who faithfully accepts his invitation and responds to it in consecration to God, which is possible only through Christ, in him and with him.³³⁴

In *RD* 3§3, John Paul II writes that the call to the way of the evangelical counsels springs from the interior encounter with the love of Christ, which is a redeeming love.³³⁵ He also affirms the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, the religious profession creates a new bond between the person and the One and Triune God, in Jesus Christ. This bond develops on the foundation of the original bond contained in the sacrament of Baptism.³³⁶ Pope John Paul II describes religious vocation as a call of Christ in his redeeming love, a call with a spousal character.³³⁷ The redemptive and spousal love of religious is a unique expression of the love of the whole Church for Christ; at the same time, it is a witness to the whole Church. Through religious profession, religious are

³³² Cf. SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND FOR SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, # 34.

³³³ Cf. TASSOTTI, *La Consacrazione Religiosa*, 82.

³³⁴ Cf. J. BEYER, "Redemptionis Donum. Un Documento di Altissimo Valore che Spiega la Legislazione del Codice nuovo", in *Vita Consacrata* 21 (1985) 158-159.

³³⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptionis Donum. Apostolic Exhortation on Men and Women Consecration in the Light of the Mystery of the Redemption*, 25 March 1984, *AAS* 76 (1984) 513-546, # 3. Hereafter *RD*.

³³⁶ Cf. *RD* # 7.

³³⁷ Cf. *RD* # 3.

“consecrated to God through the ministry of the Church” and incorporated into the religious family. Hence, the Church considers them as persons consecrated to God in Jesus Christ as his exclusive possession.³³⁸ According to John Paul’s thought, the controlling image for religious life is consecration. Consecration is a response to Christ’s love, a self-giving that is also spousal and redemptive.³³⁹

According to John Paul II, the religious profession creates a new bond between the person and the One and Triune God in Jesus Christ. The religious profession “is deeply rooted in baptismal consecration and is a fuller expression.” In this way, the religious profession, in its constitutive content, becomes a new consecration: the consecration and giving of the human person to God loved above all else.³⁴⁰ John Paul II underlines chapter 2 of the letter to Philippians that the characteristic of self-emptying contained in the practice of evangelical counsels is completely a Christocentric characteristic. For this reason, the Teacher from Nazareth explicitly indicates the cross as the condition for following in His footsteps and says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16, 24). The law of renunciation belongs, therefore, to the very essence of religious consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsel. It reflects the mystery of Calvary in order to be more fully in the crucified and risen Christ.³⁴¹ Therefore, the consecration of religious life is placed in the baptismal life in which it has its roots, and its characteristic feature is renunciation, which is modelled after the self-emptying of Christ.

3.2.5. *Vita Consecrata*

In the most recent years, the Church document which has had the most significant influence on all thinking on consecrated life is the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*. In this exhortation, he states that in every age, there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father’s call and the prompting of the Spirit, have chosen this unique way of following Christ, to devote themselves to him with an “undivided” heart (1 Cor 7, 34). Like the Apostles, they, too, have left everything behind to be with Christ and to put themselves, as he did,

³³⁸ Cf. *RD* # 7.

³³⁹ Cf. WALTER, “Religious Life in Church Documents”, 560.

³⁴⁰ Cf. *RD* # 7.

³⁴¹ Cf. *RD* # 10.

at the service of God and their brothers and sisters.³⁴² Patrick J. Griffin, in his article, says that each line of this statement has a powerful invitation for us.

First, the call to follow Christ with an “undivided heart.” The ability to follow Christ entirely without looking back, without reservation, and without distraction by other concerns is an extraordinary calling. It is to make Christ our “all” and allow him to be the centre of our life and action. Secondly, the call flows from obedience; we respond in freedom through our obedience to the way in which we have been summoned by the Father and guided by the Spirit. Thus, our vocation is an obedient response to the grace of God alive in our lives and will. Thirdly, this call is to serve as Jesus served by leaving everything else behind and placing oneself at the disposal of the Lord and others. The freedom to follow Jesus in this way flows from the unburdening of self from all, which would hold us back from genuine service.³⁴³

“Taking the main themes from *Lumen Gentium* numbers 42 and 44, John Paul II teaches in number 30 of *Vita Consecrata* that the consecration proper to the consecrated life is related to but is also different from the consecrations of Christians through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. The religious profession of the evangelical counsels is a special and fruitful deepening of the consecration received in baptism by which the close union with Christ already begun in baptism develops in the gift of a fuller, more explicit and authentic configuration to him.”³⁴⁴ The Trinitarian origin and destiny of an authentic vocation to the consecrated life are made explicit by John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata*. In number 14 of *Vita Consecrata*, he teaches that Christ’s call to leave everything and follow him more closely is made to someone only at the initiative of God the Father and through the power of the Holy Spirit.³⁴⁵

Vita Consecrata emphasises that religious consecration is new and special; therefore, it can only be understood as a personal reassumption of the common baptismal consecration. But baptism does not in itself involve the call to celibacy, the renunciation of possession of goods, or obedience to a superior in the form proper to the evangelical counsels.³⁴⁶ Corresponding to the deeper call to complete conformity to Christ, consecrated persons receive a specific gift from the Holy Spirit that enables them to live out their new vocation and mission. “The profession of the evangelical counsels is the development of the grace received from the sacrament of confirmation. But the

³⁴² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World*, 25 March 1996, AAS 88 (1996) 377-486, # 1. Hereafter VC.

³⁴³ P. J. GRIFFIN, “Documents of the Church for Consecrated Life”, in *Vincentiana* (2012) 337-338.

³⁴⁴ CONNER, “*Vita Consecrata. An Ultimate Theology of Consecrated Life*”, in *Angelicum* 76/2 (1999) 250. VC # 30.

³⁴⁵ Cf. CONNER, “*Vita Consecrata. An Ultimate Theology of Consecrated Life*”, 252. VC # 14.

³⁴⁶ Cf. E. M. SOMALO, *Vita Consecrata. Studi E Riflessioni*, Rogate, Roma 1996, 90. VC # 30.

religious consecration goes beyond the ordinary demands of the consecration received in confirmation by virtue of a special gift of the Spirit, which opens the way to new possibilities and fruits of holiness and apostolic work”.³⁴⁷ In article 31, John Paul II stresses, “Every member of the Church is consecrated through Baptism and Confirmation. However, the ordained ministry and the consecrated life are deemed to be distinct vocations with a specific form of consecration in the light of a particular mission”.³⁴⁸ Thus, every Christian is consecrated to Christ by baptism, but motivated by God’s love; the consecrated persons make a full expression of it by professing evangelical counsels. The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in Christ’s example and teaching, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. The religious represent the chaste, impoverished, and submissive aspects of Jesus to the world by authentically living the evangelical counsels.

3.3. Other Significant Papal Pronouncements on Religious Consecration

In his message on the Jubilee of consecrated life, Pope John Paul II declares that, invited to leave everything to follow Christ, you consecrated men and women, no longer define your life by family, by profession, or by earthly interests, and you choose the Lord as your only identifying mark. The invitation to renunciation is not meant to leave you “without a family” but to make you the first and distinctive members of the “new family”, a witness and prophetic example for all God wishes to call and bring into his house.³⁴⁹ While speaking to women superiors in Rome, Pope John Paul II reminded them that the vocation to the consecrated life is characterised by the call to be a disciple of the Lord in a very special manner. Its source is baptism, and consecration is an authentic expression of it. This call leads to a total gift of self for the service of the Lord through the profession and practice of the evangelical counsels, which commit one for life.³⁵⁰

In one of the messages of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Consecrated Men and Women, he says that by choosing obedience, poverty, and chastity for the Kingdom of Heaven, consecrated men and women demonstrate that any attachment or love for people and things is incapable of definitively satisfying the heart. Consecrated life, therefore, is by its nature a total and definitive, unconditional, and passionate response to God (VC 17). So, when one renounces everything to

³⁴⁷ VC # 30.

³⁴⁸ VC # 31.

³⁴⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Homily on 4th Day of the Jubilee of Consecrated Life*, 2 February 2000.

³⁵⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *To the International Union of Women Superiors General in Rome 9 May 1989*, in *John Paul II. Speaks to Religious*, VI, Little Sisters of the Poor, Chicago 1994, 77.

follow Christ when one gives to him all that one holds most dear, braving every sacrifice as did the divine Teacher, the consecrated person who follows Christ's footsteps becomes "a sign of contradiction" because his/her way of thinking and living is often in opposition to the logic of the world.³⁵¹

Pope Francis, in his letter to all Consecrated People in the year of consecrated life, says the apostolic effectiveness of consecrated life does not depend on the efficiency of its methods. It depends on the eloquence of your lives, lives that radiate the joy and beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ to the full.³⁵² In his homily on the 19th world day of consecrated life, the Holy Father addressing the assembly said that Jesus came not to do his own will but the will of the Father. This way – he tells us – was his "food" ("My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" Jn 4, 34). In the same way, all those who follow Jesus must set out on the path of obedience, imitating as it were the Lord's "condescension" by humbling themselves and making their own the will of the Father, even to self-emptying and abasement (cf. Phil 2, 7-8). For a religious, to advance on the path of obedience means to abase oneself in service, that is, to take the same path as Jesus, who "did not deem equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Phil 2, 6). Thus, the evangelical happiness of a religious person depends on the fruit of self-abasement in union with Christ.³⁵³

On the occasion of the 22nd World Day for Consecrated Life, Pope Francis makes the distinction between life consecrated to Christ totally by the vows and life which is attached to the allurements of the world. He says consecrated life is born and reborn of an encounter with Jesus as he is: poor, chaste, and obedient. We journey along a double track: on the one hand, God's loving initiative, from which everything starts and to which we must always return; on the other, our own response, which is truly loving when it has no "ifs" or "buts" when it imitates Jesus in his poverty, chastity, and obedience. Whereas the life of this world attempts to take hold of us, the consecrated life turns from fleeting riches to embrace the One who endures forever. The life of this world pursues selfish pleasures and desires; the consecrated life frees our affections of every possession in order to love God and others. Worldly life aims to do whatever one wants;

³⁵¹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address to Consecrated Men and Women on 11th World Day of Consecrated Life*, 2 February 2007.

³⁵² Cf. FRANCIS, *Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, 21 November 2014.

³⁵³ Cf. FRANCIS, *Homily on 19th World Day for Consecrated Life*, 2 February 2015.

consecrated life chooses humble obedience as the greater freedom. While worldly life soon leaves our hands and hearts empty, life in Jesus fills us with peace to the very end.³⁵⁴

On the 24th World Day for Consecrated Life, Pope Francis affirms that if consecrated life remains steadfast in love for the Lord, it perceives beauty. The vow of poverty is not some colossal effort but rather a higher freedom God gives us and others as real wealth. Chastity is not austere sterility but the way to love without possessing, and obedience is not a discipline but victory over our own chaos in the way of Jesus.³⁵⁵ In all of their messages, we see that abandoning oneself totally for the love of God in union with Christ is a remarkable characteristic of religious life.

3.4. In the Codes of Canon Law

The *Codex Iuris Canonici* (CIC)³⁵⁶ states that consecration is the basis and specific characteristic of religious life. It is defined in canon 573 as: “Life consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living, by which faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God, who is loved most of all, so that, having dedicated themselves to His honour, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world, by a new and special title, they strive for the perfection of charity in service to the Kingdom of God and having become an outstanding sign in the Church, they may foretell the heavenly glory”.³⁵⁷

The main source for this canon 573 is LG 44, which says, “The faithful of Christ bind themselves to the three evangelical counsels either by vows or by other sacred bonds. By such a bond, a person is totally dedicated to God and loved beyond all things. Indeed, through Baptism, a person dies to sin and is consecrated to God. However, to derive more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace, a person consecrates oneself more intimately to divine service in the Church by the profession of the evangelical counsels.”³⁵⁸ Both texts (canon 573§1 and LG 44) help us to understand what constitutes the consecrated life by the profession of the evangelical counsels: total dedication to God loved beyond all things; a dedication of self by a new and special title to the

³⁵⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *Homily on 22nd World Day for Consecrated Life*, 2 February 2018.

³⁵⁵ Cf. FRANCIS, *Homily During Eucharistic Concelebration with the Members of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life on 24th World Day for Consecrated Life*, 1 February 2020.

³⁵⁶ Hereafter *CIC*.

³⁵⁷ THE CODE OF CANON LAW, Canon Law Society of America, Washington, D. C. 1983, 573§1.

³⁵⁸ LG # 44.

honour and glory of God for the upbuilding of the Church and the salvation of the world.³⁵⁹ Thus, canon 573 gives us a rich doctrinal resume of the objective substance of consecrated life. The essence of this life is the dedication of oneself to God: a dedication willed by God and accepted by the believer to be for God wholly and exclusively.³⁶⁰

We have a parallel to *CIC* 573 in *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium (CCEO)*³⁶¹ 410, which says,

The religious state is a stable manner of living in common in an institute approved by the Church, by which the Christian faithful, more closely following Christ, Teacher and Exemplar of Holiness, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated by a new and special title through public vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty, observed in accord with the norm of the statutes under a legitimate superior, renounce the world and totally dedicate themselves to the attainment of perfect charity in the service to the Kingdom of God for the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world as a sign of the foretelling of heavenly glory.³⁶²

Both the Eastern and Latin norms undoubtedly draw upon the same theological principles, but the Latin Code incorporates them more into its juridical description of the consecrated life. Both canons state that consecrated persons dedicate themselves totally to God for the salvific mission of the Church.³⁶³

According to the Second Vatican Council, it is God who consecrates the person with a new and special title, and the person responds to God's action by consecrating himself or herself to God in total self-giving to God, who is loved above everything.³⁶⁴ This is emphasised in *CIC* canon 607§1, "Religious life as a consecration of the whole person, manifests in the Church a wonderful marriage brought about by God, a sign of the future age. Thus, religious bring to perfection their full gift as a sacrifice offered to God, by which their whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in love."³⁶⁵ This canon expresses religious consecration as a total self-giving of the same love by which God calls certain faithful to religious life. The Father bestows that gift through the Holy Spirit, and the religious, under the action of the same Spirit, makes a self-offering that is identified with the sacrificial love of Christ. Although *CCEO* 410 and *CIC* 607 have some

³⁵⁹ Cf. GHIRLANDA, "The Various Meanings of the Term Consecration", 24-25.

³⁶⁰ Cf. B. E. ETAFO, "Consecrated Life in the Structure of the Church", in *Bodija Journal* 1(1989) 45.

³⁶¹ Hereafter *CCEO*.

³⁶² *CCEO*, # 410.

³⁶³ Cf. J. ABBASS, *The Consecrated Life. A Comparative Commentary of the Eastern and Latin Codes*, Saint Paul University, Ottawa 2008, 20-21.

³⁶⁴ Cf. GHIRLANDA, "The Various Meanings of the Term Consecration", 29.

³⁶⁵ *CIC*, # 607§1.

similarities, the Latin canon is new and exclusive to *CIC*.³⁶⁶ For this reason, according to Canon 673, the primary apostolate of all religious is the witness of their consecrated life, which they are bound to foster by prayer and penance.³⁶⁷ Religious by their consecration through vows are not something externally consecrating to God but consecrating the whole person as a holocaust. It is purely a gratuitous gift of God, which a person responds to by complete self-submission and nurture through prayer and sacrifice.

3.5. A Few Theological Reflections on the Theme of Religious Consecration

Every Christian life is an offering. As we saw in the first chapter, the holocaust was considered the complete offering. As *Lumen Gentium* states, through the religious vows, religious are totally dedicated to God and committed to his honour and service under a new and special title. Through baptism, Christians are consecrated to God, but to derive more abundant fruit from the baptismal grace, he/she professes the evangelical counsels. It is a more intimate consecration to divine service and develops the consecration of baptism, by which a person is initially bound to God and dies to sin.³⁶⁸ Thus, the call to religious life is a divine initiative, and its fulfilment is in the baptismal consecration, which involves offering totally to God's love.

3.5.1. Divine Initiative and A Human Response

At the root of every vocation to apostolic religious life is a deep and uniquely personal experience of Christ, which makes a profound imprint on the person. This experience entails *an encounter with God*, who has manifested and continues to be in Christ. *A call* which flows from a gratuitous election on the part of God in Christ to continue his mission of announcing and making present God's Kingdom on earth. *A response*, which is a gift of grace, takes the form of a total and unconditional offering of self to God that one's whole being and activity are directed to the cause of the Kingdom. *A special consecration* by which God accepts the free and total gift of self.³⁶⁹ In evangelical terms, the consecrated life is a special gift of God, the call to the close following of Jesus Christ, the call to a profound and absorbing intimate union with Christ that would make the

³⁶⁶ Cf. ABBASS, *The Consecrated Life. A Comparative Commentary of the Eastern and Latin Codes*, 22.

³⁶⁷ Cf. GHIRLANDA, "The Various Meanings of the Term Consecration", 31-32.

³⁶⁸ Cf. J. C. HENCHEY, *Religious Life. A Sacrament of Hope in the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council*, Dissertatio Ad Lauream in Facultate S. Theologiae Apud Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomae in Urbe, Roma 1973, 46-47.

³⁶⁹ Cf. M. P. EWEN – S. VALLEJO – P. MOLINARI, "Theological Reflections on Apostolic Religious Life", in *Review for Religious* 43/1 (1984) 19.

one favoured with it want to leave all and follow Him. The response to this call is not merely a personal interior attitude to Jesus Christ but a literal leaving of all expressed in visible forms that affect the whole of life.³⁷⁰

The religious offering of self to Christ cannot be conceived primarily in terms of personal sanctification. It is a gift to Christ in order to share his life, to be united with him, and thus to collaborate with him in his apostolic mission.³⁷¹ In the terminology of Vatican II, the words ‘consecration’ and ‘to consecrate’ are employed exclusively of the divine action, whereas words like *mancipatio*, ‘to dedicate oneself’, indicate the human offering. The Church also exercises its mediating role concerning the special nature of this consecration in withdrawing those professed from the profane aspects of the world and attaching them to the divine service more specifically.³⁷² Religious consecration is a reality formed by a divine and a human element. God takes the initiative out of his love, and being aware of this calling, a person responds by dedicating his/her entire life to God.³⁷³

3.5.2. Fulfilment of Baptismal Consecration

Baptism, by which we receive the fruits of redemption in Christian initiation, establishes a relation with God. The same characteristics will mark any further bond with God. It can only develop further the relationship of baptism. Therefore, religious consecration is a dedication, not to the following of Christ to which we are already bound by baptism, but to the closer following; not to the love of God and neighbour which is already contained in baptism, but to God supremely loved and to service as a pledge for life; not to being Church that we are already members of the Church by baptism, but to take that particular place and role in the Church which are indicated by religious profession. The consecration is rooted in baptism, yet it is new. It is new because it binds new dimensions of the baptismal consecration. It is made with awareness and choice as a response of love to a particular call and constitutes a new life for God in Jesus Christ.³⁷⁴ The commitment

³⁷⁰ Cf. H. ALPHONSO, *Priestly Vocation and Consecrated Life*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Gujarat, India 1994, 57-59.

³⁷¹ Cf. P. MOLINARI, “Following of Christ in the Teaching of Vatican II”, in *The Way Supplement* (1967) 103.

³⁷² Cf. A. DE BONHOME, *A New Consecration?*, in *The Way* 37 (1980) 64.

³⁷³ Cf. J. MARIPPATTU, *Following Christ in Chastity, Poverty and Obedience. A Study on Evangelical Counsels in Consecrated Life in Particular Reference to the Teachings of Pope John Paul II*, pars Dissertationis Ad Lauream in Facultate S. Theologiae Apud Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomae in Urbae, Romae 2009, 32-33.

³⁷⁴ Cf. M. LINSKOTT, “The Consecrated Lives of Apostolic Religious Today”, in *Review for Religious* 47/1 (1988) 10.

to religious life is a commitment to the person of Jesus Christ, in irrevocable love expressed in a particular form. This commitment is a total self-gift that has an absolute priority in one's life and begins with no qualifications. The life option expressed by profession is the commitment to love Jesus Christ totally, absolutely, and forever and to express and embody that love in the complete and exclusive self-gift of consecrated celibacy.³⁷⁵

The two principal texts (LG 44 and PC 5) of Vatican II that we have already quoted state that the consecration of religious, understood as a dedication of self and the living out of a commitment, is entirely based on the consecrating power of Baptism. Through this dedication, the Christian, now a religious, has decided to live exclusively for the worship and service of God. Thus, religious consecration fully expresses that one belongs to God because of Baptism. Through this commitment, religious renounces not only sin but also all those things that might be obstacles in the path of total dedication to God. Therefore, though the profession is neither a sacramental nor a ritual act of consecration, religious bind themselves to God's service by a new and special claim, and this new and special consecration is the full flowering and ampler manifestation of the baptismal consecration.³⁷⁶ Although every Christian is consecrated through baptism, religious consecration "is regarded as an act of surrendering oneself totally, absolutely, and immediately to the love of God."³⁷⁷

3.5.3. A Total Dedication to God

In his work *On the Perfection of the Religious Life*, St. Thomas Aquinas says that the highest act of worship is the sacrifice of something good in God's honour, whether a possession or the goods of our body or spirit. Since the three vows of religious offer to God not only all of what we have but all of what we are in body and spirit, professing the evangelical counsels offers all that our natures imply. Hence, living the consecrated life is the greatest possible sacrifice – a true holocaust – that human beings can make to worship God.³⁷⁸ The total consecration of the vows gives religious life a sacrificial character. The very nature of religious life is the offering that one makes of oneself to God; it is a total adherence to God. Religious life demands a certain dying to anything that would impede living for God alone. The profession that the religious do through

³⁷⁵ Cf. S. M. SCHNEIDERS, *Selling All. Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy and Community in Catholic Religious Life*, Paulist Press, New York 2001, 80-81.

³⁷⁶ Cf. LOZANO, *Discipleship. Towards an Understanding of Religious Life*, 298-299.

³⁷⁷ Cf. BEVILACQUA, "Religious Consecration", 154

³⁷⁸ Cf. CONNER, "Vita Consecrata. An Ultimate Theology of Consecrated Life", 269.

vows is a total and free offering of what one holds most dear. It offers the only life one has at his/her disposal, and it covers every aspect of that life, the whole person, all that one has or may have; it is a certain and unique love.³⁷⁹ When Christ receives and accepts this total self-offering through the ministry of the Church, God makes the religious his own by consecrating them to his service with a new and special title (*LG* 44).³⁸⁰

Both the Latin and Eastern codes describe religious life as a life consecrated through the profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living in which the faithful follow Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit and are totally dedicated to God, who is supremely loved (*CIC* 573, *CCEO* 410). From this teaching, theologians highlight the central point: the essence of the consecrated life is a person's total dedication to God. It is a complete commitment willed and assisted by God and actively made by the person who wishes to belong entirely to God and pledges to the lifelong practice of the evangelical counsels.³⁸¹ One is religious because, through an ecclesial commitment, a person embraces a life characterised by celibacy, poverty, and obedience. This life begins with the dedication that the religious make of their entire existence to God, committing themselves to live for him alone by following Christ. This is called a consecration because it is a dedication of life to God alone. God thus becomes the only reason for their existence.³⁸² Just as martyrdom is a total offering to God without holding back anything, religious consecration is a radical self-giving forever. What makes religious consecration distinctive from the other modalities of commitment is the total and free giving of self with an undivided heart to the person of Christ.³⁸³

Consecration reveals the dynamic and religious aspect of a total belonging to God, lived as a witness of the faith in God. Therefore, consecration is a holocaust of the person in constant movement towards divinity. Consecration moves one towards a certain distance from the things of the world, the goods and values the world offers. Every total consecration to God is the result of a triple movement: a detachment from creatures, a total attachment to God, and a return to the brethren. There is a holocaust only when the person offers everything that he/she has to God.³⁸⁴

³⁷⁹ Cf. HENCHEY, *Religious Life. A Sacrament of Hope*, 49-51.

³⁸⁰ Cf. EWEN – VALLEJO – MOLINARI, "Theological Reflections on Apostolic Religious Life", 20.

³⁸¹ Cf. COLE – CONNER, *Christian Totality. Theology of the Consecrated Life*, 33.

³⁸² Cf. LOZANO, *Discipleship. Towards an Understanding of Religious Life*, 295.

³⁸³ Cf. KOTTACKA, *Theological Perspectives on the Link Between Martyrdom and Consecrated Life*, 148.

³⁸⁴ Cf. E. GAMBARI, *Vita Religiosa Oggi. Secondo il Concilio e il Nuovo Diritto Canonico*, Edizioni Monfortane, Roma 1983, 87.

The consecrations that consecrated people make through evangelical counsels are purely divine initiatives and their responses to it. It is referred to as a Holocaust when a person offers everything that he/she is and has without holding back anything, solely depending on God's providence.

3.6. Vows: Consecrated Lifestyle

Following Christ in chastity, poverty, and obedience is the fundamental norm that determines the identity of consecrated life. To be with Christ fully and completely, to achieve the fullness of our humanity and our Christian personality, we must undergo death. Religious life is a sign of that lifelong exercise of complete self-emptying and surrender in faith, hope, and love, without which it is impossible to see God. The evangelical counsels are the expression of the way in which religious people live and manifest their total adherence to Christ.³⁸⁵ Evangelical life aims at expressing the Gospel in its integrity. It is a sharing of the mind of Christ who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, obedient unto death (Phil 2, 7-8).³⁸⁶

3.6.1. Life that Reflects the Mystery of Trinity

Religious life is a total surrender to God. Self-surrender and abandonment are its most essential characteristics. The life of the Most Blessed Trinity is an example of this. The interior principle of the life of the Three Persons of the Triune God is mutual self-surrender and complete mutual self-giving.³⁸⁷ The three persons of the Blessed Trinity give themselves to each other, and they give themselves to us. Therefore, we should apply this internal and external principle of the life activity of the Triune God to our lives.³⁸⁸ The deepest meaning of the evangelical counsels is their expression of the love of the Son for the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. In the vow of poverty, the religious forsakes the possessions of the world in order to affirm the common ground of humanity shared by all. In the vow of obedience, the religious follow the will of a superior in order to recognise the reality of the Other as an expression of that ground. In the vow of chastity, the religious forsakes the bond of marriage in order to affirm before God an even deeper bond of relation uniting all human beings. The unique contribution of the religious life lies precisely in the proportionate correspondence each of the vows has to a particular Trinitarian relation: poverty to

³⁸⁵ Cf. C. A. SCHLECK, "Reflection on the Theology of Religious Life", in *Review for Religious* 28 (1969) 268.

³⁸⁶ Cf. CHARIVUPURAYIDATHIL, *Religious Life as Imitation of Christ*, 51.

³⁸⁷ Cf. F. A. CEGIELKA, *All Things New. Radical Reform and the Religious Life*, Sheed and Ward, New York, 1969, 70.

³⁸⁸ Cf. CEGIELKA, *All Things New. Radical Reform and the Religious Life*, 72.

the Father as Ground, obedience to the Son as Other, chastity to the Spirit as a Bond.³⁸⁹

John Paul II explicitly expresses the trinitarian origin and destiny of an authentic vocation to the consecrated life in *Vita Consecrata*. In number 14, he teaches that Christ's call to leave everything and follow him closely is made to someone only at the initiative of God the Father and through the power of the Holy Spirit.³⁹⁰ He states that the deepest meaning of the evangelical counsels is revealed in relation to the Holy Trinity, the source of holiness. They are the expression of the love of the Son for the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. By practising the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person lives with particular intensity the Trinitarian and Christological dimension, which marks the whole Christian life (VC 21). The initiative of the Father, the example of the Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit, together with the self-dedication of the religious person, constitute the religious consecration perfect.³⁹¹

John Paul II notes that in *Vita Consecrata*, since consecrated chastity requires an undivided heart, it reflects the unlimited love that bonds the divine Persons in the unity of the Trinity. This is the very love Jesus reveals by himself totally on the cross and the very love that is poured into the Christian hearts by the Holy Spirit to enable a response of total love for God and neighbour (VC 21). The consecrated poverty tells the world that God is our only real treasure. So, it expresses the total gift of self which the three Divine Persons make to one another, a gift that overflows into creation but is fully revealed in the incarnation of the Word and his utter impoverishment on the cross (VC 21). By living in Christ's poverty, consecrated persons receive everything from the Father and give everything back to him in love (VC 16). Finally, he points out that Christ's obedience to the Father shows a total submissiveness that is not servitude but a mature freedom, trust, and responsibility to carry out what God wants. By sacrificing freedom to the Father to obey like Christ, consecrated men and women profess that Christ is beloved and loving without limit, and he delights only in the will of the Father, to whom he is fully dependent (VC 16).³⁹² Thus, the consecrated life is deeply rooted and finds its meaning and fullness in existence in the love and union of the Triune God.

³⁸⁹ Cf. J. D. BILLY, *Evangelical Kernels. A Theological Spirituality of the Religious*, Alba House, New York 1993, 45-46.

³⁹⁰ Cf. CONNER, "Vita Consecrata. An Ultimate Theology of Consecrated Life", 252.

³⁹¹ Cf. CONNER, "Vita Consecrata. An Ultimate Theology of Consecrated Life", 255.

³⁹² Cf. CONNER, "Vita Consecrata. An Ultimate Theology of Consecrated Life", 257-258.

3.6.2. Participation in Kenotic Life of Christ

Religious life is an entry into a person-to-person relationship with Christ and a living of his attitudes inwardly and outwardly. It is the shaping of life more and more in the likeness of Christ until one can say with St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2, 20).³⁹³ The supreme norm of religious living is “the following of Christ” (PC 1). The renunciations involved in the religious life are a participation in the *kenosis* of Christ, and the religious profession means leaving all things for Christ’s sake, regarding him as the one thing necessary (PC 5).³⁹⁴ By means of vows, the Christian is totally given over to belong to God. Those who profess to live according to the evangelical counsels retain nothing for themselves but are given over to God with all they are and have.³⁹⁵

Because of the Christocentric orientation of the evangelical counsels, the Second Vatican Council affirms that those in consecrated life have freely chosen to follow Christ more closely and, consequently, should be able to manifest his self-emptying more clearly by their being publicly and perpetually committed lives of poverty, chastity and obedience in the likeness of the gospel example of Jesus.³⁹⁶ Through the evangelical counsels, the religious give themselves totally to God. St. Thomas Aquinas characterises it as a total offering (ST II-II, q.184 a.5; q. 88 a.2), a perfect sacrifice (ST II-II, q.186 a.1), and a holocaust. He looks at religious life as an offering of sacrifice and evangelical counsels as three sacrifices. Poverty is a sacrifice of external things (Heb 13, 3), Chastity is a sacrifice of body (Rom 12, 1), and obedience is a sacrifice of will (Ps 50, 19). Through this triple sacrifice, religious is dead to the world and belongs wholly to God. Thus, a professed religious no longer belongs to himself or herself but to God as a consecrated chalice.³⁹⁷

The core of religious life is the voluntary offering of the will. In religious life, the whole will be offered through the vow of obedience. Thomas Aquinas considers the vow of obedience as the most important of all the three evangelical counsels, giving three reasons: First, by obedience, one sacrifices to God one’s own will; by chastity, on the other hand, offers one’s body and by poverty external possessions. Since the body is worth more than material goods, the vow of chastity is

³⁹³ Cf. E. GAMBARI, *Religious Life. According to Vatican II and the New Code of Canon Law*, St. Paul Edition, Boston 1986, 128-129.

³⁹⁴ Cf. LOZANO, *Life as Parable. Reinterpreting the Religious Life*, 48.

³⁹⁵ Cf. P. MOLINARI – P. GUMPEL, *Chapter VI of the Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium*, 144.

³⁹⁶ Cf. E. McDONOUGH, “*Lumen Gentium*’s Chapter 6. Religious”, 931.

