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Special Report: A House Divided

The State of the Religious Life in the Episcopal Church

[Editor's note: Some statements in this report may surprise our readers, or be seen as offensive. Our purpose is not to give offense, and we ask the forgiveness of any guiltless party who might be hurt by any of the observations in this article. We would not, however, be true to our calling to follow Christ if we were to conceal the truth; for our Lord came to "bear witness to the truth." (John 19:37) Truth is essential to charity; when we see our brothers or sisters err, it is not charity to ignore this error. We are not judges to condemn, but witnesses to proclaim: there is a judge over all who will condemn us if we fail to warn our brothers and sisters when we see them straying from the way of truth. (Ezek. 3:20) We are and have been willing to accept correction at the hands of others; we pray that in the spirit of Holy Obedience that St. Francis preached (Fior., p. 9) all who call themselves religious might strive together for that perfection of charity that only humility and truth can bring about. Only in that spirit can peace and reconciliation exist; and it is for this that we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.]

What Religious Life?

Our readers are aware of the existence of religious orders and communities in the Episcopal Church, but it should not come as a surprise to them that there are many who are **unaware** of this fact. There are others who know that the religious life exists, but are poorly informed as to its nature and the variety of expressions available. It has been said that one of the reasons for the so-called "clergy surplus" is the lack of attention paid to the religious life as an alternative to ordained ministry. We will not address the issue of such side effects here; it is enough to state the fact that little is done to encourage vocations to the religious life. A vicious circle develops: lack of information produces no applicants; lack of applicants leads to dwindling communities; and dwindling communities do not recommend themselves as viable options even to the well-informed.

In the Episcopal Church today there are about thirty organizations of religious, most of them "traditional" (to use an imprecise term), many of them with fewer than a dozen members each, and some with fewer than six. Given this fact, it is obvious why the viability of the religious life might seem questionable, and why many Episcopalians are either ignorant of or bemused by the activities of this tiny minority. How did this come about, and how can it be changed?

What Is the Religious Life, Anyway?

Most simply stated, the religious life is a life lived in voluntary compliance with a rule, which commonly includes the making of solemn promises or vows to observe what are called the "evangelical counsels": poverty, chastity and obedience. The root of religion is ligare, "to bind": religious are "bound" by their rule. This rule could be observed in common with others, by an individual under the spiritual guidance of a "master," or by an experienced and brave soul living alone. The common factor is the dedication of the individual to something larger than the self, a giving up of the self to God: the new Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church avoids the term "religious" and refers instead to the "consecrated life." (CCL, Part III) It is important to note, then, that being "religious" does not necessarily involve the institutional church -- the desert fathers and mothers did not obtain church sanction for their self-dedication. Founding an "order" is quite another thing, as we shall see later on -- to be an order, a community must have the approval of the church hierarchy: the term chosen by the Roman canons is again helpful -- its religious orders are now called "institutes of consecrated life"; (ibid.) they are part of the "institution."

The evangelical counsels have been variously interpreted through the centuries. They were not explicit in the rules of the earliest religious, the hermits and the monastics (literally "desert-dwellers" and "lone-livers"), and the cenobites ("meal-sharers"). St. Benedict (d. 547) wrote a rule including obedience and communal poverty which became the model for the religious life up through the 12th century. At that point St. Francis appeared on the scene and, witnessing the corrupt path that the religious life had taken by building up property and temporal power, introduced the concept of radical poverty, in which not only the individual brothers, but the community itself owned nothing, "neither a house nor a place nor anything at all." (Reg.bul. VI. 1) Francis' rule was later sidestepped, and before his death he saw his order in possession of basilicas and monasteries.

The history of the religious life has been filled with such ups and downs: ideals come into conflict with "reality," corruption sets in, then a reformer comes along and the religious life undergoes a new cycle of renewal and revival. The Roman Catholic Church is going through such a process now, begun in 1965 with the papal decree "Perfectae Caritatis -- perfect charity. It is time for the Episcopal Church to look to renewal and revival as well.

