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To speak with one voice: a history of the constitutions and rule of life of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity

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TO SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE:
A HISTORY OF THE CONSTITUTIONS
AND RULE OF LIFE OF THE
MISSIONARY SERVANTS
OF THE MOST BLESSED TRINITY

Thesis

Submitted to

The Graduate School of the

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The Degree

Master of Arts in the Religious Studies Department

by


Sr. Deborah Lynn Wilson, MSBT

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

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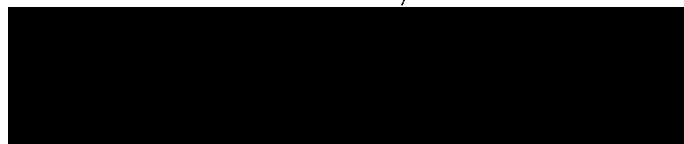
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2006

ABSTRACT

TO SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE: A HISTORY OF THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULE OF LIFE OF THE MISSIONARY SERVANTS OF THE MOST BLESSED TRINITY

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The Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity (MSBT) are a pontifical institute of sisters, one branch of the Missionary Cenacle Family, which includes the Missionary Servants of the Holy Trinity (ST, priests and brothers). The two congregations were founded together in Holy Trinity, Alabama in 1918. Juridical norms for apostolic congregations were in a period of rapid change during the 20th century, and norms for institutes of women were quite different from norms for men until the 1983 Code of Canon Law. These conditions served to separate the two congregations, which before attaining canonical status had enjoyed a close family relationship.

After Vatican II, the MSBT and the ST rediscovered and reclaimed their identity as brother and sister congregations. Ultimately, the two congregations were able to obtain formal approval of a common Rule of Life, an extraordinary concession by the Holy See. The process of obtaining this approval reflects a Trinitarian spirituality and illustrates the MSBT/ST relationship as a model for relationships within the Church. Men and women, and religious and the hierarchy, are seen collaborating as partners. This model is greatly needed in a Church suffering from polarization.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 1986, I was a Missionary Cenacle Volunteer at St. Patrick School, living and working with the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity. Many times over the years I recalled the day the sisters received word that the Rule of Life had been approved. To write its history has always been a longing of mine, and I would like to acknowledge my deep gratitude to my congregation for allowing me time "away from the missions" to study at the University of Dayton. Without the support and encouragement of my sisters, this work would not have been possible.

I would particularly like to thank the many men and women who guided me throughout my research and writing— most especially my advisor Dr. William Portier, and my readers Dr. Cecilia Moore and Br. Thomas Giardino S.M. Sr. Theresa Ahern, the MSBT archivist, was an invaluable asset. I am also grateful for the support and input I received from my additional readers: Fr. David O'Connor, ST, Sr. Joseph Miriam Blackwell, MSBT, and Sr. Sara Butler, MSBT.

Certainly the most enjoyable part of the research was the interviewing of Sr. Ann Maura O'Keefe, Sr. Sara Butler, Sr. Mary Gerald Kiely, Fr. Conrad Schmitt, and Fr. Vincent Fitzpatrick. I am also grateful for the historical research done previously by Fr. Shaun McCarty and Sr. Mary Tonra. As my work progressed, I developed a profound appreciation for the work of those who have gone before. I therefore dedicate this work to all of our pioneers, new and old, living and deceased, and especially to Fr. Vincent Fitzpatrick, ST, who died on March 7th, 2006.

To the glory of the Triune God

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INTRODUCTION

Thesis

One afternoon in February of 1986, the sisters living and working at St. Patrick School in Phenix City, Alabama received a very important message on their "telephone chain" from the Motherhouse in Philadelphia. The decree approving their Rule of Life had finally arrived from Rome. The message went up on the small blackboard on the kitchen refrigerator, and when the volunteers living with them came in from playground duty, the significance of the event had to be explained. One of the semi-retired sisters, a pioneer member who had known the founders, said simply, "It's very exciting. We've been working on it a long time. It means Rome recognizes us in a special way!"

What Sr. Marie Inez Briody expressed in a few simple sentences will herein be amplified, explored, and even interrogated. What work went in to the writing of the *Rule of Life of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity*? Who were the "we" who had been doing the work? What exactly was the Holy See recognizing that was so special it needed its own official decree? And why, really, should anyone be excited about it?

This is a history of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity¹, a congregation of sisters founded in Alabama in 1918, as told through the evolution of their juridical documents. The story reveals both the power and the lack of power that constitutions and rules wield over religious congregations. I will demonstrate that the work of producing these documents was in itself as much an expression of the congregation's spirit as the end product. Furthermore, that work in itself actually revived a critical element of their charism: the "family spirit" shared with their brothers, the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity (ST).

I intend to trace the evolution of the MSBT constitution from the founder's original words to the final approval not only of the new constitution but also, unlooked for, of a new Rule of Life. Did the approval of the Rule truly mark a particularly special moment? What do the Missionary Servants, both the men's and the women's branches, uniquely contribute to the life of the Church? How over the years has this charism been nurtured, and how has it been hindered, by policies and attitudes of a rapidly changing Church?

I contend that the 1985 *Rule of Life of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity* is not merely part of the traffic on the road of post-Vatican II renewal of religious life. It is in fact a noteworthy signpost on that road. In its pages we find the three states of life (laity, religious, and ordained) related as a family of adults with equal status in holiness in their respective vocations in the Church. In its evolution and final approval, we find that model put into practice in an extraordinary way. It is my thesis that the Rule of Life, both by the history of its writing and by the manner in which approval of it was ultimately obtained,

¹MSBT. See Appendix 1 for an explanation of the branches of the Missionary Cenacle Family and their acronyms.

stands as a model for relationships within the Church.

Method

On December 9, 1900, after centuries of what might be viewed as experimentation, Leo XIII's *Conditae a Christo* gave definitive, formal recognition of apostolic (i.e. non-monastic) religious life as a valid form of religious life. Norms for diocesan and pontifical erection followed, and a flood of congregations applied for and received approbation from the Sacred Congregation for Religious in the ensuing years. Within 60 years, even more pressure for adaptation of religious life was mounting, and the second Vatican Council once again opened the floodgates by mandating that all religious congregations begin a process of renewal. *Perfectae Caritatis*, like *Conditae a Christo*, was soon followed by norms and guidelines to aid in this evolution. It is safe to conclude that religious life as an institution in the Roman Catholic Church underwent dramatic changes in the 20th Century.

It is necessary to understand these changes in order to understand how and why the original and later constitutions of the MSBT came to be. Because the juridical status of women religious has been handled quite differently from that of men, the first chapter of this thesis will be a review of the evolution of religious life for women. It will focus primarily on changing juridical norms, starting with the emergence of apostolic religious life in the 16th century and ending with the global call for the renewal of religious life of the Second Vatican Council.

The Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity are one branch of what is now known as the Missionary Cenacle Family. Their emergence from the original lay movement as a distinct religious institute of diocesan right was bound up with the simultaneous emergence of the priests'

and brothers' branch of the spiritual family. The interrelationship of the three branches was a major factor in shaping the spirit of the sisters.² Thus the second chapter, a review of the foundation of the MSBT, will focus not only on their path to formal approbation but will include some attention to their relationship to the nascent men's congregation. We will see how the achievement of juridical status came with a high price: the dilution of the founding spirit (at least as expressed in the approved constitution), and a marked reduction in the mingling of affairs of the two young congregations. What had started out as a large, lively extended family who relied on one another for support eventually became more like distant cousins with limited contact and little or no mutual reliance. Significantly, this separation of the two branches came about not only because of the final content of the first MSBT constitution but even more because of what the sisters had to do in order to obtain its approval.

Finally, the third chapter will tell the winding journey of the writing and re-writing of the new MSBT constitution as required by Vatican II. In the two decades following the Council, the sisters lived through a time of revolution in religious life which cannot adequately be conveyed in written accounts. Interviews of some of those involved in the work highlighted that Missionary Servants, both the men and the women, experienced the same turmoil and angst that religious everywhere were experiencing. How much more incredible it was therefore that in the midst of the chaos and polarization of the day, men and women could choose to work together to craft a common constitution. Thanks to a deep desire to reclaim their true heritage, the MSBT and ST voluntarily sat together and worked out a single document all members could claim as their own. The end result was

²It is beyond the scope of this work to include a detailed examination of the on-going role of the original (lay) branch, the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate, in MSBT history, but it is important to note that this relationship is as integral as that shared with the ST branch.

one common Rule of Life from which flowed the ST and MSBT constitutions. Obtaining the Rule's approval required MSBT and ST together to push the Holy See to go beyond the comfort zone of established norms. While a common Rule of Life was certainly not unheard of, it was an unnecessary concession on the part of the Holy See to the respectful but insistent request of the two congregations.

The story of the various constitutions and ultimately the common Rule of Life has importance today in a Church which continues to suffer the effects of polarization. As will be seen, the hierarchical structure so often blamed for suppressing individual charisma was also to a large extent responsible for the reawakening of charisma weakened or dormant. Using methods of mutual respect and dialogue with each other, MSBT and ST were able to use these same methods in their relationship with the Holy See. They thereby modeled an authentic expression of their charism: a way men and women religious can relate to one another. Just as significantly, they modeled a way religious can relate to the hierarchy. Because the content of the Rule is contained verbatim in the two approved constitutions, its approval as a separate document is a redundancy which can only mean, in the words of Sr. Marie Inez, "Rome recognizes that we are special."

CHAPTER 1 THE EVOLUTION OF JURIDICAL STATUS OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS

Introduction

The juridical status of women religious has taken a unique journey down the centuries. The nuns and sisters themselves have had little to no direct leverage in shaping their status, but that shaping was not left entirely to the evolving attitudes of the hierarchy. Like geologic forces, the needs of the Church at large and the commitment of women religious themselves have also wrought changes in the landscape. Slowly and inexorably, or at times with the suddenness of an earthquake, these various forces have all worked to shift the ground on which our ecclesial structures are built.

This chapter will follow the story of religious life for women, chiefly from the perspective of the life as an ecclesial institution subject to the hierarchy. As religious life has gradually come to be understood as a distinct state of life and a gift to the Church, tradition and expectation have gradually become norm and law. Women religious have been treated quite differently from men, and it was not until the 1983 Code of Canon Law was promulgated that the differences were almost entirely erased. How and why did we get to 1983? I contend that three forces were at work: the changing social and spiritual needs of the Church and society, women religious themselves who were pushing against boundaries in response to their vocation, and the hierarchy as it alternatively constricted or liberated religious and their institutions through various forms of legislation and encouragement.

Religious life has taken on many forms over the centuries. New forms inevitably borrow from pre-existing forms and co-exist with them. We will focus on the three broad categories of monastic, mendicant, and apostolic religious life and the innovations they brought with them. Western monasticism emerged in the early Middle Ages—the 6th century Rule of St. Benedict swiftly became the dominant form—and remained the only significant form of religious life until the 12th century. Its gift was stability and a community life ordered around a common schedule of prayer and work. The second form, mendicant religious life, began with Francis of Assisi and Dominic Guzman in the 12th century and co-existed with monasticism. It was born in response to a shift from rural to urban life and a need for catechesis to combat various heretical movements emerging at the time. The Dominicans and Franciscans who typified the new form were not tied to a monastery but led more publicly visible lives as scholars and preachers. The third form, apostolic religious life, emerged in the 16th century, beginning with the Ursulines and Jesuits. This form arose to address unmet social and spiritual needs, and represented the first significant opportunity for women to live as vowed religious outside of cloister. Apostolic religious congregations, especially for women, were rarely recognized as pontifical institutions because they did not live under any of the established Rules. In the final section of this chapter we will focus on the 20th century, which marked a major turning point for religious life as waves of new legislation ended this distinction and precipitated a global renewal of all forms of religious life.

It is important at the outset to clarify the terms Rule (or Rule of Life) and constitution. Until the 16th century, every monastery or religious institute claimed one of any of a number of existing Rules, each reflecting a particular spirituality. A Rule of Life is therefore not unique to a congregation—more than one congregation can claim it. A constitution, however, is a unique

document designed and approved for a specific congregation. The constitution in effect defines the congregation as a unique entity in a way a Rule simply cannot. Because in general usage, even in Church documents, "rule" and "constitution" are often used interchangeably, there is widespread confusion on this point. In the technical sense a Rule of Life functions quite differently from a constitution—it is a layer above. A religious institute can have a constitution and no Rule, but it cannot have a Rule and no constitution. The two are distinct entities.

Religious Life before the Council of Trent

The demise of religious life as an institution in the Church has been foretold on more than one occasion in history. Nevertheless, some form of religious life has always existed, and it has managed to survive and then flourish despite periodic hard times. In the earliest days of the Church, it took the form of households of single women and widows who chose to live together and live out certain commitments flowing from their faith. A more distinctive form emerged when certain men and women elected to live solitary lives of hardship and prayer in the desert. But it was during the Middle Ages that monasticism emerged, a form of religious life built on common life around a written rule, and this particular form has been the most enduring and influential of all.

The basic elements of monastic life are the vows, a common schedule of work and daily prayer, separation from surrounding society (in varying degrees), and an organizational structure with defined roles and procedures for managing internal affairs. The Benedictine form ultimately became the prevailing model, but Celtic monasticism arose independently and made a significant contribution before eventually being assimilated into the Benedictine form.

Ironically, the state-mandated imposition of the Benedictine form on all monasteries contained the seeds of its own destruction. The Carolingian king Louis the Pious promulgated the Monastic Capitulary in 817, which mandated that henceforth only the Rule of St. Benedict could be used. However, the Rule imposed was not the original, but a modification produced by two gatherings of abbots who had been commissioned to the task by Louis under the leadership of Benedict of Aniane. The revised rule emphasized liturgy "to such an extent that monks spent vast amounts of time in choir and were consequently unable to perform the manual labor which was clearly a part of St. Benedict's vision of a monk's life."³ This in turn contributed to the development of monastic life as a life of privilege. Both men's and women's monasteries drifted far from their original ideals and function and became the subject of various reform efforts in the ensuing centuries.

Despite the Carolingian intention to impose uniformity, religious life in the monastic period diversified. Internal pressure fueled, for example, the Cluniac reform and the birth of new traditions such as the Cistercians, the Trappists, and Carthusians. They all understood themselves as expressions of the true spirit of St. Benedict. External pressure—the needs of the Church—also produced diversity. Missionary efforts required priests: monks sent into new territories for the purpose of evangelization needed to be able to baptize their converts. The practice of ordaining only a few members to meet the immediate needs of the monastery developed into the practice of ordaining many members to meet the needs of society. A new, non-monastic form of religious life also arose when some diocesan priests, attracted to monastic ideals, "organized themselves into a

³F. Donald Logan, *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 78.

kind of religious community” and adopted their own rule and became the Canons Regular.⁴ Finally, the Crusades were the impetus for the emergence of orders of “warrior monks” and other groups of vowed men in service to the Church. Naturally these non-monastic innovations were by their nature not an option for women religious, who could not be ordained nor could they take up arms against the infidels.

Following desert asceticism and monasticism, the next major development in religious life was the rise of mendicant orders. This did not replace monasticism, but drew heavily from it, and unlike some of the above-mentioned innovations, it presented at least in theory more possibilities for women. In practice, however, it was not to be. The Franciscan and Dominican men had trouble enough of their own in establishing new ways of being religious in the Church. The family resistance Thomas Aquinas faced when he clung to his Dominican vocation illustrates the problem. Mendicants were in fact countercultural. “Unlike priests, they did not settle in a parish under the authority of a bishop, nor, unlike the various orders of monks, did they devote themselves to contemplation and manual labor within the walls of a monastery. Instead, they dedicated themselves to a more itinerant and unusually independent life of ‘preaching in poverty’.”⁵ Given that the mendicant men contended with resistance, it is hardly surprising that women continued to be confined to a monastic model even when they had a mendicant foundation.

⁴Sandra Marie Schneiders, I.H.M., “Reflections on the History of Religious Life and Contemporary Development,” in *Turning Points in the History of Religious Life*, edited by Carol Quigley, I.H.M., (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 28.

⁵Nicholas M. Healy, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2003), 2.

The hierarchy was a force to be reckoned with in these developments. Innocent III instituted some hallmark restrictions on the manner in which religious orders could be founded. Conscious of "the danger inherent in an uncontrolled expansion," the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) removed the right to approve and found new religious orders from bishops and reserved this right exclusively to the Holy See.⁶ The Pope intended to force any future groups to choose an existing rule rather than invent new forms of religious life. The Dominicans were an example of his success in this matter, since they were not allowed to create a new rule but adopted the Augustinian rule. To this day, we look back on the most widely-used rules permitted at that time as the four great Rules: Augustinian, Benedictine, Carmelite, and Franciscan. Despite alleged papal anxiety about innovation, the expansion of mendicant orders continued, as is evidenced by an even stronger affirmation of Innocent's policy made by the Second Council of Lyons in 1274.⁷

Whereas the monastic form had in certain times and places allowed for strong women to arise as abbesses with some local political power and even leadership with or over brother monasteries with whom they were allied, the mendicant form was laid out more hierarchically in that regard. In a given mendicant order, the first order members were men, the second order members were cloistered women, and the third order members were laity. Schneiders cites Catherine of Siena and Rosa of Lima as famous examples of third order members who we now perceive as religious because their lifestyle so resembles the apostolic religious lifestyle we are familiar with today.

⁶Benjamin Farrell, *The Rights and Duties of the Local Ordinary Regarding Women Religious of Pontifical Approval* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1941), 18.

⁷Ibid, 19.

Juridically they were not [religious], but theologically, they were. Had they been... canonical religious, they would have been cloistered and unable to carry out the ministries for which they were so revered. This probably represents the first successful out-maneuvering of male restrictions for the sake of the apostolate.⁸

What was the force operating to keep all women religious cloistered? It would be difficult to simply attribute this to the needs of the Church, since it seems to have been the needs of the Church that fueled the rise of the mendicant movement to begin with. The answer might be found in the struggle mendicant men faced to find acceptance as they challenged the prevailing monastic model. Perhaps society, and the hierarchy, could tolerate only so much innovation at a time. In any case, the ultimately defining force was the hierarchy. Boniface VIII (1294-1303) promulgated the *Periculoso*, which "commanded that all women who have made religious profession should live in perpetual enclosure" and which forbade them "to leave the monastery for any reason, except in the case of evident danger or if one had become a cause of scandal to others."⁹

Schaaf gives a detailed account of this and subsequent similar legislation in *The Cloister*, and simultaneously betrays an attitude which lends weight to the theory that it was social expectation (particularly in the form of gender roles) as much as hierarchical mandate which kept women behind walls long after men were free to follow new forms of vowed life. Starting with *Periculoso*, on to its strong reaffirmation at the Council of Trent, and following up with even more stringent requirements which followed Trent, he paints a distinct portrait of both women religious and of the hierarchy. We meet nuns as women who are deviously avoiding the intent of the laws and bullying weak bishops with their demands for exceptions. "Too frequently and for specious reasons they

⁸Schneiders, 31.

⁹Farrell, 20.

sought release from this burdensome seclusion to which they had bound themselves by their profession.”¹⁰ The law seems to be an end in itself, since Schaaf recounts its development with little mention of its context. By 1747, the beleaguered “Benedict XIV was earnestly endeavoring to bring about a strict and universal observance of the laws of the Church and enlisted the assistance of the bishops of the whole world.”¹¹

So, in summary, *Periculoso* marks the beginning of a sustained campaign by the papacy to confine all women religious to cloister—a more and more canonically defined rather than internally defined expression of it. Schaaf’s remarks notwithstanding, more than once down the centuries vowed women found themselves forced to accept new legislation which they had in fact *not* freely bound themselves to by their profession. Movements such as third orders and the Beguines are signs that some women were seeking to live non-monastic religious life, but it was not until the mendicant movement gave way to the apostolic movement in the 16th century that women religious were able to escape strict enclosure to any significant extent. And despite their occasional successes, their actual juridical status was poorly defined at best. Papal recognition of non-monastic religious life for women was still centuries in the future.

Apostolic Life and the Embattled Emergence of Simple Vows

The apostolic movement, like the mendicant movement before it, did not replace its predecessors but drew from them. Apostolic religious life was distinctive in its emphasis on ministry,

¹⁰Valentine Theodore Schaaf, OFM, *The Cloister* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger, 1921) 52.

