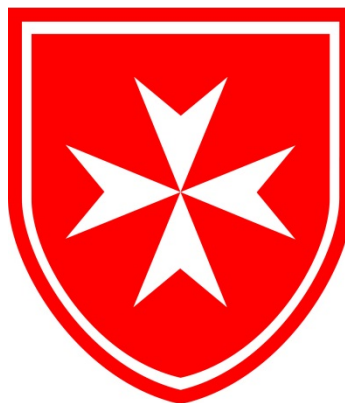


SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER ORDER
OF SAINT JOHN OF JERUSALEM
OF RHODES AND OF MALTA

Journal of Spirituality

ORDER OF MALTA
Criteria for identity
and Life commitments



ROME 2005

N. 5

INTRODUCTION

Archbishop Angelo Acerbi

In the Order of Malta's meetings, and especially in those of its Chaplains, mention is often made of the meaning of its members' vocation and identity as well as the obligations of their spiritual life and charitable works implicit in its membership. These themes were also discussed by working groups in the International Seminar on Strategies and Spirituality held on Malta at the end of January 2004. We thus thought it useful to dedicate the 5th of our "Journal of Spirituality" to these subjects.

The Order of Malta is a religious Order and in its tradition and charisma offers its members a route to Christian perfection. Thus a common spiritual direction exists for all members of the Order. But the three "classes" of which it is composed also have their own distinctive features which merit further study, and in particular with regards to spirituality. We have attempted here to reflect on their identity and ensuing obligations.

This Journal therefore presents two articles, one tending to the conceptual and other more practical, for each of the three "classes": the professed members, those "in obedience" and all the others.

The Year of the Eucharist from October 2004 to October 2005, desired by Pope John Paul II, has prompted some considerations that are not unrelated to the theme of this Journal. They are proposed by Cardinal Pio Laghi with his customary doctrinal authoritativeness and conviction.

The "class" of the Knights of Justice is of fundamental importance: the Holy See and His Most Eminent Highness the Grand Master of the Order have urged us to pay special attention to this category, also because it is hoped that their number will increase. Mons. Fra' Giovanni Scarabelli, Chaplain Grand Cross, well-known for his studies and work in the Order, treats the theme of the spirituality of the Professed Knights, and H.E. Fra' Matthew Festing, Grand Prior of England, outlines some paths, prompted by personal experience, for reflecting on the practical aspects of the Order's First Class members.

The "in Obedience" class undoubtedly requires closer examination to understand better its true condition. Prof. Fr. Costantino Gilardi, O.P., Chaplain of the Turin Delegation, competently deals with this theme, placing the second class on the high and demanding level to which it belongs, and Baron Johannes Heereman von Zuydtwick, Regent of the Sub-Priory of St. Michael, in his turn offers valid considerations for the Order's members "in Obedience".

The identity and spiritual commitments of members of the Third Class are examined by the Rev. Prof. Bruno Martin, Chaplain of the French Association, whereas John Bellingham of the Baronets of Castle Bellingham, the Order's representative to France, offers persuasive suggestions for practical life and actions inspired by the Order's charisma.

The treatise on spirituality in this edition of our Journal does not exhaust such a vast and complex subject applied to a religious-lay Order present in so many different places and cultures. It also involves studies, recommended by the Malta Seminar mentioned above, on hospitaller or welfare activities or on other sectors, such as the diplomatic missions. They are all underpinned by a basic motivation that goes beyond the purely humanitarian aspect because it responds to the evangelical ideal of loving one's neighbour, which inspired our founder and has distinguished the Order of Malta in its almost millenary history. This is a lofty ideal, requiring a high level of spiritual life in those who pursue it.

+ Angelo Acerbi

EXHORTATION BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL PIO LAGHI
2005 - Eucharistic Year

Following the year dedicated to the most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, John Paul II exhorted us, last October, to place the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist at the centre of our spiritual lives. The Holy Father's wish was and is that 2005 be the year of the Eucharist in the Church, a year during which each one of us is called to make the effort to live this sacrament, to meditate on it, to deepen our understanding of the Church's teaching on this mystery, and to welcome it as the gift of Christ par excellence.

The Pope's invitation is directed to us, Knights and Dames of the Order of Malta, to every member of the three degrees that constitute our Sovereign Institution. We should be ever mindful that The Eucharist is at one and the same time "the real presence of Jesus among us, His immolation and Calvary for us, a communion with us, under the form of consecrated bread, food for our souls". In a world in which everything seems inconsistent and in which 'appearances are everything', the presence of Jesus under the species of bread and wine is "true, real and substantial". In a world in which men and women suffer great loneliness, Jesus at the Last Supper, just before his death, performed the impossible and this in order to remain close to us.

On Holy Thursday, 2004, John Paul II addressed to the bishops, priests and all the faithful an encyclical letter entitled "Ecclesia de Eucharistia" in which he develops the theme, "The Eucharist in its relationship with the Church." As Knights and Dames of the Order we have a duty to read this encyclical in order to acquire a more profound knowledge and appreciation of the eucharistic mystery.

The Church, writes the Pope, lives on the Eucharist, lives by the eucharistic Christ, is nourished and enlightened by Him. It lives continually on the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus and it enters into this sacrifice not only by means of faith-filled memory, but also through actual contact, because this sacrifice is made present and perpetuated sacramentally in every community which offers it through the hands of an ordained minister.

When Jesus established the Eucharist, having spoken the words over the unleavened bread and the chalice of wine, he added a phrase in the form of the command, 'do this in memory of me'. Thus, the Eucharist is not only a memorial of the passion and death of Jesus, of his sacrifice on the cross, but a memorial indeed of Himself, of his prefiguration in the Old Testament and of his fulfillment in the New. The Eucharist is not only a memorial of an event that took place two thousand years ago, which can be a source of spiritual meditation, not merely a source of psychological evocation but a sacramental making present, a 'representation' of the sacrifice of Jesus, of his death and resurrection.

The Pope, in the encyclical, recalls the teaching of the Council of Trent when he affirms that “the Mass makes present the sacrifice of the cross, not adding anything and not multiplying it”, and cites, in this context, the beautiful phrase of St. John Chrysostom, ‘We offer always the same Lamb, not one today and tomorrow another, but always the same: for this reason the sacrifice is always only one.’

It is not the Church nor its ministers which ‘do’ the Eucharist, but, on the contrary, it is the Eucharist forms and builds up the Church and gives it life. In other words, the church, being an institution made up of the community of believers, headed by the Pope and bishops, does not give life from or of itself, nor does it produce itself from itself, but lives from its participation in a reality that precedes itself. “The joint and inseparable activity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, which is at the origin of the Church, of her consolidation and her continued life, is at work in the Eucharist”. (cf. n.23). So, the Church does not originate ‘from below’, but from ‘above’, that is it comes from the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

John Paul II’s exhortation, given at the end of the encyclical is addressed also to us, Dames and Knights of the three degrees of the Order. “The mystery of the Eucharist – sacrifice, presence, banquet – does not allow for reduction or exploitation; it must be experienced and lived in its integrity, both in its celebration and in the intimate converse with Jesus which takes place after receiving communion or in a prayerful moment of Eucharistic adoration apart from Mass.” (cf. n. 61).

PROFESSED KNIGHTS' SPIRITUALITY

Fra' Giovanni Scarabelli
(Translated from Italian)

The Order of St. John the Baptist, commonly known as Order of Malta, is a religious order of the Catholic Church in the strict sense of the word since its origins and until today. At the very beginning of the first Rule, which was written by Raymond de Puy and thereafter consistently drawn on in all subsequent codifications, it is stated that: "The brothers who choose to serve the poor and to defend the Catholic Faith shall keep and observe the three things they promised God, which are chastity, obedience (i.e. they shall fully comply with everything commanded by the Master) and life without property". The vows of chastity, obedience and poverty and the charisma qualify and specify the details of the religious status of the brothers belonging to the Order as such through all times. The current Constitutional Charter unequivocally states and determines in Article 1: "It is a lay religious Order". This awareness must be clear and unambiguous in every member of the Order of St. John (according to the various classes and at different levels of commitment), since all of them serve in a religious order. This also requires that all of them - and I stress ALL - possess a special vocation that is consistent with the charisma.

The above applies to the whole Order, while the reference to a diversified responsibility according to the various classes leads to another consideration on the specific spirituality of the Knights of Justice, i.e. of those persons who have directly taken religious vows and who therefore represent the essential and irremissible element for the very existence and survival of the Order: Without them - the Professed Knights - the Order loses its life and its reason for existence.

After this brief, but fundamental and clarifying preamble, I now wish to dwell upon some specific elements regarding the spirituality of the first class, which includes the Knights of Justice and the Professed Conventual Chaplains. The main elements we shall deal with here are two: the vows and the charisma.

The experience that "God first loved us" (John 15,16; I John 4,19; Eph 2,4 ff.) in spite of our condition as sinners, enhanced by Jesus' words "Come and follow me" (Lk 5,23), is the starting point of religious life that develops into an answer to God's own initiative. The exemplary nature of Jesus, consecrated by the Father, who "didn't keep anything for himself" and became "everything to everyone" (cfr. Phil 1,5 ff.) with an undivided heart and purest love, is that continuous point of reference through which the vows turn into a concrete form of imitation of Christ - obedient, poor and chaste - without any reservation, completely and irreversibly.

The fact of being called to "stay" with Jesus requires continuity and depth in prayer (resulting in *ufficiatura canonica*); it demands a transforming knowledge of his personality (meditation on the Word of God); daily nourishment with the Eucharist (the sacrament of the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord and Saviour); frequent receiving of the sacrament of reconciliation (as an experience of

the unlimited forgiveness of the Father); filial love towards the Blessed Virgin Mary (prayer of the Holy Rosary); acceptance of the saints and a special, loving devotion towards those who belonged to our Order; trustful loyalty to the Church “Mater et Magistra” as unfailing guarantee of the Revealed Truth; feeling of deep brotherhood and genuine communion with all professed members of the Order with whom we have established an authentic community, a “place” in history for our asceticism and sanctification; conscientious responsibility towards all other members of the second and third class for whom we have to embody (at the highest degree) the values of the Gospel under the specific conditions of the enlightened tradition of the Order of St. John, supported and justified in the present form of the charisma.

The charismas, as St. Paul says in the First Letter to the Corinthians (12,7) are gifts of the Holy Spirit to individuals and communities for joint edification, in order to build up the Church and make it ever more effective in its evangelizing mission and to make humanity ever more human through the light of revelation. This means that the charisma of our Order represents for all members, but especially for the professed members, the means available to them in order to cooperate in the work of salvation and to announce and testify to the Gospel.