The Function of the Religious Life

The religious life is not primarily intended for the salvation of the members of the communities themselves. It would be a kind of 20th century Pharisaism to imply that salvation is to be obtained by obedience to a set of rules, though one still hears the religious life referred to as a "fuller commitment." The Brotherhood of St. Gregory was once criticized by a member of one of the "traditional" orders who said, "They only take the vows all Christians take at Baptism." While this is far from true (the baptismal vows include worship, penance, witness, service and justice -- BCP, p. 304-5), what **if** it were? The statement betrays an attitude toward the religious life that smacks more of pride than humility. Religious follow their rules not

so as to "become better Christians" but in order to be Christians at all! There is no "better" in the kingdom of God, and what Christ asks of us is hard enough without adding human regulations (Luke 11:46). The rule is a means, a direction, an aid to the desired end; it is nothing in itself. The religious life is a road, not a destination. At heaven's gate we must shed **all** our habits; and even a cincture is too wide to go through the eye of a needle.

Nor is the religious life merely a source of cheap skilled labor for the institutional church. This may be one of its uses, but that is not its purpose. Certainly the religious serve as they are called to serve, under obedience, and at many times in the past the church, and civilization, have been guided by consecrated individuals. But this is a by-product of their consecration to obedience and poverty.

Nor is the religious life a vicarious source of prayer for the life of the church. This is the attitude that Merton condemns in his later writings; he refers to it as the "prayer wheel" mentality, in which the religious life is seen as a sort of prayer factory churning out spiritual graces for the benefit of those too busy to pray, "a 'dynamo of prayer' in which the monks are generating spiritual power for the workers in the active ministry. If the active apostolate does not proceed from the apostle's own union with God, the lack cannot be supplied by somebody else." (CWA, p. 145) Grace by its very nature is freely offered, and the ability to pray is a participation in grace, not its cause -- God is not a spiritual vending machine.

What is the religious life then? It is a pattern for the Christian life: it is a guide to the perplexed, an example to the unskilled, a comfort to the desolate. Religious must be persons of prayer who can show others the way to prayer. They must be willing servants who do what they can to help all Christians to achieve the goal of salvation in Christ. A religious brother or sister, monk, friar or nun, "should be a sign of freedom, a sign of truth, a witness to that inner liberty of the sons of God with which Christ has come to endow us." (CWA, p. 244) The religious are not off in some misty forefront of advance against the powers of darkness; they are walking alongside their fellow Christians, helping to "bear the burdens" on the way to God. (Gal. 6:2) They are not "fathers" and "teachers" but brothers and sisters. (Matt. 23:8-9) The major function of the consecrated life is to witness to, proclaim and enable the Christian life.

In the light of this fact, the failure on the part of the religious in the Episcopal Church is obvious. Who is responsible? Blame might be placed on the "protestant" party in the Episcopal Church, which distrusted the "romish" qualities of some of the traditional religious communities. But are not those communities themselves to blame for allowing this distrust to develop? We shall see below that the early history of the religious life in the Episcopal Church was marked by actions which could not but polarize the faithful along party lines of "churchmanship." The religious communities themselves must accept the blame for the current state of affairs. Just what is the relationship between the church and the religious communities?

Some History

It is impossible to write an exact history of the religious life in the Episcopal Church, particularly the early days, because the church lacked any central authority for dealing with religious. It was with the "Catholic Revival" of the mid-19th century that groups calling themselves religious orders, societies or communities began to appear. Some of these foundations were sponsored by English communities seeking to broaden the influence of the Oxford Movement. The two essential facts to note are: these communities were almost all involved in the apostolic life -- in teaching, preaching, nursing and work among the poor in the inner cities and slums; the second fact is that they were not recognized as orders by the church, which lacked any mechanism for such recognition. Although suspicious, the church was partially won over by the good work that many of these communities did, operating under the auspices of individual bishops. Because of the lack of canonical recognition, it is inappropriate to refer to such groups as "orders," though many used the title informally, and a few incorporated it into their community name.

These communities continued doing their work quietly for a number of years -- several were set up along Augustinian lines and consisted for the most part of clerics who were engaged in the restoration and founding of "Catholic" parishes; most of the communities of women were engaged in teaching, nursing, or in work among "fallen women," immigrants and the poor. A few of them passed out of existence due to the departure of a superior or founder to the "Roman obedience," but the largely "protestant" church membership would shrug and think, "What else could one expect?"