¹¹Ibid.

and for women this meant living outside of cloister. Common life was ordered around the needs of ministry rather than the monastic hours of prayer. Once again, the need for reform was a force for change. Many mendicant communities, like many monastic communities during the previous transition period, had fallen far from their founding spirit. Friars had private cooks, seamstresses, mistresses, and cells which were in fact generously appointed apartments. Nuns had lap dogs, upon which they lavished "elaborately embroidered and bejeweled cushions with long silk ribbons."¹² This fell in line with other ecclesial abuses of the late Middle Ages which Protestant reformers found egregious. The Protestant Reformation reformed religious life out of existence wherever it took hold.

Though the rise of the apostolic form of religious life is sometimes identified as part of the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation, it is more accurately understood on its own terms. Were the Jesuits "an instrument of the papacy," or were they "about something altogether different—heart-felt conversion"?¹³ Recent historians are tending toward the latter view. Religious laxity was giving way to religious passion, and this led to internal reform of abuses as well as the birth of new ministry-oriented religious institutions. "New religious orders and congregations played the major part in this development [of active, pastoral outreach], which was little related directly to Trent and Tridentine reform."¹⁴ So, the forces shaping religious life during this transition period were both internal (religious themselves were agents of change) and external (society was both repelled

¹²Lawrence Cada, S.M., et al, *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979) 33.

¹³John W. O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 77.

¹⁴Robert Birely, *The Refashioning Of Catholicism, 1450-1700* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 25.

by perceived abuses and hungering for spiritual nourishment).

The Ursulines were founded in 1535, and the Jesuits in 1540. These congregations are invariably cited as the best examples of a new form of religious life arising at the beginning of the Modern age. Ignatius' innovation was to conceive of a vowed religious life that was shaped by its ministry, so that community life was radically different. Jesuits were part of a new category, Clerics Regular, who took simple (and later, also solemn) vows and who did not live under any form of one of the great Rules. Instead they developed their own constitution. Angela Merici also adapted religious life in order to meet the needs of society, but necessarily took a different path. The first Ursulines took private vows and continued to live in their homes and wear secular clothing. Their chief ministry was catechesis, at which they were extraordinarily successful and for which they were highly valued.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563), as has been mentioned above, firmly and clearly affirmed the content of *Periculoso*, evidence in itself that religious women were not all living behind cloister walls. It would seem that women such as the Ursulines did not perceive that legislation dealing with cloister had any application to them, since they had not chosen to enter a cloister in the first place. In 1566, the pope went the next step and insisted that cloister be applied even to women religious who had not previously chosen this lifestyle:

The intention of Pope Pius V was clearly that of dissolving any congregation of women living in common without solemn vows and strict enclosure. There can be no doubt about his wish to eliminate from the Church all manner of community life except that which was approved by the long tradition of the church, that is, such as was in accordance with the norms of strict regulars. As later events proved, the efforts of Pius V never fully achieved their purpose. But his enactments did serve, for the ensuing three hundred years, as a most formidable obstacle to the establishment

and recognition of institutes of women religious of simple vows.¹⁵

Indeed, though papal opposition to innovation for women religious at times waned, none of the more sympathetic popes ever established clear alternative policies, so the legacy of Pius V was always there to ready be re-proclaimed, as Benedict XIV did repeatedly in the 1740s. However, the Council of Trent also added a new factor to the mix: in addition to reinforcing cloister on women religious, it also reformed in certain dramatic ways the role of the bishop. The bishop was restored to the role of pastor of his diocese, with the concomitant expectation that he live in it and manage its affairs. So it was that even while the Holy See sought to suppress any form of non-cloistered religious life for women, many bishops found such groups highly useful in their dioceses. Though the Fourth Lateran Council had removed the bishops' right to establish new orders, the bishops felt free to establish institutes of simple vows, which were understood to be different from the traditional orders and therefore not prescribed.¹⁶

Thus, when Charles Borromeo became archbishop of Milan, he soon invited the Ursulines to grace his archdiocese with their services. He persuaded those who came to adapt their previous customs and live together in community. They were established as a community in simple vows, lacking pontifical recognition but also avoiding the restrictions of cloistered life thereby. In later years, however, another group of Ursulines in France had quite a different experience: they were cloistered, were made to adopt a Rule (they chose the Augustinian), and had to wear a habit. In order to carry out their ministry of teaching, a special exception was made to allow their students to enter

¹⁵Farrell, 21.

¹⁶The difference between solemn and simple vows has varied over time, but suffice to say simple vows were generally understood as less radical. For example, they could be temporary.

the convent school within the cloister walls.¹⁷

This kind of end run, whether around the mandate of the Holy See or the original intent of the congregation, generally played out according to the will of the local bishop. Because non-cloistered religious women had no juridical status, they were able to evade restrictions demanded by the Holy See, but they also lacked the right to appeal to the Holy See for protection. Their affairs waxed and waned according to their relationship with the current bishop. And bishops sympathetic to apostolic religious life for women were in fact not always free to do as they pleased in this matter. The bishop of Geneva, Francis de Sales, with Jane Frances de Chantal, founded a congregation in 1615, the Visitation sisters, which served the sick poor. Within a year of its official founding, the archbishop (metropolitan) who had authority over de Sales forced him to place the congregation in a cloister and under the Augustinian Rule, eliminating their ministry.¹⁸

Vincent de Paul served the poor of France for years in collaboration with laity and priests he had organized for this work. After some effort, he was able to persuade Louise de Marillac to co-found with him the Daughters of Charity in 1633. He “was well aware of the pitfalls of this singular sort of undertaking because he had succeeded Francis [de Sales] as superior of the Visitation in Paris.”¹⁹ Determined to avoid the fate of the Visitation nuns, Vincent and Louise deliberately

¹⁷Cada et al, 68.

¹⁸Raphael Pernin, “Visitation Order,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XV*, online edition copyright c 2003 by K. Knight (October 1, 1912, accessed December 7, 2005); available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15481a.htm>, Internet.

¹⁹Louise Sullivan, D.C., “Louise de Marillac: A Spiritual Portrait,” in *Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac: Rules, Conferences, and Writings*; edited by Frances Ryan, D.C. and John E. Rybolt, C.M., with an introduction by Hugh F. O'Donnell and others and preface by Amin A. De Terrazi (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 50.

structured the new congregation to circumvent any move to cloister them. The Daughters of Charity never took final vows, only temporary vows which they regularly renewed. This strategy succeeded, and the Daughters became exemplars of a ministry we would now term social services. Additionally, they later received (and retain today) an extraordinary exemption—they are directly under the authority of the General Moderator of the Congregation of the Mission (the Vincentian men's congregation) rather than directly under the Pope or local bishops as is the usual arrangement.

The diverse strategies of Ursulines, Daughters of Charity, and the Visitation sisters and their equally diverse outcomes demonstrate that whether the Holy See, or society at large, approved it or not, women were going to continue push the boundaries. As men and women had done since the earliest days of the Church, men and women of the 16th and 17th centuries were responding to their personal vocations and to the needs they saw around them. The difference was that at this phase in Church history, the hierarchy was more centralized and organized than it had been in the early days. The Sacred Congregation for Consultation about Regulars was established at the Holy See in 1586 specifically to handle matters related to religious life. This office continued to develop in the ensuing centuries, and its work was cut out for it as the face of religious life grew even more complex.²⁰

During the 18th century, that complexity manifested as religious congregations with simple vows were increasingly crossing diocesan lines and themselves evolving. If one bishop had approved a group, was the neighboring bishop so obligated? Or his successor? This question even extended to the papacy. The case of the English Ladies against one of their bishops placed Benedict XIV in the unlikely position of affirming the approval of their constitutions, which had been given decades

²⁰This office has been renamed and restructured many times and lives today as the Congregation for Institutes of Religious Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICSAL).

earlier by Clement XI, while still denying the congregation itself any pontifical status.²¹

The French Revolution and its aftermath played a critical role in the shaping of religious life for women. One source (Cada et al.) even goes so far as to name this as the marker for a transition into a new age of religious life, the Age of the Teaching Congregations. The 19th century saw the foundation of about 600 new congregations, most of which were dedicated to building and running institutions such as schools and hospitals.²²

Following the Revolution, monastic congregations in many areas were effectively dissolved. "Monasteries and convents were uprooted, their means of support confiscated... and [secular] laws adopted which made the life of regulars impossible...."²³ Women in cloister and solemn vows were now given the blessing of the Holy See to live in simple vows without strict cloister, since the alternative in many cases was dissolution of the congregation altogether. This adaptation to the politics of the times, combined with the boom in new congregations of simple vows, led to a need for some kind of standardization in how congregations were regulated.

The Benedictine Rule, while not the first of its kind, exemplifies the concept of a governing document approved by the hierarchy under which a religious institution of vowed men or women may organize themselves. With the arrival of the mendicant form, new groups emerged which did not organize under a classic Rule, but instead developed their own unique and individual constitutions. Approval of these constitutions by the Holy See (usually) meant pontifical juridical

²¹Farrell, 27. Clement's decision was that the English Ladies were *not* the same as the Jesuitesses established by Mary Ward who had been suppressed by the Bishop of Augsburg.

²²Cada et al., 39-40.

²³Farrell, 30.

status, which brought with it certain rights and protections. As long as non-cloistered religious women were denied access to such status, bishops asserted total control over the congregations in their dioceses, for good or ill.

This scenario raised some fundamental questions. There was a broad understanding that any group who wished to be considered a religious congregation needed a hierarchically approved constitution, but what should be *in* the constitution? Precisely whose approval was needed, especially if an established group wished to cross diocesan boundaries? How much control should the bishop have over the internal affairs of the group? Could he unilaterally change the constitution, or appoint the superiors, or expel members, or suppress the entire congregation, or change their ministry?

Without any real guidelines in place, every bishop had his own policies and expectations regarding religious women in his diocese. Congregations spreading into other dioceses inevitably led to conflicts between neighboring bishops, not to mention between bishops and established congregations. The office in the Vatican responsible for religious life (by now evolved into the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars) found itself deluged with requests for intervention in such conflicts. Case by case, the Sacred Congregation gradually developed strategies for resolving problems which after time became standard procedures. By the 19th century, the concept of non-cloistered women in simple vows was much more acceptable, and the Sacred Congregation did not simply assume an adversarial stance against them. In fact, it was often the bishops who resisted attempts at legislation which would diminish their control.²⁴

What emerged was a method of approving new congregations to give them status within their dioceses without giving them pontifical status. After submitting constitutions, detailed summary

²⁴Farrell, 42.

reports, and letters of recommendations from any bishops involved, the Sacred Congregation would make any necessary adjustments and give a letter of praise for the constitution. Occasionally, it would also give a letter of praise for the Institute itself, though women's congregations rarely received such direct approval. In theory, once the Sacred Congregation had approved the constitution, the bishops were not free to revise it. From examples cited by Farrell it appears the Sacred Congregation was generally respectful of the autonomy of congregations in the handling of their internal affairs, against bishops who sought greater control.

The Holy See was beginning to recognize the chaos that was reigning. There were plans to address this issue in the first Vatican Council, but it was one of the agenda items which never made it to the floor before the Council's abrupt ending in 1870. The plan, which was never discussed, included the intention to "oblige bishops to impose episcopal enclosure" on sisters whose ministry did not demand that they leave the convent, but for those who did have to go out for ministry, to impose cloister only prohibiting the admission of outsiders into the convent.²⁵

Despite repeated efforts to confine women, but not men, to a very strict monastic model of religious life, apostolic congregations of women religious with simple vows continued to burst from the soil seemingly like weeds. But by the end of the 19th century, there had clearly been a shift in attitude by the Holy See: those weeds were actually grain, a bountiful harvest nourishing body and soul, grain which we must believe in retrospect was sown by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church. The time had come to help instead of hinder the harvest.

²⁵Schaaf, 55.

Early 20th Century: The Forces of Change in Confluence

We have traveled down the centuries from households of widows and virgins, to desert hermitages, to monasteries, to strict cloisters, to convents of women religious running institutions. For men, innovations were challenged but negotiable—but for women, innovations were often actively blocked. Resistance came in the form of social disapproval, but it also and more effectively took the form of legislative restraint. On December 8, 1900, Pope Leo XIII removed the final legislative obstacle to recognizing apostolic congregations with simple vows as a fully valid form of religious life in the Church.

Leo's historic constitution, *Conditae a Christo*, is referred to in many sources as the Magna Carta for congregations with simple vows. On the surface, it was not particularly innovative—in essence it is two lists of norms flowing naturally from general practices the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had been developing and following in the previous century. But placed in the context of centuries of papal denial of full recognition of non-cloistered women's congregations, its dramatic impact becomes clear. Social change, growing numbers of apostolic congregations attempting to define themselves, and bishops likewise growing into their roles as pastors of their dioceses—like geologic forces all these pressures, even though often at cross-purposes, had slowly but surely shaped apostolic life. But *Conditae a Christo* was more like a sudden earthquake, irrevocably shifting the terrain. In one moment, religious men and women in simple vows could no longer be considered an aberration or as somehow less authentic than members of the classic orders.

Conditae a Christo provided basic guidelines for the establishment and jurisdiction of congregations: ten for congregations of diocesan law, and eleven for congregations of pontifical law. In direct language, it drew clear lines between where the bishop could and where he could not

involve himself in the affairs of a congregation. It also clarified lines of authority among bishops in the case of diocesan congregations which had spread. Ending forever the hit-or-miss practices of previous centuries, a bishop could in no case approve a new congregation without prior permission from the Holy See. The mere existence of the second section of norms for pontifical institutes was the real innovation. There could no longer be any doubt that the Holy See was ready and willing to grant pontifical status to apostolic congregations, status monastic orders had long enjoyed.

In the two decades following the promulgation of *Conditae a Christo*, the Holy See built on this foundation through a series of norms issued by the office responsible for religious life. (The Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars split into two separate offices in 1908, so after 1908 the office in question was called the Sacred Congregation for Religious, hereafter referred to as SCR).²⁶ The most high-profile contribution to this particular body of developing law was the 1917 Code of Canon Law. Ecclesial law related to religious institutions should, however, be regarded as a moving target during this period, as real life situations revealed the need for continued refinement.

The *Normae* of 1921 issued by SCR provided fundamental guidelines for the process a congregation would follow to obtain juridical status, as well as guidelines for what should and should not be in a constitution. Keeping in mind that legislation and practice were not static in this period of time, here is how a new group would seek juridical status. It begins by seeking erection as a diocesan congregation. The first step is to submit a full report to the SCR about the group: its name, nature, work, financial means, membership, founder, habit, and so on. This report and petition for permission to approve is submitted to the SCR by the bishop, not the congregation. Once the

²⁶“Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life,” (accessed September 4, 2005); available from http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_profile_en.html; Internet.

bishop has received permission (a *nihil obstat*) from the SCR, he then issues a formal decree of approval. The group now has juridical status as a congregation of diocesan right. A copy of the bishop's decree is sent to the SCR and to the congregation, and one is retained in the diocesan archives. The congregation then "must prepare its constitutions according to the prescriptions of the code and the *Normae*" and submit them to the SCR, which may correct them as needed. The SCR is not thereby granting approval to the congregation. The bishop approves the congregation, and the SCR approves the constitution.²⁷

There is the presumption some years would pass before a congregation would seek pontifical status, if at all. Should it show "by the test of time the value of its religious spirit and its unity" it may initiate the next step.²⁸ Another detailed report is required, along with letters of recommendations from all bishops who have at least one house of the congregation in their dioceses. Also, the constitution is re-submitted as a provisional constitution. A letter of praise for the congregation from the SCR formally establishes the congregation as pontifical, even though some years may pass before it receives final approval for its constitution. In sum, a bishop's letter of praise establishes a diocesan congregation and a letter of praise from the Holy See establishes a pontifical congregation. Provisional constitutions in both cases are reviewed, revised if necessary, and formally approved by the SCR usually after about seven years of lived practice.

Through new legislation and in various addresses to religious, it is plain to see that the Holy See intended to encourage the development of religious life. This is not to say, however, that the

²⁷Joseph Creusen, SJ., *Religious Men and Women in the Code*, fourth English edition; revised and edited by Adam C. Ellis, SJ and translated by Edward F. Garesche, SJ (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1940), 23.

²⁸Ibid.

entire hierarchy had grasped overnight the essence of apostolic religious life as a form distinct from the monastic. "...Rome finally acknowledged at the *theoretical* level in the early part of the century that this [apostolic] model had validity for both men *and* women. In *practice*, however, Rome insisted that many inappropriate monastic and conventual customs had to be integrated into the constitutions of these congregations, as if it still assumed that the ideal form of religious life was monastic and anything else was not quite authentic."²⁹ This problem revealed itself in the revisions SCR required of constitutions before it would approve them. The *Normae* were applied less as norms and more like the bed of Procrustes, warping diverse charisma into the same shape. Scripture passages, quotes from founders, special prayers and practices were expressly discouraged by the *Normae*. Anything expressing the particular spirituality of the congregation was simply chopped off. Congregations would receive newly approved documents which suddenly contained restrictions on travel, eating, and lifestyle which had no relation to their practices or needs.

Conditae a Christo symbolizes a clear shift in the direction of the "force" flowing from the Holy See giving shape to religious life for women. Legislation and its application were certainly not at all times and places flowing in one direction, but it does appear that in general, Vatican leadership was actively working to encourage and not oppose growth and adaptation. In reviewing various papal addresses to or about religious women in the decades leading to Vatican II, one can find signs of encouragement. In 1912, Pius X in a letter to Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore praised the bishop regents of Catholic University of America for allowing nuns "without detriment to their rules—to

²⁹Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM, *From Chaos to Mission: Refounding Religious Life Formation* (Collegeville, M: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 27.

or more liberal interpretations.³⁴

In this address and his later one, he cites rules for cloister and styles of habits as specific examples of what needs such mitigation. "To sum up, in those matters which are not essential, adapt yourselves as reason and well-ordered charity advise."³⁵

The Holy See, especially under Pius XII, was paving the way for the complete renovation of religious life that began in earnest following the Second Vatican Council. The popes were calling congregations to be true to their diverse spirits and aims, and to leave behind those practices which prevented them from flourishing as they should. The image of religious life as a tree bearing fruit for the nourishment of the Church is to be found in the writings of several popes throughout the 20th Century. Pius XI in 1924 may have been the trend-setter: "And thus from this great variety of religious Orders, like so many fruit-bearing trees... there comes a great and varied harvest of fruits for the salvation of mankind."³⁶ It is simply inaccurate to hold that the spirit of Vatican II came out of nowhere or that the hierarchy was a monolithic enemy that religious women had to out-maneuver in their quest for liberation. On the contrary, in its own inexorable albeit uneven fashion, the Holy See was a force working undeniably for reform.

The two other forces shaping religious life were very much at work during the early 20th century as well. Like that of the hierarchy, the pressures of change from within religious life and from society at large were not uniform or unidirectional, but they were more or less in confluence. In *Transforming Parish Ministry*, in his section on the priesthood, Scott Appleby's cites currents of

³⁴Courtois, 153.

³⁵Ibid, 216.

³⁶Ibid, 58.

acquire a higher education with a view to teach in subsequent years."³⁰ In 1924, Pius XI sent a letter to all superiors of religious institutes exhorting them to allow for the intellectual training of their members.³¹ Pius XII in 1952 likewise encouraged superiors of women's institutes to allow sisters to obtain education for their ministries.³²

In addition to promoting education for ministry, the popes also urged adaptation for the times, albeit with a tone of caution against losing traditions. Pius XII in particular clearly demonstrated a desire to promote the development of religious life. In praising the canonesses of St. Augustine for their decision to form a union in 1939, he told them

... because a tradition three centuries old runs the risk of languishing or failing... if a breath of progress and adaptation does not vivify it, We are happy to see that with essential fidelity to the origins of the Institute, there is another characteristic, a new one, in the Congregation of Our Lady in the twentieth century.³³

His landmark constitution *Sponsa Christi* of 1950 was directed specifically to monastic nuns, but he intended its spirit to extend to apostolic sisters (a point he makes explicit two years later by citing himself in an address to all women superiors).

In our own day the whole institute of nuns... has been profoundly affected by the development of events and changes of circumstances. ...And it is not merely in relation to the apostolic Orders, but even in regard to the contemplative Orders, that the circumstances of the times... have been judged to demand urgently mitigations

³⁰Benedictine Monks of Solesmes, ed. *The States of Perfection*, translated by Mother E. O'Gorman (R.S.C.J. Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1967), 311.

³¹Abbe Gaston Courtois, *The States of Perfection According to the Teaching of the church: Papal Documents from Leo XIII to Pius XII*, with a preface by His Eminence Valerio Cardinal Veleri and translated by Rev. John A. O'Flynn (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1961), 56.