You always have the poor with you” (John 12,8); “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25,40). The imitation of Christ our Lord obviously requires Faith in the first place, but (as its primary consequence) it also requires active charity, as St. Paul writes: “Caritas Christi urget nos”, and “Fides operator per caritatem”. Obsequium pauperum is therefore the means to make the heart of the professed knight visible, it allows him to enlarge his heart without any limitation, and he experiences the love of God - living it, communicating it to others, testifying to it and receiving its substance.

The Knight of Justice is an expert in Divine Mercy, and he himself turns into mercy for all mankind in which he recognizes his brothers and sisters in that Lord Jesus, “mitis et humilis, longanimis, patiens et multum misericors”.

Founded in Jerusalem, in the Near East, the “Fratres Hospitalarii Hierosolimitani Sancti Joannis” were certainly very well acquainted with the experience of St. Basil the Great, and they connected it with that of St. Benedict of Nursia. These were their roots that allowed them to develop a realistic outlook on humanity, constantly “sick” at all levels (physical, intellectual, spiritual) as the historical result of the original sin. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the “heavenly doctor” for such illnesses, and the Church is his “Grand Hospital” on earth. The view on man must always be at 360 degrees in order not to be reduced to an ontologically limited vision of mere material necessities and not to betray that “unconditional humanism” to which the Holy Father John Paul II. has been calling us constantly “so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10,10). These are the pillars, the essential and indispensable points of reference of our hospitaller spirituality, both yesterday and today! This means the actual exercise of the classical seven works of mercy in the spirit of those famous words “Give them some food yourselves” (Lk 9,13) that Jesus has left us as mandate for his faithful disciples.

It is true that medieval and later culture led to interpret and live the second part of the charisma - *Tuitio fidei* - for various centuries as armed battle against the Unfaithful, but during the last two centuries we have developed a very different vision. In our days, the defence of the catholic faith must be implemented above all through a visible rootedness of our charitable actions in our ever deeper experience of Jesus, our divine model. In second places, it needs a detailed and discerning knowledge of the theological (Catechism) and social doctrine of the Church: We may credibly testify only to those matters that we are well acquainted with and have deep knowledge of. As a consequence - and as a third point - we are called to "express" our Faith through all means of communication, both in our private, personal relationships and in the public ones (whether or not official). In our mind's eye we always have to keep the image of our patron saint John the Baptist who openly declared his function towards Christ: "*oportet illum crescere, me autem minui*" (John 3,30). Always!

I believe that the above outline, even if it is very brief, has nevertheless set forth the essential guidelines and the basic elements of the spirituality of our professed knights. They ought to be shared in a spirit of service and authentic brotherhood. I wish to add one last remark, so obvious it may not even be necessary: The principles summarized above in a fraternal spirit are already and completely contained in the Constitutional Charter and in the Code of our Order. We know that these two documents are written in the required legal language, but they nevertheless form the Rule of our specific religious life, and this should not be forgotten.

+ Fra' Giovanni Scarabelli

RELIGIOUS KNIGHTS OF THE ORDER OF MALTA TODAY

Fra' Matthew Festing

Knight of Justice, a vocation for the III Millenium?

In the early 21st century world the vocation of a Knight of Justice sometimes takes a bit of explaining to the casual but interested observer. Why should this be? Why should people find it peculiar that a man should be called to be "a monk in the world" rather than just an ordinary layman, or what many Catholics would regard as "an ordinary monk" in a monastery?

The informed member of the laity may be forgiven for seeking an explanation but, interestingly, the clergy, both secular and regular, often seek clarification too. Indeed when I first became a novice in 1986 a Benedictine monk who had taught me at Ampleforth questioned me closely about why I did not want to become a monk of that monastery. My spiritual director, a chaplain to the Order for many years, said that, on the face of it, what I was seeking seemed to him to be no different from what he sought as a priest. If we were all living in 15th century Europe - I believe that no explanation would be needed - the life of a Professed Knight would be regarded as quite normal. The fact however is that, for some peculiar reason known only unto The Almighty, the Order of Malta is almost the only part of the church where the vocation of a "lay religious" still exists. To me this seems very strange indeed because, in my experience, the life of a Professed Knight fits in perfectly with daily life as a Catholic bachelor in modern times. Indeed it seems peculiar to me that the Order does not get many more vocations to the rank of Justice.

A frame of spiritual life neither extraordinary nor difficult

At a practical level the requirements for leading the life of a Professed Knight are simple and easy. You should go to daily Mass - not difficult if you live in a city in Catholic Southern Europe - more difficult admittedly if you live deep in the country in the Protestant North. You must recite Lauds, Vespers and Compline. When not sung in choir this takes only minutes. You should "devote a suitable amount of time daily to meditation and spiritual reading". Sometimes this is more difficult but surely we all at least have plenty of time for meditation, perhaps in the train or while driving the car. You should recite the Rosary daily. To me this seems so easy as to be entirely natural. My parents, whom I never regarded as particularly pious - just good Catholics - never set off in the car to go anywhere, either together or alone or with my brothers and me, without quickly and purposefully saying the Rosary. Doing so is exactly the same as putting on a seat belt or even closing the car door. Monsignor Alfred Gilbey, that much loved and supremely practical and sensible chaplain to the Order, once explained to me that the Almighty had given one five digits on each hand precisely so that the Rosary could be said quickly, quietly, easily and unostentiously. The Knight of Justice should examine his conscience daily. Is not every child taught to do that too? He should make the Stations of the Cross on suitable occasions. Is that not true of every Catholic? He should have a regular Confessor. Is that not part of the practice of being a Catholic? He should make an annual retreat of five days. He is

not encumbered with a wife and children wishing to be taken on holiday and that is not difficult to arrange. Indeed his Priory or Sub Priory will arrange it for him. Lastly he should “take part in pilgrimages visit the sick and fulfil ones proper duties by means of alms giving and visitation among those in need either in body or spirit”. Perhaps I am naturally gregarious but it does seem to me that going on Pilgrimage in particular is the greatest possible fun and most entertaining.

Indeed the whole life of the Knight of Justice is not meant to be some form of lugubrious, over self conscious, exercise in self denial and penance. Life in the Catholic church and in the Order of Malta is entertaining, intriguing and above all a source of constant laughter and good humour.

“Oh”, I hear you say - “you make it all sound a bit too easy, a bit too simple”. Well all I can say in reply is “yes - it is easy and simple - it really is up to you to allow the Almighty to lead you forward. He is simply waiting for you to put your hand in His”.

Points of reference

From time to time, it is very profitable for the Knight of Justice (and other members of the Order too) to re-read “The Code and Constitution”, the “Spiritual Recommendations” and the text of the taking of Solemn Vows, the promise of Obedience and that of their own reception into the Order. On those occasions we all “sign up” in public to certain norms of conduct and behaviour. It is well that we should be frequently reminded of them. Other parts of the church follow the same practice and, for instance, visitors to Benedictine monasteries will hear small extracts from the Rule of St Benedict read in choir every day.

When a Knight makes his solemn vows he undertakes to protect widows and orphans and, in general terms, to look after the interests of those disadvantaged in modern life wherever he may find them. This is really no different from the behaviour expected of every Christian, but how very often it seems to be forgotten in the hurly-burly of modern business. In my business life I have been sometimes quite appalled by the treatment given to people and by the fact that profit counts for all and decent behaviour is regarded as weak and foolish. Here, I believe, is an area where the Professed Knight can make clear what is and what is not acceptable behaviour however unpopular he may make himself in the process.

The daily recitation of the Divine office is a great source of inspiration and the Psalms in particular are full of good things.

Psalm 14 is worth reflecting upon because it provides a key to “Life in the World”.

“Lord who shall be admitted to your tent
and dwell on your holy mountain?
He who walks without fault;
he who acts with justice and speaks the truth from his heart;
he who does not slander with his tongue
He who does no wrong to his brother
who casts no slur on his neighbour

who holds the godless in disdain but honours those who fear the Lord.
He who keeps his pledge come what may
who takes no interest on a loan
and accepts no bribes against the innocent
such a man will stand firm forever”.

Psalm 18 too provides us with a template:-
“The law of the Lord is perfect
it revives the soul
.....

The decrees of the Lord are truth
and all of them are just.
They are more to be desired than gold
than the purest of gold
and sweeter are they than honey
than honey from the comb.
So in them your servant finds instruction
great reward is in their keeping.....”

Look no further than Psalm 23:-
“... who shall climb the mountain of the Lord?
who shall stand in his holy place?
The man with clean hands and a pure heart
who desires not worthless things
who has not sworn so as to deceive his neighbour.
He shall receive blessings from the Lord
and reward from the God who saves him.....”

If you are lucky enough to see these words on a frequent basis then most of your life and conduct should, even allowing for the horrors of a fallen human nature, fall into place ! What a tragedy it is that so very few of those responsible for the conduct of everyday affairs in the World ever see them for themselves.

Professed Knights in arms

Up until the end of the 18th century the Knights of Malta provided much of the training for the officers of the Catholic Navies and Armies of Europe. In addition, the Knights proved themselves sailors and soldiers of the very highest quality. The Order's galleys were commanded by Professed Knights and, as an Englishman descended from several Naval Officers, I am particularly conscious of the defeat of the British fleet in the Indian Ocean in 1782-3 by Fra' Pierre-André de Suffren de Saint-Tropez. He had served in the galleys of the Order's Navy and then with the French Navy during the American War of Independence. As our confrere Desmond Seward in “The Monks of War” records, he succeeded in “outsailing and outgunning a British fleet far larger than his own”. No wonder he is still regarded as one of the greatest of all French Naval tacticians. The point of course is that it is natural that life as a Professed Knight and life as a soldier or sailor can be combined. Indeed, I believe that they go together entirely naturally. Both require a small degree of self-discipline * both require a regular timetable. Both require a

sense of service to others; both, in very similar ways, require at least a degree of natural leadership. No English member of the Order can forget the death of Fra' Nicholas Upton, Turcopolier in 1551, at the head of 30 Knights and 400 Maltese cavalry when he defeated the corsair Torghut trying to besiege Mdina. Unfortunately the gallant Fra' Nicholas, being immensely fat and wearing heavy armour, expired from heat stroke at the moment of victory!

In the psalms inspiration and strength

In the same way as the Business man and Professed Knight may find inspiration in the psalms, so, too, does the Soldier and Professed Knight.

“Blessed be the Lord, my rock

who trains my arms for battle who prepares my hands for war.

He is my love, my fortress

He is my stronghold, my Saviour,

my shield, my place of refuge

He brings people under my rule.....” (Psalm 143)

In the same way psalms 117 and 91.

Almighty God has called men to be Professed Knights of St John for nearly a thousand years and there seems to be no particular indication that he will no longer do so in the future. Ours is a vocation which should thrive and develop, perhaps increasing once again in sheer numbers. We must all pray that that is His will.

