

# THE RELIGIOUS LIFE A GIFT OF GOD TO THE CHURCH ?

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Although we know that religious life (hereinafter RL) is one of the forms of consecrated life -- but not the only one -- for the purpose of this article we will take them as equivalent. Put another way, we are going to understand RL as all forms of consecrated life institutionally recognized as such, following in this the distinction made by the Church between baptismal consecration and "special" consecration as a lifestyle, or basically an institutionally recognized consecration.

The reason for doing this is that the critical assessment we will make of RL can and should extend equally to all "consecrated" life, at this point whether or not with vows, community life and other elements that characterize the RL. What is decisive for their "religious" and "institutional" implications, is that they are "consecrated"<sup>2</sup>, although basically, the same judgment could and should apply to the entire Christian life, defined justly as "life consecrated by baptism".

To justify this critical vision that we are implying, we follow with five short steps:

- 1) The reality of the crisis in RL beyond any "theological mystification" or euphemistic language.
- 2) The revealing language assumed by RL when accepting and believing itself to be a gift of God to the Church, in so far that it considers itself a "radical form" of human life.
- 3) The theoretical or non-spiritual conception that lies at the roots of RL as betrayed by the very language itself.
- 4) The absence of a true spirituality in RL, and this in a society where religion suffers a crisis both theoretically and dogmatically.
- 5) The insufficiency of a commitment whose radicalism and total giving, seems more like a recompense.

## **1. The RL in deep crisis as a way of life**

For a good approach in terms of whether the RL and consecrated life in general are a gift of God to the Church, as repeated continually by both this and the theology of religious life, we must begin from the reality of religious life itself. If in this we see signs of such a thing, then we should have to recognize, the aura of what is destined to survive no matter what changes and crises might occur. But RL is in crisis, and a very deep crisis, which affects its very nature and therefore even the very concept we have had of it. Moreover, terms such as "gift of God" and "Church" with their institutionalized significance, are also in deep crisis

Regarding this point we must be good and clear – something very rare in the ecclesial world and virtually nonexistent in the clerical. The RL crisis is not from a scarcity of vocations, nor from the culture of disbelief and religious indifference that progressively envelops different countries, nor even from the prevailing disillusionment and fatigue in RL itself. The first two situations, serious as they might be with their implications, nevertheless when well-accepted could be the rich soil for a RL with greater illusions promising, for example, a future with fewer but more alive religious communities. But this doesn't seem to be the case. The third situation is more a manifestation of the problem than of its cause, although neither church nor theology nor RL seem to consider it as such. The crisis is so deep that, strictly speaking, its roots lie not in the lack of adaptation of RL to the culture of our times, least of all to the worldly or non-spiritual form as is usually denounced, and for which adaptations and renewals decreed by the Second Vatican Council fifty years ago have been carried out.

The problem or crisis lies elsewhere. It is located in the very root of RL itself, as a form of life "institutionally religious", in which objectives, contents and proposals have been and still are "religious" by their very nature. At least properly speaking it's not located in the religious subjects as such sent into the surrounding-social-cultural context, nor in the lack of adaptation and/or renewal that had been decreed. Responsible causes for "lack-of-life" can hardly be ascribed to others nor to a lack of apt environment. And this simply because when life exists, it compulsively adapts to its environment. Much less does life ever exist by decree or from guilt, at least not a life worthy of the name. The problem is that the RL, apparently successful in the world, is in crisis: there is no life, it is bloodless. Obstructing it is the passing over from agrarian and urban-agrarian societies into which RL was born and gained success, and now entering into a society of knowledge -- into a society that is industrial with its corresponding modernity, in which RL -- a life filled with and based upon beliefs -- no longer finds acceptance.

Not only the RL but Christianity itself came into and served<sup>3</sup> this same agrarian society. In this society, values and categories such as "ordering->obeying", "God->Lord", "Jesus Christ->mediator", "authority->revelation", "incarnation, redemption", "sacraments", "end of the world", "time and eternity", and many others, enjoyed great credibility and prestige. This culture was a perfect fit for Christianity with its three-fold model: hierarchically-authoritarian, agrarian and dualistic; and for RL, where religious radicalism, sense of faith, submission and obedience, constituted its highest axiological realization, and was surpassed only by martyrdom. RL was rightly called "the Angelic Life" and "the State of Perfection". Today the cultural value of these categories has been surpassed, but nevertheless they are still in use. We are referring to the Christian categories enunciated at the beginning of this paragraph. For example, people keep talking about "consecrated life" with its great "religious connotation". And since "theologically" every baptized person is a "consecrated person" it is common to refer to the RL as a "special form of consecrated life". This was the time when Christianity and RL as its highest axiological expression, simultaneously fulfilled a double function: social programming; and serving as the path and bridge over to transcendence or the absolute dimension, however this second one not without serious and grave limitations. Because, as can be seen from very early, even already from the Gospels, Christianity suffered and succumbed to a very strong temptation: it got configured as a religion and not the path to spirituality that it was;<sup>4</sup> it became "the Christian religion" into which RL was born.

