

Communion, Variety of Charism and Mission in the Church

Rev. Bro. Olabanjo Wole, FSC
*De La Salle Brothers International Scholasticate,
Nairobi, Kenya*

Abstract

Jesus commissioned the disciples to “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (Mt. 28:19). The mission of the Church has its root from this great commission. The mission is given to the disciples, not just the Twelve Apostles. Whenever it seems the Church is in slumber, God steers His Spirit in the hearts of some members of His Body, the Church, to shake up the Church and remind her of her mission. This is how different Religious Congregations with their originating charisms spring up to respond in diverse ways to the mission of the Church and in communion with the Church. Synodality is a wakeup call to all members of the Church, the Body of Christ, to discover new ways of fulfilling the mission that Jesus entrusted to his Church. It is a call to all, not just the hierarchy of the Church, because the Holy Spirit is not restricted to any group. “For the purpose of safeguarding and handing on tradition, a system with established offices of leadership is needed. But it is equally true that for the purpose of shaking the Church out of the complacency and mediocrity that inevitably creep into any institution, the Church needs the charismatic intervention of the Spirit.”¹

¹ Francis A. Sullivan, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal: A Biblical and Theological Study* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1982), 47.

Introduction

The promise of Jesus Christ to be with His Church even to the end of the ages seems to manifest itself in the numerous Religious Congregations being formed in the Church to respond to the variant and diverse challenges that try to destroy humanity and reduce the *imago Deo* in us. From the earliest time of the Church, God steered His Spirit, like Daniel saving Susan (Dan.13), in the hearts of men and women to respond to the needs of His people by forming Religious Order/Congregation in communion with the Church, with a specific charism, for a particular mission, and originating in a particular geographical area, before spreading abroad.

Not only did Jesus promise to be with His Church, He also assured Peter, the first Vicar, that He Jesus, will be with him, Peter, to strengthen his faith; and that he, Peter, in turn should strengthen the faith of his brothers and sisters. God continues to steer up His Holy Spirit in our time. Besides the different Religious Congregations responding to the challenges of our time through their unique charisms in communion with the Church, God steers His Spirit in the heart of the Church leadership to remind His people their mission on earth. The invitation of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, to Synodality, is another way God steers His Spirit in the hearts of His people. By Synodality, the Holy Father invites all the people of God that is the Church “to reflect together on the journey that has been made so far, so that collectively, we will be able to learn from one another's experiences and perspectives, guided by the Holy Spirit. Enlightened by the Word of God and united in prayer, we will be able to discern the processes to seek God's will and pursue the pathways to which God calls us – towards deeper communion, fuller participation, and greater openness to fulfilling our mission in the world”² Synodality is a call to Religious

² For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission. *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches (Published by Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops Via della Conciliazione 34, Vaticana), 6.

Congregations that “we are to be at the service of fraternity in a wounded world and to open us to the culture of encounter in our religious communities and places of mission and make us be united to the people, and attend to the ecclesial mission according to the charism of each Institute or Society.”³

This article therefore looks at how the various charisms in the Church are for the mission of the Church, and therefore should be in communion with the Church. The article explores Synodality in connection with charism; it concludes with suggestions for maintaining and promoting the mission of the Church together as 'People of God'.

What is Synodality?

Throughout the history of salvation, God has a way of responding to the needs of His people, as an individual and as a nation. When it seemed, the ship is completely submerged by water, God in one way or another, “steers up His spirit” to the rescue. This happened in the history of the Israelites after the death of Joshua. Judges were raised up to rescue the people from the hands of their enemies, (Judg. 1;4). After so many years of enslavement in Babylon, God “roused His spirit in Cyrus, the king of Persia...” (Ezra 1:). In the same vein, when it seemed the righteous and innocent child of God was almost condemned unjustly, God “roused his spirit” in Daniel to rescue Susana (Dan. 13). The call for Synodality by His Holiness Pope Francis, could be looked at as a new way God 'roused' His spirit in order to revive His Church. With the numerous challenges facing the Church in recent years, there seems to be a need for a “new Pentecost”; a new and diverse way of evangelization; a new and deeper way of being and seeing ourselves as

³ The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life, A Publication of the Conference of Major Superior of Nigeria, 'Call For Papers 2023'