Fra' Matthew Festing, Grand Prior of England

THE PROMISE OF OBEDIENCE IN THE SECOND CLASS

Fr. Costantino Giovanni Gilardi
(Translated from Italian)

The Promise of Obedience was first introduced by the Provisional Constitutional Charter of 1956 with the intention of establishing a class of Knights who could undertake commitments and offices previously reserved only for Professed Knights (1). The Constitutional Charter (art. 8, 1B) and the Code (art. 94), reformed by the Chapter General of 28-30 April 1997, made two innovations: the introduction of Dames in Obedience and the introduction of three categories in the Second Class.

Knights and Dames in Obedience

The Constitutional Charter of 1961, reformed in 1997, divides the members of the Order into three different Classes (art. 8) with three different forms of religious commitment:

- the members of the First Class make Religious Vows;
- the members of the Second Class make the Promise of Obedience;
- the members of the Third Class make a Commitment to the Church and to the Order.

The Code (art. 94) defines and specifies the vocation of the members of the Second Class:

1. According to the state in life and in conformity with their own vocation and the directives of their legitimate Superiors, Knights and Dames in Obedience oblige themselves by a special promise, which binds in conscience, to a life leading to Christian perfection in the spirit of the Order and in the sphere of its works. Conscious of the spiritual value of such a commitment before God, they must diligently observe the divine law and the precepts of the Church so as to be a constant example of piety and virtue, of apostolic zeal and of devotion to the Holy Church.

2. Knights and Dames in Obedience undertake to utilize their temporal goods according to the spirit of the Gospel.

3. Knights and Dames in Obedience do not enjoy privileges or precedence with respect to other members of the Order.

The Special Chapter General of 27-28 November 1969, in application of the directives of the Vatican Council Decree “*Perfectæ caritatis*”(3) and the Pope’s *Motu Proprio* “*Ecclesiæ sanctæ*”, drew up an “Interpretation and Commentary on the Rules” (2) that is the most authoritative and extensive text on the spirituality of the Second Class.

We propose a brief commentary on the main spiritual foundations of the Regulations for Knights and Dames in Obedience (Code, artt. 94-107).

The Promise

Knights and Dames in Obedience hold an intermediate position (ReC, p. 28) within the three Classes of the Order, with regards both to their commitment and to their responsibilities. With reference to other ancient religious orders, the commitment in the Third Class is comparable to that made by the Oblates (3) of monastic orders and the Tertiaries (4) of mendicant orders. The Promise of Obedience is a kind of intermediate bond between the First Class vows and the Third Class commitment and is thus stronger (5) (ReC, p. 30) than the latter and, with respect to one of the evangelical counsels, is comparable to some forms of the promise approved by the Holy See (6).

“The Church has always given permission and has accepted the fact that a special group of the faithful might spontaneously bind themselves by a particular Promise to pursue a useful spiritual objective”.

In creating the Knights and Dames in Obedience, “the Holy See has given to the Order of Malta the authority to institute a Class whose members are bound by the observance of one of the three evangelical counsels, namely obedience, and this not by a temporary or perpetual vow, but by a special promise that can be withdrawn. The members who make this promise are seeking to attain Christian perfection, by limiting their full liberty – within the possible limits imposed by their profession and their family status – by the promise to obey their superiors in the Order, by following the prayers and spiritual exercises specially established for them in this Rule and by cooperating in an exemplary manner with the realization of the aims of the Order”.

Obedience

ObeY derives from ob-audire (for hearing) and thus Obedience has its first and most important reference in listening to the Word of God “Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path” (Ps., 119, 105) and to the Word of Christ (ReC, p. 36). Obedience for all Christians is the imitation of Christ who has become obedient (Phil., 2, 8) and has prayed to His Father “not as I will but as thou wilt” (Mt., 26, 39; Mk., 14, 36; Lk., 22, 42). Mary, the mother of the Lord, received the word of the messenger of God who came to her (7) and told her something that was unthinkable and impossible for men, but with God all things are possible (Lk., 1, 37; Mt., 19, 26). The Special Chapter of 1969 reminded the Knights and Dames in Obedience that obedience is “access to the supernatural. It is grounded in the recognition of God – through faith –, in the trust in God – through hope –, and in the adherence to God – through love”.

The Promise of Obedience is a special form of sequela of Christ who: “who, though he was in the form of God, [...] emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” (Phil., 2, 6-8), according to the charisma of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, “in conformity with their own vocation and the directives of their legitimate superiors” (ReC, pp. 35-36).

Greater Service

Obedience, inspired by the imitation of Christ, becomes a spirit of greater service to the faith and to the poor, guiding and moulding the life of Knights and Dames in Obedience following the example of the Son of man, who “came not to be served but to serve” (Mk., 10, 45).

The intermediate position of the Knights and Dames in Obedience signifies they are required to perform duties strictly connected to the Order’s religious and sovereign nature (Const., tit. I, art. 3; ReC, pp. 28-29). Hence the Promise of Obedience brings an honorific status with it, but a higher honorific grade always entails a greater commitment and a more intense Christian life. To stress that it involves a greater service the Code, revised in 1997, has added a paragraph stating that: “Knights and Dames in Obedience do not enjoy privileges or precedence with respect to other members of the Order” (art. 94, 3).

A Life Leading to Christian Perfection

The term perfection often gives an impression of something too high or unattainable. But if we realize that perfection derives from the Latin *perficere* which means “to complete” this can help us to understand and accept a path that involves a gradual perfectibility, according to our human abilities and aided by grace, a journey never fully completed in a lifetime and leading to that time in which “God may be everything to everyone” (1 Cor., 15, 28).

“According to the constant teaching of the Church all Christians have the duty to strive after Christian perfection observing the commandment to love God and their fellow men: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt., 5, 48)”. Christian perfection does not consist of counsels (8) and those who wish to achieve perfection do not necessarily have to belong to orders or institutions recognised by the Church. Perfection consists of charity and its highest possible degree can be achieved in any state and condition of life. Those who undertake the path of evangelical counsel place themselves, by principle, in the best conditions and want to eliminate obstacles to the growth and manifestation of charity (9).

The Constitutional Charter (art. 9, 1-2) uses the expression “perfection according to the Gospel” for members of the First Class and “perfection of Christian life” for members of the Second Class. The Regulations and Commentary specifies: “in the text of the Constitutional Charter a distinction is made between “evangelical” and “Christian” perfection [...] this is done without regards to the degree of perfection towards which all classes of the Order must tend”. This is the only charity for which all must strive, with different means according to each person’s vocation.

In the Spirit of the Order

This important clarification in the Regulations and Commentary “means that Christian perfection is pursued in the spirit of the Order. There is no doubt about the fact that one can take different paths to strive for perfection, but the Christian who chooses to belong to a religious order shows through this choice the desire to follow its traditions as specified in the Council decree “*Perfectæ Caritatis*” (10). Knights and Dames in Obedience shall make the spiritual values of the Order the subject of their contemplation and meditation with a view to giving a particular direction to their activities, as for example:

“The presence of the Lord in the Sick” (Raymond du Puy, chap. XVI).

“The care of the Sick as Our Lord” (Roger des Moulins, Statute of 1182).

“Because you promise to be the servants and slaves of our Lords, the Sick” (Customary of 1290.) (11).

“The prayer in the place of our Lords, the Sick, at Acre” – where the invocation: “Your, our Lords, the Sick, pray....” is repeated eleven times...” (Customary of 1290) (12).

Naturally, the spirituality of the Order is not limited to these examples. The history of the Order teaches us to be the outposts of the Church and to place ourselves on the borderline” (ReC, p. 33) of the Church and also on the new frontiers which the Holy Father John Paul II indicated in his Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* (n. 50) and in his address (13) on 12 January 2001 to the Order’s Ambassadors to the Holy See, exhorting that: “Now is the time for a new ‘creativity’ in charity” (14).

Within the Sphere of its Works

The sphere of the Order’s works lies in its motto *tuitio fidei et obsequium pauperum*.

“Throughout the centuries the Order has fought with the weapons that were at the time most suitable” to defend the faith and to serve the poor.

The Holy Father John Paul II, in his magisterium to the Order of St. John, has more than once pointed out how *tuitio fidei* is presently understood: “Today the defence of the faith is expressed above all in giving witness by word and action to the Christian truths. This presupposes as a preliminary condition that you are well instructed in these truths and thoroughly convinced of the duty to profess them with courage and firmness, as is required of a ‘knight’ who keeps his word. In this perspective, I would like symbolically to entrust to all the members of the Order of Malta the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which has recently been published in the Latin typical edition. Defending the faith often means, especially in our time, defending the great values that human reason without the light of Revelation risks misunderstanding in their integral and radical nature” (15). On 24 June 1999, during the Jubilee, the Holy Father addressed the Knights of every nationality present in Rome: “You are convinced that defending and bearing witness to the faith is the basis of evangelization, and you would like to make your contribution so that the Gospel message will also illumine the now imminent third millennium of the Christian era.” (16). The Pope encouraged the Order to “a new ‘creativity’ in charity”, and with these words he is also encouraging a new creativity in the defence of and witness to the faith. The Holy Father extended a special invitation to the Knights and Dames in Obedience to become “catechists”, that is teachers of the faith, without limits of age, seriously engaged in organised forms of catechesis both inside the Order (especially addressed to the young, to co-workers and to candidates) and outside the Order (especially addressed to those distant from the faith).

The Regulations and Commentary propose the obsequium pauperum for our time, with two basic guidelines: never separate the obsequium pauperum from the tuitio fidei and pay special attention to the sick, the poor and those who are away from Christ.

“The members of the Order cannot separate the duties of the apostolate from those regarding assistance to the sick and the poor, as it is their duty to fight not only disease and misery but also religious ignorance and error.” (17)

“At present, we use the most modern scientific means to help the sick as well as those who are in danger [...]. Let us take care of both our friends and our enemies, bearing witness to Christ wherever we happen to be. The poorest leper, as well as anyone who suffers and does not know Christ or denies Him, is our neighbour.”

Whatever we do “must be subordinate to the aims of those great and ancient, but always present, traditions (18): the care of the sick, the assistance to the poor and the apostolate among those who are away from Christ, particularly in cases of emergency”.

“Prayer will be your most important aid [...]. Do pray, since even when you laymen are very much occupied by your professional secular obligations, every action taken to help the unfortunate in case of disaster, and in view of the fight for the truth, will be well received by the Lord who is present in the sick and in those seeking the light of the truth”.

Utilizing Temporal Goods According to the Spirit of the Gospel

Unlike Roman law that contemplated *ius utendi et abutendi*, the Jewish-Christian conception of possession is based on two strong pillars: God donates goods to everyone and those possessing them must consider themselves responsible administrators of these God-given goods. The Special Chapter General of 1969 states that: “in the spirit of the evangelical counsel of poverty [Knights and Dames in Obedience] should set aside whatever might compromise their moral responsibility, to be used in accordance with the precepts of justice and charity, by recalling that all they possess comes from God”.