But even Christianity and RL could be a way of true and authentic spirituality, and not merely sources of world-views and history, social programming, social, ethical and personal morals, all of which is dominantly what they were. This to the extent that Christianity and RL could and did articulate a form of life, knowledge and work, profoundly axiological, as was the form of life, knowledge and work in agricultural and urban-agrarian society. The articulation of Christianity and religious life on what was most axiological, made possible the path to what was most sacred and most transcendental. These were the two thousand years of the great success of Christianity and RL. But this is ancient history. Today it's no longer the case.

Such articulation is no longer possible, and hence the crisis, simply because work and especially knowledge are no longer axiological as they used to be. Hence religion and RL are only possible when cultivated as spirituality, that is, for their own sakes, of a transcendence postulated as gratuitous, fully complete and ineffable, and lived experientially as such, not as the source of a vision of the world, or of history and the universe, neither of self nor of personal and social ethics, all of which are nevertheless very necessary. All these functions have ceased to exist as their own religion. This is where the crisis of religious life is found: in the application of assumptions that are no longer possible for being mythical (for example: the need to believe in a personal God who reveals truths with a plan and a purpose for all of us) all of which are assumptions which Christianity as a religion nor RL are any longer able to substantiate or articulate credibly. In addition a substantiation and articulation of such a nature would be eminently theoretical, not experiential, and therefore not spiritual.

This is the consequence of entering into a new kind of society, A NEW way of life based on knowledge, but not axiological knowledge, which might be used as a base or articulated as a religion that is of beliefs or "truths", and consequently neither Christianity as a religion, nor RL. That is why RL is in crisis, and a crisis unto death, because there is incompatibility between a RL based on beliefs and a society based on knowledge.

That is why the more we move into a knowledge society as a life-style, the more Religious Life goes into crisis. Although it should be stressed that the incompatibility lies between RL and a society of knowledge, between beliefs based on mythical<sup>5</sup>, legendary non-knowledge, and not between spirituality and a society of knowledge. On the contrary, these are not only compatible but actually necessary. And indeed a society of knowledge is wide open to a spirituality that is immense, if not to say total. Not so with religion.

A Christianity and RL unaware of this, perforce will be in crisis, despite any changes and adjustments that get made. Because since it will be through superficial changes and adaptations, consequently they will be profoundly insufficient. Just like those following upon the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965): certainly necessary but radically insufficient. And hence the crisis.

There is a willingness to change forms and to change certain types of content, references and presence, but what lies at the very core, the very conception of RL, its character as gift and consecration, as we see it, does not change. It is believed that, as postulated by the Council, the solution is to return to the neo-testamentary biblical origins, to the charisma of the founder, and become adapted themselves to the changing times. But this is without them coming to realize that these origins in themselves already "are religious" or are read "as religious," and that the adaptation of these "religious assumptions" --- which to a great extent are incompatible with

knowledge as a form of current living --- continue to be considered as absolute.

The best proof of this is the religiosity, and even pietism, which has characterized many of the women and men founders of religious institutes throughout modern times, especially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The three starting points assumed by the II Vatican Ecumenical Council for the renewal of religious life that were just now mentioned, were honest, but deeply inadequate<sup>6</sup>. Although it did not, it should have begun with evangelical christianities<sup>7</sup> as spirituality, and with a better understanding of the new societies and new cultures that were emerging with their demands in terms of spirituality, but, again, the Second Vat. Council lacked the ability to discover it or to bring it about. It emphasized reform and commitment by the RL, aspects necessary and valuable, believing to be sufficient that reform and commitment would lead to a good spiritual quality or would be its expression, but it did not assume spirituality as the absolute and total dimension of the human being.

No connection was made to the spiritual experience of Jesus nor to the deepest demands of women and men today. The Church as institution proposed to reform and renew itself, and largely succeeded, but without accepting the "being born again" that Jesus proposed to Nicodemus, nor did it question its need for it for its own religious institutions and religious self-conception.

