The Call of the Spirit:

Religious community and language

A briefing paper on terminology for the Council

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1. Members of the Working Group (2017-2019)

Fr Peter Allan CR
Mark Berry
Dr Petà Dunstan
Revd Dr Isabelle Hamley
Sr Margaret Theresa SLG
Revd Ian Mobsby
Sr Sue CSF
Revd Tim Watson *(until August 2018)*
Abbot Richard Yeo OSB *(until August 2018)*

2. Introduction

Ours is both a challenging and an exciting time in the life of the Church. It is a source of encouragement and hope that many groups, communities and movements are springing up that clearly evidence the grace of the Spirit. One characteristic part of this phenomenon is a new openness to the distinctive New Testament understanding of *koinonia* (community). As a result, we are seeing new expressions of Christian community life. Some of them are recognisably in, or closely affiliated with, the tradition of religious life - that pattern of discipleship that is marked fundamentally by a desire to seek God, understood as a deepening of the covenant already made in Baptism. Other expressions are more explicitly shaped by one particular commitment, such as, an intentional life of mission and evangelism.

Religious life throughout Christian history has taken many forms. It has arisen sometimes in unexpected places and defied tight definition beyond the parameters mentioned above. When too restrained, religious life has seen new movements emerge: Cistercians, Franciscans, Moravians, Shakers being a few examples. It has re-emerged even in parts of the Christian family where it has been suppressed or appeared to fade away. This is because religious life belongs to all Christians – the monastic impulse is not Catholic or Orthodox or Protestant or the property of any specific denomination or Christian group. In some phases of Christian history, it has been politicised and brought into theological and secular disputes. Yet, it transcends all those quarrels and all the attempts to suppress it or tie it to one expression of the faith. This is why, even when suppressed amongst Protestant churches, religious life nevertheless re-emerged. For centuries, community life 'hid in plain sight' in the Protestant world in universities, missionary movements and amongst many groups of faithful Christians. Religious life has been acknowledged by

more and more denominations within the Christian family, recognising the monastic impulse both in their history and in thinking of the needs of the future.

In the 21ˢᵗ century, new forms of intentional Christian communities have been bubbling up in many places, both inside and outside the formal structures of the Church of England and beyond. The Advisory Council has sought to encourage all expressions of many different expressions of Christian life, not only supporting traditional religious communities (which it terms as 'recognised communities') but also supporting and encourage emerging forms of Christian intentional communities – both residential and dispersed. The Advisory Council has identified the term 'acknowledged religious communities' to support, encourage and include those communities who have charisms that reflect the new forms of Christian religious community. The 'acknowledgement' process sets some 'expecteds' as part of this discernment process.

The Holy Spirit it seems is unsettling people to explore different expressions of intentional Christian communities with forms of vows or promises: in local settings; as part of Diocesan and national initiatives; and in mission-orientated Anglican organisations in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury. As part of this process, those involved in emerging communities have been seeking to discern a vision for living a 'Rhythm or Rule of Life' in obedience to serving Jesus in the context of Christian Community. Seeking the Holy Spirit then to discern the specific charisms and forms of emerging community is not an easy task.

In any such discernment there is a danger of using language and terminology in a light fashion. This can unintentionally disrespect the depth of Christian religious community as it has been received in the Church of England. Further, using terms without sufficient care could create structures that stifle rather than foster growth and the healthy flourishing of emerging communities.

This guidance seeks to build on previous published wisdom from the Advisory Council to:

- Assist appointed members of the Advisory Council to support and guide emerging communities through the 'acknowledgment' process that includes attention to charisms, terminology, roles, governance and healthy forms of structure.

- Assist leaders of emerging communities who are seeking 'acknowledgement' concerning the questions that need to be explored, the importance of being careful with language and terminology, and to be equipped with a basic

introductory understanding of the history and theology of the Christian Religious life from a particular Anglican/Church of England perspective.

- Assist leaders of existing communities that have been 'acknowledged' to review their use of language, terminology and understandings of the Christian Religious life, to ensure that their governance constitutions and 'Rhythms of Rules of Life' reflect this shared wisdom.

Discerning and living forms of Christian Religious life and community is not easy. It needs to be considered carefully without any romanticism for the past or fetishism for the new. Seeking to follow the Holy Spirit in commitment to the way of life of Jesus as specified in the Gospels in the context of the twenty-first century is the challenge for all Christians. Seeking to catch up with the particularity of what God is seeking and doing in emerging Christian Religious communities is an important and exciting aspect of the renewal of the Church in prayer, community, ministry and mission.

These reflections on terminology are presented in the hope that many will find here encouragement and recognition. We are not at all concerned with developing terminology as a means of control or limitation, but rather clarification and liberation. Inevitably, terms rightly understood also help to reveal the boundaries of our exploring. Such boundaries are, in our experience, encountered as pointers to the grace and generosity of God. It is then consonant with the aim of our work that we may all go on exploring in faith and hope, cautious about defining too closely, or excluding too quickly, but always eager to learn more.

3. Further work

There were several matters that the working group considered which could be more appropriately explored through further work. These include:

- Theological exploration of the difference between a Religious community and a religious association e.g. Recognised & Acknowledged Communities as compared to the Mothers Union, clergy cell groups, Society of Catholic Priests, Society of Ordained Scientists, Ministerial Experience Scheme.

