

## Theme VIII

# On the exercise of authority

### A. INTRODUCTION

180. In the first days of the Assembly we were presented with the Report of the Government for the six-year period 2014-2019. When we reached the fifth part: "Some aspects of the exercise of authority in our history as Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi," we saw that it was advantageous to delve deeper into this topic because of its special relevance. We approached it in a climate of discernment, reflection, and mutual listening, and we were able to see more clearly how deviations in this area have influenced the living out of our vocation and mission. While it is true that we have lived this area with generosity and a desire to please God, we acknowledged with sorrow the impact that the inadequate exercise of authority has had on our personal, community and apostolic life.
181. We recognize that we have made progress in carrying out the changes that the Church asked of us since 2007 and as a result of the 2011 apostolic visitation: the separation of internal and external forum, consultations for the appointment of local and territorial directors, the appointment of and work with councils that moderate authority, and the rotation of persons in positions of government. However, there are still steps to be taken and certain inertias to be corrected in order to achieve a healthy and mature experience of authority and obedience.
182. We have adopted the content of the fifth part of the report of the outgoing general government and we are convinced that the recognition made in it about our past, the clarity it throws on the traces still left in the present, the steps taken and what still remains to be done, can be an open door that gives us light on how to live an evangelical journey of growing freedom, maturity and personal responsibility because "the truth will set you free" (John 8:31). For this reason, we present some extracts from the report, and we invite each Consecrated Woman to read it prayerfully and serenely, with the hope that it will aid personal reflection on this journey of renewal, conversion, and purification that we want to continue to make as a Society.

**B. FIFTH PART OF THE REPORT OF THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT  
“SOME ASPECTS OF THE EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY IN OUR HISTORY AS CONSECRATED WOMEN OF REGNUM CHRISTI”  
(EXTRACTS)**

183. *The life of the Founder and his style of exercising authority formed in the institution a culture that fostered a strongly vertical system in which a type of obedience and dependence was valued that is not proper to a mature adult, a system where criticism and diversity of opinion were not accepted and those who did so were marginalized or labeled. This system put people in a vulnerable position, where their natural rights and even the sanctity of their conscience could be violated in the name of obedience. In one way or another, this has influenced every generation, since the directors were trained to exercise a style of authority that was not always correct and, in spite of the effort made in the years of renewal, we must not forget that each of the Consecrated Women, and therefore the directors as well, have been gaining awareness of and making steps at a varying pace, on the subject of the service of authority and obedience. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that not everything that is expressed here has been done by every person in authority nor that all the Consecrated Women have gone through these circumstances. It is necessary to recognize and thank the dedication and service of many Consecrated Women in authority throughout these 50 years, where they sought the good of those entrusted to them. What is noted in this section are the deviations that we have committed in one way or another, to try to manifest what we need to continue to work on.*
184. *The experience of each of us in this area is diverse. While we have all lived in an institutional culture where grave errors were made in the exercise of authority, some have experienced situations of abuse of authority and conscience.<sup>20</sup> It is therefore necessary to differentiate errors and deviations in the exercise of authority from what is an abuse, so as not to include everything in the same category.*

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<sup>20</sup> Note from the Assembly: We recognize that there is not yet a clear or definitive definition of what constitutes an abuse of authority or conscience. We use this term in the context in which it is used in the following two conferences:

- Lecture by Dr. Isabelle Chartier-Siben to the Conference of Religious of France, December 9, 2019: <https://www.viereligieuse.fr/Dans-un-contexte-religieux-l-emprise-correspond-a-unealienation-mentale>

- Considerazioni a proposito dell'abuso spirituale, o di coscienza. Incontro con i Direttori Spirituali dei Collegi e Convitti a Roma. Congregazione per il Clero. Rome, February 7, 2020.