³⁹⁷ Cf. KOTTACKA, *Theological Perspectives on the Link Between Martyrdom and Consecrated Life*, 86-87.

superior in merit to poverty. Secondly, because it is by his own will that a human being makes use of either his body or his goods, he who sacrifices his own will sacrifices everything else he has. Thirdly, the vow of obedience is more universal than that of either poverty or chastity and hence it includes them both (*ST* II-II, q. 186 a. 8).³⁹⁸ The *kenosis* or self-despoilment of Christ, which religious are called to share by their obedience, is that total readiness to sacrifice oneself, to abandon one's own will and one's own opinion, according to the pattern of Christ, who was ready to take the form of a servant in submission to the Father and thus to redeem sinners in the fulness of his love. He expects the same readiness from the religious to sacrifice ourselves because it is through this sacrifice that redemption is brought about.³⁹⁹

The vow of poverty tells the world that it is possible to live among temporal goods and use the means of civilisation and progress without being enslaved by any of them. Chastity tells us that it is possible to love with disinterestedness and the inexhaustibility that draws on God's heart and dedicates oneself joyfully to everyone. Obedience tells us that it is possible to be happy without stopping at a comfortable personal choice but remaining fully at the disposal of God's will. Hence, Consecrated persons are called to live virginity as a total belonging to the Lord in love, Poverty as total abandonment to the Lord and his grace, and obedience as a total submission to the design of God's love.⁴⁰⁰ Religious find their model of obedience in Christ who always fulfilled the will of the Father. The living of this counsel is a challenge to a secular need for autonomy and individualism. The vow of chastity meant to free the religious for a greater love of Christ and others. Again, the model for this counsel is Christ, who gave his life in love for all humanity. This counsel sets the religious apart from a secular society that sees love solely from a physical perspective. The vow of poverty demands the religious not to use property for their own use. The model for this counsel is Christ, who was rich but, for our sake, became poor. Living out this counsel is a challenge to the consumerism and materialism of society.⁴⁰¹ An example of religious in living the evangelical counsels is Jesus Christ, who emptied himself unto death in total submission to the Father's will.

³⁹⁸ Cf. KOTTACKA, *Theological Perspectives on the Link Between Martyrdom and Consecrated Life*, 93-94.

³⁹⁹ Cf. MOLINARI, "Following of Christ in the Teaching of Vatican II", 113.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. KALLIDUKIL, *The Canonical Significance of the Synod of Bishops of 1994 on Consecrated Life*, 129.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. P. SHEA, "Religious Men and Women", in *NCE*, 12, 88.

3.6.3. In and for the Church

Lumen Gentium 44 authoritatively taught that “the state of life which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels – while not entering into the hierarchical structure Church belongs undeniably to her life and holiness”. Evangelical counsels are gifts to the Church and for the good of the Church.⁴⁰² Consecrated life is not for itself or the individual members or even for the good of the various institutes but for the Church. It must contribute to her saving mission. One of the strongest aspirations of the *Vita Consecrata* is to succeed in making all consecrated persons more and more aware of the need to live consecrated life in an ecclesial way, “*sentire cum Ecclesia*”.⁴⁰³

The Church is holy because Christ, her head, is holy and guided by the Holy Spirit; she needs sanctification because it exists in this sin-permeated world. The call of a religious life is to live in the Church to increase its holiness. The reason for the religious existence is to lead the people of God to holiness.⁴⁰⁴ The ecclesial element is explicit in evangelical counsels: Religious vows to God through Christ, in the Spirit, and before the believing community.⁴⁰⁵ According to Vatican II, the holiness of the Church in a very special way appears in the practice of the evangelical counsels, which says, Let everyone who has been called to the profession of the evangelical counsels take every care to persevere and excel the more in the vocation to which God has called him, for the greater holiness of the Church and for the greater glory of the one and undivided Trinity, which in Christ and through Christ is the source and origin of all holiness (*LG* 47).⁴⁰⁶

3.6.4. Pre-taste of the Life to Come

By her presence, the Church proclaims that there is another world, a transformed creation, a new heaven and earth where God will be all in all. Her task and mission of bearing witness to the eschatological kingdom of God is fulfilled primarily by the public profession in the Church of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. This actualisation of faith, hope, and charity given in the baptismal consecration is realised through a divine gift whereby God is proclaimed the Infinite Treasure of lives (poverty), the Pure Love of hearts demanding undivided

⁴⁰² Cf. *VC*, # 3.

⁴⁰³ Cf. MARIPPATTU, *Following Christ in Chastity, Poverty and Obedience*, 50. *VC* # 46.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. GAMBARI, *Religious Life. According to Vatican II and the New Code of Canon Law*, 139.

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. BILLY, *Evangelical Kernels. A Theological Spirituality of the Religious*, 59.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. CHARIVUPURAYIDATHIL, *Religious Life as Imitation of Christ*, 56.

and single-minded devotion (chastity), and the Absolute and Sovereign Lord of freedom (obedience). Therefore, the religious state reminds the Church that no matter how lovely and attractive this world may be, it is not the final goal of our efforts.⁴⁰⁷

Through the vowed life, religious gives witness to values of ultimate human concern. In a vow of chastity, they forego the goods of marriage, children and sexual pleasure in order to keep their eyes more firmly fixed on the lasting goodness and pleasure of the beatific vision in the life to come. In vow of poverty, they point to the common humanity shared by all, which makes all men and women fundamentally equal in the eyes of God. In a vow of obedience, they affirm in the submission of their wills to religious superiors the existence of a higher will for their lives. To the extent that religious remain faithful to the vows they have freely chosen they make the presence of God's reign visible in the life of the Church.⁴⁰⁸ Thus, religious life proclaims that we have here no abiding city but seek the city to come; that the life that our Redeemer won for us is a new life. The religious do this by renouncing human values: the value of possessions renounced by the vow of poverty, the value of sexual powers by the vow of chastity, and the value of absolute freedom renounced by the vow of obedience.⁴⁰⁹ Mar Ivanios, the founder of Bethany, also considered religious life a foretaste of heavenly life. He states that to experience the heavenly bliss, we should give ourselves entirely to God and dedicate our lives to the good of others. The vows are the means that enable a religious to attain this.⁴¹⁰

Conclusion

Consecrated life arose in the Church out of a deep desire of ordinary men and women to live the Gospel radically. The heart of the Gospel is the person of Jesus, and hence, to be a consecrated person is to be Christ for the world – to look at the world with the eyes of Jesus, to love the world with the heart of Jesus, to reach out to the world with the compassion of Jesus. Therefore, religious life is not a renunciation of the world but a deeper immersion into the world as a radical disciple of Jesus.⁴¹¹ The starkness of the struggle to uphold the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience might remind the world that some individuals think that God is all-important and can satiate all of

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. E. DOYLE, "Reflections on the Theology of Religious Life", in *Review for Religious* 32/6 (1973) 1248.

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. BILLY, *Evangelical Kernels. A Theological Spirituality of the Religious*, 223-224.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. E. YARNOLD, "The Vows. Consecration and Sign", in *The Way* 2 (1966) 81.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 122.

⁴¹¹ Cf. F. SERRAO, "Consecrated Life. A Call to Joyful Witness to the Gospel in India Today", in *Indian Theological Studies* (2015) 232.

humankind's needs. Hence, religious life is a clear and open acknowledgement of God in Christ and offers a more expansive embodiment of all Christians' baptismal dedication.⁴¹² In the institutes of consecrated life, witnessing God through consecration is prior to all other forms, and this constitutes the specificity of this state of life. In this sense, religious life is valued in the Church more for its being than for what it does.⁴¹³

Thus, we have seen in this chapter that, according to the opinions enunciated by the Second Vatican Council, religious consecration takes place as a development of baptismal consecration. However, it cannot be reduced to baptismal consecration alone since baptism does not require any commitment to celibacy or the renunciation of one's possessions. The specific note of religious life is being total: to follow Christ is to consecrate oneself to him. It is to dedicate one's life to him (*ET* 4). The post-conciliar documents take up the double language of the Council but with a tendency to understand consecration more deliberately according to the evangelical perspective. Thus, in *Renovationis Causam* 2, we see the expression that the religious are consecrated to Christ after it has been said that he offers himself to God. Similarly, again reporting the affirmation of the consecration made to God, *Evangelica Testificatio* shows that it is about following Christ, consecrating oneself totally to him, devoting to Christ the strength to love, the desire to possess, the freedom to dispose of one's life (*ET* 7).⁴¹⁴

Based on the teachings of the conciliar and post-conciliar documents, we understand that the fundamental act of consecration to God is in baptism, and the consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels is a consequent development of that baptismal consecration. To give a basis for Mar Ivanios' idea of religious life as a holocaust to God (total self-offering), I attempted to study it from a biblical perspective, monastic traditions and relevant magisterial teachings in the first section. The teachings of Mar Ivanios on the total surrender of oneself as *sarvāṅga homayāga* and how it is practised in the congregation (Sisters of the Imitation of Christ) by its charism and spirituality will be the chief theme of the second section.

⁴¹² Cf. B. GROGAN, "Theology of Religious Life in the Directives", in *The Way Supplement* 71 (1991) 25.

⁴¹³ Cf. ETAFO, "Consecrated Life in the Structure of the Church", 48-49.

⁴¹⁴ Cf. GALOT, "La Consacrazione Religiosa nei Documenti Post-Conciliari", 156.

PART TWO
CHAPTER FOUR
VISION OF MAR IVANIOS ON RELIGIOUS CONSECRATION AS A *SARVĀṆGA*
HOMAYĀGA

Introduction

In this second part of our research, we deal with the life and teachings of Venerable Mar Ivanios, especially as a monk. Indeed, his life and mission can be studied from different viewpoints. Mar Ivanios gave courageous leadership to bring the Syro-Malankara Church toward its communion with the Catholic Church and ceaselessly worked for its spiritual perfection. He lived in a time when the Malankara community was in conflict and division due to the Latinization policy of the Western missionaries, a period that led to the breakup of the communion of St. Thomas Christians. Despite this, he valiantly battled to rebuild the community on a strong and stable basis, deeply troubled by the internal strife and overt rivalry within the Malankara Church. He believed that the worldly temptations that pervaded the Church could only be healed and surpassed by a life of holiness and dedication.⁴¹⁵ For the revival of the Church, such a conviction made him live and propagate the unique path of monastic life, which was deeply inspired by oriental religious life and the principles of Indian *Sanyāsa*.

Mar Ivanios understands the core of consecrated life as *sarvāṅga homayāga* (total holocaust). This chapter is an attempt to comprehend his vision of religious life as *sarvāṅga homayāga* (total holocaust). Our study so far has been in view of understanding the background of the concept of religious consecration as *sarvāṅga homayāga*. In the first part, we tried to see its biblical roots and sense, as well as a few lived examples, especially from the Eastern tradition of early monasticism and the Church's teachings on consecrated life along these lines. With this backdrop, we now focus our attention on the person of Mar Ivanios, his life and understanding of the religious life, and how it is found in the charism and spirituality of the *Congregation of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ* (SIC) commonly known as "the Bethany Sisters".

In the first section of this chapter, we shall examine Mar Ivanios' life and the context of

⁴¹⁵ Cf. L. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor, Kottayam 1977, 3-4.

founding religious congregations for men and women. He wanted these congregations to bear the true character of Indian culture so that Christianity could be presented in India more comprehensibly to the Indian mind, a testament to his deep appreciation and respect for Indian culture. Therefore, we will also discuss the idea of Indian *sanyāsa* and its distinguishing characteristics in the second part of the chapter. The third part of the chapter will discuss Mar Ivanios' theology of religious life as well as how and why he incorporates the values of Indian *sanyāsa* into his life and vision of consecrated life.

4.1. The Life of Mar Ivanios (1882-1953)

Mar Ivanios was born to Thomas Panikar and Annamma Panikar on 21 September 1882 in the ancient family of Panickaruveetil in Mavelikkara, a small town in central Kerala, South India. A few days after birth, on October 4, he received baptism and confirmation according to the Orthodox ritual and assumed the name of Geevarghese Panikar. In 1897, at the age of fifteen, he began high school in Mar Dionysius (M.D.) Seminary, Kottayam. During these days, his inclination towards priestly life became evident and strong. A year after joining the M.D. school, he received minor orders. Seeing his spiritual enthusiasm and passion for the Church, Bishop Pulikottil Mar Dionysius ordained him as a Deacon on 9th January 1900. After his high school studies, he was sent to Madras Christian College for higher studies, and there, in 1906, he obtained a master's degree. He was ordained a priest on September 15, 1908, by Vattasseril Mar Dionysius at Parumala Seminary, then began his career as a principal at M. D. Seminary, Kottayam.

The religious context in the Malankara Church at that time was in spiritual deterioration and degeneration. The lust for power was creeping into the Church from every corner. Fr. Geevarghese was convinced that the social and moral degradation had resulted from spiritual degeneration.⁴¹⁶ He was grieved deeply at this pathetic situation, which aroused an intense quest for the renewal of the Malankara Church. While Principal at M. D. Seminary, he was called to be a Professor at Serampore University, Calcutta. Though it was painful for him to leave his Church, he took up the professorship at Serampore College, which reshaped his life, vision and mission and turned out to be a decisive moment in the history of the Malankara Church. He believed that if there were enough well-educated people, they could change the Church's destiny. Because of this, he took some young boys to Calcutta for higher education. He was also keen on empowering Syrian Christian

⁴¹⁶ Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 23.

women since he was confident that educated and enlightened women could help to empower other women. So, he also educated a group of young Syrian Christian girls in Serampore with the help of the Epiphany Sisters from England.⁴¹⁷

Fr. Geevarghese's stay at Serampore was a turning point in his life because the desire for a religious life he had relished from childhood began to acquire a definite form at Serampore. He dedicated himself to contemplation and a fervent study of different religious orders and congregations in the Catholic Church and the lives of the saints. While in the Orthodox Church, he read a good deal of literature on most of the schools of spirituality in the Catholic Church and was greatly inspired by it. He gives us testimony of his familiarity with the Christian monastic life:

My study of early Christianity helped me to appreciate the sanctity and beauty of the lives of men dedicated to God in religious life. I found St. Basil laying great stress upon religious chastity as the foundation of monastic life, St. Francis of Assisi pointing to holy poverty as its basis, and St. Ignatius of Loyola seemed to be teaching that religious obedience, which means living in the closest possible union with God and enabling the perfect accomplishment of His holy will was the means of attaining perfection. St. Benedict regarded stability as fundamental to the religious state. St. Francis De Sales taught that sanctifying everyday life's common actions was indispensable to attaining sanctity in religious life. I felt drawn by special ties of admiration and reverence for the saints and craved for the heavenly joy of communion with them.⁴¹⁸

The Indian culture and *sanyāsa* also inspired Fr. Geevarghese, and he intended to start a Christian monastery rooted in the spiritual traditions of India, as it was not too foreign to the Indian mind. So before starting the monastic life, he studied Christian monasticism and Indian *sanyāsa*. His research and studies made him aware of the rich spiritual traditions he wanted to integrate into the life of Bethany. He has expressed this in one of his pastoral letters as below:

You know India is rich in its ancient religious traditions, so the Church must accept whatever is not opposed to Christian faith and morals and christianise them from such traditions. Thus, we can prove that Christianity is not a foreign religion in India, as many think. The Christian Church is above all the national feelings. This idea has influenced and inspired the formation of the ideal of Bethany, which is nothing other than preaching the Gospel of Christ handed over to us by St. Thomas the Apostle and making it grow in an indigenous manner.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ Cf. A. CYRIL, "Making of Mar Ivanios. A Biographical Sketch", in J. KARIMPIL (ed.), *Mar Ivanios. Person, Impact and Relevance*, Malankara Seminary Publications, Nalanchira 2021, 24-25.

⁴¹⁸ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *The First Anniversary Reunion Speech*, September 30, 1931, *Archives of the Archdiocese of Trivandrum*. Quoted in C. NARIMATTATHIL, *Arch Bishop Mar Ivanios. Pastor and Prophet of Ecclesial Communion in the Syro-Malankara Church (1882-1953)*, Pontificia Università Lateranese, Roma 1993, 65.

⁴¹⁹ MAR IVANIOS, *Pastoral Letter*, November 12, 1946, *Archives of the Archdiocese of Trivandrum*. Quoted in C. NARIMATTATHIL, *Arch Bishop Mar Ivanios. Pastor and Prophet of Ecclesial Communion*, 71.

His visits to Hindu *āśrams* such as the *Sabarmati Āśram* founded by Gandhiji and the famous *Santiniketan* of Rabindranath Tagore to understand the life and practices of the monks there and their system gave him a new picture of Indian *sanyāsa*, because these two *āśrams* explored and existentially exposed the rich spiritual traditions of the Indian culture. From his studies of the early Christian monastic traditions, Fr. Geevarghese considered St. Basil the model of organised monastic life in the East. Thus, belonging to an oriental Church and being well-trained in its traditions, he was very much attracted to the Monastic Rules of St. Basil.⁴²⁰ Consequently, in Serampore itself, with the permission of his bishop, Mar Dionysius Vattasseril, Fr. Geevarghese and those whom he has taken for education began to live a sort of religious life according to the monastic rules of St. Basil, adapting them to Indian culture which will later develop into *the Order of the Imitation of Christ* (OIC).

Though OIC originated in Serampore, its formal establishment as an institution occurred in the wilderness of Ranni-Perunnad (Kerala). Fr. Geevarghese did not want to choose crowded cities and towns for the group he was forming because, according to him, silence and solitude are the essentials for a monastic life to respond and grow in the grace of God.⁴²¹ He knew that a college atmosphere like that of Serampur would not help develop a monastic life as he envisaged it. Therefore, in 1919, Mar Ivanios resigned from Serampore, came to Kerala and began a strict monastic life with some of his friends, following the lifestyle of the Hindu monks in all possible ways except in faith and morals. The OIC history remembers that it was the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady in 1919. Hence, for the first time in the history of the Malankara Orthodox Church, there arose a religious community known as the *Order of the Imitation of Christ* or *Bethany Āśram*. On 1 May 1925, Fr. Geevarghese was consecrated as a Bishop of Bethany and received the name Mar Ivanios. Later, Mar Ivanios also founded an order for women in 1925, September 21. The order is called *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ*, commonly called *Bethany Sisters*.⁴²²

Mar Ivanios chose “Bethany” as the name for the congregations founded to convey the chief

⁴²⁰ Cf. G. T. KALLUNKAL, *Order of the Imitation of Christ – Bethany Ashram. Towards a Realization of Christian Monastic Ideals in the Indian Context*, Pontificia Facultas Theologica Pontificium Institutum Spiritualitatis Teresianum, Rome 1983, 63.

⁴²¹ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam. Autobiography of Mar Ivanios*, trans. Sr. Rehmas SIC, Bethany Sisters’ Generalate, Vadavathoor, Kottayam 2005, 78.

⁴²² Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 36-37.

objectives of religious life in a deep relationship with Jesus.⁴²³ Considering the personal attitude of the three persons of Bethany, Lazarus, Martha and Mary (Jn 11, 5) and their triple ways of service to the Lord, is behind his choice of Bethany as the name of the congregation. Lazarus witnesses the life in the risen Christ; Mary sitting at the feet of the Lord and listening to his word represents the life of prayer and contemplation, and; Martha busy and anxious to serve the Lord, represents the life of active service.⁴²⁴ In all these attitudes what runs as the golden thread both in Mar Ivanios as a monk and the vision he shares on the religious life of the members of Bethany is the firm determination and the total abandonment to God, a complete renunciation of worldly possessions and self-interests in their spiritual journey with the scope of renewal of the Church and its people.

4.2. Historical Context of the Bethany Religious Congregations

The Christian community in India attributes their origin to the apostle St. Thomas, who, according to the traditions, arrived in the Southern part of India in the year 52 A. D., established Christian communities in a few places, and finally died as a martyr in Mylapur near the actual city of Chennai (Madras). The Church of St. Thomas of India grew up in close contact with the Chaldean (East Syrian) Church. Though they accepted East Syrian Liturgy, they kept an identity of their own by adapting to India's ancient culture. Hierarchically, the St. Thomas Christians subjected themselves to the Chaldean Catholic authority, keeping their ecclesial identity and individuality.⁴²⁵

However, with the arrival of Portuguese missionaries, the situation had changed. Being ignorant of Syrian practices and customs, they tried to reform their traditional liturgy. They slowly started the Latinisation of the liturgy and insisted the St. Thomas (Syrian) Christians to accept their jurisdiction.⁴²⁶ Thus, the Syrian Church gradually began to lose that which is genuinely Syrian due to the Latinisation imposed. But later in 1653 (May 22), a great number of Syrians separated

⁴²³ Bethany in the Bible occupies a special place in the life of Jesus Christ. It was a house that Jesus often visited and spent time with.

⁴²⁴ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 71. Thus, in this dissertation, we use Sisters of the Imitation of Christ (SIC) and Bethany interchangeably when referring to the congregation.

⁴²⁵ Cf. NARIMATTATHIL, *Arch Bishop Mar Ivanios. Pastor and Prophet of Ecclesial Communion*, 42-43.

⁴²⁶ In June 1599, Alexo de Menezes, the Archbishop of Goa, held a diocesan synod at Diamper with the support of the local rulers and some of the local clergy, which imposed rules and regulations for the ancient St. Thomas Christians to accept their jurisdiction. This synod also introduced forced Latinisation of liturgy and the rejection of local practices and beliefs, leading to a significant ecclesial protest by St. Thomas Christians known as *Coonan Cross Oath*.

themselves by swearing an oath that they would never remain under the Portuguese Latin jurisdiction. This oath is known as the *Coonan Cross Oath*. As a result, the Kerala Church was divided into two groups, the old faction and the new faction, or the *pazhayakoottukar* (who remained faithful to the Portuguese jurisdiction) and the *puthenkoottukar* (people who supported the oath).⁴²⁷ Thus, the Church of Kerala, called St. Thomas Christians, lost its originality and communion and split into many groups.

The *Puthenkoor* faction, in search of a bishop to lead them, gradually ended up being subject to the supremacy of the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. This was another reason for further division in the Church.⁴²⁸ After separating from the Mother Church, the Jacobite Church of Malankara experienced many crises. Due to a conflict of opinions and a desire for independence, many autonomous communities came into existence. These quarrels, lawsuits, and the absence of a permanent spiritual head were obstacles to the growth of the spiritual life of the Church and its members. This was the context in which Mar Ivanios started his life in this community.⁴²⁹ He was deeply disturbed by the divisions in the Church. He was willing to sacrifice his life for the healing of the wounds in the body of Christ created by divisions. In his first Anniversary Re-union speech, he says, “If I were to be cut into a thousand pieces to heal a small wound in the Body of Christ, I feel it should be done”.⁴³⁰ He was convinced that only a spiritual renewal could bring about a renaissance and revival of the Church. The answer to this inner quest found its expression in the establishment of the monastic life in the Malankara Church.⁴³¹

Mar Ivanios’ early years at Serampore and his interaction with foreign missionaries there helped him realise that missionary activity is the very life of the Church and its fundamental duty. Therefore, he thought a thorough Christian education was required to revive the Church and restore peace. However, the problems in Malankara Church were not resolved. Peace was thwarted due to internal conflicts, divisions, and legal battles between two factions – the Orthodox Syrian Church, to which Mar Ivanios belonged, and the Jacobite Syrian Church. Recognising that

⁴²⁷ Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 15.

⁴²⁸ Cf. T. M. EUSEBIOS, “Historical Context of the Reunion Movement”, in J. KARIMPIL (ed.), *Mar Ivanios. Person, Impact and Relevance*, Malankara Seminary Publications, Nalanchira 2021, 56.

⁴²⁹ Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 31.

⁴³⁰ MAR IVANIOS, *First Anniversary Re-Union Speech*, Quoted in NARIMATTATHIL, *Arch Bishop Mar Ivanios. Pastor and Prophet of Ecclesial Communion*, 310.

⁴³¹ Cf. A. VALIYAVILAYIL, “The Ecclesial Vision of Mar Ivanios”, in A. VALIYAVILAYIL (ed.), *Theological Visions of Mar Ivanios*, Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth Publications, Pune 2004, 70.

education alone would not address this issue, he considered founding a missionary society to send missionaries to preach the gospel throughout India.⁴³²

Moreover, Mar Ivanios realised that unless and until an ever-burning God experience is acquired, the missionaries might go after worldly pleasures and values over time. After spending days and nights praying and contemplating, he understood that being a Christian means being a missionary who preaches the good news of salvation. A missionary is called to give Jesus to others. But no one can give what they do not possess. Therefore, the first step is to have in oneself the person of Jesus. He grew in the conviction that through a life of prayer, meditation, and austerity, one can have a true God experience in Jesus. This certainty led him to establish monastic (*sanyāsa*) life in the Malankara Church. The life of *sanyāsa* itself is the proclamation and witness of Gospel values. Hence, he started practising monastic life in Serampore around the year 1917; leaves that city in 1919 and returns to Kerala and began to live a monastic life in a place called Mundanmala in the district of Pathanamthitta. Thus, *sanyāsa* life was introduced in the Malankara Church to rejuvenate it with its spiritual upliftment.⁴³³ Ever since 1653, the Jacobite Church had made continuous and tireless efforts for the Catholic communion. All their efforts until the beginning of the 20th century were in vain. Mar Ivanios, the Bishop of Bethany, too tirelessly worked for it. His efforts were crowned with success and on September 20, 1930 the Malankara Church entered the Catholic communion.⁴³⁴

Besides that, he wanted to interrelate Indian *sanyāsa* to Christian religious life to enter into the lives of the people of that time who only knew Hindu customs and practices. When God became man, he became like us and lived among us. St. Paul explains the reality of Incarnation in his letter to Philippians 2, 6-7: “Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” This must be what Christians strive to do. Thus, Christianity identified itself with the local culture, language and traditions wherever it went. However, when Christianity came to India, it did not become an Indian Church but a Chaldean or Antiochene Church. Therefore, Mar Ivanios observed that if that continues, the non-Christians in India never accept us and rather

⁴³² Cf. J. MARIADAS, “Mar Ivanios. The Founder of Bethany”, in *Mar Ivanios. Person, Impact and Relevance*, J. KARIMPIL (ed.), 74-75.

⁴³³ Cf. MARIADAS, “Mar Ivanios. The Founder of Bethany”, 75-76.

⁴³⁴ Cf. NARIMATTATHIL, *Arch Bishop Mar Ivanios. Pastor and Prophet of Ecclesial Communion*, 310.

consider us as ‘foreigners.’ So, he says, to be one with the nation, we should adopt the culture, language, and traditions of the land, which are not against the Christian faith. Four decades before the Second Vatican Council, Mar Ivanios understood the relevance of such a vision.⁴³⁵ Hence, when he founded the religious congregation, he adopted certain traditional elements of Indian *Sanyāsa* as Bethany’s values to become one with the culture.

Women had no ritual status in the Brahminic tradition and were considered inferior in society. They were subjected to all sorts of ritual impurities, and proper education was often denied to them. Speaking on the role of women in the family, he says, “Prosperity of any community depends upon the character formation of its women. As the women occupy an important role in the family, which is the basic cell of the society and Church at large, the Malankara community is in dire need of the services of dedicated religious women committed to the cause of the people of God.”⁴³⁶ Hence, he realised that unless women were educated and made catalysts of change, a transformation of society was impossible. Consequently, he took some Syrian girls to Calcutta to educate and empower them and train them in religious life and, through them, other women in society. He was a man much ahead of his time in terms of his concepts and execution because we must know that the social situation of women at that time was very low; they were subjected to all kinds of discrimination. In this context, he took a revolutionary step to educate them and start a religious congregation, which was then unheard of in the Orthodox Church. To understand how and why he adapted Indian *sanyāsa* to his founding congregations, it is better to understand the meaning and features of Indian *sanyāsa*. *Sanyāsa* is the term adopted by Christians for religious life in India.

4.3. The Nature of Indian *Sanyāsa*

It can be said that India is the original home of monasticism. There is evidence for the existence of ‘*munis*’, or ascetics, in India from the beginning of the first millennium before Christ, and the practice of ‘*tapas*’, which included silence and fasting, was already established. *Yoga*, as a method of controlling both the mind and the senses, seems to have originated in the Vedic period. Monastic life in the sense of communities of monks renouncing the world and living in poverty, chastity, and obedience began with Jainism and Buddhism in the sixth century B.C.⁴³⁷ At the

⁴³⁵ Cf. MARIADAS, “Mar Ivanios. The Founder of Bethany”, 77-78.

⁴³⁶ MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 62.

⁴³⁷ Cf. B. GRIFFITHS, “Saint Benedict. His Significance for India Today”, in *Vidyajyoti* 44 (1980) 432.

origins, outside and inside Christianity, monasticism has a twofold character. It is a movement of world renunciation, a protest against society's worldliness and even the Church. It is striving after a higher life from a vivid apprehension of the fleeting character of man's life. This form of life was already widely and firmly established in India about the middle of the millennium B.C. At this pre-Christian stage of the monastic movement, the monk was a witness to the highest forms of religious dedication.⁴³⁸

According to Abhishiktananda, religious life, or *Sanyāsa*, is India's contribution to the world. The essential rule of the *sanyāsi* is to be free from desire, or rather, he has but one desire, the desire for God alone. Complete insecurity and the lack of all foothold in this world belong to the very essence of *sanyāsa*.⁴³⁹ Asceticism, or self-mortification, holds as large a place in Indian religious thought and practice as a sacrifice. The soul is believed to comprehend the divine when freed from earthly desires.⁴⁴⁰ Renunciation is the condition for a life of contemplative depth. It frees one to devote all one's energies to the quest for God in silence, solitude, and self-denial.⁴⁴¹ Deeply convinced of the transitoriness of the world and its goods and the superiority of spiritual values over worldly pursuits, many men and women in India have dedicated themselves to the depths of the divine. These souls who constantly and consistently upheld the value of renunciation of everything in the world in search of realisation of the Supreme Reality are known as '*Sanyāsis*', and the mode of life they adopted is called '*Sanyāsa*'.⁴⁴² Let us look briefly into ascetical life and practices in the major religions of India that have influenced Mar Ivanios to inculcate in his founding congregations the practice of living according to the life situations of India and relating with the ordinary people of that time.

4.4. Ascetical Life in Hinduism

Asceticism is one of the important contributions of ancient Indian culture. Renunciation is not just an aspect of Indian *sanyāsa* but its essence. The relentless quest for God, for the absolute,

⁴³⁸ Cf. M. F. ACHARYA, "Indian Monastic Samaj", in *The Clergy Monthly* 36 (1972) 139.

⁴³⁹ Cf. S. ABHISHIKTANANDA, *The Further Shore*, Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Delhi 1997, 5-6.

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. C. ELIOT, *Hinduism and Buddhism. An Historical Sketch*, I, Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, London 1962, 71-72.

⁴⁴¹ Cf. W. R. TEASDALE, *Toward a Christian Vedanta. The Encounter of Hinduism and Christianity According to Bede Griffiths*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 1987, 154.

⁴⁴² Cf. J. RAJAN, *Christian Interpretation of Indian Sanyāsa. A Study Based on the Vision and Experience of Swami Bede Griffiths*, Pontificia Universitas S. Thomae in Urbe Facultas Theologiae, Romae 1988, 7.

to experience him in one's intimate self and to realise him, his mode of being, and his form of acting characterise the innermost structure of Hinduism. This emphasis on the spiritual realisation of the divine seems to manifest strongly in asceticism and renunciation (*sanyāsa*). The ascetic aimed to renounce the world and his empirical self to seek freedom for his authentic self.⁴⁴³ A single-minded pursuit of the *sanyāsi* is needed to achieve the God experience, his life's most important and ultimate goal. He must renounce everything to possess one Reality, which is everything to him. Thus, in Hinduism, they lay stress on asceticism and self-mortification as a means of purifying the soul and obtaining supernatural powers.⁴⁴⁴

The Hindu ideal monk renounces every relation with the world to achieve supreme liberation, which consists of realising union with a personal God. He is the one who passes his days in contemplation, meditates on the mysteries of life, is supremely peaceful, maintains serenity in the face of honour or dishonour, success or failure, and has no desires and passions, meaning he keeps them under control.⁴⁴⁵ According to the *Bhagavad Gītā*, *sanyāsa* is not renunciation of action but renunciation in action. The *Gita* emphasises the spirit of *sanyāsa* as the renunciation of the fruit of action (*Nishkama Karma*: work without expectation, *Bhagavad Gītā* 5, 11)). It advocates that one attains *moksha* not through social withdrawal but through selfless service.⁴⁴⁶ Through the renunciation of all the attachments and allurements of the world, the *sanyāsins* dedicate themselves completely to the spiritual quest to experience the divine within themselves and lead others to the transcendent by their very presence. They are the ones who lead a good, holy, simple and self-sacrificing life.

