

CONSECRATED LIFE IN AFRICA THE CHALLENGES OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Prof. Fr. Jacques SIMPORE
Ouagadougou – 10 October 2016

First of all, I would like to thank the General Consulta and Fr. Paul Ouedraogo, the Provincial Superior, who had trust in me and invited me to share my beliefs as regards life, faith, fear and hope. I trust in the Spirit and count on your indulgence.

Christ came into the world two thousand years ago and we have received him in Burkina Faso, not to any great extent, for just 116 years. In this third millennium, consecrated life in Africa and in other parts of the world has to face up to challenges, trials of every kind, but our hope is solid. Like Mary Magdalene in the early morning of the resurrection,¹ like the disciples in Emmaus with their burning hearts,² the special assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops proclaimed: ‘*Christ, our Hope, is risen. He has met us, has walked along with us. He has explained the Scriptures to us. Here is what he said to us: ‘I am the First and the Last, I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold, I am alive for ever and ever and I hold the keys of death and of the abode of the dead’.*’³

The African bishops of the synod stated in *Ecclesia in Africa* (hereafter *EA*): ‘we want to say a word of hope and encouragement to you, Family of God in Africa, to you, the Family of God all over the world: *Christ our Hope is alive; we shall live!*’⁴ Yes: Christ yesterday and today is always alive.

The subject that I will address is well described by the title: ‘Consecrated Life in Africa. The Challenges of the Third Millennium’. Before entering the analysis of this subject let us define briefly, first of all, religious life, in line with the approach of the post-synodal exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (hereafter *VC*). I would like to propose the following pathway of analysis: 1. The foundations of consecrated life in the approach of *Vita Consecrata* and *Ecclesia in Africa*; 2. consecrated people in Burkina Faso; and 3. the great challenges for consecrated life in our epoch.

1. The Foundations of Consecrated Life in the Approach of ‘Vita Consecrata’ and ‘Ecclesia in Africa’

1.1. The Christological and Trinitarian sources of consecrated life

The deliberations of the special assembly of the Synod of Bishops for African explained the approach of *Vita Consecrata* which I mentioned above: ‘Christ our hope is alive; we shall live!’⁵ In this statement we obtain the clear belief that at the centre of our lives there is Jesus Christ, that he is in us, and that he is walking with us. To evangelise is to

¹ Jn 20:16

² Lk 24:32

³ Ap 1:17-18; *Ecclesia in Africa* (*EA*), 13.

⁴ *EA*, 13.

⁵ *EA*, 13, 57.

proclaim with words and our lives the Gospel of Jesus Christ who was crucified, died, and rose again: the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Therefore, as *Ecclesia in Africa* argues, the new evangelisation should be centred round the encounter with the living person of Christ.⁶ In the same way, for *Vita Consecrata* the gospel foundation of consecrated life is to be looked for in the existential relationship woven between Jesus and some of his disciples during his journey on earth; in the search for the perfect life, abandoning the world, leaving everything, and offering one's own life at the service of God for the advent of the Kingdom of God and the advance of one's brethren; and in the imitation from near to hand of the form of life that Jesus chose for himself:⁷ 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me'.⁸ This form of *sequela Christi*, which has its origins in the Father, emerges as a call, an election and a mission. It has 'an essential Christological and pneumatological meaning'.⁹

It is certainly the case that this 'is an initiative coming wholly from the Father, who asks those whom he has chosen to respond with complete and exclusive devotion',¹⁰ but it is the Spirit which brings forth the wish for a full response. He accompanies the growth of this wish. It is he who shapes and moulds the spirit of those who are called, configuring them to the chaste, poor and obedient Christ.¹¹ Hence the Trinitarian dimension of consecrated life.

If one asked consecrated people to locate themselves in the Gospel, the icon that best illuminated the meaning of their specific vocation – without doubt – would be expressed by their passion for God and by their passion for humanity, using, respectively, the image of the Samaritan woman now thirsty for God and then the icon of the Good Samaritan who takes care with passion of the man who has been wounded.

