

## Chapter 9 – The Religious Life

*The following reflections are excerpted from memoranda presented by the patriarch at the June, 1962 session of the Central Commission and from the Comments of the Holy Synod on the Schemas of the Council (1963). They refer to the draft of a schema “de statibus perfectionis acquirendae” (on acquiring the states of perfection) and to another schema “de rationibus inter Episcopos et Religiosos praesertim quoad opera exercenda” (on the relationships of bishops and religious, especially in respect to performing the works of the apostolate).*

### 1. The religious life and the eremitical life

The religious life is defined in such a way “*ut nunc vita anachoretica individualis inter status perfectionis minime recenseatur*” (so that the individual eremitical life is now seldom counted among the states of perfection). And yet the individual eremitical life was the very origin of the religious life, the first model of what has come to be called “*status perfectionis acquirendae*” (the state of acquiring perfection).

The West constructed its form of religious life around life in common. And since the eremitical life no longer fitted these categories, it was excluded from the idea of the religious life. Should we not on the contrary broaden the definition of the religious life in such a way as to include in some way the original form of the religious life, namely the solitary life? There is all the more reason for this because in our time there are individuals in the Catholic world striving to lead the eremitical life, not to mention that in the Orthodox world this form of religious life is being practiced effectively at the present time. At the present moment, the cause for beatification is pending in Rome for a modern Maronite hermit, Father Charbel Makhlof.

### 2. Perfection to be acquired and perfection acquired

There is always question of the famous distinction, dear to Western scholasticism, between “the state of acquiring perfection” and “the state of perfection acquired or being practiced.” Bishops are being included in the latter state. Could we not avoid this distinction which is as artificial as it is humiliating for bishops, since what bishop believes that he has arrived at the state of perfection? Besides, is there indeed a state of acquired perfection? Or is not Christian perfection rather always to be acquired, not only by bishops but even by the saints? For the East this distinction is absolutely incomprehensible.

### 3. Patriarchal and pontifical exemption

Referring to the exemption of religious, the schema affirms that the supreme pontiff “*ad seipsum, vel in Ecclesia Orientali ad Patriarcham, avocare potest religiones...*” (can exempt religious institutes to himself, or, in the Eastern Church, to the patriarch...) The formula does not seem to be correct, for as it stands, it can lead one to believe that the patriarchal or “stavropegial” exemption is also, although indirectly, a pontifical exemption. More precisely, exemption is the act by which a religious institute is withdrawn on certain points from the authority of the ordinary of the place and is made

directly subject to the authority of the pope (pontifical exemption) or to the authority of the patriarch (patriarchal exemption).

4. In the case of a multiplicity of rites. The schema deals with the “*subjectio religiosorum pro diveritate rituum*” (authority for religious where there is a diversity of rites). It envisions only two cases. The first case is when religious work in a place where there is so to speak only one rite. In that case, according to the terms of Canons 5 and 15 of the motu proprio “*Cleri sanctitati*” of Pius XII, the religious are subject to the ordinary of the place of this rite in all that concerns their apostolate. The second case is when Latin religious exercise their apostolate for the benefit of faithful of several different rites. In that case they depend for their apostolate on the ordinary who has called or admitted them.

However, the most frequent case, which has not been envisioned by the schema, is the one in which Latin religious exercise their apostolate for the benefit of the faithful of different rites, but have not been called or admitted by any ordinary of the Eastern rite. In such a case, they may continue to depend on the Latin ordinary, even though the Latin faithful in the territory are very few in number or almost non-existent.

It is this third and more frequent case that the schema should consider in order to provide a suitable solution for it. Naturally, this question should not be dealt with by the council. It would be under the jurisdiction of the commission for the reform of the Western and Eastern codes. A few years ago we worked out a plan for regulating these sorts of cases, and we take the liberty of attaching it to this memorandum for whatever help it may be.

#### 5. Title of the schema

We are not happy with the title of this conciliar schema. The authors have felt the need to compose more than one page to legitimize it, which is clear proof that it has already been subject to objections. This title exudes pedantry and vagueness. It is not correct to say that it is “most ancient,” because it goes back only to the scholastics. It is better to use the expression of the Code, “*De Religiosis*” (or simply “the states of perfection”), although this title does not agree with all the categories, since it is unknown in the East. (It is not possible to argue from the recent codification for Eastern Catholics.)

On the other hand, the term in the former legislation which recognized only monks (and the canons of the West) can no longer suffice. It is better to keep to current terminology than to use difficult formulae that belong only to the scholarly vocabulary. If the intention were to introduce secular institutes and to find a broader generic term, it would have been better to say simply: “*De Religiosis et de aliis Institutis Similibus*” (Concerning Religious and Similar Institutes). The formula would have remained the one in current use. We might also ask ourselves if, by reason of a more general legislation, we would not have to name monks in the first place, then religious, etc. Let us think of the separated East. A strictly monastic legislation should exist. The Code of Canon Law was written in an era when no thought was given to the separated East. Now that monastic values are regaining interest and rights in the Church, we must speak of them differently. The schema simply takes sections of the Code, adding to it secular institutes. The council is not bound in any way by the Code of Canon Law.

## 6. Contemplation and Action

A much too rigid division is made between contemplative orders and active orders. There are many cases in which, by the nature of things, contemplation and action are combined. Excessive compartmentalization always brings cumbersome surprises. This is the case, for example, of papal enclosure. Why not simply put an end to it?

## 7. Secular Institutes

We would be delighted to see an allusion, in connection with the secular institutes, to the first ascetics, the widows, etc., groups dedicated to pious works, in the early days of the Church, and then completely blended into the laity pure and simple, and which seem to be revived in these contemporary forms of secular institutes.

## 8. Privileges of Religious

These privileges link the religious far too exclusively with the Apostolic See, and are harmful to contacts with the local Churches and bishops.

## 9. Latin Religious in the East

Stress here that the Latin religious who work in the East must understand and love the Eastern world as a whole and not as an imitation of the Latin world.

## 10. Associations of Major Superiors

It must be specified that these associations of major superiors can be founded only with the consent or at the very least after notice to the ordinary of the place. Likewise, their statutes should not be approved by Rome without notice to the same ordinary. Where the East is concerned, these associations of major superiors must stem not from the Congregation of Religious but from the Eastern Congregation.

Moreover, it would be good that one of the bishops of the corresponding ecclesiastical province be present at these meetings of major superiors.