In 1907, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church amended Canon XIX to allow ministers of other denominations to preach with the permission of the diocesan bishop -- the so-called "Open Pulpit" amendment (C&C III.25). Today this is seen as a positive step in the development of interdenominational dialogue, and it was passed by a substantial majority from all "parties" in the church, both High and Low. A tiny minority, however, found this too much to bear, and "seceded" to Rome. We can only wonder what all the fuss was about. We must agree that the "legislation was the occasion -- but not the cause -- for this exodus." (Gannon, p. 128)

Among those departing (in 1909) were Father Paul, founder and superior of the Friars of the Atonement, the "Graymoor Friars," together with the whole community of friars and sisters (which then numbered seventeen). This in itself would not have caused much note beyond the usual comment in *The Living Church*. What brought the secession to public notice was the "property scandal." The departing friars remained in possession of the substantial piece of real estate on which their modest dwellings were built. Fr. Paul had failed to vest the property in the bishop of the diocese, though it was claimed by several that this had been his avowed intent, so that "absolute poverty would not be an idle profession." (*ibid.*, p. 169) However, since he had not made this commitment, the property remained his.

So it was decided, at the General Convention of 1913, that something had to be done to both provide for canonical recognition of religious communities and prevent the repetition of such a scandal. The canon

passed required: 1) that the community be recognized by the bishop of the diocese in which its mother house was resident, and that he have approval of any change in the rule or constitution; 2) that the church be recognized as supreme authority in matters of doctrine, discipline and worship; 3) that a community obtain episcopal permission for opening branch houses in other dioceses; 4) that priests serving as chaplains be licensed by and responsible to the diocesan bishop; 5) that the Book of Common Prayer be used for administration of the sacraments; 6) that real estate and endowments be held in trust for the community as a body in communion with the church; 7) that clerical members be subject to all canonical regulations governing the clergy; and 8) that provision be made for the appointment of a bishop visitor, either the diocesan himself or by his permission, who would hear appeals and rule on the dismissal or release of full members.

It is clear that section 6 is a heritage of the "property scandal," and that sections 2 and 5 were aimed at the use of unauthorized eucharistic liturgies (the various "missals" popular among the "Catholic" party). But these strictures can hardly be seen as unreasonably strict or binding to those who claim to live the **vows** of poverty, chastity and obedience. The "property" clause is certainly not as strict as the one imposed by St. Francis (quoted above), and is very like the compromise worked out in his lifetime (against his will), whereby the Friars Minor made use of properties which were held in title by the church. As for the liturgical question, it is ironic that religious, who anciently strove for simplicity of worship, and were rather more puritan than ceremonial (see Dix, pp. 312-317), should be caught up in such controversies at all.

The religious communities were now given the opportunity to receive official recognition by the church. The church **was** surprised, and we regret to report, that none of the communities then in existence chose to do so. The church sought to solve this problem by dealing with one possible source of difficulty, and added an additional section to the canon in 1919: "It shall not be within the power of a succeeding bishop to withdraw the official recognition that has been given to a religious community, provided, that the conditions laid down in this canon are observed." This addition addressed a very real fear on the part of some of the religious that a subsequent "Low Church" bishop might dissolve their community. It did not encourage any communities to seek recognition, however.

It is painful to have to mention the obvious at this point: that the "religious" of these communities, or at least their governing members, were not prepared to live either under obedience or in poverty as they have been traditionally understood. By the 1950s, according to our sources, not a single community had sought recognition under the canons of the church. It was at that time that the first and only traditional religious community to apply for recognition was founded.

Where Do We Fit In?

The Brotherhood of St. Gregory was founded in 1969; in accordance with the canon, the rule and constitution were approved by the Rt. Rev. Horace W. B. Donegan, then Bishop of New York. The ethos of the Brotherhood was (and is) service to the institutional church as expressed in our motto: "servants of the servants of God."

The willingness of the Brotherhood to comply with the canons placed it in a very small minority within the religious life of the church. Another fact about the community was even more revolutionary, and set it apart from the traditional religious life altogether. This was its rule, which departs radically from the "traditional" understanding of the evangelical counsels. How was the rule different from the traditional rules? We will begin by examining the most obvious, and from the traditional standpoint, the most radical change.

Chastity

Stated most simply, the Brotherhood does not equate chastity with celibacy (or celibacy with chastity, for that matter). Some of our brothers are married, with children. Their wives are not "sisters" as has been suggested. The option for wives to take on an associate's rule is open, but not required or recommended -- this is a matter of conscience. Perhaps it was this vow that the "traditionalist" mentioned above was referring to when he claimed that we "only take the vows all Christians take at Baptism." In charity let us assume that he was reading more into the baptismal covenant than is expressly stated. Certainly all Christians 'are called to live chastely, but none of them are **vowed** to it at Baptism.