Catholics and responding to being Catholics together today. “It is more urgent than ever today to preach Christ in the great modern areopagus of culture, science, economy, politics and the mass media. The evangelical harvest is great and the laborers are few (cf. Matthew 9:37). This vital field of action for the Church requires a radical change of mentality, an authentic new awakening of conscience in everyone.”⁴

The conveying of the Council of Jerusalem (cf. *Acts* 15:4-29) is an example of the Synodal life of the Church from the beginning of the Christian Community. Faced with a decisive pastoral and doctrinal challenge – the movement calling for conversion to Judaism – a community and apostolic method of discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit took place (cf. *Acts* 15:28). Participating in that decisive meeting, in different roles, were “the apostles and the elders with the whole Church” (*Acts* 15:4, 6, 22). This is an indication to us that the Church belongs to all, not just the hierarchy, but to all 'People of God'.

Synodality is that new way of evangelization; New and more profound ways of responding to the challenges of the Gospel in today's world of digital and technological explosion. “The evangelization of today's world is a task in which the Church places great hope; yet the Church is fully aware of the innumerable obstacles she faces in this work due to the extraordinary changes happening at a personal and social level, and above all, to a postmodern culture in serious crisis.”⁵ Synodality configures the Church as the *People of God on a journey and as an assembly called by the Lord*. Synodality refers to the People of God walking and planning together so as to bring about the project of the Kingdom of God and to evangelize peoples, celebrate the risen Lord and to discern together, the mind and message of God's Holy Spirit to

⁴ Stanislaw Rylko, “Ecclesial Movements and New Communities: The Response of the Holy Spirit to Today's Challenge of Evangelization”, Address in Bogota 2006

⁵ Stanislaw Rylko, “Ecclesial Movements and New Communities” Rome.

our present generation. In the words of Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich “Synodality is entering into an ever greater 'us', it is seeking what builds us together as a community, as People of God”.⁶

By Synodality, the Church, 'People of God', is called to find new, better and inclusive ways of living and spreading the Good News. New and better ways that are open to all People of God. In the word of the Holy Father: “It is precisely the path of Synodality that God expects of the Church of the third millennium.... What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word 'synod!'”⁷

The word “Synod” itself is a Greek word composed of the preposition *syn* meaning “with” and the noun *hodos* meaning “path.” It is about a path taken together, under the guidance of the risen Lord, by all the People of God with the wide variety of its members and a responsible and converging exercise of the various charisms and ministries for the sake of the common good. Synodality can therefore be described as a pathway undertaken in communion with the whole People of God in responding to the spiritual, social, economic needs of God's people in a modern technological world. Synodality is a way of following the footsteps of the Apostles. The crisis that rocked the early Church necessitated the Apostles to call the first Jerusalem Council. However, the participants were not restricted to the Apostles alone, participating in that decisive meeting, in different roles, were “the apostles and the elders with the whole Church” (*Acts* 15:4, 6, 22).

In the view of Antonio Spadaro, “Synodality does not denote a mere operational procedure, but rather the specific way of living and working (*modus vivendi et operandi*) of the Church as the People of God, who make manifest and realize concretely the people's being in

⁶ Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ, General Rapporteur of the 2021 Synod. -2023, during the inaugural session, in the synod hall, Vatican City, Saturday, October 9, 2021

⁷ Ibid.

communion in walking together, in reuniting in assembly, and in participating actively in the evangelizing mission. Synodality expresses and brings about the nature and mission of the Church in history oriented to the fullness of the Kingdom already present in Christ. So, “Church” is a name that means “Synod,” and “Synod” is a name that means “Church.”⁸

This indicates that Synodality is the total being of the Church. It is the being of a Church that does not exclude anyone; a Church that is inclusive; a Church that is open to all her children, not minding your statute, your background, and the position you occupy in the Church or in the society. All are invited and all are welcome and all are expected to take an active role in the mission of evangelization. Marking the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis said: “The journey of Synodality is the journey that God wants from his Church in the third millennium. A synodal church is a listening church, aware that listening is more than hearing. It is a reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn.”⁹

The need to find a better and more inclusive way of proclaiming and living the Gospel values is more urgent today than it was many years ago. The Second Vatican Council envisaged this need when it stated that “The present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this work of the Church so that all men, joined more closely today by various social, technical and cultural ties, might also attain fuller unity in Christ.”¹⁰ The call for Synodality invites all and sundry to collaborate and work together in making the Gospel message reach every corner of the world.