³²Ibid, 216.

³³Benedictine Monks, 311.

change in the Church and/or in society which had widespread impact: growing social justice concerns; the developing role of the laity; the liturgical movement; and improved means of communication and travel. Certainly the changes in the theology of the laity bear a closer look.³⁷

Catholic Action was first promoted by Pius X in 1905, and was further developed and concretely defined by Pius XI as "the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy."³⁸ In *Transforming Parish Ministry*, Debra Campbell's section on the laity illustrates that Catholic Action took a wide variety of forms. National conferences, diocesan and parish programs, and local small group efforts focused on everything from charitable work to liturgy were seen as part of the movement.³⁹

Though pre-Conciliar Roman documents located the lay apostolate as within, or dependent on the proper work of the clergy, pre-Conciliar theologians began to lay groundwork for a shift in this view. Yves Congar's 1957 book *Lay People in the Church* is widely quoted in works on this topic. Instead of locating the mission of the laity as deriving from the hierarchy, he argued that "the basis for the lay apostolate is not this [hierarchical] mandate, but the sacraments of baptism and confirmation."⁴⁰ Whether the laity during these decades saw themselves as acting out of their

³⁷R. Scott Appleby, "Present to the People of God," in Dolan, Jay P. et al., *Transforming Parish Ministry: The Changing Roles of Catholic Clergy, Laity, and Women Religious* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 25-28.

³⁸Aurelie A. Hagstrom, *The Concepts of the Vocation and the Mission of the Laity* (Catholic Scholars Press: San Francisco, 1994), 15.

³⁹Debra Campbell, "The Struggle to Serve," in Dolan, Jay P. et al., *Transforming Parish Ministry: The Changing Roles of Catholic Clergy, Laity, and Women Religious* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 222-252.

⁴⁰Hagstrom, 25.

baptismal call or as participating in the apostolate of the hierarchy, the operative word is "participating." Teaching and social services which had previously been the domain of institution-running apostolic congregations were more and more a means for lay Catholics to serve as well. The growing presence of the laity in these settings as well as society's increasing demand for certification of teachers became a new force pressing on the sisters: the need for education for ministry.

The sisters' own desire to live out their vocations authentically was the third force for change. They themselves struggled mightily to provide for their own education while maintaining their ministries. Sometimes through their education, they became more exposed to, and more a part of, the liturgical and social justice movements that were underway. *Review For Religious*, a journal for and by religious men and women that is influential to this day, began as a Jesuit-sponsored publication in 1942. A survey of its contents during the forties and fifties reveals a deep interest in topics such as Church history, canon law, liturgy, social concerns, living the vows in modern society, and so on.

It cannot be denied that there was a definite pressure to confine and restrict sisters, despite the broader atmosphere of openness to adaptation. No matter what Church law might say, the long-standing view of cloistered life as normative for women religious was very much alive. Patricia Byrne's chapter on sisters in *Transforming Parish Ministry* illustrates this point with stories of sisters being reported to the bishop when they were spotted shopping alone or in other innocuous ways failing to toe the line. Both the laity and the local hierarchy played their part in keeping sisters behind the cloister walls. And sisters themselves were by no means of one heart and mind on the subject. Pressure from Rome to adapt was met with anxiety and resistance in some quarters. A review of the Benedictine journal *Sponsa Regis* (now *Sisters Today*) during the thirties and forties

provides a hint that sisters called to the cloistered or semi-cloistered life may have felt somewhat defensive about their traditional way of life in the wake of the changes at work in those years.

It is admittedly optimistic to label this section "The Forces of Change in Confluence," but the forces were certainly pushing more toward reform and adaptation than against it. In contrast to the emergence of apostolic religious life in the 16th century, the hierarchy's role by now was clearly more as an encouragement than as an obstacle to change. If the popes of the 20th century had still shared Pius V's vehement opposition to non-monastic religious life for women, it is difficult to imagine that any significant changes for women religious would have ever seen the light of day.

The Second Vatican Council: An Earthquake and its Aftershocks

The Second Vatican Council should be considered as an organic whole—it was not simply one document in particular which marked the beginning of widespread adaptation and renewal of religious life. *Lumen Gentium* for example, the constitution on the Church, is often cited as having a huge effect on religious life because it emphasized the holiness of all the faithful regardless of their state of life. It was *Perfectae Caritatis*, however, that formally required renewal.

This decree was late to the floor, allowed very little time for deliberation, and was rather brief: one undivided document of twenty-five numbered paragraphs. The much longer pre-conciliar schema was quickly revised by a small working committee to remove the condemnatory language and substitute a pastoral style.⁴¹ In his 1968 commentary on the history of the document, Friedrich Wulf makes the point more than once that the apostolic form of religious life was consistently being

⁴¹Friedrich Wulf, "Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life," translated by R. A. Wilson, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, volume II*, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 303.

held to a monastic norm instead of being evaluated and critiqued on its own terms. As work on the schema progressed this was mitigated but never eliminated. Also, there was real concern among some members of monastic congregations that they would be forced into a model which had room only for either a purely monastic/contemplative form or a purely active/apostolic form with no middle ground. At the same time, some superiors of apostolic congregations complained that they did not have a fair hearing because they were vastly out-represented by abbots and priest-monks. Tanner mentions in his 2003 commentary one bishop's concern for the approval of priests, lay brothers, and teaching brothers, "who had so contributed to its [the renewal of religious life's] birth."⁴² Neither Wulf nor Tanner mention the glaring absence of women religious involved at any stage of the development of *Perfectae Caritatis*.

Due to lack of time, the Council fathers ultimately settled on a short decree that would set a trajectory while leaving explicit directions for a later document. The decree called for renewal to be achieved by both a constant return to the sources (*ressourcement*) and by an adaptation to changed conditions. There were five preliminary guiding principles for renewal:

1. The following of Christ is the ultimate norm.
2. The specific spirit and aims of each founder must be retained.
3. Institutes are to share in the life of the Church and foster its initiatives in "biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary, and social matters."
4. Institutes should educate their members about the needs of the times and of the Church.
5. Adaptation must be "animated by a spiritual renewal" no matter the apostolate.

After laying out these broad principles, the document went on to name a few more specific goals: all constitutions and related documents must be brought into line with conciliar documents;

⁴²Norman Tanner, "The Church in the World (*Ecclesia ad Extra*)" in Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komanchak, *History of Vatican II, Volume IV: Church as Communion, Third Period and Intersession, September 1964-September 1965* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003) 365.

adaptation should involve the entire congregation (not imposed from above) and should require a period of experimentation; faithful following of the rule and not the “multiplication of laws” is the goal. The decree also supported the foundation of conferences of major superiors and the encouraged the elimination of class distinctions (i.e. separating out “kitchen” sisters or “lay” brothers) within congregations.⁴³

The norms promised by *Perfectae Caritatis* were promulgated in 1966 as *Ecclesiae Sanctae* II. They fleshed out the above-mentioned principles, with a recurring theme of subsidiarity. They included some specific expectations or requirements pertinent here: minor papal enclosure is eliminated, so “semi-cloistered” congregations need to revise their documents to determine their form of enclosure for themselves; structures should be established to ensure communication between unions of superiors and both the SCR and bishops’ conferences.

These two documents were the second major earthquake for 20th century religious life. Without exception, every religious congregation on the planet, no matter its history, its juridical status, its form or function, was now required to initiate a lengthy process of research, consultation, and experimentation. The purpose of this endeavor would be to produce new constitutions which reflected the true spirit of their founders, but re-articulated for modern needs, in harmony with the spirituality and theology expressed by the Second Vatican Council as a whole.

In the ensuing years, both the Holy See and religious themselves produced materials to guide and inform this process. One of the first was a book by Elio Gambari of the SCR published only a year after the norms were promulgated. It is an easy-to-read and inspiring work which spells out what

⁴³*Perfectae Caritatis*, in Austin Flannery, OP, ed. *Vatican Council II, Volume I: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, new revised edition (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975. Fourth printing, 1998) 611-623.

the expectations for renewal are and how to go about the process. He strongly emphasizes that the process is not a chore consigned to a congregation's leadership, rather it should engage and energize the entire membership.

Regarding the desired shape of the finished product, Gambari stresses that a constitution should be infused with the spirituality of the institute throughout. It should be light on juridical content and heavy on theological, spiritual, and apostolic content. He refers to the *Normae* of 1921 and their prohibition against scripture and founders' quotes, but says that the SCR soon moved away from this.⁴⁴ He even speculates on the possibility of an institute creating a new Rule of Life, and concludes that he can see no good reason to prevent such a thing.⁴⁵ To put this into perspective, we should recall that approval of new Rules effectively ended in 1215 when the right to found new orders had been taken from bishops and reserved to the pope. In fact some new Rules did received papal approval after 1215, but when apostolic congregations began to emerge in the 16th century, the use of individual constitutions not under the umbrella of some Rule became the normal practice.

Along with so many other aspects of the Church, Vatican II sought an "adaptation and renewal" of ecclesial law as well. In fact, both the Second Vatican Council and a plan to revise the 1917 Code of Canon Law were announced by Pope John XXIII in 1959. A commission was appointed to revise the Code during the Council, but within months it decided to postpone this project until after the Council was over, so that its work could flow from the work of the Council.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Elio Gambari, S.M.M., Rev., *Renewal in Religious Life*, translated by the Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1967) 198-9.

⁴⁵Ibid, 211.

⁴⁶Elizabeth McDonough, O.P., J.C.D., *Religious in the 1983 Code: New Approaches to the New Law* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1985) 99.

During the years until the new code's promulgation in 1983, the Holy See at several points issued interim legislation regarding religious life: *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Ecclesiae Sanctae* actually fall in this category. But legislation after the Council, up to and including the 1983 Code itself, represented only aftershocks: the true source of energy behind the massive "earthquake" of the renewal traces back directly to *Perfectae Caritatis*. It directly informed over two dozen of the new canons and "its attitudinal approach to religious life is the foundation for many of the other canons.... Its influence on the renewal and subsequent legislation can probably only be underestimated."⁴⁷

By comparing the 1983 Code of Canon Law to the 1917 Code, we can identify three key changes in the treatment of religious life pertinent to this review. First of all, the structure of the Code as a whole reflects *Lumen Gentium*'s structure: the divisions convey the Church as People of God and downplay any sense of a hierarchy of holiness. This is further evidenced in one of the basic principles the canonists followed: the equality between institutes of men and women were to be respected.⁴⁸ Canon 606 makes this equality explicit. Difference is not eradicated but greatly reduced—for example, bishops no longer preside at elections of superiors of pontifical institutes of women. Secondly, there is now only one fairly brief canon directly related to cloister, as opposed to the lengthy and exacting rules which had accreted before. And thirdly, a respect for diversity is evident. Of course the code calls for the respect of distinctive gifts of religious institutes (Canons 577 and 578). But it goes further than that: secular institutes, hermits, and the order of virgins are

⁴⁷Ibid, 48.

⁴⁸John P Beal and James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, eds. *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000) 742.

now recognized as forms of consecrated life, none of which made an appearance in the 1917 Code.⁴⁹ And even more remarkably, Canon 605 encourages bishops to “strive to discern new gifts of consecrated life given to the Church by the Holy Spirit,” an attitude in stark contrast to sustained attempts to suppress emerging forms witnessed in previous centuries.

There is no real “quiet time” in the unfolding of Church history: be it slow and invincible as continental drift or sudden and dramatic as an earthquake, change happens. The 1983 Code of Canon Law, at least insofar as it deals with religious life, represents the culmination of not merely decades but centuries of evolution. Each new form of religious life has emerged in response to powerful forces at work—pressures from society and the faithful, from the hierarchy, and from within religious life itself. Those forces have wrought sudden change and slow change, they have flowed more or less together or in direct opposition to each other, but they have never ceased to flow.

It seems appropriate to close with the words of religious leaders themselves, pronounced at a gathering that was one fruit of Vatican II’s call for the development of conferences of religious superiors. On November 23rd, 2004, religious superiors of men’s and women’s congregations from around the world met in Rome for the Congress for Consecrated Life. Their closing words were:

“We sense that our forms of consecrated life are in a time of transition; our hearts burn, thirst, and search for the living water.... We do not want to get stuck in the ‘glorious past.’ Rather, we want to cast our eyes to the future, where the Spirit is sending us in order to do greater things.... Under [Mary’s] protection, all consecrated persons implore from the Spirit ‘the fearlessness to face the challenges of our times and the grace to bring to humankind the goodness and the loving kindness of Our Saviour Jesus Christ.’”⁵⁰

⁴⁹McDonough, 52.

⁵⁰USG-UISG Congress 2004, <http://www.vidimusdominum.org/Finestre/ING/popUp20.php?IdSubCat=59&TAB=congress>, accessed March 24, 2005, Internet.

CHAPTER 2 THE FIRST CONSTITUTION

The Foundings

The Missionary Cenacle Apostolate

The year before the "Magna Carta" of modern religious life was promulgated by Leo XIII, Thomas Augustine Judge was ordained to the priesthood as a member of the Congregation of the Mission, generally known as the Vincentians. A loyal son of St. Vincent De Paul, he was also formed by the legacy of progressive Catholic thought which arose in the late 1800s in the United States. Isaac Hecker, Orestes Brownson and their heirs clearly shaped Judge's understanding of the role of the laity in the Church, as is evidenced in his seminary notes.⁵¹

But when Fr. Judge himself, toward the end of his life, reminisced of his first years as a priest, it is clear that his passion flowed not from books but from a love of God and from face-to-face encounters with those he met in the streets and tenements of his first missions. He was very much tuned in to the signs of the times, even in the face of opposition from some of his confreres. "My mind was very much on the leakage at this time...."⁵² And with good reason. In 1909 he was sent to

⁵¹Dennis Berry, S.T., *God's Valiant Warrior* (Holy Trinity, AL: Missionary Cenacle Press, 1992) 147.

⁵²Timothy Lynch, ST, editor, *Father Thomas A. Judge, C.M. Founder, The Missionary Cenacle Family: Monograph 2: "Early and Final Days"* (Silver Spring, MD: Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity Archives, 1983) 42.

assist at St. John the Baptist Parish in Brooklyn, and immediately undertook a census. There he discovered first hand just how bad the "leakage" was: Catholics were staying away from the Church in droves.

Fr. Judge had a burning concern for these souls, but he quickly learned his own powerlessness to reach such numbers as were in need without the help of others. Furthermore, in many cases his clerical collar was proving to be an obstacle to outreach. For a variety of reasons, there was widespread antipathy toward priests among recent Italian immigrants, so it was often difficult for him to engage them. "Some slammed the door when they saw who it was; some peeked first and pretended they weren't home.... Father sometimes would ring the bell, and as soon as the door opened, put his foot on the sill so the door couldn't be slammed; then smile engagingly as he began the initial questions."⁵³ By conducting the census personally, he developed a keen awareness both of the spiritual and the material needs of his parishioners. "This time I was thinking very much that if the Bishop ever asked me to help him out in planning a report from the parishes, there were two things I would add to the book, 'How many sick are in the parish' and 'How many poor are in the parish'."⁵⁴ Fr. Judge was looking directly into the face of physical poverty and spiritual neglect far beyond his ability to address. But he chose to address it anyway.

Fr. Judge decided to recruit the aid of sisters to join him in outreach efforts. He immediately ran into trouble—no one he talked to thought this was a good idea, for several reasons. First of all, the local teaching sisters were already so overworked they simply could not take on additional

⁵³Timothy Lynch, ST, editor, *Father Thomas A. Judge, C.M. Founder, The Missionary Cenacle Family*: Monograph 6: "Father Judge and the Missionary Cenacle" (Silver Spring, MD: Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity Archives, 1985) 19.

⁵⁴Monograph 2, 48.

responsibilities. Secondly, there was a boundary issue: no one could conceive of sisters who would do multiple ministries. "School work and missionary work, the two departments of work" lamented Fr. Judge as he tried to find a group which could do both at once.⁵⁵ *Conditae a Christo* and ensuing norms had explicitly discouraged the foundation of congregations too broad in scope, thus encouraging this tendency toward specialization.⁵⁶

But perhaps the biggest obstacle was the concept of sisters going about the neighborhood at all hours and visiting the parishioners as Fr. Judge envisioned. The response of one reverend mother lives forever in infamy: "Father Judge, do you wish to make Salvation Army women out of my sisters?"⁵⁷

In the early years of the 20th Century, the role of the lay person in the Catholic Church seemed to be well defined. Roman Catholicism was firmly in the grip of a strongly institutional model of the Church. Aurelie Hagstrom illustrates this "one-sided emphasis on the clergy and structure of the hierarchy"⁵⁸ by citing Pope Pius X (1903-1914) in his 1906 encyclical, *Vehementior nos*, Article 8:

It follows that the Church is essentially an unequal society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the Pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So

⁵⁵Monograph 2, 49.

⁵⁶In his commentary on the 1917 Code, Bachofen lists this as one of the four conditions a bishop should require before seeking approval of a new congregation. "The *purpose* or aim of the new congregation *must be well defined* and not too *diversified*, which would be the case if the congregation should propose to devote itself to all kinds of charitable works." Bachofen, 67.

⁵⁷Monograph 2, 50.

⁵⁸Aurelie A. Hagstrom, *The Concepts of the Vocation and the Mission of the Laity* (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1994), 12.

distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members towards that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors.⁵⁹

Hagstrom calls this understanding of the Church a hierarchology. "If a caricature of this pre-Conciliar ecclesiology were to be painted in broad strokes, it would stress the passive role of the laity and confine them to the purely secular tasks of temporal activity."⁶⁰ The hierarchical model emphasizes submission over initiative. Thus, both the typical lay Catholic and the typical priest were inculcated with an image of the laity as passive recipient of truths and graces received exclusively through the hierarchical structure of the Church.

Thomas Judge, however, was not typical. In the face of enormous spiritual and physical need, he arrived at a truly Vincentian solution: engage the laity in the work of the Church.⁶¹ "In going around the parish this way, I saw the power of the working girl, the power of a zealous laity.... It was amazing, I thought. Oh, if I could get them involved in lay apostolate work, what they could do."⁶² Soon after his arrival at St. John the Baptist, Judge had identified a small group of likely candidates and invited them to a meeting in St. John Perboyre Chapel, a small side chapel of the parish church. There he explained his concerns and recruited their help. April 11, 1909 is held to be the first meeting of what came to be called the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate (MCA), and is now celebrated

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹The Vincentians had program for laity, the Archconfraternity of the Holy Agony, though this was almost defunct in the US. Fr. Judge had already tried unsuccessfully to promote it.

⁶²Monograph 2, 48.

as the date of the founding of the Missionary Cenacle Family.⁶³

By September of 1910 Fr. Judge was assigned to the Vincentian mission band, which began a life of constant travel throughout the Northeast to preach missions (which he did exceptionally well.) For the next five years, small groups of lay apostles sprang up wherever he went. He maintained contact with these lay groups through visits and letters, and they flourished. Members demonstrated the confidence to plan and carry out a wide variety of works with little or no direct clerical supervision. Home visiting in order to bring back fallen away Catholics was the mainstay activity, but members also took on corporal works of mercy and catechetics. By 1912 the scattered groups had enough of an identity of themselves as members of one organization that they formed a single governing council comprised of representatives from the local groups.⁶⁴

Fr. Judge chose and trained these lay apostles wisely, or the organization might not have survived what happened next. In the summer of 1915, he was asked to go to Opelika, Alabama to assist at the relatively new Vincentian mission there. He accepted gladly, and letters from that time indicate he was excited at the prospect of doing missionary work in such a remote and hostile location. Members of the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate⁶⁵ were clearly alarmed, however, and Fr. Judge had to persuade them to quit praying for a change of plans. He wrote to the co-director, "You

⁶³O'Bryan puts the date of the first official meeting in April of 1910. However, it is clear that Judge had already begun involving lay help in outreach before 1910. The 1909 foundation date is firmly entrenched in Missionary Cenacle tradition in any case. A centennial celebration is already being planned for 2009. James P. O'Bryan, ST, *Awake the Giant: A History of the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate* (Holy Trinity, AL: Missionary Cenacle Press, 1986) 28.

⁶⁴Ibid, 69.