But what is chastity? If all Christians are called to it, it cannot be celibacy. It should be pointed out that the Roman canons are explicit on this point -- chastity is defined as entailing "perfect continence in celibacy." (CCL, Can. 599) Under the Roman canons the Brotherhood would be a "society of the apostolic life." We would respectfully disagree with the Roman (and traditional) definition.

In spite of the reason given for this understanding of celibacy --that it allows the celibate to focus his or her entire being on God (which implies that were it not for celibacy their entire being would be focused on sex C?) -- this is certainly not the case in our experience of human nature. Most people find the weather more of a distraction than they do the sexual impulse -- they certainly talk about it enough -- and a healthy sexual relationship does not seem to have deterred many great and wise people from devoting themselves to God. Nor is it impossible for a married person to achieve that exalted epithet, "Spouse of Christ" -- at least not according to St. Francis, who was the first to found a religious order with married members (the Order of Penance, or Third Order). In his "Letter to the Faithful," which is seen as the earliest extant articulation of the Third Order's rule, Francis says, "We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined to our Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit." (Ep.fid., 8) Rather than being a strain on the sense of community, marriage opens the possible influence of the religious life to an even wider field.

We should also note that the scriptural support for the notion of celibacy is rather vague: Paul explicitly says that his opinions on the subject are completely his own (1 Cor. 7:25), and even then makes it clear that celibacy is not for everyone. As our Lord says, "Let those accept it who can." (Matt. 19:12) Some who have attempted the road to celibacy without having the charismatic gift for it (for it is clear that this is what it takes) become embittered and ^{unhappy}, sinning in their hearts and thereby breaking their vow and calling down judgment on themselves.

We respect the authority of the Roman church in its dealings with its members -- and the interpretation of chastity as perfect celibacy is consistent with the Roman view on clerical celibacy. But surely the Anglican tradition has always been to allow marriage for the clergy, and even Rome is considering this (however distantly or discreetly), which should make it clear that celibacy itself is not a theological but a disciplinary issue, in spite of attempts to exalt it into a virtue. It would seem, then, that to require celibacy in an Anglican setting is inappropriate.

However, the main weakness with this definition is its narrowness -- it limits chastity to simply never having, nor desiring (v. Matt. 5:28), sexual relations. To single out one aspect of human nature for such rigorous control strikes us as a perverse accident of moral history. For us chastity is a matter of personal integrity -- custody of the whole person. In this light, chastity governs all emotional aspects of the personality. Anger, impatience, envy, despondency, hatred, as well as lust and vanity -- these are the enemies of chastity. As Friar Giles said, "My brother, I tell thee that the diligent custody and continual watching of our bodily and spiritual senses, keeping them pure and spotless before God -- that is truly called chastity." (Fior. p. 286)

Poverty

The understanding of poverty as lived out by the Brotherhood also departs from traditional practices. In one way **we are** radically traditional, however, in that the community owns no real estate. Individually, the brothers are called to live simply, providing for themselves (and families, if such be the case) from their work in the world, and contributing to a common purse for the alleviation of hardship within the community and as a witness and mission to those in need outside. This interpretation is not so far from the vow of poverty as it was lived under Francis' rule, except that he did not allow his brothers to handle money or to own anything at all: "The brothers who know how to work should do so and exercise that trade which they [already] know.... and they may have the tools and instruments suitable for their trades." (Reg.prim. VII) This work was the main source of food and supplies for the friars, and they were only to **seek** alms as a last resort. (ibid.)

Poverty manifests itself in a spirit of detachment rather than in external impoverishment. St. Gregory, in one of his homilies, describes how one may "make use of the things of this world without being possessed by them." This is key to our understanding of poverty. To renounce "personal" possessions in exchange for life on a well situated country estate is not necessarily true poverty; once real estate enters in, the religious are in danger of becoming "personally poor but collectively rich." (Hall, p. 53)

The poverty we seek is poverty of spirit -- the ability to give up not only things, but ideas, notions and habits. It is not the lack of things, but the freedom to use the things of the world without fear of being possessed by them, because they are used in a spirit of detachment, a willingness to "give up" and "let go." The cloister is no sanctuary from possessiveness. As Merton points out, "contemplatives take a short view of their vocation, one that is almost 'materialis-

tic' (emphasis on walls, grilles, veils, withdrawal, mutism)." (CWA, p. 152) We would add to that list: rites, customs, habits, ceremonial practices, breviaries ... the "possessions" of the religious are insidious, and emotional attachment to these things is contrary to true poverty of spirit. As St. Francis said, "The spirit of the flesh. .. does not seek a religion and holiness in the interior spirit, but it wishes and desires to have a religion outwardly apparent to people. And these are the ones of whom the Lord says, 'Truly... they have received their reward.'" (Reg.prim., XVII)