⁸ Spadaro, Antonio, SJ and Carlos Galli. “The Synodal Church.” <https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-synodal-church/> 26 October 2018/Last Updated on 4 March 2021, copied on April 25, 2022.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, October 17, 2015, No. 9: cf. w2.vatican.va.

¹⁰ Lumen Gentium 1.

Charism

The word 'charism' is used in a general way to designate gifts bestowed by God gratuitously (Rom. 1:11; 5:15; 6:23; 11:29; II Cor. 1:11). From the point of view of Saint Paul, charisms are not privileges reserved for some individuals. In the view of Francis Sullivan, there are two ways the Holy Spirit breathes life into the Body of Christ, the Church. The breath of the Holy Spirit could come through "Covenant relationship with the Church, guaranteeing the effectiveness of its sacraments and official ministries; and, by his unpredictable and often surprising charismatic interventions."¹¹ All Christians are open to receive these gifts and use them for building up the community. Charisms are not extraordinary gifts, but the recipients may use them in extraordinary way. However, without charity within which the recipients have to operate them, charisms are nothing.

Charisms are free gifts of the Holy Spirit intended for the building up of the Church, the Body of Christ. The gifts of charism proceed from the Holy Spirit, (I Cor. 12:4-11). 'Building up of the Body of Christ' is the end result of charisms. This has been the primary function of the Church throughout history, "to stand up against social system structured by domination or sin, or historical entities characterized by these, in order to set them on a new course of becoming more perfect systems so as to prepare for the Coming of the Lord in his Parousia."¹²

The call to Synodality is therefore, a call to revisit the primary mission of the Church, part of which is "to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to tell the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Lk. 4:18-19). Charisms are

¹¹ Francis A. Sullivan, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal: A Biblical and Theological Study* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1982), 47.

¹² Ericque Dussel, The Differentiation of Charisms, in *Charisms in the Church*, ed. Christian Duquoc and Casiano Floristan (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 41.

therefore the gifts through which the Spirit structures the Church by rousing from within the Church the services and functions needed to accomplish this primary task of the Church, according to the diversity and qualities of each member.

God's Spirit, A Paradigm for Authentic Charism for the Mission

In the first chapter of the Bible, the Spirit was introduced to us: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God's spirit hovered over the water.” (Gen. 1:1-2). According to Catholic teaching and tradition, “the term 'Spirit' translates the Hebrew word *ruah*, which in its primary sense, means breath, air, wind.”¹³ The Spirit is the breath of God, the wind that 'hovered over the water'.

In His encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus affirmed that the Spirit of God is truly *ruah* that blows wherever it wills. “The wind blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. That is how it is with who are born of the Spirit.” (Jn. 3:1-8). The Spirit of God that 'hovered over the water' at the beginning of creation, the same Spirit 'blows wherever it pleases.' But as the Spirit blows, it fills those who 'are born of the Spirit' and empowers them to be called 'children of God.'

The Church Magisterium teaches that “When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church, and thus, all those who believe would have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father (cf. Eph.2:18). He is the Spirit of Life, a fountain of water springing up to life eternal, (cf. Jn.4:14; 7:38-39)”.¹⁴

¹³*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994), 193.

¹⁴ Lumen Gentium 4, A Document of Vatican II.

At baptism Christians receive the Holy Spirit that makes them recognize “Jesus is Lord” (1Cor. 12:3); and makes them “Cry out Abba Father”. Through the same Spirit, Christians become children of God, members of Jesus' family, the Church. This same Spirit is renewed and re-energized in the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Baptized received seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Prophet Isaiah foretold these gifts, which the Messiah would manifest, (Is. 11:1-4). The seven gifts are: Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Counsel (Right Judgement), Fortitude (Courage), Piety (Reverence or Love), Fear of the Lord (Wonder and Awe in God's presence).