⁶⁵In fact the organization had various names for itself in the early years. For the sake of clarity, I am using the name finally adopted in 1950 even where such usage is anachronistic.

may have seen the Wisdom in my teaching you to become more and more detached even from my direction."⁶⁶

Rural Alabama in 1915 was almost totally devoid of Catholics, and those who persevered in their faith were subject to harassment. In the nine counties comprising the mission, there were 121 known Catholics, of which about 20 were practicing. In Opelika itself, Judge counted "four white Catholics... also, four colored Catholics."⁶⁷ His predecessors at the mission had been beaten and otherwise assaulted, and Judge's first attempt at outreach, the establishment of a school, failed utterly due to hostile out-maneuvering by local leadership. A sympathetic confrere wrote to Judge, "You are in a worse region than China."⁶⁸

But this first failure contained the seeds of an unexpected success: he had recruited three lay associates of the MCA to volunteer for a year or so and help him get the school started. They arrived in January of 1916, and others soon followed. When the school in Opelika failed, instead of going home, they looked around for new missionary opportunities.

The Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity

These first volunteers themselves defined the ministry. They found a more promising site for another school in nearby Phenix City, a mill town directly across the Chattahoochee River from Columbus, Georgia. They designed the schedule of the school to accommodate the needs of the

⁶⁶Ibid, 142.

⁶⁷Joseph Miriam Blackwell, MSBT, *Ecclesial People: A Study in the Life and Times of Thomas Augustine Judge, CM* (Holy Trinity, AL: Missionary Cenacle Press, 1974), 153-4.

⁶⁸Ibid, 160.

millworkers' children, something the public school had refused to do. The millworkers' children simply weren't going to school at all. This was clearly an abandoned work, a hallmark of Fr. Judge's criteria for ministry. The volunteers set about furnishing the school, promoting it to the townspeople, raising money to run it, and recruiting additional volunteers. As a result, not all subsequent volunteers were necessarily MCA members, northerners, or even Catholic.

Lou Keasey is an example of a volunteer who came without any prior connection to Fr. Judge or the MCA. She was a schoolteacher in rural Pennsylvania who had always been very active in her parish. She had felt some missionary impulses for some time, and had actually acquired (but not signed, apparently) a two-year contract to go teach at a mission for Native Americans run by the Capuchins, all carefully arranged by her Capuchin parish priest.⁶⁹ Keasey's decision to instead volunteer in Alabama was based purely on listening to a visiting volunteer's account of her previous months in Opelika. Keasey had not been steeped previously in the missionary spirituality of the MCA. This is evidence in itself that lay Catholics were ready and willing to see themselves as missionaries, despite a lack of hierarchical support for this model at the time.

Within two years, Keasey and several other volunteers, who at this point were running a nearby donated plantation as well as the school, had gradually formed themselves into a nascent religious congregation which was steadily growing in size.⁷⁰ When it became obvious that it was time to get organized, Fr. Judge appointed Lou Keasey as the first General Custodian (superior) of

⁶⁹Mary Tonra, MSBT, *Led By The Spirit: A Biography of Mother Boniface Keasey MSBT* (New York: Gardner Press, 1984), 38.

⁷⁰They continued to work with volunteers who did not choose to follow this path, and eventually the tradition of recruiting volunteers developed a formal structure. Missionary Cenacle Volunteers is one of the oldest Catholic volunteer programs in the U.S.

the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity (MSBT)—without consulting her first! It seems to have been his assumption that leadership of the MSBT included a leadership role with the MCA, to which she had never belonged.⁷¹ (In fact, it was not until after Vatican II that the MCA assumed real autonomy and a partnership equal to the men's and women's branches of the Missionary Cenacle Family.)

In 1915, Fr. Judge first arrived in Alabama. In 1916, the first volunteers began to arrive. In 1917, some volunteers began to call themselves sisters and live a structured life in common. In 1918, the sisters incorporated for legal purposes, since they were now property owners. The plantation donated to them complete with mortgage, about twenty miles south of Phenix City, had become headquarters for both the women's and the newly developing men's congregations.⁷² Soon, the men bought another huge tract of land across the road from the original plantation to set up separate facilities. The entire settlement was named Holy Trinity, and continues today to be a nexus of missionary activity for both congregations.⁷³

The Quest for Approbation

With a large established base of lay members in the Northeast to provide both vocations and promotion of the southern missionary efforts, the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity grew rapidly. Before Judge had appointed Keasey as General Custodian on New Year's Day of 1919,

⁷¹Tonra, 64.

⁷²The land had been neglected, but soon became a source of food for the brothers, sisters and volunteers, as well as a source of income from its lumber.

⁷³Please see Appendix 1 for a brief explanation of terminology and devotions.

the group had already adopted a garb and taken religious names for themselves. In the final months of 1918 they opened four new missions: a school in Maryland, a school in a small town near Holy Trinity, a combination school and food co-op for African Americans located in Holy Trinity itself, and the Home for Creole Boys in Pensacola, Florida.⁷⁴

Funding was a never-ending need, and Keasey, now known as Mother Boniface, found herself thrust into a new world. In order to get permission to collect money in any given diocese, she had to meet personally with the local bishop. Bishops, upon learning about a congregation whose purpose was to take on abandoned work, naturally began to request the sisters to take on work in their own dioceses. Lacking any kind of juridical status at this stage, Mother Boniface composed a prudent response letter to be used for such inquiries. "It must be understood that as a Community we are subject to our superiors. We do not wish to invade the field of communities already established, rather, offering ourselves for a work that these communities cannot take."⁷⁵

As the congregation spread during the 20s, the pressure to obtain official status mounted, both from bishops and from Fr. Judge and the sisters. Fr. Judge made much of an affirming letter from the Apostolic Delegate for the work the sisters were doing, but in fact the letter carried no official weight. To obtain status, the rules established by *Conditae a Christo*, the 1917 Code of Canon Law, and the Norms of 1921 applied. Some kind of provisional constitution would have to be submitted to the Bishop of Mobile, who would then seek permission from the Sacred Congregation for Religious (SCR) at the Holy See to erect them as an institute of diocesan right. Final approval for a constitution generally came only after years (typically seven) of living under a

⁷⁴Tonra, 49-50.

⁷⁵Ibid, 63.

provisionally approved document, to allow time to adjust it to current norms and lived experience.

There was no legislative expectation that a new congregation should produce a perfectly crafted constitution before it could achieve juridical status—in fact, the norms clearly had the letter of praise (the *decretum laudis*, conferring status) *precede* the final approval for the constitution. But even with this generous grace period, neither Fr. Judge nor Mother Boniface seemed eager to commit a provisional constitution to paper. In a 1921 conference, Judge said, “Often rules have been asked for, but it is my thought in this matter to be cautious and to wait....”⁷⁶ He wanted the constitutions of the congregations to reflect how they were already living, and he was very clear that how they were to live was to be developed by the members themselves, after prayer and counsel, based on their own needs and experiences.

Nevertheless, drafts of a constitution for the sisters were made during the twenties. There was no rush to approve one however—the consensus was that the mens’ congregation should get priority in seeking approval. The Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity (ST, the male branch) were in a much more precarious position than the women, owing to their smaller size, significantly lower average age, and the complications accompanying approbation for a clerical institute that also included brothers. With the aid of two canon lawyers who also happened to be the dean and assistant dean of the School of Canon Law at Catholic University of America, Fr. Judge was able to provide a satisfactory constitution for the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity which soon led to their erection as a diocesan institute in 1929 under Bishop Toolen of Mobile.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Shaun McCarty, S.T., *Rationale for a Common Rule of Life for the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity*, MSBT Archives, 23.

⁷⁷McCarty, 24.

The sisters' path to juridical status, however, proved to be unexpectedly complicated. Sr. Mary Tonra provides a detailed account of the twists and turns in her biography of Mother Boniface, *Led By the Spirit*. The source of the problem, apart from the challenge of navigating the fairly new norms (of which only the professionals seemed to have a good grasp), was rooted in Bishop Thomas Toolen's obvious ambivalence toward Judge himself. Only near the very end of the process was the main source of his critical opinion of Fr. Judge uncovered. The Treasurer of the MSBT disapproved of the manner in which things were run, and had been sending secret reports to Toolen complaining about Fr. Judge and the administration in general. This may help explain the otherwise mystifying reversal that unfolded.

In April of 1930, Fr. Judge and Mother Boniface held a council with the local custodians (superiors) in the North to work out a plan of action. They decided to use the ST constitution as a guide, and to gather letters of recommendation from all the bishops whose dioceses had MSBT missions. There was concern that the Sacred Congregation for Religious would mandate the adoption of a habit and veil, and the sisters hoped that widespread support from the American hierarchy would forestall this. The custodians were instructed to encourage the bishops to support the MSBT garb in their letters. "Mother Boniface explained that ... 'of course the Priests and Bishops here think it would be a mistake for us to wear veils and try to do our work.'"⁷⁸

Concern about being forced into a religious habit was part of the anxiety associated with obtaining juridical status. Soon after the council meeting of custodians, Mother Boniface wrote to one of them: "Monsignor Bernardini leaves for Rome very soon and he wants to take the Rule with

⁷⁸Tonra, 233.

him, so before long you may be wearing a flowing veil in cloister."⁷⁹ The sisters had from the beginning adopted a black dress and hat that superficially resembled a widow's dress or a nurse's uniform. This choice was partly a matter of survival: they had been publicly harassed and had even received anonymous letters threatening violence from organized anti-Catholic groups, and a nun in a veil simply would not have been let in the door of many a home in rural Alabama at that time.

But it was more than an adaptation to cultural pressure. Fr. Judge had inculcated in the Missionary Servants a strong desire to move freely among the people they served without attracting attention or erecting unnecessary barriers. In a conference he gave in 1932, he digressed with a humorous reminiscence of a somewhat traumatic visit he had made as a teenager to the convent of his aunt. He sat in the exceedingly formal convent parlor for what seemed an eternity, enduring the stern gaze of an array of saint statues while his mother and aunt ignored him and chatted on about family affairs. "... After all, I was only a piece of animated boyhood. Finally, I blurted this out--'Aunt, how in the world can you live in a place like this.'" On the way home Judge naturally received a dressing-down from his mother, and concluded:

I should not be brought back to a holy place like that. In my heart I agreed, I was unworthy to go back there again. Well now, that was the convent then and that is pretty much the convent today, or the ordinary convent. Well now, would a boy 16 find that in the [MSBT] Cenacle convent? I don't think so. Sister comes in in a commonplace way. She hasn't any bells or medals or anything else. There is not anything very forbidding, as far as I can see, in our parlor. First of all, she doesn't dress like a sister. She is just a modestly garbed woman of the day. This is all now. I notice she is quite mobile. She can swing into the automobile with the grace of a man. She is quite self-reliant. Instead of going out with a companion she is off by herself. She comes in and out. That is her spirit. This is a Missionary Servant, this is not a cloistered sister, this is not a quasi-cloistered sister, this is not a sister who never leaves the house from the time she enters it until she is carried out in death. She

⁷⁹Ibid, 233-4.

is in and out.⁸⁰

At the same time that Fr. Judge, Mother Boniface, and others were working on a draft of the MSBT constitution, letters of commendation from the bishops began to arrive. Finally Mother Boniface met with Bishop Toolen to show him the draft and the letters. She wrote later of the meeting, "He read the draft through, commenting on different parts, especially the scope of the work, stating he thought it rather broad for a young Community.... He questioned the advisability of asking Rome for an Indult to make Father Judge our Spiritual Director for life."⁸¹ He finally expressed his pleasure with the congregation and promised he would request permission of the SCR to give them juridical status.

Confident that all was in place, Monsignor Bernardini, the Dean of the Canon Law School at CUA, took the draft of the MSBT constitution and all the other necessary reports and documents to Rome in June of 1930. By November he had returned with the approval of the provisional constitution and the necessary permission from the SCR for Bishop Toolen to erect the congregation in the diocese of Mobile. When Mother Boniface called on Toolen with the Decree of Erection freshly arrived from Rome, she must have been surprised when he refused to sign it.

The reason Toolen gave was that the constitution was only a draft, and he wanted to wait until the SCR approved the final version of it. This, of course, was the reverse to what the norms actually dictated. In the next two months Mother Boniface made three more visits to Toolen without success. He seemed alternatively obstructive and sympathetic. He continued to insist, opinions of

⁸⁰MF-0086-7, conference by Father Judge on 27 August 1930 to Missionary Cenacle members. MF numbers are microfilm numbers, which are used to identify original documents of Father Judge and Mother Boniface in the MSBT and ST archives.

⁸¹Tonra, 240.

famous canon lawyers notwithstanding, that he could not sign the decree until the constitution was approved. But the subsequent visits also revealed that he strongly disapproved of Fr. Judge as spiritual director, and this was probably his true objection.

By January of 1931, the sisters had come to accept that they would not change Toolen's mind. As it happened, the Motherhouse at Holy Trinity had burnt to the ground the previous January, and in the ensuing months the MSBT had received invitations from sympathetic bishops to relocate to their own dioceses. The bishop in whose diocese the Motherhouse is located is the bishop who canonically erects a congregation. A special council was called on January 16 and the sisters arrived at the decision to approach the ordinary of Philadelphia about relocating their Motherhouse there.

After the council meeting, Mother Boniface almost immediately got on the phone to make an appointment with Cardinal Dougherty of Philadelphia, only to learn he was on a cruise in the Caribbean. She obtained the name of the ship he was on and ascertained that it was due to dock in Havana on February 1 for a few days. On January 29, she and Sr. Mary Francis Taylor took a train to Miami, and from there took an overnight boat to Cuba, arriving early the morning of January 31. They spoke no Spanish, but found a policeman who had just enough English to direct them to a church with an English-speaking priest. When they found the priest they asked if he could connect them to a convent which might provide overnight lodging for them. He was openly skeptical that they were religious sisters and did not want to help them. Finally, he gave them directions to a convent of Dominicans who spoke English. The superior there immediately recognized them and took them in—she even made arrangements for the meeting with the Cardinal.

So on Sunday morning of February 1, as soon as the boat docked, His Eminence was greeted with the news that Mother Boniface was in Cuba hoping to speak with him. He went directly from

the ship to the Dominican convent. In her report of the event she said, "He said he did not know how we found out [where he was] and he did not know how we had gotten there, and neither did he care; but he knew one thing and that was that he was very glad to see us and we were very welcome."⁸² Cardinal Dougherty held the Missionary Servants in high esteem for their work in his archdiocese, and was more than happy to help them relocate the Motherhouse and formally erect them as an institute of diocesan right.

Preparations for the transfer began immediately, and all sisters in central administration, including the entire company of postulants and novices, settled in Philadelphia in May. The extensive paperwork, however, had to be almost totally redone and sent to Rome again. Thus, it was not until February 20, 1932 that Cardinal Dougherty was at last able to grant juridical status to the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity. Tragically, Mother Boniface did not live to see the day. While nursing some of her sisters who had contracted typhoid fever at their mission hospital in Gadsden, Alabama, Mother Boniface herself fell ill with the disease. She died unexpectedly at age 46 on November 22, 1931.

The First Constitution: Before and After 1933

The provisional MSBT constitution saw numerous revisions in the years before a draft was actually submitted to the Sacred Congregation for Religious in 1930. In 1952, a spiritual directory was printed and distributed for personal use, and the second half of the booklet bore the heading "Original Draft of the Constitutions of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity as Father Judge First Gave Them." The sisters used this undated document as daily spiritual reading, and

⁸²Ibid, 277.

although the MSBT archives has no original document from which the printed version was taken, this is accepted simply as the constitution Father Judge intended the Missionary Servants to have. However, while it contains lengthy passages that are undoubtedly his work, it also has one glaring omission. The Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity are nowhere mentioned. Specifically, neither Father Judge nor the ST are named in any kind of leadership or advisory role for the MSBT. Since such an arrangement was a fighting point between the sisters and the hierarchy throughout the entire process of obtaining status, it is impossible for this draft to be an early draft, for example an initial effort composed before diocesan status was being aggressively pursued. It might well be a later or even final draft containing core material composed by Fr. Judge along with changes advised by canon lawyers. The version printed in the 1952 booklet simply cannot be assumed to be some pure, unedited expression of Father Judge unmarked by canonical requirements or by pressure from Bishop Toolen.

Even bearing this in mind, the existing draft and the approved constitution distributed in 1933 are strikingly different. To describe the differences metaphorically, the draft is the work of an artist, and the constitution is the work of an engineer. The 1933 constitution is thorough, functional, and concise—but dry. It looks like a boilerplate in which items specific to the congregation were inserted as needed. Where the draft incessantly repeated “The Missionary Servant of the Most Blessed Trinity,” the constitution uses only “The sister.” The draft’s section on the novitiate reads like a homily, while the constitution’s section is a list of regulations. It only acknowledges the existence of a unique MSBT spirituality in Articles 2, 3, and 4 and later in Articles 104 and 105. One has the inescapable feeling that it is the “fill-in-the-blank” product of a bureaucracy.

A comparison of parallel elements in the documents will better illustrate their differences. The opening article in the 1933 constitution reads simply: "The general end of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity is the sanctification of its members through the practice of the three simple vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, and by the observation of the present Constitutions."⁸³ In contrast, Article One in the draft (provided in Appendix 2) is an inspirational discourse on the dire needs of those in danger of losing their faith due to "collapse of family life and the startling and unceasing activities of evil and scandalizing agencies...." It eventually arrives at the relatively succinct conclusion: "Preservation of the Faith, therefore, synthesizes the hopes and prayers of a Missionary Servant of the Most Blessed Trinity."⁸⁴

The articles in the approved constitution treating the particular devotions are mere lists. The devotions are the same in both documents: the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, the Incarnation, the Mental Sorrows of Jesus, the Angels, and the Apostles. However, in the draft, each devotion is accompanied by a full paragraph of exhortation and methods by which a Missionary Servant of the Most Blessed Trinity ought to practice that devotion. The constitution article 127 lists the virtues: prudence, simplicity, humility, charity, sacrifice, patience, and self-denial. The draft article 1 of chapter 2 lists the virtues with accompanying scripture citations. Interestingly, the list is different: in the draft, in the place of self-denial we find instead the virtue of zeal.

⁸³*Constitutions of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity* (1933), 5. The wording of this article is a formula apparently found in every constitution of the day.

⁸⁴"Original Draft of the Constitutions of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity as Father Judge First Gave Them," in *Spiritual Directory of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity* (1952), 63-4.

There are three issues addressed in the 1933 constitution which are treated rather differently in the draft, all key points related to the sisters' particular lifestyle and missionary work: eating, traveling, and cloister. In the draft, we learn the Missionary Servant should not take food when out visiting, as an exercise of self-denial in the practice of chastity. In the same section on chastity is the instruction to keep her Custodian (local superior) informed of her comings and goings. The word cloister is never used, but there is instruction in one article prohibiting access of outsiders to the interior space of the Missionary Cenacle—this would mean the bedrooms and the community room.

In the constitution, the section on obedience includes the rule that a sister must ask permission of the Custodian before leaving the cenacle, obviously more restrictive than keeping her informed. She is not to go out of the cenacle alone, "except in case of necessity," or if she is doing ministry and the Custodian judges that it is appropriate. The constitution specifies that the sisters can drive and travel by train.⁸⁵ These are significant additions not found in the draft. Missionary Servants had been driving and traveling routinely from the beginning, and may have seen this as so obvious that it need not be mentioned. However, this was not the norm, and its presence in the final approved constitution suggests that at some point someone realized this was a privilege which needed to be explicitly protected.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the norm at this time was that a sister would never appear in public alone. While the addition of a rule requiring a companion might sound restrictive, the fact that it is rather generously modified once again points to a desire to protect established practice.

⁸⁵1933 *Constitutions*, 36.

⁸⁶I examined the constitutions of six other women's congregations approved during this period, and none of them mention automobiles or trains.

It is in the constitution's insertion of rules of enclosure (i.e. cloister) that the prevailing winds of a monastic norm for women religious are most evident. There are eight articles on the subject, some of which are taken directly from canon law. Terms seen nowhere else make an appearance here: externs, cells, and portress, all monastic terms. In the draft, silence was required from the time of night prayer until after breakfast. In the constitution, silence is expected at all times except recreation, and only on "solemn occasions" might the custodian allow recreation during a meal. Completely absent in the draft, the constitution has much to say about personal correspondence, which had to go through the local Custodian.⁸⁷

The requirement that all meals be taken in the refectory, and the explicit inclusion of the refectory within the bounds of designated cloister, meant that Missionary Servants could no longer share meals with anyone outside the congregation. This was a radical change from the family lifestyle the Missionary Servants had shared up to this point with the lay members and the priests and brothers of the Missionary Cenacle Family. In a letter Judge wrote in 1923 to Bishop Caruana to explain the sisters' expenses, he said, "The ordinary Sisterhoods have but few visitors at their convent and the obligation of hospitality comes to them as an exceptional thing. Our Sisters must entertain because of the Outer Cenacle [lay members], who are really a part of their family.... It is no uncommon thing, for example, for fifteen or twenty to be at a meal in Brooklyn."⁸⁸ Upon learning of the new restrictions, some sisters, including some in leadership, were so upset they had to

⁸⁷Ibid, 43-46.