## 2 - "God's gift to the Church" or a betraying language

This "religious" conception of itself by RL -- as though it were necessary and divinely guaranteed for all time -- is adequately picked up and captured the RL expression as "God's gift to the Church," which is repeated by both the Church and theology, without suspecting its character which is mystifying and therefore unrealistic. And the form to read and interpret it is, without doubt, as a religious friend, talking about the crisis of RL, put it to us: *"Very possibly the RL as it exists today will disappear, but not RL in itself. Because RL is a gift of God to the Church. "This RL" may disappear, but there will always be consecrated life in the Church "*.

An expression seemingly so true because of its doctrinal content. But will it be as secure as you think? Will RL be guaranteed forever precisely as "consecrated life" in the Church? Would this even be spiritually and "Christianly" desirable? The expression contains three terms, "God", "gift", "church" and all three supposedly are beyond all doubt, real and true. But is it really so?

**Let us begin with the word "God". The "God" that the expression implies -- Lord God or Father just as you like, making a great gift to his Church, has validity only in a theistic view, either as hierarchical and authoritarian or rather as fatherly and intimate, as usually presented in pos-council theology. Authoritarian or intimate, this is God with power and obviously capable of making gifts. Even more, according to the expression, only God can make the gift of RL, and in giving it to the Church, God is showing both the quality of the gift itself and of the community or institution to which it is being given, plus the divine parental relationship that Gos maintains with it.**

**But this vision, very evident in a society that is urban-agrarian and artisan, -- and in its intimate expression even more evident in modern**

**Christian believers -- has begun to go into crisis in modernity itself, in the industrial society. And, of course, its crisis is broader and more profound in our society of knowledge. Because in it can be found no place to question ourselves over the meaning of nature, the cosmos, of man and of history. These things have no meaning in themselves, but only the meaning that we might give them. God neither guarantees nor warrants anything. As such, God is not required. God is not necessary as creating power nor as ultimate explanation for everything nor as its source of meaning. So much for this part.**

**Furthermore, spirituality as an experience -- destined to surmount religion in a society of knowledge -- strictly speaking does not know a personal God, nor an ontological God and even much less some anthropomorphic God. And besides, spirituality is actually incompatible with such a God. The God of spirituality is a "God without God".**

**Spirituality is the experience of unity, gratefulness, completeness and fullness: it is being "a totality". It is literally unspeakable, unnamable, and therefore even "the experience of nothing", because since it is "a totality", it is not the experience of anyone or anything. Spirituality as an experience which in itself is not theistic, because it knows no need: not even a need for God.**

**Spirituality as genuine experience is identified with the famous expression of Master Eckhart: "That is why I ask God to free me from God." Because spirituality is the experience of totality in its unity, including even God, without one or two others; in it there is no room for God. In spirituality there is no place for a God who needs a "locus".**

As, in the words of Master Eckhart, no one is truly poor who still has in her or his soul a place where God might be. **And if one is not truly poor, God can not be in that person. God can only be in place where place does not exist.**<sup>10</sup>

That's the reason why the idea of "gift" likewise can not be linked to God. The God of genuine spiritual experience can not make a gift, a present, neither small nor great, since the very God is pure gratuity and only gratuity; God is fullness and totality in itself, never half way, or a step further – fullness, and therefore God's very own reason for being.

To speak of "gift" involves recognizing a difference, superiority and a previous state of being between the giver and the recipient. At very least this smacks of dualism. This is very understandable and even apparent in a "hierarchical-authoritarian vision" of a society that is agrarian and artisan with a dualistic vision, but it makes no sense for a vision of reality -- if we can call it such -- that leads to a spiritual experience that is non-dual. In this experience all is God: all is one, everything is everything; no multiplicity nor difference and, obviously, there is nothing greater than anything not even God.

To speak of a God "who gives" is to continue maintaining an anthropomorphic and personalizing vision of God, incompatible with the knowledge we have of the absolute dimension. Because knowledge of the absolute dimension is knowledge with neither content nor form. And as such, it alone is worthy to be called "spiritual", and the only knowledge spiritually compatible with a society of knowledge. Any other knowledge is religious, rational, dual, in one word a functional substitute that goes into crisis.

We say that to speak of a gift is to recognize in the donor a superiority and previous state with respect to the person receiving the gift. But when God, gift and Church (or baptized community), get to be institutionalized, as in this case, then the relationship is also institutionalized, and God is forever linked to the Church by his gift, that is, until the end of time. In other words, God becomes bound to his gift and actually subject to it. What began as a gift, so to speak, turned out to be an eternal obligation. Would this be a correct conception of God, apart from the supposed personalization it represents? And the gift institutionalized in this way, would it really be a gift? Of course, in one understanding, the Church -- the work par excellence of God -- is also eternal. But is it really so?