If one examined the document *Vita Consecrata* to identify in the Gospel the icon that illuminates the meaning of this special vocation, we would be presented, without hesitation, with the image of the shining face of Christ in the mystery of the transfiguration.¹²

This is the same icon to which the whole of contemplative spiritual tradition refers – a tradition that links consecrated life to the prayer of Jesus on the mountain. The active dimension of consecrated life is rooted in the same image because a person cannot give what he or she does not fully possess. Just as Christ is the image of the Father, so a religious is called to be an icon of Christ. In prayer, a religious contemplates Christ and tries to resemble him; in his or her apostolate a religious tries to make Christ present by being his image. In this sense, we clearly see that *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Vita Consecrata* meet each other in the great subject of the centrality of Christ in the existence of consecrated people.

In reality, today, it is though the Church suggested to us the following: in this third millennium, servants of God centre yourselves increasingly in Jesus Christ. 'Make your life a long conversation with Jesus as he makes himself known in the Gospels. Do not skimp on time given to prayer, to meditation on the Word of God, sharing with your brothers and sisters

⁶ EA, 57.

⁷ VC, 14.

⁸ Mt 19:21.

⁹ VC, 14.

¹⁰ VC, 17.

¹¹ VC, 19.

¹² VC, 14.

this word that gives life'.¹³ To sum up, make Africa the 'second homeland of Christ' (Pope Paul VI).

1.2. Consecrated life: a sign of communion in the Church

From section 46 to section 62 *Vita Consecrata* speaks about consecrated life as a sign of communion in the Church: international religious institutes have the duty to nurture a sense of communion between peoples, races and cultures and to bear witness to it.¹⁴ For this reason, this document asks consecrated people: 'to be true experts of communion and to practise the spirituality of communion as "witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design";¹⁵ 'to be a leaven of communion at the service of the mission of the universal Church by the very fact that the manifold charisms of their respective Institutes are granted by the Holy Spirit for the good of the entire Mystical Body, whose upbuilding they must serve'; to be true co-workers of bishops in the harmonious development of diocesan pastoral care, according to the guidelines of *Mutuae relationes*; and to 'face in a creative way the challenge of inculturation, while at the same time preserving their identity'.¹⁶

In short, 'the consecrated life has not only proved a help and support for the Church in the past, but is also a precious and necessary gift for the present and future of the People of God, since it is an intimate part of her life, her holiness and her mission'.¹⁷ From this point of view, consecrated people are called as sons and daughters of the Church to be a sign of communion in a world that is lacerated by divisions and injustices, a sign of communion with each other, and a sign of communion for lay people. For this reason, the Church entrusts to consecrated people the task of developing the spirituality of communion at three levels: in their own institutes; in the ecclesial community; and in the world, in constant dialogue, cultivating the noble dialogue of charity.

After dwelling on the identity, the function and the role of consecrated people in the universal Church, with reference to *Vita Consecrata* and *Ecclesia in Africa*, we will now see the impact of these religious in the context of Burkina Faso.

2. Consecrated Life in Burkina Faso

First of all, let us pay tribute to all those consecrated people who have given their lives for the evangelisation of Burkina Faso from 1900 to today. I am referring to the first Missionaries of Africa (the *White Fathers* as they are commonly called), the founders of the Family-Church of Burkina Faso. We may also think of the women Missionaries of Our Lady of Africa (commonly known as the *White Sisters*) and all the Congregations that have followed their example. We may think, in particular, of the Superior Generals, the Provincial Superiors of the Province of Rome, and the Camillian missionaries who founded the Camillian Province of Burkina Faso. Superior Generals: Fr. Forsenio Vezzani, Fr. Enrico Dammig, Fr. Calisto Vendrame; Provincial Superiors of the Province of Rome: Fr. Andrea

¹³ Manuscrit de la Soeur Lorraine Casa, *Vie consacrée comme vie en dialogue*. Unpublished paper.

¹⁴ VC, 51.

¹⁵ VC, 46.

¹⁶ VC, 51.

¹⁷ VC, 3.

