

Pope Francis on Religious Life



What, therefore, is the priority of consecrated life? The Pope answered: “Prophecy of the Kingdom, which is a non-negotiable. The emphasis should fall on being prophets, and not in playing at being them. Naturally the devil proposes his temptations to us; one of them is: just appear to be prophets. But it is not possible simply to play at these things. I myself have seen very sad things in this regard. No: religious are men and women who light the way to the future.”

In his interview with *Civiltà Cattolica* Pope Francis had clearly stated that religious are called to a prophetic life. This is what is particular to them: “to be prophets, in particular, by demonstrating how Jesus lived on this earth, and to proclaim how the kingdom of God will be in its perfection. A religious must never give up prophesising.... Let us think about what so many great saints, monks and religious men and women have done, from St Anthony the Abbot onward. Being prophets may sometimes involve making ruido (Spanish for noise). I do not know how to put it.... Prophecy makes noise, uproar, some say ‘a mess.’ But in reality, the charism of religious people is like yeast: prophecy announces the spirit of the Gospel.”

So, how to be prophets living one’s own particular religious charism? For Pope Francis there is a need “to reinforce that which is institutional in consecrated life and not confuse the Institute with the apostolic work. The former perdures; the latter fades away.” The Pope continues: “The charism perdures, is strong; the work fades away. Sometimes the Institute and the work are confused. The Institute is creative, is always looking for outlets. In this way too the peripheries change and a checklist can be made that is always different.”

At this point the questions asked centered around themes of vocations. We are witnessing a profound change in the human geography of the Church and so too of religious institutes. Vocations in Africa and Asia are increasing, which alone account for most of their total number. All this poses a series of challenges: inculturation of the charism, vocational discernment and the selection of candidates, the

challenge of interreligious dialog, the search for a more equitable representation in the governmental organizations of the Institutes and, more generally, in the structure of the Church. The Pope was thus asked to offer some guidance concerning this situation.

Pope Francis says that he is well aware of the many geographical changes in consecrated life and that “all cultures are able to be called by the Lord, that he is free to stir up more vocations in one part of the world than in another. What does the Lord wish to say by sending us vocations from the youngest Churches? I don’t know. But I ask myself the question. We have to ask it. The Lord’s will is somehow in all this. There are Churches who are bearing new fruit. At one time they perhaps were not so fertile, but they are now. This necessitates, of course, rethinking the inculturation of the charism. The charism is one but, as Saint Ignatius used to say, it needs to be lived according to the places, times and persons. The charism is not a bottle of distilled water. It needs to be lived energetically as well as reinterpreted culturally. But in this way there is the danger of making a mistake, you say, of committing errors. It is risky. Certainly, certainly: we will always make mistakes, no doubt about it. But this should not stop us, because there is the chance of making worse mistakes. In fact we should always ask for forgiveness and look shamefully upon apostolic failures due to a lack of courage. Just think, for example, of the pioneer intuitions of Matteo Ricci which were allowed to crumble at that time.”

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