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When we think of monks and nuns, i.e., those whom we call by the title Sister and Brother – we are often referring to a category of men and women, predominantly in the Catholic Church, who according to an ancient tradition have dedicated themselves to God by publicly professing vows. The vows are familiarly (not necessarily) three: poverty, chastity, and obedience. In the Catholic tradition the manner of life that comes with the public profession of these vows is called Consecrated life or Religious life, and its most familiar institutional form is Religious Orders. The members of Religious Orders are commonly referred to as Religious, and Religious may be distinguished according to specific affiliations: Benedictines (abbreviated: OSB), Dominicans (OP), Franciscans (OFM), Jesuits (SJ), and Salesians (SDB), to name but a few prominent exemplars. One of the most striking features of these groups is their commitment to live a common life, such that goods and meals are shared, and prayers recited together with regularity and formality.

Some of the men within Consecrated life may also receive the sacrament of Holy Orders, and for this reason, it is not uncommon to know deacons, priests, and bishops (members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy) who are also Religious. Moreover, some of the tasks undertaken by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, such as spiritual counselling, distributing Holy Communion, visiting the sick, working in departments of the Roman Curia, are shared with Religious, be they men or women.

Consecrated life distinguishes itself from other ecclesiastical institutions on the basis of its form of life, as described above, and the ends to which this form is directed. The first end is evangelical: to model concretely the life of Jesus, who was poor, obedient, and chaste, and by this means to remind the Church that the way of life taught by Jesus is a paradigm for yesterday, today, and forever (cf. Heb.13, 8). The second, following from the first, is eschatological: Religious are meant to be signs or pointers of the Kingdom of Heaven, toward which everyone is destined.

My purpose in the following pages will be to address the problem of vocational fragility in Consecrated life, particularly in the early stages of commitment. I am writing from the standpoint of one who is well acquainted with Religious Orders, with the contemporary issues facing Consecrated life, and with the conviction that Consecrated life is an indispensable facet of the Church's life. I am equally convinced of the role and importance of institutions in perfecting masters and training novices in the tradition of a community. The concern I wish to bring to the table, in light of these convictions, is the increased fragility of Consecrated life relative to the rapid expansion and steadfast commitment for which it was known only a few decades ago.

Fragility literally describes something as breakable and implies need of special care. In recent times, predominantly in the modern West, the term has been used by spiritual directors and seminary personnel to characterize lifelong commitments (e.g., marriage, priesthood, Consecrated life) which have been marked by high levels of indecision and impermanence. More specifically, fragility has been presupposed of a large number of young Religious who leave their Orders, or in cases which, while not resulting in defections, seem troubled by uncertainty or straddled between different options.

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In identifying the causes of fragility, three accounts have come to dominate: theological, psychological, and sociological. These accounts have proffered a *scientific* way of calibrating the problem with recourse to hard data: gesturing at various kinds of spiritual negligence, psychological limitations, and shifting social trends. And these data often have been used to buttress certain critiques of modern Western society, such as those which claim that today's young people are sloughing off responsibility, obligations, and commitments once held sacred. But while the tune of these critiques is by now familiar (perhaps not entirely without justification), it would be a mistake to think that they, or the hard facts, tell the whole story of fragility. The problem with recurring to scientific accounts alone – that is, in viewing fragility from the standpoint of the spectator looking upon the world – is that the picture of today's vocations risks being totalized and depersonalized. The human person is sacrificed to the "they" who are critiqued, and the individual is evacuated of anything remarkable or "traumatizing" that would make him or her also the object of admiration, the breath (*spiritus*) of new life in the institution.1

The point I want to argue is that there is an unarticulated background at work with what some people are calling fragility, and that the picture changes when the background is brought to the fore. The picture (not of fragility!) puts us in view of the humanity of the other and provides us with a basis for ethically underpinning social interaction within and administration of ecclesiastical institutions. As long as this background remains unarticulated, the story of fragility results as incomplete and what we say and do about it risks being misconstrued.

In order to bring this background into view, I will draw from Charles Taylor's work of retrieval in *Sources of the Self* and *The Malaise of Modernity* through which the importance accorded to questions of identity or selfhood are seen in connection to a set of moral requirements which arise from the standard of being true to oneself: i.e., from the ethic of authenticity.2 Taken from this angle, a background should emerge for understanding fragility as a tension arising between the moral ideal of what it means to be true to oneself, on one hand, and the requirements incumbent on an institution (e.g., Religious Orders, the Church, marriage and family) for discharging its proper functions in society, on the other. By way of conclusion, I hope to offer some lines of thought concerning the conditions necessary for mediating these competing areas of interest and investment, and thus suggest a logic for strengthening the viability of vocational commitment as a personal response to an ideal given by Christ, lived in community, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The synoptic Gospels offer an obvious starting point for framing vocational fragility.3 In the story of Christ's meeting with the young man, when the answer to the question: "What must I do to merit eternal life?" results in Christ's instruction: "go, sell everything you have, and give to the poor … ; and come, follow me," we learn that the man goes away sad and heavy of heart; for he was rich and could not bring himself to part with everything he owned (Mk 10:17-22, Mt 19:16-22, Lk. 18:18-23).4 We hear of others who wish to follow Jesus, but who seek at the same time to maintain the standards of everyday comfort, or to fulfill cultural obligations, or to maintain familial ties. The cost of discipleship, in Christ's own words, is unequivocal: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:57-62). Indeed, leaving behind one's treasure in order to follow Christ – be it houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands (Matt. 19:29) – seems to be the standard test of discipleship. And the standard response of the disciples whose faith it put to the test tends to be tepid and timorous – as we find with Peter's denial (Matt. 26:69-75, Mk. 14:66-72, Lk. 22:56-62, Jn. 18:25-27), the disciples' inability to keep watch in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:40, Mk. 14:37-41, Lk. 22:45-46), and Thomas' notorious doubt (Jn. 20:27).