Obedience

All religious know that obedience is the "hard one." This is because it directly faces the worst of all sins, pride. Poverty and chastity meet their hardest obstacle in the will -- and it is through obedience that the will is tamed, and aligns itself with God. We need not say any more about the Brotherhood's "interpretation" of obedience, because in our understanding of this vow we are absolutely "traditional." A brother vows obedience to "Jesus Christ as his only Lord and Savior, to the articles of faith contained in the Creeds of the church, to the rule of the Brotherhood, and to the Superior General and the masters appointed over him." (BSG Rule, I.3) The Brotherhood further "observes the Constitution, Canons, doctrine and worship of the Episcopal Church as the supreme authority under which it functions in obedience." (BSG Constitution, III)

True "Monastics"

The Brotherhood has been criticized for not "living in community," by which traditionalists mean living at least in twos or threes. The root of the word *monastic* means "alone," and so the earliest religious lived. The idea that religious must **live** under one roof is a later development, and goes against the common sense notion, "A house is not a home." Community spirit can transcend geography. If the eucharist teaches us anything, it is that the Body of Christ is not bound by time and space. To the liberated Christian no place is especially holy: Peter wanted to build booths on the mountaintop, but he didn't know what he was talking about. (Luke 9:33)

A cleric from a traditional community once said to us, "There's more to the religious life than wearing a habit." To that **we** say, "Amen."

Some More History

This detour into the philosophy of the Brotherhood was necessary in order to gain an understanding of events that took place in the years between 1969 and 1982. Some of these events came about through our own ignorance of the uncanonical standing of nearly all of the traditional "religious communities." This standing was obviously not something these groups were proud of, and only recently have they begun to mention it in print. To understand the history of the religious life in the Episcopal Church, and why traditional communities now feel free to mention this dark chapter from their past, we must backtrack to 1949, and the foundation of an organization which eventually persuaded the church to bring its canons into line with their practice.

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**"The Conference on the Religious Life in the Anglican Communion
in the United States of America and Canada"**

The Conference's avowed aim, at its foundation, was to "spread information about the religious life in the American church, to encourage its growth," provide for "mutual cooperation among religious themselves" and "foster an understanding between the communities and the church at large." (ARC, p. 34) In its educational function it has met with little success. It carries out this function largely by producing occasional directories which list the names of its members, and appearing in a booth at General Convention. Its attempts at encouraging growth are hardly likely to bear much fruit, since most of its members are declining. The Conference was of no help to the Brotherhood in its early years.

It is a sad commentary on the state of Episcopal religious life in general, and the Conference in particular, that the Brotherhood has been more enthusiastically received by Roman Catholic than Episcopal religious. For example: our rule was written in consultation with the Visitation Nuns (a cloistered order who nonetheless were supportive of our very un-cloistered ideas); many of our brothers belong to the National Assembly of Religious Brothers; and our superior general is the only non-Roman associate member of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. At social and liturgical events our Roman brothers and sisters welcome us with a warmth, affection and affirmation which is a striking contrast to the icy coldness with which some Episcopal religious still confront us (others have come to tolerate us, but few are openly affirmative). The Romans find our lifestyle fascinating, and see it as an exciting possibility for growth of the religious life.

However, when in our early years we sought membership in and support from the Conference, we were told that its constitution did not allow the Brotherhood to be a member. We were not informed as to precisely why, and never sought to raise the point of our own canonical status (since we assumed theirs was the same). We still do not know, and assume it has to do with our interpretation of the vow of chastity.

Behind the scenes, however, the Conference was active in another way, and at the General Convention of 1976 a substitute canon on the religious life was introduced and adopted. The Brotherhood of St. Gregory, at that time one of the few canonically recognized religious communities in the Episcopal Church, was not consulted nor even informed of this action.