4.4.1. The Meaning of *Sanyāsa* and the Appellatives of Hindu Ascetics

The Sanskrit term *sanyāsa* comprises the prefix 'sam' and the noun 'nyāsa.' 'Sam' means, ideally, wholeheartedly. 'Nyāsa' means laying aside, resigning, abandoning. Thus, *sanyāsa* connotes complete renunciation and abandonment of worldly possessions and the concentration of thought and devotion on the Supreme. Intense attachment to the divine and utter detachment from everything else is the core of *sanyāsa*. Hence, etymologically, *sanyāsa* means: a complete

⁴⁴³ Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, *Classical Hinduism*, Università Gregoriana Editrice, Roma, 1982, 368-369.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. ELIOT, *Hinduism and Buddhism. An Historical Sketch*, I, 16.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, "Monasticism. Hindu and Christian", in *Bulletin Secretariatus Pro Non-Christianis* 37 (1978) 46-47.

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. J. MENAKALIEKKAL, "Mar Ivanios a Proactive Mystic", in A. VALIYAVILAYIL (ed.), *Theological Visions of Mar Ivanios*, Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth Publications, Pune 2004, 311.

renunciation and abandonment of worldly possessions and surrendering one's whole life to God.⁴⁴⁷ Thus, the *sanyāsi* lives a detached life, abandoning everything and himself to the Ultimate Reality. *Sanyāsa* is a state of life in which one dedicates oneself to holiness.⁴⁴⁸ The term *sanyāsa* connotes a complete break with the world; it implies abandoning all ties, obligations, property, and possessions. It is a total renunciation of everything except God and freedom from all the attachments.⁴⁴⁹

Many different terms have been used in the Hindu religious literature in the context of asceticism and renunciation of the Hindu ascetics. *Sanyāsi* is the most common term applied to a professional ascetic who completely renounces the world and all its attachments for self-realisation. *Sanyāsi*'s are known under many names, emphasising certain life characteristics. (1) *Parivrājaka* a religious mendicant. The *Brahmanic* wanderer had no shelter, having left home and possessions. (2) *Muni* means "impulse"; hence, anyone inspired by an inward impulse is an inspired person. One who has reached total silence experiences God and communicates it to others in silence. A pious and learned person, endowed with more or less of a divine nature, having attained it by mortification and concentration. (3) *Sādhu* means a 'straight, well-disposed, good, virtuous man, honest, a sage, a seer'. They are mostly religious teachers and undertake long journeys to the great places of pilgrimage and partake in festivals and fairs on the way. (4) *Tapasvin* practices *tapas* (austerity). *Tapas* means 'warmth, heat', and then the feelings or sensations, usually painful, experienced due to heat; then voluntary pain of suffering endured from religious motive. Thus, the term signifies religious penance and austerity and connotes the merit gained through such devotion. (5) *Ṛṣi* is the one who has a vision of God.⁴⁵⁰ (6) *Yogin* is balanced in mind and strives for the Absolute. One who unites himself with God by detaching himself from the world.⁴⁵¹ They are the ones who detach themselves from the earthly attachments and make themselves closer to God.

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. M. G. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi 1976, 43.

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. RAJAN, *Christian Interpretation of Indian Sanyāsa*, 12.

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. W. TEASDALE, "Sanyāsa. The Primordial Tradition of Renunciation-A Radical Monastic Proposal", in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 31/1 (1996) 80.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, "Hindu Monasticism", in *Studia Missionalia* 28 (1979) 292-293. See also in RAJAN, *Christian Interpretation of Indian Sanyāsa*, 13-14.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. J. NEUNER, "Non-Attachment, Indian and Christian", in *The Clergy Monthly Supplement* 2 (1954) 95.

4.4.2. The Four Aspects of Indian Asceticism

The Hindu ascetics practised and proposed certain ascetical practices to attain God-realisation and purification of body and mind. These practices are *Tapas*, *Vairāgya*, *Sanyāsa*, and *Yoga*.

4.4.2.1. *Tapas*

The Sanskrit term *tapas* is derived from the root *tap*, which means ‘to be hot or heated’ and ‘to burn’.⁴⁵² Its meaning is extended to zeal or fervour of doing things. In the *R̥gveda*, *tapas* is used to mean the heating, the burning of sun and fire; to consume by fire and heat, evil or enemies. In the *Atharvaveda*, it is said that a Vedic student has to undergo certain physical and mental disciplines to acquire knowledge of Brahman. Thus, his life of *tapas* is associated with celibacy.⁴⁵³ The *Bhagavat Gītā*⁴⁵⁴ denounces all kinds of penances and practices which involve the torture of the flesh. *Tapas* is not dwelling in a cave, giving up food or affairs of the world, or tormenting the body. True *tapas* involve the discipline of the body, speech, and mind. *Gītā* calls it a *Bhāvasamśuddhi* - purification of attitudes and emotions. It is a discipline by which instincts and urges are sublimated by purifying the body and mind. *Tapas* signifies not only bodily mortifications but also some definitive virtues and practices. Fasting is regarded as the greatest *tapas*, but the highest value is attached to the moral qualities of the soul.⁴⁵⁵ Thus, it is not tormenting the body but an effort in disciplining the body and mind by denying comforts and pleasures for the spiritual ends.

4.4.2.2. *Vairāgya*

The word *Vairāgya* means ‘aversion, distaste for something’; in the religious context, it signifies freedom from worldly desires and indifference to worldly objects and life.⁴⁵⁶ Though the term asceticism is used to mean both *Vairāgya* and *sanyāsa* (*tyāga*), there is a difference between the two. *Vairāgya* is an essential condition leading to *tyāga*, withdrawal from worldly life, *sanyāsa*. This withdrawal, to be complete, has to be physical as well as mental. The physical renunciation

⁴⁵² Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 14.

⁴⁵³ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 17.

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. The *Gītā* is a dialogue between the Arjuna and the god Krishna. The text instructs how to elevate the mind and soul to look beyond appearances for the God-realisation.

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 25-27.

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. DHAVAMONY, *Classical Hinduism*, 373.

must result from the mental renunciation, which is *vairāgya*. This virtue is acquired through training and discipline, which prepares the mind to be detached from the worldly life. Hence, *vairāgya* is the pre-requisite of a *sanyāsa*. *Vairāgya* lies in realising the transitoriness of all worldly objects and desires. It is a freedom from all worldly desires and indifference to the worldly objects of life. It is an inner aspiration for higher things of the spirit.⁴⁵⁷ Thus, it is not running away from the world's realities but mastering the soul to face the realities of existence in complete detachment.

4.4.2.3. *Sanyāsa*

According to *Mahābhārata*, *sanyāsa* is the last stage of life where one should leave off Vedic study and regard neither life nor death with joy. Here, the person abstains from injury, regards all creatures with impartiality, and is devoted to truth. Having been freed from all attachments, he seeks only the knowledge of the self. The *Gītā* defines *sanyāsa* as 'the renunciation of actions springing from selfish desires' and abandoning the fruit of all actions. Even austerity, sacrifice and charity, which are means of purification, have to be pursued without desire for fruit and without attachment.⁴⁵⁸

The *Upanishads*⁴⁵⁹ refer to *sanyāsa* as the effort to purify human nature through renunciation.⁴⁶⁰ Here, a person is completely relieved from all the cares of life and devotes his whole attention to the realisation of the Supreme Being, surrendering fully to Him. It is the dedicated search for God in total renunciation. The attitude of *sanyāsi* should be not to possess anything but God. A true ascetic is "he who does not touch objects of sense that enter him".⁴⁶¹ He is a *tyāgin* who has left everything, a renouncer because when he becomes conscious of the absolute reality, he gives up everything: the desire for children, possessions, and worldly fame.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 28-29.

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 45-46.

⁴⁵⁹ The word *Upanishad* is derived from *upa* (near), *ni* (down), and *sad* (to sit), meaning sitting down near. The *Upanishads* are the utterances of spiritually enlightened people who obtained the highest truths through earnest meditation.

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. E. RÖER, trans., *The Taittiri'ya, Aitare'ya, S've'ta's'vatara, Ke'na, I's'a Katha, Pras'na, Mundaka and Ma'ndukya Upanishad*, T.J.M. Arthur, Calcutta 1853, 163. *Mundaka Upanishad* 3: 2, 6. The *Mundaka Upanishad* contains three parts, each with two sections. It is an ancient Sanskrit Vedic text embedded in *Atharva Veda*.

⁴⁶¹ C. MUPPATHY, "A Note on *Sanyāsa*", in *The Living Word* 85 (1979) 30-31. See also in *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.6.

⁴⁶² Cf. S. VANDANAMTHADATHIL, *Inculturation in Religious Life Among the St. Thomas Christians in Kerala (India). An Appraisal*, Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a S.Thoma Aq. in Urbe, Rome 1998, 125. See also in *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* 3.5.

Sanyāsa is not an escape from the world but a responsible and dedicated search for the Absolute and one's life meaning, the union with God.

4.4.2.4. *Yoga*

Yoga is derived from the verb 'Yuj, ' meaning to join, to attach. In the *Gītā*, it is called *Samatvam*, which means balance or equilibrium, secured by mental discipline.⁴⁶³ It is an art of meditation closely connected with *tapas* to achieve physical and mental powers. It is a technique of intellectual illumination and a means of spiritual enlightenment.⁴⁶⁴ It was believed that ascetical practices could help men come into intimate relations with the spirit world and obtain the power to change the natural course of events and things. This led to the origin of yoga, for yoga is associated with controlling the physical sense and man's mind. Bodily discipline became a means of further mental control.⁴⁶⁵ It is said that yogic practices were known in the circles of ascetics and mystics from early times in India. Pathaṅjali collected and classified the ascetic practices and contemplative formulas that were extant in his time. He gave a philosophical basis to the whole system and demonstrated for the first time how yoga may be used to emancipate man from the bondage of his mind, senses, and ignorance. The practice of continence (*Brahmacarya*) is an important element in *yoga*.⁴⁶⁶

4.4.3. *Sanyāsa* and *Āśrama* System

The term *Āśrama* is derived from the root *śrama*, which means to exert oneself. The term has two meanings in the ancient Indian literature. The first signifies a place where the ascetics live and perform religious austerities; the second is a stage in the long journey of life. According to Vedic teachings, man's life is divided into four stages. *Sanyāsa* is the fourth and final stage in man's life.⁴⁶⁷ *Manusmṛiti*⁴⁶⁸ prescribes four stages in the evolution of an integrated life (*Manusmṛiti* II, 176). First is the *Brahmacarya*; *Carya* means course of conduct; thus, *Brahmacarya* means conduct adapted to the search of the Absolute (*Brahman*) or one who walks with *Brahman*.⁴⁶⁹ It is the stage where a boy lives with his teacher and receives religious and

⁴⁶³ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 237.

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 61.

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, *Hindu Spirituality*, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome 1999, 109.

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 48-49.

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. RAJAN, *Christian Interpretation of Indian Sanyāsa*, 16.

⁴⁶⁸ *Manusmṛiti* is an ancient legal text of Hinduism that prescribes the social obligations and duties of the various castes and individuals in different stages of life.

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. DHAVAMONY, "Monasticism. Hindu and Christian", 45.

secular instruction. The most important training of the *Brahmacarya* stage is moral because control and purification of the will constitute the basis for the right kind of intellectual growth. The control of the senses is the main moral training, and celibacy is the foundation of this discipline.⁴⁷⁰ After the *Brahmachari*⁴⁷¹ finishes his intellectual and moral training, he enters the householder's state, *garhasthya*. The householder raises a family and serves his parents and society. The chief injunction of this stage is to practice the ritualistic sacrifices as explained in the *Brāhmaṇs*.⁴⁷²

When the householder starts to have grey hair and wrinkles on his face and grandchildren have been born, he restores to the forest, and this stage is the *vānaprastha*. The primary duty of this state is to take his mind off the transitory values of this life and concentrate on attaining spiritual liberation. Sacrifice, study, asceticism, and compassion for all are now the principles of his life. However, he does not cut himself off from the life around him but continues to serve his fellow beings and cosmic nature through prayer and the performance of sacrifices.⁴⁷³ Finally, he enters into the ultimate path of renunciation *sanyāsa*, in which he is bound neither by work nor by desire but is dedicated wholly to acquiring knowledge of *Brahman*.⁴⁷⁴

By going through the four stages, the individual practices the four *puruṣārthas*: *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*, namely duty, wealth, pleasure, and liberation. In the first stage, *dharma* is predominating; in the second stage, while *artha* and *kāma* are predominant, the individual practises *dharma*. In the third stage, *dharma* and *mokṣa* become the main concerns of life, *dharma* occupying the primary position. In the final stage, *mokṣa* occupies the supreme position.⁴⁷⁵ Each of the four stages is called *āśrama* in the sense that staying in it, the person concerned makes intense (*ā*) efforts (*śrama*) to realise the goal of life, namely, the union with God.⁴⁷⁶ It should be noted that this institution of four stages applies only to the males of the higher castes. For others, the only stage sanctioned in the scriptures is family life.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. A. BASU, "Ashramas as Permanent Forms of Asceticism", in *Journal of Dharma* 3/2 (1978) 115-116.

⁴⁷¹ A student of the Vedas committed to celibacy.

⁴⁷² Cf. BASU, "Ashramas as Permanent Forms of Asceticism", 117-118.

⁴⁷³ Cf. BASU, "Ashramas as Permanent Forms of Asceticism", 118-119.

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. S. PRABHAVANANDA, *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India 1981, 37.

⁴⁷⁵ Cf. P. H. PRABHU, *Hindu Social Organization. A Study in Socio-Psychological and Ideological Foundations*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1961, 97.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. T. KOCHUMUTTOM, "Sanyāsa Versus Consecrated Life", in *Third Millennium* 17 (2014) 95.

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. D. ACHARUPARAMBIL, "Monasticism in Hindu Tradition", in *Euntes Docete* 30 (1977) 443.

4.4.4. The Transcendent Nature of *Sanyāsa*

The worries of this life should not become a burden for the *sanyāsi*, especially those of the people who were dear to him once. He is completely indifferent to all things, even to physical conditions of heat, cold, etc. He is beyond *dharma*⁴⁷⁸ and *adharma*, what is done and what is not done. He has no sense of otherness or opposition, for he has transcended all the pairs of opposites.⁴⁷⁹ A *sanyāsi* must go beyond all social and religious ties because he or she is seeking that which is beyond all, that which has no obligation or institution can contain or express. Here, a person leaves life's active duties and concerns and retires into solitude for prayer, intense meditation, and austerities to attain final liberation. One who embraces this way of self-denial and contemplation becomes a *sanyāsi* or a *sanyāsini* ('nun'). *Sanyāsa* is thus a central part of the Hindu view of life that delineates four successive stages.⁴⁸⁰

When someone decides to become a *sanyāsin*, he approaches an honoured *guru*, requesting to accept him under his guidance and to initiate him into *sanyāsa*. The *guru* instructs him and tests his sincerity and constancy through many trials. When he is satisfied with the authenticity of the candidate's decision, the *guru* gives him the solemn initiation or *sanyāsa dīkṣā*. Daniel Acharuparambil describes solemn initiation as follows:

First, a funeral rite is performed, symbolising that he is dead to the world. Then follows various sacrificial offerings in the sacred fire to ensure divine protection and self-purification. Then, he intentionally installs the sacrificial fire to remind himself that, after that, he is not bound to perform any external sacrifices; instead, all his sacrifices must be internal. He then bids farewell for good to all his relations and friends, abdicates all his material goods in favour of whom he wishes, and professes not to harm any living creature. In front of all, he makes the solemn oath of perpetual renunciation, the essential feature of *sanyāsa*, declaring thrice, 'I have given up everything.' Immediately, his caste symbols, namely the sacred cord and the tuft of hair, are removed. He no longer belongs to any caste and transcended all considerations of caste. His secular dress is then removed and is clothed with the poor garment of a *sanyāsin*. He is also given a staff and a begging bowl, the symbols of a pilgrim on earth. A new name is given to the new *sanyāsin*. The rite concludes with conferring on him the authority to initiate other worthy aspirants to *sanyāsa*.⁴⁸¹

Thus, *sanyāsa* is a stage in which the individual works towards letting go of everything in

⁴⁷⁸ *Dharma* consists of the ten highest moral qualities. learnedness, austerity, self-sacrifice, faith, sacrificial ceremony, forbearance, purity of emotions and pity, truth, and control of self. The essence of *dharma* is declared to consist in not doing to others what is disagreeable to oneself. M. DHAVAMONY, "The Sādhu Ideal as Realized by Hindu Saints", in *Studia Missionalia* 35 (1986) 210.

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. ABHISHIKTANANDA, *The Further Shore*, 24.

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. TEASDALE, "Sanyāsa. The Primordial Tradition of Renunciation", 80-81.

⁴⁸¹ Cf. ACHARUPARAMBIL, "Monasticism in Hindu Tradition", 446-447.

pursuit of attaining the greater truth, the Ultimate.

4.5. *Sanyāsa* in Jainism

Vardhamana Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, is said to have been born in 599 BCE. He grew up in comfort, married, and had a daughter. Then, at the age of thirty, he renounced the world and took a life of severe asceticism. Exposed to the elements, to attacks by insects, to the injury and abuse of men, he bore all with patience and equanimity, eating what was offered by others, often nothing, and observing long fasts. He continued this life for more than twelve years. Finally, in the thirteenth year of fasting and meditating, he achieved the state of omniscience or *kevala* (“aloneness”).⁴⁸²

According to Mahavira, man is the maker of his destiny and can attain emancipation through his moral life and spiritual practices. He preached renunciation as the surest means of emancipation and demanded the strictest possible ascetic life from monks and nuns. He was dissatisfied with the existing system of *sanyāsa* in Hinduism, which was mainly meant for elderly men and only for the high caste.⁴⁸³ In Hinduism, after spending an average of twenty-five years in each life stage, a person spends the last part of life searching for self-realisation. But Mahavira was not convinced by this system of life. He said it was very difficult for a person to enjoy the pleasures of life and then renounce all attachments and desires. Life is most uncertain, and a person may die at any moment and fail to work out of his salvation. He opened the door of monastic life to all. Realising the difficulty of extinguishing desires and uncertainty of life led, Mahavira to advocate complete renunciation and detachment from active worldly life.⁴⁸⁴

Jain and Jainism are derived from the Sanskrit root ‘*Ji*’, which means to conquer. A Jain believes in conquering the flesh to attain supreme purity, leading to infinite knowledge, happiness, and power. About the main precepts of Jainism, all Jains are one. At the beginning of the Christian era, however, they divided into two sects, namely *Digambaras* and *Śvetāmbaras*, due to certain differing regulations regarding the life and conduct of the monks. The most important of these is the *Digambara* monks, who advocated a stricter form of renunciation and a total non-possession.

⁴⁸² Cf. P. HEEHS (ed.), *Indian Religions. A Historical Reader of Spiritual Expression and Experience*, University Press, Washington, NY 2002, 90.

⁴⁸³ Cf. S. VANDANAMTHADATHIL, *Inculturation in Religious Life Among the St. Thomas Christians in Kerala (India). An Appraisal*, Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a S.Thoma Aq. in Urbe, Rome 1998, 199.

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. I. C. SHARMA, *Ethical Philosophies of India*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London 1965, 121-123.

They held that the monks should be free from the consciousness of their bodies and are not allowed to wear garments; they hold that ascetics must possess nothing, not even a loin cloth; hence, they must be entirely nude, whereas the Śwetāmbara monks are enjoined to wear white robes.⁴⁸⁵

One of the most important institutions of Jainism is asceticism or *Tapas*. *Tapas* is divided into external and internal. The former comprises the austerities practised by the Jainas; the latter consists of their spiritual exercises, self-discipline, and the cleansing and purifying of the mind. Both the internal and external were further divided, each into six sub-divisions. Among the austerities, fasting is the most conspicuous.⁴⁸⁶ *External Tapas* are fasting, begging for food, renouncing and suppressing taste and dainty food, mortifying the body, and living with perfect self-control. *Internal Tapas* are penance in expiation of any fault committed consciously or unconsciously; modesty means perfect self-control and purifying the mind by right knowledge, faith and conduct, service to others, scripture reading, meditation, and non-attachment to the body.⁴⁸⁷

Jainism considers the world of transmigration as a bondage that the wise long to terminate. Even in the body, the soul can attain a beatific state of perfect knowledge and, above the highest heaven, the paradise of blessed souls freed from transmigration. This paradise to be reached by right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct is called the three jewels in Jainism.⁴⁸⁸ Right faith is unshaken faith in the teaching of the Jains; right knowledge is true understanding of their principles; and right conduct is practical living following these principles.⁴⁸⁹ Right conduct is based on the five vows taken by every Jain ascetic (1) not to kill that is not to cause pain or destruction to any living being by thought, speech, or conduct (2) not to speak untruth meaning truth in speech, thought, and deed (3) to take nothing that is not given (4) to observe chastity in word, thought, and deed (5) renunciation of all earthly concerns or nonattachment to the world.⁴⁹⁰ Jainism removed the restrictions of caste and sex and opened the gates of monastic life to all.⁴⁹¹ The renunciation of Jain monks was radical and abrupt. They were admired in India but not so

⁴⁸⁵ Cf. PRABHAVANANDA, *The Spiritual heritage of India*, 155-156.

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 183.

⁴⁸⁷ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 184.

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. ELIOT, *Hinduism and Buddhism. An Historical Sketch*, I, 107-108.

⁴⁸⁹ Cf. PRABHAVANANDA, *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, 159.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 178.

⁴⁹¹ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 325.

much imitated.⁴⁹²

4.6. Asceticism in Buddhism

Siddhārtha Gautama was the son of a small “republic” ruler in the lowlands of southern Nepal and northern Bihar. His early days till he reached manhood were spent in splendour, ease, and luxury. He lived a life where the world’s miseries were unknown. The Buddhist tradition tells that on four occasions, he went out of his palace and happened to see four persons in four different stages. He saw an old man and felt that he was subject to the frailties of old age, saw a sick man and felt that he was subject to sickness, saw a dead man and knew the transience of human life, and met a monk with a peaceful countenance who had left all the attachments and desires of the world and seeking religious truth. These sad facts of life moved him to anxious and puzzled reflection on life’s problems. The life of a monk, who has renounced every comfort of life yet cheerful in mind and serene in spirit, inspired him to renounce the world and all his attachments. Thus, he left his home and family and retired to the forests to seek the truth.⁴⁹³

The transitory nature of human life and the world made Gautama follow a renounced life to reach the ultimate truth. He led a rigorous ascetic life for six years in the jungle of Uruvela. But he was convinced this was not the right way since it did not bring any spiritual illumination and peace but exhaustion and impotence of mind. He decided to give up ascetic practices and resume normal food and drink intake to recover his strength. After he gained bodily health and mental vigour, he spent seven weeks under a tree called Bodhi, sitting in a state of most profound meditation. One night, towards the dawn, he finally realised the Truth. He thus became Buddha (the Enlightened One).⁴⁹⁴

Buddha, after going through severe ascetical practices, realised that penances and self-mortification were quite unsatisfactory and continuous self-torture was not conducive to insight. Therefore, he rejected both the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification and preached the Middle Path, by which the wayfarer avoided the two extremes. The path consists of the *four noble truths* and the *eight-fold steps*. The *four noble truths* are: Life is suffering, the cause of suffering is craving, craving can be destroyed, and there is a path which leads one away from

⁴⁹² Cf. RAJAN, *Christian Interpretation of Indian Sanyāsa*, 49.

⁴⁹³ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 153-155.

⁴⁹⁴ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 156-157.

craving and suffering. The path alluded to in the fourth truth is the *eightfold path*. They are: 1. Right views 2. Right intention 3. Right speech 4. Right action 5. Right livelihood 6. Right effort 7. Right mindfulness, and 8. Right concentration. The only asceticism he permits is bodily self-control to aid mental self-control.⁴⁹⁵

Official Buddhist monasticism prevailed in India from the sixth century B.C. to about the ninth century A.D. Monastic life under Hinduism was eremitical. However, the element of communal or cenobitical life began to appear under Buddhism.⁴⁹⁶ The establishment of a religious order is one of the greatest achievements of the Buddha. This is known as *Saṅgha*. It has a two-fold meaning in Buddhism – ‘an entire monk fraternity’ (body of persons) or ‘the bond of association among monks’ (confederation which makes them one body).⁴⁹⁷ The Buddhist monk, *bhikṣu*, has given up every source of sin by the vision and can crush every evil inclination and live purely. Restraint in life, habit, and thought seems to be his special virtue.⁴⁹⁸ Buddha’s declaration that an ascetic who does not take life, who has a clear conscience, who is full of compassion, who has sympathy for all that lives, who controls his senses, and who is endowed with wisdom to know the truth is to be called a real *śramana*.⁴⁹⁹

After the death of Buddha, his disciples organised and remembered the teachings of their master. These original Buddhist teachings are preserved in the *Tripitaka* collections, or the three baskets. The three collections are named the *Vinayapiṭaka*, which prescribes rules in detail for the conduct of the monks of the Order; the *Suttapiṭaka*, which reveal practical methods of spiritual attainment; and the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, doctrines which deal with Buddha’s psychology and ethics.⁵⁰⁰ The continuity of the monastic organisation has been the only constant factor in Buddhist history. The rules of the Vinaya regulated monastic life. The term is derived from ‘*vi-nayati*,’ which means to lead away from evil to discipline. Poverty, celibacy, and inoffensiveness were the three essentials of monastic life. The *Vinaya* says a monk should rely on begging for food and all other needs. The Buddhists considered the practice of begging to be a breeding ground for many

⁴⁹⁵ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 161-162.

⁴⁹⁶ Cf. M. DEEGALLE, “Asceticism. Buddhist Perspectives”, *Encyclopaedia of Monasticism*, I, 89.

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. S. DUTT, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India. Their History and Contribution to Indian Culture*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London 1962, 20.

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 166.

⁴⁹⁹ Cf. T. LEGGETT, trans., “The Realization of the Buddha”, in *The Middle Way* 75 (2000) 25.

⁵⁰⁰ Cf. PRABHAVANANDA, *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, 174.

virtues.⁵⁰¹ In Buddhism, *sanyāsa* has two equivalents: *śramaṇa*, which means ‘making effort, exertion, toiling’ and hence one who performs acts of mortification or work for spiritual life, and *bhikṣu*, a mendicant living on alms. The Jains call such one *yati*, literally, ‘a striver’, which signifies one who has controlled all his passions and feelings. In this way, ascetic life was the concern of all Indian folk.⁵⁰²

4.7. Characteristics of Indian *Sanyāsa*: A Summary

The very purpose of *sanyāsa* is to experience the Ultimate Reality in the depth of one’s being. It is a state of life in which a person is detached from everything in the universe and from oneself and is intensely attached to the Ultimate Reality.⁵⁰³ By convincing the transcendence of this world and the superiority of spiritual ideals over earthly pursuits, many men and women in India committed their lives to finding the ultimate meaning of human life and the Supreme Reality. I have selected a few of the numerous Indian virtues of *sanyāsa* that the pioneers incorporated into the Christian religious life.

4.7.1. Life of Absolute Poverty and Total Renunciation

Renunciation is the heart of *sanyāsa*, and absolute detachment is its characteristic. The attitude of a *sanyāsi* is to possess nothing but God. It is through the practice of renunciation that the person becomes essentially free, awake, and so acosmic, not of this world. The ultimate degree of this renunciation and detachment requires the *sanyāsi* to go beyond their attachment to self-seeking. To be the same in pleasure and pain is the real *sanyāsa*.⁵⁰⁴ Renunciation frees one to devote all energies to the quest for God in silence, solitude, and self-denial. It leads to an experiential awareness of God, who does not pass away. The most radical renunciation is that of the false self, the ‘ego,’ which is the root of sin, conflict, and spiritual stagnation.⁵⁰⁵

A *sanyāsi* sees his/her goal, the divine, as far more sublime than anything else in the world. It is a “pearl of great worth.” He gives up everything else to possess it. So, a person detaches

⁵⁰¹ Cf. E. CONZE, *Buddhism. Its Essence and Development*, Harper Torch books, New York 1959, 54-56.

⁵⁰² Cf. MUPPATHY, “A Note on *Sanyāsa*”, 30.

⁵⁰³ Cf. RAJAN, *Christian Interpretation of Indian Sanyāsa*, 187.

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. B. GRIFFITHS, *River of Compassion. A Christian Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita*, Amity House, Warwick, NY 1987, 82-83.

⁵⁰⁵ Cf. W. TEASDALE, “The Nature of *Sanyāsa* and its Value for Christian Spirituality”, in *Communio* (1985) 327.

oneself from things to attach to the fullness of reality.⁵⁰⁶ Swami Shivananda says it is only through renunciation that one can become immortal. *Yoga* and *bhoga* – union with God and a sense of enjoyment cannot go together. One cannot get any taste of the bliss of Brahman unless one gives up the happiness of this world. The *sanyāsin* is to be a living symbol of an uncompromising spirit of renunciation and poverty. After initiation, he leaves his near and dear ones, his home and possessions, and his hometown and wanders from place to place without a fixed dwelling.⁵⁰⁷ The essential need is the renunciation of the ego, of the self. When centred on itself, the ego is the root of all evil and becomes the principle of self-will. He who renounces all self-will is a true *sanyāsi*. That is the essence of *sanyāsa*.⁵⁰⁸

According to *Bhagavad Gītā*, renunciation is the beginning, the middle, and the end of spiritual life. Otherworldliness does not imply escaping into the forest and shunning the duties of everyday life but performing it with a heart free from attachment and thoughts of worldly gain and directed entirely to the Supreme Being.⁵⁰⁹ The Laws of Manu say that *sanyāsi* should be indifferent to everything. Let him not be sorry when he obtains nothing nor rejoice when he obtains something. By eating little and living in solitude, let him restrain his senses if sensual objects attract them.⁵¹⁰ “The ultimate moral ideal of the *Upanishads* is complete self-abnegation, the utter renunciation of all selfish and personal desires. To one in such a state of inner purity, there is no longer thought of ‘me’ and ‘mine’, the individual self to which such words pertain being wholly absorbed and extinguished in the infinite oneness of God”.⁵¹¹ Therefore, renunciation is the prerequisite for self-realisation and God-experience.

4.7.2. Solitude and Silence

Solitude and silence are necessary conditions in the life of a *sanyāsi* to be in constant communion with the divine. *Manu* ordains that *sanyāsi* should wander alone without any companion (VI, 42). Unnecessary speech, idle talk, and gossip distract the sincere spiritual seeker. Thus, solitariness is seen as a necessary condition for deepening the spirit of detachment and enjoying the greatest possible freedom of the spirit. This solitude is to be nourished by silence. It

⁵⁰⁶ Cf. S. SEVANAND, “Christian *Sanyāsa*”, in *Indian Theological Studies* 14/3 (1977) 268.

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. ACHARUPARAMBIL, “Monasticism in Hindu Tradition”, 448-449.

⁵⁰⁸ Cf. GRIFFITHS, *River of Compassion. A Christian Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita*, 106.

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. PRABHAVANANDA, *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, 100.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. G. BÜHLER, *The Laws of Manu*, Oxford, Clarendon 1886, 209.

⁵¹¹ PRABHAVANANDA, *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, 65.

is said that the *sanyāsi* is supposed to break his silence only to repeat the scriptural texts to utter the words of blessing on others.⁵¹² True solitude can only be gained when a person mentally withdraws from the world and detaches from everything.⁵¹³ It is in silence and solitude that the *sanyāsi* experience the divine. The awareness of God is impossible without silence, recollection, solitude, and a certain withdrawal.

4.7.3. Singleness of Purpose

One gets the idea of becoming a *sanyāsi* through *Viveka*, i.e., the ability to discriminate between the transitory and the permanent. Once *Viveka* is attained, he/she strives to realise Brahman with intense desire and singleness of purpose. All the other things are unimportant; for a realised sage, only the Absolute exists. A genuine realised *sadhu* has no desires. It is not because of any psychological incapacity to love and feel but rather because of the experience of the divine. When one has the fullness of reality, the divine, other things are only signs of what he/she already possesses, the Absolute.⁵¹⁴

4.7.4. Equanimity, Peace and Freedom

Another virtue recommended for the *sanyāsi* is equanimity in all life circumstances and towards all sorts of people and objects. No person, object or event should affect his soul's deep tranquillity and peace.⁵¹⁵ Pleasant or unpleasant circumstances, joy or sorrow, favour or disfavour, praise or blame will not upset a true *sanyāsi*. He is always happy, possessing equanimity in all situations, and free from excitement, fear, anger, and hate; friendly and kind towards all and sympathetic towards all creatures (*Gīta* 12, 13).⁵¹⁶ He must neither love nor hate anyone nor show gratitude for favours nor resentment at cruelty. He must be indifferent to all men, feeling neither attachment for the good nor repulsion for the evil. Unless a man's mind was at peace with itself, with others, and with the world outside, it was impossible to induce motionlessness of the body and stillness of the soul. Hence, the monk bowed to be gentle in speech and behaviour to all.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹² Cf. ACHARUPARAMBIL, "Monasticism in Hindu Tradition", 449-450.