## Presupposition

185. *The foundation of our obedience is filial, therefore, linked to the truth that being children makes us free, to grow in the love of the Father who affirms our good. The freedom that Christ has come to bring us is not a lack of any obligation or demand towards our actions. We live in obedience to God because we freely want to respond to his love, in identification with Christ through the Holy Spirit. In the Christian obedience of consecrated persons, there is an ecclesial mediation, which must correspond to this "glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). We recognize our need for conversion and purification so that our understanding and practice of authority honors this condition as daughters of God.*

## The past

186. *There was an institutional culture that favored homogeneity in various fields, where submission to authority was valued, and an attempt was made to instill a way of thinking and feeling according to the directives and desires of the person in authority. This permeated personal, community and apostolic life, marking a way of being and of interacting.*

187. *There was a climate of pronounced adherence to authority and to our own way of doing things, which lacked a critical sense towards the institution and all who formed a part of it, particularly those in authority, who were idealized, closing our eyes to their mistakes, or at the very least, trying to excuse them. This was protected by the promise not to criticize and to warn the director if anyone did. This meant creating a close circle around the authority figure and the environment became more closed in on itself, and therefore people became vulnerable.*

188. *Divergence, questioning and a critical spirit were rejected because they were considered as threats to "the monolithic unity and esprit de corps".*

189. *There was no separation between the extra-sacramental internal forum and external forum, so all the aspects of one's personal life were subject to authority. In addition, trust and total openness with authority was encouraged and valued as a way to be known and helped, and it was frowned upon when someone didn't do so. Naturally, people who needed to feel understood, loved and valued wanted strong ties with the authority figure (the only people with whom they could have deeper ties), with the risk that this would be fertile ground for abuses of authority and conscience.*

190. *This dependence on authority in the various spheres of life undermined personal autonomy and freedom, which in many cases was disregarded: the person came to judge and value herself according to the judgment and value that authority had of her; the management and*

*decisions of one's own life required the approval of authority in even trifling matters. Indiscriminate docility to authority was erroneously considered to be true obedience, favoring infantilism in people.*

- 191. The authority, on many occasions, seemed to have the right to interpret what God was asking of the person, judging their intentions and their actions, probing their conscience without respecting the right to privacy and discretion, making judgments about the person and consequently replacing their conscience. This significantly affected the concept that the person had of herself, her capacity to assume a free and personal way of being facing God in regard to the judgments and decisions about one's own life, limiting the possibility of personal discernment.*
- 192. In the human and psychological realm, authority had the prerogative of demanding that the person be accompanied and have psychological or psychiatric evaluations, determining the professionals who would provide the assistance, accessing the information and evaluations without asking for the person's consent.*
- 193. This type of obedience was motivated in many different ways, generating a great and sincere desire to please God, at the same time identifying authority with the will of God in even the smallest details, in the preferences and suggestions of authority, beyond what was strictly required by consecrated obedience. Obedience of judgment was also encouraged as part of the same promise of obedience, without distinguishing it from the true matter of the vow. The mixture between the motivation to please God and a meticulous obedience generated confusion and different types of deformation of consciences, depending on the culture and age.*
- 194. The area of interpersonal relationships was reduced by norms or ways of life that somehow limited and controlled dealings with various types of people. Relationships with one's own family were greatly affected, weakening family ties; relationships with outsiders were lived with caution, always seeking an apostolic goal; fraternal relationships were to be marked by charity towards everyone, and any close and deep relationship was avoided, as it was automatically considered a risk in the area of chastity or universality of dealings with others. In the precandidacy and formation center, classes were held at home, outings were organized determining who went with whom, etc. There was, generally speaking, a lot of control. All of this meant people lived in more sheltered environments and with fewer ties, relationships or support networks making them more vulnerable and dependent on the institution, and therefore on its authority.*
- 195. Vocational and formative processes were more oriented towards the acquisition of traits of an ideal woman and the achievement of group objectives, without taking sufficient account of the situations and processes of each person according to their age, origin, way of being,*