Cardone, Fr. Nicola Buccione, Fr. Renato Di Menna, Fr. Guido Rapposelli, Fr. Carlo Collafranceschi; Missionaries: Fr. Pasquale Del Zingaro, Fr. Giovanni Palombaro, Fr. Fernando D'Urbano, Fr. Celestino Di Giovambattista, Br. Giovanni Grigoletto; deceased Camillian religious from Burkina Faso: Fr. Alessandro Toè, Fr. Gilbert Compaoré, Br. Dimitri Evariste Dambre and all deceased Camillian aspirants and candidates; and all deceased men Camillians and women Camillians, the Daughters of St. Camillus.

I ask for a moment's silence from you for personal prayers for them. 'O Father, full of tenderness and mercy, we pray to you for all those who looked for you and served you in body and soul on the way of perfection and who now rest in you: may you be their reward'.

We cannot forget to thank God for the men and women Camillian missionaries who are still with us and embody the Gospel and the charism of St. Camillus: Fr. Andrea Amendola, Fr. Salvatore Pignatelli, Fr. Antonio Zanetti, Br. Vincenzo Luise, and Sr. Bartolomea.

In Burkina Faso who are the people who are commonly called consecrated? They are all those Christians who, through baptism, are consecrated to the Lord. Religious life is a special and particular way of living this baptismal consecration. Indeed, in the rite of religious profession the person officiating over the celebration says 'by baptism you are consecrated to the Lord; by a special title you commit yourself to following Christ'. This is why we say that every baptised person is consecrated. Secular priests, deacons, are consecrated not only by baptism but also by ordination and by their commitment to celibacy.

The term 'consecrated' in a very broad sense includes all baptised people, but in particular it is used to refer to those who are committed to following Christ through the practice of the evangelical counsels: the public vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, united to other forms of commitment, lived in a community or as an individual. In Burkina Faso there are various forms of consecrated life: religious of a contemplative life, such as monks and nuns, for example those in Koubri, Diabo, the Carmelites in Mondasso, and others...; institutes of apostolic life, such as the Jesuits, the Brothers of the Sacred Family, the SIC, the SAB, the FMM, and most recently, Notre Dame du Lac, the Sisters of Consolation, the SEM; societies of apostolic life, the Missionaries of Africa; secular institutes, for example the fraternity of the Resurrection (consecrated widows, *Caritas Christi*), the priests of Prado; associations of consecrated lay people: the missionary workers (*Eau Vive*), *les Claire Amitié*; and consecrated virgins, *les Évangélistes*...

All these forms of consecrated life are active in the local Church of Burkina Faso in the fields of catechesis, education, formation, instruction, health, silent prayer, social development...All of these institutes, through their diversity of charisms, cooperate with bishops, priests, and lay people of good will for the evangelisation of this country. But whatever their practical activity, their principal form of apostolate is the witness of their consecrated lives.

I do not want to go into the statistics in order to specify the number of these institutions in Burkina Faso or the number of consecrated people. What is certain is that almost 25% of the clergy of Burkina Faso is made up of priests who belong to institutes of consecrated life.

Consecrated people are at the heart of the ministry of the local Church in Burkina Faso. They teach, educate, train, provide care and work for social development in the name of Christ, of the Church, and for the Church.

In this third millennium, what are the dangers that threaten consecrated people? Which elements are their Achilles heel, weak points that could obstruct the harmonious development of their lives and their ministry?

3. The Great Challenges of Religious Life at the Dawn of the Third Millennium

We can see six principal challenges that consecrated people have to address in the third millennium. To these challenges every religious Congregation in Burkina Faso looks for solutions. Here I will only try to evoke the challenges that are posed to us. The *challenge of formation*: in this dynamic world of changing ideas and behaviour, what kind of formation should be offered to consecrated people so that they do not lose their identity? The *challenge of the evangelical counsels*: how should the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience be lived in a world that is increasingly secularised and disconnected? The *community of consecrated people is a cell of the Family Church in dialogue*: are individualism and the mass media capable of valuing this task? The *challenge of inter-ethnic community life*. The *challenge of inculturation*: how can international Congregations aculturate their charisms in a country and live in the present the ideal of life that was proposed in the past by their founder? And the *challenge of witness*: being the voice of *those without a voice*?