Assignment of the Scapular

In the Rite of the Promise of Obedience the scapular is assigned (19) “for the propagation of the faith and for service to the needy”.

The scapular is an “apron” for work and for service, as attested by the Benedictine Rule that speaks of the “*Scapulare propter opera*” (20), and it is the visible sign of a greater dedication of Knights and Dames in Obedience in the propagation of the faith and a greater service to the needy. The Lord Jesus gave us an example: “he rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded” (Jn., 13, 4-5).

With this gesture, Jesus Christ imprinted in his disciples’ mind the memory of his love and his service to men, asking his disciples to imitate him.

Year of Preparation

The Regulations (art. 94) lay down that Knights and Dames in Obedience, “conscious of the spiritual value of such a commitment before God, must diligently observe the divine law and the precepts of the Church”. The Special Chapter General of 1969 comments thus: “In order to observe the divine law and the precepts of the Church, it is obviously necessary to know them. First the Knight in Obedience shall devote himself to humble reading of the Holy Scriptures, of the Sacred Tests, of the acts of the Magisterium of the Church, and particularly of the documents of the Council” (ReC, pp. 36; 46).

During the year of preparation (Code, art. 97) the person charged with spiritual guidance will help the candidate to discover the specific nature of the vocation of the Knight and Dame in Obedience with explicit reference to the Christian vocation, to baptism and to confirmation (21) and to the various ways of living out the universal call to holiness (22), proposing a detailed reading with commentary of the Council documents, of the Pontifical documents and of the documents of the Order. Specification

In particular, they should read the parts regarding the laity, the *Lumen Gentium* (30-38) and *Gaudium et Spes* (33-45) constitutions and the *Apostolicam actuositatem* decree on the Lay Apostolate (ReC, p. 36).

The most significant Pontifical documents include the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici* on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world (30 December 1988) and the apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte* (6 January 2001), with which the Holy Father John Paul II proposes a “fresh enthusiasm for Christian life” that every local church, every institute and every believer should show in the new millennium.

The official documents of the Order should also be studied, with particular reference to the Class of Knights and Dames in Obedience: the Constitutional Charter, the Code, the Regulations and Commentary (Special Chapter General of 27-28 September 1969), the Missal of the Order (23) and the Guidelines for the Life of the Members of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (24).

It would be useful to have a detailed catechesis on the Word of God, the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours with particular focus on the Christian interpretation of the Psalms.

+ Fr. Costantino Giovanni Gilardi

(1) C. TOUMANOFF – G. ROCCA, *Sovrano Militare Ospedaliero Ordine di Malta*, in “Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione” (hereinafter DIP), VIII, Edizioni Paoline, Rome, 1988, coll. 1934-1945; L. GNAVI, *Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta* in

“Digesto delle Discipline Pubblicistiche”, XIV, UTET, Turin, 1999, pp. 394-412, the Promise of Obedience on p. 404, with ample bibliography pp. 394-397.

(2) S.M.O.M., *Regolamenti e Commenti* (hereinafter ReC), Rome, 1970, pp. 27-43. The quotes in inverted commas without reference to the source are from *Regolamenti e Commenti*.

(3) J. DUBOIS – I. OMAECHEVARRIA, *Oblato*, in DIP, VI, 1980, coll. 654-676; G.-M. OURY, *Oblature*, in DS, XI, 1981, coll. 566-571.

(4) E. BOAGA, *Tiers Ordres Séculiers*, in DS, XV, 1991, coll. 946-960; G. ROCCA, *Terz’Ordine*, in DIP, IX, 1997, coll. 1042-1050; E. BOAGA, *Terz’Ordine Secolare*, in DIP, IX, 1997, coll. 1097-1129.

(5) In ReC on p. 29 it is asserted that the Promise is comparable to the promise of the Tertiaries and Oblates, but the answer given by the Secretary of the 1951 Commission of Cardinals to a question asked by the Order specifies that: “The bond established by the Promise [of Obedience] is stronger than the promise of the Tertiaries and Oblates” (ibid., p. 30).

(6) To compare better the partial analogy of the Promise of Obedience with other forms of commitment approved by the Holy See, refer to the conciliar and pontifical documents cited by M. ALBERTINI, *Istituti Secolari*, in DIP, V, 1978, coll. 106-117 and by G. ROCCA, *ivi*, coll. 117-121.

(7) “How shall this be?” (Lk., 1, 34).

(8) Reference here is to evangelical counsels followed by religious orders with vows of obedience, poverty and chastity.

(9) A. GAUTHIER, *Obbedienza*, in DIP, VI, 1980, col. 528.

(10) “The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time.” [...] “It redounds to the good of the Church that institutes have their own particular characteristics and work. Therefore let their founders’ spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions - all of which make up the patrimony of each institute - be faithfully held in honour.” (*Perfectæ caritatis*, 2 and 2b); A. BERTIE, *The Order of Malta Yesterday and Today*, address given on 16-5-1991 to the Centro Italiano di Studi per la Conciliazione Internazionale by H.M.E.H Fra’ Andrew Bertie, Prince and Grand Master, Rome, 1991.

(11) This Customary proves how devoted the first generations of Knights were to the mediation on the Gospels: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant (diakonos), and whoever would be first among you must be your slave (doulos)” (Mt., 20, 25-27 and Phil., 2, 7). No less explicit is the Admission Ceremony: “We

add a promise that no other religious makes, we promise to be slaves (Mt., 20, 27) *dominorum infirmorum*"

(12) Italian version in E. NASALLI ROCCA, *La preghiera collettiva dei malati negli ospedali medioevali e particolarmente negli ospedali gerosolimitani*, in "Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia di Storia delle Arti Sanitarie" (1941).

(13) "L'Osservatore Romano", 13 January 2001.

(14) "Now is the time for a new 'creativity' in charity". Magisterium of Pope John Paul II for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, Bergamo, 2001.

(15) "L'Osservatore Romano", 13-14 October 1997.

(16) "L'Osservatore Romano", 25 June 1999.

(17) ReC, p. 36 refers to the decree on the Lay Apostolate *Apostolicam actuositatem* and to the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*.

(18) Cf. Discourse of H.M.E.H. fra' Andrew Bertie, Prince and Grand Master, for the opening of the SMOM Seminar at Valletta on 29 January 2004 and the Final Reports of the Seminar Commissions.

(19) The scapular is part of the habit of some religious institutes or of a form of devotion. Since the use of the religious habit and scapular was linked to special spiritual privileges and indulgences, the lay faithful (oblates and tertiaries) also wanted to wear them in both life and death Cf. G. ROCCA, *Scapolare*, in DIP, VIII, 1988, coll. 1015-1018; L. SAGGI, *Scapulaire*, in DS, XV, 1991, coll. 390-396; P. SIFFRIN, *Scapolare*, in EC, XI, 1953, coll. 15-16; A. MICHEL, *Scapulaire*, in DTC, XIV, 1939, coll. 1254-1259.

(20) For the Benedictines, the scapular was a kind of apron worn when working. It was in the Benedictine Rule (chap. 55) that the term scapular was first given to this part of the monastic habit: "*Scapolare propter opera*" (D. DE BRUYNE, *Note sur le costume bénédictin primitif*, in "Revue bénédictine", 33, (1921), pp. 56-61).

(21) CEI, *Rito della iniziazione cristiana degli adulti*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Rome, 2002. The *Praenotanda* are a very rich source for the Christian vocation and its subsequent conditions according to the different charisma.

(22) *Lumen Gentium*, 39-42 and *Christifideles laici*, 16-17.

(23) The French edition contains in the first part masses of the Order and for its special celebrations; and in the second part, pp. 289-584, many texts on the spirituality of the Order: *Missel et Lectionnaire de l'Ordre de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem, de Rhodes et de Malte. Supplément au Missel Romain et extraits du Rituel*, Paris, 2002.

(24) SMOM, *Indirizzi di vita per i Membri del Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta*, Rome, 1993. For spirituality a useful reference is: BERNARDO DI CLAIRVAUX, *Il*

libro della nuova cavalleria. De laude novae militiae, ed. F. Cardini, Senato edizioni, Milan, 2004; F. DUCAUD-BOURGET, *La spiritualité de l'Ordre de Malte* (1099-1955), Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, Rome, 1955; E. NASALLI ROCCA DI CORNELIANO, *Il Cavaliere cristiano. La spiritualità dell'Ordine di Malta*, Rome, 1965; R. N. J. BARWIG, *Reflections on the Spiritual Life for Members of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta*, Rome, 1981; G. SCARABELLI, *Linee di spiritualità del Sovrano Militare Ospedaliero Ordine di S. Giovanni di Gerusalemme, detto di Rodi, detto di Malta*, Milano, 2001. For an overall picture of the Order refer to dictionaries and respective bibliographies, and especially: A. LINAGE CONDE, *Militari (Ordini)*, in DIP, V, 1978, coll. 1287-1299; F. MACALLI, *Militari (Ordini, Architettura)*, in DIP, V, 1978, coll. 1300-1319; P. BAILLY, *Hospitaliers (Ordres)*, in DS, VII, 1969, coll. 784-808; P. VIARD, *Hospitalité*, *ivi*, coll. 808-831; G. G. MEERSSEMAN, *Le varie milizie di Gesù Cristo*, in “*Ordo fraternitatis. Confraternite e pietà dei laici nel medioevo*”, 3 voll., Herder, Rome 1977, III, pp. 1233-1272.

THE SPIRITUAL COMMITMENT OF KNIGHTS AND DAMES IN OBEDIENCE

Johannes Freiherr Heereman von Zuydtwick

1. The charisma of the Order of Malta

The Order of Malta is one of the old-established Orders of the Roman Catholic Church. The physical and spiritual needs of pilgrims in the Holy Land was the specific cause which inspired the Blessed Brother Gérard and his companions to devote their lives to the service of the poor and sick. In them members of the Order recognised Jesus Christ the Lord, and served Him. The brotherhood drew up a rule for itself, and this formed the basis of what was later recognised by the Church as the Rule of the Order. Through the changing forms their service has taken through time, the Knights Hospitaller of St John – later the Knights of Malta and the Knights of St John – have remained true to their founding principle, in accordance with the word of the Lord: “Ye have the poor with you always” (Mk 14,7). The mission to help those in physical and spiritual need is valid through the ages, even though this may take different forms. Thus the two essential pillars of the Order of Malta’s service, *Obsequium Pauperum* and *Tuitio Fidei*, represent a fundamental mission of the Church, at all times and in all ages, which the Order of Malta sees as its duty to fulfil.