- Further work on the theology of Charism.

- The relationship of the new Canon when it is passed to the ongoing development of the religious life that includes established terminology.

- The relationship between emerging religious communities and mission and evangelisation.

4. The significance of language

The main consideration of this report is to look at language: the words we use for different offices, for different forms of community life and community roles. It may sound like a sterile and minor argument: after all, language does not belong to anyone, so why argue over who should use what terms or not? Of course, language is not a neutral tool that can be appropriated by one group or another, controlled or restricted by one group or another. The essence of language is that it is something that we hold in common, and that enables us to communicate with one another and build bridges with each other. Language also sits at the juncture between past and future, a link between a world past and a world still to come. Language can be used to communicate, to facilitate growth (we know that the wider a child's vocabulary, the better they will do, first at school, then in life), to enable others. It can also be used to control, to shame, to restrict, to ostracise. Language is powerful: as such, the way we choose to use it, particularly when forming identity (for new communities) or delineating identity (for established communities) is not anodyne, but powerful. It needs to be done self-consciously and self-reflectively.

Language enables us to express who we think we are. It enables others to identity who we may be in relation to them. How does this work when applied to the question at hand? As new communities develop, the need to find a language to express their organisation is both functional and ontological. At a functional level, borrowing terms from traditional communities enables quick-fire identification with a concept held in common with the wider culture. For example, in general culture an 'abbot' or 'prior' are terms recognisably associated with the Religious life; in church terms, they are also recognisable, and overlaid with concepts of spiritual authority. Dissonance comes into play however when the general concept intersects with the incarnated reality of how the words have been used and are still used by specific communities.

Beyond the general similarities, words and networks of related terms are used in specific ways by individuals ('idiolect') and by socially identifiable groups ('sociolect'). The concept shared in common is therefore nuanced, influenced and modified by a specific group's usage. The question at hand therefore is how far can the terms 'stretch' to enable the generic meaning to encompass the range of specific uses. When does a specific use become so isolated from the general meaning held in common by a substantial group that it loses its ability to signify reality to the wider world?

A further complexity is the inevitable fact of the evolution of language: even within enclosed groups, language is never static, but evolves together within the group. As

such, it is possible for a sub-group's language to become isolated from the wider, held-in-common meaning of wider society.

Furthermore, whilst language evolves, it also keeps a certain sameness which ensures continuity with history, rootedness and connection over time. When a new community emerges, it naturally wants to acknowledge its dependence and connection with history as well as establish its distinctive identity.

Disputed terms are therefore emotionally-laden. Preventing new communities from using ancient, honoured terms is denying them a link to the past. Yet further, it denies their self-representation and construction of identity: it is saying they are 'other' rather than 'kin', in discontinuity rather than continuity. It is also a way to attempt to control their shape and development.

On the other hand, using terms without care for those who have held and cherished those terms as part of their own definition of identity fails to recognise that language is deeply embedded in history and real communities in ways that are equally powerful for self-identification. Using terms without exploring the depth of their meaning also risks projecting a false, idealistic identity rather than one properly grounded in experience and dialogue with the wider world and the language that represents it.

5. Anglican historical context
a. Leadership titles

The impact of leadership titles in Religious life

Titles in Religious life, whether given or assumed, have many layers of meaning: for the person concerned, for their community, for the Church and society in general. They touch on matters of power and authority and of status and identity, both for the person and the community. They are not mere incidentals. Their significance is both inward and outward.

Inward to the title-holder:
They are significant to the person as defining their role and jurisdiction.
In a positive sense, this can be empowering and give confidence. Titles indicate the trust that others in the community have in the leader they have chosen. It gives the person the authority to negotiate, represent and make decisions. In a negative sense, the title can become an identity to which the individual is wedded and their self-worth becomes attached. It can flatter the person's ego and lead to self-importance. Titles can also be a 'cover' for exercising inappropriate power over others.

Inward to the community:
The use of titles for office holders can give the community a sense of its development and that it has achieved stability. This can mean in a positive sense that titles are an encouragement to the community. They establish a sense of order and lines of authority that promote the community's aims and charism. A leader with authority can provide a sense of direction and growth. In a negative sense, the titles can give a community a false sense of having 'established itself', when in reality the group is unstable. They can hide fragility and incoherence behind a supposed hierarchical framework.

Outward to the Church and to society:
They indicate role, status and jurisdiction to the Church and society in general.   In a positive sense they can help those outside believe they are dealing with the 'decision-maker'. Titles indicate the trust that others in the community have in the leader they have elected. It gives the person the authority to negotiate and represent and make decisions. In a negative sense, they can be assumed in order to impress or inflate or exaggerate. Outsiders can be misled as to the importance of the person with whom they are engaging. They can also be uncomfortable, even intimidated, by the perceived authority the title conveys.

The meaning of leadership titles

Superior
The term originally indicated authority – superior meaning to 'be above' in terms of decision-making. In time, especially in class-conscious societies, it became blurred with the word superior being used in everyday language to mean 'better than'. Hence it became disliked, especially from the 1960s onwards.