3.1. The challenge of formation

Today, more than ever before, the formation of young people and above all of religious raises various problems. How can they receive formation that directs them towards witness to Christ in a world that is no longer Christian? What civic, philosophical, theological and spiritual formation can be offered to them? How can ongoing courses of formation and updating be organised for religious who have been active for a long time in the field of ministry? There is a need for criteria for an authentic choice at the level of formation.

Our world also needs consecrated people who are specialised in some fields of the religious and ‘profane’-secular sciences: in both these fields our institutes need providers of formation for the men and women who are receiving formation, for teachers of the postulancy, of the novitiate, and of initial and ongoing formation.

But we have to pose some questions to ourselves. Do these men and women providers of formation love and cultivate a sense of belonging to their institutes? Do they really know the charism and the spirituality of their Congregations so as to be able to transmit it and provide formation to young people in the spirit of their founders? Did they live – at least for two or three years – experiences of ministry and apostolate that are specific to their institute before entering the field of formation? Do we really need a *piece of paper* to provide this service? At times, a young religious, after his studies, slams the door and goes elsewhere: who is to blame for this? Discernment is not always easy and can be a source of conflict within institutes. There are so many questions, so many difficulties and so many challenges: what should be done?

Those who do not risk, obtain nothing. Today we have specialisations within specialisations. Should we keep up with the world, applying to ourselves the same rhythm of the world, or do we prefer, with a false modesty, to give up? A consecrated person who is dead to the world, when he or she obtains a specialisation does not enter a competition for

diplomas: for a consecrated person specialisation should be a work necessity, a question of greater efficiency and competence in his or her ministry.

As the Second Vatican Council stated: in ‘individual institutes the formation of all the members is to be continued after first profession so that they lead the proper life of the institute more fully and carry out its mission more suitably’.¹⁸ This *Ratio Studiorum*, continued the *Code of Canon Law*, ‘is to be systematic, adapted to the capacity of the members, spiritual and apostolic, doctrinal and at the same time practical. Suitable degrees, both ecclesiastical and civil, are also to be obtained when appropriate’.¹⁹

We must, therefore, invest young forces in formation: today’s sacrifice is the wealth of the future because a well-trained person is worth three people who are not trained.

3.2. The challenges of the evangelical counsels

3.2.1. The vow of chastity

By the vow of chastity a religious consecrates his or her heart to live the purity of his or her mind, heart and body so as to have greater freedom to love God and everything that belongs to Him with an undivided heart. If a consecrated man dedicates his life to God in celibacy, this is to respond in an ever better way to a divine love that he cannot satisfy in any other way. It is clear that he does not have an arid, hardened and insensitive heart. He believes in love. He believes in the love that is open to the universal, open to everyone.

On the eve of her religious profession, the friends of a woman religious asked her: ‘Marie Pauline, you know each one of us has a fiancé. At twenty we are no longer little girls! But for you, who will be your life’s companion?’ And she answered: ‘You did not create me, Christ created me! I love him. He from whom I received my life: he will always be for me, day and night, the subject of my most intimate thoughts. In Him, for Him, with Him, I encountered love – that is everything’.

Many people do not believe in, or do not understand, the meaning of our celibacy in ‘an Africa thirsting for fertility’.²⁰ It is said that at the beginnings of religious life in Burkina Faso a young girl aged seventeen, who had been engaged since her childhood, fled from her home in order to become a sister. Two years after her flight, her mother braced herself, challenging her family, and went to visit her daughter in her convent. As soon as the postulant saw her mother she was very happy – that was normal. After their meal, the future woman religious accompanied her mother and visited the chapel. When her mother saw the Virgin Mary carrying the child Jesus in her arms, she began to weep: ‘My daughter, have a good look, look at your statue: your statue also has a child in her arms, now only you do not want children. Get your wits back, be reasonable again!’

People do not always understand the vow of chastity. In addition, the shallow and at times irresponsible behaviour of some consecrated people suggests that religious play at being hypocrites. We must recognise this challenge.

3.2.2. The vow of poverty

¹⁸ CCL, 659 §1.

¹⁹ CCL, 660 §1.

²⁰ Matumgulu Marcel, *Les consacrés de l’an 2000*. Unpublished manuscript.