The Spirit of '76

What were the changes in the canon submitted by the Conference? The major change, which allowed the previously unrecognized communities to retain their property, became the first section of the new canon: the community is allowed to hold "possessions in common or in trust." Celibacy is required, and "life in community" (which is not defined). Obedience is to the rule and constitution of the community -- no mention is made of the doctrine, discipline and worship of the church. nor of the Book of Common Prayer. Recognition is through a committee of the House of Bishops, rather than the diocesan, and a minimum of six professed members is required. The remainder of the provisions are essentially unchanged.

This is a canon that the Conference members (at least those with six or more members) could live with, and between 1976 and 1982, most of those who could be recognized finally took their place as religious orders in the Episcopal Church.

Where We Stood

The Brotherhood was in an unusual position at this point -- it had been granted canonical recognition (which could not be revoked); but what of any other community that might come along with similar "contemporary" ideas? The canon as it stood would render new foundations along these lines impossible. We felt, for the reasons stated above, that the requirement of celibacy is inappropriate in this church, but it seemed that there was little we could do, and we resigned ourselves to continue working in our own ministries. The Conference at this point dropped us from their listings of Religious Communities in the Episcopal Church (in spite of our canonical standing). Since we were still listed in the *Church Annual*, however, we did not deem it necessary to trouble the Conference further.

At this time we became aware of a group of religious sisters, who like us did not see marriage as an impediment to doing the Lord's work -- the Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit. Our mutual discovery was fortuitous (we saw their listing in the *Church Annual*). Sister Angela, the founder of the Worker Sisters, and our superior Brother Richard Thomas decided that we could not let matters rest in this state of suspended animation. At this point the Worker Sisters numbered about forty (there are now over a hundred) -- obviously a going concern! And so we began to think about submitting a further amendment to the canon on the religious life that would allow the option for either "traditional" or "contemporary" religious communities to exist. Sister Angela wrote a draft canon which was submitted to the House of Bishops Standing Committee on the Religious Life. This draft left the current canon essentially unchanged as the first section of the proposed canon. The second part of the proposed canon was similar in wording to the first, with the omission of the clause on "celibate life in community" and "possessions in common or in trust." Communities recognized under the first section were to be called "Traditional Religious Orders" and those under the second part "Contemporary Religious Orders." The Conference was unaware of this draft amendment until the beginning of the General Convention 1982.

Makes the Heart Sad

Imagine our surprise when we read the following in a recent publication of one of the Conference member communities, written by the prior of another of them: "... in 1982 a proposed revision to the canon was made, supported by the Conference membership which recognized the growth and development of religious communities other than those which were specifically monastic in character.... A second part to the canon was created for other Christian communities with the help of a Conference on the Religious Life task force working in cooperation with the House of Bishops Committee for Religious Communities."

In fact, not only was the Conference unaware of the proposed canon, but it was hostile to its introduction and passage. There were a series of private meetings by the Conference, to which Sister Angela

and Brother Richard Thomas were not invited. The representative of the community which printed the above article was not invited either, which may explain their innocence in printing it (it seems that this order is seen by some of the other Conference members as too "contemporary!"). But there is no excuse for the author of the article, and it is partly because of its publication that we are presenting this special report.

Days of animosity in the hallways of the convention center in New Orleans followed. The "old orders" didn't seem to understand that their part of the canon was unchanged, and that all we wanted was to introduce the possibility for canonical oversight of "nontraditional" communities. A quote: "Why do you want to change our canon?" Another, addressed by a sister of a large traditional community to Sister Angela: "Why don't you people just go away!?" After several days of this sort of behavior, the Conference was prevailed upon by the bishops' committee to sit down face to face with us and discuss our differences. We had a huge surprise in store for us. It seems, after all this anxiety, that what most upset the Conference members was the use of three words: traditional, contemporary and order. They didn't feel that we should call ourselves an "order"; they didn't like the implied value judgment in "traditional" and "contemporary." Our collective jaws dropped. In one of their closed door meetings the Conference members had decided to rename the two sections for "religious orders" and "Christian communities." While we were not particularly pleased with the title "Christian communities," which is somewhat ambiguous, in the interests of peace and harmony we agreed to these minor changes. The canon passed the House of Bishops unanimously; the bishops sang the doxology.

The Brotherhood reapplied for recognition under the new canon, although this was unnecessary, and was for the second time canonically established.