While Sacred Scripture warns that the divine calling to discipleship may be submitted to verification – "as gold that is tested by fire" (4Exra.16; cf Sir. 2) – and while pusillanimity and humiliation are often more the outcome than courage and heroism, the lesson which has repeated itself through the ages – to the ancient Israelites and then to the disciples of Jesus – has been unequivocally to trust in God's mercy, to derive strength from one's trials, to hope beyond hope that all might be redeemed and remade according to God's plan of salvation. (This puts me in mind of a vision of Julian of Norwich in which the Lord says: "'Sin is needful, but all shall be well. And all shall be well. And all manner of thing shall be well'…")[5] Doubt, fear, faltering, even sin do not offer a sufficient basis for abandoning the call of discipleship. Rather, the urgency of evangelization, the *kerygma* itself, demands that efforts be made to shore up commitment and resolve.

With this lesson in mind, a strict correlation could not be made between the temptation to look over one's shoulder in longing for the life one has left behind and actually lacking the requisite aptitude for Consecrated life. This is certainly the perspective taken on defections in *Religiosorum Institutio* (1961);[6] however, in the historical context in which this document was drafted, the matter of imputing moral culpability for defections on major superiors and formation personnel was of far greater interest than examining more deeply the possible causes.[7] Defections were seen plainly as a matter of spiritual negligence: either there was no vocation to begin with, or if there had been, someone was to be held accountable for its floundering.[8] On this account, recurring causally to fragility might have seemed a ruse of moral lassitude, or an incomprehensible trivialization of the indispensable process of verification which allowed that some people would justifiably leave, whether by their own reckoning or by proactive instruction of their superiors.

The possibility of interpreting one's vocational crisis otherwise, say through the lens of fragility, required that social and human conditions be taken into account in such a way as was only prepared for by The Second Vatican Council and particularly by *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). With *Gaudium et Spes* the fact was fully acknowledged that the conditions for Religious belief and practice no longer obtained as before. After years of entrenchment against modernism (marked by interdicts, censorship, and excommunications),[9] the Church turned a sympathetic regard on the "troubled and perplexed" condition of the modern world and adopted a stance of "solidarity and respectful affection for the whole human family."[10] With the Gospel in hand, the Church invited itself to become a partner in dialogue with humanity about all the different problems and questions concerning "current trends in the world, about [man's] place and […] role in the universe, about the meaning of individual and collective endeavour, and finally about the destiny and nature of man."[11] On this account, it made sense to talk about fragility as a matter of concern not only in relation to Consecrated life and priesthood, but in relation to the value of the human person, the sanctity of marriage, the role and importance of the family, indeed, of the Christian calling itself.

In light of the Church having achieved this compassionate regard *en face* of the modern predicament, subsequent endeavours to adapt Consecrated life, initiated under the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965), "in accordance with the needs of our age …, animated by a renewal of spirit," soon came to regard the problem of defections differently: modern social and psychological circumstances were brought to bear on the exigencies of Religious life, and the force of seeing the problem of defections through the lens of *Religiosorum Institutio* – solely as one of moral negligence and irresponsibility (on whatever side this might fall) – was lessened.

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By contrast, *Renovationis Causam* (1969), in harmony with the compassion of *Gaudium et Spes*, recognized that "[t]he youth of today who are called by God to the Religious state are not less desirous than before, rather they ardently desire to live up to this vocation in all its requirements, provided these be certain and authentic."[12] So, if the burgeoning vocation crisis was to be addressed with any greater precision it would be in terms of appreciating fragility as a bi-product of new social pressures. But it was not just that the cultural revolution of the 1960s – sex, drugs, and rock and roll – made it more difficult to cultivate and care for vocations (even after vows!), but that, at the level of freedom and responsibility, a proper grounding was lacking for youth to face these pressures with equilibrium. *Renovationis Causam* framed the problem in terms of maturity: "Most of the difficulties encountered today in the formation of novices are usually due to the fact that when they were admitted they did not have the required maturity."[13] On this account, instead of turning vocations away, the entire formation cycle was to be adapted to the "mentality of younger generations and modern living conditions," facilitating the attainment of human and spiritual maturity in stages.[14] This did not necessarily demand that "the candidate be … able to measure up immediately to all the demands of the Religious and apostolic life of the Institute"; but there had to be a sufficient basis for expecting that the demands of Religious life could be taken up eventually after some initial guidance with serenity.[15]