These seven gifts of the Holy Spirit produce some fruits in the individuals that allow the Spirit to work in them. Saint Paul, in his letter to the Galatians (5:22-23), enumerated nine fruits of the Holy Spirit as: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are what all Christians need to live a genuine Christian life and face the challenges of daily living, (Eph. 4:11-12; 1Cor. 12:4)

Though these gifts are 'special' gifts that all baptized and confirmed Christians received at the reception of the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, yet their efficacy depends on the cooperation of the individuals with the Spirit. Because the Spirit of God does not force itself on us. The Spirit of God comes like a gentle breeze, (1Kgs.19:11-12), whispering to the ears of those who cooperate with it. The same Holy Spirit is with the Church “Till the end of time” (Mt. 28:20). The Holy Spirit guides, unifies the Church in communion and works of ministry. He equips and directs the Church hierarchy with charismatic gifts and his fruits.¹⁵

¹⁵ Lumen Gentium 4.

It is this Spirit of God that manifested himself in the lives of the Founders of various Religious Congregation. The Founders of Religious Congregations discovered that they are capable of perceiving the Divine beyond the world of matter and energy, time and space. They perceive God in everything and everyone around them. Founders are like, as Loren Eiseley suggests, the Brazilian amphibian fish whose eyes have two lenses, one for seeing under the water and one for seeing above the water.¹⁶ With the second lens, the Founders are able to see, discover, and respond to the needs of their environment, putting their gifts of the Holy Spirit into practical use. The second eyes have been given to all human, what we call 'inner eyes.' Unfortunately, most of us most of the time have cataracts on our second lens; and so, we see but we don't perceive.

Not only do the Founders see with the 'second lens', they are deliberate in compassion, “intentionally placing oneself in situations where people are struggling and need help, and being present to that experience.”¹⁷ Such experience, for them, becomes transformative, life-changing. This is the essence of spirituality, the essence of Christian life. The Christian life is not about doing good to please God the judge. The Christian life is not “about believing now or being good now for the sake of heaven later. It is about entering a relationship in the present that begins to change everything now. Spiritual life is about this process: the opening of the heart to the God who is already here.”¹⁸ This is compassion. This is what Saint Paul refers to when he speaks of the greatest of the spiritual gifts as love.

¹⁶ Loren Eiseley, *The Invisible Pyramid* (New York: Charles Scribner and Son, 1970), pp.119-120.

¹⁷ Marcus J. Borg, *The God We Never Knew, Beyond Dogmatic Religion to a More Authentic Contemporary Faith* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1998), p. 127.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.128.

Spirituality – a life of relationship with the Spirit of God – must definitely lead to compassion. If spirituality does not lead to compassion, “then either it is a life in relationship to a different spirit or there is a lot of static in the relationship.”¹⁹ Charism is therefore, that practical ways of living the spiritual life; a practical way of living the greatest of the spiritual gifts. Hence, charisms are more profound than the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Synodality is a call to both the Church and community of consecrated life to be re-founded daily. Just as the call for conversion comes to us daily, so is the call for the Church to be re-founded, to be renewed daily. The call however, is both collective and individual. All members of the Church are called to re-examine their lives. Family is the smallest unit of the society. When every family lives the gospel values, then the work of evangelization becomes easier, faster, and deeply rooted.

The spirit behind Synodality could be likened to the experience of Saint Francis. When Francis was told by the figure on the cross in San Damiano to repair the Church, Francis took it to mean the church edifice. Later, “Francis came to learn that he was being asked not just to improve a building, to re-found his own Christian life and to found a new community. He was also being asked to re-found the Church itself.”²⁰

Synodality is a call to every member of the Church to live up to their baptismal promises. It is a call to every Religious Community to live their charismatic gifts more charismatically. This means that Religious Congregations must live in a way that is visibly full of the faith, the hope, the love, the joy that comes from finding and re-finding the pearl of great price (Mt.13:46).

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 129.

²⁰ Thomas Lane CM, *The Cry of Christians: Tradition & Transition*, (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2000), p.166.

Synodality is calling the whole Church to be more religious. The Consecrated are not the only ones called to be religious. Synodality calls all Catholics to be religious. “Religion is about ties. True religion improves the quality of our ties with God, with other people, with the communion of Saints, with the whole human family, with the whole of creation.”²¹ Synodality calls all Catholics to make ties and connections between our spiritual searching and the religious celebrations that, far from being empty rituals, should ensure the worship of God 'in spirit and in truth' (Jn. 4:24).