With a gratuitous, free and detached heart, a consecrated man offers his own hands that are engaged in life. In this way he shows that the poverty that he has embraced is not the life of a lazy person; it is not a life of leisure but a life of work not only for ourselves but also, and above all else, for other people, for those in need and the poor. Poverty in itself is an evil, a lack because it makes man less a man. Man is deformed. Poverty and riches are the principal enemy of man in his search for God. Evangelical poverty, according to the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, leads to humility, to simplicity, appreciating small things, directing them and aiming them at the apostolate.

But what is the challenge of the vow of poverty for African religious? We could ask ourselves: in Africa, which goods can or should young candidates forgo before their religious profession? What is the meaning of the concept ‘forgoing-abandoning’? Could religious life not appear to some a form of promotion, given what is abandoned by religious vows compared to what will be obtained thereafter? Other practical questions are posed in various institutes: should religious who are on holiday have money in their pockets? How much money should they have? What form of transport should they use to move about? Does the institute have the duty to build a house for the family of a religious? What are the dynamics of the African family?

The danger for religious is having to live in their communities as places to ‘plunder’ for themselves, with the pretext of helping their families in an African sense. And yet we do not become religious in order to bring with us our families. It is certainly the case that a religious cannot ignore his family but the help that is given must be offered, in agreement with his Superiors, in a spirit of humility, of simplicity and of poverty.

When a community is erected in *deep* Burkina Faso, whatever is decided, a solid house of cement is built, there are forms of transport, and the standard of living of the religious will always be greater than the people who live in the same village. How can one speak about a vow of poverty, of voluntary forgoing, if these consecrated people already see themselves at the highest level of the common life of the people! The challenge is launched. Can one speak about the same form of poverty in Paris, in London, in India and in Peru as in Ouagadougou? As *Vita Consecrata* emphasised: ‘There are many communities which live and work among the poor and the marginalized; they embrace their conditions of life and share in their sufferings, problems and perils’.²¹

At the level of poverty one of the great challenges of the third millennium is the economic autonomy of the institutes in Africa. Western Europe has made great sacrifices to support us. But now, with the problems of Eastern Europe, the difficulties are many in number. ‘It is therefore urgent that the particular Churches in Africa have the objective of providing for their own needs as soon as possible, thereby assuring their self-sufficiency’.²²

Religious in Africa must not expect manna from on high. Rather, they should learn to become responsible. Were this not to happen, this dependency would create the temptation to live permanently above what they can afford and thus not to favour the management of the communities themselves. But how should they behave? Each institute must find its own strategies to maintain a balance without compromising its charism and its religious identity.

²¹ VC, 90.

²² EA, 104.

This is difficult because it requires discretion, even though it is the path to follow towards shared and balanced solutions.

3.2.3. *The vow of obedience*

A religious forgoes ‘himself’ in order to carry out the will of God through the guidance of his Superiors. Obedience requires that we have a clear vision of faith as regards our Superiors, and esteem, always in faith, for authority: ‘we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace amongst yourselves’.²³ Obedience helps us to adopt the attitude of Jesus and of Mary: ‘Lo, I have come to do your will’ (Heb 10:9); ‘I am the handmaiden of the Lord’ (Lk 1:38). Obedience, observes, *Perfectae Caritatis*, ‘far from lessening the dignity of the human person, by extending the freedom of the sons of God, leads it to maturity’.²⁴ We should never think in the following terms: ‘fortunately, we have Superiors who think for us!’ Superiors should never think for us! Like a brother or sister, a Superior helps you to interpret and discover the will of God for you. Religious, ‘under the motion of the Holy Spirit, subject themselves in faith to their superiors who hold the place of God. Under their guidance they are led to serve all their brothers in Christ, just as Christ himself in obedience to the Father served His brethren and laid down His life as a ransom for many’.²⁵

In reality, the challenge of obedience at the present time arises from a conflict between two models: the traditional African model, on the one hand, according to which authority has always had an important role in clans, in families and amongst the elders, but which in Africa as well, today, is losing ground; and, on the other, the *modern* model of criticism on all fronts and protest.

