

## Lesson 13

# MISSION THROUGH RELIGIOUS LIFE



Eli was a priest in Israel. The young boy Samuel served the Lord in the presence of Eli. One day the Lord called Samuel who was lying near the Arc of the Lord: 'Samuel, Samuel'. He thought that it was Eli who called him and answered: "Here, I am". When he ran to Eli, he realised that Eli did not call him. Thrice it happened. Then Eli said to Samuel. "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:9). Samuel went and lay down. Then he heard someone calling again Samuel, Samuel. As suggested by Eli, he replied. The Lord spoke to him. Samuel who listened and responded to the call of the

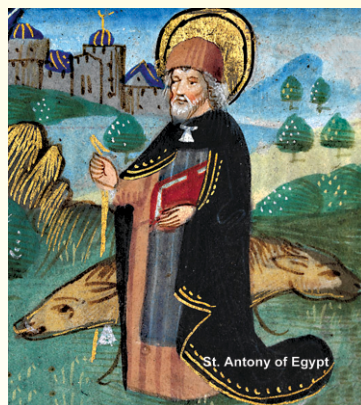
Lord became His prophet. Right through the Bible, we see a lot of people who responded to the Lord's call. Each Christian is called to respond to God through the rich and full life in Christ. Religious are those who respond to such a call in a special way.

## Religious Life in the Church

By 3rd century AD religious life had its firm root in Christianity. Egypt is the cradle of Christian religious life. St. Antony of Egypt is known as the father of solitary religious life. St. Pacomius of Egypt instituted the first Ashram where many religious started living together. St. Benedict, St. Martin of Tours, and St. Patrick started Ashrams in Italy, France and Ireland respectively. Gradually religious Ashrams were established in most of the European nations.

**Activity-1.** Study the life-style and activities of a religious congregation and prepare a note on it.

Though religious were present in Christianity in India from the beginning, organised religious life came into being when Rev. Fr. Thomas Palackal, Rev. Fr. Thomas Porukara and Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara together instituted the religious congregation, known as 'Amalolbhavadasa Sangham' (Community of the servants of Mother Mary Immaculate) on 11th May 1831 at Mannanam. Today this congregation is known as 'Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. (C.M.I). The first native religious congregation in India for women, Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (C.M.C.) had its origin on 13th Feb, 1866. Its founders were St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara



and Rev. Fr. Leopold Beccaro. Following this, several other congregations suited to the needs of the time by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

## **The Essence of Religious Life**



Religious life is a part of the life, holiness and mission of the Church. (V.C.3) Religious life remains as an important factor in the mission of the Church revealing the interior character of Christian call. Religious life is a life-style where the religious dedicate themselves permanently for God and their fellow beings. On the basis of evangelical counsels, the religious live the three vows of obedience, chastity and poverty.

The essence of religious life is the fundamental self-giving done out of love for Jesus Christ the Lord and in Him to every member of the human family. (V.C.3). This self-giving is manifested through the life commitment based on the evangelical counsels. Through this utmost love offer, the religious become totally dedicated to God and thus, in a special way, they become dedicated to His service and His glory. This dedication points to the undivided relationship which Jesus has with His spouse, the Church (L.G. 44)

## **Vows**

A Vow is the covenant of love which a person offers to God and which God receives through the Church. Through the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty the religious dedicate themselves totally to love God and man to the utmost. The value of vowed life consists in their personal relationship with Jesus. A Vow in itself is not an end; it is only a means.

The most fundamental rule of religious life is to imitate the Jesus of the Gospel. (P.C.2). They have to imitate Christ the pure and poor, Christ who submitted Himself to His Father's will unto the death on the cross and thus redeemed and

sanctified humanity (P.C.-1). The religious imitate Christ and become one with God through the evangelical counsels. The primary aim of religious life is union with God. Hence the religious should try constantly for holiness and union with God.

## **The Missionary Task of Religious Life**

Missionary activity is a life of love, giving one's own self. Through it, we nurse the distorted image of God in the face of our fellow-beings. The Church and the society need persons who are ready to dedicate themselves totally to others for love of God. The world is waiting for persons who are willing to reveal to the world the paternal face of God and the maternal face of the Church and to spend their lives to give others life and hope. The main apostolic fields of the religious are the following:



## **Apostolate of Prayer**

Like the greatest missionary, Jesus, all religious should be united to God in prayer. The Religious who proclaim the infinite love of God must enjoy His company in a very deep way, experience His presence deeply. The missionary activity of the religious will be strengthened when they spend their time in deep silence, listening to Him. A Religious who does not have deep God-experience in prayer and meditation will have very little spiritual influence and success in missionary activities.