RL and Church, as beneficiaries and recipients of an institutional gift of God, now remain sublimated: "RL God's gift to the Church!" But also, as an effect of the same recognition, they become progressively further removed from reality; removed from their human, anthropological and experiential origin; removed from the most authentic origin through Jesus and the Gospels; now cut off from society and culture like the current societies and cultures of knowledge, which in a certain way make them possible, if only in the form of postulates, they tell them how they have to be.

As the existence of RL is guaranteed forever in a Church that is also guaranteed, wouldn't that sense of security explain both the doctrinal and institutional attachment, and the utter lack of preoccupation to "discover the treasure" and "buy the pearl of great price" about which the Gospel speaks, all for the sake of the Kingdom and the sublime bliss of the Beatitudes? Once Church and RL have become sacred, it's only necessary to "believe and accomplish"; basically, there is nothing to discover and cultivate, since all is a gift. It's religion versus spirituality.

To this "believe and accomplish", RL and the Church, by mutual agreement, today add as a modern evangelical dimension the "commitment to everything and everyone". As if "religiously inspired" commitment in itself was a synonym for spirituality or at least as a way to it. But is it really so?

What is certainly true is that the Church sees and values RL as a commitment both by herself and to herself, to the point that it's difficult to imagine the Church without the work and witness of so many consecrated women and men.

Pope Francis was very clear on this point in his words at the Angelus on Sunday February 2 of the year 2014 on the occasion of the "World Day for Consecrated Life". He said: *"Let's think what would happen if there were no nuns: with no nuns in hospitals, no nuns in mission schools. To imagine a Church without nuns is unthinkable."*

The Church as an institution no longer sees herself without RL, without that army of thousands of religious women and men working, practically unconditionally, committed to and in the Church. And without doubt in large part, because they also work for her. Although it would do no harm -- simply as an exercise -- to imagine the Church without RL and even think whether RL, as it is conceived and exists, far from being "the summit" might rather be an "element of distortion" to the extent that what makes it great and radical are religion with its beliefs and not a spiritual experience of the full realization of a human being.

However, as stated in the heading of these paragraphs "RL gift of God to the Church", the language itself gives it away. It betrays precisely three

concepts that are in crisis: God as a donor, RL as a divine gift, and the Church, because they don't respond to the reality they express. God as donor is as tender and loving as one could desire, but He is Lord, has the power to make gifts, is above, belongs to a different level and is not the God that spirituality would propose. God is one who, once accepted the revelation of God, can be reached by reason and even defended rationally. It's not the God of experience, that can only be reached when all other knowledge has been silenced, including a functional and self-interested knowledge of God.

A "RL gift of God" makes invisible, if not denies, that every human being as a speaking being, is capable of access to the absolute dimension.<sup>12</sup> To explain this dimension in the living human person, it is not required to have recourse to God to explain it as a gift, much less as a gift to "God's Church". The "absolute dimension", along with the "relative dimension" that is proper to a human being as far as it's a needful animal, is an invention of biology. It is neither a gift of God nor a "vocation" which God gives to some within the Church. It is a constitutive dimension of every human being as such and therefore one which every human being is called upon to cultivate, especially now in our society of knowledge. Humanity has no need that God should donate a gift of RL to his Church: every human being already has it internalized as a biological invention together with speech.

As far as the Church -- the community of spiritual women and men inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus -- is one community among many that give expression to the real communion of all human beings in their absolute dimension and in which this dimension grows and is celebrated. In the most profound sense, it can be said that it includes the community of entire mankind in so far as it is the carrier of this dimension.

And in the cultural sense, as has been said, it is the community that lives this dimension culturally inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus, which merits for itself the title "Christian". But taking into consideration that the important thing in Christian spirituality is what is substantive, essential and common, not just one which per se has the adjective "Christian", as happens to any other spirituality, although it's important, it's only cultural.

In synthesis, to a conception of RL as a gift of God to the Church, must be preferred the conception of the absolute dimension as constitutive to all human beings as such, and of special importance, especially today, together with their culture.

With all that on the table, nothing prevents utilizing a theistic language. However what is decisive is to realize its limitations and never hide or silence what we must express: that the spiritual dimension is not a divine gift of God to his Church but a dimension inherent in every human being and it demands to be cultivated.