Abbot/Abbess
These terms stem from Abba/Amma, terms for father and mother. The use of these in early monasticism stressed parental care as well as authority. They have been used widely in monastic communities in particular, although in some periods of history they were linked with considerable power and jurisdiction beyond the community. So, in some contexts they would be judged to be similar to 'superior'. However, such associations have faded in modern times and the more pastoral interpretation has made them attractive to some new communities.

Prior/Prioress
In monasteries, this term was used either for the superior in a small community - or the deputy superior where there was an Abbot/Abbess. It has been used for non-monastic communities with the leader being the 'first' or 'prior' person in the group. The term for the deputy to such a role is Sub-Prior/Sub-Prioress.

(Reverend) Father/Mother superior
The use of a parental prefix to superior added an element of relationship to the role of superior, to make it for non-monastic communities more like Abbot/Amma. The word Reverend showed that it was a spiritual paternal/maternal relationship.
There was also a gender issue with respect to Mother Superior. In many women's communities well into the middle of the 20th century, the 'superior' was a male priest, often given a title such as Warden. The sister elected to be in charge of the sisters in the convent was therefore the 'mother' superior and not THE Superior.

Minister
Generally used by Franciscans but also others where the linguistic emphasis indicates 'service' rather than 'authority'. To minister to someone is to look after them. However, minister is long associated with parochial priesthood as well as leadership in some churches. It is also a term used in secular government and suggests politics to many. So, it has not been popular amongst non-Franciscan Religious communities.

Guardian
This is another term used by Franciscans and which has been adopted by new

communities. It is a term suggesting protection and a 'looking out for'. It is suggestive of a duty of care rather than of power.

Dean
This term derives from the Latin and old French terms for someone in charge of ten people. It was a military term originally. It was adopted by some smaller Religious houses. It has survived in cathedrals, for someone leading the chapter, and in educational institutions for leaders of faculties or college chaplaincies. In modern times, it has appealed to some new communities as being an ecclesiastical alternative to leader, yet without strong monastic overtones.

Leader
This term is one suggesting a function which carries authority. It has become more popular since the late 20th century as it has been considered not to have the layers of different meanings that the word superior has gathered. It is judged more neutral, concentrating on a role in a team rather than the title-holder's qualities.
It suggests a decision-making power, but it is however without strong pastoral overtones. It can suggest someone 'in front' rather than someone 'among and with'. It is also a secular term with no specifically religious connotation.

Spokesperson
This term, used by some dispersed communities, implies a functional role without authority. The person so named can relate community views to others outside but has no privilege in discussions between the members. The term suggests a person who represents the community but is not its decision-maker.

Brother/Sister
The terms brother and sister have been used in communities since the early Christian centuries to emphasize a sense of both family and equality among members. Retaining these titles when someone becomes a leader or has authority has been a feature of particular traditions of Religious life, including for example some Franciscans and some Protestant groups, such as the Moravians. The personal title has been distinct from the role title. Since the mid-20th century, it has been more widely adopted with many superiors still being known as Brother or Sister after assuming an authority role.

Some historical points about choices of title

Attention
The early founders of Anglican communities in the 19th century wanted to establish themselves in the Church and witness to wider society. The use of authoritative

titles helped gain attention for their communities and their work. Lydia Sellon SHT (1821-1876) went from 'superior' to 'Lady superior' to 'Abbess-General' in a dozen years. Such titles, whatever the negative side, helped publicise women's communities as an important initiative.

Discretion

Richard Benson SSJE (1824-1915) believed that revival of Religious life among Anglicans was best served by discretion. He was the 'superior' plain and simple of his community. There were no further enhancements. A generation later, Charles Gore (1853-1932) refused to use even that title and was known as the 'senior' when leading the new Community of the Resurrection. Here the emphasis was on their work advertising the community and attracting vocations.

Gender

It is important to note that for male priests like Benson, their ordination already gave them 'authority' in the Church. As a parish priest in Oxford, Benson had status and respect before founding a community, so adding grander monastic titles was unnecessary. In contrast, female leaders were struggling to be taken seriously by bishops and others and so saw grander titles as a way of establishing their importance when meeting men in authority. The use of the title 'Reverend' for a woman in a time when women were not eligible for ordination was also significant.

Authority versus service

In the mid-20th century, words like 'superior' had become associated with hierarchy and power, which were less favoured by a generation in society that stressed equality and group decision-making. Many communities, particularly from the 1960s onwards, began to change to more neutral words like 'leader'. The new (later acknowledged and non-celibate) communities that emerged, from the Third Order SSF (in the 1930s) to the Community of Aidan and Hilda (in the 1990s) have used terms such as Minister and Guardian for their leaders.

Different expressions of religious life

The Christian impulse to religious community can also be traced in other forms alongside the monastic. Out of the 16th-century reformation, there were a number of Protestant expressions of intentional community inspired by the influence of the Moravians, anabaptists and others. Such lay communities of people living together focussed their way of life on bible study, prayer, worship, work and service. This has inspired expressions or forms of the religious life ever since. It should also be noted that after the closure of the monasteries in Britain, cathedrals and parish churches would still embody a rhythm of daily prayer and Holy Communion, and holding in the Offices of the new Book of Common Prayer a particular monastic-inspired spirituality. In all these forms of community, the terms used overlapped

with those of pastoral ministry, so bishop, minister and deacon were used for both types of leadership.