*affectivity, sensitivity, etc. There was a rather egalitarian idea of the type of mission that they were being formed for, with little interest in the apostolic service that each one could exercise in her own personal journey.*

- 196. At times, people with skills in the field of human relationships were placed in positions of authority who, in some cases because of their affective immaturity or other personal motives, tended to manipulate people or sought to surround themselves with some who "were their favorites" or were useful in helping them with required service.*
- 197. There was a tendency to seek out certain profiles of people to appoint them to authority; they were often young and tended to remain in the position without adequate rotation of persons. This, associated with certain privileges (perhaps minimal, but significant in the very regulated and dependent life that was lived; they had more freedom, more personal space, etc.) made it difficult in many cases for them to put themselves in the shoes of the Consecrated Women whom they governed and to empathize with their situations.*
- 198. The pace of life used to be very overburdened; even free time was scheduled. This did not give the person the space or time needed to think, to be alone with oneself, to question things, to form her own opinion and to have deep relationships with others. Not living in this way could generate a feeling of guilt for "not taking advantage of one's time."*

### **Report from the 2011 Apostolic Visitation**

*199. The report from the Apostolic Visitation in 2011 mentions:*

- The fact that the directors were so young, and with little experience of consecrated life, meant that they sometimes applied the norms with a lack of certainty, without real knowledge of each individual, and without a hierarchy among the many norms they had.*
- To need to purify the concept of the vow of obedience, offering room for personal freedom, and respect for the conscience of each person, in order to encourage responsible obedience and allow for a fraternal life where transparent fraternal interaction can take place.*

### **Work done over the years**

- 200. Following the intervention of the Pontifical Delegate, various efforts have been made to promote awareness of those institutional areas that needed to be changed in the field of the service of authority and obedience. This is a core element in the institutional culture, which had already been called for in the Holy See's Communiqué to the Legion of*

*Christ of May 1, 2010. It is noted that steps have been taken, but it is still not enough. It is necessary to continue to deepen the understanding of the human person from an accurate Christian anthropology, as well as in the vow of obedience and the service of authority. This needs to happen through a formation that sheds light on fundamental principles, the aspects that need to be addressed and the horizon which we all need to walk towards together in a spirit of co-responsibility.*

- 201. Having consulted men and women of the Church who have been clarifying these concepts, there has been a growing awareness of the need to clarify for all the Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi what the vow of obedience implies in its canonical and charismatic aspects, helping them to better understand where it is lived and applied and where it is not. The aim is to convey this from the first stages of formation, and to use the renewal courses to reinforce this understanding and to purify past errors.*
- 202. We have sought to offer formation in the service of authority in order to identify the errors of the past and to renew the way in which this service is lived out. We have sought to address: the dignity and respect of the person, her conscience, freedom and the capacity to respond with maturity and autonomy before God, to recognize her capacity to seek and know the truth, her freedom of expression, her appreciation of critical thinking, her interpersonal relationships in various settings, safeguarding the separation of forums, decision making based on principles exercised in personal discernment and not according to a control exercised by authority, etc.*
- 203. Renewal and rotation of people in positions of authority is happening by appointing directors at all levels, with various profiles. An attempt has been made to eliminate a stereotype of persons in authority by encouraging the mentality that this is a service, rather than an honor, in which everyone's availability is needed. In spite of this, sometimes it has been the communities themselves who prefer a person with more experience, as director, instead of accepting the proposal of new people who are willing. At other times, it has been difficult to find Consecrated Women who are willing to take on a role of authority, above all as directors of communities, because of the demands that are made on authority as a result of how this position was lived in the past, because of the tensions that arise today in a time when many changes are taking place at the same time, with the consequent insecurity and loss of confidence due to the demise of the parameters used in the past, and the lack of assimilation of the principles that should lead and enlighten us.*
- 204. The communities currently conduct consultations for the appointment of their local and territorial directors. Each director exercises a moderated authority and is supported by a council.*