### **3. Radical Impossibility of a Theoretical Conception of Spirituality**

In the long run, perhaps the worst thing would be to conceive of RL as having a theoretical nature linked to the gratuitous love of God for the Church. Because this conception really makes true spirituality invisible up to the point of impossible. Regarding this point, as in many other religious points, the step between a truth believed, however formulated as a fact or data -- RL God's gift to the Church -- and a predominantly theoretical attitude of acquiescence and acceptance, is very easy to take, and often occurs together with its consequences.

The step is easy to take, because in this scheme of revelation which has become faith -- which is the quintessential scheme of theist religions -- unconsciously the primacy is put on acceptance, and this is fundamentally mental and theoretical. It does suppose a discovering, and therefore an implication, in and from the most profound depths of a being. In the scheme of "revelation becoming -faith", revelation always comes from outside, it does not happen internally, in our intimate being, where we are most ourselves. Revelation always comes from outside, and its initiator is always some one else, external to us, -- GOD -- especially when revelation and faith have a traditional interpretation.

Hence one can spend a good part of life, if not all of it, in the effort to internalize something that should have been internal from the beginning. It is a heteronomous experience, not from and by our being. It is factitious and invested with authority; it reveals facts or data, external to us that we must accept, because their author is supposed to be God, raising acceptance and confession as the first and most important element.

Faced with a heteronomous revelation the most important thing is to believe, confess and do what is asked of us, and the first thing we are asked for is assent. The theoretical nature of this movement can not be more evident. It's a complete movement affecting our thinking, our discursive and argumentative understanding, even our emotions, and can even go on separated from our deepest selves. The result may seem paradoxical, but it is not. It makes sense.

Therefore a starting point, so typical for "religions of dogmas", makes spirituality difficult, in so far as this is self-discovery and its cultivation, its involvement and effort, get to the point of making it impossible. This is what explains the theoretical and committed character that Christianity has as a religion, all at the expense of what ought to be its truly spiritual character. The less spiritual and experiential is its faith the more it has to compensate with one or the other of two contrary tendencies, either: sacramentalization and ritualism, or commitment. What's pathetic is that faith gets to become a revelation of truths, of contents, therefore somewhat theoretical and dual, when faith has no other object than itself, with neither contents nor formulations.<sup>14</sup>

Paraphrasing the words of Karl Rahner, "Christianity of the XXI century will be spiritual or will not be", it also can be said of RL it: it will be spiritual or it will not be at all. And for this it has to emerge from within what is presented and is regarded as "a call" or "vocation" felt internally but whose origin comes externally and is basically of a theoretical nature.

#### **4.- Lack of the spiritual dimension that it claims to be**

Primarily religious, confessional and theoretical, as paradoxically RL seems to claim, it nevertheless is not so spiritual as it believes. Spirituality is not its forte, but rather its deficiency. Hence the spiritual weakness that has characterized it for centuries, with the result that truly spiritual women and men in it have been scarce, and even the exception. What has abounded in it are deeply religious women and men, and in this regard, models for the rest of the Christians, because RL was designed for this but not for genuinely spiritual women and men.

We must be convinced of this. The RL is not intended nor designed for spirituality -- to produce truly spiritual men and women-- but to produce religious women and men. That's why we can not solicit from them that which they don't have, i.e. that for which they were not designed. RL, of course with its natural deterioration and relaxations, has managed very well to produce religious women and men. It has even made them into exemplary women and men. But **this** happens always within Christianity as a "religion of beliefs" and logically a moral life of asceticism but not of genuinely spiritual women and men. And this simply because Christianity was never considered a path to spirituality.

In this respect it's a pity that in the "Asian Journal" of Thomas Merton the passage was silenced in which on 3 successive days in November 1968, he had three interviews with the Dalai Lama talking about Tibetan Buddhist spirituality and Christianity and how the Dalai Lama was honestly concerned to learn about monastic life in the West, and in particular about the spiritual role played by the three vows in the spiritual life of the monks.

The Dalai Lama was so interested in this point that in the third and final interview he asked specifically about it. The newspaper reflects only the interests of the Dalai Lama and some of his questions, such as whether, *"once the monks took vows, they continued to make progress along a spiritual way towards some eventual enlightenment, and, what were the steps in this progress?"*<sup>15</sup>. It does not pick up the possible responses of Merton, who probably could not go much beyond the conventional: the vows as consecration, commitment and availability. Because these were the values that prevailed in 1968, and still are dominant in the monastic and RL in general in the West.