⁸⁸MF-005415, Father Judge, letter to Bishop George J. Caruana, 1 August 1923.

reassess whether or not to remain in the congregation.⁸⁹

Equally confounding was the omission of any mention of Fr. Judge or the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity. As previously explained, this is not in the only existing draft, either, but it is repeatedly mentioned in correspondence in the years preceding submission of the constitution to the Holy See. Fr. Judge's vision of the arrangement was based quite intentionally on the arrangement of the Daughters of Charity to the Congregation of the Mission. The reason the sisters wanted to be under the ecclesial authority of Fr. Judge (and after him the General Custodian of the ST) was uncannily similar to the reason the Daughters of Charity sought a parallel relation to Vincent de Paul and the Vincentians. The Daughters had eluded cloister by forming themselves as a pious confraternity, and the norm for such an institute was that the bishop appoint one of his priests as ecclesiastical superior. Cardinal de Retz had of course appointed Vincent, but Louise de Marillac had feared that after his death, any other diocesan priest could not maintain the spirit of the Daughters the way a member of the Congregation of the Mission could. After much pressure from Louise, new documents were drawn up which allowed for Vincent to be succeeded by the superior of his own congregation.⁹⁰

The Missionary Servants had repeatedly insisted on a similar arrangement for the same reason. They were never assured it would be allowed, but it was the outright refusal of Bishop Toolen to accept such an arrangement that finally precipitated the sisters' relocation to Philadelphia. In the famous meeting of Mother Boniface with Cardinal Dougherty in Havana, Dougherty was not

⁸⁹Sister Marie of the Holy Trinity, report given to Sr. Marie of the Precious Blood, April 24, 1977, MSBT Archives.

⁹⁰Shaun McCarty, S.T., *Rationale for a Joint Constitution* (MSBT Archives, 1980) 28.

opposed to the idea in theory, but he did express concern that the ST members were as yet too young to assume the responsibility should Fr. Judge die within the next few years (which in fact he did).⁹¹ Dougherty later in writing clarified that canon law was explicit that the local ordinary alone had authority to expand or prevent the expansion of an institute within his diocese. Mother Boniface at this point was referring to Fr. Judge's proposed role as Spiritual Director and not Ecclesiastical Superior. She replied that she understood the role would be advisory and not a substitute for the normal authority of the ordinary.⁹²

In sum, the constitution that finally arrived in the hands of the Missionary Servants was a compromise document. On the whole it treated the sisters as if they were generic in function and monastic in origin, as all congregations during this period were being treated. In certain key ways it did violence to the spirit and lifestyle which had formed the sisters since 1918. It severed the family connection to their spiritual brothers by removing any mention of them even in an advisory role, by removing mention of them in their prayers for the dead (the suffrages, a standard list in all constitutions of the time), and by imposing rules preventing them from sharing meals together.

It is nevertheless important to consider that the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity managed to obtain juridical status despite the fact that their work was not focused on one particular apostolate, and actually eschewed the owning and running of institutions, the *raison d'être* of most women's congregations being founded in the United States up to that point.⁹³ It allowed the

⁹¹Tonra, 277.

⁹²Ibid, 287.

⁹³The "special purpose of the congregation," Article 2, is two pages long and has nine sections. Compared with other constitutions' brevity on this point, usually only a few sentences, the contrast is truly remarkable.

continued use of the garb instead of requiring a habit and veil. It softened normal restrictions on travel, so sisters were more free to leave the cenacle alone, or use a car or public transportation. Thus it was possible for them to more or less sustain their typical pattern of moving freely among those they served.

Life After Death of the Founders

In *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life*, the authors provide a graphical bell curve representing the life cycle of a religious congregation with five basic stages.⁹⁴ The Missionary Cenacle Family, unfortunately, did not smoothly transition from the founding stage into the expansion stage. Within a four year period, the ST achieved juridical status in Alabama, the MSBT Motherhouse burnt down and the congregation relocated its headquarters to Philadelphia, Mother Boniface died, the ST relocated their Motherhouse to Cleveland, the MSBT achieved juridical status, and Fr. Judge died in 1933. These events working together launched the ST and MSBT congregations into their expansion and stabilization periods rather abruptly and, sadly, rather separately from one another.

This new long-distance relationship was radically different from the relationship the congregations had shared while the founders were living. Holy Trinity, Alabama, when both motherhouses were literally walking distance from one another, was like a settlement of one large extended family—not always happy, certainly, but assuredly closely interdependent. Meals, liturgies, and celebrations were often joint affairs. The two groups' finances were not well separated, and Mother Boniface was responsible for most of the fund-raising for both groups. Their ministries

⁹⁴Cada et al, 53.

generally were not joint, but they undertook some projects together, for example the publication of *The Holy Ghost Messenger*. With Fr. Judge more often absent than present, "Mother Boniface is pictured as assuming leadership of both groups along with Father Judge when he would be away."⁹⁵

Nothing could make the family spirit more tangible than the response of the young ST brothers when the MSBT Motherhouse burnt to the ground on the night of January 2, 1930. The sisters subsequently assumed responsibility for cooking for everyone at the men's facilities, and all meals were taken together there. Fr. Timothy Lynch, in formation at the time there, recalled, "The family spirit came into it, and we heard from Father Judge how much we owed the sisters.... They would come to Mass, and then they would share our meals with us.... We went over and fixed up the chicken coops for their new convent, and if we had extra things we brought them over there, also beds. It was really good training."⁹⁶ Br. Francis Donohue recalled, "There was a real good brother-sister relationship between the crowd at St. Joseph's [the ST side] and the group on the Sisters' side. It always came to the forefront when there was any kind of work, or trouble to overcome, then there was a unification right there. The friendships I made there have held me in good stead over the years."⁹⁷

Shaun McCarty, ST, researched the evolution of the ST/MSBT relationship in a rationale he prepared for the Holy See in 1980, a revision of which was printed and distributed to all MSBT and ST in 1982. This summary is based entirely on his work. Before the founders' deaths, there were at

⁹⁵Shaun McCarty, S.T., *Rationale for a Common Rule of Life for the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity*, (MSBT Archives, 1982) 17.

⁹⁶Tonra, 226.

⁹⁷Ibid, 227.

least two formal joint councils of MCA/ST/MSBT leadership on record. Afterwards, "oral tradition testifies to the fact that between the years 1933-49 there were meetings of at least the general administrations of the three branches of the family."⁹⁸ There is no written record of a council of ST/MSBT leadership until 1950. It appears intentions were good to meet yearly from this point on, but this did not materialize. In 1963, there was a joint ST/MSBT/MCA council to handle business related to the foundation of a pious union as a fourth branch of the Missionary Cenacle Family.

In addition to the formal meetings of leaders above, there is ample record of cooperation on a more spiritual level. The ST and MSBT both continued their work with the MCA. MSBT frequently relied on ST for spiritual direction or to serve at retreats. Anniversary celebrations were occasions to come together. "The strongest witness of continued family spirit, beginning in 1944 and lasting through 1966, is the publication of Missionary Cenacle Review."⁹⁹ This was a journal relating events of the Missionary Cenacle Family.

Nevertheless there can be no question that the close brother/sister relationship of the two congregations waned after the founders died and the motherhouses were separated. When missions were in proximity, informal connections and friendships generally developed—McCarty cites the missions in Puerto Rico as an example of this. But on the whole, the MSBT tended to gravitate toward urban settings and social work, and the ST were drawn more into parish work in rural areas.

In reviewing letters and council minutes from the 1930s and 40s, certain concerns are in evidence which illustrate the on-going tension between the Missionary Servants' desire to live out their apostolic vocation and their desire to be faithful to a constitution which was by and large not

⁹⁸McCarty, 1982 *Rationale for a Common Rule*, 30.

⁹⁹Ibid.

constructed for that vocation. Because it is mentioned in several sources, it appears that the most difficult change was prohibition of sharing meals with "externs" and allowing them into the "cloister." This effectively ended the common practice of eating with MCA members and the ST. It was not the only struggle, however. In a letter from the General Custodian to all local custodians to prepare them to receive their copies of the newly printed constitution, she expresses this tension in her exhortation to "be sure not to exaggerate or minimize any of its regulations. I fell [sic] there will be a tendency as much as one way as the other unless we are all reasonable and ever mindful of the fact that we are aiming at perfection and these rules are to help us attain it."¹⁰⁰ The letter goes on to specify the new rules banning eating between meals and mandating nightly recreation all together as a group as potential problems. In each case she is advising the local custodian to adapt the rules as necessity demands. "Remember, this does not mean that you are breaking a rule, but it simply means you are making use of a rule to acquire grace for yourself by asking a permission."¹⁰¹

The concern about eating between meals continued to surface over the years. It was a stricture which surprisingly enough had been inserted by Fr. Judge, not by Rome. The problem was that the sisters frequently worked long hours, often walking about in neighborhoods, and frankly needed to snack to keep going. Fr. Judge's intention was not to impose ascetic fasting, but to encourage the sisters to grow in the virtue of obedience by regularly asking permission to eat. Minutes from council meetings of local custodians during the forties show that by then, the issue was not that sisters were in danger of starving out of a sense of scrupulosity, but that many were resisting the need to ask for

¹⁰⁰Mother Mary of the Incarnate Word Rahaley, letter to Sr. Claire, 11 September 1933, Number 333-4, MSBT Archives.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

permission at all.

At the 1949 Chapter, the Missionary Servants took the step of formally seeking a revision to the 1933 constitution in order to preserve another distinctive element of their charism which it would seem had never been seriously challenged up to that time. Despite the acquisition of a small hospital in 1925, the MSBT had avoided the owning and running of institutions. There had been several councils held in 1924 to discern whether or not to accept the donation of the hospital, since it was a departure from the work the sisters had been doing up to that point. It appears that a big motivation for accepting the 50-bed facility was the opportunity for Catholic evangelism in Gadsden, Alabama, a decidedly Protestant town with a small population of unchurched Italian immigrants. Once it was acquired, the name was immediately and pointedly changed from Gadsden General Hospital to Holy Name of Jesus Hospital. Mother Boniface soon reported in a letter, "Some of the people do not seem to take kindly to the new name, so we will indeed need many prayers."¹⁰²

In 1945, the sisters had taken on the running of an orphanage in Bethany, Oklahoma. The General Custodian, Mother Mary Francis Taylor, felt the need to explain this action in her opening address at the 1949 Chapter. "We do not want to get into institution work and it seems by taking over this work that we have gone against our policy.... We believe that if it is possible to convince Bishop McGuinnis that this is not our work and that we are willing to get into other missionary work if he gets another community to handle the orphanage, we should do so."¹⁰³ At this chapter, the delegates decided to request a revision of the constitution, clearly to strengthen the General Custodian's ability

¹⁰²Tonra, 135.

¹⁰³Mother Mary Francis Taylor, opening address to 1949 Chapter delegates, MSBT Archives.

to resist the pressure of bishops looking for sisters to run diocesan institutions. Approval was subsequently obtained to insert a new article: "The Congregation shall not undertake the care of institutions. Such a work may be accepted only with the unanimous consent of the Reverend Mother Custodian General's Council."¹⁰⁴

The first constitution of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity reflected the prevailing trend of constitutions as strongly juridical documents with minimal spiritual or ascetic content. Women religious were popularly understood as monastic or quasi-monastic interchangeable parts who specialized in running institutions—generally either schools or hospitals. The Missionary Servants resisted this prevailing current by obtaining juridical status despite the fact that they did not wear a habit and veil and despite the fact that they avoided institutional work and sought out whatever kind of work was falling through the cracks in a given diocese. In a world of specialists who kept a distinct distance from the world, Missionary Servants stood out as "go anywhere, do anything" generalists whose lifestyle stood in clear contrast to the monastic model. They could drive, they could go out unaccompanied, and they wore simple but modern hats instead of veils. The 1933 constitution made some concessions to their unique traditions even though it did not leave those traditions unscathed. But with the arrival of the Second Vatican Council, renewal of the MSBT and ST congregations was to bring a renewal of the original family connection, and a re-creation of their constitutions into something Father Judge would have found more recognizable.

¹⁰⁴ Article 4, *Constitutions of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity*, revision of 1949, MSBT Archives, 12.

CHAPTER 3 RENEWAL AND RULE

The First Steps Toward Renewal

Pontifical Status

As detailed earlier, in the decades before the Second Vatican Council, there were many signs that the Holy See was encouraging some reforms of religious life. Pius XII's *Sponsa Christi* in 1950 and later addresses he made to women religious were direct calls to reform. The Missionary Servant's garb and hat may have fallen within the boundaries of fashion in the 30s, but had not been modified since then, and some modest tailoring was approved in 1958.¹⁰⁵

Another approval of greater significance came that year: the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity received approbation as a congregation of pontifical status. Mother Mary Sebastian Whaley, the General Custodian in office when the approval finally came, "was especially appreciative of the amount of paperwork which would be reduced when operating under Pontifical status."¹⁰⁶ It is hardly surprising that, apart from the implied honor in such an approval, reduced paperwork would be the best reason for welcoming the news. The new 1958 constitution, which had as a matter of routine been given a seven-year conditional approval, was in essence identical to the

¹⁰⁵Mary Tonra, MSBT, *As the Spirit Rules*, 1988 (?), unpublished manuscript, p. 28, MSBT Archives. This work is an interweaving of narrative with transcripts of letters, minutes, memos, interviews, and oral presentations.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

1949 constitution. A comparison reveals only minor rewording. When the men's congregation likewise obtained pontifical status that same year, their constitution was "permitted to retain some of the warm counsels set down by Father Judge."¹⁰⁷ 1958 was occasion for joint regional gatherings of the two congregations as they celebrated not only their new status but the 25th anniversary of Father Judge's death.

The Chapter of Renewal

In theory, the 1958 constitution would have received final approval by 1965, perhaps with some minor revisions. In fact, the 1962 Chapter had already voted to request the elimination of some of the articles dealing with cloister, but under the circumstances had held off petitioning for the changes.¹⁰⁸ The upheaval of Vatican II had intervened, and by 1965 *Perfectae Caritatis* was promulgated, setting in motion a global reform of religious life. Minor revisions were out of the question: all constitutions, directories, books of custom, and so on were required to be fully revised only after an extensive renewal process. By 1966, the MSBT's liaison at the Sacred Congregation for Religious was warning "Given the fact that within two or three years [all constitutions] will be subject to almost unlimited experimentation, it seems that the Sacred Congregation is reluctant to give anything like a *definitive* approval" to the 1958 provisional MSBT constitution.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Ibid, 33.

¹⁰⁸Mother Marie of the Holy Trinity Healy, letter to Fr. Bernard Ransing, 18 June 1965, MSBT Archives.

¹⁰⁹Fr. Bernard Ransing C.S.C., letter to Mother Marie of the Holy Trinity, 4 November 1966, MSBT Archives.

The sisters embarked on their renewal process by launching an extensive survey in 1967, the year before their renewal chapter was to commence. The questionnaire was intended to provide feedback for chapter delegates to use in their task of renewal, which would ultimately culminate in a new constitution. The almost one hundred percent return of the survey forms is an indication that there was a powerful sense of engagement throughout the congregation.¹¹⁰

The 1968 Renewal Chapter was a massive undertaking. Delegates had been elected far enough in advance that they could begin their pre-chapter meetings seven months before the chapter itself was officially opened. There were four pre-chapter meetings in which procedures were agreed on, the scope of the work to be done was outlined, and commissions (committees) were established. At the fourth pre-chapter meeting, a guest speaker from the Canon Law Society of America updated the delegates on the new mode of operation needed for chapters: “ ‘It should come up with something... that can warm the hearts of people, challenge them, thrill them.... You are not to replace the old laws with new ones, but foster growth and further responsibility....’ ”¹¹¹

In the midst of all these meetings with their flood of new information, it was becoming evident that a new kind of energy was being unleashed in religious life. Permission to experiment with common prayer and with the garb, given in March 1968 after a pre-Chapter meeting had explored the idea, resulted in widespread variations in dress and in prayer across the congregation seemingly overnight. There was doubtless a growing anxiety that amidst these sudden shifts, the charism would be lost. Sr. Mary Gerald Kiely related in a letter that pioneer member and former

¹¹⁰Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 56.

¹¹¹Fr. Paul Boyle, C.P., “Mechanics of the Chapter,” May 1968 in Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 59.

General Custodian Mother Mary Sebastian "gave a forceful address to the Delegates in which she stressed the principles, the thoughts and the hopes of Father Judge, whom she knew so well and worked with so closely. I think she made a decided impression on the Delegates."¹¹² The lasting impact of her words was no doubt magnified when Mother Sebastian returned home from the meeting and died suddenly only days later. In Sr. Mary Tonra's historical account of this period, she conveys a sense that everything became subject to debate and even simple procedural matters became bogged down. She reports that after the final pre-Chapter meeting, some of the pioneer sisters gathered afterwards and in some anguish asked, "What are we going to do, they are changing everything!"¹¹³

The Experimental Constitution

The renewal chapter was convened in June 1968 and closed in June of 1969 after having met for five sessions which varied from one to two weeks in duration. During the course of the year that the chapter was still officially convoked, newly elected General Custodian Sr. Mary Gerald Kiely established the Constitutions Committee.¹¹⁴ The 1968 Chapter also approved some basic changes to the 1958 constitution. This was distributed in early 1970 bearing the title "Constitutions of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity (1958) with Experimental Alterations."

¹¹²Sr. Mary Gerald Kiely to Fr. Bernard Ransing, C.S.C, 10 December 1968, MSBT Archives.

¹¹³Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 60.

¹¹⁴Sr. Mary Gerald, despite pressure both from within the congregation and from Cardinal Krol, refused to assume the title Mother. She established this new tradition because she did not want the leadership role to emphasize a parent-child relationship.

Large sections of the experimental constitution are taken unchanged from the 1958 constitution, notably the sections dealing with governance and formation procedures. There are some major deletions, mostly those which were clearly monastic in tone. The articles dealing with order of precedence, travel and eating restrictions, and inspection of mail are simply gone. The twenty-three articles dealing with cloister and the order of the day are not completely gone but are wholly transformed. The single remaining article addressing cloister says simply: "In every Missionary Cenacle some places should be set apart as normally for the private use of the Sisters. Sisters should use discretion when inviting visitors into these areas."¹¹⁵ Additionally, this heavily revised section now delegates the responsibility of determining the schedule, silence, and meals to local house council rather than spelling out details of how to organize the day.

It is the opening eight articles, "End of the Congregation," which mark the true renaissance of the Missionary Cenacle spirit into the proper law of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity. After almost a thirty-year absence, Father Judge is back. The material does not restore the homiletic form of his original draft, but in its own succinct style it brings alive the unique charism of the congregation in a way the previous constitutions failed even to hint at. Fr. Judge is named and directly quoted. Rather than listing specific ministries as the way "the congregation carries out its special purpose," it uses visionary language and specifies the criteria for ministry in a broad sense.¹¹⁶ Another significant change is the introduction, at long last, of an article on the "Family Spirit" and the mention by name of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity.

¹¹⁵"Constitutions of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity (1958) with Experimental Alterations," MSBT Archives, 22.

¹¹⁶*Ibid*, 12.

The First Constitution Committee

With this document in place as an interim constitution, the newly formed Constitution Committee embarked on the long and winding journey to craft something permanent.¹¹⁷ Official membership as well as attendance varied between five to twelve members. The committee met at least ten times between October 1969 and April 1972, and likely more than that.¹¹⁸ Most of these meetings were a full weekend in duration and it is clear from the minutes there was a considerable burden of homework to do between meetings. All members were engaged in full-time ministry, and there is no indication that any of them had specialized training at that point to equip them to the work.

At the first full meeting on November 1, "Sister Mary Gerald addressed the committee and stated that the Constitution Committee is the most important committee in the Community because it is vital to the future of the community." The committee was charged with producing a draft to submit to the June 1970 Council meeting. The Council would then submit this to the community for use until the 1972 chapter could work on it and prepare a final form to submit to the Holy See for approval.¹¹⁹

Faced with the daunting task of generating a workable constitution within seven months, the sisters immediately proceeded to work out an action plan with long and short range goals. The first concern was education, and they agreed on seven areas of research: scripture, writings of Father

¹¹⁷The members of the committee represented a mix of generations. At least five of the twelve would have been considered younger members. At least one was Puerto Rican.