Titles in a wider context

The relationship between what leaders are titled and what the community is doing as its ministry and witness is a crucial consideration. Context ought to be a factor in such decisions because Religious communities are part of a Church and of a society. They need to reflect the tradition that they inherit and which sustains them, but do so alongside connecting appropriately to those they serve and their ecclesiastical partners.

For new communities, it is important they understand the importance of getting that relationship right: taking on leadership terms without due consideration may affect, even damage, their formation and their work. The 'right and wrong' cannot be found in an absolute standard applicable to all communities and all situations. Some may want to take on a structure and then try to grow to fill it. For others leadership terms can evolve as the community evolves rather than being taken on as a 'superstructure' beforehand. The history of Anglican communities has examples of both. However, it is a matter for thoughtful decision and not a mere incidental. Titles can be about status, role, identity, self-confidence, connecting with a tradition, relationships and other factors. It is important therefore that communities and their founders explore all the implications carefully before making these choices.

b. Terminology of Vows and Promises

Every baptised Christian has a vocation to live out their baptismal commitment. This can be open to further commitments, such as ordination or matrimony, which are an extension of the Christian vocation. Taking vows or promises in a recognised or acknowledged community (after a period of testing and probation) is a particular living out of a person's baptism. It involves membership of a visible community and a public (not only private) commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

At the beginning of the revival of formal Religious life in the Church of England in the 19th century, many pioneers took public vows to a priest even before a community had formed, the very first being Marian Hughes in 1841. The emergence of communities with an ordered life took some years and was after a period of experiments, some of which failed whilst others grew and prospered.

From the beginning of the revival among Anglicans, vows were a source of controversy. To the Religious themselves, the vows were central. Without a life-long public commitment to God, their life of sacrifice would be insufficiently anchored. It would be the equivalent to them of two people living together as spouses without the vow of marriage. The problem of the vows for the bishops was essentially their permanence – the life commitment. If the vows were public, valid and binding - like marriage vows - then they were indissoluble and there would be the problem of what to do if they were broken. For bishops, therefore, a form of release was essential, meaning Religious vows were not necessarily permanent. In the end a compromise was reached. Religious could take life-long vows before the bishop, but that in turn meant he could dispense them if required. So, the very demand of Religious that their vows should be received by a bishop and recognised by the Church was the very means by which the bishops asserted their power of release.

Most early communities among Anglicans expected novices to take life vows; there was no interim or temporary period. Only in the 20th century did many communities introduce a period of 'simple vows'. These might be life-long in intention but in the community not in the Church – and so not usually taken before a bishop and the community could release the person from them if need be. Some communities gave these vows a period of time (such as three years) after which they would expire and the Religious was free to leave if he or she chose, or else they could decide to take life-long vows (sometimes known as 'solemn vows' by monastic communities) within the Church. The names and terms used by different communities varied. However, the various terms were a secondary issue to the two essential matters in the view of the communities and the Church: the vow was a public commitment (not a private matter); and there was a mechanism for release for life-long vows. This was the settled mind among most Anglicans (Religious and bishops) by the early 1900s.

Vows were seen in terms of the Evangelical Counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience - or in their Benedictine expression: obedience, stability and conversion of life. Both versions contain the same essential elements, including celibacy, and were seen as one not three separate vows. Together, they countered the temptations/distractions of material wealth, sex and power that were judged as obstacles in seeking God in the Religious life.

The Anglican communities of the revival in Religious life therefore adopted the traditional vows that had evolved throughout the centuries of the Church's existence. They were expressing something in an Anglican context that was already established theologically in the wider Christian church, with a long history of

sources. They had of course to contend with the 16th-century Reformation critique of those vows, views that were still present and vocal among many Anglicans, but the task was one of re-introducing traditional vows not creating a new or modified interpretation. Their lives were experimental and insecure in many aspects, but the vows based on a venerable tradition proved a source of stability for them.

In the 20th century, some Anglicans however wished to follow a modification of the vows which would allow them to have community ties and follow Jesus and yet remain closer to the life of everyday Christians and non-Christians. They saw the Third Order tradition among Franciscans as a route for this. The evolution of the Third Order of the Society of St Francis from the 1930s onwards was a complicated journey but it eventually emerged as what would now be termed an 'acknowledged' community. The members were allowed to be married and have their own homes and employment, yet were bound by public promises within a dispersed community dedicated to following Jesus. This modification was then followed by other communities among Anglicans. Different terms have been used – temporary vows, promises, pledges etc – but they have all involved a definite commitment. However, whilst such vows were 'public' in the sense of being taken usually during a Eucharist and before other members, they were more akin to the 'first or initial vows' of members of recognised communities: that is, if release were required it was a matter for the community Chapter not the bishop.