Restructuring initial formation to provide personal guidance meant thinking in terms of categories such as Christian Formation (meeting Jesus of the Gospel), Social Adjustment (preparation for the vows and community life), and Development of Human Values (addressing the human and emotional maturity of the candidate).[16] The specialized nature of these tasks, particularly the third (concerning psychological maturity), could not be met entirely in-house by formation personnel, or naively presumed of the community, or seen as contingent on the agreeability of the environment and its distance from "metropolitan temptations"—the avoidance of which had been the motivation for situating novitiates in the countryside. Thus, the human psychological sciences were sought more regularly and with less prejudice—at least officially.[17]

Today, most if not all Religious orders and dioceses state in their official formation guidelines that psychological resources, where necessary and deemed helpful, be drawn upon to assist with the needs of formation, be this in the initial stages or afterward. The degree to which this leads to an aptitude for Religious life varies from case to case. And thus, some people may be deemed unsuited on a psychological basis. In order to facilitate assessments at this level, a number of Orders, with the help of psychologists, have developed a checklist of *positive and negative criteria* or *counter-indications*, which, being adapted to the requirements of different apostolates, identify situations and attitudes which raise questions or doubts regarding vocational suitability or exclude the possibility of Consecrated life.[18]

But the assessment of the candidate's affective and emotional maturity presupposes an immanent framework of intricate psychological influences, such as family relations or exposure to violence and sex or the circumstances of childhood rearing. On this account, the constitutive background of one's personal history determines where the question of adaptability to Consecrated life may be problematic, and can be weighed with a view to anticipating the likelihood of psychological integration and the chances of success .

And yet, a condition of fragility persists. This is known statistically.[19] It is known also from reports given by the major superiors of Religious Orders.[20] Indeed, the very fact that the term fragility (or its equivalents has entered common reflection on the pastoral care of vocations, gestures at its validity also prior to statistical research: fragility captures what spiritual directors, seminary rectors, and novice masters have commonly come to regard as characterizing the condition of a new generation of young

Religious. The worry expressed here is not over the small percentage of Religious who leave on account of having verified through experience that their vocations genuinely lie elsewhere. This has always happened. The cases crying out for an account are of another type: those in which the conflicted discernment of the young person shows up as an anomaly against the positive signs of a vocation. This is what formation personnel have been trying to explain by recurring to an immanent psychological background; and that is why one response to the anomaly of enduring fragility has been to tighten the screws on the initial assessment. The puzzle is that while the maturity of the Religious may be consistent with the requirements of Religious life, and the positive signs of a vocation be amply present, a state of fragility still characterizes the vocation. Why? Moreover, there is a limit to how far any assessment can be taken in the first instance (be it psychological, spiritual, physical, or otherwise) before it becomes virtually impossible for anyone to enter a Religious Order – and everyone recognizes this.

In order to find a way of completing or mediating the psychological picture of fragility, some have looked for its roots in the dominant social and cultural ideologies of our time. An early articulation of this attempt can be found in *Gaudium et Spes,* where the predicament of human beings in the modern world (viz., at grips with questions of identity, the meaning of suffering and evil, the nature and destiny of man, the purpose of human existence) is understood in light of the speed of progress, patterns of consumption, the abandonment of older lifestyles, etc.[21] In other words, the conditions which obtain for Religious belief and practice (including the sources of atheism and secularism) are explained in relation to exogenous factors which shape mentalities, moral attitudes, and self-understanding. On this account, fragility is no longer understood *only* in terms of one's immanent psychological background, such as one's troubled family background. Rather, the breakdown of the family is on the same level as vocational fragility; and the sources of both can be understood in terms of social change. The social sciences have become pivotal to how Religious Orders frame fragility and in what they see themselves as being able to do about it.

In a recent letter on vocational fragility, Rev. Francesco Cereda, SDB, General Councillor for Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco,[22] frames fragility according to a familiar characterization of social change which he labels *postmodernity*: The dominant individualist, consumerist, relativist culture of today – marked by constant transition and rapid change, eradicated from tradition, lacking a common moral grounding, and enjoying the security of affluence – has had a concomitant effect on clear thinking, self-giving, Religious faith, the acceptance of responsibility, and, ultimately, vocational perseverance.[23] The problem of vocational fragility (or the breakdown of the family), finds its roots in a state of affairs where people, especially young people, "live in a way that is disjointed or conditioned by what is in fashion; this weakens them and leads to even more inconsistency, incoherence, dissatisfaction, instability, superficiality.[24] This position is strengthened all the more when held against other contemporary societies (e.g., Africa, India, and Islamic societies), on one hand; and an earlier, more exigent age (e.g., the era before World War II), on the other.[25]