And this is what continues to happen, now in the new society and cultures of knowledge, in which however religion is increasingly in crisis, and spirituality is what women and men in this society are looking for and demanding. The contradiction could not be greater, and hence the crisis. And yet, with its weak proposals for change and adaptation, RL continues to offer more of the same: beliefs and morality are first in all renewal, before and instead of Christianity as a path to spiritual life and to spirituality.

While spirituality as the culture of the absolute dimension is the condition for survival, RL only succeeds in offering "quality religiosity" -- certainly enlightened and educated, with high social awareness -- but still religion, that is to say, a way of life more bound up to truths of faith, beliefs and rituals, and outmoded contents than to our inner life and interior oneness.

Rather than anemia, RL is suffering from a profound and radical lack of spiritual life.

## **5. Radical commitment or insufficiency and compensation**

For this situation RL has come up with an alibi which is not merely ambiguous, but even very dangerous: the over-evaluation of activity, especially in the form of human commitment. Having been called to discover the absolute dimension, which by its nature is free and fully total here and now, RL nevertheless persists and insists upon evaluating activity for its fruits and results, i.e. for its ability to improve human living conditions and personal

realization. This approach constitutes a serious difficulty because the pertinent activity is incompatible with spirituality.

It is true that what apparently drives RL in this direction is love -- the greatest commandment of Jesus and the criterion par excellence of Christian spirituality and, strictly speaking, of all spirituality, since without love there is no spirituality. But likewise on this point we must be very clear and. The love that is the path to and expression of spirituality is totally unselfish, fully complete in itself, given fully and totally freely, never as "a means for an end".

Only this love is spiritual and the path to spirituality. And this love has a special character, very well expressed in the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Beatitudes: it is an action taken for itself, not for its results, i.e, activity fully and totally selfless. Every other love and activity is "self-interested", even though in a very subtle way, and it is neither liberating nor personally realizing – it is not spiritual.

The Christians who composed the "Hymn to Love" mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, especially verses 1-3, were very clear on this point.

Also it was very clear to Mahatma Gandhi, when with reference to his non-violent movement, *satyagraha*, he told his followers to be absolutely sure of its political triumph, while at the same time warning them not to join the movement simply because of this security, because that would be to pervert it. They had to join the movement for the movement itself, for the fullness that the action in itself meant, and not for its results<sup>16</sup>. No wonder that the *Bhagavad Gita*, along with the Beatitudes were the two texts on which he meditated especially during the last years of his life.

The Religious Life may believe that a totally disinterested love is the driving force in its being and acting. But is that really true? It would have to have the courage to objectively and quite frankly propose it for soul searching, since there is so much depends on it.<sup>17</sup>

At least it would have to be a point of suspicion of something since when talking about selfless activity in itself, and not for its results, many women and men religious frown, as if they were being invited to passivity and inaction, when in fact it touches upon a very wise and genuinely spiritual teaching. This activity itself, regardless of its results or fruits, does not presume passivity or inaction, but rather activity at its highest degree: activity identified with being, activity in and for its totality, without any selfishness or subjectivity. Without this generosity and selflessness as the foundation for everything, activity succumbs to calculation and selfishness as the universal law for everything<sup>18</sup>, as it already is, as we suffocate for having eliminated the natural and social conditions for gratuity necessary to live as human beings even biologically. Selfishness, subtle as it might be, is partial and sees everything as partial, in terms of means, never in terms of being full and total as we all are and everything is.

Another suspicious element is that the self-interest in RL because of its commitment has emerged and keeps on emerging within the "religious nature" of Religious Life itself, in its turn was assumed from Christianity itself as a religion. Is it possible that with this as the means and without superseding it, there could be generated the possibility of a total, genuinely spiritual commitment? It would take a miracle.

We must be very clear. There are commitments arising from a religious motivation that can continue up to death, and yet are not spiritual -- they are

not total. They are subtly self-interested commitments: expressions of a certain attachment and product of a certain rationalization, a certain justification and calculation. They don't spring up from an experience of the absolute but from a view point that is ethical, rational and limited, even though it might be necessary.

The insistence of a Master Eckhart upon this surrender and complete detachment does not carry a medieval aroma. Instead, it is a very current doctrine, that today no spiritual person would contradict. It means death to self or the ego, of what both spiritual women and men have spoken of at all times and in all cultures. Jesus was also strong on this same teaching with expressions such as "he who tries to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses it, will retain it" (Lc 17: 33) or "when you give alms, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Mt 6: 3) --- disinterest and total surrender.