The idea of 'taking vows' was seen as a sign of full membership and an important milestone in a person's vocation. Indeed, Anglicans who came together in a variety of contexts, with a range of membership rules, came to regard a public vow in some form as a necessary step for recognition, a symbol of acceptance by the Church. This has had both rewards and dangers, especially with the advent of many new communities in the 21st century, establishing themselves yet not sure how far to connect with tradition and precedent. The debates on these matters remain in their early stages as these new communities are at the stage of flux and experiment that characterised recognised communities in the 1850s and 1860s. As yet, there is only a limited 'tradition' of vows and promises without the inclusion of celibacy and with different interpretations of the words obedience and chastity. The newer forms of Religious community are therefore trying to find a new way to express vows instead of reviving a long-established one. That is a significant task which may take decades to evolve.

One evolving response in some new communities is that members take promises for a particular period and these are often referred to as 'seasonal vows'. The time implied by the 'season' varies from community to community. When communities are new, they cannot necessarily be certain which direction their ministry and witness will take, whether they will last for a short or much longer time, or the

variety of members they will attract. In such circumstances, life vows are not possible as the 'life' has yet to evolve into a settled pattern.

However, a community is not the same as a campaign or an association, which involves a commitment to a cause or activity. Christian community in contrast can only be built on some form of commitment to one another. A form of promise therefore is appropriate. It is this type of promise that is termed 'seasonal'. What it contains and the specifics can vary but the unchangeable element is the commitment to God and one another.

One of the specifics of some promises and vows is to a Rule of Life, a set of precepts (and expressions of them) that are the framework for a life of commitment. However, this is not the same as a 'Rhythm of Life' which is not about rules but instead about the spirit in which they are lived. So, a rhythm of life is not a timetable, liturgical or otherwise, and is not about 'managing' time, having a 'task list' or having deadlines to meet.

The monastic sense of a rhythm of life is to achieve a balance between all the aspects of Religious life: prayer, study, work and interaction with others. The aim is to ensure one element does not dominate over the others and, ideally, they flow into each other in a harmonious sequence. The Daily Office and the Eucharist/Holy Communion are the regular times of worship and prayer and they create a structure to the day that is God-facing. A crucial aspect of study is to deepen a person's understanding and awareness of the gifts of God. These are then insights that can be shared with others in love. Periods of work and hospitality are reflections of the need to serve others. Putting it together, it means that prayer turns into action, which leads back into prayer. The rhythm of life therefore is an ongoing reminder to each person of the important elements of a Christian life.

The challenge in the future will be to retain flexibility about the role of Religious vows and promises without diminishing their sacred intention. A considerable period of testing in a novitiate should be usual before formal public Religious vows are taken, whilst seasonal promises may be used as an intention at an earlier stage. This time of testing is even more significant if the stability of the whole community may not have yet been firmly established.

When to take vows or promises, in what form and at what point is therefore not a simple matter of recognition. Far more is involved than that. The decision must be made after reflection on the social context of the community, its ministry and responsibilities and the internal relationships and patterns of the members. The form the public commitment takes can vary and has been given different names reflecting a range of 'grades' and meanings. However, the form is secondary to the fundamental commitment.

6. Scriptural and theological context
a. The language of leadership and roles within communities in Scripture

Within communities of faith, questions over terminology for leadership and belonging are not new. Indeed, the Old and New Testaments give us examples of both. This is particularly acute in the New Testament church. This was a time when new communities were formed and sought both a shape and a language to express their continuity with what was known whilst taking into account the new realities of life 'in Christ', or 'in the Spirit'. Here already is one of the terms that differs!

The term 'leadership' is unsatisfactory at several levels and does not clearly relate to Old or New Testament language. It is, however, the nub of a number of contemporary debates and so is useful as a short-hand in discussion of offices that carry authority, responsibility, guidance or supervision in relation to communities of believers.

Communities disagreed over founders and how to express their key relationships to those who started them. The church in Corinth was divided over Paul, Apollos or Cephas as human founders (1 Corinthians 1). Paul reminded them they are first and foremost formed by Christ. Yet the apostle's reminder sidestepped the issue slightly. The reality of the communities with which he was dealing was that, as human communities, their rootedness in specific teaching and personal relationships shaped their understanding of who they were. Just as importantly, was *how* they were and had come to be. Paul's sharp rebuke needs bearing in mind as we too consider the differences between communities, so that we put these differences in proper perspective. The reality of humanness - and its corollary, the need for belonging and definition - begs for attention to be paid to the subject.

The New Testament displays a slightly bewildering array of terms for functions and roles within communities of faith, which again alerts us to the human need for the proper ordering of communities and their worship, and an equal pull between unity and diversity (see Jimmy Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*). Paul made lists of different 'ministries', themselves linked to different roles or functions within the church. The lists overlap, but are not coterminous. The variety of terms for different types of leaders (apostles, elders, overseers, deacons etc.) points to the need to attend to the specificity of each community: the different communities that Paul is writing to are rooted in different cultural backgrounds, face different challenges, and thereby

organise their lives together in different ways – though these are all rooted in the same overarching principle of being 'in Christ'.

The level of continuity with Old Testament terms depends on the ethnic make-up of the new community. Indeed, one of the central disputes of the New Testament Church was how far it was meant to reflect its Jewish roots. This is not primarily about language or leadership, but about symbolic action and outward expression of faith as embodied in circumcision and relationship to food. While the issues are clearly different, some of the dynamics have a bearing on present-day discussions, in that they concern the discernment of appropriate continuity and discontinuity, and the need for gentleness between communities. Discernment of what is appropriate is only part of the picture; Paul's injunction was, on the one hand, not to burden new communities with burdens that are not theirs to bear (e.g. Galatians), but on the other to care first for the spiritual welfare and development of others, so that those who think themselves strong do not lead others to falter (1 Corinthians). A careful balance is being struck here about the degree of control that one community, group or leader can exert over another.