Now the tune of Cereda's concern, audible in other quarters of the Church, is by no means the lament of a Catholic outlook alone. Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind* sounds the same alarm.[26] The crux of the argument assumes that today's youth are under the spell of a facile *relativism* – rooted in a kind of individualism – which amounts to: (i) the right to chose for themselves their own pattern of life; (ii) the right to decide in conscience what convictions to hold; (iii) the right to determine the shape of their lives in a whole host of ways that their ancestors could not control.[27] A culture defined along these lines is worrisome to Cerea and Bloom (and many others besides[28]) for fear that individualism (self-centeredness and the lack of shared values) will keep young people from "an awareness of greater issues which transcend the self:" and that this will result in dire consequences for institutions.[29] Even where

exception to this rule is taken by the generosity of many young people who invest themselves in peace-and-development projects (e.g., The World Youth Alliance, Doctors Without Borders, and *L'Arche*), or who participate in enthusiastic spiritual movements (e.g., World Youth Day, Communion and Liberation, Campus Crusade for Christ); or who follow exigent spiritual paths (e.g., *Opus Dei*, *Regnum Christi*, the Tridentine Liturgy), the force of the argument suggests that "there is no moral ideal at work here, or if there is, on the surface, it is a screen for self-indulgence."30 As Cereda puts it in reference to the present generation of young Catholics: in their search for novelty, marked by emotions such as "I feel" and "I want," it follows that

> *Religious experience* … becomes the search for the feel-good factor about oneself and for highly emotional experiences. In general Religious formation makes little impact and does not involve the person in the depth of his being. Each one remains self-centred, convinced that everything can be easily achieved on the basis of personal prestige and possessions, and not with effort and perseverance. Then, as a result of ethical relativism, shared values do not exist.

> This has a knock-on effect on civil, ecclesiastical and Religious institutions, which, in addition to being weak and not very attractive because of changed times, are no longer popular nor appreciated, not trusted nor referred to.31

With all that might be said about the rise of new Religious Orders and the fervour of Lay Movements, on one hand, there is the worsening problem of ongoing discernment and unsustained commitment, on the other. Thus, it is not inconceivable that Cereda's harsh critique of modern Religious experience captures some – even much – of what may be going on. It also seems that his social-scientific version of post modernity does not take into account its moral sources; and for this reason Cereda's story is unable to posit an outcome other than the slide to subjectivism and atomism it criticizes. But I want to argue that the slide is not ineluctable; that there is an alternative. A consideration of the sources of post modernity reveals that there is a background picture, a moral ideal, so far unveiled, which motivates young people to take up the exigent paths of Religious life and experience that they do.32 Subjectivism and atomism are its debased forms; but the moral ideal itself is precisely what needs to be taken into account if (a) we are to have a fuller appreciation of vocational fragility, and if (b) we are to consider the future and viability of Religious institutions in light of that to which the ideal enables them to aspire.

What is the basis for invoking a moral ideal at this point? In other words, in what sense is a moral ideal unaccounted for in the story of fragility given above according to Sacred Scripture, or the human and social sciences? To some extent, the occurrence of a background prior to and informing one's choice and action is already presupposed in the other accounts. This background is explained in terms of supposedly harder facts. As we saw above, these are: (a) showing recalcitrance before the Divine Calling, (b) shouldering the burden of psychological baggage, and (c) being driven ineluctably by social forces. And, of course, where the opposite holds, the basis for the positive criteria emerges: (i) docility before the Divine Calling, (ii) psychological maturity, and (iii) immunity from the tainting effects of post modernity. Now, none of these is to be excluded from a full account of fragility, nor should any one operate in an exclusionary way without the possibility of overlap. But even so, these accounts do not explain how a vocation can find itself struggling to maintain higher ground over another calling, a good, demanding recognition – the demands of which are felt on the same level as those of the vocation.

To be sure, the conflict experienced between two perceived goods is as old as the fall from innocence itself. What is new today is that people no longer approach this tension with the worry of divine retribution, or any other category through which it would be considered better to err in fidelity to the

vocational commitment than to err in pursuit of some other possibility or goal that is in some sense authenticating. What is new today is that the decision comes to be based on an inner sense of what it is more right to do, i.e., in terms of what one feels *called* to do. This holds true for other vocations as well. Taylor observes: "it is not just that people sacrifice their love relationships, and the care of their children, to pursue careers. Something like this has always existed. The point is that today people feel called to do this, feel they ought to do this, feel their lives would be somehow wasted or unfulfilled if they don't do it."33

When Taylor considers the sense of calling behind these choices, he uncovers a moral ideal. By moral ideal he is underscoring the standard by which people evaluate what is better or higher, and presuppose what is more desirable. This ideal is the ethic of authenticity: referring to decisions which are based on some sense of what it means to be true to oneself. Authenticity is what is being invoked when we say we are called to follow certain paths. At the same time, many examples of abandoned commitments today are representative of a debased form of this ideal. But it need not be the case that individualism in its strivings for authenticity narrow its capacity to think beyond itself.34

In other words, I want to suggest that the slide into atomism is not the only way the importance we place on the individual has to end; that authenticity is the valid form of this consideration; and that it should be taken seriously because it makes a difference to vocations and to the viability of institutions.