The Conference Again

In the same article quoted above, the prior states: "The Conference... seeks to help new groups in formation when asked to do so, whether they be monastic orders or Christian communities.- In fact, neither the Brotherhood nor the Worker Sisters have been asked to participate in the activities of the Conference. Their constitution still prohibits our membership. It strikes us as odd that we can be accepted as religious brothers by the Roman Catholics and not by the Conference. The questions that must be raised are: By what authority does the Conference operate? Who is the Conference to set its constitution against the canons of the church? And is the Conference actually able to carry out its work?"

Almost half of the members of the Conference are not recognized or recognizable under the canons. By what right do these individuals speak for the "religious life in the Anglican Communion in the United States and Canada"?

The time has come for the painful realization that the Conference, as currently constituted, has outlived its usefulness to the church at large, if it ever had any. We call upon the Conference to either rewrite its constitution to be in line with the canons of the church,

or to dissolve.. The Conference is to have its triennial meeting just prior to the General Convention. This is an opportunity for them to make these appropriate changes:

- 1) Membership of the Conference should consist of the senior member (superior, prior, moderator) of every canonically recognized religious order and Christian community, or their appointed delegate.
- 2) Representatives of newly formed or forming groups, or older communities now unable to meet the canonical requirements for recognition, should be allowed to participate as observers.

If unable to make these adjustments the Conference should be willing in the spirit of poverty and obedience to pass out of existence.

Renewal: Beyond the Necessary to the Possible

The state of the religious life in the Episcopal Church is clearly in disarray. Many of the religious orders are losing members through secularization, and the number of applicants is diminishing. Why has this happened? How can this course of events be changed?

It has been suggested that part of the decline among the women's religious orders is the opening of the presbyterate to women. It would seem that this might have some effect; but surely if the religious were doing their job of educating the church to the nature of the religious life, which is entirely different from the ordained ministry, the impact of this change would be less severe. Clearly education is a factor of major importance -- comprehensive sources of information must be available which describe in detail the lifestyles of the various communities.

The second point of importance is the lifestyles themselves. To quote Pope Paul VI, "The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time.... Let their founders' spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions -- all of which make up the patrimony of each institute -- be faithfully held in honor." (PC, 2) These three factors are key to the future of the religious life: the Gospel, the roots of the community, and the modern world.

In many communities the intentions of the founders have not been kept. As noted earlier, most of the religious communities in the Episcopal Church were founded as apostolic organizations devoted to the "corporal works of mercy" or to teaching and preaching. Unfortunately, many of them have given in to the "temptation of the desert" -- they have tried to become "monastic" and not only refer to themselves as such, but have given up their active ministries in order to retire to monasteries! Two women's orders originally devoted to inner city and parish work are now firmly planted on suburban estates, effectively closed off from apostolic work. An order founded in this century with the express purpose of maintaining and staffing a nursing home, first gave up nursing to become administrative, and is now trying to sell the nursing home in order to retire to the "monastic life" (their term). A largely clerical order of preachers has adopted "the Rene-

dictine rule," although they maintain several houses and travel about. Our only true monastic community has given up farming (manual labor was key to Benedict's concept -- *ora et labora* -- pray and work), while at the same time soliciting over five million dollars for building a new monastery to house more brothers. Almost a third of their community was secularized last year.

Some General Suggestions

We do not wish to make the picture appear entirely grim. There is hope in the recent activities of some of our religious communities. Some have been forced by circumstance to take a hard look at what they have been doing. Others perhaps need advice and direction.

It should be clear that the temptation to own and maintain property is one that should be resisted by religious communities. Several communities have found that they are unable now to maintain large houses built in their heydays -- houses now closed or sold, while the members have moved to former guest accommodations. Other communities have tried to maintain their properties by putting their members to work in the world. It is ironic that the very communities that ten years ago told us it was not possible for religious to work in the secular world now have members employed in nine-to-five jobs. But with the endowments and legacies of the Episcopal Golden Age drying up, there is not much choice if they are to maintain such properties. St. Francis was right to advise his brothers never to own such places!

If one side of renewal is a return to roots, the other is adaptation to the realities of the modern world. Some of these adaptations (becoming involved in secular employment) are happening by virtue of necessity. The papal decree calls for the re-editing of "constitutions, directories, custom books, books of prayers and ceremonies and such like" and the suppression of "obsolete laws." (*ibid.*, 3) As far as office books go, the church already has one -- the Book of Common Prayer, or the enriched Prayer Book Office, are suitable for use by religious with little or no further need for revision.