Terms for roles and leadership were still fluid in the context of the rapid development of the New Testament Church, which may have something to say to us in the context of multiple experiments by new communities in the current landscape. Interestingly, the New Testament seems most concerned with the charisms associated with various roles, and the spiritual qualities of those who shoulder specific roles and responsibilities. Often, the terms used tend towards being descriptive rather than prescriptive: we have groups of 'offices' or 'ministries' led by the specific gifts of the spirit (from administration to speaking in tongues) depending on what various people are seen to be consistently gifted in.

It is worth noting here the distinction between the possibility of gifts being given to any Christian, and the recognition of consistent use of certain gifts which then unfold into specific ministries. For instance, all are called to be witnesses, and can be equipped by the Spirit in their witness. But some are called to be evangelists, as people whose most characteristic and consistent gift is witness or evangelism. In this case, the 'title' is one of recognition of gifts bestowed directly by the Spirit. These then combine a direct calling by God through the gift, and a human willingness to nurture, develop and use this gift in service.

There are, of course, examples of gifts being distorted and misused, which can then lead to the departure of the Spirit. We see most of these examples in the Old Testament, such as in the story of Saul, or the fall of many of the judges. In these cases, leaders often had innate characteristics that prepared them for leadership; the Spirit of the Lord then 'came upon' them and formally equipped and anointed

them for leadership. Whilst there was no expectation for leaders to be perfect, there was also a pattern of leaders abusing power, turning away from God and leading people astray, which led to the departure of the Spirit, removal from office and judgement of the corrupted leader (sometimes only at the point of death). In this sense, leadership consisted of a double movement, bringing together certain abilities and predispositions (which a leader would often have to grow into properly) and a divine choosing or appointing. Whilst there is a strand of stories that looks at unexpected leaders, they are usually unexpected because of their social positioning (e.g. David), their history (Moses, Paul), possible impairment etc. Yet they all seem to have abilities and a spirituality that predisposes them to be grown as leaders.

The manner of the choosing is much less clear. Sometimes leaders are clearly appointed by an act of divine providence (Paul as an Apostle – in the wake of prophets of the Old Testament who are called through a theophany). Sometimes they are chosen or discerned by a community, based on skills and attributes (see the appointment of deacons in Acts 6). Sometimes they emerge organically as their gifts are exercised and recognised. Overall, the picture we have in Scripture is multi-faceted, with multiple strands of service and leadership explored and evaluated (the books of Judges and Kings are particularly good as a reflection on various forms of leadership, ways of coming into leadership and flaws in leadership). The consistent integration of all aspects of life in Old and New Testament prevents a facile divide between secular and spiritual service and leadership. It paints a picture of leaders as under the authority of God, and the people under their leadership as having responsibilities of their own in both choosing leaders, and in responding to them and working with them.

The lists of ministries in the Pauline Epistles also remind us that all service is done within the context of the equipping of the Spirit. Discerning appropriate roles and leadership is therefore based on a recognition that all gifts are bestowed by God in the first place, that the exercise of all gifts needs to be done under God, and that a certain amount of human work in nurturing the type of spiritual disciplines needed to undergird the proper exercise of gifts is vital.

Scripture therefore does not tell us exactly how to choose people for specific roles, nor what they should be called. What it does tell, however, is that care is needed in defining roles, in discerning vocations, and attention to the voice of the Holy Spirit is crucial.

b. God and the Religious Life

Introduction: Vocation

When we seek to understand and talk about the phenomenon of the Religious life, of Religious communities, of all those called to some distinctive path by God, it is easy to be caught in a web of history, of regulation, of complex terminology, and of customs and traditions. Yet, when all is said and done, there is one non-negotiable element at the heart of it all.

For every person drawn into a Religious community or led to explore their response to God in certain distinctive ways, there is, at the heart, a call from God. This call is itself experienced in very different ways, sometimes as a vague feeling, sometimes with almost cinematic clarity. This intensely personal, not to say individual, element is an essential part of the phenomenon of religious vocation. In the early church there is much to suggest that, from the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the local church, some were called to find more solitude, to seek the unmediated presence of God. From this movement comes the term monk (*monos*). In another phase, this call to solitude drew men and women back into closer, disciplined fellowship - and so came the beginnings of cenobitic monasticism, associated particularly with Pachomius. Significantly, St Benedict in his Rule recognises that this is a pattern that may be repeated as those who have matured in the common life find a new call emerging - to move out into solitude, to the life of a hermit.