Contrary to what we are accustomed to think, quite possibly the commitment as it is carried out and realized by RL is a sign of spiritual failure and functions as a compensating mechanism. It is certain that from a deeper and more genuine spirituality, the commitment of the RL would also be more genuine and more fruitful. Because in no way at all it attempts to diminish the commitment but rather to provide it with the spiritual dimension it deserves: the dimension of gratuity and total self-giving. Self-giving? "Self-giving" supposes a dualism that involves two. Instead it should be of "total unity".

Is it surprising that some authors, social philosophers, epistemologists and theologians are now positing activity without results as the pre-supposition from which we have to depart, if we want to build a society that is human, let alone more just and humane, even simply feasible? We are making reference to authors such as Raimon Panikkar<sup>19</sup>, Franz Hinkelammert<sup>20</sup>, Marià Corbí<sup>21</sup> and Antonio González<sup>22</sup>.

Frequently RL suffers the temptation of not having done sufficient to change the world in which we happen to live. Is this an "Evangelical Syndrome" or rather "activity" as it is valued by western society? Without realizing that if it is this second one, then this commitment, even with all its values and virtues, is merely reproducing the very partial and therefore highly debatable, fundamental axiological western-world vision and therefore of course, thus reproducing a world which in other respects, RL correctly criticizes and condemns. If that were the case, then rather than regret for not having done enough, RL should have to ask itself about "how it was done" and then be repentant for that. In spirituality as a path and an experience the "how" is usually more important than the "what". And it seems that should be the same in RL.

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<sup>2</sup> Una vida dedicada en totalidad y de manera permanente a Dios en la Iglesia y sancionada como tal por esta, que automáticamente se traduce en dedicación to-tal a la Iglesia. Ambas "dedicaciones" se implican mutuamente y una vez realizadas aparecen como "sagradas", en el sentido de no cuestionables.

<sup>3</sup> A propósito del cristianismo como una religión de las sociedades preindustriales y fundamentalmente agrarias, ver: Marià Corbí, **Proyectar la sociedad Re-convertir la religión**, Herder, Barcelona 1992, pp. 227-325; **Religión sin religión**, PPC, Madrid 1996; **Hacia una espiritualidad laica. Sin creencias, sin religiones, sin dioses**, Herder, Barcelona 2007; J. Amando Robles, **Repensar la religión. De la creencia al conocimiento**, EUNA, Heredia (Costa Rica) 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Ver Marcel Légaut, **Introduction à l'intelligence du passé et de l'avenir du christianisme**, Association Culturelle Marcel-Légaut, La Magnanerie-26270 Mirmande, 1997. Traducción parcial al castellano en la obra **Reflexión sobre el pasado y porvenir del cristianismo**, Asociación Marcel Légaut, Madrid 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Entendemos por creencias, y por ende las calificamos de míticas, todas las verdades, como las religiosas, pero no sólo ellas, que pretenden ser descripciones de la realidad, cuando el conocimiento antes que conocimiento de la realidad es modelación de esta. Concebidas de

esta manera, las creencias son producto de una epistemología mítica.

<sup>6</sup> Como lo fue todo el Concilio Ecuménico Vaticano II. Ver al respecto nuestro trabajo, J. Amando Robles, "*Un Concilio tan necesario como profundamente in-suficiente. Crítica de Marcel Légaut al Concilio Ecuménico Vaticano II*" en <http://cedi.cr/recursos/docs/publicaciones/AR-Legaut-Vaticano%20II.pdf> accedido el 16/04/14.

<sup>7</sup> Decimos "cristianismos evangélicos", en plural, porque, como se sabe, son varios los cristianismos, no uno solo, que coexisten en los Evangelios y, en principio, con la misma o parecida radicalidad evangélica

<sup>8</sup> Maestro Eckhart, Sermón 14 "*Beati pauperes in spiritu, quia ipsorum est regnum coelorum*", en **Obras Escogidas**, Edicomunicación, Barcelona 1998, p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 195.

<sup>10</sup> En la concepción de Eckhart este lugar sin lugar es la "chispa" del alma, donde nada ni nadie ha entrado nunca, ni siquiera Dios. Una manera extrema de indicar el no lugar.

<sup>11</sup> A este respecto la Exhortación Apostólica Postsinodal *Vita consecrata* de Juan Pablo II del 25 de marzo de 1996 "Sobre la vida consagrada y su misión en la Iglesia y en el mundo" no puede ser más elocuente. Ver sobre todo nº 29-34, "En la iglesia y para la Iglesia".