In order to make this point, it is important to appreciate how today our decisions and actions have come to rest on the axis of choice, and that for our pre modern ancestors this was not so. Our premodern ancestors had little say in how their vocations were decided. One was either born into one's station (knight, labourer, nobleman, etc.), or otherwise one was given by one's parents to a monastery in exchange for a divine favour, or sometimes one was inducted into clerical life to be schooled. The exceptional cases in which one did break from the pre-established order in order to follow a Divine Calling was not tantamount to challenging that order; nor would it have been entirely comprehensible in our modern sense of acting from personal conviction. By way of example, St. Francis of Assisi divested himself of his aristocratic heritage (quite literally) in order to don the garb of poverty not from a gradually acquired sense of what was more meaningful for him; rather, his action was a matter of conversion (metanoia), falling quite suddenly on the heels of Christ speaking to him from the crucifix in San Damiano. The Divine Calling for St. Francis was not the result of an unarticulated inner sense of what obtained for deciding and acting (which is what we invoke in vocational discernment today); it was a command he received from Christ.

To the extent that it is not entirely disconcerting for us to think of a vocation as a matter of obedience to a God-given command, it is in fact still possible to use this phraseology even today. Kierkegaard, a man less modern than ourselves, still shuddered at the thought of it in *Fear and Trembling*, and could not fathom its possibility without first eulogizing the dreaded drama of Abraham offering his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. Similarly, we today are a long way off from Anselm's *credo quia absurdum est* on matters of vocational discernment. There is a crucial difference which has to be appreciated if our modern culture of discernment is to be seen in its connection with vocational fragility; or if that which appears to be the lack of resolve or the fear of self-denial in today's young people is to lead to framing the challenges facing Religious life with greater clarity. The resoluteness of our premodern ancestors, described above, arises before "the growth of a rich vocabulary of interiority, an inner realm of thought and feeling to be explored. This frontier of self-exploration has grown through various spiritual disciplines of self examination, through Montaigne, the development of the modern novel, the rise of Romanticism, the ethic of authenticity, to the point where now we conceive of ourselves as having inner depths. We

might even say that the depths that were previously located in the cosmos, the enchanted world, are now more radically placed within."[35] This appeal to inner depths carries us out of the world where what obtains spiritually derives from "purposive forces already in nature," into a context that "puts a premium on constructive action, on an instrumental stance towards the world."[36] The emphasis in Christianity, then, begins to crystallize around ordinary life – the life of production and reproduction, work and love. Ordinary life inculcates new disciplines which, in the context of the present discussion, are seen in a variety new ecclesial movements which bring together laity and Religious, families and celibates, men and women, contemplatives and actives under one roof to live the Gospel in some manner of shared experience, with accents on family spirit, spiritual friendship, and social outreach. The thought of the monastic ideal becoming incarnate in ordinary life, as a leaven of Christian hope and love, holds remarkable appeal for young people today.[37] It brings one to posit the wild analogy of St. Benedict in Greenwich Village.

How does all this change the story of fragility?   It places a great deal of importance – from the very first moment of discernment – on a personal sense of fulfilment. This ideal survives today as the legacy of a certain Romantic expressivism in which moral importance was accorded to the idea that each person was the artist of his or her own life. Today the ideal comes to us in the ethic of authenticity and takes the following formulation: "Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own."[38] Expressivism today means listening to one's inner depths in order (a) to recover what corresponds in thought and action to one's personal sense of self, and (b) to bring this into some kind of embodiment, to externalize it for all others to see and recognize. We do not need to recur to Walt Whitman in order to find this ethic at work. To a great extent, in the popular imagination, it has been attributed anachronistically to St. Francis of Assisi (although we are now in a better position to see the limits of this reading, as well as to anticipate the debased forms and fragmentation into which this ethic can slide). Every ideal has its debased forms; but there is no sense in which fear of these dangers should preemptively exclude expressivism from modern embodiments of Catholic Christianity. It is a powerful ideal in the spirituality of young people today on which even Pope John Paul II draws when considering the pastoral care of vocations:

> This is what is needed: a Church for young people, which will know how to speak to their heart and en kindle, comfort, and inspire enthusiasm in it with the joy of the Gospel and the strength of the Eucharist; a Church which will know how to invite and to welcome the person who seeks a purpose for which to commit his whole existence; a Church which is not afraid to require much, after having given much; which does not fear asking from young people the effort of a noble and authentic adventure, such as that of the following of the Gospel.[39]

Expressivism and the accent on ordinary life have become part of the way modern Catholic Christianity represents itself to itself, both in lay movements and in a variety of new embodiments of Consecrated life. Even more striking is the fact that a whole slew of recently canonized saints captivate the imagination not only for their virtue and miracles, but for the ordinariness of their lives (e.g., think of Pier Giorgio Frassati's alpine skiing or Mother Teresa's temptations to atheism).

Thus, authenticity is a moral ethic with a definite consequence on vocational discernment and on modern Religious belief and practice. To this end, Taylor is perhaps right: "What we need is neither root -and-branch condemnation nor uncritical praise; and not a carefully balanced trade-off. What we need is a work of *retrieval*, through which this ideal can help restore our practice."[40] I have felt the better part of this retrieval in the more capable hands of Professor Taylor. What I have tried to suggest is that the retrieval in question anticipates a logic by which to safeguard the role and importance of institutions,

on one hand, and the means by which the ethic of authenticity can take shape, as an animating principle without fragmentizing community or the mission, on the other.