2. Life in Obedience

The mission of the Order of Malta is carried through in the first place by the Professed Knights of Justice. These have dedicated their lives to God, in order to live in accordance with the Evangelical Councils and true to the directions of the Church in the service of the Order.

Alongside this first estate of the Professed Knights, some decades ago – in accordance with the needs of the Order – a second estate of Knights and Dames in Obedience was established. It came into being, not only on account of the lack of Professed Knights at that time, but also – and more important – in response to deeper but more significant cause.

It is true that the diminishing number of Professed Knights made it difficult to fulfil the growing responsibilities of the Order. But there was a group of people with responsible careers, often in a social or charitable field, who led exemplary married and family lives, were involved in the life of the church and were looking also for a closer bond with the Order of Malta.

It was thus appropriate to open up a suitable form of membership of the Order to those ordinary members of the Order of Malta who wished to commit their life to the mission of the Order within the scope of their professional and family obligations

The Promise to live in Obedience is a explicit expression of the baptismal promise. It becomes a commitment to the striving for Christian perfection in the spirit of the Evangelical Councils in accordance with the mission of the Order of Malta

3. Aspects of spiritual commitment in Obedience

The principles of the spiritual commitment of the members of the Second Estate are governed by the Constitution and Codex of the Order of Malta. These obligatory rules must be fulfilled through the individual priories and sub-priories.

It sets up some specific guidelines, based on the above.

Readiness for obedience

The search for the concrete expression of the will of God in one's life leads one to seek assistance in the interpretation of God's will. There are the commands of the Gospel, as revealed to one in the teachings of the Church. There are obligations arising from the sacrament of marriage and concern for the family. In addition there are unavoidable professional and social duties. Those who live in the Obedience of the Order of Malta commit themselves additionally to the specific service of the poor and sick, and to witness of their faith to the best of their abilities. In every case a readiness for obedience is required, in order to uncover God's mission in the everyday things of life, and not to decide according to one's own desires or aversions, but to seek to know the will of God.

In this multiplicity of perhaps competing duties, the Promise is a suitable means for recognising the right order of priorities. The directions of superiors also offer helpful advice in the sense of providing encouragement and guidance. Thus a "duty of obedience" means a willingness to listen to the words of superiors, in the expectation of finding help from them in distinguishing the voice of the Lord.

Duty of prayer

Prayer is the expression of faith in the living God, to whom one gives thanks for one's life, to whom one's life is answerable, and with whom one shares it in all things. The Christian's daily prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist and the taking of the Sacraments, as covered by Article 101 of the Codex, are the objective side of this life with God and the Church. This is to be supplemented by personal prayer, in which one opens one's life before God, meditates on the word of God, and prays to the Lord. In addition there is participation in the canonical observance of the prayers of the hours, as well as prayer for intercession for one another and for the greater concerns of humankind.

Before all action, the life in Obedience demands a oneness with the will of the Lord in prayer.

Involvement in the Church

Those who seek for the will of God must come to the Church. For the Lord is to be found in the community of the faithful, who are His body. Every Christian contributes to its development through the grace of the Holy Ghost entrusted in him. Thus a life in Obedience must also include a readiness, within the scope of one's own possibilities, to undertake liturgical or organisational services in one's own parish and to participate in the life of the community. Alongside their own family, this is the first and primary location in which the members of the Order of Malta can bear witness to their faith.

Brotherly community

Even though the members of a priory or sub-priory of the Order of Malta do not live together in a community, their common spiritual path nevertheless gives rise to a bond of intensive togetherness. Important aspects of this are the joint spiritual exercises and days of meditation, as well as prayer groups, obligatory prayers carried out together, and prayers for one another. The concern for one another in both external and spiritual matters develops from this, and so equally does its power of attraction for new members. It is fruitful and helpful in this when Dames and Knights mutually complement one another in the different individual forms of expression of their spiritual commitment. Especially for married couples, this jointly lived spiritual commitment is a strong bond of unity and a source of strength for the family.

Service to the members of the Order

The Knights and Dames in Obedience see themselves as under an obligation to serve the other members of the Order especially in the deepening of their religious life. What is learned in the community of the sub-priory or priory bears fruit for the Order as a whole. For this reason the Knights and Dames in Obedience make efforts to encourage prayer circles in their neighbourhood, and to give a spiritual stimulus at regional meetings.

Not least, through prayer and example they can encourage others to discover and realise their calling. In this way, the Obedience can contribute to the revival of the First Estate!

Service in the works of the Order

The Knights and Dames in Obedience are ready, each in their own way, to serve in the works of the Order. In view of the fact that, among the many staff of the Order's works - whether in voluntary or full-time office - there is an ever growing number of people who have little or no religious education, a major challenge for the Dames and Knights in Obedience is to be found in the field of religious training and the spreading of the Gospel. It is worth emphasising this point. Through its willingness to accept the work of "volunteers" and others, the Order also accepts the responsibility to offer them a suitable education in Catholic teaching. This task would seem to be ideally suited to be entrusted to the members in Obedience. The service of the poor and sick - required of all members of the Order - should be performed in whatever specific and personal ways are possible for them. Here too, a life in Obedience demands a willingness to put the interests and imperatives of the Order, in accordance with the wishes of superiors, ahead of one's own personal desires.

4. Conclusion

As a result of the establishment of the second estate, of the Knights and Dames in Obedience, the Order of Malta is even more clearly recognisable than before as a segmented community.

There is room within the Order for different callings and missions. Professed Knights living in celibacy, and married and unmarried Dames and Knights in Obedience, complement one another and thus provide a more fully rounded picture of the Church within the overall framework of the lay order. This accords

with the spirit of the II. Vatican Council, in a similar way to the new spiritual communities and movements which developed as a result.

Thus the Order of Malta, while remaining as one of the old Orders with their long and powerful tradition, is open to the requirements of the situation in which the Church and society find themselves today.

Johannes Freiherr Heereman von Zuydtwick
Regent German Subpriory of St. Michael

THE THIRD CLASS AND ITS SPIRITUAL DEMANDS

+ Abbe B. Martin

(Translation from French)

One may consider as truly original of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, the blending in its midst of members who are Religious (the Professed), members who take a specific undertaking of obedience (the members in Obedience), and then members “who do not make religious vows or the Promise but live according to the norms Church and are prepared to commit themselves to the Order and to the Church.” (1) The latter forming the greater part of the 11,000 members of the Order.

Indeed the great religious orders have over time enrolled lay associates wanting to participate in some fashion in their lives and spirituality: Benedictine Oblates, Franciscan or Dominican Third Orders... Since its origins the Order of St John enlisted members of whom the statutes did not require religious vows “Donnés”, “Donats” or members of “Devotion” (2). The Sanctoral of the Order has registered the names of some amongst them, like Saint Toscana or the Blessed Adrian Fortescue. (3) But the revolutionary upheavals of the end of the XVIII century considerably changed the physiognomy of the Order, the number of members taking religious vows became far fewer, whereas those of “honor” did not stop growing. Pope Pius IX ratified this status quo by officially approving the existence of these lay people in the midst of the first National Associations. (4) During the whole of the second half of the 20th century and until today there has been a constant increase of Members of the Third Class, while the works relating to aid and charity developed exponentially. (5)

To understand better the spiritual demands of belonging to this third class of the Order, it is absolutely necessary to refer to the fundamental texts: the Charter, the Spiritual Recommendations, and the Regulations and Commentary. (6)

A real belonging to the Order

The Rules of the Order underline certain important points. All its members whatever their canonical status belong to this unique “family”, and are invited to live its two charisms *tuitio fidei* and *obsequium pauperum*. As said in the Regulations and Commentary “those who request, or are invited to enter the Order in one of the categories of the third class must be aware that ... although they are not strictly speaking religious (like the Professed Knights) and are not bound by a special religious promise (like the Knights in Obedience), they yet become members of a religious Order.” (RC11) The Spiritual Recommendations are just as explicit specifying that members of the third class “who do not make vows of specific promises are nonetheless obliged by their real belonging to the Order to maintain a tenor of Christian life and exemplary conduct both privately and publicly.” (SR7)

Many of our Grand Master’s recent speeches, as well as in interventions in several working groups of the International Seminar in Valetta in 2004, insist that joining

the Order includes personal obligations: improvement of one's Christian life and formation, and concrete participation in charitable works. It is not without interest to note that the texts, which promulgate the real belonging of all members to a religious order refer to the teachings of Vatican II on the call to sanctity common to all baptized "whatever their status or rank". (7)

The Order of Malta experiences within itself what in the Church is referred to as consecrated life: "The profession of the evangelical counsels shines before [its members] as a sign which can and should effectively inspire them to do so." (VC404) That is true of life in the Order of Malta: the Professed Members as "authentic religious" live "the most binding" consecration. (SR6) This way of life ought to enlighten and inform other members also called to fulfil their unique baptismal sanctity. In a passage of the SR we read: "given the universal call to holiness and the apostolate on the part of the baptized, it follows that every Knight, by virtue of his Christian vocation and the special charisma of the Order of Malta to witness to the Faith and to charity, knows and observes special duties and the rule of Spirituality, in order to glorify God, to sanctify himself and to build up the kingdom of God in the world." (SR6) In the same way the RC ends very significantly with a heading called "Spiritual Guidelines for all the Members of the Order" noting that a number were "the same for all three Classes". (RC29-30)

This demonstrates clearly that there is no "spirituality" specific to Members of the Third Class, but only differences in the ways of living this unique call to the baptismal sanctity. Often involved in a stressful professional life, in family duties with all that these imply, and also expected to take part in the local activities of the church, members of this Class, have to bring to all these areas the special grace received from two charisms, Faith and Charity.

Witnessing through an exemplary life

The direction given by the fundamental texts of the Order is the exemplarity of one's Christian life. "The members of the Order are to conduct their lives in an exemplary manner in conformity with the teachings and precepts of the Church." (CCC19) Here again the Charter acknowledges fully the teachings of the 2nd Vatican Council on the role in the Church of secular faithful, teaching explained specially in the decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* (VC766-798) expounded upon by Pope John-Paul II, in his post synodal apostolic exhortation *Christi fideles laici*. The first call Members of the Order should hear, is the one addressed to all faithful "to endeavor to have the Gospel spirit permeate and improve the temporal order, going about it in a way that bears clear witness to Christ." (VC768)

Even before any specific involvement in the Order's charitable work, the first area where its members activities must be exercised and the first place for their spiritual life are, "the ordinary conditions of life ... Family cares should not be foreign to their spirituality, nor any other temporal interests." (VC770) The same Council text praises the most basic virtues: "They should hold in high esteem professional competence, family and civic sense, and the virtues related to social behavior such as honesty, sense of justice, sincerity, courtesy, moral courage; without them there is no true Christian life." (VC771) These ideas specifically mentioned by the Council are truly in harmony with the spirit and the traditions

of the Order that “all members are expected to behave like true Christian.” (SR9) The Council further underlines that moved by the spirit of divine charity the faithful will “express concretely in their lives the Spirit of the Beatitudes” (VC770) words which bearers of the eight-pointed Cross cannot but fully appreciate.