The Religious are obliged to pray for the whole world. Praying for the conversion of sinners, healing of the sick, for world peace and welfare is a very great apostolate. The contributions that Religious congregations consecrated only for contemplative life make to the Church through prayer are really invaluable.



## Parish Apostolate



Religious houses are situated in the boundary of a Parish. Co-operating with the Parish priest they engage in various developmental activities of the Parish. Thus, they are obliged to use their creative power fully for the material and spiritual welfare of the Parish. The Religious can contribute a great deal to lead the parish family to a life of sacrifice and sacramental life. The Religious are also active alongwith the Parish Priest to build up and strengthen the family units. They ought to use their gifts and talents to build up a firm faith life. As the light of the Parish, the religious can lead the people who live in ways of darkness to the right path.

## Apostolate of Catechism

We use catechism classes as means to give fundamental principles of Christian faith and the teachings of the Church to children and youth so as to enable them to receive clarity and life to the faith which they received in baptism. Catechism aims at teaching the faithful to worship in spirit and in truth through the creative and full participation in the Holy Mass, training them to form Christian personality, helping the children to form Christian conscience, and above all, building up the body of



Christ (LT. 1). The religious participate in the task and effort of the Church to form zealous Christians ready to dedicate themselves for the growth of the Church by instilling in the hearts of the youth, deep love and loyalty to the Church. Above all, by their zealous faith and missionary spirit they lead the young generation to strong Christian life.

## Family Apostolate

Individuals and families are the basis of society. It is in families that life is welcomed, protected and nourished. Hence, the religious can give knowledge about the sanctity of family life, make them conscious of their responsibilities and reconcile and rehabilitate the broken families through family apostolate.



The Religious pay attention to deepen the faith of the young and elderly generations through house visit in our age when families are on the verge of danger. Family renewal is essential since great personalities are formed in families. Religious share the compassionate love of Jesus by visiting families and sharing their pains, sufferings and brokenness.

## Social Service

“Just as you did it to one of the least of these, who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt. 25: 40). The religious have experienced the love and compassion of Jesus who owned the sufferings of humanity by identifying Himself with the least and the poor. Hence they take special interest to understand the needs of the poor, the suffering and the exploited brethren around them, to go to them and help them. They plan various social welfare programmes and try to improve the social, economic, moral and spiritual standard and lead them to self-sufficiency. They come forward to help those who are suffering from disappointment, drunkenness, drug addiction, social disparity, etc. They also take initiative in providing basic needs like food, shelter, education, etc. They shelter those who are cast out by society like the orphans, the weak etc.



## Missionary Activity



The Church evangelises by leading the non-believers to faith and deepening the faith of the faithful. Just as the Father sent His son to reveal His love for human beings, the religious are sent to proclaim the Gospel to the whole of humanity. They try to let Jesus be known throughout the whole world through prayer, service and suffering. When they become living witnesses to Christ in their own place and community, all will know Christ and accept Him as saviour.

Religious life is an essential factor in the missionary life of the Church. We have the responsibility to pray for the religious to fulfill their mission. Let us desire and pray so that thousands may receive this call to consecrated life.

**Let us Read the Word of God and Meditate**

Phil. 3:12-21

**A Word of God to Remember**

“But our citizenship is in heaven and it is from there that we are expecting a saviour, the Lord, Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20)

### **Let us Pray**

Lord Jesus, help the religious to live vows of obedience, chastity and poverty and be witnesses to the Gospel and to spread the Gospel.

### **My Decision**

I will be respectful in my dealings with the religious.

### **Let us think with the Church**

We must recognise that religious life, that reflects the life-style of Christ as a means to express the holiness of the Church, has an objective quality.

Because of this, it is a rich special expression of Gospel values... It is a more full expression of the goal of the Church. That goal is the sanctification of humanity. Religious life proclaims the future age; in one sense, it enjoys that too (V.C. 32).

### **Let us find out the answers**

1. Who are the religious ? What is their place in the Church ?
2. Write a note on 'religious life and vows'.
3. What is the role of the religious in a Parish ?
4. What is the role of the religious in family apostolate ?
5. Describe the social services of the religious.