<sup>12</sup> De esta manera nos hacemos aquí eco de la antropología que maneja Marià Corbí, el ser humano como animal viviente hablante, y que por el hecho de hablar tiene un doble acceso a la realidad, que aparece ante él en una doble dimensión, *relativa*, o sea función de la vida, y *absoluta*, o como en sí misma es. Ver a este respecto Marià Corbí, **La construcción de los proyectos axiológicos colectivos. Principios de epistemología axiológica**, CETR y Bubok, Barcelona 2013, pp. 17 y sgs.

<sup>13</sup> Es mucho más fácil pensar la realidad e intentar transformarla en función de nosotros, porque esto es lo que hacemos como animales vivientes interesados que somos, que trabajar y cultivar la propia interioridad, y desde ella y con ella pensar la realidad y transformarla

<sup>14</sup> Ver Tomás de Aquino, Sum. Th. II-II, q. 1, arts. 1 y 2, doctrina muy reiterada por Raimon Panikkar en sus obras. Ver, por ejemplo, **Iconos del misterio. La experiencia de Dios**, Ediciones Península, Barcelona 1998, pp. 42-45; **La nueva inocencia**, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella (Navarra) 1993, p. 183; **Entre Dieu et le cosmos. Entretiens avec Gwendoline Jarczyk**, Albin Michel, Paris 1998, p. 213 y sgs. Es también muy ilustrativa al respecto la diferencia que advierte Marcel Légaut entre lo que él llama *movimiento de fe* y *acto de formula-ción*, acto este último que demanda *adhesión*. Ver Marcel Légaut, *Ensayo sobre la fe*, publicado por **Cuadernos de la Diáspora**, nº 20 (mayo-noviembre 2008), 73-111.

<sup>15</sup> **Diario de Asia**, Trotta, Madrid 2000, p. 132.

<sup>16</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, **Mi vida es mi mensaje. Escritos sobre Dios, la verdad y la no violencia**. Introducción y edición de John Dear. Sal Terrae, Santander, 2ª ed. 2003, pp. 51-52.

<sup>17</sup> En los mismo escritos que acabamos de citar de Gandhi se lee: "La identificación con todo lo que vive es imposible sin autopurificación. Sin autopurificación la observancia de la Ley de la No-violencia no es más que un sueño vacío. Nadie puede hacer el bien si no es puro de corazón" (p. 79).

<sup>18</sup> El esquema de la ley, como lo llama Antonio González en su obra **Teología de la praxis evangélica. Ensayo de Teología Fundamental**, Sal Terrae, Santander 1999, cap. 3, pp. 112-173.

<sup>19</sup> La espiritualidad como condición de la nueva civilización que hay que construir está presente en toda su abundante obra, especialmente bajo la categoría de visión *cosmoteándrica* de la realidad. Ver especialmente **La intuición cosmo-teándrica. Las tres dimensiones de la realidad**, Trotta, Madrid 1999; **La plenitud del**

**hombre. Una cristofanía**, Ediciones Siruela, Madrid 1999; **Paz y desarme cultural**, Espasa Calpe, Madrid 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Este postulado es recurrente en las obras de la última etapa de su pensamiento, que en términos generales coincide también con la última década. Cito especialmente tres: **Hacia una crítica de la razón mítica. El laberinto de la modernidad**, Editorial Arlequín, San José (Costa Rica) 2005; **Lo indispensable es inútil. Hacia una espiritualidad de la liberación**, Editorial Arlequín, San José (Costa Rica) 2012; y **Teología profana y pensamiento crítico. Conversaciones con Franz Hinkelammert**, de Estela Fernández Nadal y Gustavo David Silnik, CICCUS y CLACSO, Buenos Aires 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Marià Corbí habla más bien de lo que él llama *la cualidad humana profunda*, cuyo cultivo considera condición de sobrevivencia en las sociedades actuales de conocimiento. Ver **Reflexiones sobre la cualidad humana en una época de cambios**, Verloc y CETR, Barcelona 2012, y **La construcción de los proyectos axiológicos colectivos. Principios de Epistemología Axiológica**, CETR y Bubok Publishing 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Antonio González, **Teología de la praxis evangélica. Ensayo de Teología Fundamental**, Sal Terrae, Santander 1999; **Reinado de Dios e imperio. Ensayo de teología social**, Sal Terrae, Santander 2003, y **La transformación posible. ¿Socialismo en el siglo XXI?**, Bubok, Madrid 2010.