⁵¹³ Cf. RAJAN, *Christian Interpretation of Indian Sanyāsa*, 79.

⁵¹⁴ Cf. SEVANAND, *Christian Sanyāsa*, 268.

⁵¹⁵ Cf. ACHARUPARAMBIL, "Monasticism in Hindu Tradition", 452.

⁵¹⁶ Cf. SEVANAND, "Christian Sanyāsa", 269.

⁵¹⁷ Cf. J. N. FARQUHAR, *The Crown of Hinduism*, Oxford University Press, London 1915, 256.

4.7.5. A-cosmicism

The life and ideal of the *sanyāsi* is a-cosmic or otherworldly. This a-cosmic element means that a *sanyāsi* has no ties, obligations, family commitments, or social or political functions. When he feels that he has some duty or obligation towards anyone else, whether self-chosen or imposed by others, he will fall away from the true ideal of *sanyāsa* for which he was set apart from society – to witness to the one unique Absolute.⁵¹⁸ He is dead to society and to the world, waiting to shed his body so that he may be fully merged into the Absolute. He has no obligation to society regarding things that can be seen and measured.⁵¹⁹ The *sanyāsi* renounces all worldly attachments, all family bonds, and all caste. He is free from all bondage to the social order. This led to the idea that the *sanyāsi* is beyond work. The *Gīta* teaches that he should do his work without attachment, not seeking any reward and offering all he does as a sacrifice; then, he is a true *sanyāsi*.⁵²⁰

4.7.6. Prayer and Contemplation

A saintly man is a contemplative who lives the divine life in union with the Absolute.⁵²¹ Of all, the most important occupation of a *sanyāsi* is prayer and contemplation. In Swami Sivananda's words, "You have become monks; you have taken shelter under Him after renouncing everything. Hence, God-realization is the one aim of your lives".⁵²² They should constantly seek the Supreme Self with the consequent destruction of the passion and with the concentration of the mind fixed on the contemplation of the Self.⁵²³ Free from all obligations of ritual observances binding on people in the other stages of life and from all cares and worries of ordinary existence, the *sanyāsi* should engage wholeheartedly in meditation, which is the most efficacious means of God-realization. In the Hindu view, meditation is more than a mere intellectual activity, reflection, or sustained thinking; it is a means for experiencing internally the reality or truth on which one fixes one's mind and heart, one's total being. In short, a Hindu *sanyāsi* is a powerful symbol of the otherworldly dimension of human existence.⁵²⁴

Having dealt with the concept of Indian *sanyāsa* (asceticism) and its characteristic values,

⁵¹⁸ Cf. ABHISHIKTANANDA, *The Further Shore*, 13.

⁵¹⁹ Cf. SEVANAND, "Christian *Sanyāsa*", 269.

⁵²⁰ Cf. GRIFFITHS, *River of Compassion. A Christian Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita*, 106.

⁵²¹ Cf. DHAVAMONY, *Hindu Spirituality*, 110.

⁵²² S. SHIVANANDA, *For the Seekers of God*, in trans. S. Vividishananda - S. Gambhirananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta 1972, 242.

⁵²³ Cf. DHAVAMONY, *Classical Hinduism*, 392.

⁵²⁴ Cf. ACHARUPARAMBIL, "Monasticism in Hindu Tradition", 453, 455.

let us now examine some of the beginners who have incorporated the values of Indian *sanyāsa* into Indian Christianity and the reasons how and why they adopted it.

4.8. Indian Christian *Sanyāsa* and its Pioneers

Irresistibly attracted by the values of Indian *sanyāsa* and moved by the thirst to make the message of Christ incarnate in the heart of India, some Christians adapted and adopted the Indian *sanyāsic* style of life. Roberto De Nobili, Brahmabandhab Upādhyāy, Abbè Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux, Bede Griffiths and Francis Mahieu Acharya are among them. They were not blind followers of the ancient tradition of Indian *sanyāsa*; they combined the elements that could be incorporated and excluded the elements that could not be harmonised with the Christian faith. They adopted a *sanyāsic* lifestyle to preach Christ's message more effectively and reach the Hindu mind.⁵²⁵

Robert De Nobili (1577–1656), who was of Roman origin, came to India as a missionary, convinced that, in India, the caste Hindus regard anyone alien to their way of life as completely unworthy of being believed. They are also inordinately fond of their ancestral traditions and so repelled by a way of life other than theirs that they will be blinded to all reasoning if someone alienates their culture and adapts to the place's customs. He learned that he could never come closer to the people of India and win them over to Christ if he continued to live in the European style.⁵²⁶ Therefore, he understood that with personal holiness and soundness of catholic doctrine, adaptation to local customs is of absolute necessity for preaching the gospel.⁵²⁷ He was aware that the Gospel of Christ would not be acceptable to the people without living according to the teaching of Christ, the doctrine of the Church, and the celebration of the sacraments in a way intelligible to the customs and culture of the Indian people. Realising that the life of a *Sanyāsi* is highly appreciated in India, he adapted and adopted the *Sanyāsi*'s dress, diet, and manner of living to open the door of India to Christianity.⁵²⁸

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay was born in the Brāmin family of Bengal on February 11, 1861. Although he was brought up in an orthodox Hindu Brāhmin family, he was very much attracted to

⁵²⁵ Cf. RAJAN, *Christian Interpretation of Indian Sanyāsa*, 87.

⁵²⁶ Cf. S. VIKRANT, "De Nobili's Missionary Method", in *Indian Missiological Review* 1 (1979) 176-177.

⁵²⁷ Cf. VIKRANT, "De Nobili's Missionary Method", 179.

⁵²⁸ Cf. T. A. SWAMI, "Roberto de Nobili – The Pioneer of Indian Christian Spirituality", in *Indian Theological Studies* 40 (2004) 70.

Jesus Christ from his early days. The book “*Catholic Belief*” by Bruno, which he read in 1888 while tending to his sick father, planted the seeds of a religious revolution in him. What attracted him to Jesus was that he was without sin; he despised and pardoned transgressions but loved the sinners. Overcoming all resistance, he converted to Catholicism in 1891.⁵²⁹ He wanted to harmonise Christianity with Hinduism. He was aware of the fact that prevalent missionary methods were unattractive to the Hindus, and if India were to be won over to Christ, Christianity had to change its Western garb.⁵³⁰ He was convinced that only the Christian *Sanyāsi* could present the teachings of the Church to the Indian people because of their spiritual authenticity. Influenced by de Nobili’s example, he found Indian monasticism, which would become a means for evangelising the people of India.⁵³¹ By adopting the *sanyāsic* lifestyle, he proved that the Church does not denationalise converts and realised that one could be Catholic in religion and a Hindu in his way of life.⁵³²

Jules Monchanin⁵³³ (1895-1957) and Henry Le Saux, who came to India as French missionaries inspired by the spirituality of India and *sanyāsa*, wanted to adapt it in their lives to reach the people of that time, especially the Hindus. Monchanin says we must grasp the authentic Hindu search for God to Christianize it, starting with ourselves first of all from within.⁵³⁴ They wanted Christian monasticism in India, which would be “totally Indian and totally Christian”. They both embraced the state of *sanyāsa* and took Indian names. Monchanin adopted the name Swami Parama Arupi Ananda (a man of the supreme joy of the spirit), and Henry Le Saux adopted the name Abhishiktananda (bliss of Christ). They are convinced that it is on the monastic level of both traditions that India and the Church will meet and embrace each other. Thus, they wanted to relate and integrate the Christian monastic life with that of Hindu *sanyāsa*. They realised that monasticism plays a vital role in the attempt to reach Hindus, and it is on the monastic level of both traditions that India and the Church will meet and embrace each other.⁵³⁵

Henry Le Saux (Abhishiktananda) was the first Christian ever to sit at the feet of an Indian

⁵²⁹ Cf. RAJAN, *Christian Interpretation of Indian Sanyāsa*, 96-97.

⁵³⁰ Cf. K. BAAGO, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, The Christian Literature Society, Madras 1969, 29.

⁵³¹ Cf. TEASDALE, *Toward a Christian Vedanta*, 25-26.

⁵³² Cf. T. A. SWAMI, “The New Indian Christian Theological Approach of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya”, in *Indian Theological Studies* 41 (2004) 326.

⁵³³ Regarded as one of the founding pioneers of the Christian *sanyāsic* movement in its modern expression.

⁵³⁴ Cf. J.G. WEBER (ed.), *In Quest of the Absolute. The Life and Work of Jules Monchanin*, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, MI 1977, 73.

⁵³⁵ Cf. TEASDALE, *Toward a Christian Vedanta*, 28-30.

master to submit to one as a disciple. Sri Gnānānanda, who became his guru, taught him the way of meditation, which is essential for the *sanyāsic* commitment. The *sanyāsic* life is a way that transcends all social ties and responsibilities and is a symbol of that deeper dimension of experience to which we are all destined in our humanity. So, he puts it as “the *sannyāsi* is the outward expression of man’s ultimate freedom in his innermost being”, for *sannyāsa* exists in the fullness of realisation beyond signs. He lived in this beyond as a Christian *sannyāsi*, and he saw in the *sanyāsi*’s commitment to renunciation, solitude, and spiritual freedom a complementarity with the values of the Christian monk, for both the Hindu *sanyāsi* and Christian monk have the same goal: union with the Divine Reality.⁵³⁶

Swāmi Bede Griffiths was a Benedictine monk who came to India in 1955, establishing a form of contemplative life by integrating Indian *sanyāsa* with Christian monastic life. Alan Griffiths was born in England on December 17, 1906. He matriculated at Oxford in 1925 and accepted Christianity. It was not until he went to Oxford and met C. S. Lewis that he started thinking more seriously about God. Together, they pursued a religious quest, which led them both back to the Anglican Church. But Griffiths eventually converted to a Roman Catholic and became a Benedictine monk shortly thereafter.⁵³⁷ He sought to develop a monastic life based on the Indian tradition. He realised that true convergence between Hinduism and Christianity could take place in the life of *sanyāsa* rather than engaging in finding similarities in doctrines and dogmas. A Hindu will not be convinced by arguments but by a life lived in the closest intimacy with God, which is believed to be the work of the monk in India.⁵³⁸

Francis Mahieu Acharya was a visionary who integrated the Western monastic and spiritual traditions with the spirituality of Indian traditions. Born as John Mahieu in Ypres, Belgium, on January 17, 1912, and crossed over to the Promised Land on January 31, 2002. He was trained in business administration in Brussels and London and became the Chief Executive Officer of his family’s cloth industry. However, against his family’s wishes, he discarded his successful business and social life to follow his inner call for monastic life. In 1935, he joined the Scourmont Benedictine Monastery and became a monk. While he was in London, he met Mahatma Gandhi

⁵³⁶ Cf. TEASDALE, *Toward a Christian Vedanta*, 34-35.

⁵³⁷ H. GUSTAFSON, “Substance Beyond Illusion. The Spirituality of Bede Griffiths”, in *The Way* 47/3 (2008) 33.

⁵³⁸ Cf. RAJAN, *Christian Interpretation of Indian Sanyāsa*, 188.

and was profoundly inspired by the simplicity of Gandhi, which prompted him to follow the path of the spirituality of simplicity. To realise this goal, he took a leave of absence from the monastery and travelled to India in 1955.⁵³⁹

In India, Francis met the French hermits Le Saux and Monchanin, who had come to India and established an Ashram in Tamil Nadu based on Indian spiritual tradition. Francis joined and studied with them the Ashram way of life and Indian spiritual tradition. Later, aiming at establishing a monastic life truly Christian and truly Indian, he came to Kerala and adopted a spirituality that was both Indian and Oriental. At the approval of the Syro-Malankara Church in Kerala, Francis Acharya and Bede Griffiths founded the *Kurishumala Ashram* on March 21st 1958. There, he tried to integrate Western monastic traditions with the simplicity and spirituality of the Indian traditions.⁵⁴⁰ *Kurishumala Ashram* is blended with three different spiritual sources: 1) Benedictine-Cistercian spirituality, which stresses communal prayer, manual labour and *Lectio Divina*. 2) The West Syriac Liturgy and Spirituality. The liturgical services are in Syro-Malankara tradition and use Indian Rite Mass, including chants, ceremonies and symbols adapted from Hindu tradition. 3) the Indian monastic lifestyle is based on simplicity and austerity. He was a pioneer in the rebirth of Syriac monasticism and in blending it with Indian spiritual traditions.⁵⁴¹ *Kurishumala Ashram*, a strong and thriving institution even today, adheres to Francis Acharya's vision of blending Christian traditions with Indian spirituality through a simple and austere way of life.

These are a few examples of those who adopted Indian *sanyāsa* as a means of interacting with Indians and sharing the gospel with them, but there was no continuation because there were not enough people to carry it on. The essence of Indian *sanyāsa*, marked by abstinence, detachment, austerity, simplicity, and a yearning for God alone, moved Mar Ivanios to recognise it and incorporate it into his founding congregation, with the required adjustments and changes.

4.9. Meeting of Indian *Sanyāsa* to Christianity

According to Bede Griffiths, *sanyāsa* is the “place” of an existential convergence, or

⁵³⁹ Cf. M. CHANDRANKUNNEL, “Francis Acharya. A Paradigm of Dialogue between the East and the West”, in *Third Millennium* 11/2 (2008) 3.

⁵⁴⁰ Cf. CHANDRANKUNNEL, “Francis Acharya. A Paradigm of Dialogue between the East and the West”, 3-4.

⁵⁴¹ Cf. M. MARTHE, “Integrating the East and the West. Life Vision of Francis Machieu Acharya”, in *Third Millennium* 11/2 (2008) 34.

encounter, between the two great faiths within the depths of the monk's heart. Both the Hindu and Christian *sanyasi*'s are engaged in the quest for the absolute, and both are committed to this quest through a life of renunciation and total dedication.⁵⁴² He says one who has 'renounced' the world is immensely simple. He needs no house or furniture. He may live in a cave or take shelter beside a temple. He needs only one meal a day, which he gets by begging. He can thus reduce his life to an absolute simplicity. He is totally detached from the world, depending on divine providence for his bare needs of food, shelter, and clothing. This detached life of a *sanyāsi* will be a great challenge to the world, which takes pleasure in continually increasing human needs and is dependent on the material world.⁵⁴³

Further, he states that detachment from the world is not opposed to commitment to the world. It is freedom from all selfish attachments. We can serve the world only when free from self-love and self-will. So, the *sanyāsi* must be detached from his very self. He does not belong to himself but to God. Just as poverty is detachment from the world, then chastity is detachment from the flesh. This does not mean that the world and flesh are evil, but they are created by God and destined for the resurrection. They become the source of evil when we are attached to them or put them in the place of God. We must sacrifice the world and the flesh to make them holy by offering them to God. Then obedience is detachment from the self. The self is the principle of reason and responsibility in us; it is the root of freedom and makes us human.⁵⁴⁴ Therefore, renouncing all our desires and will is the most radical detachment.

An ideal Hindu monk renounces every relation with the world to achieve supreme liberation, which consists in the realisation of union with a personal God or of total identification with the Absolute. He is a person who passes his days in contemplation, meditates on the mysteries of life, and walks as an expert in the spiritual life. He is supremely peaceful and keeps his serenity in front of honour or dishonour, success or failure; he is a person of the spirit who loves all beings, does not hate anybody, and keeps desires and passions under control.⁵⁴⁵ To the mind of the Hindu, the life of the *sanyāsi*, who has freed himself from all human ties like this and given up all physical comfort and well-being for a spiritual existence, has always seemed to be the highest.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴² Cf. TEASDALE, *Toward a Christian Vedanta*, 152.

⁵⁴³ Cf. GRIFFITHS, *Return to the Centre*, 10-11.

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. GRIFFITHS, *Return to the Centre*, 13-14.

⁵⁴⁵ Cf. DHAVAMONY, "Monasticism. Hindu and Christian", 46-47.

⁵⁴⁶ Cf. BHAGAT, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 4.

The Christian monastic traditions also found the great ideal of renunciation at the root of the monastic discipline. Every monk strives to achieve God-realization by inner control of heart and mind. Vows are the means of offering oneself as completely as possible to the love and service of God.⁵⁴⁷ Christian perfection consists of communion with the Triune God. A Christian *sanyāsi* has to undergo a triple death to be in communion with the Triune God. That is a death to the world, a death to the flesh, and a death to the self.⁵⁴⁸ Only a change in his mind will make him integrate everything, which alone can give him true happiness. A *sanyāsi* is the one who has integrated everything in his life, and he is a man of integration. His life is a life centered on the Centre. This Centre is within his innermost self and, simultaneously, infinitely beyond everything. When a *sanyāsi* is united with this Centre, he remains calm, serene, joyful, and peaceful.⁵⁴⁹ Hence, Christian and Hindu monastic ways of life insist on morality, utter simplicity, detachment, meditation, contemplation, renunciation of temporal goods, and purity of body and mind. Thus, we see a great convergence between both Christian and Hindu Monasticism.⁵⁵⁰

The values in *sanyāsa* of renunciation, total dedication, mendicancy, poverty and asceticism, God experience, silence, solitude, self-denial, inner freedom, meditation and the like make *sanyāsa* a vital monastic institution.⁵⁵¹ Christian asceticism, like Indian *sanyāsa*, is based on detachment, a radical separation from the world to give oneself totally to God.⁵⁵² Renunciation is an important aspect of religious life; it consists of renouncing something to possess Christ and giving up anything that is not strictly needed for God-experience. The true spirit of renunciation involves giving due priority to God-experience and pursuit with singleness of purpose.⁵⁵³ It is not only the same methods, renunciation of the world, silence, fasting, control of the senses and the mind, common life, celibacy, and obedience, but the goal of monastic life in East and West is essentially the same. What distinguishes a Christian monk is that his search for God is centred on Christ.⁵⁵⁴

A *sanyāsi* does not possess anything, not even the clothes on his back. He has renounced all

⁵⁴⁷ Cf. DHAVAMONY, "Monasticism. Hindu and Christian", 48.

⁵⁴⁸ Cf. GRIFFITHS, *Return to the Centre*, 90.

⁵⁴⁹ Cf. RAJAN, *Christian Interpretation of Indian Sanyāsa*, 270.

⁵⁵⁰ Cf. DHAVAMONY, "Monasticism. Hindu and Christian", 48.

⁵⁵¹ Cf. TEASDALE, "The Nature of *Sanyāsa* and its Value for Christian Spirituality", 330.

⁵⁵² Cf. B. GRIFFITHS, *Christ in India. Essays Towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1986, 10.

⁵⁵³ Cf. SEVANAND, "Christian *Sanyāsa*", 279.

⁵⁵⁴ Cf. B. GRIFFITHS, "The Monastic Order and the Ashram", in *The American Benedictine Review* 30 (1979) 135.

‘property.’ This is the real renunciation of ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ A *sanyāsi* is totally detached from the world and from himself. He/she must be ready to give up everything, not only material attachments but also human attachments – father, mother, wife, and children. But one thing that must be abandoned unconditionally is the ‘self.’⁵⁵⁵ All the Indian spiritual systems unanimously say that to make any progress in spirituality, one must first destroy the ego (*aham*), which is the sense of pride and vain glory. This reminds us of the words of Jesus, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mk 8, 34). Then, a Christian yogin who has destroyed his ego with all its passions and emotions and manifests Christ in and through his life and actions. He is completely indifferent to all life experiences because he is firmly grounded in God.⁵⁵⁶

The Hindus believe that God invariably manifests himself in and through a spiritual man. Therefore, the Indians will recognise one as a man of God only if, in and through one, they can see the presence and influence of God. The spiritual person is seen as fully liberated even while living in the body. He continues to live in body but has transcended all the limitations of his body and the world. In biblical terms, “to be in this world but not of this world”. He is no longer attached to anything in this world; nevertheless, he is completely detached and free from the pleasures and pains of this world.⁵⁵⁷ A religious person is considered to have transcended his selfishness and assumed a life fully dedicated to God and his people. On the one hand, he has renounced his selfish interests and destroyed his ego; on the other hand, he has assumed a universal outlook and developed the spirit of God, his real self. Only such a man will be accepted by the Indians as religious.⁵⁵⁸

The Indian understanding is that a man of God has nothing to do with the affairs of this world except in a spiritual manner. A *sanyāsi*, who is regarded as the epitome of the ideal man, is thought to be dead to this world and to live as though he were a part of the heavenly realm.⁵⁵⁹ The early Christian monks exemplified this: they gave up everything and moved to secluded places to attain a union with God and a pure life. Such a life is considered absurd and illogical in today’s society.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. B. GRIFFITHS, *Return to the Centre*, Indus, New Delhi 1995, 11-12.

⁵⁵⁶ Cf. T. A. KOCHUMUTTOM, *Comparative Theology. Christian Thinking and Spirituality in Indian Perspective*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, India 1985, 59-60.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. KOCHUMUTTOM, *Comparative Theology*, 60-61.

⁵⁵⁸ Cf. KOCHUMUTTOM, *Comparative Theology*, 64.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. KOCHUMUTTOM, *Comparative Theology*, 63.

Here arises the value of renounced life where we can witness the Gospel message of Jesus where he says, you are in this world but not of this world and “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (Jn 15, 19).

4.10. Total Renunciation as the Common Factor

Christianity is a way of life based on the self-emptying nature of Christ’s incarnation and redemption. The concept of *sanyāsa* in Indian tradition is not only the denial of all a person has but also, more primarily, the surrendering of oneself to God. *Sanyāsa* is a way of life in which a person is detached from everything in the universe while intensely attached to the ultimate Reality. Call to Christian discipleship requires total renunciation of all possessions. Jesus wants his disciples to give up everything, not only what he has but also what he is. The self-surrender should be total without any reservations, placing his total trust in Christ.⁵⁶⁰ Renunciation is indispensable to practising the whole Gospel, teaches St. Basil. He who wishes to follow God must disentangle himself from the chains binding him to this life. “The soul that follows Christ no longer carries the burdens of this world,” writes St. Jerome. According to Cassian, the monk is essentially a “one who renounces” and continues to renounce his whole life.⁵⁶¹ Thus, the early fathers, understanding the transitory nature of this life, renounced everything and followed Christ.

According to Indian tradition, for a *sanyāsi*, God alone is indispensable, and all other things are dispensable. For him, there isn’t anything he will not give up for the sake of God. So, *sanyāsa* is the unconditional and unlimited trust in God’s love; it is indeed one’s life in union with God. It is harmony and union of love with God and all his people and other creatures in an unselfish and non-possessive manner.⁵⁶² For Hindus – lay or spiritual seekers – spirituality is always associated with actual renunciation. It is not merely the physical renunciation of people and things but the detachment of the heart from all that is not God. This total freedom from people, things, and oneself, which results from renunciation, leads to personal attachment and whole-hearted love of God. Three words that abound in Indian literature on a *sanyāsi* and thus for a spiritual person are

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. A. M. FRANCIS, *Christian Kenotic Spirituality and Hindu Sanyāsa Spirituality*, Excerpta ex Dissertatione ad Lauream in Facoltà Missiologia, Romæ 2004, 91-92.

⁵⁶¹ Cf. G. M. COLOMBÁS, “The Ancient Concept of the Monastic Life”, in *Monastic Studies* (1964) 72.

⁵⁶² Cf. KOCHUMUTTOM, “*Sanyāsa* Versus Consecrated Life”, 88-89.

detached, selfless, and non-possessive.⁵⁶³

Jesus demands of his disciple's total renunciation of everything in following him, 'my disciples should not love anyone more than me' (Mt 10, 37), 'should deny oneself' (Mk 8, 34), and "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mt 19, 21). In the Christian tradition, the renunciation is made through the profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Thus, the call to Christian discipleship requires total renunciation of all possessions. Christ is the first model of perfect renunciation. Having the possibility of possessing and enjoying everything he desired, Christ did not cling to any such perishable pleasures that we learn from the Gospel account of Jesus' temptation (Mt 4, 1-11).⁵⁶⁴ This is what we learn from the life and teachings of the early fathers and Mar Ivanios, who found in the Gospel message of renunciation the basis to attain the highest perfection. Holiness or perfection is the result of renunciation. In Indian theological terms, it is expressed as God-experience - the ultimate goal of life.⁵⁶⁵ In short, *sanyāsa* is the dedicated search for God in complete renunciation and purity of life.

After discussing Indian asceticism (*sanyāsa*) and its characteristic values and its adaptation to Indian Christian *sanyāsa*, let us look at Mar Ivanios' teaching and vision of religious life and how and why he assimilated and integrated the values of Indian *sanyāsa* into his founding of religious congregations.

4.11. Vision of Mar Ivanios on Indian Christian Religious Life

One of the great contributions of Mar Ivanios to the Malankara Church and the Christian community is his vision of *sanyāsa*. He established a way of life called Bethanian *Sanyāsa*, which perfectly harmonises with the traditions of the Church and Indian spirituality. He was aware that, in a country like India with a long traditional culture which is intimately bound up with religion, there could be no place among the people for a society with a culture foreign to the Indian mind.⁵⁶⁶ Mar Ivanios imagined he could only create Christian monasticism in India by adapting its culture.

⁵⁶³ Cf. KOCHUMUTTOM, "Sanyāsa Versus Consecrated Life", 90-91.

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. P. PATTATHU, *The Contemporary Āśram Movement and its Contribution to Indian Christian Spirituality*, Excerpta ex Dissertatione ad Doctoratum in Facultate Theologiae Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianae, Roma 1990, 14.

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. PATTATHU, *The Contemporary Āśram Movement and its Contribution to Indian Christian Spirituality*, 16-17.

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 125.

To manifest Christ, one must incarnate in the Indian cultural values and bear on oneself the Indian cultural garb, so the Indians must find they are at home. Therefore, he adapted for himself and his followers a purely Indian monastic life, a life equal to the life of the Hindu monks for evangelisation among non-Christians.⁵⁶⁷ Later, the Second Vatican Council too stressed the same concept in *Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church): “If the Church to be able to offer all men the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, then it must implant itself among all these groups in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of those human beings among whom he lived” (AG 10). Four decades before the Second Vatican Council, Mar Ivanios understood the relevance of such a vision and took appropriate steps towards Indianization to become one with the nation’s culture and traditions to present Christ in a more acceptable way to the Indian mind.

Mar Ivanios’s spirituality and vision of religious life (*sanyāsa*) are found in his writings, especially in his autobiography called *Girideepam* (The Mountain-Light) and *A Guide to Malankara Sanyāsa* (Malankara *Sanyāsa* Jivitha Sahāyi). Here, we will be drawing his concepts on religious life mainly from these two books and some of his published and unpublished writings and writings of others on him as far as they help our topic. Mar Ivanios wanted to synthesise Indian *sanyāsa* and Eastern monasticism in his religious congregation. The monastic ideals of St. Basil inspired Mar Ivanios. Basil’s idea of the Gospel-based community life, spiritual upliftment of the people, and an empathetic approach towards defenceless people, especially women and children, are seen in the vision of Mar Ivanios, too. Although the compositional relationship with the Basilian monastic writings is not apparent in the teachings of Mar Ivanios, in many fundamental respects, the monastic principles of St. Basil are closely related to the aspects of Bethany.⁵⁶⁸

4.12. Adaptation of Indian Tradition

As we have seen already, as an initial step towards the realisation of religious life, not only did Mar Ivanios get inspiration from the great rules of Christian origin, but also the Hindu monks and monasteries. He wanted to give the congregation the stamp of Indian culture in all possible ways, as it was not to be foreign to the Indian mind. Apart from studying the *sanyāsis*’ mentality,

⁵⁶⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE IMITATION OF CHRIST, *The Holy Rule*, Bethany Press, Kottayam 2018, # 2-3. Hereafter *HR*.

⁵⁶⁸ Cf. J. VALLIYATTU, *Bethanian Sannyāsa Darshanathile Basilian Swadeenam*, *Bethany Ashrama Shathabthy Smaranika 1919-2019*, (Mal.), Bethany Ashram Generalate, Kottayam, 2020, 73.

he also learned much about their usages and customs and found Christian variants for many other Hindu externals.⁵⁶⁹ To preach the Gospel of Christ and to make it grow in the ancient and rich soil of Indian culture, yet to preserve its great religious heritage and ascetical traditions, Mar Ivanios saw that adaptation of the ways of life was necessary; otherwise, fellow beings would consider Christians as ‘foreigners’.⁵⁷⁰ For him, it was not a question of adapting mere externals of Hinduism or certain ceremonies of Christianity to cater to the Hindus. Still, it was essentially indigenous growth, a new offshoot of Christianity in all its native vigour and riches.⁵⁷¹

Mar Ivanios wanted to adopt a mode of life that was true to the Christian principles and blended with the venerable and traditional customs of the Indian *sanyāsis*. To an Indian mind, a *Sanyāsi* renounces all his possessions except his loin cloth, begging bowl and water pot; he subsists by begging and wanders as a mendicant, concentrating his mind on God. Thus, to win the people’s minds for Christ, Mar Ivanios thought of adapting the lifestyle of Indian *sanyāsis*. Therefore, he and his followers imitated the Hindu monks, leading a simple and humble life. They went barefooted and lived on alms and manual labour.⁵⁷² Mar Ivanios adapted for himself and his followers the ‘*kavi*’ (saffron), the colour used by the Hindu *sanyāsis* that has been considered the common symbol of austere life and self-abnegation in India. Keeping in mind that Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims would easily accept it without prejudice as a habit suited to men of God engaged in the works of God. It is usually made from clothes that have been dipped in red mud. It reminds the Christian monks of God’s warning: “You are dust, and unto dust, you shall return” (Gen 4, 1). True to the monastic traditions of the Indian *sanyāsis*, they practised vegetarianism. Eating meat was considered a luxury foreign to Indian taste and was forbidden. They sat on the floor and ate food with their hands in plain earthenware or coconut shells.⁵⁷³

Mar Ivanios and his followers intended to identify themselves with Hindu monks in as many ways as possible, hence accepting many existing Hindu practices and integrating them into their Christian life. They have adopted some practices, such as purification, which is required of any Hindu who enters a temple. First, he removes his shoes, washes his hands and feet, and thus

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. V. BERGEN, “Contemporary Christian Experiments in *Ashram* Life”, in *Journal of Dharma* 3/2 (1978) 183.

⁵⁷⁰ Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 131.

⁵⁷¹ Cf. ANDREW, “Bethany- The Embodiment of Revolutionary Idea”, in *Kathirukal* (1967) 15. Quoted in L. MOOLAVEETIL *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 132.

⁵⁷² Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 132-134.

⁵⁷³ Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 135-136.

purifies himself to be worthy of standing before God and communicating with him. When a Hindu devotee enters the temple, he salutes by joining the hands at the chest or forehead level to express his reverence and intense supplication to the transcendent God. Mar Ivanios adapted some of these Hindu ways of prayer and paying homage and reverence to God and made it Christian. He found it necessary to be an Indian Christian monk among the Hindu monks. Thus, he followed in his monastery such pious, traditional customs of India, such as taking off his shoes when entering a church, salutation by a profound bow with the joining of the hands, and showing veneration and submission by touching the ground with forehead, and meditation squatting on the floor cross-legged etc.⁵⁷⁴ Imitating the Hindu monks and the Eastern tradition, he adopted the practice of growing beards. Hindus consider a bearded monk a person of great austerity who practices severe penance. It is also an external sign of separation from the world and its pleasures.⁵⁷⁵

According to Mar Ivanios, the failure of the Indian Church in its evangelisation consists mainly in the fact that very little attempt was made to understand the religion of the people to whom the Gospel was to be preached. Indian religion has a wonderful tradition that has been developing for centuries, and Indian people have their cultural heritage. Thus, Mar Ivanios knew that without knowing the Indian tradition and cultural heritage, one could not perform a fruitful apostolate. Therefore, he recommended the study of Hinduism to his followers, and he showed great interest in studying the Hindu sacred writings, particularly ‘The *Ramayana*’ and ‘*Bhagavad Gīta*’. In short, introducing such practices of the Indian *sanyāsis* in his newly founded *Āśram* helped the Bethany monks for better evangelisation among the Hindu brethren. All these show how Indian traditions also significantly contributed to forming Mar Ivanios’ spiritual life.⁵⁷⁶

John Berchmans writes that genuine Indian values, such as the primacy of prayer, simplicity, renunciation, detachment from merely human values, searching for God, and so on, were highly regarded and practised by Mar Ivanios and his followers.⁵⁷⁷ In the Holy Rule of Bethany *Āśram*, it says, “The special character of our Congregation is to imitate with detachment and simplicity of Indian asceticism, the simple life of Jesus Christ who lived always united with the eternal Father in prayer and doing good to all”.⁵⁷⁸ In short, Mar Ivanios, in his close imitation of Christ and His

⁵⁷⁴ Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 137-138.