The role and importance of Religious Orders is to help accomplish the work of salvation in the world.[41] This goal depends on the flourishing of its members. In the past, when tension arose between the individual and the institution, it was wondered whether this flourishing was best achieved by heavy handed governance or by unrestrained freedom. Neither of these has proven to be helpful as a viable logic for flourishing. It seems a third possibility has yet to be explored where both governance and freedom abide as co-principles, but where the limit of either one or the other requires a mediator. Here there is need of further philosophical enquiry. The sources of Consecrated life recovered at the Second Vatican Council can only realize their potential within the culture of authenticity if there is (1) a recovery in ethics of a shared moral sense of the good, a common object of love, in relation to which members of a community recognize themselves and generate self-understanding, and (2) a willingness to consider what it means to place oneself in ethical relation to the other person in light of this love-generating object before pressing forward with pragmatic exigencies – even when these exigencies are tied to the urgencies of evangelization.[42] On the theological plane, a constellation of questions and challenges arise from these two points concerning how to organize the relationship between the institutional Church and the charismatic element within the Church, which will likely keep theologians occupied for years to come.

Still, some guiding principles are already within view. In an article on the relationship between "institution" and "Spirit" (i.e., the hierarchical and the pneumatological elements in the Church), Josef Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) cautioned against too great an emphasis on pastoral planning and organization *en face* of the renewal of the Church represented in ecclesial movements and new orders. Ratzinger's caution in fact mirrors my own apprehension about shaping religious orders around exigencies rather than the gifts of the Spirit embodied in the men and women who are the life by which they live. The point I wish to underscore from Ratzinger's article is the dual importance of an individual's participating in the forms of life of a community, on one hand, and the community's remaining opened to new forms of life proposed by the Spirit, on the other. Ratzinger's words, quoted below, are directed to the movements; but they can easily be extended to new orders, and, on my view, to young members of religious orders and their superiors. He writes: "While it is necessary to remind the movements that – even though they have found and pass on the whole of the faith in their own way – they are a gift to and in the whole of the Church and must submit themselves to the demands of this totality in order to be true to their own essence. *But the local churches, too, even the bishops, must be reminded to avoid making an ideal of uniformity in pastoral organization and planning. They must not make their own pastoral plans the criterion of what the Holy Spirit is allowed to do: an obsession with planning could render the churches impermeable to the Spirit of God, to the power by which they live.*"[43]

As it is evident from Ratzinger's caution that there is need of further theological work in the moral shaping of the Christian community. Perhaps this can be profitably accessed anew by turning to friendship—a long neglected theme of theology;[44] for friendship, a central principle of Christianity – reflected in the Trinity, the Communion of the Saints, the history of the early Church, and in the intrinsic structure of being, namely, reciprocity – is equally crucial to the ethic of authenticity. In Taylor's words, "in the culture of authenticity, relationships are seen as the key loci of self-discovery and self-confirmation. Love relationships are not important just because of the general emphasis in modern culture on the fulfillment of ordinary life. They are also crucial because they are the crucibles of inwardly generated identity."[45] Some of what Taylor is gesturing at, is already acknowledged in the renewed

emphasis on community life expounded with exemplary eloquence in Fraternal Life in Community and Vita Consacrata.46 With friendship ethically underpinning human relations – be it by fostering relations of the heart (cf. St. Augustine, J. H. Newman), or by 'seeking the face of the other' (cf. Levinas) – one is well removed from the standpoint of the spectator looking upon the world; one is much better positioned to recognize through the particularity and incommunicable depths of the other person the Spirit moving through and renewing – not sacrificing – institutions.

In the future, perhaps the dreams, hopes, and desires of young Religious and the personal gifts with which the Holy Spirit has endowed them, on one hand, and the role and importance of the institutions and the structures of authority, on the other, may be seen less in tension, and more as overlapping. Weighed down by the pragmatic exigencies of older structures and the dwindling number of Religious and clergy, it is a possibility we have only begun to explore. *Veni Sancte Spiritus …*

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1. The term "traumatizing" in relation to human identity occurs in the later writings of Emmanuel Levinas. See also: Simon Critchley, "Leaving the Climate of Heidegger's Thinking" in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, eds., (CambridgeUniversity Press, Cambridge, MA, 2002) 8-13, esp.12 ff. Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, A Peperzak, S. Critchley, and R. Bernasconi, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996) 6.

2. The "ethic of authenticity" was first explored by Charles Taylor in his groundbreaking *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1989), and subsequently distilled for a popular audience in his CBC Massey Lectures, *The Malaise of Modernity* (House of Anansi Press: Toronto, Canada, 1991). I rely heavily on both works, but cite only from *The Malaise of Modernity*.

3. The Old Testament offers similar examples, too many to innumerate here. I offer a few New Testament examples instead, given that consecrated life, characterized most distinctly by the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, is patterned specifically on the life of Jesus who was poor, obedient, and chaste.

4. Citations are from the *Revised Standard Version*.

5. Julian of Norwich, *Showing of Love: Extant Texts and Translation*, Anna Maria Reynolds and Julia Bolton Holloway, eds. (Florence: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001) 12.26. Julian of Norwich (1342 - c.1413), an English mystic, is known for having had visions of Jesus which she relates in her writings.