Moreover it is not difficult to carry over to the Members of the Order what is said about the unity of the conscience and behaviour: “the layman, at one and the same time a believer and a citizen of the world, has only a single conscience, a Christian conscience; it is by this that he must be guided continually in both domains.” (VC772) RC summarizes everything saying all Members of the Third Class are “bound to a life of an outstanding Christian, that is to say, a profoundly Christian life, not merely formal and superficial.” (RC30)

Life of prayer and Christian formation

Destined to nurture an active spirituality, prayer within the Order of Malta should be characterised by its intensity rather than its scope. In his introduction to the British Association’s book of prayers, Archbishop Couve de Murville, comments, that if in the old days the Knights of St. John used to pray in the roar of battles, or the bustling of hospitals, the same problems present themselves today to us busy people with a full complement of distractions. (8)

Therefore what is only required from the Members of the Order is no more than that which is asked of all baptized: frequent partaking of the sacraments of penance and Eucharist, daily prayers, with a special mention of the recitation of the Rosary, which in fact are old customs of the Order. The Knight’s Prayer should be of special importance. Far from being a routine or an easy obligation to accomplish by its brevity, this prayer for members of the Order, should play a dual role: first, to place the members daily face to face their ideal, second to manifest symbolically through this daily gesture the unity of brotherly communion within the Order.

For this life of prayer and for food for one’s spiritual life to follow the Order’s charisms “in communion” with all the members, great personal or communal use ought to be made of the Missal and Sanctoral proper to the Order. Many national Associations, have tried to put at the disposal of its Members these “spiritual” treasures.

To follow the Order’s missal, is to discover the main patrons of our Order: St. John the Baptist, Our Lady of Philermo, and Blessed Gerard. It is to venerate those who distinguished themselves ‘as hospitallers’ or as ‘defenders of the faith’. It is to understand the special place of women who illustrate the charisms of the Order of St. John: St. Fleur, St. Toscana, and St Ubaldesca. It is to discover that sainthood can still flourish. (9) Added to prayer are the requirements of Christian formation. In the VC texts already mentioned, great emphasis is made on the point that lay faithful are “earnestly exhorted ... to take a more active part, each according to his talents and knowledge and in fidelity to the mind of the Church in the explanation and defense of Christian principles and in correct application of them to the problems of our time” (VC773) terms in which one would have no trouble recognising the *tuitio fidei* dear to the Order. RC has taken up these very themes of fostered requirements which the present situation renders all the more

necessary. (RC30) The Grand Master's message in Valletta in January 2004, contained these warnings "We should note that in many places the traditional ties with the Church and its teachings are becoming weaker. Even in the classes of society from which we recruit our members, knowledge of the faith and spiritual experience and practise are on the decline. Therefore our members, increasingly need help to extend their knowledge about our religion and faith, and to deepen their spiritual life in order to strengthen them on their path to personal sanctification within the Order and to provide them with a strong base for the *tuitio fidei* on outward service." (10) The chaplains of the Order, according to their own regulations, are particularly invited to help members deepen their spiritual life and religious culture.

Many Members look with justifiable pride, to the Order's history for all it holds of prestige and honour. It is well to underline that our spiritual life is also rooted in the Order's 900 years of charity.

Participating concretely in the works of the Order

Whereas this deepening of the faith and spiritual life represents for members of the Third Class a means to live out the ideal of *tuitio fidei*, *obsequium pauperum* will be lived if possible, by hands on experience in the charitable activities of the Order. "To devote oneself to the charitable activities of the Order" is an essential part of Members' duties. (CC19) Yet one should remember that this activity should in no way be to the detriment of the family or professional life. (SR10) The generosity of Members of the Order should manifest itself, preferably, in the charitable activities of the Order itself. Such participation will be all the more effective if Members take the trouble to acquire the necessary qualifications. (SR10) Needless to say that fullness of participation is achieved when one has direct contact with our Lords the Sick or the Poor. When doing so, it is Christ Himself whom we recognize and worship in them. What is lived today by Members of the Order, working in hospitals, or during pilgrimages with our Lords the Sick, unites us with the most ancient traditions, when in Rhodes or in Malta Knights of each Langue took their tour of duty in the *Sacra Infermeria*.

Much more could still be said if we proceed from the conviction that the Order of Malta offers to its Third Class through the fundamental texts referred to above as through its 900 years of experience, the basic guidelines from which they can operate: baptismal sanctity lived in the world, a life in prayerful union with the Order, Christian formation, the latter to be understood as the basis of *fideo tuitio*, active participation in charitable activities, because through these we meet Christ himself in the person of those who suffer.

It is necessary to point out that these spiritual guidelines are no different to those proposed to members of the Order's other classes. There is one Christian vocation, common to all baptized, which is to the call to sanctity. The same obtains within the Order of Malta where we have but one ideal of defence of faith, and service to our neighbours, performed in varied ways whether by Professed, Members in Obedience or Members of Third Class. It would be erroneous to think that the latter may be content with fewer requirements, because their commitments might not be considered as strong as the other Members. If we follow all basic texts of the Order the contrary must be affirmed. Because these members are an integral

part of the Order, they are also called to live in full the fundamental charisms of *tuitio fidei* and of *obsequium pauperum*.

+ Abbé B. Martin

(1) Constitutional Charter and Code, (CCC) p.17. Page numbers will be given in the text with the abbreviation shown in the original footnote to the works(s). All emphasis are the author's.

(2) Many medieval donations carry with them affiliation clauses. For example in January 1286, Julienne de Chagnon gives one hundred gold "sous" to the Chazelle commandery of the Order on the condition "*quod ipsa domus de Chazaleto recipiat me in sororem et partiticipem bonorum et eleemosynarum in perpetuum dicte domus.*"

(3) Toscana, "consoeur" of the Verona Hospital in the 13th century; Blessed Adrian Fortescue, father of seven children, Knight of Devotion, martyred under Henry VIII.

(4) Géraud Michel de Pierredon. *Histoire politique de l'Ordre de s. Jean de Jérusalem*. Paris : [s.n.], 1990, vol. 3, p. 23, 36 ff,

(5) 2800 members in 1931 up to some 11,000 today.

(6) Constitutional Charter and Code... Rome: [s.n.], 1998; *Spiritual Recommendations for Members of the Sovereign Military Orde of Malta*. Rome: [s.n.], 1993 (SR); *Regulations and commentary* approved by the Special Chapter General, October 27-28, 1969. (RC) [Vienne: 1969]

(7) Vatican Council, 2 1962-1965. Vatican Council: *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. New Rev. Ed. Northport (NY): Costello Publ. Comp., 1998; vol.1, p. 396-398. (VC)

(8) Julian Allason, ed. *Prayers of the Sovereign Military & Hospitaller Order of Malta*. Wallingford: Blackthorn Press, 1991. Rev. ed., pp. xvi-xxi.

(9) Four recent Blessed are John XXIII, Cardinal Schuster, Bishop Apor, and the Emperor-King Charles of Habsburg.

(10) Opening speech delivered by H.M.E.H. The Prince and Grand Master at the International Seminar in Malta January 29, 2004.

PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF BEING A MEMBER OF THE THIRD CLASS OF THE ORDER - KNIGHTS, DAMES AND DONATS

Amb. John Bellingham

Obligations as Catholics

We in this class have no special obligations other than fulfilling the injunctions of the Daily Prayer of the Order. However when we ponder these, we realise that we have an agenda much in excess of the minimum that is laid down for the ordinary practising Catholic. These minima are shocking by the little that is demanded, but we should remember that the Church, ever mindful of the weaker brethren, will not place too heavy a burden on us lest we find ourselves technically in a state of sin and fall into despair. We are asked to observe the Ten Commandments in which is rooted the teaching of the Church and which cover all aspects of an upright life; however, except for the fifth, the others are prohibitions: 'Thou shalt not...', such is the fallen nature of man. To the Decalogue our Lord added two positive commands which ask that we give love, and that is where, in addition to restraint, a positive effort on our part is demanded.

The Church has always asked from her children more than the minimum, but as we are frail creatures, we need a recognised structure on which to build our activities. In former times this was the parish and it should remain so. However, on account of prosperity and mobility, as a unit it has lost much of its coherence: whereas in the past our absence from the parish church on a Sunday would have been remarked upon, now, if noticed at all, it would be assumed that we were away for the weekend. This is where many of us can benefit from a larger organisation designed specifically for the laity, like a Third Order, supported by a Regular Order, 'the members of which should be bound... to practise works of mercy more systematically than ordinary persons living in the world.' - (St. Francis). The modern Church has engendered many such lay organisations like the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Legion of Mary, Opus Dei and the Focolare Movement. We however have chosen to be affiliated to the most ancient order of chivalry in Christendom.

Pietas melitensis

When we say that 'the Lord has seen fit to enlist us for His service among the Knights of St. John,' we recognise that an all-seeing God is proposing to our free will that it is in this Order dedicated to His Forerunner, that, despite all the other obligations of the laity - civil, economic and towards the family - someone of our average ability, particular disposition, and station in life, can apply more readily the gifts that He has given us to promote His Glory.

Next we implore the intercession of His Holy Mother under her particular manifestation of Philermo which unites Western and Eastern Christendom. We recognise thereby that every venture of our Order has been placed under her protection and we beg her to give us the strength that we will need to lead an

upright life, to be generous to others and to fulfil our commitments to the Order and elsewhere.

Next we ask the Blessed Gerard and all the Saints and Blessed of our Order to keep us faithful to its traditions. But first we must learn what these are. From the Code and Charter we learn that the Order of St. John is a *persona mixta* characterized by paradoxical twosomes: it is both lay and religious, both military and hospitaller, both sovereign and subject to the Holy See, and by tradition aristocratic.

The first gives us our privileges and obligations as a Third Order: again to quote St. Francis, we 'should.... fast more strictly, pray more regularly and hear mass more frequently ..' When we think of our Patron, St. John the Baptist, we think of his fasting and his austerity. The reforms that followed the Second Vatican Council greatly reduced our penitential obligations and left much, perhaps too much, to the discretion of the individual.

As everybody knows, the fasts and abstinence austerity has been considerably reduced for all the Catholics. It may be good to remind what are the obligations still valid. The only fasting days are Ash Wednesday and Holy Friday (persons over 60 are exempted). Abstinence from meat shall be observed on Ash Wednesday and all Ember Fridays. During the rest of the year it is praiseworthy to abstain from eating meat on Friday, but one can repair with some prayers or good work. Of course the attendance to Mass on Sunday is compulsory as well as in the Holy Days of Obligation whose number changes according to the country. It is a praiseworthy habit to attend Mass also on the Days of Devotion even if it is not obligatory, and it is recommended to make some penitence even if it is not obligatory.