⁵⁷⁵ Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 139.

⁵⁷⁶ Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 144-145.

⁵⁷⁷ Cf. J. BERCHMANS, “Religious in the Malankara Church”, in *Christian Orient* 3 (1982) 108.

⁵⁷⁸ *HR* # 6.

life of prayer and action, accepted many Hindu customs and practices and Christianized them. The practice of such customs in his personal life and his appearance as a Hindu monk helped him to be a free associate of the Hindu brethren.⁵⁷⁹

In this way, Mar Ivanios entered into the tradition of the Indian *sanyāsa*. He established a Christian monastery in which the life of prayer and asceticism followed Christian principles and kept in touch with the Indian tradition. So, Mar Ivanios was far ahead of the Second Vatican Council in his visions and concepts, which state, “Religious institutes, working to plant the Church, should strive to give expression to them and to hand them on, according to the nature and the genius of each nation. Let them reflect attentively on how Christian religious life might be able to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions, whose seeds were sometimes planted by God in ancient cultures before the preaching of the Gospel” (*Ad Gentes*, 18). He pioneered many things in the Church; about thirty years before the Second Vatican Council, he translated the liturgy into the local language and spoke of a Church rooted in indigenous culture to prove that Christianity is not foreign to India.⁵⁸⁰ But sad to say, as years passed, we have failed to continue his vision of integrating Indian spirituality into our religious communities and lives.

4.13. The Core of Mar Ivanios’ Understanding: *Sarvāṅga Homayāga*

Mar Ivanios constantly compares the concept and values of *sanyāsa* with *yāga* (sacrifice). In 1920, on the feast of Pentecost, Fr. P.T. Geevarghese reminded the monks (the first batch of the members of Bethany Ashram) about the importance and obligations of the vows that they were going to take; from that, we may see the vision of Mar Ivanios on religious life.⁵⁸¹ He says *Sanyāsam* (religious life) can be compared to a sacrificial cow. The following was the instruction that he gave to the first three members who made their religious profession:

The sacrificial cow must pass through four stages before it is sacrificed. First, the animal is selected and separated from the herd. Secondly, it is brought to the temple entrance and tied up there. Thirdly, on the day of sacrifice, the devotee comes to the temple, slaughters the sacrificial animal, and cuts it into different pieces. The blood is collected separately; the devotee hands them over to the priest, and the priest takes them to the altar of the Lord. Lastly, the priest burns the flesh and dashes the blood on the altar. Jews had different types of sacrifices, but a burnt offering (holocaust), in which the whole animal is offered, is considered better than any other offering. Regarding the

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. NARIMATTATHIL, *Arch Bishop Mar Ivanios. Pastor and Prophet of Ecclesial Communion*, 79.

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. J. MENAKALIEKKAL, “Mar Ivanios a Proactive Mystic”, 325.

⁵⁸¹ Cf. J. M. PADIPURACKAL, *Mar Ivanios’ Vision of Religious Life. Sanyāsa as Yāga & Sneha Marga, Bethany Ashrama Shathabthy Smaranika* (1919-2019) Bethany Ashram Generalate, Kottayam, 2020, 68.

other offerings, some share is kept apart for the priests and devotees, and only one portion is burned on the altar. Whereas in the burnt offering, everything is completely offered to the Lord. *Sanyāsa* is nothing but a sacrifice of the holocaust.⁵⁸²

As we have seen in the first chapter, the burnt offering is the most popular worship in the Old Testament. With the burnt offering, more than atonement is involved; the Israelites emphasised that it was not just giving the animal to God as a gift but also offering and dedicating themselves, their entire being, to God as a sacrifice. The primary intent of the burnt offering is to give to God a gift, ultimately of oneself, although the aspect of atonement is certainly there.⁵⁸³ The burning of the entire animal in the burnt offering symbolised complete surrender to YHWH and self-denial - a life totally given over to his will. Thus, the burnt offering involves a vital component of complete submission and self-dedication. The burnt offering, also known as the Holocaust, is regarded as “the perfect sacrifice” because it represents a flawless oblation in which the entire victim is converted into a vapour of smoke.⁵⁸⁴

The significant features of the burnt offering are as follows: First, the worshiper is more important than the kind of offering. The rich devote cattle, the middle class devotes sheep or goats, while the poor devote birds. The value of birds is never lighter than cattle, sheep, or goats. The important thing is the heart of the dedicated person. It is important to give voluntarily and with gratitude. Second, the burnt offering means to be fully devoted to God. Burning does not mean dedicating a part but dedicating everything totally. Like Abraham, his future was entirely devoted to God when he sacrificed Isaac. Third, all worship should cooperate with the priest and the congregation. The person who brought the burnt offering laid his hands on the head of the burnt offering and took off the skin. Then, the priest put the sacrifice on the altar and burned it to God. Significantly, the person who brought the offering and the priest shared the work. Worship given to God must not be burdened to any one person, but a “worship together.” Active participation of the priest and the worshiper makes the sacrifice relevant and acceptable.⁵⁸⁵

These notions of the burnt offering must have motivated Mar Ivanios to compare religious

⁵⁸² Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 133.

⁵⁸³ Cf. C. V. DAM, “The Burnt Offering in its Biblical Context”, in *Mid America Journal of Theology* 7/2 (1991) 202.

⁵⁸⁴ Cf. L. M. MORALES, “Atonement in Ancient Israel. The Whole Burnt Offering as Central to Israel’s Cult” in J. C. LAANSMA- G. H. GUTHRIE – C. L. WESTFALL (ed.), *So Great a Salvation. A Dialogue on the Atonement*, Hebrews T&T Clark, London 2019, 34-35.

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. S. LEE, “A Reconsideration of the Theological Significance and Application of the Burnt Offering”, in *International Journal of Information Research and Review* 5/4 (2018) 5422.

profession with the burnt offering sacrifice in the Old Testament. According to him, the essence of *sanyāsa* is to sacrifice oneself as a perfect burnt offering to God. Like the sacrificial animal, the *sanyāsi* (monk) is set apart by himself. He comes to the *āśram*, which can be compared to the temple's premises, on his own will. He remains there, expecting the day of sacrifice while purifying himself by washing his sins daily with tears. On the day of sacrifice, which is considered a religious profession, the *sanyāsi* beheads himself. He chops away his head himself with the threefold vow. The mere observation of the vows alone will not make one a *sanyāsi*. He has to be laid on the altar of the Lord and be burnt. He lies on the altar with Jesus Christ, and this sacrifice is an ongoing process till the end of his life.⁵⁸⁶

Thus, the burnt offering indicates that the human being is more important than the animal to be sacrificed; sacrificing oneself totally to God, active participation of the priest, worshiper, the offering, and the congregation in the offering is important. As we have seen in the first chapter, the concept of burnt offerings as part of the rituals originates in pagan religions. However, it was also introduced and practised in the Jewish religious traditions. The first reference to the human sacrifice can be found in the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham at the command of God, even though it did not take place. Secondly, self-sacrifice was not God's intention but rather obedience and faith. Thirdly, the sacrifices of bulls, lambs, birds, etc, were made as an act of penance, seeking God's mercy and grace. The animals represent the humans at the time of offering. On the contrary, in the New Testament, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross opens a new page in the context of burnt offerings and sacrifices of oneself to God. Jesus' total surrendering to do God's will (*Ecce Venio*) is the inception of a new era of self-sacrifice. Therefore, Christians no longer have to offer literal sacrifices, for Christ has fulfilled and thus ended the Old Testament sacrificial system. He says, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifice and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings; (these are offered according to the law), then he added, See, I have come to do your will. He abolishes the first in order to establish the second" (Heb 10, 8-9).

Following Jesus' spirit of self-sacrifice, men and women make a self-consecration to God through the profession of religious life. According to Mar Ivanios, the *sanyāsi* should have the victorious life seen in Christ, the life which he has given fully as an offering to human beings, his life of detachment and the intellect necessary for eternal life. This is the response we give to God's

⁵⁸⁶ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 133.

call through the religious profession. Profession is the response we give to the perfect self-sacrifice of the Messiah as the sacrificial cow.⁵⁸⁷ Mar Ivanios, in his application of *sanyāsa* to that of the burnt offering, recalls the sacrificial elements of Christ on the cross, such as, firstly, it is no more a sacrifice of an animal but rather human consecration of oneself to God; secondly, it is a total consecration of oneself to God in thought, word, and deed, and dedicates him/herself to God in the spirit of living and dying for Christ alone; thirdly, this act of self-consecration takes place in the presence of a community of believers who witness the active participation of the candidate who is ready to dedicate him/herself to God at the altar in the celebration of the Eucharist, the prolongation of the mystery of Christ at the incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. Thus, he says, *sanyāsa* (religious life) is nothing but a burnt offering, sacrificing our whole being on the altar of God along with the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. When a soul thus gives itself fully to God, through love, to seek Him alone, when it is detached from every creature, from itself, from all human springs of action, in order to cleave only to God, then it is a “holy sacrifice” – a holocaust.⁵⁸⁸

According to Mar Ivanios, the following can be considered as the essential aspects of *sanyāsa*:

4.13.1. Jesus: The Perfect *Sanyāsi*

Mar Ivanios affirms that the foundation of Christian *Sanyāsa* is the Incarnation of Christ, the Son of God, and His sacrifice on the Cross. A *sanyāsi* lives his life by imitating and obeying Christ. The major part of *sannyāsa* is that Jesus the Messiah is all in all to the *sanyāsi*; that is, the *sanyāsi* is subservient to and possessed by Jesus the Messiah. Christian *sanyāsa* is not simply sacrifice, but it is possessing God.⁵⁸⁹ According to him, the first *sanyāsi* who appeared on earth was Jesus, the Messiah, for among human beings, the man who sacrificed himself in perfect dedication to God is Jesus. Therefore, the origin, founder, and ideal man of *sanyāsa* is Jesus. The divine call of Jesus, the call Jesus received and followed, is the true call to *sanyāsa* by our response. In our divine call and acceptance, the call of Jesus is being continued and carried out in us.⁵⁹⁰ Mar Ivanios claims that of all the men, Jesus is the one who gave his life in perfect devotion to God. Therefore, he is

⁵⁸⁷ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 111-112.

⁵⁸⁸ Cf. MARMION, *Christ the Ideal of the Monk*, 114.

⁵⁸⁹ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 26.

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 29.

the source and origin of religious life. The religious life is, in fact, an immolation of our whole being made with love and its whole significance comes from its union with the sacrifice of Christ. In contemplating this sacrifice of the Cross and taking the immolation of Jesus as our example, we must learn the qualities that the offering of ourselves in a profession ought to have. S/he throws him/herself, in the spirit of abandonment, unto the Lord, to possess Christ, to do His will, and to be another Christ.

In his book *Christ the Ideal of the Monk*, D. Columba Marmion draws on St. Benedict's idea that the immolation of Christ on the cross serves as the foundation for the monastic profession and identifies three characteristics: Christ's immolation is a *holocaust worthy of God*, a *full holocaust*, and a *holocaust offered out of love*.

(1) *A holocaust worthy of God*: St. Paul tells us that the moment Christ entered the world through the Incarnation, the first movement of his soul was to cast His gaze upon the sacrifices offered to God under the Old Law. The Divine Word, who knows His Father's infinite perfection, does not find these sacrifices worthy of the Father: "In burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure" (Heb 10, 6). But Christ has seen that His own Body is destined to be the true Victim of the only sacrifice worthy of God, "Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body has thou prepared for me" (Heb 10, 5). The heart of Jesus was attached only to the Father therefore Christ was an unspotted sacrifice offered to God (Heb 9, 14).

(2) *A full holocaust*: Christ's sacrifice is not offered only at the time of the Passion. He has been a victim from the moment of the incarnation. In entering the world, He beheld the suffering, humiliation, abjection, and ignominy endured from the Crib to the Cross. He accepted to fulfil all that was decreed: "I have come to do thy will, O God" (Heb 10, 7). Our Lord utters upon the Cross before breathing His last sigh: "All is consummated" (Jn 19, 30), the supreme echo of the *Ecce venio* (Behold I come). His sacrifice is *one*: perfect in its duration and its plenitude.

(3) *A holocaust offered out of love*: It is Himself, the whole of Himself, that Jesus Christ offers and that He offers unto the last drop of His Blood. There is nothing so perfect as this holocaust, which Jesus Christ made once and for all, of His own Body suffices to sanctify us. What completely renders this holocaust infinitely pleasing to God is the perfection of love wherewith it

is offered. Love urges Him to offer Himself entirely to Father's will.⁵⁹¹ Therefore, the value of our religious life comes from Christ's oblation, a message that Mar Ivanios taught his followers.

Mar Ivanios asserts that the source and supreme authority of *sanyāsis* life is Jesus, the Lord. He explains the elements of the vow of *sanyāsa* of Jesus in the following manner: *Obedience*: obedience from the depth of the heart is the essence of the vow of Jesus. To carry out the will of the Father, he was willing to make any sacrifice. True *sanyāsa* is to follow Jesus the Lord in this way. *Immense Love*: The love of Jesus the Lord was that he gave himself fully without leaving behind anything till the end. To save humankind, our Lord mortified himself with his whole mind. This self-giving love of Jesus must also be in the real vow of *sanyāsa*. *Perfect and Salutary Self-Renunciation*: the life of Jesus the Messiah is the life of self-renunciation for the atonement of the sin of humankind. The *sanyāsi* should imitate and continue in the world this self-abnegation of Jesus in his life.⁵⁹² Thus, for Mar Ivanios, Christ is the source and foundation of religious life, whom we must follow in words and deeds.

4.13.2. Christian *Sanyāsa*: Perfect Imitation of Christ

Following Jesus implies sharing his condition and being conformed to his life. It involves 'leaving', leaving one's former way of life, which means self-denial.⁵⁹³ The motto of Mar Ivanios was "to Possess God than to serve him". He says those who earnestly desire to serve God, as far as possible, would prefer to dedicate the rest of their lives to possess him. The one who wants to be close to God "must imitate Jesus Christ in everything, which implies radical self-renunciation and consequent sacrifice. Jesus' sacrifice at Calvary should be reflected in one who wants to imitate Christ. He must abandon his family, native place, and all worldly affairs, including himself. The disciples of Jesus abandoned everything and followed him in the true sense and thus acquired a great union with God, and they are the genuine messengers of the Gospel. It is only through such people that the world will come to know that Jesus is the Messiah. Those who have discovered God have the confidence and willpower to declare that they have renounced everything to follow Jesus."⁵⁹⁴

In the meeting between Jesus and the young man who came to him seeking the way to

⁵⁹¹ Cf. MARMION, *Christ the Ideal of the Monk*, 108-110.

⁵⁹² Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 30-31.

⁵⁹³ Cf. CHARIVUPURAYIDATHIL, *Religious Life as Imitation of Christ*, 20.

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 70-71.

eternal life, narrated in the Gospel, Jesus invites him to lead a life holier than he has lived. He invites him to eternal life and attains perfection in virtues and deep communion with God. The Lord says, “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; Mk 10, 21; Lk 18, 22). Thus, in one of his pastoral letters, Mar Ivanios says that through the words the Holy Redeemer told the young man, he shows us the perfection of the Christian life. There are many steps towards holiness or eternal life. Here, our Lord points out that the most perfect one among them consists in renouncing everything and following Jesus, our Lord. Therefore, the religious life is making an effort to the perfection of love through the path of renunciation. For a religious person, Jesus alone is his wealth, Jesus alone is his happiness, and Jesus alone is his principle of life. A religious receives the Lord Jesus as everything in his life through the vows of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience.⁵⁹⁵

The official name Mar Ivanios has given to his founding congregations is Order/Sisters of the Imitation of Christ. Through this name, he underlines that monastic life’s ultimate purpose is to imitate Christ in words and deeds. In his *Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, he says that Jesus, the Messiah, is our religious order’s most important aim. We should desire what he desires and strive for what he strives for.⁵⁹⁶ In the Rules of Bethany, he instructs that “the special end of the Congregation called Imitation of Christ, shall be to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, as closely as possible both in His life of prayer and action, through the adaptation of Indian ways of life”.⁵⁹⁷ Hence, imitating Christ means striving to become another Christ here on earth by uniting with him in our thoughts, words and deeds.

4.13.3. Renunciation of Self

Renunciation is the primary condition for following Christ. Those who want to become disciples of Jesus must give up everything they have. Take up your cross and follow Jesus (Lk 14, 26-28; Mt 16, 34-35). As we have seen already, the essence of Indian asceticism is renunciation. Asceticism means a state of life in which everything is completely renounced. Mar Ivanios says in his autobiography that those who earnestly desire to serve God, as far as possible,

⁵⁹⁵ Cf. G. PRABHEESH (ed.), *Watchful Shepherd. Collection of the Pastoral Letters of the Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, Catholicate Centre, Trivandrum 2012.

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 73.

⁵⁹⁷ *HR* # 2.

would prefer to dedicate the rest of their lives to possessing him, for there is nothing nobler than to possess God in this world, which is the place of refuge for the white ants. We cannot attain the extraordinary experience of the presence of God except through sacrifice. The crystal model of self-sacrifice seen in Calvary should be reflected in a monk. Dying to the world and to renounce oneself means the same.⁵⁹⁸

According to Mar Ivanios, wealth, dignity, and public recognition are synonyms of dishonour, poverty and disgrace for a *sanyāsi*.⁵⁹⁹ In his *Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, Mar Ivanios writes that a real *sanyāsi*, on account of the immense solicitude for pleasing the Lord, lovingly gives oneself entirely to the brethren and tries to be dead to self.⁶⁰⁰ Mar Ivanios not only preached and taught but also set an example of renunciation and love of God through his own life. His unwavering love and faith in God inspired him to devote his entire life to the spiritual upliftment of the church and its members and renounce his esteemed positions and professorship.

4.13.4. Life of Prayer

Prayer, which is essential for spiritual growth for the religious, was diligently fostered by Mar Ivanios. Through prayer, he always kept himself close to the Lord. Jesus Christ, who united himself with his Father in prayer, is an example of religious for their life. The Eucharistic Liturgy was a great source of Mar Ivanios's spiritual life, expressed through words and deeds. He says, "We can offer to God no greater honour than worthily participating in the holy sacrifice".⁶⁰¹ In his book *Sabhāvalsaram* (The Christian Liturgical Year), he wrote, "Christ said, when two or three are gathered in my name, there will I be. Hence when we come to pray, we must see Christ with our spiritual eyes".⁶⁰² He rose at midnight to chant the Divine Office. In this way, he trained himself and his followers in a proper liturgical spirit, which helped them to follow Christ better. As a founder, Mar Ivanios witnessed his deep intimacy with the Lord through prayer, which motivated him to renounce himself for the sake of God. So, in prayer, we encounter God; it is the time he fills us with his presence.

⁵⁹⁸ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 70-71.

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 71.

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 77.

⁶⁰¹ MAR IVANIOS, *Rubrics of the Malankara Mass*, Tiruvalla, 1951, 1. Quoted in LOUIS MOOLAVEETTIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 120.

⁶⁰² MAR IVANIOS, *The Christian Liturgical Year*, Tiruvalla, 1926, 26. Quoted in LOUIS MOOLAVEETTIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 121.

4.14. Religious Profession: A Sacrificial Self-offering

The early monastic fathers considered the monastic profession as the full realisation of the mystical crucifixion with Christ expressed in the Pauline phrase, “to be crucified to this world.” On the Cross, the monk dies mystically, which is the essence of the monastic profession. This death constitutes a sacrifice, a holocaust. The monk’s heart is a clean altar upon which he sacrifices his passions, consumes his sins, and offers up his chastity. His body is a temple and his heart a sanctuary wherein he sacrifices his flesh and makes an oblation of his heart. As it is in the Indian tradition, St. Jerome writes that all ascetic practices have but one purpose: to put the monk in real, intimate, mystical contact with the divine. The monk uproots himself to seek God, to follow Christ. Monks may not have riches, but they have the Lord of riches, Christ Himself.⁶⁰³

According to Mar Ivanios, religious life on earth is the life of the Messiah who ascended into heaven. The *sanyāsi* should have the victorious life seen in Christ, the life which he has given fully as an offering to God and human beings, his life of detachment, and the intellect necessary for the life of the other world. This is the response we give to God’s call. Our Lord came down in body and completely offered himself to do the will of his Father. So, he says, the *sanyāsi* joins our Lord in this offering at the time of profession.⁶⁰⁴ To join in the life of love of the Blessed Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, *sanyāsi* is the sacrificial cow that voluntarily offers itself in the love of God. His profession is a humble acknowledgement of God, the source of all love, who has guided him thus far and continues to do so as he climbs the ladder of holiness and communion with God. Through the perpetual profession, he becomes united to the glorified humanity of Jesus in a deeper sense.⁶⁰⁵

Mar Ivanios says the three vows set free the soul from the three cares of human life. The worry about acquiring and retaining material wealth, worldly belongings, and similar things disappears through the vow of poverty. The *sanyāsi* reaches the point where his only possession is God. All obstacles and mental worries in an individual’s desire to please a wife or spouse are removed by the vow of virginity. When a *sanyāsi* reaches this level, only God is pleasing to him/her, and he/she loves only God. One attains the state of not needing to worry about what to do or any action on determining something owing to a lack of bravery and confidence through the

⁶⁰³ Cf. COLOMBÁS, “The Ancient Concept of the Monastic Life”, 84-86.

⁶⁰⁴ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 111.

⁶⁰⁵ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 112.

vow of obedience. The will of God alone is the rule of life for a *sanyāsi*.⁶⁰⁶ Therefore, Mar Ivanios says that the perfect sacrifice a creature can offer to God is the vows and religious profession. Through them, we give to God as an offering of everything that we are, we have, and whatever we shall have, keeping nothing back. The *sanyāsi* lives to fulfil the will of the Lord alone. This is nothing but a Holocaust.⁶⁰⁷ When we go through the writings and teachings of Mar Ivanios, we come to know his deep understanding of religious vows to the life of Jesus, which he acquired by his union with the Lord through prayer and contemplation. He says, Our Lord Jesus had not possessed anything as his own. He lived in this world desiring nothing of worldly comforts and honours. He accepted the poverty of the manger, a life with the poor Apostles, the helplessness of the cross and the tomb belonged to another. In the same way, the *sanyāsi* walk in his footsteps and heartily share the Lord's spirit, mind and life of poverty.⁶⁰⁸

The vow of chastity helps us to dedicate fully to God – our heart with all its passions and our body with all its strength to God. In order to be intimately united with God, whatever is related to our nature, is to be sanctified and renewed. Our every thought and action should be of the Lord. We have to be burnt in the love of God because the love of God is the fire that consumes all rubbish and base powers. Religious chastity will subsist in the union between the hearts of the *sanyāsi* and God.⁶⁰⁹ Regarding the vow of obedience, he says the state of *sanyāsa* is a school that teaches us to submit our self-will to God fully and to accept God's will daily. Our Lord learnt obedience through the difficulties and sufferings he underwent. It is not that easy to sacrifice our self-will, even to our Lord; it created mental anguish in the garden of Gethsemane. Just as the will of our Lord is united with the will of his Father through the vow of obedience, our will, too, should be united with that of the Lord through the vow of obedience.⁶¹⁰ Hence, we can say that he was a man of God who, through the life of prayer and contemplation, immersed himself in the mysteries of Christ, from which he drew the spirit of *Sanyāsa* and showed us the value of sacrifice and total renunciation of everything for the realisation of God-experience.

⁶⁰⁶ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 115-116.

⁶⁰⁷ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 117-118.

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 120.

⁶⁰⁹ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 122-123.

⁶¹⁰ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 125-126.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to understand the life of Mar Ivanios and his vision of religious life concerning Indian *sanyāsa*. He wanted to synthesise Christian monasticism and Indian ascetical values in his founding congregation to be effective instruments in witnessing Jesus among the people of India. To understand his religious life and vision, we have examined the Christian and Hindu understandings of religious life, which gave shape to his vision. In this study, we have realised that the ultimate end of religious life, whether in Christianity or Hinduism, is the realisation of God. Hence, in the first part, we have briefly analysed the nature of Indian asceticism and its practices in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. The analysis begins with the etymological meaning of the term *sanyāsa*, the different terms used to denote *sanyāsi*, the four dimensions of Indian asceticism, and its characteristic features. Then we dealt with the Indian Christian *sanyāsa* and its pioneers: how and why they have adapted and integrated Indian *sanyāsa* into Christianity.

In the last part, the attempt was to see the person of Mar Ivanios and his vision of religious life, who rejuvenated and reconstructed the Malankara Church through a deep commitment to a *sanyāsic* form of life. The establishment of the indigenous Christian religious community was his great contribution to the Malankara Church, which gave the community a new life and spirit. Like St. Anthony the Great, St. Pachomius, St. Basil and other early fathers, Mar Ivanios also stands as a true model of religious life who, in realising the worthlessness of power, wealth and honour, renounced everything and surrendered totally to God for the spiritual renewal of the Church and its people. In the next and last chapter, we will focus on the charism and spirituality of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ and the challenges facing today to live the total consecration as a holocaust according to the vision of Mar Ivanios.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TOTAL OFFERING OF SELF IN THE CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

Introduction

The essence and distinguishing identity of any institute of consecrated life are intricately tied to its charism. It brings forth in the Church a particular form of discipleship and spirituality,⁶¹¹ as well as commitment to some specific forms of apostolate. For a religious family, spirituality is not merely a way of life but is characterized by the way its members live out its basic charismatic gifts.⁶¹² Any attempt to understand better the charism of a religious family can motivate and inspire a more profound commitment to the spiritual practices of its members.⁶¹³ With this scope this concluding chapter intends to study the charism of *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ* (Bethany Sisters). The first section will present the Biblico-theological understanding of charism and its use in the conciliar and post-conciliar teachings. In the second section, we will annotate on the charism and spirituality of Mar Ivanios and the Bethany Congregation which has *sarvāṅga homayāga* at its heart. The third and concluding part of the chapter will address some of the current risks and challenges that SIC faces in living the charismatic patrimony entrusted to it by the Founder Mar Ivanios. This part also will propose in this context a few insights to make relevant the SIC charism.

5.1. Charism: A Brief Exploration of its Meaning

The Greek word *charisma* is a verbal noun from the verb *charidzomai*, “to bestow a gift or favour,” and means a gift freely and graciously given, a spiritual capacity resulting from God’s grace. The word *charisma*, given a religious meaning by St. Paul in the New Testament, “refers to a dazzling variety of gifts.”⁶¹⁴ The Greek words *charis* and *charisma* are found frequently in the letters of St. Paul. “*Charisma*” is derived from the word *Charis*, which means “grace”, with the

⁶¹¹ “Every authentic charism implies a certain element of genuine originality and of special initiative for the spiritual life of the Church... The specific charismatic note of any institute demands, both of the Founder and of his disciples, a continual examination regarding fidelity to the Lord; docility to His Spirit; intelligent attention to circumstances and an outlook cautiously directed to the signs of the times”. *Mutuae Relationes* # 12.

⁶¹² Cf. *VC* # 93.

⁶¹³ Cf. C. UKWE, “The Foundation of New Religious Institutes. A Brief Commentary on the Guidelines and Directives of the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria”, in *The Catholic Voyage. African Journal of Consecrated Life* 14 (2018) 146.

⁶¹⁴ E. J. MALATESTA, “Charism”, in *NDCS*, 140.

suffix “*ma*”, expressing the result of the action indicated by the verb.⁶¹⁵ *Charisma*, as distinguished from *charis*, represents the favour granted by God rather than the will of God by which it is granted. It describes and designates a particular kind of spiritual gift of God which enables the recipient to perform some office or function in the church (Rom 12, 16; Eph 4, 11). Such gifts are received not for the individual’s benefit but for the community’s good, emphasising the importance of communal living and shared purpose.⁶¹⁶

The word *charisma* derives from the root “*char*”, meaning to express the love of God for human beings. The love expressed has been a “covenantal” love, indicating the commitment and goals of that love offered to an undeserving humanity by God. The words from the root *char* express this gratuitous and faithful love. The Greek ending of “*ma*” indicates the objectification of internal or subjective intention. Thus, *charisma* is a word denoting the faithful, unmerited love of God and the concretisation of that love, not just about the love of God but of an object that embodies that love.⁶¹⁷ The word is used generally to designate gifts bestowed by God gratuitously (Rom 1, 11; 5, 15; 6, 23; 11, 29; 2 Cor 1, 11), and these gifts are used for the upbuilding of the Christian community (Rom 12, 6; 1 Cor 12, 4; 9, 28; 30, 31).

5.2. The Biblical Sense

Except for two variants in the Greek version of Sirach (Sir 7, 33; 38, 30) and Theodotion’s translation of Psalms (30/31, 22), the use of the word *Charism*, *charisma* (χάρισμα) is an exclusively Pauline term and a good number of scriptural scholars agree that Paul used it sixteen times.⁶¹⁸ We find it outside the Pauline corpus only once in 1 Pet 4, 10.⁶¹⁹

The word *charisma* does not exist in the Old Testament; instead, they used three Hebrew words to express the graciousness of God, namely *aheb*, *hanan* and *hesed*. The word *aheb* expresses unsolicited and unaccountable love. It signifies God’s gift of pure and unconditional love for his people (Deut 7, 7). The word *hanan* means to be gracious, to have mercy on someone. It expresses the unmerited favour on the part of the giver, who is the superior. God sees the needs

⁶¹⁵ Cf. R. LAURENTIN, “Charisms. Terminological Precision”, in *Concilium* 109 (1978) 8.

⁶¹⁶ Cf. M. BRENNAN, “Religious Life’s Charism. Transforming Life”, in *Origins* 23/12 (1993) 208.

⁶¹⁷ Cf. J. J. KILGALLEN, “Reflections on Charisma (ta) in the New Testament”, in *Studia Missionalia* 41 (1992) 290.

⁶¹⁸ Cf. Rom 1, 11; 5, 15-16; 6, 23; 11, 29; 12, 6; 1 Cor 1, 7; 12, 4-6; 9, 28, 30-31; 2 Cor 1, 11; 1 Tim 4, 14; 2 Tim 1, 6.

⁶¹⁹ Cf. W. F. DICHARRY, “Charism”, in *NCE*, III, 389.

of the people and responds in Grace.⁶²⁰ According to Torrance, the third word, *hesed*, has the same significance as *charis* in the New Testament, which signifies loving kindness. It is closely bound up with a two-sided relationship within which covenanted kindness is a sure bond. *Hesed* is the act of kindness by which God chooses Israel and promises blessing and salvation. Thus, *hesed* is a self-giving of God to Israel, a promise confirmed by an oath and established in a definite covenant.⁶²¹

There is no direct reference to charisms in the Gospels. However, in the Gospel of Mark, we find an indirect reference to Jesus' promise of extraordinary gifts. "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name, they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mk 16, 17-18). This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit descended on the Apostles (Acts 2, 5-11). Though the phenomenon of the Spirit is manifest explicitly in the Acts of the Apostles, it was Paul who first brought the term *charism* into Christian terminology.⁶²²

5.3. The Pauline Understanding of Charism

Not all the uses of the term *charisma* in the Pauline corpus give us the same understanding; rather, they reflect the basic meaning of the root *charis*. In the Greek New Testament, *charisma* occurs seventeen times, as indicated above, sixteen in Paul's letters and once in 1 Pet 4, 10. Let us briefly look at some of Pauline's occurrences of *charisma*: In 1 Cor 1, 7; Rom 1, 11, the term *charisma* occurs in the thanksgiving section of the First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1, 4-9). Here, Paul emphasises the abundance of spiritual gifts the Corinthian community has received. In Romans, he looks forward to sharing some Gift of the Spirit to strengthen others.⁶²³ In Rom 5, 15-16, Paul reflects on the opposition between two powers, grace and sin. "But the gift is not like the trespass. If many died through one man's trespass, many more have the grace of God, and the gift in the grace of that man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many. And the gift is not like the effect of that

⁶²⁰ Cf. T. F. TORRANCE, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh 1948, 10-11.