205. *The precandidacies were closed, among other reasons, because over the years important deficiencies were noted in the formation processes of some of the Consecrated Women who came from these centers, which did not favor their maturation. Having a closed environment did not favor the integration of the experiences proper to adolescence, regarding their formation of identity, affective maturation, etc.*
206. *We have opened ourselves up to academic environments outside our own. Many Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi are studying for degrees and doctorates in civil and ecclesiastical institutions outside Regnum Christi and they bring back the richness that they receive. The studies of the Consecrated Women in formation are no longer internal but are carried out in an ecclesiastical university, thus fostering a deep philosophical and theological formation which helps them to acquire a solid foundation, to form critical thinking, to broaden their personal relationships, to experience diversity and to be enriched by it.*

### **Current situation**

207. *In personal and community life, although steps have been taken, today we still see the traces of the wounds, errors, and confusion which we have lived in this area of service of authority and obedience. It is necessary to attend to them by means of formative activities that enlighten and shift the institutional paradigms.*
208. *The wounds suffered by the system in which we lived, as well as the fears that accompany them, are manifested in different ways according to the different types of people, the experiences they had, the age at which they occurred, their duration and the range of these experiences. Some of the consequences are: depression or sadness, insecurity and low self-esteem, anxiety, immaturity in taking charge of one's own life, distrust of authority, a tendency to protect oneself and sometimes to overreact by stressing one's autonomy and individuality, anger at the actions of authority and harsh judgements about the way people are.*
209. *It is clear amongst the Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi that each one must be responsible for her own personal life and that all are called to take co-responsibility for developing the community, without expecting almost everything to depend on authority. Often, however, all kinds of problems are deferred to the one in authority, or authority is blamed for things that are rather the actions or limitations of other people.*
210. *In theory, we have come to understand that many people will have to exercise this service at some point, and that the director cannot be expected to do so perfectly. However, in many cases there continue to be high expectations of authority. It also happens that, when a new*

*person is appointed director, the community or the director herself soon asks for a change.*

- 211. Some directors are afraid to exercise the service of authority because they do not want to fall into the errors of the past, they hold back, or they do not know how to offer the service which they were entrusted with. The vast majority are becoming aware and changing at different rates. It is not clear what is and what is not the responsibility of the director, there are different expectations and viewpoints in the same community, which makes it is difficult for the director to know how to proceed with each person.*
- 212. Dialogue with the one in authority is more common than before. There has been an advance towards mutual acceptance and listening, openness to diverse and sometimes divergent points of view, there is growing freedom to present and express one's own point of view to authority, but it is still necessary to encourage this and to continue to take steps in mature and respectful dialogue.*
- 213. The separation of forums has been understood and appreciated and it is a common practice among Consecrated Women to have spiritual direction with a person who has no authority over them and who, in many cases, is not part of Regnum Christi.*
- 214. Today it is more common than ever for people in authority to seek to protect and safeguard the individuality and freedom of each person to act according to her conscience and before God. Three points that we have worked on particularly attentively are:*

  - 1º Living according to principles: we have gone from living in a thoroughly regulated system to living according to principles that guide each person in the different circumstances of her life according to her condition as a Consecrated Woman of Regnum Christi.*
  - 2º Personal responsibility: each Consecrated Woman is ultimately responsible for the decisions she makes. When she experiences difficulty in obeying some indication, she has the freedom to express her disagreement, and in a climate of dialogue with the one in authority, seek together what God may be asking of her in that circumstance.*
  - 3º Graduality: During the years of initial formation the formators have the task of accompanying more closely those who are learning what it means to be consecrated within Regnum Christi. In the measure that she assimilates the style of consecration to which she is called, each Consecrated Woman who has freely embraced this form of life, takes on the living of the proper law by applying principles to their various circumstances with maturity, rendering less necessary the close accompaniment of the formators.*



