

Three Cheers

from

Luca !

I'm saying with music how glad I am about all those who are helping UTUTU, IKOM — and now CHILE.'

You should see those long lists of subscribers which come from the Holy Child Schools. I see them when *Mamma* (that's my mother, *The Pylon's* subscription manager) types copies at home. I am big enough now to help her by moving around the sticky white paper (tastes good!) and the black one (which I like because it comes off on my fingers). Life is so exciting, isn't it?

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Authority in religious life

— a discussion

By M. M. Ursula Blake

SISTER A is a religious with normal and quite open views on religious life as it is at present lived in the Church who desires, however, to find a deeper approach, still more love and more imagination in discovering needs both in and outside convent life but always within the present framework.

SISTER B is a religious of the same order who thinks that experiments should be made rather in new forms of the dedicated life.

Sister B. The life of the Evangelical Counsels has had such a variety of patterns since apostolic times: Consecrated virgins living at home, hermits alone in caves and desert places, hermits in a loose form of association, the cenobitic life in community even as it has developed into the various types of religious life which exist now and, lastly, secular institutes.

There seems room today for other forms. Take, for instance, the one I shall call "S.C.L." — social consecrated life — for want of a better title. It is rather like that of the hermits in loose association only these modern "hermits" carry their cave in their hearts as the Sisters of Charity must carry their cloister. They are immersed in the jungle of modern life.

Sister A. That sounds to me like a Secular Institute.

Sister B. It is actually a further development because the structure is quite different. The secular institute is still in its main outline "pyramidal" in form whereas S.C.L. is *democratic* with no vow of obedience and no weight of maternalism exercised by a superior. The community decides — perhaps that each should go her own way.

Sister A. But how can, for instance, eight people decide on something that is essentially communitarian — where to live, how the finances should be acquired, whether to have Compline in common, and so on?

Sister B. Where all are striving for charity the better opinion will prevail. "Charity is the bond of perfection." If the vow of chastity is under-

stood in depth as "disponibility to God" there will be enough give and take, as in a happy marriage, for the things of daily life to fit into place. Such a way is more in accord with the modern trend, more personal, more mature. It plays down traditional obedience for the sake of that self-fulfilment which will lead to a wider apostolate. Such people can be more spontaneous, can give what they want to give of themselves and when they can best give it. Once people concentrate on the fact that special charisms are received from the Holy Spirit for judging the rights and wrongs of a given situation remote control may be a hindrance.

Sister A. Would you say these people jettison obedience more for personal fulfilment or for the apostolate?

Sister B. The stress will depend on temperament.

Sister A. Haven't many religious Congregations developed from an S.C.L., like that of St. Angela Merici and her first companions? The difference would seem to be that this process is in reverse now: Some religious who have actually made the *three* vows feel they are going to *do more* rather than *less* by getting released from one of them, obedience. These people often talk as though the majority of Sisters were sad and frustrated, yet at "Regina Mundi" here in Rome where they come from all over the world the first thing lay students notice is the strong undercurrent of joy and the personal charity.

I think those who have left religious life must have suffered very much while making such a decision but aren't they terribly confused by all this jargon about the "ego" and "my rights", all this talk of "situation ethics" and the rest?

Sister B. I think they feel they are opening up a valuable way for the future. This "social consecrated life," they say, should appeal to modern youth in a way that standard religious life has ceased to do, witness the falling off of vocations. These people may have the answer.

Sister A. They may produce *an* answer. They may show by trial and error how much sharing of responsibility is possible in religious life at all levels.

Sister B. And won't they help us all to find new fields of apostolate?

Sister A. Quite possibly, but are they not far too optimistic? After all, natural society and all successful secular society is built on order. Don't you think that the sociologists of the future will find in 20th century Catholic "peer groups" much the same phenomenon as in pure 19th century Marxism which, because of its impracticality, never left the printed page. Can one envisage a planned apostolate without a planner?

Sister B. In some areas, yes.

Sister A. But surely they will have a hard task to prove that religious life is not well-patterned on the Christ-given structure of the Church "coming down from the Father of lights," where all are SENT and there is order in delegated authority?

Sister B. But there would be some joint authority. The difference is that, having no vow of obedience, they would be free to opt out.

Sister A. I think you have put your finger on the two great differences between religious life and S.C.L. First, the *permanence* of the consecration which the three public vows of religion always imply. Furthermore, the bond of perfection is charity but it is charity for God and man after the manner of Christ's charity. His love was shown not just in service but essentially in *filial* service: "I am come to do the will of him that sent me." This was a permanent state of obedience to his Father, not a series of acts. It was the divine Son as Person who "emptied Himself" (*kenosis*) of the use of spiritual powers — not material things — when he chose to be "found as a man," like us in all things except sin. His *kenosis* is therefore more nearly expressed by a vow of obedience than by a vow of poverty. It is only by the disponibility of the whole man, exterior and interior, that a shadow of Christ's meekness and humility of heart come to us. The *kenosis* of baptism requires the immersion of the *whole* man into the death of Christ.

Sister B. This means, of course, that not only religious but every Christian must genuinely serve and obey the Church.