6. *Religiosorum institutio*, English edition: *Instruction on the Careful Selection and Training of Candidates for the States of Perfection and Sacred Orders* (numerous editions; Vatican City: Sacred Congregation for Religious, February 2, 1961).

7. In §1.13 the document addresses these words to Superiors: "Superiors should see to it that they be not responsible for the mistakes or errors of those in charge of selecting and training young men. This will be the case if they are culpably uninformed of the norms laid down by the Church, or ignore them, or apply them carelessly; if, ignoring the necessary discernment of spirits, they admit into Religious life and allow to remain therein those who have not been called by God, or if they neglect to give proper formation to those who are evidently called and to safeguard them in their divine vocation. Therefore, this Sacred Congregation regards it as its duty to exhort superiors most earnestly always to keep before their eyes the norms herein set forth, being mindful of the grave warning of this Sacred Congregation in its Instruction, *Illud Saepius*, of August 18, 1915 […]"

8. The causes of defection identified in *Religiosorum institutio* were: §1.6. Undue Family Influence; §1.7. Undue Influence Of Superiors And Directors; §1.8. Ignorance Of Obligations And Lack Of Liberty In Accepting Them; §1.9. Fear Of An Uncertain Future; §1.10. Difficulty With Chastity; §1.11. Loss Of The Religious Spirit. After enumerating these points and briefly discussing each one, the following judgment is passed: §1.12 "Unfortunate Religious priests bring forth these and other similar arguments, at times even attempting to make the Church responsible for their deplorable condition, as though the Church, through her ministers, had admitted them to the Religious and priestly life without the necessary qualifications, or did not know how to train and protect them once they had been called unto the portion of the Lord."

9. For a good introduction see: Darrell Jodock, ed., *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context.* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000). For a historical and philosophical perspective on how neoscholastic entrenchment affected the theologians of the period and resulted in a turning away from Thomism and philosophy in general, see: Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians* (Blackwell: Oxford, UK, 2007).

10. *Gaudium et Spes*, §1.3. Citations from the edition in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, vol.1, Austin Flannery, ed., (Costello Publishing Inc.: Northport, NY, 1975), 903-1000.

11. Ibid, §1.3

12. *Renovationis Causam*, English edition: *Instruction on the Renewal of Religious Formation* (Vatican City: Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, February 13, 1969). Citations from the edition in *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 13, 1969. http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/ciclrnew.htm (accessed August 15, 2007).

13. Ibid, §4.

14. *Renovationis causam*, "Introduction."

15. Ibid, §4

16. Cf. Damian Byrne, "Pre-Novitiate Formation" (letter, September 1987). http://www.op.org/international/english/Documents/masters_order/Byrne/pre_novitiate.htm (accessed December 17, 2007)

17. Ibid. In a letter concerning the purpose and structuring of formation in the formal period preceding novitiate (pre-novitiate), the Master of the Dominicans, the V. Rev. Damian Byrne, O.P., wrote: "As part of [the process of training] a number of provinces engage the help of those qualified in psychology. This is a delicate matter and the rights of the individual must be carefully respected, (cf. Can. 646, 220). Such help can be extremely useful in guiding candidates in their future growth as human beings and Religious and in guiding the admissions board - the right of admitting candidates remains with the province LCO 171."

18. The thoroughness with which the Salesians of Don Bosco have treated the question of psychological aptitude (the categories of positive and negative criteria for vocational discernment) in their formation guidelines seems to me unprecedented and unparalleled among Religious Orders. See: "Criteria and Norms for Salesian Vocational Discernment," in *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis et studiorum,* English edition: *Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco* (Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 2000), §2. http://www.sdb.org/eng/sottosezioni/_2_24_71_.htm# (accessed December 17, 2007). See, by way of comparison the Franciscan equivalent: *Ratio formationis fanciscanae*, English edition (Rome: General Secretariat for Formation and Studies, 2003), §151.

19. Mary L. Gauthier, *Catholic Ministry Formation Enrollments: Statistical Overview for 2006–2007* (Washington, D.C.: Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, 2007). http://cara.georgetown.edu/Overview0607.pdf (accessed December 2, 2007). For an overview for 1945-2007 see "Statistics on Religious Life." Centre for Applies Research in the Apostolate (CARA), Georgetown University. http://cara.georgetown.edu/bulletin/RelStatistics.html (accessed December 2, 2007).

20. (cf. "Report of the Vicar of the Rector Major to GC25" 103)

21. See especially §1.10

22. Founded by St. John Bosco and approved by the Holy See in 1865, the Salesians of Don Bosco (officially: the Society of St. Francis de Sales) are one of the largest and most global Religious Orders in the Catholic Church. Statistical data in the Salesian *Anuuario* reports that for December 31, 2005 there were 560 novices and 2, 792 seminarians; while the total number of Salesians was 16, 568. Source: http://www.sdb.org/sdb2006/index.asp?Lingua=2&MySez=9&MySotsez=4&MyDetSotSez=1&FileCentro=_2_9_4_1_.asp (accessed December 4, 2007).