It is important, however, that adaptations not betray the most fundamental principles of the community's ethos. As Merton points out, there is a danger in thinking that "by throwing off the veil, running around talking to everyone, and getting themselves involved in every kind of active task" the monastic can find fulfillment. (*CWA*, p. 152) Those called to the contemplative life must find their renewal inwardly. Those called to celibacy should rejoice in this charismatic gift. And those whose communities were founded for active ministry need to get back into action!

What of the numerous small communities, those with fewer than six members? Here is some papal advice: those communities which are judged "not to possess reasonable hope for further development... should be forbidden to receive novices in the future. If it is possible, these should be combined with other more flourishing communities and monasteries whose scope and spirit is similar." (*PC*, 21) In the Episcopal Church, of course, the leaders of the communities themselves must make these decisions. It takes humility for members of a community to admit to the fact that they are not thriving, to dissolve their community and seek to join another with the same spirit.

14 Along these same lines, bishops and others in the position to do so should discourage the foundation of new communities with spirits essentially similar to those already in existence. "Otherwise communities may be needlessly brought into being which are useless or which lack sufficient resources." (ibid., 19) The same care must be taken with those who wish to become "solitary" religious. The House of Bishops has a standing policy discouraging such individuals from seeking to live the religious life alone and virtually unsupervised. This way is fraught with grave spiritual danger for the individual and those in authority. Unless adequate supervision can be maintained by the bishop personally or a spiritual guide of some experience, such persons should be encouraged to enter an established community.

The reading of the papal decree in its entirety (only 20 pages!) is heartily recommended to all. We have only touched on some of the major points here, and there is much to be gained from a careful study of this document, and to be learned from the experience of our Roman brothers and sisters who have been involved in this program of renewal for almost twenty years.

Lastly, and most importantly, is the Gospel. The religious must witness to the Christian faith in a special way; they must above all be credible in their avowal of the evangelical counsels: only then do they dare speak out.

Hopeful Signs

There are bright spots: the Society of St. Francis has begun a work in Brooklyn that is true to the Franciscan spirit. ++++ The Community of St. John Baptist is carefully examining its rule and constitutions, together with its founding community in England, seeking to adapt to changes in the world. Some of the sisters are once again becoming involved in city ministry, where they can be of great use. ++++ The defection of the superior of the Poor Clares may have opened to them the possibility of becoming the first order to follow what St. Clare wanted but the church wouldn't allow -- an apostolic ministry based on poverty. If instead they wish to be enclosed contemplatives, it might be better for them to join with an already existing community of that type. ++++ The Society of St. John the Evangelist has been consolidating its energies, and devoting more time to publishing -- this could fill a void in the church caused by the demise of Seabury Press.

Several other communities have continued to thrive -- in general they are the ones who have remained true to their foundations. Those apostolic communities who have fallen prey to the "temptation of the desert" should wake up to the dangers before it is too late. It might be as well for all religious communities to divest themselves of properties, or place them in trust with the church, in a spirit of devotion and faith.

Apology

We pray that anyone offended by anything we have said in this report will realize that it is not our intent to offend, but to inform. Some of the things we have said may cause hurt feelings, but we pray that those feeling hurt may accept correction with humility and repentance. If we are mistaken in any of our facts, we report them only as they

have been received by us from competent authorities; if there are any errors of fact in these pages we not only beg forgiveness but ask for correction. In addition, any comments addressed to us will be taken with great seriousness. What we seek is an opening of dialogue, and an end to the silence and division in the life of the church.

The Wounds of Christ

"And still our wrongs may weave thee now
New thorns to pierce that steady brow,
And robe of sorrow round thee." (Hymn 522)

The Risen Christ showed his wounded hands and side to the doubting disciples. One might say that it was their doubt that kept those wounds from healing, that kept that blood flowing. The Body of Christ, the church, is no less wounded by our doubts and frailties. The pride that causes division and dismay, the clinging to distinctions of human making, to customs of earthly origin: these are the nails and thorns that wound that already bleeding body. We appeal to our brothers and sisters, to the members of the Episcopal Church, and to all Christians, to embrace the only vocation which God wants us to undertake -- to become his children, loving one another as he has loved us. For where true love and charity are found, there is God.

"New Advent of the love of Christ,
Shall we again refuse thee,
Till in the night of hate and war
We perish as we lose thee?
From old unfaith our souls release
To seek the kingdom of thy peace,
By which alone we choose thee."
(Hymn 522)

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