In the earliest phases there is no canon law, little talk of vows, of rules or constitutions: this is an essentially personal experience, a very particular challenge rooted in the commitment that each has made in baptism. However, the call is realised it is never more or less than a living out of the baptismal covenant, a following of the Gospel path and the injunction "Follow me!" - though with a particular shape and form. On the other hand, from the beginning there has been a recognition that because this is a response to the call of God, a call to growing intimacy with God, it entails a willing engagement with God as revealed in Jesus Christ: that is to say, the response has been recognised as embracing the steadfastness and fidelity of God; the single-minded attentiveness that God has towards God's creation; the freedom from attachment that characterises the God revealed in Jesus. Such response is summed up in the Evangelical Counsels. It is in response to the revelation of God's steadfast love that men and women were moved to commit themselves to a Gospel way that was even more radical in its contours than the new life they began in baptism. Typically, this further commitment embraces the Evangelical Counsels in a radical way: a radical freedom from attachment, a life of celibacy as an offering of love, and a seeking to live in obedience to the will of God.

Charism

Most particularly since the Second Vatican Council, discussion of the Religious life has been shaped by an understanding of 'charism'. This has become a technical term that describes the essence of a community's vocation that distinguishes it from every other. It deliberately calls to mind Paul's talk of the gifts (*charismata*) of the Spirit, given for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ. The charism of a community is then the particular call of the Spirit to this group of Christians to live and to serve in a distinctive way. Charism is God's gift: it is the unique gifting of the Spirit for this group (or family of communities like, for example, the Franciscans). But the charism has to be embodied, has to be incarnated. This requires discernment - and, at this point, there is inevitably human frailty and error. Charism is the ongoing call of the Spirit, never-ceasing, always faithful; embodiment is necessarily provisional, entwined in culture and ethos. Fidelity to the charism then requires renewal and reform, and indeed re-imagining, from generation to generation.

Religious Life as Sacramental

A strong element of the theological understanding of Religious life has turned around the recognition of its importance as a sign (or more truly, a symbol). It was not long before a religious vocation was spoken of as a 'white martyrdom', a counterpart to the unsought glory of the martyrs themselves. From this point of view, a religious vocation was thought of as having some equivalence to martyrdom, not in its meaning for the individual, but in the equivalent potential of the signs - the monk and the martyr - to speak unequivocally of the sovereignty of God, of the location of ultimate meaning and purpose in and with God and of hope for the kingdom.

It is in just this context that the history and theology of the vows of religion belong. They are, to put it bluntly, rather signs of God's than of human fidelity. They are expressions of the confidence that the commitment made is met by God's loving mercy: You are mine. Thus, the vows indicate and enact a new phase of the baptismal covenant; a new realisation of what it is to be baptised into the death of Christ that we may also rise with him. It is then quickly apparent that the evolving history of the significance of vows in the Religious life (see previous section) often has much more to do with the embodiment of charism in ethos that we spoke of above. There is only one response to the God who gives us everything and that is to give everything, completely, in return. In practice, Christian life recognises that, until death, this will be worked out very differently in each of us, but the Religious life has remained a sacramental reminder that God does indeed ask everything of us. In this sense, temporary or seasonal vows are human adaptations, rather as Iris Murdoch once famously suggested that we should paraphrase Matthew's injunction "Be ye therefore perfect as your heavenly Father

is perfect!" as "Be ye therefore slightly improved!"

To some extent, the context does offer a measure of differentiation between 'vow' and 'promise' in that when I promise something I have a significant responsibility in determining the content of the promise, whereas a vow is more clearly a joint undertaking between God and me. This, however, breaks down when we remember that baptism is generally spoken of in terms of promise; and that contemporary secular weddings still speak of vows. St Augustine recognises that vow and promise are fundamentally synonyms. For our purpose the non-negotiable element that we are acknowledging is the sacramental dimension: just as in baptism, so in Religious life (and marriage), the vow/promise is first an action of God, met by our response. There is, then, a measure of solemnity and unknowability about the ultimate meaning of all such undertakings.

Religious Life

Another aspect of the 'sign' of Religious life is its radical dependence on God, God alone. The commitment of the life only makes sense as a life lived in response to the living God. This lies behind the evolved symbolism of monastic profession as a dying in order to live, but is fundamentally a declaration that the life we know now is but the stage of being born into the fullness of the life of the kingdom that can only be fully known after death. This, in turn, underlines the importance of every community being able to embrace death: the death of its members, the death of particular works, the death of a community itself as but a part of the movement into life.

History witnesses to many reforms and developments. There are seemingly entirely new movements, and there are radical reforms of older roots. Yet, two patterns may be discerned. On the one hand, a constant re-emergence of the fundamental radical otherness of the first expressions of the Religious life; and, on the other hand, a borrowing of elements of the Religious life/community tradition to enable or focus particular gifts and ministries in the service of the Gospel. The Spirit is always larger and more generous than human imagination: in the present moment we are reminded of Father Faber's hymn "There is grace enough for thousands of new worlds as great as this; there is room for fresh creations in that upper home of bliss."

What do we look for today?

Just as a good wine is described as having various 'notes', so everything that belongs in the tradition of Religious life similarly has theological 'notes'.

- Fundamentally, there will be an evident continuing of the baptismal journey, both for the individuals involved and for the communities they form. This

will be evident not only to participants, but to the wider church.

- Secondly there will be a charism. This may take some time and effort to discern: there may be confusion between charism and ethos; there may be an apparent clarity within the group that is not seen by those around (or *vice versa*), but there will be a distinctive call of the Spirit that is willing this venture to be for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ.