The charisma of the Order in action

The military and hospitaller characteristics are translated respectively by *tuitio fidei* and *obsequium pauperum*. There has been a tendency in recent writings within the Order to amalgamate the two. Since the Order no longer has brethren-at-arms defending Christendom, it is claimed that the most effective defence of the faith is the witness of personal example in caring for the sick. While in no way minimising the value of personal example, this seems to be a compression of history and a response to modern squeamishness about having sometimes to defend the faith by force of arms. For seven centuries the Knights Hospitaller provided both a *tuitio fidei*, in that they watched over the deposit of faith despite the prevalence of false doctrines and the temptation to abjure when seemingly overwhelmed by the enemy and when in the captivity of the infidel, and also maintained a *tutela fidelium* in that they physically defended the faithful. To risk one's life fighting for Christendom was described by a Pope of the time as the greatest form of love.

Although the Order no longer has armed forces of its own, its members serve in many armies and navies defending that in which they believe; wherein there is no incompatibility. In Lebanon some years ago the Order of Malta used its physical presence on the spot and its diplomatic pressure to prevent the forced expulsion

by the Moslems of a local Christian population. There are many parts of the world where today Christians are in physical danger simply because they are Christian.

While apologetics are best left to authorized theologians, all members of the Third Class should be able to defend in writing and in conversation - always of course with charity and courtesy, but with logical argument - those points of Church doctrine most often under attack to-day, namely the wrongfulness of euthanasia, abortion, contraception and the re-marriage of divorced persons, remembering that our Patron St. John the Baptist was beheaded for doing just that.

The *obsequium pauperum* covers all aspects of the Order's Hospitaller work. "The Holy Poor" are both the poor and the sick, and *obsequium*, implies that we should follow them right through to their obsequies as was the ancient practice of the Knights Hospitaller. The poor are not just the poor in material goods, but also the "poor in spirit" towards whom we must show a special tenderness for they are among the most vulnerable. A person can be comfortably off, yet housebound, lonely, bereaved and distraught. However difficult they are, we must persist with tact and imagination.

The sick are usually most appreciative and set us an example. But if they should be impatient and appear ungrateful, it is a bonus for us. *Obsequium*, besides "service" also means "deference" and accords well with our reference to them as "our Lords the sick". They are entitled to tell us off, and it keeps us from becoming self-righteous and complacent. We must remember that all we do for them should be done in the name of the Lord, Whom we must see in each one of them. As Our Lord is King, they are his courtiers before whom we in the Order must also be prepared to play the role of Court Jester and bring some merriment into their lives.

The Order's various auxiliary Hospitaller Services and Ambulance Corps will be in danger of descending into mere humanitarian organisations, if the members of the Order who are responsible for them do not insist on their remembering that they are a Roman Catholic organisation. The fact that non-Catholics and lapsed Catholics are attracted to them and work admirably within them should not allow their Catholic character to be watered down. Care of the sick is the particular charism of our Order. From the time of the Crusades the Knights Hospitaller distinguished themselves from the other Military Orders by setting up a hospital wherever they found themselves. Primarily these were for the care of pilgrims, hostels for the healthy and hospitals for the sick; thus it was providential that our late Grand Master Fra' Angelo conceived the idea of making the annual pilgrimage with the sick to Lourdes the principal event that brings together all branches of the Order.

The diplomatic recognition

The subjection of the Order to the Holy See in spiritual matters and its sovereignty in temporal matters, notwithstanding its having no territory, continue to perplex many governments. Nonetheless the integrity of the Order and its proven efficiency in providing long-term medical aid, usually in collaboration with the Catholic Church, has made it welcome in many developing countries which

have given it diplomatic recognition. The Order's Diplomatic Service offers a fantastic opportunity for members of the Third Class with business and negotiating experience and with a talent for fund-raising and a taste for hardship and adventure, to rediscover the initiatives which made the Hospitallers of former centuries a force to be reckoned with.

The traditionally aristocratic character

The traditionally aristocratic character of the Order is one subject which is rarely discussed openly and frankly. This is regrettable because brushing a controversial subject under the carpet, or disguising the facts with ambiguous phrases, only serves to maintain confusion and mistrust. The word "aristocratic" is sometimes explained through its etymology and interpreted as the "rule by the best", this however could lead people to believe that we are speaking of a "meritocracy" which could not be further from the true meaning. The Order has always been recognised as a noble descent body recruited among those of historic nobility for a minimum of one hundred years or three generations. This is what has given it its prestige because people see it as embodying those qualities which that particular social class has been bred to exemplify, namely courage and courtesy, integrity and generosity - the "verray parfit gentil knight" of Chaucer. The fact that some individuals fail to live up to the standards of their class does not alter the argument, because historic nobility is not the only qualification for membership. The Military Orders were founded to provide a cadre within whom those of a particular class could best channel their aggressiveness and their devotion in the service of Christendom.

The noble tradition of our Order deserves to be kept. However the modern times request that it should not be exclusive, but that the membership to the Order should be open also to individuals who, although not noble by blood, yet have conspicuous intellectual and moral qualities placing them on a prominent position in the society.

A spirituality of communion

Finally, members of the Third Class are enjoined to be charitable to their neighbours. Among these, the poor, the sick and strangers pose us less of a problem than do our confreres. Even among the Apostles there was dissension and rivalry; St. Paul constantly urged the members of the churches to refrain from quarrelling and to love one another. All religious orders have experienced moments of internal strife.

In joining the Order we meet some people whom we would have known anyhow, and others whom we would never have met but for the Order; among these we make some rewarding friendships, but there are others where politeness is the warmest sentiment which one can muster. Acting in community with all our confreres and consoeurs is one of the harder tasks that are demanded of us. Thus our meetings and committees are important for our spiritual progress; that is why we try to ensure that they are preceded by mass. This also keeps us up to the mark; when we attend mass on our own, no one notices if we do not receive Holy Communion; indeed, if we do not believe ourselves to be in a state of grace we should not receive. However attending mass in community and not receiving can cause embarrassment to ourselves and be seen by others as a bad example.

Consequently it is very important for members to fight their habitual sins and to be on watch for the unforeseen ones, so that they can have made full and frequent confession before attending mass. Our chaplains have been appointed by the Order to minister to our needs; we should consider ourselves fortunate to belong to an Order that offers such a sound and practical structure on which to build a part of our lives.

Amb. John Bellingham

I DUE PROBLEMI EMERGENTI DELL'ORDINE
DI S.GIOVANNI DI GERUSALEMME DETTO DI RODI, DETTO DI MALTA
Conte Neri Capponi

I due problemi che l'Ordine di San Giovanni dovrà affrontare nel prossimo futuro sono: il reclutamento dei professi o frati dell'Ordine ed il reclutamento e l'identità dei cosiddetti Cavalieri in Obbedienza.

Prima di affrontare il problema bisogna premettere alcune note sulla natura dell'Ordine di Malta. L'Ordine ha infatti una doppia personalità: una che si fonda sul diritto canonico come Istituto religioso ed una, innestata sulla personalità canonica, di diritto internazionale fondata sulla consuetudine del diritto delle genti. Qui verrà considerata solo la fondamentale personalità canonica.

L'Ordine appartiene alla grande categoria degli Istituti di vita consacrata e più precisamente alla prima sottocategoria degli Ordini o Istituti religiosi; è inoltre un ente di diritto pontificio ed in quanto tale dipende direttamente dal Pontefice Romano.

Un Ordine o Istituto religioso ha due caratteristiche che lo contraddistinguono: l'emissione dei tre voti di povertà, castità ed obbedienza da parte dei suoi membri e la vita comune, fatto, quest'ultimo, molto importante perché la vita comune significa la separazione dal mondo. Accanto all'Ordine o Istituti religiosi figura la sottocategoria degli Istituti secolari che sono caratterizzati sia da impegni religiosi (che possono anche non essere voti pubblici, ma fra cui figura l'impegno alla castità perfetta) sia dal fatto di non ritenere una vita comune perché vivono, appunto, nel "secolo".

Non ritenendo dalla caduta di Malta (1798) la vita comune l'Ordine di San Giovanni di Gerusalemme dovrebbe essere ora considerato fra gli Istituti secolari (1) ma per privilegio della Santa Sede continua ad essere ufficialmente annoverato fra gli Ordini o Istituti religiosi. Va qui precisato che l'Ordine di Malta poiché laicale, cioè ordine religioso governato da professi laici, ha dopo la rivalutazione del laicato ad opera del Vaticano II, immense possibilità di azione nella Chiesa.

Tale essendo la natura dell'Ordine di Malta è ovvio che la sopravvivenza dell'Ordine come Istituto religioso, anzi addirittura come Istituto di vita consacrata, sta nell'esistenza della categoria dei membri professi che cioè abbiano emessi i tre voti di povertà, castità e obbedienza: come disse recentemente l'attuale Gran Maestro: "i professi sono l'Ordine". I professi attualmente, sono molto pochi (una quarantina) di età avanzata e quasi esclusivamente europei. Due sono le cause di questo declino dei membri professi dell'Ordine: le modalità di reclutamento e l'assenza di una qualche forma di vita comune sia pure su base volontaria.

Il reclutamento dei Professi

Il reclutamento dei professi è avvenuto fino ad ora nel ceto nobiliare. Ma bisogna anzitutto considerare che la identificazione del ceto nobiliare che fornisce i professi all'Ordine è quello definito dalla consuetudine europea dei secoli XV e XVI la quale non sempre si adatta a realtà simili al di fuori dell'Europa. Inoltre la secolarizzazione e la denatalità ha attinto anche gran parte dei ceti nobiliari europei che, di conseguenza, non forniscono più come una volta, i professi all'Ordine. Se vi sono vocazioni nelle famiglie più tradizionali, queste si indirizzano, come reazione, ad ordini con regole più severe che comportano anche lo stato clericale. Nonostante la rivalutazione del laicato (e perciò degli ordini laicali) ad opera del Vaticano II questa rivalutazione non è penetrata nei ceti nobiliari più tradizionali le cui vocazioni, appunto, sono indirizzate allo stato clericale (e perciò agli ordini clericali) considerato più perfetto dello stato laicale: è ovvio che questa mentalità non consideri che la perfezione non sta nello stato ma nella rispondenza alla chiamata di Dio che può chiamare allo stato clericale come chiamare a rimanere nello stato laicale.