Synodality is a call to each and every member of the universal Church to live and preach the Good News in their own particular locality. Jesus' ministry, for the most part, was limited to the Jews of His time. “Our own task is to bring the Good News of the Kingdom to our own historical context – our global village, the world.”²²

In his address to all 'renewal movements' in the Church, on Pentecost Sunday in 1998, Pope John Paul II reiterated the role and importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of individual Catholics in particular and the Church in general: “Whenever the Spirit intervenes, he leaves people astonished. He brings about events of amazing newness; he radically changes persons and history. This was the unforgettable experience of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council during which, under the guidance of the same Spirit, the Church rediscovered the charismatic dimension as one of her constitutive elements.”²³ This is clearly stated in *Lumen Gentium* long before the Pope declared it: “It is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the Church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the people, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts according as he wills (cf. 1 Cor 12:11), he

²¹ Ibid., 168.

²² Gordon D. Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 2000), 174.

²³ Pope John Paul II, *Pentecost Sunday*, Rome, 1998

also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank...He makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church.”²⁴

No Religious Institute is founded for itself. Religious Congregations are founded for the mission of the Church. Religious Life is an integral part of the Catholic Church, founded with a particular charism to respond to particular problems confronting the Church in a particular locality. It is God that breathes His Spirit on the founder to respond in practical way, to the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Charism and Synodality, an Invitation to Authentic Gospel Value

Charisms are gifts distributed by the Spirit to each person as God wills. Charisms are practical ways and manners of responding to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Charisms are deeper and more profound than the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the sense that charisms are giving to the individuals, but not for the use of the individuals. When a gift is giving, it belongs to the recipient, and the recipient can do whatever he/she likes with the gift. A charism as a gift, is meant for the growth and development of the group. In charism, you 'have your cake, but you cannot eat the cake, the cake has to be shared with all.'

This is exactly what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men and to the needs of the world.” (CCC 799) “Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them, and by all members of the Church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine

²⁴*Lumen Gentium*, n.12.

gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic promptings of this same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true measure of all charisms.” (CCC 800)

Synodality call is a renewed call to go back to the origin, the source, the basic reason of our Christianity. In other words, to be another Christ to the poor, the needy; to involve everybody in the evangelization process, and to get involved. Jesus proclaimed the gospel to the poor. Following this example, the Church has always been in support of the poor, the marginalized. In fact, no Religious Congregation came into existence if not to serve the poor. Hence, Vatican II invited all Religious Congregations to return to their root, return to their *raison d'etre*.

In his apostolic letter, 'Witnesses of Joy', Pope Francis invited all Consecrated persons to look to the past with gratitude, and re-live their history. “All our Institutes are heir to a history rich in charisms. At their origins we see the hand of God who, in His Spirit, calls certain individuals to follow Christ more closely, to translate the Gospel into a particular way of life, to read the signs of the times with the eyes of faith and to respond creatively to the needs of the Church. This initial experience then matured and developed, engaging new members in new geographic and cultural contexts, and giving rise to new ways of exercising the charism, new initiative and expressions of apostolic charity.”²⁵

This is an invitation to consecrated men and women to return to their root, understand their charisms, and develop creative ways of responding to the needs of the people of our days. There is need for charism maturity and diversification so as to respond effectively to the

²⁵ Pope Francis, Witness of Joy, *Apostolic Letter of His Holiness, to All Consecrated Persons on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life* (Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2015), 1.1.

needs of the Church in modern world and be useful to the present society. Charism maturity is a developmental process which entails “strong awareness of self, purpose, place in society, and limitations, as well as the capacity to adapt to historical and cultural changes while remaining established in one's root.”²⁶

Synodality is therefore, a call from the Holy Father to all Consecrated Religious to take cognizance of their origin, be creative in living their charisms today, be creative in responding to the needs of the time without losing focus of their charisms. It is a call to share their charisms, their spirituality with people they work with. A call to be open to the movement of the Spirit today. It is a call to individuals, groups within the Church, and the Universal Church, to be open to new conversion of heart. A conversion that means “the re-orientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from difference of an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right.”²⁷

Synodality, Charism and Mission; Way Forward

It is clear from what has been said so far that the call for Synodality is a call to look for better ways of propagating the faith, a profound way of spreading the Good News proclaimed by Jesus Christ and handed on by the Apostles, a better way of inclusive evangelization where everyone in the Church and society is allowed to contribute to the spread of the Gospel. It is also clear that charisms are practical ways in which the Holy Founders responded to the needs and challenges of their times,

²⁶ Reginald Cruz, 'Charismatic Maturity and Its Impediments: Considerations on a Persistent Challenge for Consecrated Life in Africa', in *Consecrated Life in Africa* (Nairobi Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2016), 60.