⁶²¹ Cf. TORRANCE, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, 13-15.

⁶²² Cf. M. G. CRASTA, *Charism and Commitment. An Explorative Study on the Charism of the Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany*, Estratto dissertazione. Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana Facultas Theologiae Institutum Spiritualitatis, Romae 2007, 41-42.

⁶²³ Cf. KILGALLAN, "Reflections on Charisma (ta) in the New Testament", 297-298.

one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification" (Rom 5, 15-16). This generosity of God towards sinful people who are undeserving is the product of God's love. This externalisation of God's love for the sinner that is free from condemnation is *charisma*.⁶²⁴ On the one hand, the power of sin has put humanity to eternal death; on the other hand, under the power of grace, through the sacrifice of Christ, a free gift (charisma) is given to the believer, leading him/her to eternal life.⁶²⁵

In Rom 6, 23 we see that "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Again, the emphasis is that this life is purely a gift; Paul has recourse to the word *charisma*. Death is the appropriate penalty for sin, and eternal life is a free gift.⁶²⁶ Here, using the term *charisma* reveals that the eternal life given to the believer is a personal, free gift from gracious God and exceeds human merit.⁶²⁷ In Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says that these spiritual gifts are for the good of the community's life.⁶²⁸ The charisms are "special graces" that the Spirit distributes "as he wills" (1 Cor 12, 11) to the faithful of every rank. "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone" (1 Cor 12, 4-6). These graces make them ready to undertake various tasks for the renewal and building up of the Church (LG 12); as it is written, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12, 7).⁶²⁹

Paul explains the diversity of gifts: "Some people God has designated in the Church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers" (1 Cor 12, 28). Others are the different activities that are useful to the community, such as service, teaching, exhortation, works of mercy, words of wisdom and knowledge, outstanding faith, the gift of healing, speaking on tongues, and discernment of spirits (Rom 12, 6-8; 1 Cor 12, 8-9).⁶³⁰ These manifestations of the Spirit in different functions are a gift freely granted to different persons for the upbuilding of the community. Just as God has created different organs in the body, he also established different

⁶²⁴ Cf. KILGALLEN, "Reflections on Charisma (ta) in the New Testament", 292.

⁶²⁵ Cf. E. NARDONI, "The Concept of Charism in Paul", in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55/1 (1993) 70-71.

⁶²⁶ Cf. KILGALLEN, "Reflections on Charisma (ta) in the New Testament", 293.

⁶²⁷ Cf. NARDONI, "The Concept of Charism in Paul", 71.

⁶²⁸ Cf. H. H. ESSER, "Grace, Spiritual Gifts", in *NIDNTT*, II, 121.

⁶²⁹ Cf. A. VANHOYE, "The Biblical Question of Charisms After Vatican II", in R. LATOURELLE (ed.), *Vatican II. Assessment and Perspectives*, I, Paulist Press, Mahwah (NJ) 1989, 443.

⁶³⁰ Cf. A. GEORGE – P. GRELOT, "Charisms", in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 70.

functions in the Church.⁶³¹

The particular vocations of Christians are similarly founded on charisms: one is called to celibacy, and another receives some other gift (1 Cor 7, 7). He acknowledges that each person has his/her own *charisma* from God, and continence is a special free gift. Thus, the whole life of Christians and the functioning of Church institutions depend on Charism. Through them, the Spirit of God governs the new people on whom He has been poured in abundance. To some, He gives power and grace to fulfil their functions, to others to respond to their vocation and to be useful to the community so that the body of Christ might be built up (Ephe 4, 12).⁶³² Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you (1 Tim 4, 14). This text uses *Charisma* as a special gift given to Timothy. There are two aspects here: the prophetic intervention and ritual institution. “I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power, love and self-control” (2 Tim. 1, 6-7). Here, Paul exhorts Timothy to rekindle the gift of God that is given through the laying of hands.⁶³³

Outside the Pauline corpus, we find it only in 1 Peter, “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Pet 4, 10). Here, the meaning of the term *charisma* is the free gift given to some believers to benefit all, similar to the various ministries described in 1 Cor 12 and Rom 12. Hence, from the above texts, we can conclude that there are three different kinds of “gifts of grace” which Paul applies to the term *charisma*. In some texts, he uses the word to describe the essential grace of redemption and eternal life (Rom 5, 15-16; 6, 23). In other texts, he uses the term to describe particular gifts of divine favour granted to a person by the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor 12, 7, 9; 2 Cor 1, 11; Rom 11, 29), and in some other passages, *charisma* appears in the plural form and describes the gifts of grace distributed among the members of the community with a view to the role or function which each is to have (1 Cor 12; Rom 12, 6-8; 1 Tim 4, 14; 2 Tim 1, 6). Charisms are the manifold ways in which the graciousness of God is manifested in the lives of individuals, making them effective instruments of grace to others.⁶³⁴ When the New Testament texts speak of charisms, we do not find the

⁶³¹ Cf. NARDONI, “The Concept of Charism in Paul”, 73.

⁶³² Cf. GEORGE – GRELOT, “Charisms”, 70.

⁶³³ Cf. CRASTA, *Charism and Commitment*, 47-48.

⁶³⁴ Cf. F. A. SULLIVAN, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal*, Servant Books, Ann Arbor, MI 1982, 17-18.

expression of the vocation and mission today recognised as the consecrated life; however, we find the roots of the charisms.⁶³⁵ Thus, we understand from the Scripture that Charisms are the gratuitous gift of the Spirit, which he gives to persons for the common good.

5.3. The Charism of Religious Life in the Magisterium

Having examined charisms from the Scriptural point of view, let us now move to the Christian theological understanding of the term *Charism*. To articulate the particular charism of Mar Ivanios, a theological understanding of the charism is essential. Therefore, in the first part, we shall focus on the theological understanding of charisms and from this background, we shall articulate his charism. From the Council of Trent, the term charism came to be accepted in spiritual theology, but it was not taken up for serious discussion until the dawn of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Paul VI was the first to officially use the word charisms concerning religious life in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio* after the council.⁶³⁶

5.3.1. In the Conciliar Teachings

In the Second Vatican Council, the word charism was used in reference to religious life, speaking of the charismatic character of the life of evangelical perfection, of a truly charismatic religious person, of charismatic gifts granted to the founders and of the charismatic character of religious institutes. However, in the conciliar texts, the word “charism” does not seem to have a precise meaning because sometimes it indicates spectacular gifts, sometimes anything that comes from God. Furthermore, the Council distinguished (LG 12) between exceptional and simpler charisms, thus broadening the meaning of charism. In any case, the conciliar documents never used the expressions “charism of the founder” and “charism of religious life”.⁶³⁷

St. Thomas Aquinas explained charism by “*gratia gratis data*” (grace freely given, 1 Cor 12, 8-10) and distinguished from sanctifying grace as “*gratia gratum faciens*”. For Thomas, sanctifying grace affects our participation in the divine nature. It brings us to union with God, while gratuitous graces are freely bestowed grace because it is granted to humans beyond the capacity of his/her nature and personal merit. It is not given for the justification of oneself. Rather,

⁶³⁵ Cf. VATICAN SYNOD SECRETARIAT, “The Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World. Working Paper for October 1994 World Synod of Bishops”, in *Origins* 24/7 (1994) 113.

⁶³⁶ Cf. E. MCDONOUGH, “Charisms and Religious Life”, in *Review for Religious* 52/5 (1993) 646.

⁶³⁷ Cf. G. ROCCA, *Il Carisma del Fondatore*, Ancora Editrice, Milano 1998, 26-27.

it is to cooperate in the justification of others. So, Paul, speaking of this grace, says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12, 7).⁶³⁸ This Thomistic concept is reflected in Vatican II’s teachings on charism (LG 12). To define charisms, Vatican II distinguished from the grace that the Holy Spirit grants to the People of God “through sacraments and ministries of the Church”, which is sanctifying grace⁶³⁹, whereas the Holy Spirit bestows charisms on the faithful “as he wills” (1 Cor 12, 11). The term, as he wills, reveals “the free initiative of the Spirit,” meaning charisms are bestowed without any intervention of the institutional office. The Sanctifying grace is granted in the same way to all, but charisms are not given to all in the same way.⁶⁴⁰

According to Paul and the Council, there are special graces that the Holy Spirit distributes to each “as he wills” (1 Cor 12, 11). The purpose of such gifts is to make them “fit and ready to take various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church”, and since they are freely given, they “are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation” (LG 12). The constitution *Lumen Gentium* teaches that total dedication to God in the celibate life for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and in the evangelical counsels “is a precious gift of grace”. The counsels are a divine gift that the church has received from her Lord, which she always preserves with the help of his grace (LG 42-43). It was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that religious life was acknowledged as a divine gift that the church received from her Lord (LG 44).⁶⁴¹ The Council considered the founders’ charisms when it indicated as a principle of renewal of religious life, saying it should be according to the founders’ spirit, evangelical intentions, and examples of their saintliness (LG 45, PC 2 b).⁶⁴²

5.3.2. In the Post-Conciliar Documents

In *Evangelica Testificatio*, the biblical vocabulary of *charism* was applied to the reality of religious life in the Church. Pope Paul VI described religious life as a charism and fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work in our midst (ET 11). In this apostolic exhortation *Evangelica*

⁶³⁸ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae. The Gospel of Grace (1 a 2æ. 106-114) 30*, trans., Cornelius Ernst, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK 2006, 127.

⁶³⁹ Cf. A. D’CRUZ, “The Role of Charisms in the Church”, in *Vidyajyoti* 78/8 (2014) 573.

⁶⁴⁰ Cf. L. LE, *Religious Life. A Reflective Examination of its Charism and Mission for Today*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge, UK 2016, 27.

⁶⁴¹ Cf. BRENNAN, “Religious Life’s Charism. Transforming Life”, 208

⁶⁴² Cf. M. R. JURADO, “Consecrated Life and the Charisms of the Founders”, in R. LATOURELLE (ed.), *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives*, III, Paulist Press, New York, NJ 1988-1989, 11.

Testificatio, the expression “charism of the founder” seemed to indicate content but in a much stronger meaning than that of “spirit” because the founders were presented as “raised by God”. In the rest of the document, the word “charisma” continued to be used, often replacing the term “spirit”, and came to take on two other meanings: applied to religious life, it simply indicated the gift constituted by religious life itself; next applied to the institute, it indicated its purpose, mission or identity.⁶⁴³

The official document that has provided more detailed teaching on *charism* is *Mutuae Relationes*, published in 1978 by Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. The topic of the charism of the religious life can be found in Chapter 3. It stated that religious life is “a special gift for the entire Church” (*MR* 10). There are many Religious Institutes in the Church, each differing one from the other according to its proper character. Each contributes its vocation as a gift, raised by the Spirit through the founders, and the Church authentically approves this gift. The very charism of the Founders appears as an “*experience of the Spirit*”⁶⁴⁴ transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them in harmony with the Body of Christ. For this reason, the Church preserves and fosters the distinctive character of various religious institutes. This distinctive character involves a particular style of sanctification and the apostolate, which creates its particular tradition (Cf. *MR* 11).⁶⁴⁵ Article 12 of *Mutuae Relationes* explains the signs of a genuine charism: Every authentic charism implies a certain element of (1) genuine originality (2) and of special initiative for the spiritual life of the Church. Hence, charism involves three factors: it is an enabling gift of the Spirit, conforms the recipient to Christ, and builds the Church.⁶⁴⁶

In *Redemptionis Donum* (1984), John Paul II describes that the particular apostolic mission of each institute is the special gift of the founders, which, received from God and approved by the Church, becomes a charism for the whole institute. This gift corresponds to the different needs of the Church and the world at particular moments of history. In turn, it is extended and strengthened

⁶⁴³ Cf. ROCCA, *Il Carisma del Fondatore*, 42-43.

⁶⁴⁴ Jurado describes it as something distinctive of the founders, producing a particular style of holiness and apostolate. JURADO, “Consecrated Life and Charism of the Founders”, 13. This is supported by Lozano, who says that through their experience of the Spirit, founders are given an inspiration that involves both certain ministries and a calling to a particular lifestyle, J. M. LOZANO, “Founder and Community. Inspiration and Charism”, in *Review for Religious* 37/2 (1978) 228.

⁶⁴⁵ Cf. JURADO, “Consecrated Life and the Charisms of the Founders”, 12-13.

⁶⁴⁶ Cf. M. J. BUCKLEY, “Charism and Identity of Religious Life”, in *Review for Religious* 44/5 (1985) 661.

in the life of the religious communities as one of the enduring elements of the Church's life and apostolate (*RD* 15).⁶⁴⁷

The 1994 Synod on consecrated life's role in the Church and the world in its article 15 says, as graces coming from the Spirit, these charisms are ordered to the upbuilding of the church, to the good of humanity and the needs of the world and are to be received with gratitude. Article 16 of the lineamenta for the 1994 synod says, "Charism implies a particular and concrete style of spiritual life, a determined form of apostolate, a specific experience of community life and a particular involvement in the world." Each institute's charism enriches the legacy of life, history and spirituality, characterising each family's identity, shared in common through the spirit of the founder/foundress and brought to life in the Church through the presence of their followers.⁶⁴⁸

In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II speaks of the founding charism. In Article 36, he writes about several factors concerning the growth of holiness in consecrated life. First, there is the need for fidelity to the founding charism and subsequent spiritual heritage of each institute. Here, John Paul II says that fundamental to every charism is a threefold orientation, and he traces the roots of the charism of religious life to the Trinity. First, the charism leads the consecrated person to belong wholly to God and to speak about God so that he/she can taste the goodness of the Lord in every situation. Secondly, it leads to the Son, fostering an intimate and joyful communion of life with him in serving God and his/her neighbour. Finally, every charism leads to the Holy Spirit, who guides and sustains an individual's spiritual journey. This threefold relationship emerges in every founding charism, though with the specific nuances of the various patterns of living, because every charism predominates a profound desire to be conformed to Christ to witness some aspect of his mystery.

5.3.3. In the Codes of Canon Law

The word charism appeared among the norms concerning consecrated life during various stages of the Code of Canon Law's revision process. However, before the promulgation of the *Codex Iuris Canonici* in 1983, the term charism that appeared in the schemas (1980 & 1982) was either substituted by other words or omitted entirely. During the revision process, the term was

⁶⁴⁷ Cf. JURADO, "Consecrated Life and the Charisms of the Founders", 14.

⁶⁴⁸ SYNOD 1994 "LINEAMENTA", "Consecrated Life in the Church and the World", in *Origins* 22/26 (1992) 439-440.

replaced in the 1983 edition of Canon Law as spiritual patrimony (intention of the founder) and nature⁶⁴⁹, spirit⁶⁵⁰, character (distinctive identity of an institute), and sound traditions⁶⁵¹ of an institute (*CIC* 576, 577, 578, 588, 598).⁶⁵² Commentators say that the main reason for leaving out the term charism was that it was not a precise juridical term that could be used in juridical language.⁶⁵³

Canon 575 pointed out that the evangelical counsels are “divine gifts which the Church received from the Lord”. By referring to the evangelical counsels as “divine gifts”, the code implicitly recognised the charismatic nature of religious life. Canon 576 referred to the role of pastors in interpreting the evangelical counsels and their responsibility to encourage the institute to flourish according to the spirit of the founders. “It is for the competent authority of the Church to interpret the evangelical counsels, to direct their practice by laws, and by canonical approbation to establish the stable forms of living deriving from them and to take care that the institutes grow and flourish according to the spirit of the founders and sound traditions (*CIC* 576).

Canon 578 states, “the mind and designs of the founders regarding the nature, purpose, spirit, and character of an institute, which have been sanctioned by competent ecclesiastical authority, and its sound traditions, all of which constitute the patrimony of the same institute are to be observed faithfully by all”. In *CIC* 1983, the concept of charism was substituted by a word called ‘patrimony’ since it was more comprehensive and precise. Thus, *CIC* c. 578 expresses the charism of an institute with the word patrimony and it says charism should not be destroyed or altered but conserved and renewed.⁶⁵⁴ Further, 598 § 1 states that each institute, attentive to its own character and purposes, is to define in its constitutions how the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience must be observed for its way of living.⁶⁵⁵ Though the code does not use the term charism, religious life is considered a divine gift. It is clearly defined as a tool for maintaining the

⁶⁴⁹ The term ‘nature’ denotes the specific juridical quality the founder intended to give to his community and the foundation on which the Church has given her approval. V. KOLUTHARA, “St. Chavara and His Charism”, in *Herald of the East* 10/2 (2014) 301.

⁶⁵⁰ The spirit of an institute is a particular way of living the Gospel. It is the way of life foreseen by the founder due to the charism he received from the Holy Spirit. KOLUTHARA, “St Chavara and His Charism”, 303.

⁶⁵¹ It refers to beliefs, information, and customs handed down through word or by example from one generation to the next. KOLUTHARA, “St. Chavara and His Charism”, 310.

⁶⁵² Cf. Y. SUGAWARA, “Concetto Teologico E Giuridico Del «Carisma Di Fondazione» Degli Istituti Di Vita Consacrata”, in *Periodica* 91 (2002) 239.

⁶⁵³ Cf. KOLUTHARA, “St. Chavara and His Charism”, 294-295.

⁶⁵⁴ Cf. KOLUTHARA, “St. Chavara and His Charism”, 295.

⁶⁵⁵ Cf. CRASTA, *Charism and Commitment*, 60-61.

institute's identity because it must manifest its spirit and mission in the Church.⁶⁵⁶

Oriental Canon Law, either in the *Motu Proprio* or in the present Code *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium (CCEO)*, never used the term charism to describe religious life. In the *CCEO*, the term charism appears once in c. 381§3, which mentions that clerics must esteem the laity's multiform charisms. However, it is to be noted that the working group of the Pontifical Commission for the Codification of Oriental Canon Law highlighted the charismatic aspect of the call of the Holy Spirit, due to which the religious life was seen as belonging to the "mystical aspect" of the Church. Therefore, the working group proceeded to explain that while the Church's hierarchy had the right to discern and regulate the charisms of the religious life, it was yet bound to respect the proper nature of that charism and its various manifestations, allowing each institute to express its own "personality" within the wider communion of the Church in the canons on religious life. In brief, although the term charism does not appear in the canons on religious life in *CCEO*, it does not deny the reality.⁶⁵⁷ When *CIC* c. 578 uses the phrase 'intention and projects of the founders', *CCEO* prefers the phrase 'mind and designs of the founder.' In the constitutions approved by the hierarchical authority (*CCEO* c. 414), the members will find the founders' expressed intentions and determinations with structures appropriate to their mission and informed by their founding spirit (*CCEO* c. 426). It is summarised in 'mind and designs of the founder' in the *CCEO* c. 426.⁶⁵⁸

5.4. The Nature and Purpose of Charism

According to the theology of charism, 1) charisms are universally present in the Church, 2) charisms are frequently of quite an ordinary character, 3) charisms are apostolic for it is to the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God and given not only for the benefit of the recipient but also for others and 4) charisms appear in constantly new forms.⁶⁵⁹ Charism is the gift of the Spirit, giving the community its basic identity, wholeness, and unique meaning within the religious institutes.⁶⁶⁰ Charism always effects a particular configuration to Christ. Authentic charism will always be costly and entail an inescapable element of suffering and the cross as one attempts to bring

⁶⁵⁶ Cf. SUGAWARA, "Concetto Teologico E Giuridico Del «Carisma Di Fondazione»", 266.

⁶⁵⁷ Cf. KOLUTHARA, "St. Chavara and His Charism", 295.

⁶⁵⁸ Cf. KOLUTHARA, "St. Chavara and His Charism", 299.

⁶⁵⁹ Cf. G. FOLEY, "Charisms in Religious Life", in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 3, 393.

⁶⁶⁰ Cf. J. M. RENFRO, "Religious Charism. Definition, Rediscovery and Applications", in *Review for Religious* 45/4 (1986) 528.

something true of Christ to the contemporary world or into the contemporary church. Authentic charism involves a willingness to undergo and endure as Christ.⁶⁶¹

As we have seen, *Lumen Gentium* 12 mentions the three-fold purpose of charism: firstly, to make the faithful able and willing to carry out various tasks and offices; secondly, for the building up of the Church; and thirdly, for the renewal of the Church. In “The Role of Charisms in the Church’s Life”, John Paul II teaches that the gift of the Holy Spirit should not be contrary to the faith that the same Spirit inspires in the whole Church. The presence of the “fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace” (Gal 5, 22). If a charism causes trouble and confusion, it means either it is not genuine or has not been used correctly. The use of charisms in the community is “for building up” (1 Cor 14, 26). It has to make a constructive contribution to the life of the community, union with God, and fraternal communion.⁶⁶² Charisms are directed towards activities needed for the constant building up of the Church and given in response to human needs.⁶⁶³ We have been attempting to comprehend charisms from the viewpoints of Scripture and the Magisterium and their nature and purpose. Let us examine how the concept of charism is applied to religious life.

5.5. The Charism of Religious Life

Though Vatican II studied religious life in the Church and its significance in the Church’s life, it did not speak explicitly of religious life as a charism. Rather, *Lumen Gentium* states that the religious state of life is a “particular gift in the life of the church” (LG 43). In its texts on religious life, the Council has used the term *donum*, the Latin equivalent of the Greek *charisma*, several times.⁶⁶⁴ This state of life is not given to all the baptised Christians in the Church. Only a few are called to a closer imitation of Jesus through evangelical counsels. In this sense, religious life is a special gift, a charism, and it is given in the Church, to the Church and for the Church. Everyone who is called to religious life is not invited to embrace the same form of life. There are virgins, hermits, coenobites, monastics, mendicants, missionaries, etc. The one called does not choose the form but receives it as a gift from God. So, a form of life is a special gift, a charism. No one can choose to enter a particular religious institute unless inspired by God. God calls a person to share in a particular institute’s common history, common charism, common spirituality, and common

⁶⁶¹ Cf. BUCKLEY, “Charism and Identity of Religious Life”, 661.

⁶⁶² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *The Role of Charisms in the Church’s Life*.

⁶⁶³ Cf. VANHOYE, “The Biblical Question of Charisms After Vatican II”, 446.

⁶⁶⁴ Cf. LE, *Religious Life*, 34-35.

identity. By becoming a member, a person receives a new identity in the particular Institute, which is purely a gift from God.⁶⁶⁵ Thus, the state of religious life in which people are called to imitate Jesus by the profession of evangelical counsels is a gift from God and is considered a charism.

5.6. The Charism of the Founder

The Holy Spirit infuses graces not only through the Sacraments and ministries of the Church; when he wants to bring about something new, he inspires people with charisms. However, the source of both graces is the one Holy Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives different gifts to different persons for the welfare of the Church (1 Cor 12, 1-11; *LG* 7).⁶⁶⁶ Hence, charism is a gift of the Spirit given to an individual for the benefit of others. A specific charism is a personal gift of the Spirit given to an individual because of his or her relationship with God, bestowed upon a person at particular times in the history of the Church to address a specific need in the Church.⁶⁶⁷ Thus, charism is the particular mission and vocation of the founder.

The founders are formed by God to fill a void or to emphasise a value to the rest of the Church. Their distinctive calling and response are a gift of God to the Church. They have a specific spirituality and are drawn to live a particular lifestyle while participating in the mission of Christ. This gift of God comprises their gifts from God, their spirituality or habitual way of responding to God and their ministerial choices. This will become the founding charism when the founder begins to attract followers. Thus, there are three elements in charism: the person, spirituality and the manner of serving the Church.⁶⁶⁸ Hence, the founders' theological vision and corresponding spiritual experiences give religious institutes their identity. The activities and ministries are the expressions of the charism, not the charism itself.⁶⁶⁹ Founding persons were able to comprehend pressing needs and respond to them in innovative ways. Their needs were made known to them within the social context of the world in which they lived. For us today to return to the spirit of our founders, to come in touch with the charism that gave us life and existence, is to give deep attention to the meaning of that originating impulse within the cultural context of the world in which we

⁶⁶⁵ Cf. CRASTA, *Charism and Commitment*, 54-55.

⁶⁶⁶ Cf. D'CRUZ, "The Role of Charisms in the Church", 574.

⁶⁶⁷ Cf. J. C. FUTRELL, "Discovering the Founder's Charism", in *The Way Supplement* 14 (1971) 63.

⁶⁶⁸ Cf. J. ARROWSMITH, "Understanding the Charism of a Religious Congregation", in *Doctrine and Life* 68/4 (2018) 51.

⁶⁶⁹ Cf. CRASTA, *Charism and Commitment*, 62.

live.⁶⁷⁰

The document *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium* says, Consecrated life came into being through the creative prompting of the Spirit, who moved founders and foundresses along the Gospel path, giving rise to an admirable variety of charisms. They were docile to the Spirit's guidance, followed Christ more closely, entered into intimacy with him and shared in his mission. Their experience of the Spirit must not only be preserved but must also be deepened and developed.⁶⁷¹ The Gospel of Christ and Christ himself, the living good news of the Father, is always the foundation of every life consecrated to God and the inexhaustible treasure from which, under the action of the Spirit, the founders and foundresses draw their inspiration and life. All their experiences are rooted in the words and examples of Jesus; thus, every charism is rooted in the following of Christ. The charisms of the consecrated life cannot be separated from the following of Christ and the gift of consecration.⁶⁷²

The founders are inspired by a particular Gospel message, which becomes the foundation of a particular way of life and ministry.⁶⁷³ Antonio Romano expresses the reflection of Ciardi about the charism of the founder that the experience of the Spirit leads founders to recognise being called by God to a special mission in the Church, encouraged and motivated to devote themselves to God and God's work at a particular historical time in response to specific needs, a new call to live in the spirit of the Kingdom of God.⁶⁷⁴ According to Juan Lozano, the founders cannot give all the aspects of their charism to the institute; rather, they can give only the spirit of their charism, the way they understood and responded to the person of Jesus Christ.⁶⁷⁵ In short, charisma is a gift of the Spirit to an individual for the good of the Church and to meet the pressing needs of the time. We have been analysing the term charism in relation to the institutes of consecrated life generally. The most illuminating affirmation we find regarding charism and spirituality is in the Apostolic

⁶⁷⁰ Cf. BRENNAN, "Religious Life's Charism. Transforming Life", 211.

⁶⁷¹ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, "Starting Afresh from Christ. A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium", in *Origins* 32/8 (2002) 138.

⁶⁷² Cf. VATICAN SYNOD SECRETARIAT, "The Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World", 114.

⁶⁷³ Cf. FUTRELL, "Discovering the Founder's Charism", 68.

⁶⁷⁴ Cf. A. ROMANO, *The Charism of the Founders. The Person and Charism of Founders in Contemporary Theological Reflection*, in St. Pauls, United Kingdom 1994, 119.

⁶⁷⁵ Cf. J. M. LOZANO, *Foundresses, Founders and Other Religious Families*, trans., J. Daries, Claret Centre for Sources in Spirituality, Chicago 1983, 49.

Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: “When the Church approves a form of consecrated life or an institute, she confirms that in its spiritual and apostolic charism are found all the objective requisites for achieving personal and communal perfection according to the Gospel” (VC 93). With this affirmation as the springboard, we shall now reflect on the charism and spirituality of Mar Ivanios as founder.

5.7. Charism as Lived and Taught by Mar Ivanios

The charism of the SIC finds its origin in Mar Ivanios’ life and vision of religious life. For him, religious life is an ascetical life in which one sacrifices oneself on the altar of love to serve God and fellow human beings as Jesus Christ offered himself. As we have seen in the previous chapter, “the essence of religious life, according to him, is to submit oneself as a holocaust to God”.⁶⁷⁶ He says, “When those whom God calls hear the call, they submit themselves fully to the spirit of Messiah, renouncing their self and everything and follow the Lord”.⁶⁷⁷ Indeed, his entire life was a perfect holocaust to God for the sake of the gospel and the community. The spiritual degradation and degeneration of the Malankara Church wounded Mar Ivanios’ heart. He dedicated his entire life to the spiritual upliftment of the Church. Mar Ivanios’ spiritual journey was a gradual and transformative one. His mind traversed through various stages of transition, each step bringing him closer to his final vision. Day in and day out, he immersed himself in prayer and meditation, seeking to discern God’s will. It was through this rigorous spiritual discipline that he eventually came to the realisation that founding a religious congregation of dedicated people who willingly surrendered their lives to God was the key to capturing the heart of India for Christian life and spiritual renewal of the Church.

Charism, according to Mar Ivanios was an involvement in Christ’s mission. The primary objective of the church is to spread the good news of salvation to everyone, which was made possible by Christ. God’s glory and human salvation are the two main goals of evangelism and this was the mission of Christ. We are, therefore, called to carry on this mission of Christ.⁶⁷⁸ He desired that the Malankara Church undergo spiritual rejuvenation to spread the Gospel worldwide, especially in India. To achieve this goal, he first considered founding a missionary community.

⁶⁷⁶ MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 113.

⁶⁷⁷ MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 27.

⁶⁷⁸ BETHANY MISHIHANUKARANA SANYASINI SAMOOHAM, *Charism*, (Mal.) Bethany Sisters’ Generalate, Kottayam, 2008, 9.

After spending many hours and days in front of the Blessed Sacrament, he came to the conclusion that a missionary group could not accomplish renewal within the Church and evangelisation of India. His spiritual life was deeply rooted in the scripture and his close union with the Lord through prayer. From his deep relationship with God, his decisions and deeds were determined. We can find it clearly in his writings. Regarding the founding of the congregation, he writes in his autobiography:

My mind again and again began to waver in pain, for I would not have any guarantee that the missionary society would achieve my highest hopes. Since I had consecrated myself fully to God, I decided to wait until God revealed His holy will. I kept on waiting in prayer, meditation, and, above all, the Holy Mass. I prayed to God merely to make myself and my disciples be ready to live for the glory of His Holy Name, whatever the cost, even if it should mean leaving our country, our people and suffering great hardships.⁶⁷⁹

After much prayer and contemplation, Mar Ivanios realised that a religious congregation was the only way to bring about the spiritual revival of Malankara Church and the evangelisation of India. Consequently, he concluded that the most effective way to spread the gospel throughout India is through Indian Christian *sanyāsa*. His integration of Christian principles with the rich traditions of India gave a new lease on religious life. We can see his deep religious spirit in his writings and speeches. During his speech on the occasion of his consecration as bishop, he said, “The Bishop of Bethany prefers to walk in the footsteps of the Anchorites of the early church, who in the wilderness embraced poverty as riches.”⁶⁸⁰

His prayer life was closely connected with fasting and penance. According to him, fasting is necessary to fight against the hostile forces. Mortifying the exterior senses and interior passions is necessary to union with the Lord. However, he says that excessive fasting and austerity greatly hinder prayer. Thus, fasting is not to enfeeble the body but to give health to the soul. In quiet solitude in the silence of the Perunad forest, Mar Ivanios communed with God through a life of prayer and penance.⁶⁸¹ Jesus’ life of action was an outward manifestation of his prayer life. Mar Ivanios tried incorporating prayer and an active lifestyle into his everyday life, modelling himself after Christ. Even if he worked for charity all day, he would spend the night in prayer and

⁶⁷⁹ MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 70.

⁶⁸⁰ MAR IVANIOS’ SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF CONSECRATION AS BISHOP IN 1925, *Archives of the Archdiocese of Trivandrum*.

⁶⁸¹ Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 74-77.

meditation with the Lord.⁶⁸²

The core of Ivanian spirituality is the person of Jesus Christ. Imitating Jesus in every aspect is the key aspect of his spirituality. It involves identifying oneself with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ lived a life of perfect service and perfect prayer. Therefore, Mar Ivanios teaches that true imitation of Jesus Christ is following both his prayer life and active life.⁶⁸³ His total surrender to God's will and his openness to the Spirit shaped the basis of his spirituality. By his very life of prayer and sacrifice, Mar Ivanios set an example of solid spirituality for his followers.