It is thus absolutely necessary to return to a renewed understanding of the theological and Christological meaning of obedience in religious life: the Superior who commands is Christ. A religious who obeys is also Christ himself. Everyone should see each other as Christ and act according to the supreme law of charity. The great challenge remains, therefore, the mentality of conversion. Obedience becomes difficult to live for a consecrated person if he or she has not understood that the model of obedience is not a human model – obedience must flow from the union of the will of Christ towards the Father.

3.3. *A community of consecrated people is a cell of the family-Church in dialogue*

The central idea of *Ecclesia in Africa* to give vigour to evangelisation is symbolised by the concept of the Church as a family. This symbol ‘emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust’.²⁶ Thus religious life should find its place and its role in the Family Church of God, making a great contribution in the field of solidarity, of dialogue and of forgiveness.

²³ 1Th 5:12:13.

²⁴ *PC*, 14,2.

²⁵ *PC*, 14.

²⁶ *EA*, 63.

‘Do not allow the African family to be ridiculed on its own soil!’²⁷ Just as the African family is to be saved, so must we save the community. The great challenge for a community is dialogue. In the view of *Ecclesia in Africa*, ‘Openness to dialogue is the Christian's attitude inside the community’;²⁸ ‘dialogue is the new name of charity’.²⁹ The worst offence for a fellow religious is to be ignored.

The religious of Burkina Faso of the third millennium are meeting the challenge of community life in order to give true value to evangelisation. Rather than fleeing from community, an attempt will be made to build a small *Bethany*. A community, says Jean Vanier, ‘is not a community when a majority of its members achieve a move from the community to me, but when I convert, moving from myself to the community’.³⁰

3.4. The challenge of inter-ethnic community life

A certain number of institutes of consecrated life have a life in common. Our fraternities want to make present in our world the union of charity which is the heart of the Trinity. And yet Africa is lacerated by multiple economic, political, ethnic...divisions. Life in common requires us to live together quite apart from our differences and oppositions. How will it be possible to be stronger than the spirit of the world by which the pressures of family, of history, and also of today's society, can enter our communities and divide us?

The challenge is to live together with the same love, making it visible from outside as well. The men around us need this witness.

3.5. The challenge of inculturation

‘The most urgent task’, says Father Sidebe Sempore, ‘is to create conditions so that the gospel, the whole of the Gospel, is rooted in hearts and our customs’.³¹ A bishop of Rwanda, before being executed during the slaughter of June 1994, confessed: ‘We made a mistake. Everything has to be redone, otherwise the Church will not have carried out her mission’.

Inculturation is often misunderstood. For some people, inculturation is placing culture to the fore, replacing Christian liturgies with local rites, with the establishment of one's own culture, with the justification of a purported Asian, American or European ‘morality’ in the Pacific or in Africa, according to the environment in which one finds oneself.

The process of the insertion of the Church in cultures requires a great deal of time – it is not a simple exterior adaptation. By inculturation ‘is meant the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through the integration of Christianity, of the various human cultures’.³² This integration must be experienced by the people of God who are called to dedicate themselves and their communities to creating a synthesis of the human sub-stratum with Christ.

²⁷ EA, 84.

²⁸ EA, 65.

²⁹ Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam* (6 August 1964), AAS 56 (1964), p. 639.

³⁰ Vanier Jean, *La communauté, lieu du pardon et de la fête* (Paris, Fleurus, 1979), p. 7.

³¹ P. Sidibe Sempore, *Perspective de l'après-synode*. Manuscript.

³² *Assemblée extraordinaire de 1985, rapport final*, II, D,4.

From this point of view, the Church embodies the Gospel in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples and cultures into her own community; she transmits her values, starting from the sound assumptions that are in them, renewing it from within. The challenge of inculturation in Africa lies in forming disciples of Christ who know increasingly fully how to assimilate the gospel message.³³

3.6. The challenge of witness: being the voice of those without a voice

The Church must continue to perform her prophetic role and be the voice of those without a voice.³⁴ When one speaks about evangelisation, declared the Synod for Africa, one does not exclude development. And when one thinks of development, one must think immediately of the *development of every person and the whole man*. Evangelisation is not only proclaiming the Good News. It also includes denunciation: ‘evangelization must denounce and combat all that degrades and destroys the person...But it should be made clear that proclamation is always more important than condemnation, and the latter cannot ignore the former, which gives it true solidity and the force of higher motivation’.³⁵ On the threshold of the twenty-first century, which is full of contradictions, how can consecrated people fight for the rights of man, of minorities, against torture, the death penalty, the principal endemic diseases, social injustice and arbitrary imprisonment? More specifically, how can consecrated people be the voice of those without a voice in Burkina Faso?