²⁷ Jack T. Sanders, *Charisma, Converts, Competitors: Societal and Sociological Factors in the Success of Early Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 73.

and sharing the charisms with those who believed in them, leading to the formation of Religious Congregations. The Religious Congregations developed, matured and gradually spread everywhere, to fulfill the mission entrusted to the Church by Jesus Christ: “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations...” (Mt.28:19ff). The mission of the Church is therefore “to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church.”²⁸

However, the call for Synodality is necessitated by the fact that, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, sees the need for the Church to change in her methods and process of evangelization. In Africa for instance, despite the fact that there is increase in number of dioceses, number of indigenous Bishops and Priests, increase in number of candidates in major seminaries and Religious Formation Houses, yet we cannot turn blind eyes to the great number of Catholics leaving the Church to join Pentecostal Churches of African origin, different sects, Islam and even African Traditional Religions.

As a way forward therefore, I propose the following:

a. Understanding the Originating Charism

Members of Religious Congregations must understand that Charisms are neither the properties of their Founders nor that of the Congregations. The charism of a Religious Congregation does not originate from the Founder. Charism finds its origin in the “Holy Spirit who gratuitously gives his passion and compassion to a world beset by sufferings – illness, ignorance, enslavement, marginalization, etc. – and indifference – be they social, psychological, or spiritual.”²⁹ Consecrated men and women must understand that the charism of their

²⁸ *Lumen Gentium* 1, A Document of Vatican II.

²⁹ Reginald Cruz, 'Charismatic Maturity and Its Impediments: Considerations on a Persistent Challenge for Consecrated Life in Africa', in *Consecrated Life in Africa* (Nairobi Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2016), 69.

congregation is giving for the sake of the People of God, giving to be able to respond to the People's needs in all ramification. The originating charism is therefore, “that action of the Holy Spirit which is the institute's founding gift – the charism that determines its particular type of spirituality, life, apostolate, and tradition.”³⁰ So, members of Religious Communities must be willing to share this gift with whoever desires it among the People of God.

b. Differentiating between Charism and Mission

Religious must strive to understand and be able to differentiate the charism of the congregation from the mission approved for them by the Church. Mission is understood to incorporate: (1) the people and places where the Holy Spirit bids the religious to bring the Good News; (2) what the congregation aspires to achieve once its members are in these places and in touch with these people and; (3) the ministries that are appropriate for the congregation to undertake in the light of the marks of the congregational charism. Charism on the other hand, is the *raison d'etre*, it is the motivating spirit, it is the Being of the Congregation. A charism is what differentiates one Religious Congregation from another. “The way the word charism is used is quite ambiguous and frequently a source of misunderstandings and errors. Often charism is identified with the specific ends of the institute –that is, its ministries –with the danger of overshadowing the significance of consecration for the institute and how consecration and ministries are related to each other. Other times, the word is intended to emphasize only the inspirational spiritual aspects [of the congregation], but making no reference to its history or its juridical system.”³¹

³⁰ Ibid., 69.

³¹ Vincenzo De Paolis, *La vita consacrata nella Chiesa* (Venice: Marcianum Press, 2010), 207

c. Developing Strong Charismatic Maturity

The saying that “You cannot give what you don't have” is very true here. Signs of charismatic maturity are very weak in Religious Congregation where the members do not know or have fundamental understanding about charisms in Consecrated Life. Such a situation is analogous to health care workers lecturing about Alzheimer's syndrome while having little or no understanding on how the brain basically functions. This is the case with Consecrated Religious speaking about charism of their congregation but with no knowledge about the theology of charism. It will definitely be a case of the blind leading the blind. “The Church itself assesses that when charisms are ill-described, consecrated persons would become part of the life of the Church in a vague and ambiguous way.”³² Hence the need for Religious Congregation to develop strong charismatic maturity, and have formidable understanding of the theology of charism and the Church's teaching on charism.

d. Charism, a Gracious Gift Gratuitously Given

Charism is a free gift of God, giving gratuitously to all the Baptized. Charism is not limited to Consecrated Religious alone; it is the Holy Spirit that gives charism to whoever he pleased. The ministerial Priesthood should therefore, elaborate on this to the lay faithful. “The noble duty of pastors toward the laity consists not only in shepherding them but also in recognizing their ministries and charisms.”³³ Consecrated persons do not have charisms because of profession of vows; rather, the Holy Spirit entrusts charisms to them by virtue of baptism.