¹¹⁸Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 78.

¹¹⁹Constitution Committee, minutes of 1 November 1969, MSBT Archives.

Judge, documents of Vatican II, documents from the 1968 chapter, documents from other pertinent MSBT sources, constitutions of other congregations, and periodicals and books. Each sister chose one area for research with a view to educate the committee on this topic at later meetings.¹²⁰

Later minutes do not make clear how well this education process was executed. It appears there was only a brief sharing of highlights with recommendations for further reading, but it may be that there was more depth which simply isn't conveyed in the minutes. In any case, given the time constraints, thoroughness is unlikely. By the end of the December meeting, the sisters concluded "We should each attempt to draw up entire Constitution if possible[.] Make a copy for each Member of Committee and bring to meeting in February".¹²¹ The plan was to synthesize something from everyone's individual attempts.

At the February meeting, drafts were circulated and the synthesis was begun. Some drafts were more developed than others, but a homiletic style not unlike Father Judge's original draft was a favored approach. The drafts were sprinkled with Missionary Cenacle catch phrases such as charity at white heat, abandoned causes, shock troops, and charity aflame, but they also referred to scripture and Vatican documents. None of them were in any way "juridical." They dealt with the nature and purpose of the congregation, the spirit of the vows, and some general remarks on formation and governance, but there were no specific rules and regulations.

The June 1970 deadline was extended and a draft was not submitted until August. Two separate drafts had strong support and the committee was unable to resolve this division, finally

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Constitution Committee, minutes of 29 December 1969, MSBT Archives.

resorting to a vote. "It was the only instance in which a vote had to be used by the committee."¹²² Thus, the draft submitted did not have the whole-hearted support of the committee, though all members were in agreement about submitting it. Sr. Mary Gerald had concerns about the draft and put the committee on hold until she could get consultation. Eventually she had the draft reviewed by a noted consultant on religious canon law, Joseph Gallen, SJ. After a detailed commentary on specific sections and phrases, Gallen concluded that the draft was on the whole too vague and lacked some key elements, such as an unambiguous expression of authority and obedience. "Constitutions and a Rule are to lead to action... they are not merely spiritual reading. I do not think that these constitutions have this preceding principle sufficiently in mind."¹²³

It appears there was a hiatus of one full year in the work of the committee. It was not until the September 1971 meeting that the committee received feedback from Sr. Mary Gerald and the Council on the draft they had submitted. They were given more resources to consult in their work, and they agreed to work on a new draft all together rather than by attempting to piece together parts from individual efforts. This September meeting was also significant because it marked the first clear beginning of collaboration with the ST constitution committee. Fr. Vincent Fitzpatrick was the invited guest and spent the better part of a day reviewing the approach the men were using and sharing some of the insights they had gleaned.¹²⁴

¹²²Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 77.

¹²³Joseph Gallen, S.J., undated memo to Mary Gerald Kiely, Constitution Committee files, MSBT Archives.

¹²⁴Constitution Committee, minutes of 11-12 September 1971, MSBT Archives.

In April 1972, a partial draft was submitted which was subsequently distributed to the congregation for feedback in preparation for the 1972 chapter. The committee also submitted some general recommendations for future work, and dissolved itself with the understanding that the chapter would continue the work on a constitution and the new Council would decide how to proceed from there. At the 1972 chapter, Sr. Mary Gerald (who had been re-elected to a second term as General Custodian) announced that "we are being advised to allow more time for living and researching before writing anything for the future."¹²⁵ This chapter ultimately moved to officially disband the Constitution Committee and instead allow appointed ad hoc committees to work on specific components as needed. The 1970 revision of the 1958 constitution remained in effect.

Beginning Again

Sr. Mary Gerald had been aware that things were not going well for the MSBT constitution committee. The members who had worked on it had not seemed clear enough in themselves as to what they wanted, and apart from her advisors' recommendations, she herself felt a break was important before making a fresh start.¹²⁶ By 1975, she was ready to get the process moving once more. This time, however, she had a new idea: a joint constitution with the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity. She approached the ST General Custodian, Stephen Quinn, privately about this thought, but he suggested she find out if it were even possible before pursuing it any further. On a trip to Rome in November 1975 for a meeting of the International Union of Superiors General, she arranged an appointment with longtime SCRIS liaison, Fr. Bernard Ransing to ask about a joint

¹²⁵Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 101.

¹²⁶Sr. Mary Gerald Kiely, interview by author, 20 February 2006, Stirling, NJ.

constitution.¹²⁷

Sr. Mary Gerald recalled: "His first reaction was, 'I don't know. Nobody has ever asked that question before.'" He asked to have time to check it out, so she met with him a second time before leaving Rome. His response at this second meeting was, "'I don't see a reason against it and no one here I've asked does, either.' I remember he used these words expressly: 'Go for it, Sister!'"¹²⁸ Ransing was not in any sense assuring her that such an approach would ultimately be accepted, but that it sounded like it could be worth trying to see what happened. As will be seen later, the Sacred Congregation was to prove unequivocally opposed to a joint constitution, but this initial encouragement may be rooted in the long-standing problem with terminology. Whether the parties involved at this juncture meant constitution, rule of life, charism statement or some other category might not be clear, but it *is* clear that the ST and MSBT leadership understood that approval of a joint document was at least on the table for discussion and therefore worth pursuing.

Working with the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity

Before looking at how the two congregations began to work together, a review of the ST process up to that point is necessary. As early as 1966, MSBT council minutes reveal that ST General Custodian Gerard Fredericks had suggested some joint workshops to study their respective constitutions together in preparation for their 1968 renewal chapters.¹²⁹ Mother Marie of the Holy

¹²⁷In 1967, the Sacred Congregation for Religious (SCR) was renamed the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRIS, or in some sources SCRIS).

¹²⁸Kiely interview, 20 February 2006.

¹²⁹McCarty, *Rationale for a Joint Rule*, 36.

Trinity, pioneer and former General Custodian, was an invited guest presenter at an ST pre-chapter meeting, and the ST (as did the MSBT) strongly reaffirmed the family relationship in their chapter documents.¹³⁰ This reaffirmation by both congregations' renewal chapters appears to be the beginning of a steadily increasing awareness of the family spirit that had been so evident in the early days. MSBT and ST leaders had stayed connected, but at last the concept seemed to be spreading out into the general membership. The MSBT 1972 chapter and the ST 1973 chapter both called for continued development of the family relationship.¹³¹ A joint constitution was not in anyone's mind at the outset, however.

The ST approach to producing a new constitution could hardly have been more different from the MSBT approach. The ST renewal chapter had mandated that a constitution committee be formed which would include one member devoted full time to the task. It further mandated community-wide consultation and an adherence to guidelines rooted in juridic norms, the gospel, signs of the times, and the founding charism. There was no mandate for this committee to produce an actual draft within a certain time period. There is no doubt that finances played a role in the differing approaches. While newly appointed chair of the ST committee, Shaun McCarty, was freed from his current ministry and sent for a year of full-time study to prepare for the task ahead, the MSBT committee had no budget because the congregation was in serious financial straits at that time. One MSBT committee member was denied a request for airfare to attend the meeting, and since her local cenacle could not afford it, she simply had to resign from the committee.¹³²

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Ibid, 39.

¹³²Constitution Committee, minutes of 1 November 1969, MSBT Archives.

The ST Commission was initially composed of five members and six consultants, though over time the numbers varied. They met more or less bi-monthly for the next six years.

The Commission realized more acutely as the task unfolded that the important goal was not a finished product of revision accomplished apart from the involvement of the community at large. More and more the Commission saw its role as developing a process in which the awareness of the community would be raised concerning its shared vision, mission, and values. The working assumption was that only after this deep, underlying communion or common vocation was identified and clarified should there be an attempt at its common re-expression.¹³³

During the first years of its work, the ST Constitution Commission produced several works as a by-product of their research: a provisional *Directory* of changeable norms, *Missionary Cenacle Heritage* (which was distributed to the entire Missionary Cenacle Family), *Grace of the Founder*, *Profile of Our Charism*, and a revision of the classic *Missionary Cenacle Meditations*. The original 1928 Constitutions was also distributed, which unlike the MSBT constitution, had been allowed to retain Judge's influence and "was felt to be so close to the source of our original inspiration that it could speak singularly to our spirit."¹³⁴ This material represented the commission's own efforts to re-ground themselves in their charism, and was passed on to all ST in order to effect the same change throughout the congregation.

In addition to this work on the ST charism, the commission was also studying theology of religious life and canon law related to religious life. The commission made regular use of official consultants and their work was reviewed both by the Council and consultants before being generally distributed. Finally, the commission began receiving input from the membership at large through the use of regional meetings and questionnaires.

¹³³McCarty, *Rationale for a Common Rule*, 61.

¹³⁴Ibid, 63.

When Fr. Vincent Fitzpatrick met with the MSBT committee in September of 1971, he presented on the Missionary Cenacle charism, but he also took the opportunity to strongly recommend widespread community consultation before attempting to produce a constitution.¹³⁵ He must have been struck by the dramatic difference in the MSBT approach. The MSBT had already submitted a draft the previous year after only eight months of work, whereas his own committee had resolved not to produce a draft at all prior to their 1973 chapter and was still deeply embroiled in study.

Following the ST 1973 chapter, the commission was now called a committee, and it became a resource for continued renewal and consultation of the congregation. It produced a series of summaries called Concise Statements to be used for reflection and feedback. These statements were "carefully documented in major areas of shared values that constitute the Congregation as a distinct group in the Church."¹³⁶ This work was well underway by the time Sr. Mary Gerald was inspired to broach the idea of a joint constitution.

After getting the clear encouragement of members of the Sacred Congregation for Religious, Sr. Mary Gerald was invited by Fr. Stephen Quinn to attend a meeting of the ST Constitution committee and present her idea in January of 1976. There ensued a lengthy discussion in which reasons for and reasons against the plan were gradually articulated. Fr. Vincent recalled that it took some time for some of the members to work through their feelings. In particular, pioneer member

¹³⁵Constitution Committee, minutes of 11 September 1971, MSBT Archives.

¹³⁶McCarty, *Rationale for a Common Rule*, 66.

Fr. Timothy Lynch repeated in some anguish, "All that work! All that work!"¹³⁷ The men realized that they would inevitably have to backtrack in order to catch their sisters up to speed before they could continue forward, and there may have also been some concern that including the women in the process might mean revising and to some degree losing "all that work" of the previous five years. Nevertheless, their immediate reaction to the proposal was a willingness to at the very least explore it further.

The "cons" on the list generated by the ST members as they talked out their reactions to the suggestion seemed to revolve chiefly around concerns about the ability to work together, on many levels. The men had already hesitated to add additional ST to their committee for the very reason that a new member might have trouble catching up to where the group was, so this concern was not simply a reaction against working with the sisters. They did wonder if the differing approaches of the two groups up to that point would prove too big an obstacle, and they especially wondered if the membership at large, both MSBT and ST, would be ready or able to meet around a common document. They had already been struggling with a lack of full corporate ownership of the work they had done up to that point, so this was not for them a merely theoretical problem.¹³⁸

The "pros" proved to be more enticing, as the men recognized the logic of the idea given their common heritage and the possibility that new MSBT members would increase the ground that could be covered and bring in a new perspective. The ST committee members unquestionably held the family ideal and collaboration with women as values which motivated their positive response.

¹³⁷Fr. Vincent Fitzpatrick, interview by author, 20 February 2006, Stirling, NJ.

¹³⁸McCarty, *Rationale for a Common Rule*, 69-71.

Furthermore, they perceived that this kind of joint endeavor flowed naturally from Vatican II.¹³⁹

The result was a joint meeting of the ST Constitution Committee and a newly established MSBT Constitution Committee of three MSBT on 19 May 1976.¹⁴⁰ They spent much time reviewing the history of work done up to that point. They requested that their respective leaders educate the general membership about this idea and ask for their reactions. In the coming months, most responses seemed positive, and the project went ahead with the understanding that chapter mandates in support of a joint document would eventually be required. The women received some training on the writing of new constitutions at St. Louis University soon after this initial meeting. The subsequent meeting on 27 September 1976 is considered the first meeting of the two committees as one true joint committee, in which the members worked out a more detailed understanding of how to proceed.¹⁴¹

The MSBT/ST Corporate Reflection meetings

The new Joint Committee received word that SCRIS was not encouraging the submission of constitutions at the time due to a serious backlog.¹⁴² This remained the case for some years to come, since every congregation in the world was in some stage of renewal and documents were

¹³⁹Ibid, 69.

¹⁴⁰They were Sisters Joseph Miriam Blackwell, Catherine Steiner, and Mary Fidelis Tonra. Sr. Sara Butler later replaced Sr. Mary Tonra.

¹⁴¹Ibid, 77. In fact, some memos in the ensuing years occasionally referred to the group as if it were joint meetings of two Constitution Committees. The ST and MSBT committees did work independently on their own juridical content and directories.

¹⁴²Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 137.

beginning to flood the office. The news was not unwelcome, as the Committee was strongly committed to in-depth consultation of all members throughout the development of a joint constitution, and this would take years.

The Concise Statements developed by the ST became the core material for the next phase of work. These statements were succinct assertions in modern language of basic concepts all the ST could agree on. They had been thoroughly referenced to show their origins in the writings of Fr. Judge and previous chapter documents. The Concise Statements had gone out as a series in categories such as vows, prayer, and community life. The Statements had been honed through feedback from members in regional meetings, and the ST committee had viewed them as kernels of what would become their constitution. Those Statements which clearly could apply to both congregations were now handed over to the MSBT Committee, who proceeded to do their own research. They were able to reference and revise the statements using their own material, and a synthesis was sent out to all ST and MSBT for feedback.

By May of 1979, the Joint Committee had received a significant return of questionnaires from members of both branches, which indicated a predominately positive reception to the material generated thus far.¹⁴³ The MSBT 1978 chapter had given formal approval to the pursuit of a joint constitution, and the ST 1979 chapter followed suit. With these two critical mandates and a series of core statements already generally well-received by the members, the Joint Committee was ready to develop its critical next step: mandatory reflection meetings of every ST and MSBT, in small mixed groups.

¹⁴³ Joint Constitution Committee, minutes of 17-19 May 1979, MSBT Archives.

Perfectae Caritatis, which launched the renewal of religious life in 1965, was explicit that this renewal must involve all the members of an institute, and later documents and commentaries continued to underline this point. By 1980, the average MSBT and ST on the mission must have felt nothing if not consulted. But this new consultation process was unique in format. It was not a questionnaire which could be (and in many cases was) ignored. It was not an item on the agenda of a regularly scheduled regional meeting. It was not even a meeting consisting entirely of members of one's own congregation. This consultation was mandated by formal letters sent by the members' respective General Custodians.¹⁴⁴ And it required sharing with strangers—for in many if not most cases, MSBT and ST did not know each other. The long separation begun after the death of the founders and the relocation of the Motherhouses had, for some, never really ended.

In June of 1980, the fruit of years of work (and rework) was finally distilled into one nineteen-page document titled "Initial Draft of Proposed Joint Constitution." This represents the first widely distributed document organized enough to be considered a real draft. It was distributed to every Missionary Servant of both congregations. It included a cover letter from the Joint Constitution Committee explaining the proposed final structure: Part One (represented by the initial draft in hand) would be a common statement; Part Two (not included) would be juridic norms "different for each Institute" covering areas such as authority and membership.¹⁴⁵ Each congregation would also have as a separate document its own directory of changeable norms—that is to say, changes could be made by chapter decisions without requiring permission from SCRIS. The draft contained 121 articles divided into nine sections reflecting the categories of the Concise Statements.

¹⁴⁴Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 188-9.

¹⁴⁵"Initial Draft of Proposed Joint Constitution," MSBT Archives, 19.

Only days prior to this mailing, every ST and MSBT had received a letter explaining the procedure for consultation on the draft. Sr. Sara Butler and Fr. Vincent Fitzpatrick had been freed by their Councils from their ministries in order to devote a full year to conduct reflection sessions on the draft. A schedule was offered of 45 meetings over a six-month period, everywhere from Mexico to Puerto Rico to Massachusetts, so that there could be no possible reason any ST or MSBT might be unable to attend. The intention was to create groupings of 10 to 15 MSBT and ST who would pray, reflect, and share together for a full day, facilitated by both Fr. Vincent and Sr. Sara.

Those members who failed to register were personally contacted for a more persuasive invitation. Sr. Mary Tonra interviewed Fr. Vincent and Sr. Carolyn Marie Becker who were engaged in this kind of follow up, and their techniques were both amusing and remarkably successful. "Only five M.S.B.T. and nine S.T. members were unable to attend, principally because their absence was unavoidable."¹⁴⁶

The atmosphere at these mandatory Corporate Reflections varied from location to location, but Fr. Vincent and Sr. Sara noted some general trends in how the two congregations were responding both to the process and to the content. It is clear from a rather frank report written to the MSBT and ST Councils and from recent interviews with the facilitators that these meetings brought into the open some strong feelings around issues related to the perceived charism and around issues which in fact many religious in the United States were grappling with during these years. Fr. Vincent noted that where there was resistance among the men, it was most often rooted in a concern that the entire project was a distraction from the original work of running mission parishes in the rural south, and that "we were throwing overboard our missionary work" in favor of chasing after new ideals

¹⁴⁶Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 194.

from Vatican II.¹⁴⁷ Among the sisters, both facilitators recalled some anxiety that a joint document would somehow subject the women to the men. Passions were high. Fr. Vincent said, "I remember quite clearly when [one sister] stood up and said "We will work with you but we will never work for you!"¹⁴⁸

In fact this particular concern reflected a growing feminist current among women religious throughout the country. Some feminist thought resisted any form of submission to the authority of the hierarchy. The ultimate end of this trajectory is loss of canonical status. Recognition of the authority of the Pope and the local ordinary is part and parcel of being an officially established ecclesial institution. Sr. Mary Linscott, who in her work at SCRIS saw many drafts of constitutions during this period, observed that reactions of congregations to post-Vatican II upheaval ranged from holding fast to the old ways to "a leap into a pattern which involves the virtual dissipation, or at least non-exercise, of any real authority."¹⁴⁹ The question was being actively debated in many forums as to whether retaining canonical status was even a desirable goal. Authority and the vow of obedience were particularly hot topics among women religious, and MSBT were no exception to this rule.¹⁵⁰

The interviews even more than the written reports conveyed a sense of religious life which had lost its mooring and was now tossed by powerful winds of change, where "it would be no exaggeration" to say that everything seemed to be up for grabs: vows, prayer, common life,

¹⁴⁷Fitzpatrick interview, 20 February 2006.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁴⁹Sr. Mary Linscott, "The Service of Religious Authority: Reflections on Government in the Revision of Constitutions," *Review for Religious*, March/April 1983, 197.

¹⁵⁰David F. O'Connor, S.T. *Witness and Service: Questions about Religious Life Today* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 38-9.

ministry.¹⁵¹ These were the years of exodus, in which congregations were suffering great loss of membership. In such times, that men and women religious nevertheless chose to invest considerable effort into remaining seated at the table to work out a common document is no small accomplishment. Significantly, when asked if she had noted any general patterns in how well (or how badly) these Corporate Reflections went, Sr. Sara immediately replied that they tended to go better wherever the ST and MSBT already knew each other. She cited Mexico and California as specific examples, both missions in which the men and women were working together or in close proximity and knew each other socially.¹⁵²

Despite the anxieties, frustrations, and passions these gatherings evoked, they bore remarkable fruit. Interim and final reports reveal that the facilitators noted a shift in attitude during the meetings:

"The response [to a common document] was overwhelmingly favorable. For many, the experience of the meeting itself supported this sentiment and resolved problems. By and large, the meetings provided a very fruitful experience of affirmation and gave opportunity for an honest expression of difficulties. Fewer than twenty members expressed serious reservations or opposition to the common project."¹⁵³

In this same vein, the identity of the congregations as part of the Missionary Cenacle Family was identified as one of the most strongly affirmed elements of the draft.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹Fitzpatrick interview, 20 February 2006.

¹⁵²Sr. Sara Butler, interview by author, 18 February 2006, New York, NY.

¹⁵³Fr. Vincent and Sr. Sara to "Brothers and Sisters," undated draft of cover letter to be sent with summary of results, MSBT Archives. The total ST and MSBT attending these reflections is not mentioned, but can be estimated roughly at 500 participants.