## Remaining tasks

215. *In this section, tasks concerning the exercise of authority and the relationship with authority are outlined, but it will be important, at the same time, to continue to work on how to live out the vow of obedience.*
216. *Since the apostolic visitation, there have been developments in the awareness of the true role of authority in the life of a consecrated woman. The Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi have walked a path of growing personal freedom and responsibility in living out their vocation, but the weight of a history of almost 50 years, where the paradigm of authority was very different, cannot be disregarded.*
217. *It is necessary to understand that a cultural change of this magnitude touches the deepest part of individuals and their lived experiences. The wounds in this area make the journey difficult but not impossible. It is necessary to continue helping to heal these wounds.*
218. *Among the tasks that remain to be done, we highlight the following:*
- 1° *To walk together with the Church on the path of a new and deeper understanding of the essence of consecration, especially the concepts of obedience and authority.*
  - 2° *Those in authority must continue to take into account that there will be people living under their jurisdiction with different wounds, difficulties in trust, and with more difficulty in obeying. They also need to recognize that they will have people who have difficulty in changing their paradigm and who will continue to depend excessively on them. The challenge will be to continue to walk with everyone in this paradigm shift, as one encounters these differences in a community.*
  - 3° *Those who exercise authority need to be aware of the errors and deviations which they can fall into, fruit of the institutional mentality lived in the past and which continues to affect us today. Only in this way can they humbly watch out for them, recognize them and ask for forgiveness when they fall into them. We embrace this as a path of personal and institutional purification.*
  - 4° *It continues to be important to explore the principles that guide the exercise of authority, as a priority area of ongoing formation. Likewise, to continue to fathom a correct Christian anthropology that allows us to view people as God sees them and to act accordingly, valuing and safeguarding the treasure of human freedom and believing in their capacity to adhere and respond to the good and the truth.*
  - 5° *Continue to exercise authority and obedience lived out with a profound respect for freedom and the individuality of each person, respecting the individual's relationship with God.*

- 6° *Continue to foster adult relationships among the members of the Society, among directors and members, among sisters, with the chaplains, in our apostolic work, etc. Recognize the important role that friendship has in the Christian life and in the life of holiness; both friendships among Consecrated Women and other human and Christian friendships that enrich one's own journey. To seek to form the affective side of friendship and to strengthen it in a community life that involves participation.*
- 7° *Continue to take steps to grow in direct and simple interpersonal communication. There is still a long way to go; often there is a communication that is strained between people due to partial and indirect perceptions.*
- 8° *Learn to discern with freedom, recognizing the malaises of the past that may condition us.*

### C. THE HORIZON

219. As an Assembly, we are aware that, in continuity with the path of conversion undertaken in this area, we must focus on the mystery of Christ, what he tells us about the exercise of authority, and, above all, contemplate how he wanted to exercise it, ordered around the values of the Kingdom. "The son of man has not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mt 20:28) Though Master and Lord, we see him at the Last Supper washing the feet of his disciples and giving us the command to do the same. (cf. Jn 13:15) Authority belongs to Christ, and therefore those who are called to this service must be aware that they are only mediators, like John the Baptist who pointed towards the Lamb, (cf. Jn 1:29) or like Mary, who invites us to listen to Jesus and do whatever he tells us. (cf. Jn 2:5)
220. We need to deepen the understanding of authority at the service of the community and at the service of the Kingdom in a mutual search for the will of God. Authority is placed at the service of the person, carries out a work of spiritual encouragement of the community and strengthens the fraternity lived centered on Christ who sends us on mission. The community, united together, discerns the paths which the Spirit is guiding it on, and authority harmonizes this listening of everyone and invites them to deal with the diversity, in order to make the final decisions that are reserved to them. This is an ongoing challenge, and we are enthusiastic to continue advancing in this direction, by promoting spaces of personal and community freedom, and an exercise of authority which, in respecting this freedom, helps to combine the well-being of individuals with the common good.
221. We see the growing co-responsibility among us in building our communities as a horizon before us, because "the community is what

its members make it."<sup>21</sup> If in the past more weight was given to the authority figure and almost everything depended on her, today we want to continue to move forward and encourage the contribution and commitment of each one, interdependence and collaboration. We want this to be reflected "in a testimony of fraternal communion that is attractive and resplendent. May all people appreciate how we take care of each other, how we encourage each other and how we accompany each other,"<sup>22</sup> both in our fraternal life and in the development of the mission that the Lord is calling us to. Authority is exercised at the service of the mission by encouraging participation and open and sincere dialogue.