Sister A. Yes, indeed. But by making the vow of obedience we religious have freely and firmly committed ourselves to a more active and responsible service of Christ within *this* pattern rather than in *that*. So if and when my thoughts start up along the lines: "But my conscience says etc. etc. . . ." don't I have to resolve my problem within this pattern, presuming of course there is no question of sin? Francis freely accepted one pattern, Ignatius another. Isn't that how the Church grows — barring a very rare exception to a fundamental rule — through fidelity?

Sister B. Perhaps the S.C.L. groups see fidelity differently. They want to be *free* to be faithful to the Holy Spirit within them.

Sister A. Well, if one believes in the Holy Spirit, one must pay serious attention to Vatican II telling us that it is the vow of obedience which enlarges "the freedom of the sons of God." But the whole tenor of the Council was also interested in enlarging the scope of freedom. After all, the extent of the field of religious obedience is determined only by Canon Law and individual Rules and Constitutions. In today's climate, change tends towards a much greater flexibility of framework with less rulings but "a deeper and more fertile understanding of the Rule."

Sister B. And another call for more freedom comes from today's status of women.

Sister A. Yes. But no one should forget that it was people like Marcella and Hilda and Mechtilde and Catherine of Siena, etc. who showed the whole of Christendom that women were persons not chattels. In one way, nuns were the first feminists so it is not the fault of religious life as such when some top-heavy structure has been erected which keeps Sisters immature. Maturity has flourished and must flourish wherever union with God — the supreme Reality — is at the centre of a dynamic and joy-bearing life of service.

Sister B. Yes. *How* much there is in the Church calling out to be done. In fact, some of what is written about infantilism in religious life is most exaggerated. Those of us who have never been superiors have certainly at times had to face the heaviest kinds of responsibility — matrons and school principals in war-time, missionaries in explosive situations, college administrators, etc., etc. The point is, I think, that *all* need responsibility, down to the youngest.

Sister A. Of course they do. However, for the major forms of the apostolate, like teaching, medical services, the organized social services, I cannot see the S.C.L. groups providing the necessary continuity nor the professional standard required. The major apostolate of Sisters needs a vertical as well as a horizontal relationship. Maternalism may be "out" but motherliness never will be.

Sister B. All the same, for the less organized personal charity among the poor and the deprived of all kinds there may be plenty of room for "social consecrated life."

Sister A. Yes, the *kenosis* of a life of true chastity and poverty could be in itself a valuable witness to Christ both for those in the Church and those outside it. But is would *not* be the same as the fuller *kenosis* which results from obedience. "He who shall lose his for my sake shall find it."

Won't there always be young Christians who, out of love for "the poor, virginal, and obedient Christ" will never be content with less than this Paschal holocaust — the Good Friday which really is "good" because on the third day there is Easter?

Sister B. Time will tell. "*What is born of the Spirit is spirit.*"

Sister A. I too was thinking just along those lines. You have quoted St John so for good measure, but not by way of proof, I shall quote St Peter in the Jerusalem Bible version: "*Do not behave in the way that you liked to before you learnt the truth; make a habit of obedience: be holy in all you do, since it is the Holy One who has called you . . . I Pet. 1 : 13-15.*"

In that context, and whenever one can remember that context, the responsible obedience we know today is not bearable. It is lovable.

J.Y.A.F.

AN INTERNATIONAL YOUNG ADULT FORUM

PIPE DREAM

To the Editor,

In this spatial age when scientific and mathematical advancements are rapidly racing us towards the unknown, we young adults of tomorrow tend to question with curiosity, and an equal amount of fear, the future of this world, our country and our lives.

We know and understand with a stark realism that this terrestrial planet is going to be placed precariously in our hands within a short interval, and suddenly we find ourselves contemplating the fate and fortunes of this future.

What will the nineteen seventies bring to this ever-widening world of ours, a world waiting for our command to either raise itself to new heights or fall forgotten into the wasteland of nuclear warfare? The youth of today declares with an unbounding faith that his nation and the world around him will reside in *Peace*. That word will abide in our hearts, in our minds, and on our tongues. Wars must cease to exist, prejudice must be a forgotten word, and nations must strive towards a cooperative and beneficial co-existence. Those pipe dreams seem to be of a very large nature, but why not hope while there is still time to hope . . . rather than despair. It's a strange approach to have and tenaciously hold on to in this agnostic

and atheistic world of yours, but our greatest pipe dream is to have this planet surrounded and enriched in an atmosphere of Christian love. Quite an improbable feat, you say? We agree, as we scan the front page headlines daily in quest of a segment of promising news — quite an improbable feat. But the improbable is never impossible, and there lies our stronghold.

Over and over again the youth of today realizes the state of affairs which will soon be his legacy in the years to come. We did not create the turmoil and upheaval which is being thrust in our midst, yet we are being forced to accept it and to search for a plausible solution to all the problems of mankind. And the adults of today question us: "What will you do to dissolve these problems?" Well, my distinguished elders, we can hope, we can love, . . . and we can pray.

Lois Layne Freshman
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DON'T DISMISS IT

Sir,

I know that I have the support of all the various artists when I deplore the lack of cosmopolitan tolerance, particularly in Iron Curtain countries,