5.8. The SIC (Bethany) Charism

The charism of Bethany is deeply rooted in the teachings of its founder, Mar Ivanios. He says offering oneself as a holocaust (*sarvāṅga homayāga*) to God is the basis of radical discipleship. He put forth a rule of life for himself, and the Congregation is to *imitate Christ*. The Holy Rule of the *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ* defines the charism of Bethany as:

The imitation of Jesus Christ, realised through participating in the redemptive mission of the Triune God and striving for the spiritual renewal of the Malankara Church for the evangelisation of India and the empowerment of women. This charism should be realised in the everydayness of religious life by loving our Lord Jesus the Messiah firmly, imitating his contemplative hidden life closely and his exemplary active public life, and observing religious life according to this rule and spirituality founded on the liturgy of the Malankara Catholic Church in conformity with the Oriental and Indian heritage of *sanyāsa*.⁶⁸⁴

The Holy Rule explains that the essence of Christian *sanyāsa* (religious life) is to receive the mysteries of salvation realised in Jesus Christ through his incarnation and continued in the Church and to follow Christ most closely in one's life. The purpose of religious life is to bear witness to heavenly life in the Church through the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, the evangelical counsels, dedicating themselves perfectly through life in the community and serving the people of God, according to the need of the times in the fullness of love (*HR 2*).

The Holy Rule states that the specific nature of our religious life is to imitate the simple life of our Lord, who, in union with God the Father in prayer, did good to all in complete renunciation and simplicity. Simplicity is a remarkable characteristic of Bethany. We must live this austere and

⁶⁸² Cf. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Spiritual Life of Mar Ivanios*, 86.

⁶⁸³ I. PARACKAL, "Ivanian Spirituality of the Imitation of Christ", in J. KARIMPIL (ed.), *Mar Ivanios. Person, Impact and Relevance*, Malankara Seminary Publications, Nalanchira 2021, 113-114.

⁶⁸⁴ *HR* # 3-4.

humble life in Bethany, seeking fulfilment only in God and keeping a pure intention to pursue Him alone (HR 7-8). Mar Ivanios teaches that the incarnation of Jesus the Messiah and his atoning death on the cross form the cornerstone of Christian religious life. For the one who has been consecrated, Jesus the Messiah is everything; that is, he/she is possessed and subservient to Jesus. The Lord will dwell in those who follow him when they live in passionate devotion to him and continuous union with him. They will be filled with pure love and gratitude towards him, motivating them to live lives like the Lord's.⁶⁸⁵ For him, possessing the Lord is more sublime than serving him. Hence, imitating the life of Jesus so closely and living in him enables us to realise the charism that Mar Ivanios entrusted to us.

Mar Ivanios gives a certain principles that will help us to live our charism and organise our lives as religious people: 1) He asserts that it is our duty to emulate our Lord's sacrificial life through our profession. The sorrow of the Lord for sins ought to be there in the *sanyāsi*. His or her heart ought to be filled with love for God and hate for sin. 2) Everyone who follows our Lord is required to renounce oneself and bear the cross every day. The *sanyāsi* should make it a daily habit to carry the cross, renounce oneself, and earn the Messiah. 3) Jesus lived in his Father's bosom during his earthly ministry because of his life of communion with God. With the Messiah, the *sanyāsi* should reside in God's bosom; the three vows support this. 4) Jesus devoted his life to serving God, which includes serving others out of love for God. *Sanyāsi* must similarly serve humanity out of love for God.⁶⁸⁶ Consequently, by identifying with the sacrifice of Jesus and consecrating our entire being as a holocaust, we can live our religious life meaningfully and serve as witnesses of Jesus in a rapidly changing world where the sense of God and morals are diminishing and in a culture that does not value religious life.

5.9. The Spirituality of “Bethany”

Every religious institute has its own specific spirituality, determined by its charism and mission. Bethany's spirituality is characterised by its priority to God-experience and interiority. Union with God and living constantly in him are the essential nature of Bethany's spirituality.⁶⁸⁷ The name “Bethany” is a perpetual reminder of the unwavering love and warm reception offered

⁶⁸⁵ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 26.

⁶⁸⁶ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 113.

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. V. N. KALAPURAYIL, *Ongoing Spiritual Formation According to the Vision of Mar Ivanios, the Founder of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ. Its Implications and Relevance for the Congregation Today*, Thesis ad Doctoratum in Theologia Vitae Consecratae adsequendum, Romae 2016, 114.

to our Lord at all times. The members (Lazarus, Martha, and Mary) who were part of the original Bethany mentioned in the Gospels (Lk 10, 38–41; Jn 11, 1-45) are intended to serve as role models for the religious life in the Congregation of Sisters of the Imitation of Christ. Bethany indicates the nature and charism of the congregation founded by Mar Ivanios, emphasising prayer and activities.⁶⁸⁸ Mar Ivanios' great teaching to his followers is that "union with God is more sublime than mere service of God".⁶⁸⁹

Martha was a woman of great faith and an epitome of hospitality and service. Mary was a woman of spiritual acuity and devotion. Bethany's spirituality emphasises inner awareness of God as the "one thing necessary" (single-minded devotion to Jesus Lk 10, 42). The third person of Bethany is Lazarus; in the gospels, there is no record of him speaking. According to Christian spiritual tradition, solitude and silence are necessary to experience the Divine Reality. While Martha represents service and Mary represents contemplation and prayer, Lazarus represents silence. Thus, these elements, which are reflected in the persons of Bethany - silence, contemplation, and service have culminated in the spirituality of Bethany.⁶⁹⁰

In Lk 10, 39, Mary is described as one who sits at the feet of the Lord, listening to his word. The expression "to sit at the feet" describes the relationship between a disciple and a teacher.⁶⁹¹ In v. 40, Martha, unlike Mary, is "distracted by many tasks". Martha approaches Jesus and asks for his assistance. Hearon states that the verb for "approach" frequently occurs in Luke-Acts to denote an encounter with the divine presence (Lk, 2, 9, 38; 4, 39; 21, 34; 24, 4; Acts 12, 7; 23, 11). Thus, Warren Carter asserts that Martha's use of the title "Lord" ("Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?" Lk 10, 40) in addressing Jesus is appropriate for a disciple who encounters Jesus and recognises God's authority and reign.⁶⁹² Hearon highlights the significance of this concept in preventing unwarranted comparisons between Martha and Mary. Martha, who initially welcomed Jesus, continues to be described as a faithful follower of Jesus. Because the patristic tradition frequently elevates Mary as a contemplative role model and Martha as a counter-

⁶⁸⁸ Cf. CONGREGATION OF SISTERS OF THE IMITATION OF CHRIST, *Programme of Formation (Ratio)*, Bethany Sisters' Publication, Kottayam 2009, 58-59.

⁶⁸⁹ MAR IVANIOS, *Gurumozhikal. Sayings of the Founder* (Mal), Bethany Sisters' Generalate, Kottayam 2014, 22.

⁶⁹⁰ Cf. J. MARIADAS, "Mar Ivanios. The Founder of Bethany", 78-79.

⁶⁹¹ Cf. H. E. HEARON, "Luke 10, 38-42", in *Interpretation* 58/4 (2004) 393.

⁶⁹² Cf. W. CARTER, "Getting Martha out of the Kitchen. Luke 10, 38-42 Again", in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58/2 (1996) 274.

model.⁶⁹³

The immediately preceding context of Luke 10, 38-42 is in verses 25-37, where we see that Jesus encounters a lawyer who asks what it is necessary to *do* to gain eternal life. Jesus tells him the parable of the Good Samaritan and tells him to go and *do* likewise. The juxtaposition of two episodes where Jesus emphasises first doing and then hearing suggests that both are important. In the same gospel 8, 21, Jesus says, “My mother and my brothers and sisters are those who *hear* the word of God and *do* it”.⁶⁹⁴ As such, discipleship requires both doing and listening. Thus, serving and listening are two sides of the same coin of discipleship. Like Mary, a Bethany sister must be at the feet of the Master to abide in the presence of the Lord and receive the grace that will enable her to share the gospel and different apostolates of the congregation like Martha. Mary was a person of “listening”. She was completely present and focused her whole attention on the Lord. Hence, Mary urges us to be with the Lord, pay attention to him, and allow him to work silently in our hearts.

In the Gospel of John, chapter 11, 1-44, we see the person of Lazarus in the miracle of raising him from the dead. The miraculous raising of Lazarus confirms Jesus’ authority to give life and to resurrect the dead. Jesus’ answer to Martha’s question ‘Why he delayed’ (vv. 18-22) reveals the nature of miracles and His divine authority over life and death: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will never die” (vv. 25-26).⁶⁹⁵ When Jesus announces to Martha that he is the resurrection and the life, asking her, “Do you believe this?” she answers with full conviction: “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world” (11, 27). In so doing, she articulates the aim of the entire Gospel (20, 31). She represents the disciple par excellence at this moment.⁶⁹⁶ This miracle provided the ultimate evidence for faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah and the divine Son of God (11, 27; 20, 30-31), and Lazarus stands as an icon of faith in our mission to non-believers. Hence, the miracle of Lazarus’s resurrection helped to deepen faith in Jesus, and His intentional delay reveals that God often uses suffering as an opportunity for divine intervention. Thus, each of the Bethany saints set a model for us to imitate

⁶⁹³ Cf. HEARON, “Luke 10, 38-42”, 394.

⁶⁹⁴ Cf. L. MACNAMARA, “Martha and Mary. Rivals or Partners? A Fresh Look at Luke 10, 38-42”, in *The Furrow* 70/11 (2019) 596-597.

⁶⁹⁵ Cf. S. S. KIM, “The Significance of Jesus’ Raising Lazarus from the Dead in John 11”, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168 (2011) 55-60.

⁶⁹⁶ Cf. C. M. COLLEEN, “Speaking Through Ambiguity. Minor Characters in the Fourth Gospel”, in *Biblical Interpretation* 10/3 (2002) 335.

Jesus Christ in our lives. Mary teaches us how to lead a prayerful, contemplative life, Martha urges us to render selfless service to others, and Lazarus challenges us to live a life of perfect witness to the Son of God.⁶⁹⁷ Therefore, “filled with the love of God, a Bethany sister is obliged to lead an integrated life of prayer like Mary, a life of service like Martha, and a life of evangelisation and propagating the faith like Lazar” (*HR* 5).

5. 10. The Sources to Live a Self-Emptying Life

According to Mar Ivanios, life should be centred on the Holy Eucharist, the sacrament of love and the source of unity. The liturgy of the hours, reading and meditation on the Word of God, spiritual reading, personal prayer, spiritual exercises, etc., enable religious to have a good foundation in spiritual life. The Holy Rule of the Congregation expresses that we receive the strength required for our way of life and apostolate from the Divine Eucharist and other sacraments (*HR* 156).

5. 10.1. The Holy Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours

From the Eucharist, the abundant fountain of spiritual life, we nourish ourselves and encourage others to grow in the liturgical life.⁶⁹⁸ The Holy Rule of Bethany stresses daily Eucharistic celebration and divine office. The Holy Eucharist, the sign of unity and source of all blessings and the covenant of everlasting love, should nourish and strengthen our spiritual life (*HR* 163). Liturgy of the Hours is the canticle we offer to the Supreme Father in union with our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest and the heavenly hosts in the name of the whole creation and the Holy Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. The divine office prayed in common helps to continue our Eucharistic unity. (*HR* 165-166). The main objectives of the liturgy of the hours are to adore and glorify God, to sanctify the world and to unite it with God, and to make holy the day and night (*HR* 169).

5.10.2. The Word of God

Prayerful pondering on the Word of God will strengthen, purify and enlighten our minds, hearts and will-power. Such prayerful reception of the Word of God will guide us to the divine mysteries and the love of God and human beings and help us grow in holiness. Thus, the Word of

⁶⁹⁷ Cf. PARACKAL, “Ivanian Spirituality of the Imitation of Christ”, 116.

⁶⁹⁸ Cf. SERENA, *Religious Life as Imitation of Christ*, 81.

God should be the foundation of Bethanian spirituality (*HR* 159-160). To gain the surpassing knowledge of Christ and find solace and inspiration, the Holy Rule insists that sisters must read and meditate on the Word of God daily (*HR* 161).

5.10.3. Meditation and Personal Prayer

True holiness of religious life, freedom of heart and evangelical fervour ensue only through the union with God that arises from meditation. Meditation enables our hearts and minds to draw closer to God, makes seeking God easy and joyful, and helps us understand the mysteries of salvation. Thus, Meditative reading of the Word of God is essential to achieve a solid union with Christ (*HR* 172-173). Hence, the constitution exhorts the members to try to preserve this spirit of contemplation, which is melded in the Indian culture and the primaeval charism of Bethany as its heritage (*HR* 174).

We who have left everything for the sake of Christ (cf. Mk 10, 28) and assumed the religious life ought to live in union with God in Christ. Perfect self-dedication through prayer is the core of our spiritual life. A religious who seeks God sincerely is a person of prayer. The moments we spend in prayer and contemplation on God are the moments he fills us with the consciousness of his presence. In order to have a personal union with the Lord, sisters develop the habit of personal prayer. Conversion of heart is necessary for growing in holiness and attaining union with God. Thus, examining conscience, monthly recollection and yearly retreats help approach God with a renewed heart and a life hidden in God with Christ (*HR* 191). Fasting and abstinence are closely connected with Bethany's prayer life to strengthen the disciplinary life and acquire virtues. These are some of the means the congregation suggests to sisters to help them achieve union with God and truly embody the charism and spirituality of the congregation as intended by its founder.

5.11. The Apostolic Activities: Living Kenotic Love

Bethany's spirituality is characterised by the primacy of prayer over service. Mar Ivanios exhorted his followers to imitate Christ through an integrated life of prayer and action.⁶⁹⁹ To realise the vision of Mar Ivanios, in self-abandoning love for Christ and humanity, the Bethany sisters, engage in any work in accordance with the needs of the Church and the charism of the congregation. The main apostolic activities are pastoral activities, women's empowerment,

⁶⁹⁹ Cf. SERENA, *Religious Life as Imitation of Christ*, 82.

education, care for the sick and helpless, and evangelisation through media.

Sisters strive to establish a solid foundation for the people's faith lives and ensure their timely adherence to the sacramental life so that they can recognise and benefit from the spiritual resources of the Malankara Church. Thus, Bethany sisters offer them different spiritual services within the parish, including catechism, prayer meetings, and family visits (*HR 242*). Mar Ivanios states, "The prosperity of any community depends upon the cultural and character formation of its women."⁷⁰⁰ Therefore, Bethany promotes their holistic development and spiritual growth by conducting seminars, counselling, initiating self-employment schemes, and other empowerment programmes. Sisters use these occasions to help them recognise their dignity and role in the family and society.

In the early 20th century, women had inferior status in India. They were supposed to remain in the house and look after their husbands and children. They were never allowed to take up societal responsibilities, and formal education was often denied them. Realising the need for women's education in the all-round development of society, Mar Ivanios took a revolutionary step to establish a women's congregation to empower them and others through them. Thus, the ministry of education occupies a prominent role in the congregation's apostolate. The constitution of the congregation says our school's environment should reflect God's presence and be a platform for preaching the Gospel. Realising the fact that the school is the primary place from where a person receives integral formation, sisters engage in educational activities to nurture in the children and the youth the importance of prayer life, discipline, truthfulness, responsibility, a sense of values and generosity (*HR 246*).

By caring for the sick and helpless, the sisters try to imitate Christ the Healer more closely and participate in his healing ministry. By doing ministry of healing and charitable activities, sisters try to share the merciful and healing love of the Lord (*HR 247*). By providing homes for the aged and mentally retarded children, hospices and orphanages through which, sisters try to reach out to the poor and needy and show them the compassionate love of the Lord. Today, social media are an effective platform for preaching the gospel and revealing the splendour of Christian life. Thus, realising the positive dimensions of social media, sisters are trained in media and communication and use YouTube and other social media to spread the gospel and Christian values

⁷⁰⁰ MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 72.

(HR 250).

Bethany endeavours to stay faithful to her charism and spirituality while combining a life of prayer and action in the spirit of renunciation and the self-emptying life of Christ. However, as our congregation approaches its centenary, we must ask ourselves whether we are living our charism and spirituality in accordance with the original intentions of our founder, Mar Ivanios. Thus, I would like to see some of the practical challenges affecting us today in living our charism and spirituality authentically and suggest some proposals.

5.12. The Challenges to Live *Sarvāṅga Homayāga* Today

As previously mentioned, religious institutes emerged in response to specific historical demands. Something that held significance in the past for a specific location and time may no longer hold value in the modern context and circumstances. Our religious life and the ministries in their previous form might not always be relevant in the modern world because of our different challenges. Inigo quotes Fr. Arrupe, who says it is a crime to heedlessly apply yesterday's solution to today's problems. A new kind of religious life must emerge to respond to the signs of the times and the challenges of the modern world.⁷⁰¹ Let us look at a few of the challenges that religious are currently facing that diverge from the original vision of our founders.

5.12.1. Globalization and Secularization

The consecrated life engaged in the world as it is in the church has been subject to the strong influence of enormous social and cultural changes, which have become a genuine challenge. Today's world appears confusing, particularly in light of social media's influence. The speed of life has increased due to the communication technologies that have accompanied globalisation. There is a crisis in religious life as a result of the globalised secular world.⁷⁰² We live in a historical, cultural, and social context in which evangelical counsels are not appreciated and much less understood. For instance, obedience appears to violate the freedom of self-determination, self-fulfilment, and self-choice. Chastity is perceived as giving up the benefits of marriage and the opportunity to share the good and the bad times of life with someone. In a world where financial

⁷⁰¹ Cf. INIGO, "Consecrated Life. Today's Challenges and our Creative Response", in *Sanyāsa Journal of Consecrated Life* 1/2 (2006) 212.

⁷⁰² Cf. I. JOACHIM, "Religious Life in Asia Today", in *Review for Religious* 70/3 (2011) 248.

security and well-being are paramount, poverty is less acceptable.⁷⁰³ The religious portray themselves as symbols of God and his grace and love in a world focused on productivity, efficiency, economy, and well-being. Consecrated life is obviously countercultural since it is centred on God and self-giving to others. It seems to oppose materialism and the absolute value of money, as well as body worship, hedonism, individualism, and all forms of authoritarianism.⁷⁰⁴ These changes in culture also challenge the SIC as it does all the religious who are called to emulate the self-emptying life of Christ.

5.12.2. The Rise of the Laity and Shift in Motivation

In the past, we, the religious, dominated the fields of education and healthcare and owned practically all educational and medical facilities. But today, several colleges headed by laity offer new courses focused on the workplace. They teach ethics and morals to their students as well. Today, the Laity are incredibly knowledgeable and devoted to the service of humanity. Our institutions are now viewed more as businesses than charities helping the impoverished. Today, we are not seen as individuals who have given up everything to serve humanity because of the profit we are making, which alters our way of life.⁷⁰⁵ Mar Ivanios, taught the SIC that we should imitate Jesus, who, in union with God the Father in prayer, “went around doing good and healing all” (Acts 10, 38). The challenge that emerges for the religious is to question themselves whether they integrate prayer life with the apostolates, or are preoccupied more with institutional activities with less attention given to the inner spiritual attitude of being a person handed over to God in love as a holocaust.

In the Syro Malankara Church laypeople actively participate in the mission of reaching out to the needs of the people visiting the sick and the impoverished to offer them comfort and company in their loneliness. The “Gospel group” (*Suvishesha Sangham*) comprises priests, religious, and laypeople actively participating in the Church’s life which offers the possibility for the religious to live the mission Jesus entrusted.

4. ⁷⁰³ Cf. J. M. ARNAIZ, “The Great Challenges of Consecrated Life Today”, in 10 Capitalo Generale FSP (2013),

⁷⁰⁴ Cf. P. MWANIA, *A Life Uncommonly Blessed. Consecrated Life Today, Challenges and Trajectories*, 5.

⁷⁰⁵ Cf. INIGO, “Consecrated Life”, 214.

5.12.3. Issues in the Community Life

The inspirations and ideals of a religious community have always been that of the early Christian community presented in the Acts of the Apostles. “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” (Acts 4, 32). Mar Ivanios says: “you should consider each person in the community to be better and holier than you; hence, honour them in your heart. You should be ready to sacrifice even your life for the salvation and sanctification of others”.⁷⁰⁶ The *HR* underscores that the life and love of the Holy Trinity should reflect in the SIC communities (*HR* 199). According to St. Basil, one of the inspirers of the *HR*, the love of God and the love of neighbours are fully expressed in communal life, where everyone works together to achieve perfection.⁷⁰⁷

It may do well to question whether the members are actively involved in and present in the community life, whether the excessive use of mobile phones and other social media affect the commitment to live, promote and grow in the common living. The preoccupation with excelling in the office and other activities often result in being disconnected from the community activities and becoming less sensitive to the physical as well as spiritual needs of other members of the community. The religious communities are becoming more individualistic and biased, and SIC is no exception to this trend. When we find refuge in our own certainties and comfort zones, indifference toward others and division, there grow isolation and dissatisfaction, leading to resentment, constant complaint, and boredom, ultimately resulting in the loss of one’s religious calling.⁷⁰⁸ Our ability to forgive and let go of slights has been lost. Our willingness to give up comfortable lives and the sense of altruism erodes. Consequently, the religious too are becoming selfish and individualistic affecting the tranquillity and joy of community life. Hence the need to renew within and bear witness by loving and accepting others from the heart, which requires a total abandonment of oneself.

Here arises the meaning and relevance of Mar Ivanios’ concept of *sarvāṅga homayāga*,

⁷⁰⁶ MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 55.

⁷⁰⁷ Cf. In the Longer Rules St. Basil writes: “your gift for craftsmanship will not find its proper end unless other people are around to use the things you make. God made us this way: possessing things others lack and lacking things others possess”: *Longer Rules* 7; Cf also: BASIL, *Ascetical Works*, 11.

⁷⁰⁸ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *The Gift of Fidelity the Joy of Perseverance*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, Vaticano 2020, 34.

which states that one has to let go of all comforts and self-interests to have a meaningful religious life and witness Christ in this rapidly changing world that values power, possessions, wealth, pleasures, and so on. Those who are consecrated to God have the duty and mission to live in a constant state of self-sacrifice and oblation for the benefit of the community and its members. However, we must never lose sight of the human component of our communities. Since we are frail, imperfect, and miserable humans, there is always potential for healthy conflict within our religious communities. There is a conflict between grace and nature, the new and the old generation, and the old and the new spirit. During stressful and tense moments, we must strive for a harmonious balance between nature and grace, community and individuals. Our dedication to Christ and faith will enlighten and motivate us to live in genuine love and communion.⁷⁰⁹ Hence, we are called to love as Jesus loved and live in communion with others.

5.12.4. The Influence of Mass Media and Vocation Crisis

We are in a new technological culture that expands daily with the rapid development of science, technology, and communications. Understanding and appropriately applying new information and communication technologies is essential for evangelising oneself and others. This suggests that in order to accomplish solidarity, avoid immediacy, and bridge distances, new information and communication technologies will be integrated into consecrated life and used as evangelising tools in our mission and way of life.⁷¹⁰ The media heavily influences today's youth. The world we live in is highly advanced in information and communication. The advancement of science and technology has led to a decline in faith in God and ritualistic religion among people. To deal with this world, we should be updated and teach our religious people to use it effectively, which is an urgent need. In the modern world, youth have numerous opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. Our religious life needs to be revitalised, keeping in mind the changes that are occurring in our world and emphasising the needs of the youth.⁷¹¹ Since we are also a part of it, we ought to learn how to use it responsibly. Failure to do so can result in addiction, destroy genuine relationships with people, cause issues in the community life and our intimacy with the Lord, and ultimately lead to discontent in religious life.

⁷⁰⁹ Cf. F. A. CEGIELKA, *All Things New. Radical Reform and the Religious Life*, Sheed and Ward, New York 1969, 151-153.

⁷¹⁰ Cf. ARNAIZ, "The Great Challenges of Consecrated Life Today", 13.

⁷¹¹ Cf. INIGO, "Consecrated Life", 215.

The absence of emotional support, broken families, the nuclear family system, poverty, and traumatic childhood experiences all lead to eventual suspicions about the motivations behind the religious life choices of those from such backgrounds. The need for more people to enter religious and priestly vocations is greater now than ever in the Church's history to meet the increasing challenges facing the apostolate. Many factors, such as an affluent society, unprecedented freedom, the growing emphasis on science and subjectivism, a plethora of intriguing career options, and the concurrent devaluation of religious life, have been suggested as causes of the decline of vocations.⁷¹²

The 'vocation crisis' should be seen as a challenge rather than a tragedy. It is an eye-opener and a self-appraisal for every consecrated person and congregation to re-examine the founder's mission, vision, and particular charism in the modern world. Consecrated persons should possess a spirituality that marks a profound commitment to God and a concern for the neglected, poor, and less privileged. Thus, the 'vocation crisis' is an invitation to evaluate and re-evaluate the liberating dimensions of various traditionally carried-out ministries. In a way, it is an invitation to concentrate on the very person of Jesus to articulate one's own vocation and mission.⁷¹³ In 1975, Paul VI made the impactful remark, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers; if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."⁷¹⁴ Thus, witnessing our lives is the most effective means of attracting people to religious life today.

5. 13. Response to These Challenges

In his article "Sand Traps for Renewal Programs", Francis Blouin asserts that today, religious are tied to the institutions that sometimes we confuse means with ends, forgetting that we are first and foremost messengers of the Gospel rather than professional workers. Self-denial and personal asceticism have no value today. Some have given in to the pressure of leading increasingly luxurious lives and the prestige that comes with social standing. If one does not voluntarily accept the Lord's obvious challenge to self-denial, it is impossible to live a life of genuine poverty, giving service to others, sensitivity to the Spirit, loving celibate commitment, creative solitude, and constant attentiveness to the Lord.⁷¹⁵ Thus, we illustrate some resolutions to

⁷¹² Cf. S. McCARTY, "Meeting the Vocation Crisis", in *Review for Religious* 26/5 (1967) 939-940.

⁷¹³ Cf. J. SANKARATHIL, *Consecrated Life. God's Own Signature*, ATC Publishers, Bengaluru 2022, 178-179.

⁷¹⁴ *EN* # 41.

⁷¹⁵ Cf. F. BLOUIN, "Sand Traps for Renewal Programs", in *Review for Religious* 36/1 (1977) 7-9.

these challenges to live out our consecration meaningfully and make a difference in the midst of today's complexity.

5.13.1. Starting Constantly Afresh from Christ

Religious life cannot be sustained without a constant refocusing on Jesus, the Word Incarnate, as the CICLSAL underscored at the beginning of the third millennium.⁷¹⁶ Finding a way to live a life where the person of Jesus and his mission becomes the centre of everything through genuine discipleship is the biggest challenge for consecrated life. This calls for a deepening of the mystical, prophetic identity of the consecrated life at the service of the Kingdom, which is founded on the Word of God and the Eucharist. The vows mark our relationship with Jesus, others, and ourselves. But, for many in today's world, the manner in which they are expressed and lived is meaningless. Consequently, it is up to us to live the vows faithfully and give them new meaning.⁷¹⁷

Poverty is a Gospel mystery; one must love Christ to comprehend it. The mystery of poverty springs from the mystery of the *kenosis* of Christ, Christ's emptying of himself. It is a mystery that human reason cannot fully comprehend, something we can approach only enlightened by the Holy Spirit. To understand poverty, we must have a faith experience of Christ's emptying of himself.⁷¹⁸ Thus, poverty means total detachment, withdrawing trust from all things created and placing all our trust and hope in God. This total trust in God's providence helps us dispose of everything and liberate us from attachment to anything, experiencing humiliation, being despised, being cast aside, and being roughly treated.⁷¹⁹ The mission of those consecrated by the profession of evangelical counsel is to communicate God's love to the world. Today's challenges demand a strong interior life deeply in tune with the Spirit of Christ. Through the profession of chastity, poverty, and obedience, consecrated persons offer a prophetic witness to the world and address the challenges of hedonistic culture, materialism, and distorted use of freedom.⁷²⁰ The quality of religious life cannot be measured by its utilitarian basis but by the person's commitment and loving relationship with Christ. We are called to love and serve others as Jesus did: "You call me

⁷¹⁶ CICLSAL, *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium* (2002) # 21.

⁷¹⁷ Cf. ARNAIZ, "The Great Challenges of Consecrated Life Today", 15-16.

⁷¹⁸ Cf. ARUPPE, *Challenge to Religious Life*, J. AIXALA (ed.), Gujarat Sahitya Prakash Anand, India 1979, 117-118.

⁷¹⁹ Cf. ARUPPE, *Challenge to Religious Life Today*, 120-121.

⁷²⁰ Cf. R. McDERMOTT, "Vita Consecrata. A Vocation for the Third Millennium", in *Review for Religious* (1996) 456-457.

‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you” (Jn 13, 13-15). We bring Christ and the Kingdom of God to the world and give it an experience through the various services we provide to society. It is not just through our actions but our very being and witness are the primary means by which we make the Kingdom present.

5.13.2. Self-Renunciation

Ours is a consumerist world where efficiency, convenience, and wealth are the primary goals. We live in a digital world that controls almost all our lives. The need for wealth, convenience, and authority burns within us. How does one practise religious poverty in such a world? Amidst all these, Christ remains the model of our apostolic poverty and simplicity of life. Living austere in abundance and in a prosperous world is a real challenge. True simplicity of life can only be attained through an inward, individual faith and love experience of Christ the poor.⁷²¹ The simplicity proper to our way of life is today menaced not only by our inbuilt *egoism* but by the *consumer society* in which we are plunged: a society that provides facilities for almost everything our egoism craves. So, we who live in societies of affluence must be very conscious of the enslaving effects of an economy of abundance. If we want to live the life of austerity to which we are called, we must ask ourselves, “What do I need, and what things I do not need?”. Thus, the simplicity of life excludes ostentation, vanity, and a preoccupation with creature comforts.⁷²²

The Lineamenta for the Synod of Bishops in 1994 says the evangelical counsels manifest the fundamental character of the Gospel and bear testimony to it in that they are a “total yes” to the love of God and neighbour and stand in forceful opposition to the negative tendencies of the world and sin, as witnessed in many sectors of society today. People today suffer from an excessive seeking after pleasure and selfishness, which is contrary to the vow of celibacy and universal love; they are subjected to a cult of having and of consumerism, which is contrary to evangelical poverty and the communal sharing of goods; they are seeking to assert the power to the point of oppressing others, which is against the fellowship of communion and obedience to God’s design.⁷²³ Abraham

⁷²¹ Cf. ARUPPE, *Challenge to Religious Life Today*, 127-129.

⁷²² Cf. P. ARUPPE, *Challenge to Religious Life Today*, 114.

⁷²³ Cf. SYNOD 1994 “LINEAMENTA”, “The Consecrated Life in the Church and the World”, in *Origins* 22/26 (1992) 437.

was the resolute and generous patriarch who responded promptly to God's call to leave his land to take up his abode in an unknown place. This spirit of self-abandonment, of hurling oneself blindly into the arms of God, is a source of consolation and strength that can be experienced only through the mediation of faith in times of tribulations and uncertainties of religious life.⁷²⁴ Sacrifice-making is not an easy task but not a life-denying risk, but rather the risk of faith and hope in God, who has promised to reward those who have given up all things to follow him (Mt 19, 21). We do not reject created gifts when we freely renounce them; rather, we affirm that God alone is good and the source of all goodness.⁷²⁵

Mar Ivanios teaches that to a religious person, wealth, fame, and popularity are synonymous with poverty, defamation, and disgrace. When a religious person appears to be an idiot and lunatic in the eyes of the world, he/she enjoys perfect happiness.⁷²⁶ Pope John Paul II teaches in *Vita Consecrata*: "the evangelical counsels should not be considered as a denial of the values inherent in sexuality, in the legitimate desire to possess material goods or to make decisions for oneself. While affirming the value of created goods, evangelical counsels relativise them by pointing to God as the absolute good." (VC 87). In an age where "mortification", "abstinence", and "self-denial" are seen as "old-fashioned" and ridiculous, the religious need to strive to practice detachment from "what is sensual and self-gratifying".⁷²⁷ As Mar Ivanios lived and taught, *parithyāga* (renunciation) marks its lifestyle. Those who choose to be with the Lord never lose this interior character of this life, nourished by prayer, contemplation and by a self-giving (*kenotic*) style of life. The great witness thus the religious can provide to humanity today is to live austere lives in the spirit of the evangelical counsels testifying against consumerism, self-exaltation and hedonism, in the simplicity of life by closely imitating Jesus in both words and deeds.