222. Renewal also requires that we go deeper in the living out of our vow of obedience as a search for union with God and a free response to his love, as trusting daughters in the hands of the Father. It is an obedience which accepts the will of God as the only criteria of life, discerned and interpreted through multiple means (our own conscience, the Word of God, the magisterium of the Church, the signs of the times, our own community, our proper law and, in a special way, our legitimate directors). It is necessary that each Consecrated Woman grow in the art of discernment in order to listen to the movements of the Spirit, since "true obedience demands that each one manifest his or her own conviction after having matured it in discernment."<sup>23</sup> Thus, obedience can be a path of growth and freedom for the person.
223. We are aware that the way in which we have lived authority has also affected our exercise of authority in the area of apostolate, as well as our way of relating to others in pastoral activity. Keeping our eyes on Christ will encourage us to focus on people, respecting their space for freedom and discernment, their own rhythm, timing, possibilities, and ways of being, and rejecting all forms of superiority. It will allow us to be receptive to all people and be ready to walk by their side, fostering open and attentive listening, and seeking frank dialogue in resolving conflicts. It is a new opportunity for recognition that leads us to live our evangelizing mission with humble and prophetic leadership.
224. Making our own the conclusions of the report of the government for the six-year period 2014-2019 and recognizing as an Assembly our need to continue to walk a path of evangelical conversion in the exercise of authority, we have asked our new government to direct its efforts towards the path of formation which requires renewal in this area, towards pastoral accompaniment of the current directors and those who have been affected by the inadequate exercise of authority, and towards the elaboration of documents which will guide and provide frameworks to avoid abuses.

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<sup>21</sup> CICLSAL. *New Wine, New Wineskins*, #24

<sup>22</sup> POPE FRANCIS. *Evangelii Gaudium*, #99

<sup>23</sup> CICLSAL. *New Wine, New Wineskins*, #24

## CONCLUSION

225. “Accepting the successes, as well as the personal and communal limitations, far from being just one more news item, becomes the initial kickoff of every authentic process of conversion and transformation. Let us never forget that the risen Jesus presents himself to his own with his wounds. Moreover, it is precisely from his wounds that Thomas can confess his faith. We are invited to not dissemble, hide, or cover over our wounds. A wounded Church is able to comprehend and be moved by the wounds of today's world, make them its own, suffer them, accompany them and move to heal them. A wounded Church does not put itself at the center, does not think it is perfect, does not seek to cover up and conceal its evil, but places there the only one who can heal the wounds and he has a name: Jesus Christ.”<sup>24</sup>
226. Today we thank the Lord for giving us the light to see our wounds more clearly and also be able to respond to them. Hand in hand with him, we can continue to face the open challenges that we still have, continue to learn and reflect on the role of the directors in the communities, value their service, exercise personal, community and pastoral discernment with freedom and maturity, etc. This gives light to see more clearly the consequences and damage that this has caused in many lives. We want to ask forgiveness to all those people who have been hurt by our way of exercising authority.
227. We look to the future with hope because we are confident that this is a good time for personal, community, pastoral, and institutional conversion and that the adequate exercise of the service of authority and obedience will be one of the key elements of our journey of renewal in the different aspects of our vocation and mission. It will be an evangelical and evangelizing process that will lead us to a greater fulfillment in living our consecration.

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<sup>24</sup> POPE FRANCIS. Letter to the Church in Chile, May 31, 2018. #6