¹⁵⁴Fr. Vincent and Sr. Sara, progress report of 5 December 1980, MSBT Archives.

Despite the *sturm und drang* manifested at many of these gatherings, the Corporate Reflections had in some sense solidified the re-awakening sense of family in a way joint leadership meetings and chapter declarations did not. The family spirit had never been lost, but it had surely fallen on hard times in decades past. Now individual members in missions scattered across North America were ready to reclaim their special relationship as brother and sister Missionary Servants by petitioning for a common constitution.

Navigating the Holy See

Negotiating the shoals

The last Corporate Reflection meeting was held in May of 1981, and the next phase of the journey was now launched. While the Joint Committee embarked on the task of working through the immense volume of input from the consultations, the ST and MSBT Councils thought it prudent to communicate with the Holy See at this early stage for some guidance.¹⁵⁵ Sr. Mary Linscott of SCRIS had come to the United States expressly to give opportunity for consultation on constitutions for any congregations who needed it. General Custodians Fr. Conrad Schmitt and Sr. Ann Maura O'Keefe, along with Fr. Shaun McCarty and Sr. Catherine Steiner of the Joint Constitution Committee, availed themselves of this opportunity in September 1980.

"When some religious institutes began to experience a negative reaction on the part of Rome..., or when the drafts of their constitutions were being returned by the SCRIS for correction

¹⁵⁵Fr. Shaun McCarty had submitted his 127-page *Rationale for a Joint Constitution* to SCRIS in May of 1980, so the Sacred Congregation had already been advised of the plan.

and revision, some religious began to express their dissatisfaction...."¹⁵⁶ Those who directly worked with Sr. Mary Linscott reported her appreciation for the MSBT/ST initiative of making early contact. It seems many congregations during this period were submitting (without any prior communication with SCRIS) what they considered to be finished products, and they then reacted strongly when the documents were sent back for revision. The men and women serving at SCRIS did not enjoy being cast in an adversarial relationship, and this might have fueled their encouragement for continued dialogue despite what appeared to be looming storm clouds.¹⁵⁷

At this initial consultation, it became clear that the term "joint constitution" was not going to be accepted by SCRIS. Sr. Mary Linscott proposed that the two congregations simply incorporate the same body of material into two separate constitutions, but the MSBT and ST were unsatisfied with this approach. They all agreed to put the issue to one side at this early stage and return to it after more work on the content had been done. She recommended that as soon as the next draft was ready, it should be submitted to SCRIS, and arrangements should then be made for them to go to Rome.

Sr Ann Maura explained:

"Sister realized that we were sincere and grasping for something that would be expressive of our charism.... She said she would arrange for a Special Committee to be put together to review the Document, and to sit and talk with us so that we would avoid bringing the Community to a point of expectation that wasn't possible. That really was one of our concerns, that we were not working ourselves into a corner for a terrific disappointment, and that would cause rupture in our Community feelings for the sacred Congregation, which represents the Church and the Pope's thinking in Rome."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶O'Connor, 37.

¹⁵⁷Fr. Conrad Schmitt, letter to Sr. Ann Maura O'Keefe, 24 June 1981, MSBT Archives.

¹⁵⁸Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 191.

In the charged atmosphere of the day, it appears both the MSBT/ST leadership and SCRIS wanted to avoid running aground on this single issue when the work thus far on the actual content was by every indication proceeding well. Various sources indicate that SCRIS was impressed with both the content and the process of consultation used to arrive at it. Fr. Conrad had business in Rome in June 1981 and took the opportunity to meet with Fr. Basil Heiser of SCRIS and later with Sr. Mary Linscott as well. He avoided using the term "joint constitution" and simply described once more what they hoped to submit: a two part document, in which the first part was common to both congregations and the second part which had one section for the ST and one for the MSBT. Fr. Conrad "was impressed with what seemed to be a more receptive and cooperative attitude" on their part. It was here he learned more about the trouble other congregations were facing by failing to consult early and often. "Many congregations are getting bad advice about leaving things flexible... especially in the area of obedience and authority."¹⁵⁹

In November 1981, the Joint Constitution Committee distributed its second draft. It was much longer than the initial draft because it included Part II (the juridic content requiring approval of SCRIS) and the directory (legislation changeable by chapter mandate) for the two congregations. The MSBT draft only contained Part II B and directory, while the ST draft likewise had only its own material (II A and directory). Part I was a substantial reworking of the initial draft, and bears a strong resemblance to what was ultimately to be approved by SCRIS.

This draft is much more concise, tightly organized, and even poetic. In the cover letter accompanying the revised draft, the Joint Committee acknowledged that the consultation process

¹⁵⁹Fr. Conrad to Sr. Ann Maura, 24 June 1981.

“challenged us to give more serious consideration to certain central aspects of our life and spirit.”¹⁶⁰

They cited the sections on spirituality and the vows as receiving particular attention in order to more clearly link spirituality with ministry and “to overcome the disjunction between spirituality and the vows on the one hand, and the vows and community life on the other.”¹⁶¹ The first article, absent in previous material, immediately sets the tone for all that follows with the well-chosen use of Father Judge’s image of “an evangelical burning that would sweep over the whole world.”¹⁶² The draft was reviewed both by individuals and by regional meetings and the Joint Committee used the resulting feedback for continued work.

The Meeting in Rome

At last the time had come to go to the Holy See. The November 1981 draft had been sent and Sr. Mary Linscott had arranged for a special meeting of members of SCRIS with the MSBT and ST. One of the major obstacles to the entire endeavor had been that within SCRIS, constitutions for men’s congregations and constitutions for women’s congregations were handled by two separate divisions. This may have been because juridic norms were so different between them, but in any case it meant the entire machinery of approval was separate.¹⁶³ Thus, this meeting represented a special

¹⁶⁰Constitution Committees, “Revised Draft of Proposed Constitution,” November 1981, MSBT Archives, 3.

¹⁶¹Ibid, 4.

¹⁶²Ibid, 11.

¹⁶³In a memo dated 30 November 1982 to Sr. Ann Maura, Fr. Conrad mentions that the women’s division was much more backlogged than the men’s, and were much more strict about working on documents in chronological order based on date received.

concession on the part of SCRIS, and clearly would not have come about without Sr. Mary's coaching of the two General Custodians as to how go about requesting it, as well as her behind-the-scenes work to gather together some appropriate consultants from within the Sacred Congregation.¹⁶⁴

On April 19 and 20, five members of SCRIS and five Missionary Servants met in Rome to discuss the draft.¹⁶⁵ In addition to their own responses, the SCRIS members brought feedback from other readers within the Congregation. All those interviewed emphasized how warmly they were received and how respectfully the ensuing dialogue proceeded. It would seem that the members of the Sacred Congregation saw themselves as an underutilized resource and were gratified that they were being approached as allies rather than adversaries.

The SCRIS members made it clear from the outset of the first meeting (a Monday morning) that a joint constitution would never be approved, though they were able to appreciate the rationale behind the request. They then went on to lavish praise on the content of the draft:

Some of the initial general comments were: "Of the over 400 constitutions we have received, this is one of the few I have enjoyed reading." "Part I is beautifully written; for me personally it was spiritual reading." They said it was one of the most complete documents they have received; that we obviously had good consultants - and followed their advice; that the involvement of the members of the Congregations was excellent; that the presentation format is excellent. They particularly commended the team who conducted the forty-five reflection groups.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴Sr. Ann Maura O'Keefe, interview by author, 18 February 2006, New York, NY.

¹⁶⁵Those present from SCRIS were: Sr. Mary Linscott SND, Fr. Basil Heiser OFM, Sr. Miriam Cerletty SDS, Fr. Francis Gokey SSE, and Fr. Terrence Carey OFM Cap. The Missionary Servants were Sisters Ann Maura O'Keefe, Sara Butler, Catherine Steiner and Fathers Conrad Schmitt and Shaun McCarty.

¹⁶⁶Sr. Ann Maura O'Keefe and Fr. Conrad Schmitt, report to all ST and MSBT, 18 May 1982, MSBT Archives.

After some more detailed analysis of the MSBT section of Part II, the meeting ended to be resumed on Tuesday morning. The Missionary Servants gathered on Monday afternoon in their hotel to assess the situation and strategize. The refusal to consider the approval of a joint constitution was by no means a surprise, but all the work done in recent years had only served to make this goal seem more and more desirable to the membership of both congregations across the board. They had come so far, a common document simply had become a “non-negotiable,” and they agreed not to back down on this issue.¹⁶⁷ The members of SCRIS had sympathetically suggested that they submit separate constitutions which each incorporated Part I, or that they “publish a separate pamphlet” or charism statement containing the essence of Part I to distribute to their members.¹⁶⁸ Neither of these suggestions carried much appeal.

As the General Custodians and the committee representatives discussed their options that afternoon, a new idea emerged. They could separate Part I and submit it as a common document for separate approval, and submit their own sections of Part II as individual constitutions. Their goal at this point was to push the Holy See to formally recognize the special relationship by giving official approval to this common document expressing the core charism. “We want Rome to say this is our common heritage!”¹⁶⁹ Memories are not clear whether they actually called this common document a Rule as they discussed it among themselves that afternoon. But the following morning before the meeting resumed, Sr. Miriam of SCRIS approached Sr. Ann Maura and said, “Why do you keep

¹⁶⁷Sr. Sara interview, 18 February 2006.

¹⁶⁸Fr. Conrad Schmitt, telephone interview by author, 17 March 2006.

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

using the term 'joint constitution'?" She suggested they try calling it a Rule.¹⁷⁰

Once the meeting resumed, both sides of the table seemed to ready to compromise on this new approach, and began calling this new proposed joint document a Rule. The SCRIS representatives assured the Missionary Servants that they would be able to get their separate constitutions approved with minor adjustments, and these constitutions could both include all of the material from Part I within them. They were encouraging but less certain about the prospects for approval of the Rule as a separate document, but unlike the joint constitution proposal, they were willing to pursue it. Fr. Conrad recalls they were essentially told, "As for the Rule, we don't know. It would be the first time we've done it in a long time. But we'll give it a try."¹⁷¹

That afternoon, the five Missionary Servants celebrated with a spontaneous picnic of bread, cheese and wine on a park bench adjoining a statue of St. Catherine of Siena. They felt they had succeeded in "pushing Rome" to look at things in a new way, as had St. Catherine many centuries before.¹⁷² The joint constitution could not come to pass, but now they could hope for approbation of their charism as a common Rule of Life.

The Decrees of Approval

The 1983 Chapters

The Missionary Servants returned home feeling both affirmed by the Sacred Congregation and confirmed in their efforts by the Holy Spirit. "We knew the Holy Spirit was with us because the

¹⁷⁰Sr. Ann Maura, interview 18 February 2006.

¹⁷¹Fr. Conrad, interview 17 March 2006.

¹⁷²Ibid.

Community at this time was praying to the Holy Spirit knowing that we were there [in Rome] and... you could feel the intensity of the spiritual depth of prayer because it just took off to a position that we never, never anticipated."¹⁷³ The next step was to obtain mandates from the upcoming ST and MSBT chapters to seek approval of Part I of the revised draft as a common Rule of Life. Each congregation also needed to make further revisions of their constitutions, formerly referred to as Part II A and Part II B.

On a trip to Rome later that year, Fr. Conrad took the opportunity to consult once again with Sr. Mary Linscott and Fr. Gokey on their progress in the revisions. He reported to Sr. Ann Maura

Sister Mary and Father Gokey are both hopeful about our getting "a Rule," because (Sister said) there is some precedent with other orders (Third Order Franciscans, some federations of Sisters, etc.). Ours is different: two Congregations, etc., but they feel optimistic.¹⁷⁴

The Joint Constitution Committee met in August 1982 to review their options in view of the April meeting in Rome, and decided to submit a proposal to both Chapters recommending that Part I be submitted as a common Rule of Life. They also printed a revision of Shaun McCarty's *Rationale for a Joint Constitution*¹⁷⁵ and had it distributed to all MSBT and ST as part of preparation for their chapters.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³Sr. Ann Maura O'Keefe, interview by Sr. Mary Tonra in *As the Spirit Rules*, 245.

¹⁷⁴Fr. Conrad Schmitt, memo to Sr. Ann Maura O'Keefe, 30 November 1982, MSBT Archives.

¹⁷⁵This shorter version was renamed *Rationale for a Common Rule of Life for the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity*.

¹⁷⁶Joint Constitution Committee, minutes of 2-3 August 1982, MSBT Archives.

The differing terms of office meant that ST and MSBT chapters usually did not fall in the same year, but 1983 was one of those unusual years. They were held on overlapping dates in late May through early June. Both Conrad Schmitt and Ann Maura O'Keefe were re-elected as General Custodians of their congregations, and each was invited as a guest speaker to address the delegate body of the other congregation. Naturally, the content of both addresses centered on the proposed common Rule of Life, and reflected an awareness of the responsibility to live the family ideals it expressed.

By the end of the two chapters, both delegate bodies had agreed to mandates for a common Rule of Life. The MSBT Chapter approved the Rule and their constitution and directory as superceding all previous legislation, pending final approval from the Holy See. Aware that minor revisions might still be required by SCRIS, the ST and MSBT mandates essentially enabled their General Custodians to handle this and seek final approval without taking the documents back to another chapter for approval. The ST mandate read in part

Being led to a rediscovery of our roots and recognizing the tradition of the family of separate but interdependent groups, we shall submit jointly ... our Rule of Life for the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity for single approval.... In post-General Cenacle deliberations with [SCRIS],... the General Custodian is given the mandate to work for approval of the Rule of Life... according to the mind of the General Cenacle."¹⁷⁷

This mandate expresses in few words the heart of the process of renewal the Missionary Servants, both men and women, had come to use. The process was born directly from the founding charism, which included the tradition of family. The process was inclusive: eventually every member of both congregations was actively involved, and initial resistance gave way in the end to near

¹⁷⁷ST enactment from 7th General Cenacle, cited in Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 271.

unanimity in a desire for a common Rule. This inclusivity extended even to the hierarchy, as the process had included regular and respectful dialogue with members of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. And ultimately, the process included trust in authority, as the delegate bodies gave into the hands of their General Custodians the power to complete the final revisions.

The MSBT Constitution

On the fiftieth anniversary of Fr. Judge's death, 23 November 1983, the Rule of Life and the ST and MSBT constitutions were formally submitted to the Sacred Congregation for approval. All three documents were pointedly submitted together in one packet under a joint MSBT/ST cover letter.¹⁷⁸ By the spring of 1984, SCRIS had responded with a request for minor changes before approval could be given. In the case of the Rule, the comments were few and minor. The MSBT constitution, however, required more attention.

Work, consultation, revision, and re-work had never really ended on the MSBT juridical content. The MSBT constitution had a few points which had consistently drawn comments from SCRIS readers throughout the revision process, and the newest requested changes, unsurprisingly, touched on these same issues: prayer, obedience, authority and attire.¹⁷⁹ Like many women religious in this time, MSBT struggled mightily to find an expression of authority which both satisfied the members of SCRIS and their own members at the same time. There were strong feelings around the

¹⁷⁸Fr. Conrad Schmitt and Sr. Ann Maura O'Keefe, letter to His Eminence Edward Cardinal Pironio, 23 November 1983, MSBT Archives.

¹⁷⁹Sr. Ann Maura O'Keefe, letter to Sisters, 4 September 1984, MSBT Archives.

issue of authority among women religious, and more than one congregation had run aground by trying to avoid investing authority in an individual. For some this seemed patriarchal, and new models reflecting a more feminist approach were desired. MSBT wording on authority had been vague in previous drafts, and there had been some hope that as an alternative to having a local custodian, authority could be vested in the local house council. But this was not to be: "the basic principle applied was that religious authority must be specified in a person."¹⁸⁰ The final solution was to add an option to the traditional practice of having a local custodian. Personal authority was invested in the General Councilors, so that each Councilor became responsible for those sisters in a given geographic region who did not have a local custodian.¹⁸¹

The other nagging issue was about dress, and the MSBT Constitution Committee files contain a disproportionately large amount of correspondence and commentary on this subject. From the earliest days, in the North as well as the South, wearing a traditional habit and veil was viewed both by the sisters and by the bishops as an unacceptable obstacle to the kind of work they did. It had been a triumph when the approved 1933 constitution had returned with the garb description intact. Committee members resurrected letters from bishops Mother Boniface had solicited to demonstrate that the oldest tradition had been to dress in a way which did not attract attention. It was not until one of the members of SCRIS saw a photograph of Mother Boniface that they seemed to grasp that the pioneer MSBT had worn a sort of nurse's uniform and had never in their history been in a habit.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰Ibid.

¹⁸¹This quickly became the norm. However, efforts to restore the exercise of personal authority to sisters at the local level began with the 1998 Chapter, and today it is the exception rather than the rule for a General Councilor to have personal authority over a sister.

¹⁸²Sr. Sara, interview 18 February 2006.

Nevertheless, the very last revision requested by SCRIS, while admitting the lack of habit to be an exceptional case which was allowed to stand, required one final tweak to the article dealing with attire: an insertion that the garb was "in some way different from the forms that are clearly secular."¹⁸³

Finally, seventeen years of work, nine jointly with the ST, were rewarded. In June of 1985, while an MSBT symposium on vowed life was in progress, Sr. Ann Maura received a letter from SCRIS announcing that the documents would definitely be approved. As soon as SCRIS received a final draft reflecting the most recent requests for revision, they would send the MSBT a formal decree, dated on an appropriate feast day of 1985. She read the letter to the assembly, and later recalled to Sr. Mary Tonra, "Our spontaneous expression of joy was truly a wonderful moment in our lives as Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity. The standing ovation was a sight that will always remain with me...."¹⁸⁴

The final draft of the MSBT constitution was sent in November and the decree of approval arrived in the mail in January 1996 (along with the request to insert the phrase about attire.) However, there was no decree for the Rule of Life. Upon learning that Fr. Conrad had likewise received a decree for the ST constitution but not for the Rule, she called SCRIS directly to inquire. It is not clear why the Rule had not been given a decree. It is logical to assume that the Sacred Congregation intended to approve the Rule since they had been requesting and receiving revisions on it since the 1982 trip to Rome. The oversight and Sr. Ann Maura's final phone call in a rather

¹⁸³SCRIS, letter to Sr. Ann Maura O'Keefe, 3 January 1986, MSBT Archives.

¹⁸⁴Sr. Ann Maura O'Keefe, interview by Sr. Mary Tonra in *As the Spirit Rules*, 333.

concrete way symbolize Fr. Conrad's later reflection that the Missionary Servants were called by the Holy Spirit to "push Rome" to go beyond their established norms. The two constitutions contained all the material that was in the Rule, and from the viewpoint of SCRIS a separate decree might have seemed redundant. But the Missionary Servants pushed, and in February, the two General Custodians received identical copies of a decree of approval for the *Rule of Life of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity*.¹⁸⁵

The decree for the Rule of Life was given the date of the Feast of Pentecost, 26 May 1985. The decree for the MSBT Constitution was dated the Feast of the Most Blessed Trinity, 2 June 1985. On or near the feast of Christ the King in November of 1986, regional celebrations were held in which Missionary Servants, ST and MSBT together, formally received specially bound copies of their new documents. That same year, John Paul II issued his encyclical on the Holy Spirit, *The Lord and Giver of Life*. The theme of relying on the Holy Spirit for inspiration and guidance recurs in many notes and reflections left by the committee members and leaders during the renewal process. The Missionary Servants could be left with little doubt that it was the grace of the Holy Spirit which brought them to the moment of standing together as brothers and sisters to receive their common Rule of Life.

¹⁸⁵Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 335.

CONCLUSION

*This joint effort of our branches of the Missionary Cenacle Family can be truly prophetic. It captures the dream of Father and Mother, only partially realized in their lifetime, almost lost completely after their death, but now again a vision and aspiration developing anew with infused vigor at a point in our history critical for our future. If we lose this opportunity, as represented in this document, I wonder if we shall ever again have the opportunity to speak with one voice, to articulate together that giftedness that is uniquely ours.*¹⁸⁶

Though mention of supporting the MCA had remained as part of their special purpose in the 1933 MSBT constitution, any mention their brothers the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity had been excised. Father Judge's original draft continued to be used for spiritual reading, and in fact the sisters did continue to pray for the ST despite the juridical surgery. But it was the relocation of the MSBT Motherhouse to Philadelphia that began the separation of the two congregations, and probably played a greater role in that separation than any other factor. Had their central offices and novitiates remained separated only by Route 165, a simple country road, it is easy to imagine that the family spirit would have better survived the excision from documents and the death of the founders.