³² Reginald Cruz, 'Charismatic Maturity and Its Impediments, 62.

³³ *Lumen Gentium*, n.30

e. Charism is for the Benefit of All

Charisms should not be understood the way gifts are generally understood. A gift is generally something given by one person to another, and the receiver can personally keep or enjoy the gift. Charisms are not like that. Charisms are not for the benefit of the recipient. In charisms, 'you have your cake, but you cannot eat it alone'; it has to be shared with others. "All the members of the faithful are called to discover, accept, nurture and share these gifts – whether they are ordinary or extraordinary – to the Church for the sake of its renewal."³⁴

f. Charisms, Instruments for the Mission of the Church

The end result of charism is "Building up of the Body of Christ" and for the Church to succeed in carrying out this mission, all the baptized must join hands together. Charism is a moving force, the engine that keeps the People of God going on the mission. Synodality invites all Catholics to join hands together and develop new and more inclusive ways of evangelization. Religious Communities must be at the fore front of this. "The evangelical harvest is great and the labourers are few. This vital field of action for the Church requires a radical change of mentality, an authentic new awakening of conscience in everyone. New methods are needed, as are new expressions and new courage."³⁵

Conclusion

The promise of Jesus to be with His Church to the end of ages continues to be sustained and fulfilled, despite the numerous challenges facing the Church in our time. As ways of fulfilling this promise, God continues to steer His Spirit in the hearts and minds of His people at one time to another, even when the individuals are unaware or unprepared.

³⁴ Reginald Cruz, *Charismatic Maturity and Its Impediments*, 64.

³⁵ Stanislaw Rylko, *Ecclesial Movements and New Communities*:

God keeps reminding His Church through different means to be focused on her mission. Definitely, the Church cannot undermine the role of her hierarchy but at the same time, there is need to carry every member of the Church along in every decision making, there is need to allow God to steer His Spirit in the hearts of the faithful, besides the hierarchy of the Church. “For the purpose of safeguarding and handing on tradition, a system with established offices of leadership is needed. But it is equally true that for the purpose of shaking the Church out of the complacency and mediocrity that inevitably creep into any institution, the Church needs the charismatic intervention of the Spirit.”³⁶

In the encyclical *Laudato Si'* (LS) Pope Francis states that the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* was for “all the members of the Church with the aim of encouraging a process of missionary reform that is yet to be carried out” (LS 3). The call to Synodality is a call to look at the methods of evangelization that will be involving and inclusive, not just the hierarchy but all Christians. The call for Synodality is a realization of the saying of Jesus about “the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both new and old.” (Mt. 13:52). Synodality is a return to the basic message and challenges of the Gospel; but involving something new and distinctive, a new way of meeting the challenge of the Gospel, a fresh approach, more appropriate to the needs of the time. It is to bring about this newness and freshness that characterize charisms of each Institute of Consecrated Life; not for the Founders, but for the growth and development of the mission of the Church. The originating charism of each Religious Congregation started from among the people of a local Church, to respond to the needs and growth of the evangelization of the people of that particular local Church.

³⁶ Francis A. Sullivan, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal* 47.

Pope Francis told the gathering of Bishops during the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, that, “The world in which we live and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, requires from the Church the strengthening of synergies in all areas of its mission.”³⁷ The Church's response to the challenges of our times requires 'New Wine in New Wine-skin.' The making of this new wine requires the collaboration of all members of the Church, the Body of Christ. Because, through the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation all members of the Church have been anointed by the Holy Spirit and it is when we work together like this, the “entire Christian community is infallible when its members discern together and speak with one voice on matters of faith and morals.”³⁸ This makes the call for Synodality more important and urgent. A call that requires all Catholics, young and old, male and female, Religious and Lay, ministerial Priests and all Baptized to wake up and together develop a new way of responding, preaching and living the Gospel of Jesus.

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³⁷ Pope Francis, *Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, October 17, 2015, No. 9: cf. w2.vatican.va.

³⁸ Pope Francis, *Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, October 17, 2015, No. 9: cf. w2.vatican.va

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