- There will be recognition of an obligation and responsibility to live in such a way that attention is directed from the persons involved to God, creator and redeemer of all.

- There will be a willing acceptance of a sacrificial and sacramental dimension: in both manner of life and commitment to it, the emphasis is on the claim that God makes on us to be signs of the kingdom, signs of the utter steadfastness of God and God's enduring fidelity.

- The Gospel life that emerges will draw on the wider tradition in its patterns of prayer, its skilful practices and its embracing of asceticism, thus demonstrating an honouring of the past as well as an openness to the novelty of the Spirit now.

- Whatever the form of life the most authentic 'note' is the harvest of the Spirit: love, joy, peace…

c. Reflections on the Emerging Communities & Terminology

God's mission will produce new forms of Christian community that began with the Gospel. The work of the Holy Spirit will lead to the need for experimentation. This means that time needs to be given before seeking clarity can be achieved as part of a discernment process.

This experimentation is either bubbling up from local contexts, or as the initiative of particular Dioceses or mission organisations. The variety of these contexts make it complex to make definitive guidance. So, the Church needs to have patience with this process and the Church authorities need to exercise care and understanding in nurturing these new initiatives.

The emerging communities need to understand however that they need to participate in the responsibilities of the Church and engage with issues such as safeguarding. These are non-negotiable expectations.

The use of terminology is an important element in the discernment process. Emerging communities may draw in this naming exercise on a number of differing resources:

- A fusion of Benedictine, Franciscan and Ignatian sources.
- Welsh, Scottish, Irish and Northern English Celtic Christian sources.
- An eclectic mix of biblical, local, ecumenical and historical influences.

Many new communities see themselves as an ongoing element of the religious life and therefore seek to situate themselves as part of that tradition and its terminology. This may lead to the use of traditional terms for leaders and this may be appropriate in some cases. What matters is that the impact of those choices is considered and understood.

With respect to vows, the Evangelical Counsels remain the traditional expression of Christian community and will continue to shape some communities into the future. Some emerging communities seek to build on a different interpretation of the vows – an example being Third Order Franciscans.

All types of vows and promises serve the witness and vision of the Church. Whilst of equal value, the distinction between the Evangelical Counsels and other forms of vows and promises needs to be acknowledged. The use of terminology that covers both traditional and emerging communities and their vows and promises needs to be handled with care and understanding. This will help avoid confusion and the creation of conflicting expectations.

Some qualification to terminology can therefore be helpful – for example 'seasonal vows' which seek to honour and respect the Evangelical Counsels yet allow emerging communities to be part of the long tradition of the Christian religious life throughout the centuries.

Generosity from all sides in understanding the sensitivities and aspirations of different types of community will lead the various strands of religious life to a unity of purpose and vision. Ongoing conversations about the use of terminology will assist this process.

7. Conclusions

1. The language we use is important. The terminology we use for positions of authority and leadership and for vows and promises has an impact beyond the immediate situation.

2. The evolution of terms within a community is about making relationships within and outside of the community.

3. There is a distinction between making an individual private promise to God and making a public promise or vow as part of a community before God.

4. Leadership terms should be appropriate to the immediate context and help not hinder the community's relationships with others in the wider church and those they serve.

5. There are different types of vows and promises. They are of equal value to the life of the Church and are all a response to God's call and covenant. However, an awareness of the distinction between the Evangelical Counsels (which includes celibacy) and those taken by acknowledged and emerging communities, should be maintained, and the two should not be confused.

6. Engaging with this document and discussing the issues with mentors and advisers outside of the community is significant before decisions are finalised around terminology for a specific community.

8. Questions for reflection

Vision and Purpose

Is the call you are discerning from the Holy Spirit for a particular person or a community that is dispersed or residential?

Has the community discerned a mission or ministry to a particular group of people? Will this include a purpose towards God's preferential treatment of the Poor, disadvantaged and excluded?

How does the community relate their call to the mission and evangelism of the Church?

Has the community sought assistance and advice in this discernment process?

In what way does the community life relate to the local church and Diocese?

Is the community envisaged as a short-term project or an ongoing community?

Has the community documented the discerned vocation of the group as a form of Rule or Rhythm of Life?

Is there a process of regular review around charism, ministry and terminology of the community?

Organisation

Has the community discussed leadership and the decision-making process?

Has the community discussed what sort of promises and vows may evolve?

Has the community considered money and resources?

Has the community considered national safeguarding standards?

In all these matters have proper accountability structures been established and documented?

Leadership and vows terminology

Has the community as a group discussed the use of terms for its leaders and the promises or vows taken/intend to be taken?

In that discussion has the impact of particular terms been considered in relation to the Church as a whole and to wider society?

Will the terms used help or hinder the community's internal relationships and those with people outside?

Have the terms used been discussed with appropriate mentors and advisers outside the community?

Relationship to the wider Church

Has the community been in touch with the local Bishop and Diocesan structures?

Has the community been in touch with the local parishes or Deanery?

Has the community considered the various ways of being connected with the Diocese and legal identity e.g. BMO, a charity, part of mixed economy parish?

Will the community in time want to explore formal recognition or acknowledgement of the Advisory Council and engage with the Council's advisory documentation?