¹⁸⁶Fr. Stephen Quinn, ST, address to the delegates of MSBT pre-chapter meeting, 1 June 1982, in Tonra, *As the Spirit Rules*, 246.

It is quite important to recall the reason for this relocation: it was the price the MSBT were forced to pay in order to achieve juridical status as an ecclesial institute. What unfolded was not what they had sought for their constitution, and it was not what they had sought for their headquarters—in both cases, it was what members of the hierarchy had required of them, directly or indirectly.

It is therefore even more important to fast forward to what unfolded in the ensuing decades. MSBT accommodated to hierarchical expectations up to a certain point, but the hierarchy was not monolithic. It undeniably accommodated the MSBT in a number of ways: initially by allowing their garb, their driving about, their generalist “special purpose” with its nine sections and its explicit refusal to take on the running of institutions. And ultimately, the Holy See accommodated the MSBT and ST by acceding to their unusual request for formal approbation of a common Rule of Life. There were other spiritual families with vowed branches working on their documents during this same period— thus, there were other congregations who might have opted to follow a similar course but did not. The Rule was not somehow a necessity demanded by “the family spirit,” because other families existed which did not produce one.

As the path to the 1933 constitution had led to separation, the path to the 1985 constitution led to re-unification. The process of going back to the roots, a process mandated by *Perfectae Caritatis*, rekindled the family relationship of the two branches. That process included repeated reworking of material, a commitment to negotiation, collaboration, and respectful listening. The Missionary Servants used this approach in their own work, and seemingly as a matter of course came to include the members of SCRIS in the process. Their inclusion of SCRIS personnel as on-going partners in the process was, according to several sources, a departure from the adversarial approach which marked the process of many other congregations. This fundamental attitude of inclusion and

relatedness stands in contrast to an attitude of dichotomy (liberal/conservative, male/female, clerical/lay, religious/hierarchy). This attitude of inclusion and relatedness appears to be the natural fruit of a devotion to the Holy and Blessed Trinity, a God whose essence is relationship and in whose image we are made. Both the Rule and the process which bore it were the fruit of men and women religious who had often reflected on the words of their founder, "Live more in the Presence of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Realize more and more that every human being whom you meet is the living image of the Blessed Trinity. Respect and honor all as a consequence."¹⁸⁷

In interviewing those who worked on these documents in the seventies and eighties, a picture gradually emerged that was not evident from the written sources. Without an understanding of any history, one might read the common Rule of Life and marvel at its poetic beauty and truly inspiring expression of a charism. In reading the written sources, one begins to marvel at the sheer energy and dogged persistence that went into producing it. One might even see the hand of the Holy Spirit at work in moving the Holy See to approve it against all odds. But in speaking with those who lived through the years of work, one begins to grasp yet another marvel: during a time when a polarizing brand of feminism and a suspicion of authority pervaded both society and the Church, men and women with little more than a name and a past history to connect them elected to sit down together, work together, and even suffer together, in order to bring into being a common Rule of Life. To those who lived through the work, who chose to stay while so many were leaving, the Rule is more than a marvel, it is a miracle.

¹⁸⁷*Missionary Cenacle Meditations*, 3.

The ST/MSBT Rule of Life as it exists now could only have been produced in an environment which could tolerate difference and respectful collaboration. Men and women, clerics and laity, religious and Rome—everyone worked together to create a document which calls its members explicitly to see themselves as one apostolic family. It is for this reason that the document and the process which produced it stand as a model for how relationships in the Church can work. Difference has not been erased nor denied, but it functions to synergize, to produce something new and good which separate factions could not produce apart from one another. The Missionary Cenacle Family continues to work together in many ways. The General Councils of the four branches meet together three times a year, and the ST and MSBT Councils meet together twice a year in addition to this. The four branches jointly sponsor Missionary Cenacle Volunteers, Trinity Mission Center, and Missionary Cenacle Press. Mission planning in some key areas is done jointly, and some missions have been opened recently in Mexico explicitly as joint MSBT/ST missions.

Fr. Conrad repeated strenuously in his interview that it “was not Rome’s idea” to create a Rule, rather it was Missionary Servants inspired by the Spirit pushing the boundaries, pushing Rome, that gave us our Rule. After my interview with Fr. Vincent, as he walked me to the door, almost his last words to me were, “It was because of Rome that we have our Rule! It’s thanks to Rome we got back the family spirit!” The passion behind these two seemingly contradictory claims contains a single truth, a truth anyone devoted to the Holy and Blessed Trinity should be able to grasp. It is because of Rome, and it is because of the Missionary Servants, and most of all, it is because of the power of the Holy Spirit living and active in both, that the *Rule of Life of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity* exists today, a living document which nourishes its members.

Article Eight of the Rule of Life closes with a quote of Father Judge, and it is a fitting close to this study.

A family spirit should be demonstrated by loving regard among the members of the branches and, when feasible, by collaboration in apostolic works.... Father Judge declared that *if the right spirit is maintained, if the primitive spirit is passed down, this family idea will engender the most beautiful fruits for the honor and glory of God and for the edification of the Church.*

APPENDIX A

The Missionary Cenacle Family

There are four branches of the Missionary Cenacle Family (MCF). All share a common spirituality and consider Fr. Thomas Judge, CM, as founder. Membership in a given branch is through formal commitment after a period of formation. The head of a branch is called the General Custodian. Leadership of all the branches meets together twice a year for joint planning.

There are three on-going projects which are sponsored by all four branches jointly: Missionary Cenacle Volunteers (MCV), Trinity Mission Center, and Missionary Cenacle Press. Other temporary committees may be formed as needed for joint projects.

- MCA** *Missionary Cenacle Apostolate*: the original, lay branch, founded in 1909 in Brooklyn. Dr. Margaret Healy is co-founder.
- MSBT** *Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity*: the second branch, the sisters, incorporated in 1918. Mother Boniface (Lou Keasey) is co-founder.
- ST** *Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity*: the third branch, the brothers and priests, incorporated in 1923.
- BTMI** *Blessed Trinity Missionary Institute*: a pious union of women in private vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience who live and work in the world. Although certain women in the MCA had been making private vows since the days of Fr. Judge, it was not formalized as a branch until 1968. Dr. Margaret Healy is co-founder.

The Missionary Cenacle Family has many devotions, but devotion to the Trinity and to the Holy Spirit are foundational. For Father Judge, the Trinity represented the totality of all Catholic faith and doctrine, and by spreading a devotion to the Trinity, one is spreading the fullness of Catholic teaching.

The term cenacle (upper room) was important to Fr. Judge because it was where the apostles received the Holy Spirit, and the place from which they went forth into the world as missionaries. Thus all local groups of lay members and all residences of ST and MSBT are called Missionary Cenacles.

APPENDIX B

Excerpts from original MSBT Constitutions

Article 1 of the Original Draft of the MSBT Constitution:

The life of our sisters, as the name implies, is of a missionary nature. Appreciating and valuing this will provide a particular inspiration to us blessed with such a vocation in keeping the rule which is to effect that we develop in ourselves a missionary spirit. We are to keep in mind that we are called by the Holy Ghost to labor, especially in abandoned places, or for those who are destitute of the ordinary ministrations of religion. Abandonment, what a word! but what abandonment is comparable to that condition wherein there is a lack of the helps of religion, of even the opportunity of knowing God and His holy mysteries? Can any misery be more extreme? None save this—a loss of faith, the loss of all that Christian hope holds out, the loss of Holy Religion with its sacramental helps.

The saddest of all the facts of the daily experiences is the number who are being lost to the faith. Collapse of family life and the startling and ceaseless activities of evil and scandalizing agencies are largely responsible for the imminent peril to the faith and morals, especially of children. Preventive measures to save at least the innocent and exposed little ones are so urgently needed. Preservation of the lambs of the flock. Preservation of the faith when it is imperiled sums up many difficulties; proselytizing harm, neglect, deadly indifference, loss of moral restraint, and consequent intolerance. Appeals seemingly without answer, expense without visible gain, laboring amongst the rude and irresponsible without fruit, desolate experiences, dealing with the perverse and stubborn, exposing oneself to the shaft of ridicule and the slander of the unfriendly so that one must become anathema for one's brethren, is often the experience of those who would labor in the vineyard where it has been scarified and blasted by the blight of neglect and evil. It is easier to labor among the untutored but open-minded pagans than to deal with the apostatizing and perverted. Preservation of the Faith, therefore, synthesizes the hopes and prayers of a Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity.

Article 1 of the 1933 Constitution approved by SCR

The general end of the Congregation of the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity is the sanctification of its members through the practice of the three simple vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, and by the observance of the present Constitutions.

APPENDIX C

Rule of Life for the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity

(All italics are direct quotes of our founder, Fr. Thomas Judge CM.)

1. *Our Lord had very much at heart the creating of a spirit, a missionary spirit, an evangelical burning that would sweep over the whole world. He came to cast a fire on the earth, and he willed that it would be enkindled (Lk 12:49). The Holy Spirit has enkindled this fire in our hearts. This is our heritage: an apostolic spirit, a Gospel spirit, a Catholic spirit. The Missionary Cenacle spirit is charity, charity aflame.*

Nature and Purpose

2. We are two religious Institutes of pontifical right, branches of one apostolic family, who have been called by God to be missionaries in the Church: some as Sisters, Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity; and others as priests, deacons and Brothers, Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity. Together, our religious and lay branches comprise the Missionary Cenacle Family.

3. By our lives as Missionary Servants we seek first to *glorify the Triune God. We follow in the footsteps of the apostles* who, filled with the Holy Spirit, went forth from the Cenacle to *spread everywhere the knowledge and love of Jesus*. We live and work that *God's name may be hallowed, that his kingdom come, that his holy will be done (Mt 6:9-10).*

4. *The missionary thought, the missionary idea, the missionary spirit should be dominant in our Missionary Cenacles.* We meet the pressing needs of our day by undertaking works that the Church wants, that are good and necessary, and that have a note of abandonment about them. In all our apostolic commitments, we recognize the authority of the bishops and their special role as signs of unity and as pastors in the local churches.

5. Our specific mission is *the preservation of the faith* in those areas and among those people who are spiritually neglected and abandoned, especially the poor. Our chief effort is to develop a missionary spirit in the laity, with the goal that *every Catholic be an apostle.*

6. *We are to have an ardent zeal for the poor, for those desolate in all things spiritual* and for victims of injustice. Charity urges us to action on behalf of justice as an integral part of announcing the coming of the kingdom.

7. *The Cenacle spirit is a Catholic spirit, a living, burning, operating love of God and neighbor.* We are to share this spirit by promoting and supporting the ministries of the laity in the mission of the Church. We acknowledge "different gifts but the same Spirit, different ministries but the same Lord" (I Cor 12:24).

8. We are to call forth apostolic men and women from everyday walks of life to become lay associates in the Missionary Cenacle Family. A family spirit should be demonstrated by loving regard among the members of the branches and, when feasible, by collaboration in apostolic works. It is our particular responsibility as religious members of this family *to conserve this Cenacle spirit and to be the sanctuary where that fire is kept*. Father Judge declared that

if the right spirit is maintained, if the primitive spirit is passed down, this family idea will engender the most beautiful fruits for the honor and glory of God and for the edification of the Church.

Spiritual Life

9. *The Cenacle spirit is a Christlike spirit* of "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). We are to confess in our hearts the mysteries of faith: the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. We aspire to *a devotional knowledge* of these mysteries, that is, a deeply personal and interior *faith that is restless until it finds expression in good works*; our good works, in turn, nourish our life of faith and bear fruit in apostolic holiness.

10. We are to have a personal love of God our Father, of his Son Jesus, and of the Holy Spirit who abides with us. In a particular way *we cherish in our prayer and labor the naked, abandoned Jesus on Calvary*. We express our love through personal service to his poor and abandoned members.

11. We are to make the Holy Spirit better known and loved. By steadfast prayer in our Cenacles we seek *to attract the Holy Spirit* so that our own hearts may be enkindled with God's love and that we may spread this fire to others. We ask to be filled with the gifts of the Spirit, wisdom and fortitude especially.

12. *The Cenacle spirit is a Gospel spirit*. In order to follow Jesus more closely, as set forth in the Gospels, we profess by public vows the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience as a fuller expression of our baptismal consecration. The uncompromising message of the Gospels calls us to exercise our prophetic role as *witnesses to truth*.

13. Vowed life in community unites us, in our respective Institutes, in faith, hope and love. We strive to emulate the early Christians who had one heart and one mind and were nourished by the teaching of the apostles, and the breaking of the bread and the common prayers (Acts 2:42; 4:32).

14. *We shall hold the Word of God in high esteem*. We cherish the Gospels in particular because they depict Jesus showing by word and example the way to the Father. By reflection on the *providence of everyday life* in the light of the Gospels we come to a *devotional knowledge* of the mysteries of faith and a deeper understanding of our own experience. Each shall have a copy of the Sacred Scriptures and make frequent use of them in prayer and proclamation.

15. The Eucharist is the *center and sun* of our apostolic lives. We are to worship God in the daily celebration of the Eucharist, our sacramental participation in the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. We should so prepare and celebrate the Eucharistic Liturgy that it will be a genuine expression of community and source of apostolic vitality. We are to have reverence for the sacramental presence of the Lord Jesus and for all that is related to the Eucharist, especially the priesthood.

16. Because of our need for God's mercy in our brokenness, we are to approach the Sacrament of Penance frequently for reconciliation and healing. By our experience of sacramental forgiveness, we grow in mercy and compassion towards others.

17. *The Cenacle spirit is a prayerful spirit.* We recognize that *only a spiritual person can lead an apostolic life, and that we cannot be spiritual without prayer.* Great value, then, shall be placed upon periods of prayerful silence and recollection. We are to devote suitable time each day to personal prayer, meditation and spiritual reading. Our reading should include Missionary Cenacle writings and, in keeping with our maxim, *sentire cum ecclesia*, we are to reflect prayerfully on the documents of the Church.

18. Periodically we shall seek extended times of prayer and recollection. We are each to make an annual retreat. In order that we may be more attentive *to the lights and impulses* of the Holy Spirit in our following of Christ, we are encouraged to seek personal spiritual direction.

19. We are to glorify the Triune God through common prayer, especially the Liturgy of the Hours. We pray together to promote greater zeal in the apostolate, more supportive community life and stronger bonds within the Missionary Cenacle Family. We shall encourage others to share our prayer.

20. *Our prayer should not be narrow, personal prayer; it should reach the throne of God only after having touched the farthest bounds of God's creation and mourned in every human misery and rejoiced in God's goodness.* We are to pray, therefore, for the needs of the entire Church, especially for the Holy Father, for bishops and for priests; we pray for youth and for those who are sick, suffering or abandoned. We have a special obligation to pray for our living and deceased relatives, friends, benefactors and members of the Missionary Cenacle Family.

21. In our religious family we have a special devotion to *Mary, Queen of the Missionary Cenacle, to Joseph, an unfailing and powerful friend*, to the Apostles, ardent followers of Jesus, and to Vincent de Paul, patron of charity and humility.

22. *The Cenacle spirit is an apostolic spirit which finds its perfection in zeal, the white heat of charity.* We are to *become perfect in the spirit and virtues of the Cenacle, to live and die simple, prudent, humble, charitable men and women; men and women of sacrifice, of patience, of self-denial whose lives are spent and consecrated to the service of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

Vowed Life

23. Christ calls us to follow him with liberty of spirit and to share in his emptying of self for others (Phil 2:7). He was celibate and poor (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58) and obedient unto death (Phil 2:8). We freely vow chastity, poverty and obedience as a personal response in faith to God whose love the Holy Spirit has poured out in our hearts (Rom 5:5).

24. Our religious profession binds us to the Church and its mystery in a special way. By profession of vows we are joined together in our respective Institutes for the sake of apostolic mission, through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Our vows should help us express a more generous love of one another in community; community life, in turn, should contribute to the faithful living of the vows.

25. We imitate the single-hearted love of Jesus who gave himself for us as an offering to God (Eph 5:1). Our gift of self in consecrated chastity should liberate our hearts to love and to be loved by all those given us in community and ministry. Our chastity should find expression in a warm and selfless love of others.

26. By the vow of chastity, we promise to remain celibate and to lead lives of perfect continence for the love of God and for the sake of the kingdom (Mt 19:22). By accepting the gift of celibacy, we express our preferential love of the Lord Jesus.

27. In the spirit of the Missionary Cenacle, we are to offer each other support and understanding, *rejoicing with those who rejoice and sorrowing with those who sorrow*. In a special way, our love is given to the sick and aging who are our particular treasure in community.

28. We imitate the poverty of Jesus who for our sake "made himself poor though he was rich, so that we might become rich through his poverty" (2 Cor 8:9). The virtue of poverty inspires us to be totally dependent upon the providence of God, to be subject to the common law of labor, to heed the cry of the poor and to live simply, holding all things in common in our respective Institutes.

29. By the vow of evangelical poverty, we renounce our right to dispose of and to use anything that has material value without permission. We retain the radical right to own and acquire goods.

30. We are to be responsible stewards of the material goods entrusted to us. Our Cenacle heritage, moreover, directs us to be generous in sharing with others and in offering hospitality.

31. We imitate the obedience of Jesus, who "humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross" (Phi 12:8). The virtue of obedience is grounded in faith and love, generosity and forgetfulness of self. Our obedience should be *humble and of the heart, simple and entire, constant and strong in everything*.

32. By the vow of obedience, we pledge to obey those persons who exercise authority in our respective Institutes in everything that pertains to the observance of the Constitution and the integrity

of our religious profession. We are to obey the Holy Father in virtue of our vow of obedience and to show him a particular loyalty.

33. Relying on the Holy Spirit, we are to seek together, in our respective Institutes, to discover God's will in a climate of respect and trust. With genuine love, we call each other to grow in apostolic holiness through encouragement and mutually appropriate accountability. This practice of taking counsel in matters of common life and mission is a cherished tradition in the Missionary Cenacle. After prayer and counsel, we humbly accept the decisions of those in authority.

Ministry of Authority

34. Religious authority is exercised in our respective Institutes by those chosen to call us to be faithful to our vocations as Missionary Servants. The functions of this authority are to assist each other to seek the will of God, to promote a true spirit of community and to unite us in pursuing our apostolic goals.

35. This authority, a ministry after the example of Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve (Mt 20:28), is to be exercised according to the Constitution and other statutes of common and particular law.

36. We recognize the value of counsel and consultation in important matters of common concern. In house council, we are to share the responsibility for decisions affecting the local community. Local Custodians and other designated persons exercise personal authority within their mandate.

37. In each Institute full authority shall be exercised in an ordinary manner by its General Custodian assisted by its General Council. This authority encompasses religious leadership and government of our Institutes, the call of members to mission and responsibility for administration of our temporal goods.

38. In each Institute full authority shall be exercised in an extraordinary manner by its General Cenacle, which is convened to elect its General Custodian and General Council, to protect the spiritual patrimony of the Institute and to foster its appropriate renewal, and to legislate for the entire Institute in those matters that touch upon policy, works and the general good.

Membership

39. *The apostolic spirit is a rare spirit, a priceless spirit, a spirit high above that of those who are ordinarily devout. This is the spirit of those great, self-denying, sacrificing lovers of Jesus who leave everything and dispose themselves to go anywhere.*

40. We are each to encourage and to foster vocations to our religious Institutes. We look for candidates who, in addition to meeting the canonical requirements, manifest a *love of God, a zeal for neighbor and a spirit of sacrifice*. The candidates are to be acquainted with the life and spirit of the Missionary Cenacle.

41. The novices of each Institute are introduced to the nature and practice of the vows, according to our charism. At the completion of the novitiate, those novices who are admitted to each Institute make profession of vows according to the Constitution. This commitment must be renewed until the time for profession of perpetual vows.

42. Profession of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience is made to the Triune God, according to the Constitution, and is received by the General Custodian of the respective Institute. Since all members profess vows according to the Constitution, all are equally obliged to its observance. Separation from our respective Institutes is to be effected with charity and equity according to the common law.

43. Fidelity to our vocation demands that we continue our spiritual, apostolic, academic, personal and social development, within our common goals and mission. We have gifts that differ according to the favor bestowed on each of us (Rom 12:6). In community we should be challenged to discover, develop and use our gifts, lest the grace of God be given in vain (I Cor. 15:10). This is a lifelong process, and, as we advance in age, we are to follow Jesus ever more faithfully in the power of the Spirit, until that day when, with him, we enter into the glory of the Father.

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