5.13.3. Called to be a Life Witness

The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* reminds us, "Consecrated persons are being asked to bear witness everywhere, with the boldness of a prophet who is unafraid of risking even life" (VC 85). To witness the message of Jesus and his kingdom, we must be clear and readable signs communicating that his kingdom is primary and everything else is secondary. Our vocation

⁷²⁴ Cf. ARUPPE, *Challenge to Religious Life Today*, 3-4.

⁷²⁵ Cf. P. O'CALLAGHAN, "How Much of us Lives on Forever? The Christian Meaning of Sacrifice and Dedication", in *Annales Theologici* 30/2 (2016) 350.

⁷²⁶ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 71.

⁷²⁷ Cf. J. THAYIL, "Communication and Communion in Religious Life", in *Herald of the East* 12/2 (2016) 268.

calls us to live the encounter with God at the heart of human existence.⁷²⁸ We are called to bear a strong and timely witness to the fullness of the Christian life to the world and the Church. As Pope Francis says, “The apostolic effectiveness of consecrated life does not depend on the efficiency of its methods but rather on the eloquence of the life of consecrated men and women, which radiate the joy and the beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ to the full”.⁷²⁹

Today, more than ever, the world needs to witness religious life as it tends towards the oblivion of eternal values. Pope John Paul II asserts in *Vita Consecrata* that, more than in external works, their mission consists in making Christ present to the world through their personal witness. The more they allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is present and active in the world (VC 72). The global community requires individuals who are dedicated, experienced, genuine, morally upright, and capable of nurturing a genuine spiritual life to effectively address the paradoxes and challenges of the contemporary age without succumbing to the prevailing mindset of our time. Thus, every consecrated person must become the tangible manifestation of God’s kingdom.⁷³⁰ The consecrated demonstrate Christ’s saving and loving presence in this chaotic world by their total giving over to him and by their dedicated life. They share with the world the happiness and significance of a life in and for God in places where it is devalued and questioned. In them is fulfilled Christ’s call to be “the salt of the earth and the light of the world” (Mt 5, 13-14).

5.13.4. Invited to Walk in Synodality

As Pope Francis urges all the faithful today, consecrated life is a call to walk in synodality. Pope Francis, in his address to the Sisters of St. Dorothy on the occasion of their General Chapter on 3rd March 2022, emphasised that Institutes of religious life are “repositories of a great heritage and a rich tradition of synodality,” noting that “walking together, with Christ and in the Spirit, constitutes the essence of Christian religious life.” Walking together in the Spirit, he said, imprints a style of communion and participation marked by mission. Synodality should begin within us from a change of mentality, from a personal conversion, in the community and in our apostolic

⁷²⁸ Cf. M. RONDET, “Choices of Religious life in a Secularized World”, in *Review for Religious* 34 (1975) 571-572.

⁷²⁹ FRANCIS, *Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, 1.

⁷³⁰ Cf. SANKARATHIL, *Consecrated Life. God’s Own Signature*, 184.

activities.⁷³¹

Bernard Franck argues that “the essence of Synodality is a spirit rather than a principle”.⁷³² According to Franck, it requires reciprocal listening, sharing, solidarity, willingness to collaborate and cooperate, give and receive, and accept and welcome. This implies relationships rooted in respect and charity, which Franck calls the “Synodal spirit.”⁷³³ Thus, the SIC are invited to embrace synodality as their way of life, journeying with others in this time of digital culture and individualism. As consecrated persons, they are gifts to one another in the community by valuing and listening to everyone and sharing their time and talents. *The Holy Rule of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ* reminds: “Like Bethany, which Jesus loved, our houses should be holy shelters where His love is active and enduring. The life of our community is the mutual giving and service of one another.”⁷³⁴ When they unite themselves to Christ and live their charism of “living holocaust to God” they can easily give up their comforts and self-interests for the benefit of others.

5.13.5. Creatively Faithful

Perfectae Caritatis urged the religious congregations to update and revitalise themselves in vital fidelity to Christ and his gospel, the original vision of their founders, responsive to the needs of the humanity of our times, and with particular commitment to spiritual life.⁷³⁵ To be creatively faithful to such a call invites the SIC to refocus their attention on the life and vision of Mar Ivanios’, the Founder to whom living a religious life is akin to making a burnt offering, giving up all self-interests and offering one’s entire self to God and to his people. His is a perennial invitation to put on Christ, who gave up himself as oblation of love for the salvation of humanity.

As Mar Ivanios teaches, the goal of religious living is perfect conformity to Christ, a wholehearted dying to self and complete living with and for Christ. The sacrifices inherent in the religious vows, the resistance of the spirit of the modern world, and the pressures and frustrations of daily activity can all be seen in a new light when one realises that these are aspects of death with Christ that leads eventually to a deeper union with him. E. Browning refers to such a religious

⁷³¹ Cf. C. WELLS, *Pope: Walking together is the essence of religious life*.

⁷³² B. FRANCK, “Les Expériences Synodales Après Vatican II”, in *Communio* 3/3 (1978) 77, Quoted in R. LUCIANI, *Synodality. A New Way of Proceeding in the Church*, Paulist Pres, Mahwah, NJ 2022, 28.

⁷³³ Cf. FRANCK, “Les Expériences Synodales Après Vatican II”, 77, Quoted in LUCIANI, *Synodality*, 28.

⁷³⁴ *HR* # 200, 201.

⁷³⁵ Cf. *PC* # 2.

life as a prolonged martyrdom.⁷³⁶ Mar Ivanios speaks of it as a wholehearted giving oneself to Christ as a holocaust in love that leads the religious to die to all inordinate inclinations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we tried to understand the charism and spirituality of the Congregation of the *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ*. We parted by a rapid exploration of the meaning of charism in the Scripture and in the teachings of the Church. We have noted that it is St. Paul who first introduced the term charism as such into Christian terminology and that he used it to convey different meanings. The charism was not seriously discussed until the dawn of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Paul VI was the first to officially use the word charisms concerning religious life in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*. In brief, in the documents of the Church, charism is a gift of the Spirit to an individual; however, it is not for the benefit of the recipient but for the sake of others to upbuild the Church. The Church thinks of consecrated life itself as the gift (charism) of the Holy Spirit, which consists of many gifts (charisms) as manifestations of his action in the Church that create manifold forms of life given over entirely to God.⁷³⁷ These religious institutes come into existence to meet the particular needs of the Church at different times. Thus, we saw that a charism is a faith experience of the founder that creates a path of sanctity and responds to some felt need of a context. From this background, we tried to understand the charism of Mar Ivanios and the Congregation of the *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ* in the ecclesial context of India, especially as a charism that emerges in the Syro-Malankara Church.

The charism of the OIC and SIC religious families is the consequence of the Mar Ivanios' total openness to the action of the Holy Spirit. The Malankara Church was in spiritual deterioration due to divisions, quarrels, and lawsuits. Mar Ivanios earnestly desired its spiritual reformation, and he was convinced that religious life can bring out the best, the life of Christ operative in the heart of the Church. Hence, he chooses under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to live a monastic religious life. Eventually, his aspiration to renew the Malankara Church culminated in the founding of the OIC and the SIC congregations. As pastor of the Church, Mar Ivanios also wished to emancipate the status of women who were considered inferior in society at that time. He took the initiative to educate a core group first, giving them religious instruction in view of founding a

⁷³⁶ Cf. C. BROWNING, "Martyrdom and the Religious Life", in *Review for Religious* 20/2 (1961) 115.

⁷³⁷ Cf. PC # 1; VC # 1.

congregation that would help promote women in the Church and, thus, in society. Thus, imitating Jesus' life closely through prayer and contemplation, the Bethany sisters work for the spiritual renewal of the Malankara Church and for the emancipation of the women by providing them with education and meeting their spiritual and material needs. Finally, we have identified some of the obstacles we currently face and concluded by suggesting some approaches and means to live out the charism and spirituality in accordance with Mar Ivanios' vision. The SIC has a unique role to play in this fast-changing era of human history by living her charismatic patrimony of single-minded discipleship; to possess everything in God, making their life a perfect holocaust to God, as Mar Ivanios lived and taught them

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, we tried to understand the vision of Mar Ivanios's religious consecration as *Sarvāṅga Homayāga* —a total self-offering to God as a holocaust. Venerable Mar Ivanios was a man destined by God to lead the Malankara Church to Catholic communion and restore its spirituality from open rivalries and conflicts. He dedicated his entire life to preserving the internal harmony and peace in the Church. After spending long years in prayer and penance, he concluded that only a deep-rooted religious life inspired by an intimate relationship with Christ could cure the ailments of his community. This paved the way for the foundation of the Bethany Congregations: *Order of the Imitation of Christ* and the *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ*.⁷³⁸

Our aim was to investigate the meaning and relevance of Mar Ivanios' concept of the complete offering of one's whole being, in a society that worships absolute freedom, pleasures, wealth, possessions and so on. In the initial chapters of the dissertation, we attempted to comprehend God-oriented life as sacrifice from the perspectives of the bible, early monastic figures, and the magisterium. In the Old Testament, sacrifice was the divinely ordained means of approaching God. When the ancient Israelites performed sacrifices, they gave God what God had given them, expressing their close relationship with God and seeking to deepen that bond. Many offerings and sacrifices were made in gratitude for God's favours and requests for blessings. In the first chapter, we looked into the origin of the Israelites' practices of sacrificial offerings and their meaning. The five important sacrificial offerings of ancient Israel were the burnt, cereal, peace, sin, and trespass offerings. Each of these sacrifices had its own meaning and purpose. The burnt offering was for the atonement of sin. It is an offering of consecration. The cereal offering was to express thankfulness and dedication to God; the peace offering was for fellowship with God; the sin offering dealt with a situation where purification was needed, while the trespass offering expressed salvation over sin. Thus, until the advent of Christ, the sacrificial system was an essential element of Israel's religion.

The Old Testament sacrifices were only a shadow of the Supreme sacrifice which Christ was to offer on the cross. All the sacrifices in the Old Testament were fulfilled in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Christ is the High Priest and the sacrificial victim *par excellence*, and

⁷³⁸ Cf. NARIMATTATHIL, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios. Pastor and Prophet of Ecclesial Communion*, 309.

no further sacrifices are necessary to maintain fellowship with God. According to Christian theology, therefore, the sacrificial death of Christ put an end to the Mosaic sacrificial system. Thus, we understood that the early Christians spiritualised the idea of sacrifice, so the Christian sacrifice is not primarily a ceremony or ritual that we “do” or “give up” but is a total self-giving. In the beginning, martyrdom was considered the ultimate self-offering. However, with the end of persecution, it was replaced by monasticism, withdrawal from the world, and its passions and desires considered as a pure sacrificial offering to God.

Thus, in the second chapter, we tried to see the heroic persons who dedicated themselves to God diligently at the cost of everything in the history of the Church and who inspired Mar Ivanios for the foundation of his indigenous congregation. While Mar Ivanios was a professor in Serampore, he dedicated himself to contemplation, a fervent study of different religious orders and congregations in the Catholic Church, and the lives of the saints. He was greatly influenced by the spirituality of Saints Basil, Francis of Assisi, Therese of Avila, Alphonsus Liguori and Ignatius of Loyola. To understand the initial concept of total renunciation in religious life, we tried to look at the life and teachings of some of the early desert fathers and a few monastic figures. They were all once greatly influenced by the things of this world, but at a certain point in their lives, they were urged by the love of Christ and his gospel message, gave up everything that they held dear and committed their entire life to love God and enter into a deeper relationship with him. They became radical followers of Christ and his gospel message. They all taught us to detach from the perishable things of the world and be in union with the Lord in complete self-denial through prayer and contemplation, which will give us God-realisation - the ultimate end of life. Highlighting the lives and teachings of these exemplary figures gave us the background of how significant today the teachings and concepts of Mar Ivanios on religious consecration as a total offering of one’s whole being in this technologically advanced world where religious life through evangelical counsels is revalued and considered meaningless.

In the third chapter, we analysed some of the pertinent magisterial teachings on total self-offering and consecration in religious life. Religious consecration, understood as a dedication of self and the living out of a commitment, is entirely based on the consecrating power of Baptism. Vatican II clearly indicates that baptismal consecration is indispensable to any subsequent Christian consecration. *Lumen Gentium* 44 and *Perfectae Caritatis* 5 of Vatican II revitalise that the basic act of religious life is to give oneself wholly to God (LG 44) and to give one’s whole life to God (PC 5). Based on the teachings of the conciliar and post-conciliar documents, we

understand that the fundamental act of consecration to God is in baptism, and the consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels is a special and fruitful deepening of the consecration received in baptism by which the close union with Christ begun in baptism develops in the gift of a fuller configuration to him. Therefore, in the first section, we attempted to study how the Bible, monastic traditions, and church teachings connect to the concept of self-immolation as the complete offering of oneself in religious life.

The central theme of the study is presented in the second part, which contains Mar Ivanios's life and teachings on the total surrender of oneself as *sarvāṅga homayāga* (the sacrificial oblation of one's entire self) and how it is presented in the Holy Rule of *f the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ* and how it is lived by its members. In order to understand Mar Ivanios' vision of religious life, we had to analyse the context in which he founded the religious congregations in the Malankara Church. Thus, in the first section of this chapter, we briefly discussed the historical background of the Church. Mar Ivanios lived when the Malankara community was in conflict and division because of the Latinization policy of the Western missionaries. Until the arrival of Portuguese and Spanish missionaries, the St. Thomas Christians lived in perfect harmony and communion. The arrival of the Portuguese missionaries towards the end of the 15th century marked a new epoch in the history of the St. Thomas Christians.⁷³⁹ Having failed to understand the oriental way of Christian life and the Hindu customs, they started the Latinisation of the liturgy.⁷⁴⁰ The local Christians resisted the policies of the missionaries and denied every possibility of giving up their old traditional practices. We have seen how it finally culminated in the famous "*Coonan Cross Oath*" in 1653 at Mattancherry, where they solemnly swore that they would never remain under the Latin Bishops and their jurisdiction.⁷⁴¹ It led to the division of the St. Thomas Christians into two groups, namely the *puthenkūttukār* and *pazhayakūttukār*. The former formed an independent Church with a bishop consecrated by twelve priests, which created a schism in the Malankara Church. *Pazhayakūttukār* remained under the administration of the Latin Bishops. As a result, one-third of the St. Thomas Christians broke away from the Catholic communion, namely the *puthenkūttukār* and placed themselves under the jurisdiction of the Jacobite Patriarch of

⁷³⁹ Cf. A. M. MUNDADAN, *Indian Christians Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy*, Dharmaram Publication, Bangalore 1984, 32.

⁷⁴⁰ Cf. G. CHEDIATH, *Keralathile Kraisthava Sabhalkal* (Mal.), Oriental Institute Publication, Kottayam 1989 5-6.

⁷⁴¹ Cf. X. KOODAPUZHA, *Thirushabhacharithram* (Mal.), Oriental Institute Publication, Kottayam 1974, 768.

Antioch. Hence, the “*Coonan Cross Oath*” divided the St. Thomas community.⁷⁴² The *puthenkūttukār* managed to obtain valid episcopacy and apostolic succession through consecration only in 1772. There were several attempts made for the catholic communion, but none of them bore fruit.⁷⁴³ In 1875, the Antiochene Patriarch Peter III came to India, convened a Synod at Mulanthuruthy, and asserted temporal and spiritual jurisdiction over the Church. The Metropolitan and his group stood adamant without yielding to the demands of the Patriarch. This event again split the Church into two: Dionysius and the party against the patriarch (Metrān Kakṣi) and the second group under Mar Kurilos (Bāva Kakṣi or Patriarch’s party). This division in the Church led two parties into an open fight to get control over the Church properties without having anything to do with faith, morals and worship. All these quarrels, lawsuits, and the absence of a permanent spiritual head were obstacles to the growth of the spiritual life of the Malankara Church. This was the time Fr. P. T. Geevarghese, later Mar Ivanios, began his service in the Church.⁷⁴⁴

Deeply troubled by this internal strife and open rivalry within the Malankara Church, Mar Ivanios fought to rebuild the community on a strong spiritual basis. He earnestly desired its spiritual reformation, and his aspiration finally culminated in the founding of a religious Congregation. It was realised in 1919 with the foundation of the *Order of the Imitation of Christ* for men and in 1925 by founding *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ* for women. Placing himself under the protection and guidance of the Holy Spirit and undergoing a long period of agonising spiritual purification, Mar Ivanios realised that “There is nothing more sublime than union with God in this valley of tears”.⁷⁴⁵ This intense spiritual fervour and enlightenment led him to a monastic life inspired by Oriental religious life and Indian *sanyāsa*. While the struggle for supremacy in the Church was still prevalent, in 1913, Fr. P. T. Geevarghese was called to take up the professorship at Serampore College in Calcutta. It was his conviction that only a proper education could heal the wounds of the community. With this aim in mind, he took some men to Serampore so that they would become an asset to the Malankara Church.⁷⁴⁶ He turned his attention

⁷⁴² Cf. MALNCHARUVIL, *The Syro-Malankara Church*, Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Alwaye 1973, 110-119.

⁷⁴³ T. J. CHERAVALLIL, “A Profile of Archbishop Mar Ivanios”, in *Theological Visions of Mar Ivanios*, A. VALIYAVILAYIL (ed.), Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth Publications, Pune 2004, 28.

⁷⁴⁴ Cf. NARIMATTATHIL, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios. Pastor and Prophet of Ecclesial Communion*, 44-49.

⁷⁴⁵ MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 60.

⁷⁴⁶ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 51.

also to the womenfolk⁷⁴⁷ in view of their education and welfare, he took some women to Calcutta. He says, “The prosperity of any society depends on the character formation of its women”.⁷⁴⁸ He believed that “Convents are inevitable for the spiritual growth of the community and its educational advancement.”⁷⁴⁹

However, until then, as we have noted, no organised canonical religious life existed in the Malankara Orthodox Church. By 1917, his aspirations began to take concrete shape, and he wrote to Bishop Mar Dionysius about his desire to start a monastic order. He considered St. Basil the model and founder of organised monastic life in the East, and he was very much attracted to its monastic ideals. He and his followers converted their residence into a sort of *Ashram* and began to observe the rules and regulations of St. Basil, adapting them to the Indian culture. They strictly observed the religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Their daily life comprised the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, morning and evening meditations, examination of conscience, etc. and imposed upon themselves the rule of “great silence”.⁷⁵⁰

However, realising that the college campus was not a good place to live his vision of the spiritual renewal of the Church, he wanted to establish the *Ashram* amid the Malankara Church to produce better fruits. Thus, he resigned from the professorship of Serampore College on 15 March 1919 to dedicate himself completely to monastic life. The place chosen for the monastery was Perunad, near Ranni, a remote hilly area in Kerala. The reason for choosing this place was expressed in his autobiography: “Silence and solitude are essential to monastic life to have a union with the Lord. Therefore, crowded cities and towns are not suitable for the growth of the community”.⁷⁵¹ They cleared the forest, put up huts using bamboo, grass and mud and inaugurated the *Ashram* on 15 August 1919. The official name Mar Ivanios has given to his founding congregations is Order of the Imitation of Christ for men and Sisters of the Imitation of Christ for Women. Through this name, he underlined that the ultimate purpose of religious life is to imitate Christ in words and deeds. Through religious life, one tries to become another Christ who sacrificed his life for humanity. Thinking of a name for the congregation he founded that would

⁷⁴⁷ The social background of women in India, especially that of the Syrian Christian women, was caught up in a web of established customs, blind beliefs and traditions.

⁷⁴⁸ MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 51.

⁷⁴⁹ MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 124.

⁷⁵⁰ Cf. P. PALLATH – S. KANNANKARA, *Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. Important Documents (1925-2019)*, Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, Vadavathoor, Kottayam 2022, 102-103.

⁷⁵¹ MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 71.

convey the chief objectives of religious life and a deep relationship with Jesus, he opened a dictionary of the Bible, and the word ‘Bethany’ came to his attention. Considering the personal attitude of the three persons of Bethany, Lazarus (witnesses the life of risen Christ), Martha (anxious to serve the Lord represents the life of active service) and Mary (sitting at the feet of the Lord and listening to his word represents the life of prayer and contemplation) (Jn 11, 5) and their triple ways of service to the Lord, he chose Bethany as the name of the congregation he founded. Mar Ivanios’ passionate vision of imitating Jesus Christ in his life of prayer and action by blending Christian monastic traditions with the Indian *sanyāsa* led to the founding of the monastic communities for the spiritual renewal of the Malankara Church. Following many years of prayer and study, he came to the conclusion that the only way to save the Malankara Church from the issues and disputes it had been dealing with was through its reunion with the Catholic Church. Thus, on September 20, 1930, he left Mundanmala with the monks from Bethany Ashram and joined the Catholic Church and Bethany became the cradle of the Reunion Movement.⁷⁵²

Mar Ivanios wanted to incorporate Indian *sanyāsa* into Christian religious life to enter into the lives of the people of that time who only knew Hindu customs and practices and not to consider Christians as foreigners. Thus, in this fourth chapter, we attempted to understand the origin, meaning and characteristics of Indian *sanyāsa*. *Sanyāsa* is a way of life in which a person is detached from everything in the universe and intensely attached to the ultimate Reality. The very purpose of *sanyāsa* is to experience the Ultimate Reality in the depth of one’s being. Total renunciation, austerity, detachment, solitude and silence, universal love and equanimity, prayer and contemplation are some of the values of Indian *sanyāsa*. The farsighted Mar Ivanios understood that fruitful mission work could be done in India only if we adopted the lifestyle of Hindu monks and the values of *sanyāsa*. Though a few Western missionaries like Father Robert De Nobili, Henri Le Saux, Bede Griffiths and others attempted the nationalisation process in their mission work, the process was stopped due to the lack of people to carry it on.⁷⁵³

Call to Christian discipleship, too, requires total renunciation of all possessions, as Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mk 8, 34). Mar Ivanios realised that, to manifest Christ, one must incarnate in the Indian cultural

⁷⁵² MARIADAS, “Mar Ivanios. The Founder of Bethany”, 79.

⁷⁵³ Cf. PALLATH – KANNANKARA, *Syro-Malankara Catholic Church*, 102.

values and bear on oneself the Indian cultural garb so that the Indians must find they are at home. Therefore, he adapted for himself and his followers a purely Indian monastic life, a life similar to the life of the Hindu monks for evangelisation among non-Christians, which perfectly harmonises with the traditions of the Church and Indian spirituality. Four decades before the Second Vatican Council, Mar Ivanios took appropriate steps towards Indianization to become one with the nation's culture and traditions to present Christ more acceptable to the Indian mind.

After analysing the features of Indian *sanyāsa* and its practices in Bethany, we studied Mar Ivanios's vision of religious life. According to him, Jews had different types of sacrifices, but a burnt offering (holocaust), in which the whole animal is offered, is considered better than any other offering. Regarding the other offerings, some share is kept apart for the priests and devotees, and only one portion is burned on the altar, whereas in the burnt offering, everything is completely offered to the Lord. *Sanyāsa* is nothing but a sacrifice of the holocaust.⁷⁵⁴ In the burnt offering, the Israelites emphasised that it was not just giving the animal to God as a gift but dedicating their entire being to God as a sacrifice. The primary intent of the burnt offering is to give to God a gift, ultimately of oneself. The burning of the entire animal in the burnt offering symbolised complete surrender to YHWH and self-denial - a life totally given over to his will. Thus, the burnt offering involves a vital component of complete submission and self-dedication.⁷⁵⁵

On the contrary, in the New Testament, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was a turning point in the context of burnt offerings and sacrifices of oneself to God. Jesus' total surrendering to do God's will is the inception of a new era of self-sacrifice. Therefore, Christians no longer have to offer literal sacrifices, for Christ has fulfilled and thus ended the Old Testament sacrificial system. He says, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifice and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings; (these are offered according to the law), then he added, See, I have come to do your will. He abolishes the first in order to establish the second" (Heb 10, 8-9). Following Jesus' spirit of self-sacrifice, men and women make a self-consecration to God through the profession of religious life.

According to Mar Ivanios, the *sanyāsi* should have the victorious life seen in Christ, the life which he has fully given as an offering to human beings: his life of detachment and the intellect

⁷⁵⁴ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *Girideepam*, 133.

⁷⁵⁵ Cf. MORALES, "Atonement in Ancient Israel. The Whole Burnt Offering as Central to Israel's Cult", 34-35.

necessary for eternal life. This is the response we give to God's call through the religious profession. Profession is the response we give to the perfect self-sacrifice of the Messiah as the sacrificial cow.⁷⁵⁶ Thus, he says, *sanyāsa* (religious life) is nothing but a burnt offering, sacrificing our whole being on the altar of God along with the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. He asserts that the first *sanyāsi* who appeared on earth was Jesus, the Messiah, for among human beings, the man who sacrificed himself in perfect dedication to God is Jesus. Therefore, the origin, founder, and ideal man of *sanyāsa* is Jesus. The divine call of Jesus, the call Jesus received and followed, is the true call to *sanyāsa* by our response. In our divine call and acceptance, the call of Jesus is being continued and carried out in us.⁷⁵⁷ Thus, we can conclude that Mar Ivanios, in his application of *sanyāsa* to that of the burnt offering, recalls the sacrificial elements of Christ on the cross. Firstly, it is no more a sacrifice of an animal but rather a human consecration of oneself to God; secondly, it is a total consecration of oneself to God in thought, word, and deed in the spirit of living and dying for Christ alone. Thirdly, this act of self-consecration takes place in the presence of a community of believers who witness the active participation of the candidate who is ready to dedicate him/herself to God at the altar in the celebration of the Eucharist, the prolongation of the mystery of Christ at the incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of Christ.

In the last chapter, we have attempted to understand the charism and spirituality of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ and how the congregation carry out its charism according to Mar Ivanios' vision through different apostolic activities. The essence and identity of any institute of consecrated life depend on its charism. To understand the term charism in relation to the Institutes of Consecrated Life, we attempted to see the theological understanding of the term in the first section. Thus, we looked into its significance and uses in the Bible and the conciliar and post-conciliar documents. The use of the word Charism, *charisma* (χάρισμα) is an exclusively Pauline term. We find it outside the Pauline corpus only once in 1 Pet 4, 10.⁷⁵⁸ The Greek word *charisma* is a verbal noun from the verb *charidzomai*, "to bestow a gift or favour," meaning a gift freely and graciously given. The word is used generally to designate gifts bestowed by God gratuitously (Rom 1, 11; 5, 15; 6, 23; 11, 29; 2 Cor 1, 11), and these gifts are used for the upbuilding of the Christian community (Rom 12, 6; 1 Cor 12, 4; 9, 28; 30, 31). When the New Testament texts speak of

⁷⁵⁶ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 111-112.

⁷⁵⁷ Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyāsa*, 29.

⁷⁵⁸ Cf. DICHARRY, "Charism", 389.

charisms, we do not find the expression of the vocation and mission today recognised as the consecrated life; however, we find the roots of the charisms in the religious life.⁷⁵⁹ It is from the Council of Trent that the term charism came to be accepted in spiritual theology, but it was not taken up for serious discussion until the dawn of the Second Vatican Council. The term becomes one of the nuclei of the theology of consecrated life in the post-conciliar phase.

We have noticed that it was Pope Paul VI who first officially used the word charisms concerning religious life in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio* after the council.⁷⁶⁰ In its second chapter, *Lumen Gentium* discussed the charisms given by the Spirit for the renewal and building of the Church (12). However, while speaking about the charism in general, *Lumen Gentium* never directly applied its doctrine on charism to religious life, even though its sixth chapter addresses religious life in the Church, the closest the Council dealt with the “charism of a founder.” The term charism of a founder is defined as “free gifts of the Holy Spirit given to an individual, intended for the building up of the Body of Christ”. Thus, we understand that religious institutes come into existence to meet the Church’s particular needs at different times. Charism is a particular faith experience of the founder and the felt need of a context. From this background, we tried to understand the charism of Mar Ivanios and the Congregation of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ.

We have seen that the Bethany Congregations, both for the men and women, came into existence to rejuvenate the spiritual atmosphere of the Malankara Church as a result of Mar Ivanios’s prayer, hard work, sacrifice, and deep union with the Lord. The charism of Bethany is the imitation of Jesus Christ, realised through participating in the redemptive mission of the Triune God and striving for the spiritual renewal of the Malankara Church for the evangelisation of India and the empowerment of women.⁷⁶¹ As the Holy Rule of the congregation states, every Bethany sister strives to embody this charism in the everydayness of religious life by loving our Lord Jesus the Messiah firmly, imitating his contemplative hidden life closely and his exemplary active public life.⁷⁶² Mar Ivanios named the congregation “Bethany”, considering the personal attitude of the three persons in Bethany. Bethany’s spirituality is characterised by its priority to God-experience

⁷⁵⁹ Cf. VATICAN SYNOD SECRETARIAT, “The Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World”, 113.

⁷⁶⁰ Cf. McDONOUGH, “Charisms and Religious Life”, 646.

⁷⁶¹ HR # 3.

⁷⁶² HR # 4.

and interiority. Bethany is modelled after Lazarus, Martha, and Mary in the gospel, and they are the patrons of the *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ*. Therefore, filled with the love of God, Bethany sisters try to lead a life of prayer like Mary, a life of service like Martha, and a life of evangelisation and propagating the faith like Lazarus. By drawing strength and inspiration from the Holy Eucharist, the Word of God, the liturgy of the hours, personal prayer, meditation and teachings from the early fathers, Bethany sisters engage in different apostolic activities like education, care for the sick and helpless, pastoral activities, women empowerment, evangelisation through media etc.

The Bethany sisters strive to combine a life of prayer and action while remaining true to her charism and spirituality. However, as the congregation approaches its centenary, we have asked whether we are living our charism and spirituality in accordance with the original intentions of our founder, Mar Ivanios. Thus, we have discussed some of the actual challenges in living our charism and spirituality authentically. As part of the modernised world, the Bethany sisters, too, face the temptations of the world.

We live in a historical, cultural, and social context in which evangelical counsels are not appreciated, and much less understood. Rather than becoming God-oriented, we become more institutionalised. We are in a new technological culture that expands daily with the rapid development of science, technology, and communications. Understanding and appropriately applying new information and communication technologies is essential for evangelising ourselves and others. Thus, we posed a question: whether we could bear witness to Christ amid these challenges. Our founder, Mar Ivanios, taught us that we should imitate Jesus, who, in union with God the Father in prayer, went about doing good to all. Do we integrate our prayer life with apostolic activities, or are we more focused on institutional activities than our spiritual lives with God? Based on our study of Mar Ivanios' life and vision, we illustrated certain conclusions about living our religious life meaningfully today, as Mar Ivanios envisioned.

Firstly, in a society that values power, wealth, pleasures, prestige, efficiency and so on, we need to start afresh from Christ. Christ's emptying of himself must be our life principle, and we must be inspired by it to detach ourselves from created things and put total trust in God's providence. The single-minded and exclusive devotion to Christ makes religious life special and meaningful today. Secondly, we have to lead a renounced life. In the modern world, anyone who tries to lead a life of selflessness and sacrifice is perceived as crazy, fundamentalist, or fanatical.

Thus, the greatest service that consecrated people can provide to humanity is to live self-sacrificing lives through our evangelical counsels where it is less valued and steadfastly testify against consumerism in the simplicity of life by imitating Jesus in both words and deeds. Thirdly, we are called to witness religious life as it tends towards worldliness. We should demonstrate Christ's saving and loving presence in this chaotic world through our total dedication in our very lives. To witness the message of Jesus and his kingdom, we must be clear and readable signs communicating that his kingdom is primary and everything else is secondary. Fourthly, as Pope Francis urges everyone today, we, the religious, are called to walk in synodality. Hence, we are invited to make synodality our way of life and journey together with everyone by listening to and appreciating each other. Finally, we must constantly ask what it means to live *sarvanga homayaga*, the total self-sacrifice mode of existence today according to the founder's vision in response to the needs of the time.

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