How can they push international agencies, NGOs and States to create solidarity funds for the vulnerable, the marginalised and those at risk, people with AIDS or chronic illnesses? How can they help orphans, people with handicaps, refugees, elderly people without resources? How can they promote the culture of life, combatting abortion and contraception? ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel’ (1Cor 9:16) proclaimed Paul of Tarsus. In this third millennium, consecrated people are called to act, to comfort, to heal, to listen...in front of their Teacher who whispers in their hearts: ‘you give them something to eat’ (Mt 14:16); ‘do not be afraid, I have defeated the world’; ‘they will change their swords into ploughshares’ (Is 2:4). No more wars! How can we promote and maintain peace and justice in the land of Africa, the cradle of *Homo Sapiens*?

These are some inevitable challenges. Are we ready to meet them? May the Almighty help us!

Conclusion

Servants of the mission of Christ, in the twenty-first century, there is always hope: ‘You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also *a great history still to be accomplished!* Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in

³³EA, 78.

³⁴EA, 70.

³⁵EA, 70.

order to do even greater things'.³⁶ There are still many challenges for consecrated people in Africa in the third millennium. One need only think of the missionary challenge, of the challenges of maintaining social works, of the mass media, of the social crisis, of the political changes that agitate African States, and of the goal of promoting the culture of life. It will not always be easy to find solutions because they require a deeper and shared analysis. In Burkina Faso we are going through the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the Camillians in Africa, with the challenges, the advances, the riches and the weakness of that presence. Going through the second part of the centenary will be complex in the same way as the first part of this century has been complex. It will involve many snares, many challenges.

In the final analysis, canon law says to consecrated people: the primary ministry of a religious lies principally in witness to his or her consecrated life, through prayer and penance.³⁷ *Vita Consecrata* recommends that religious should never separate the commitments of their lives from a life of intimacy with Christ, from conformity with him, and from knowledge of the One and Triune God.³⁸ Religious consecration is the total giving of oneself to God. It is like libation in traditional rights where we entrust water to mother earth in an irreversible way. We cannot give with the right hand and gather with the left hand; it is a total giving which has its requirements and its challenges.

What could be the image of a consecrated person at the dawn of the third millennium? One is dealing with a mature and responsible person, aware of his or her talents and limitations: a man or woman of faith and of hope; a man or woman of prayer and action. In his or her life and ministry, a consecrated person updates the charism of the founder of the institute. He or she is embodied in reality, has a scientific and professional training in the field of its charism, but he or she will remain simple and humble, always ready to learn new strategies for an updated service in order to respond in the best ways to the emerging needs of suffering man.

To end this paper, do you know why the water in the sea is salt water? A Hindu legend tells us the following: 'Once upon a time there was a puppet made out of salt who tried to meet the sea. He wandered around the plains, jumped in the valleys, climbed mountains, asking everyone that he met: 'I want to meet the sea! Are you the sea?' One day, when he had arrived at a large expanse of water that extended as far as the horizon he asked the eternal question: 'are you the sea?' And a voice said: 'if you want to meet the sea, go forward'. The puppet obeyed immediately and took three steps into the water. The toes of his feet and his ankles began to dissolve and to melt. Worried and in a state of panic, he asked his question again. And the voice replied to him again: 'if you want to meet the sea, go forward again, despite the challenges posed by your pain'. He took a step forward and suddenly a great wave swallowed him up. But before dissolving completely in the water he had time to say: 'now I understand. I am the sea'.

Passion for God and for humanity, like the puppet of salt of the Hindu legend, can be traversed only in a burning search for God, and in the evening of our lives we will also be able to say that we do not only belong to Christ – we have become Christ.³⁹

³⁶ VC, 110.

³⁷ CCL, 673.

³⁸ VC, 77,78,79,80,82,83.

³⁹ VC, 109.