Si impone perciò una diversa valutazione dei requisiti di *status* familiare per il reclutamento dei professi. Va anzitutto ricordato che fino al Capitolo Generale tenuto a Rodi nel 1420 lo *status* familiare richiesto per la professione nell'Ordine non era tanto basato su un criterio di nobiltà generosa quanto su uno di "notorietà". Formalmente si richiedeva solo che il candidato fosse figlio di cavaliere e che la di lui madre fosse figlia di cavaliere, ciò allo scopo di assicurare che nell'educazione del candidato fossero stati seguiti i principi dell'etica cavalleresca. Prima del Capitolo Generale del 1420, che in modo alquanto generico sancì per i candidati le ascendenze nobiliari, anche personaggi non di sangue nobile o cavalleresco (in senso stretto) vennero ammessi nell'Ordine come cavalieri a pieno titolo (2). Si tratta, pertanto, per l'Ordine di tornare all'antico nel suo reclutamento dei cavalieri professi, aggiungendo al criterio dei quarti di nobiltà quelli più elastici della "notorietà" e della "distinta civiltà" della famiglia del candidato: ciò, inoltre, faciliterebbe il reclutamento anche fuori dell'Europa. Già ora in alcuni casi si è fatto ricorso a questi criteri più elastici, ma rimane il fatto che il professo non nobile è escluso da quasi tutti gli incarichi di governo dell'Ordine e questo non facilita il reclutamento di coloro che non sono nobili in senso stretto.

Modi di vita

Per quanto riguarda la vita comune va notato che anche gli Istituti Secolari che escludono la "vita comune" come elemento caratterizzante, prevedono, però, frequenti periodi, più o meno lunghi, di incontri comunitari che non hanno, ovviamente, lo stesso significato della "vita comune" negli Istituti o Ordini religiosi, ma che sono necessari da un punto di vista pratico sia per assicurare la coesione dell'istituto che per l'aiuto reciproco a cui sono tenuti i sodali, nonché per l'approfondimento comunitario del carisma dell'istituto stesso. Nell'Ordine di Malta queste forme elastiche e non permanenti di vita comune sono tanto più necessarie a causa del peso gravoso dell'osservanza dei voti solenni o perpetui che grava sulla vita di ciascun professo, esposto come singolo ed isolato individuo al mondo e alle sue seduzioni. Va inoltre considerato che negli ordini religiosi caratterizzati, appunto, dalla "vita comune", è l'ordine che mantiene il singolo religioso il quale avrà pure fatto voto di povertà ma un letto in convento ed una minestra in refettorio le trova sempre, questo non avviene nell'Ordine di Malta

ove il professo deve, salvo casi particolari, mantenere se stesso, spesso con il proprio lavoro, con annessa difficoltà a gestire il voto di povertà. Né, a proposito della vita comune, può trascurarsi un fatto psicologico che ha a che vedere con la quasi assenza di vocazioni giovanili fra i professi dell'Ordine. Mentre il vecchio professo può, psicologicamente, vivere per conto suo questo è molto più difficile per un professo giovane gravato dai tre voti e immerso da solo nella vita mondana a cui, spesso, il lavoro lo costringe.

In conclusione: regole di reclutamento più elastiche ed il recupero di una qualche vita comune, sia pure su base volontaria, sono essenziali per il potenziamento del ceto dei professi nell'Ordine di Malta.

Cavalieri e Dame in Obbedienza

L'altro problema che l'Ordine deve oggi affrontare concerne l'identità ed il reclutamento nonché il relativo utilizzo dei cosiddetti Cavalieri in Obbedienza.

L'iter storico

Storicamente l'Ordine di San Giovanni detto di Malta, così come gli altri ordini religiosi, ha sempre avuto dei secolari affiliati che nel caso, però, dell'Ordine di Malta hanno, al contrario di quanto avveniva ed avviene negli altri ordini, comportato diverse categorie alcune più impegnate, altre meno impegnate. Nell'epoca gerosolimitana dell'Ordine vi erano i *confratres* o cavalieri secolari affiliati all'Ordine, i cavalieri a contratto, i donati od oblato che avevano solo un'affiliazione spirituale. Nei periodi successivi vi sono state molte trasformazioni: i donati, ad esempio, diventano o aspiranti cavalieri o professi di seconda categoria ed anche i *confratres* ed i cavalieri a contratto subiscono mutamenti. Dal diciottesimo secolo in poi si instaurò la consuetudine di insignire principi o grandi nobili della cosiddetta croce di devozione: l'Ordine sia come ricompensa nei confronti di personaggi importanti sia come misura diplomatica conferiva a questi personaggi importanti il diritto di esibire la croce ottagonale sulle proprie vesti, non era un'affiliazione ma il conferimento di una specie di onorificenza religiosa. A poco a poco attraverso il XIX ed il XX secolo le croci di devozione, o di onore e devozione, si diffusero e poiché anche per questa "onorificenza" era invalso l'uso di chiedere per il suo conferimento i quarti di nobiltà richiesti per i "frati", quando si trattò di insignire i non nobili, ormai necessari per far fronte ai molteplici compiti dell'Ordine, si inventarono i donati di devozione e per i più meritevoli le croci di devozione per grazia magistrale. A poco a poco questi latori di "onorificenze religiose" si considerarono come degli affiliati all'Ordine dedicandosi attivamente alle attività ospedaliere dell'Ordine in conformità con il carisma giovanita o melitense. Si costituirono così delle associazioni di questi secolari insigniti della croce dell'Ordine, associazioni su base nazionale che divennero sempre più importanti mentre il centro dell'Ordine gestito da pochissimi ed anziani frati decadeva sempre più. Come sappiamo vi fu il tentativo non riuscito del Cardinal Canali di appropriarsi dell'Ordine che egli giudicava solamente in base ai suoi membri professi. Fu allora, per far fronte alla situazione (in mancanza, appunto, di professi competenti), che anche a secolari insigniti della croce ottagonale furono assegnate cariche che in un ordine religioso sono normalmente riservate ai membri professi dello stesso, causando con ciò non poco allarme nella Congregazione dei Religiosi, l'organo della S. Sede che presiede alla vita consacrata. Fatta la pace con la S. Sede, la stessa propose una riforma

degli Statuti dell'Ordine e, di fronte alla carenza di professi che richiedeva necessariamente un ricorso ai secolari, la S. Sede ammise questa necessità ma richiese che tali secolari fossero in qualche modo religiosamente impegnati: la S. Sede paventava, infatti, che la presenza di semplici secolari alla guida dell'Ordine compromettesse, con l'andare del tempo, la sua caratteristica di istituto di perfezione. La S. Sede suggerì pertanto la creazione di una categoria di membri secolari che assumessero un impegno particolare con annessi obblighi religiosi.

Nel progetto di riforma degli Statuti preparato dalla S. Sede, il cosiddetto "Codice Scapinelli" dal nome del Sottosegretario della Congregazione dei Religiosi che l'aveva redatto, tali membri secolari, impegnati con una promessa, venivano descritti come "cavalieri con promessa", per distinguerli sia dalla categoria di onore sia dai "cavalieri con i voti", cioè i professi. Nella Carta Costituzionale e nel Codice, che poi vennero approvati e pubblicati il 27 giugno 1961, tale categoria di promittenti fu denominata "Cavalieri di Obbedienza" (recentemente mutata in quella di "Cavalieri in Obbedienza").

Identità del II ceto

L'obbedienza era l'unico impegno che tali cavalieri, spesso coniugati, potevano assumere, poiché era esclusa sia la castità perfetta che la povertà (3). Allo stesso tempo la Carta Costituzionale ed il Codice del 1961 dichiararono "membri" dell'Ordine anche quelli che avevano ricevuto la sola croce di devozione nei suoi vari ceti. L'Ordine si trovò così costituito da una classe di religiosi e da due classi di aggregati o affiliati secolari: la classe "in Obbedienza" con obblighi religiosi ed impegni specifici che hanno qualche analogia con i terziari degli ordini mendicanti o a certe categorie intermedie di alcuni istituti secolari ed una classe senza impegni ed obblighi specifici salvo i voti battesimali (propri di ogni cristiano), che in questo caso assumono un rilievo speciale. Considerando più da vicino i Cavalieri in Obbedienza va notato anzitutto che, se all'inizio potevano considerarsi una vera e propria classe a sé, questa caratteristica si è attenuata quando si è passati dalla denominazione di "Cavalieri di Obbedienza" a quella più complessa che vuole la locuzione "Obbedienza" preceduta dalla denominazione (Onore e Devozione, Grazia e Devozione, Grazia Magistrale) che il cavaliere aveva prima di fare la promessa. Questo accentua due aspetti della seconda classe, quella dei promittenti: in primo luogo ribadisce che l'Obbedienza presuppone una previa entrata nell'Ordine ed in secondo luogo accentua l'impegno e la scelta individuale del cavaliere per una perfezione cristiana secondo i doveri del proprio stato, sottomettendosi a certe regole di vita religiosa. Va ribadito che prima del servizio all'Ordine il "Cavaliere in Obbedienza" deve soddisfare gli obblighi del suo stato secolare, obblighi di stato che precedono ogni impegno nei confronti dell'Ordine. Sono sorti degli equivoci riguardanti la classe "in Obbedienza". La parola "obbedienza" ha portato qualcuno a credere che i "Cavalieri in Obbedienza" costituissero una specie di milizia speciale soggetta ai superiori.

A parte il fatto che qui si parla di obbedienza canonica ben diversa da quella in uso nelle forze armate degli stati (4), la qualifica di "obbedienza" è, come abbiamo spiegato, una caratterizzazione per esclusione, poiché la promessa non poteva comprendere la castità perfetta e la povertà. Inoltre nell'Ordine si è diffusa un'altra concezione sbagliata a proposito di questa seconda classe di membri, l'idea che diventare cavalieri in obbedienza fosse una promozione come passare

da croce semplice a gran croce. Invece di considerare la promessa d'obbedienza come l'estrinsecazione di una vocazione specifica ad una santità secolare e laicale si sono fatti entrare in questa classe persone prive di questa vocazione specifica ma semplicemente come premio per servizi resi. A questo si aggiunge la pressione dei cavalieri della terza classe per "entrare in Obbedienza," e poter così conseguire posti di dirigenza nell'Ordine, stravolgendo il carattere stesso della promessa di obbedienza che essendo l'espressione di una vocazione spirituale esclude, per ciò stesso, ogni ambizione umana. Si è pensato che i cavalieri in obbedienza sono troppi (circa 600), troppi certo sarebbero se non si trattasse di altrettante vocazioni specifiche che, come è bene ricordare, vengono attivate dall'Alto se sono vere vocazioni.

È dunque una questione di identità che ha bisogno di essere approfondita. Se il ceto "in Obbedienza" sarà veramente disposta alla vocazione ad un livello più alto di spiritualità, sarà più chiaro anche il ruolo pratico dei suoi membri e potrà anche contribuire all'aumento numerico dei Cavalieri di Giustizia.

Conte Neri Capponi
Delegato di Firenze