23. Francesco Cereda, "Vocational Fragility: Initiating Reflection and Suggesting Action" in *Acts of the General Council, no. 385: 'You will be my witnesses even to the ends of the earth'* (Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 2004), §1. To be sure, Cereda's definition of postmodernity is extremely broad, and spills over into other categories. By way of comparison, Terry Eagleton offers a more harnessed definition in his critique: "Postmodernity is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation." See: *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996): vii.

24. Francesco Cereda, "Vocational Fragility: Initiating Reflection and Suggesting Action," §1,

25. "In our day, the problem needs to be posed from a new angle: Is there a single phenomenon here, or do we need to speak of 'multiple modernities', the plural reflecting the fact that other non-Western cultures have modernized in their own way and cannot properly be understood if we try to grasp them in a general theory that was designed originally with the Western case in mind." See: "multiple modernities" in Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004) 1-2. Cf. secularism defined in the West, North-west, North Atlantic (vs. Islamic countries, India, Africa) in Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 2007), 1.

26. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 61. As Charles Taylor points out in *The Malaise of Modernity*, the enormous success of Bloom's book – listed on the *New York Times* best-seller list for several months – suggests that the thesis "touched a chord." See: *Malaise of Modernity*, 13.

27. Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity,* 2. In addition to *individualism* – the first source and aspect of the modern malaise which Taylor identifies – there are two others: a) the recurrence to instrumental reason, and b) political and social atomism. See: The "The Three Malaises" in *The Malaise of Modernity*, 1-12.

28. See: Daniel Bell, *The Culture Contradictions of Capitalism*, 2nd Edition (London : Heinemann, 1979); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979; W. Norton: New York, 1991), and *The Minimal Self* (W. Norton: New York, 1984); Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'ère du vide: essais sur l'individualisme contemporain* (Gallimard: Paris, 1983). All the above are cited by Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 14.

29. Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 14-15.

30. Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 14-15.

31. Francesco Cereda, "Vocational Fragility: Initiating Reflection and Suggesting Action." (Italics in the original)

32. Cf. Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 16.

33. Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 17.

34. Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity" in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Alphonso Lingis, trans., (1987; Duquesne University Press: Pittsburgh, PA, 1998) 54.

35. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2007) 539-540. In connection to the rise of a "frontier of self-exploration," in addition to mentioning Montaigne's contribution, Taylor elsewhere cites St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), especially *Spiritual Exercises*, and St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622), especially *Treatise on the Love of God* (to which I would also add *Introduction to the Devout Life*).

36. Ibid, 541.

37. For further discussion on "a new kind of monasticism, or ascetic simplicity, [...] emerging among Christians who are gathering in intentional urban communities [...] around a shared vision of the good life and governed by a common moral rule, like the influential *Rule of St. Benedict*," see: Bryan Hollon, "Saint Benedict in the City" in *Towns and Cities* (Waco: The Centre for Christian Ethics Baylor University, 2007) 37-42 http://www.baylor.edu/christianethics/ CitiesandTownsArticleHollon.pdf (accessed January 24, 2007).

38. Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 29. For the genealogy, see the influence of Francis Hutcheson, the Earl of Shaftesbury, and John Locke in *Sources of the Self*, 248-267, and the related discussion on Rousseau's "le sentiment de l'existence" and Johann Gottfried von Herder in *The Malaise of Modernity*, 25-29.

39. John Paul II, address: "Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the XXXII World Day of Prayer for Vocations."

40. Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 22.

41. Cf. Pope Paul IV, Papal Decree: *Perfectae Caritatis*, English edition: *On the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life* (numerous editions; Vatican City: October 28, 1965).

42. I am thinking in the first instance of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), and of Oliver O'Donovan's, *Common Objects of Love: Moral Reflection and the Shaping of Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002). In the second instance I am thinking of Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exterirority*, Alphonso Lingis, trans., (1961; Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969). Cf. Simon Critchley, "Why Totality? Why Infinity?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas,* 13-15. My argument in condition (2) echoes the second formulation of Kant's categorical imperative, namely: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means to an end" (*Metaphysics of Morals, trans., James W. Ellington, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993) 30.*

43. Joseph Ratzinger, "The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements" in *Communio* 25 (Fall 1998), 480-499; 499. Emphasis mine. The rich content of this article, not to mention the technical rigour and elan with which it addresses some quite difficult ecclesiological questions makes it valuable reading for anyone wishing to enter more deeply into current enquiry concerning ecclesiastical renewal.

44. Two noteworthy introductions are Daniel Schwartz, *Aquinas on Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Caroline White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For a more recent (still rudimentary) example of theological reflection on friendship see the Italian theologian and founder of the movement Communion and Liberation, Luigi Giussani, *«Tu» (o dell'amicizia)* (Rizzoli: Milan, 1997).

45. Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 49.

46. See: Eduardo Card. Martínez Somalo, "Fraternal Life in Community" (Vatican City: Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, February 2, 1994) and John Paul II, Apostolic Letter: *Vita Consacrata*, English edition: *The Consecrated Life* (numerous editions; Vatican City, March 25, 1996).